

Derrida's Reading of Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity: A Study

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Abstract

In the *Cartesian Meditation* Husserl explains how the *alien* original sphere (of someone else) is motivated in one's own sphere. The *fifth meditation* investigates the *alter ego* in the realm of the *transcendental ego*. Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity is the phenomenology that seeks to describe *the experience of the otherness of the other*. It gives an account of the *analogical apperception of the alter ego*, not in terms of the traditional dualistic notion of the Other Minds, but directed towards the *constitutional analysis of the other as an alter ego*. Levinas came heavily on Husserl's theory of alter ego and accused the latter of falling within the grip of the Western dualism of self and other dichotomy. Derrida on the contrary came to rescue Husserl's phenomenological account of alter ego.

The paper attempts to endeavour Derrida's reading of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity that deconstructs Husserl's phenomenological account of subjectivity based on Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity. The paper is divided into three sections. First, articulates Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity in terms of his theory of alter ego. Second, is Derrida's attempt to re-read *Levinas' account of Husserl's other as a gesture of violence*. Third, gives a comprehensive account of Derrida's appraisal of the structural framework of Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity.

Introduction

There is no doubt that Derrida is one of Husserl's greatest critics. Derrida's deconstruction started as an investigation into the metaphysics of presence that he inherited from Levinas. However, whereas the Western 'metaphysics of presence' mainly focuses on *the question of*

being, Derrida [following Levinas] transformed it to the relation of alterity. In his essay “Violence and Metaphysics,” (1921) Derrida deconstructed the metaphysics of presence in two aspects. First, it was a deconstruction of the ‘presence’ that relies on Husserl’s notion of ‘*the principle of all principles.*’ Second, is the deconstruction that limits metaphysical claims and points towards the *experience of the non-presence*. Following this, Derrida read Husserl’s intersubjectivity as the *phenomenological experience of the non-presence alterity*. It is, for Derrida, an *experience of non-Greek, non-foundation*, that the phenomenology of intersubjectivity is mainly focused upon.

I

Husserl’s Theory of Intersubjectivity

The fifth meditation of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditation* discusses in depth his theory of intersubjectivity. It explores the problem inherent in experiencing someone else ‘*within the limits of the transcendently reduced ego.*’ Husserl writes, “When I, the meditating I, reduce myself to my absolute transcendental ego by phenomenological epoché do I not become *solus ipse.*” (§ 42: 89) This also constitutes the problem of transcendental subjectivity that “restricts me to the stream of my pure consciousness,” (CM: 89) and subsequently to the phenomenon of solipsism. However, Smith noted that “Husserl [fifth meditation] is much preoccupied with subjects of experience other than himself, the ‘solitary, meditating philosopher.’ (2003: 212) Husserl writes,

“ But what about other egos, who surely are not a mere intending and intended *in me*, merely synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*, but, according to their sense, precisely others?” (CM: 89)

Hence, Smith rephrase that the task of Husserl’s phenomenology was to discover the intentionality, syntheses, and motivations in which the *sense* of the “other ego” becomes fashion *in me*. It is concerned with showing “how our belief in the actual existence of other is justified and grounded in our experience...and [how], under the title, harmonious experience of

someone else, [the sense “other ego”] becomes verified as existing.” (2003: 212-213) That is, in short, *the constitution of the other ego in the realm of our transcendental ego*. In other words, it is the question of how the sense of another subject can become constituted by me at all. The issue then is not about what is other ego, or how to prove that there is any such thing around. Carr expresses, “the task [of the fifth meditation] which arises is to explain how the Other exists for him, not whether the Other exists as such.” (1973:19) In other words, it is a question about, *how the Other is given to me*.

Hence, the ultimate task of the fifth meditation is concerned with ‘the transcendental classification of experiencing ‘*someone alien*’ objectively, [in the sense of existing outside me] that cannot be reduced to facts merely concerning *my consciousness*. Husserl refers to anything that transcends *my* own consciousness as alien. And, the Other transcends *my* own consciousness. It is, nevertheless, experience ‘within the limits of my transcendently reduced pure conscious life’, not as some kind of ‘private synthetic formation [of my pure consciousness]; but as alien to me. Husserl called such experience of the Other as *intersubjective*. He explains the enigma that constitutes the experience of the (Placeholder1) other, [that belong to another sphere] that is alien to my ego [that is my original sphere or the sphere of ownness] through a radically new level of intentionality, [that relates what is alien] namely the *analogical apperception* [or apperceptive transfer]. Here, the Other is given as an ‘intentional modification’ of my own self. This givenness of the Other is described phenomenologically through various terms used by Husserl, such as ‘reduction, ‘empathy, ‘pairing,’ etc.

Appresentation, according to Husserl, presupposes a core of presentation. To quote him,

“[Appresentaion] is a making present combined by associations with presentation, with perception proper, but a making present that is fused with the latter in the particular function of co-perception”. In other

words, the two are fused that they stand within the functional *community of one perception*, which simultaneously presents and appresents, and yet furnishes for the total object a consciousness of its being itself there.” (CM: 122)

What emerges as absolute reality is not my transcendental ego, but transcendental intersubjectivity. This is because, every appresentation, for Husserl, *can exist only in the functional community with presentation*. In other words, every experience [including the experience of the other] presents, *must belong to the unity of the very object appresented*. (CM: 122) It opens us, to what Husserl calls the ‘community of monads’ which he designates as ‘transcendental intersubjectivity.’ (CM:130) To quote Husserl,

“We need hardly say that, as existing for me, it is constituted purely within me, the meditating ego, purely by virtue of sources belonging to my intentionality; nevertheless it is constituted thus as a community constituted also in every other monad (who, in turn, is constituted with the modification: ‘other’) as the same community – only with a different subjective mode of appearance- and as necessarily bearing within itself the same Objective world.” (CM: 130)

Husserl concluded that the nature of his phenomenology of intersubjectivity is open-ended that is subjected to the constitution of time. In his last work, *The Crisis*, Husserl examines the inseparable relation between the intersubjectivity and the lifeworld but focuses more on the world than on the other.

II

On Husserl’s Phenomenology of Alterity and the Violence of the Other

Derrida investigates Levinas’s account of Husserl’s notion of other as alter ego. Levinas, argues Derrida, reads, the other of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditation*, as an “ ego phenomena, [that is] constituted

by analogical appresentation on the basis of ego's own sphere." (VM: 153) In other words, according to Derrida, Levinas misreads Husserl's infinite alterity of the other, in terms of the analogical appresentation, as a reduction of the other to the same.

The other, for Levinas, is absolute alterity [of the other] that is absolutely irreducible. It is infinitely irreducible. Its exteriority can neither be derived nor engendered nor constituted based on anything other than itself. In other words, according to Derrida, Levinas conceived the other 'without any relation to the same,' that is, without any presence, or without any totality. It is, therefore, the relation of non-presence, and non-totality. According to Derrida, Levinas rephrases 'metaphysics of presence' as 'violence' that tends to reduce the Other to the sphere of sameness. In other words, Husserl's determination of the 'other as the alter ego is violence,' because, for Levinas, Husserl's alter ego implies that the 'other is the same as or like me.' That is, violence, indicates all metaphysics of presence that falls within the realm of totality of being, language, or logos. The other as absolute alterity, for Levinas, without any relation to the same, is relation-less, and ir-reducible. It is, therefore, peace and silence [non-violence]. And, the Other, as such is not, for Levinas, defined by intuition. Derrida noted that for Levinas, "this other, in its alterity, does not appear for an ego." (VM: 154)

It follows that Levinas' alterity as 'alterity without the same' does not appear in the zone of the same. That is, the relation of other with the same is 'a relation of exteriority'. It is 'non-violent', non-presence, non-predicate, or non-speech. Derrida noted that according to Levinas, any attempt to reduce the infinite alterity to the ego would be an act of violence and totalization.

If, for Levinas, the other is 'what I myself am not,' (VM:156) and if the other escapes every moment of my *egological* life, and does not have the form of the ego, the question arises, how is it possible to conceive the alterity without it having relation to presence. That is precisely, the

question of, what is the intentional phenomenon in which the other appears as other. According to Derrida, Levinas's alterity of the other, his absolute alterity evokes a transcendence of the other, that 'refuses to see itself in it an ego,' is an 'ethical order' that comes even before 'every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence.' (VM: 156)

Derrida, in his defense for Husserl's phenomenology of alterity, argues for the impossibility of conceiving alterity without its relation to the presence. The notion of analogical appresentation, discussed in Husserl's fifth Cartesian Meditation, clearly states the affirmation of the *original non-presence* of the other as the 'irreducible mediate nature of the intentionality,' that aims at the "other as other". (CM: 154) Following, Husserl's insight of the 'appearance of the other' that always transcends the *ego's intentional phenomenon*, Derrida argues that Husserl's phenomenological account of 'the other as transcendental other' [that is, the other absolute origin and other zero point in the orientation of the world] can never be given to me in an 'original way,' but only through a process of analogical appresentation.' (CM: 154) The nature of analogical appresentation far from signifying [a general account of] an 'analogical' and 'affirmatory' reduction of 'the other to the same', as Levinas misread Husserl, according to Derrida is "the unsurpassable necessity of meditation," (VM: 154) that make the other be other. This is because the interiority of the others can never be given to me immediately. It can never be my interior life. It is never my own.

In short, Derrida reads Husserl's analogical appresentation of the alterity of the other as an *original non-presence* that is always singular and irreducible. It is transcendent, outside, that is beyond and always implies a relation to others; in other words, it always implies transcendental intersubjectivity. Husserl's fifth meditation is particularly sensitive to this *phenomenal system of non-phenomenality* that is at the heart of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity.

III

Husserl's Transcendental Intersubjectivity and the Deconstruction of Presence

Derrida's elucidation of Husserl's fifth meditation weighs up the phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity, in terms of 'transcendental symmetry.' It explores the nature of the interrelatedness of all the individual spheres of ownness, that emerges as "what is *jointly* constituted by all subjectivities." (Smith: 2003: 220) That is, the other ego is appresented as *constituting a lived body for itself*. Husserl argues that, even within myself,

" [that is] within the limits of my transcendently reduced pure conscious life, I *experience* the world (including others) - and according to its experiential sense, *not* as (so to speak) my private *synthetic* formation but as other than mine alone, as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone." (CM:91)

These analyses of the sense 'other than mine' is the 'other ego', the first step that address the '*thereness-for-everyone*'. The constitution of the sense of other subjects of experience, the first alien, the first Not-I, is the other I. Smith explains that, "what Husserl requires is that these subjects should intercommunicate, that they should affect one another, so as to establish transcendental intersubjectivity." (2003: 215)

What is significant in Derrida's reading of Husserl's transcendental intersubjectivity is the interpretation of the latter's themes of alterity and temporality that abruptly changes terrain from Western metaphysics. That is, whereas classical Western metaphysics of presence focuses on truth, essence and evidence, totality and logocentrism; Husserl's intersubjectivity is constituted in 'the phenomenal system of non-phenomenality.' It is an 'intentional modification' of my own self, in which, the 'other ego' is still a metaphysics of presence that nevertheless, finds itself "worked out" by the theme of non-presence; that is the alter

ego and temporality. (Lawlor: 165)

Derrida adheres to Husserl's notion of adumbration that offers an analysis of the perception of physical objects from endless spatial profiles. The other is first of all a body and therefore also involves profiles. "Without this adumbrating, the other's original non-presence would not be able to appear." (Lawlor: 163) Unlike Levinas [who treats the expression of Husserl's alter ego as a factual or pre-eidetic subject], Derrida stresses that the expression of Husserl's 'alter ego' consists in a strange kind of relationship between "*ipse*" that is, self or ego, and "*idem*" that is, identity, that does not mean the same thing. That is, there are two forms of ego, the original ego, and the another transcendental ego [is another 'origin of the world']. Following Husserl, Derrida argues that my ego is mine for me [*ipse*, or egoity] and other for the other; the other's ego is his for him and other for me. Derrida calls this relationship 'transcendental symmetry.' Lawlor claims that "the point Derrida is making here is that the alterity of the other is impossible without this transcendental symmetry or transcendental sameness." (164)

Derrida defended Husserl from Levinas's criticism [of reducing otherness of the other into sameness] by concluding that the "transcendental asymmetry is the irreducible violence of the relation to the other - since it is symmetry or sameness- and yet it is at the same time non-violence." (Lawlor: 164) Derrida argues that the *transcendental symmetry* alone maintains the alterity of the other since it is *dissymmetry or difference*. Derrida calls such analysis of egoity a 'transcendental archi-factuality'. This is also Derrida's deconstruction of the phenomena of subjectivity. The essay, 'Violence and Metaphysics' also represents Derrida's first attempt to 'amalgamate' the 'transcendence of the other' with the 'transcendence of the same'. It is, however, an amalgamation not of identity, but difference or rather *différance* of Derrida's deconstruction, without which, the alterity of the other is nothing less than irrational.

Derrida unequivocally supported Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity that upholds a notion of subjectivity that is always haunted by the otherness of the other. His deconstruction of Husserl's transcendental ego [that always exceeds the original sphere of ego] significantly defended Husserl's theory of alter ego that exhibits a remarkable regard for the otherness of the other. Derrida argues that Levinas's failure to recognise the phenomenology of Husserl's other as alter ego, and accusing Husserl's other as falling within the realm of same, fails to see that there is more to Husserl's other than myself. Unlike Levinas, Derrida stood by Husserl's phenomenology of other that precisely refuses to reduce the other to sameness, even with its claim that the other appears as other within the realm of same. The authenticity to posit the other as a conscious subject, indeed as another transcendental ego, is the possibility of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Derrida certainly does not subscribe to the phenomenology of Husserl's ego, but in so far as, phenomenology is the conscious experience of the non-presence, singularity, and irreducible alterity of the other Derrida remains a phenomenologist.

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