

Moran, Dermot and Szanto, Thomas: *Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the 'We'*. New York and London: Routledge, 2016 (Research in Phenomenology, Vol. 3). ISBN 978-1-138-91879-5, 337 pp. US - \$145 (hardbound).

Timothy A. Burns

Paul Ricoeur, in his commentary on Husserl's Fifth Meditation, observes that "solipsism has always been the common-sense objection to idealistic philosophies" (2007, p. 116). For his part, Husserl was aware of the seriousness of the "solipsistic objection" to his phenomenology (See e.g., Hua I, p.121; and Hua XIII, p. 154). Despite his consistent attempts to block this objection, it is fair to say that outside of the circles of Husserl research it remains a widespread prejudice that phenomenology is, at best, ill-equipped to account for intersubjective phenomena because of the individualism that its method(s) entail, or at worst, is outright solipsistic. Thomas Szanto and Dermot Moran's new collection of essays ought, finally, to close the door on this objection (Cf. Moran's comment in his contribution to the collection at p. 108).

Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the 'We' is the third volume in Routledge's "Research in Phenomenology" series. Edited by Szanto and Moran, each of whom also contribute a chapter, the collection is composed of nineteen essays divided into five parts, and its stated goal is "to reevaluate, critically and in contemporary terms, the unprecedentedly rich phenomenological resources regarding social reality on the level of interpersonal, collective, and communal engagements" (p. 11). The volume goes above and beyond in terms of achieving its stated goal. Though, a more apt subtitle may have been "*Re-discovering the 'We'*" given that many of the contributions aim to elucidate ways in which contemporary, especially analytic, debates on questions of social cognition, social ontology, and collective intentionality may benefit from a rediscovery of resources to be found in the works of both well-known (e.g., Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler) and lesser-known (e.g., Max Geiger, Aaron Gurwitsch, Adolf Reinach, Alexander Pfänder, Edith Stein, and Gerda Walther) members of the phenomenological movement.

One of the most difficult tasks facing the editors of any collection of essays is to construct a coherent whole out of diverse parts while avoiding redundancy. Szanto and Moran have paid keen attention to this aspect of their work and have, in my mind, succeeded greatly.

One way in which they have done so is the aforementioned effort made to include contributions that engage both canonical figures and lesser known members of the phenomenological movement. This book is not a work devoted to the interpretation of a single thinker. It is, rather, an elaborate patchwork quilt of phenomenologists working under the heading of a shared theme. This diversity of parts gives rise to a unity of voice that speaks to phenomenology's acuity with respect to some of the most important philosophical questions concerning the nature of social reality.

A further way in which the volume succeeds in constructing a unified whole is the care that has been taken in the logical division of the contributions into sections. As simple as this sounds, not every collection of essays succeeds on this note, and some don't appear to try. As I noted above, the book is divided into five parts. Part I is tasked with elaborating the "most salient normative aspects, ethical motives, and the broader political-philosophical background" of the phenomenology of sociality (p. 12). A shared concern among the authors featured in this section are the questions of where to locate, or how to prioritize intersubjectivity – whether in terms of shared life, dyadic I-Thou relations, plurality, the life-world (*Lebenswelt*), or the experience of being addressed by the other, and the authors address these questions in this part from historical and methodological perspectives. Part II picks up on the questions raised in Part I; however, the second part approaches these questions in terms of the relationship between the concepts of intersubjectivity, the notion of a We-World, and objectivity. Just as Parts I and II are interconnected investigations, Parts III and IV jointly explore the embodied and affective footings of collective intentionality, social cognition, and social interaction. Part V rounds out the volume by addressing issues that arose in Parts III and IV in relation to debates over collective intentionality, but here the authors pursue agential, practical, and normative questions in the works of three key figures within the phenomenological movement, viz., Husserl, Scheler, and Sartre.

In a brief review it is impossible to do justice to each of the first-rate essays collected in this volume, and I would do a disservice to the contributions if I were to offer only a brief summary of each. Instead, I will review each of the five constituent parts of the collection, identifying the main questions and themes of each part, and comment at length on a selection

from each. I would direct readers interested in an overview of each of the contributions to Szanto and Moran's introduction to the book.

Each contribution to Part I addresses, in some way, the question of the priority of I-Thou relationships over the individual standpoint or more general conceptions of collectivity and togetherness. When describing the social world, is priority to be given to dyadic interpersonal encounters where subjects address one another face-to-face or to individuals as such? Perhaps there is a third member in this debate? Ought we, instead, prioritize a shared life-world or language that makes social reality possible in the first place? In keeping with one of the strengths of the book, the authors of this section engage in debates with a wide range of philosophers from Gadamer, Habermas, Löwith, and Stein to Arendt, Buber, Levinas, and Darwall.

In her chapter, Sophie Loidolt presents a heretofore underappreciated phenomenological interpretation of Hannah Arendt's conception of "actualized plurality." Loidolt explicates actualized plurality as a unique form of being together with others that opens the "existential possibility of becoming a self by articulating one's perspective on the world, in the face of and together with others" (p. 47). Loidolt argues that "the condition of plurality and the possibility of its realization lies in unique world accesses, streams of consciousness, in the plural for whom one and the same world appears. [...] Actualized plurality, explicated phenomenologically, means the plurality of irreducible perspectives on a common world as the interacting articulation and disclosure of each one's being-a-perspective, and at the same time, the constant actualization and establishment of a space of appearance and, thus, of a common world, which is the medium and background of this disclosure" (p. 53). In other words, actualized plurality is the opening up of an intersubjective space, through speaking and acting, in which I can appear as a unique and distinctive "who," as opposed to a mere "what" reducible to my role, station, gender, or to some combination of properties. Thus, Loidolt comments, "it turns out that 'uniqueness' is the result of an active encounter of singular accesses in the plural, by speaking with one another and by acting together" (p. 46). The appearance of *who one is* through actualized plurality is a "sort of self-appearance (mostly in acting and speaking) that does not objectivity me, but is the appearance of my very unique subjectivity in the face of others, as an *intersubjective* event" (p.48).

Loidolt also points out the normative, ethical, and political implications of Arendt's notion of actualized plurality. Arendt does not set out her conception as a neutral description of human living together, but rather she privileges it as an "authentic form" of We-ness. An authentic form of the We is one that does not abolish the uniqueness of the individual I's that constitute it (p.52). "Quite the contrary, it is the necessary medium of their distinct articulation and appearance" (p.52). Thus, Loidolt indicates how one can hear in the background Arendt's criticisms of totalitarianism and mass consumerist modern society.

The uniqueness of Loidolt's presentation of Arendt's notion of actualized plurality lies in her phenomenological explication of it both as a "transformation of the classical Husserlian or Heideggerian phenomenology" and in her demonstration, *pace* standard interpretations of Arendt, that plurality is not a mere empirical fact but is "something that has to be actualized in certain modes of being together" (p. 43).

Part II of *Discovering the 'We'* extends the volume's focus on the question of whether to prioritize the individual standpoint or a form of collectivity. Dermot Moran's contribution to the volume works to show the overlap, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say the intertwining, of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the social world with that of Edmund Husserl. Moran points out how Merleau-Ponty picks up and thematizes previously underappreciated aspects of Husserl's thought, specifically his conception of *Ineinandersein* (being-within-one-another), in order to develop them his own phenomenology of intersubjectivity. *Ineinandersein* ends up being a crucial phenomenological insight that can describe the interweaving and interconnectedness of "individual, conscious experiences within the unified 'nexus of consciousness'", the way in which the mental is interwoven with the body, the way in which individual conscious lives come together to create communities of a higher-order, the way in which the social lives of individuals and communities interweave in the creation of history, and the way in which this can extend across generations to weave traditions of thought, culture, and spirit (*Geist*) broadly understood (p. 108). Ultimately, interconnectedness and intersubjectivity are foundational for phenomenology. The world is "first and foremost the concrete *social, historical, and cultural* world, the common shared world of collective human interrelationality [...] a temporally unfolding 'world' that is never given all at once since it stretches into the past and points toward the future" (p. 109). The shared, cultural world of

everyday life is prior to the abstract accomplishment that is the world as understood by modern science, i.e., the world as mathematically formalized and exhaustively quantifiable.

This chapter is especially useful for demonstrating again the emphasis that Husserl always placed on intersubjectivity. The prominence of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's thought is not a novel spin the French thinker puts on the thought of his German predecessor. As Moran states, "[A]nyone who reads the *Cartesian Meditations* to the end will see that even there, where he is being most Cartesian, Husserl is stressing the ontological primordially of intersubjectivity in his discussion of the community of monads" (p. 108). I could not agree more with Moran's analysis of the fundamental position that intersubjectivity occupies within phenomenology, and it is a point that needs repeating. I can only lament the fact that he is "preaching to the choir," as it were. Those most likely to read his chapter in this book are unlikely to disagree with him before they pick up the book. But perhaps this is true of most academic writing.

Part III addresses the topics of social cognition, embodiment, and social emotions. What is the nature of interpersonal understanding, social interaction, social participation? Do we initially understand others as unique individuals or as fulfilling typical social roles? What is the nature of shame, and is the experience of it as central to social cognition as empathy is often taken to be? What does it mean to relate to the dead? These are just some of the questions addressed in the third part of the book.

In chapter eight, Joonas Taipale appeals to Merleau-Ponty's famous analogy between interpersonal and linguistic understanding in order to take a new tack in the discussion of levels of empathy. Just as there are levels of reading comprehension – he asks us to consider the difference between carefully reading a book and skimming the table of contents to see if something might be worth "*a closer look*" (p. 143) – there are different levels of interpersonal understanding. In both cases, the expectations to which the shallower look gives rise "rely on pre-established associations and sedimented meanings" (p. 144). In the arena of interpersonal understandings, we can call these "*typification*" (p. 144). Not only does Taipale argue that most of our initial perceptions of others bear a structural resemblance to "skimming" rather than "close reading," but he also argues that this must be the case. "[W]e are bound to set *off* from heavily typifying expectations [...] empathy comes with a *foundational order*: to grasp others in

their singularity is to ‘see through’ the supra-individual (social, occupational, etc.) typicalities that we have already ascribed to them from the outset” (p. 144).

At this point, a question arises. What exactly does the author mean by “typification?” Taipale clarifies his sense of typification as a kind of prejudice, which immediately brings to mind Gadamer’s expansion on this theme in *Truth and Method* though he does not engage with his work. He defines typification as “the process whereby features that are not experientially present are smuggled into the anticipatory horizon of our present experience. That is to say, by rule, typification makes our experience of others *prejudiced*” (p. 144). To say that we always, in some sense, prejudge the other is just to say that our initial contact with a person does not grasp his or her singularity. The vast majority of everyday encounters are with anonymous individuals whose uniqueness does not concern us. We grasp them in their social roles: supermarket clerk, customer service representative, police officer. And we ascribe to them, in advance, certain expectations based on those roles.

Taipale speaks of “type-orientation” and “token-orientation” in empathy and argues that empathy has “something like a teleological structure to it” (p. 145). In this structure, type-orientation is our starting point and token-orientation is the telos. We begin with understanding others as exemplifications of a type and proceed toward an understanding of their uniqueness. Even when we are interested in getting to know someone we have not met before more deeply, we “lack the required background data that would enable us to locate the other’s current expressions in their singular factual context, and already for this reason, our experience of the other” is strongly type-oriented (p. 146). He further argues that even when we make purchase on another person’s individuality via token-orientation empathy we do not grasp her “as *devoid* of these supra-individual typicalities,” but we come to appreciate the unique way in which she fulfills those typifications (p. 146).

It would have been nice to see Taipale consider an ethical objection here. Social types seem to be value laden in most cases. Does type-oriented empathy, from which we always begin *per* the author, objectify and reduce people to, at least potentially, socially distorted meanings and thereby imprison our understanding of them to their socially constructed roles? For example, I initially encounter a young woman under the typifications sedimented in my own constituting subjectivity, typifications that I have in large part to the society, history, and culture to which I

belong. Do these typifications stand in the way of my coming to appreciate her as a unique and valuable person, regardless of her gender and socially constructed norms surrounding it? Furthermore, if I come to realize that my social typifications are in some way derogatory, e.g., if I were a white settler in colonial Williamsburg who had received a negative typification of the indigenous people, does this obstruct the potential veracity of my token-oriented empathic engagement? I don't take it that these questions must be answered in the affirmative, but they are worth considering.

Part IV seeks to answer questions related to the role that emotions, or other affective components, play with respect to collective intentionality. One such important question is, "What is the role of emotions in empathy, sympathy, and emotional contagion, and what role do they play for the understanding of intersubjectivity, and for participation in the social world?" (p. 15). Ingrid Vendrell Ferran's chapter offers a programmatic response to just such a question and, in doing so, offers more evidence of the meagerness of the solipsistic reading of phenomenology.

Vendrell Ferran argues that we can develop a phenomenological sociology, differing from the one Schütz offers, by reexamining the work of the early phenomenologists. She makes her case by focusing on affective intentionality, or "the phenomenological idea that affective phenomena are intentionally directed toward the world and others, and reveals [sic.] what matters to us and what motivates us to action" (p. 221). Specifically, by taking up the works of Scheler and Pfänder, she shows that our affective intentionality is socially embedded, socially shaped, and that it can assume shared forms. In doing so, she helps bring to light some of the fundamental social dimensions of early phenomenological thought.

The first section of her chapter focuses on Scheler's account of the stratification of emotional life, the relationship that this stratification bears with respect to the hierarchy of values, and his two forms of emotive intentionality. After developing Scheler's account of emotive intentionality, she takes great care in showing how our ability to grasp values in intentional feelings and respond to them with emotional reactions can be mapped onto a broader phenomenological sociology through "four different forms of 'being with one another'" that Scheler identifies (p.225). These four forms of being together (mass, life-community, society, and the collective person) are regulated according to the kinds of values that each form recognizes and the levels of emotional sharing realized between the members in each case.

The second section of Vendrell Ferran's chapter focuses on Pfänder's theory of personality and his taxonomy of sentiment. She does an especially good job of clarifying Pfänder's notion of inauthentic sentiment. A sentiment is inauthentic if "it is inherited from the culture in which I am socialized [...] adopted from the testimony of others" (p.229). An inauthentic sentiment is socially constructed in the sense that it is taken up from "the social world of our interpersonal relations" (p. 230). Her particularly informative example is the love that a two year old child feels for her new sibling. Such love is probably taken on in response to the parents' engagement with the new sibling and remains inauthentic until it is replaced with true thoughts, feelings, and desires toward the child's brother or sister. This highlights the second feature of inauthentic sentiments, viz., that they can develop into authentic ones. "[T]his possibility of conversion highlights the social structure of affective intentionality, as individuals can internalize forms of being related to others, and this 'internalization' may change the structure of the self and the way in which we are intentionally directed toward others" (p. 230). Inauthentic sentiments are "not in harmony with the general tune of our psychic lives, i.e., they are not supported by other thoughts, convictions, ideas, feelings, or sentiments," and this explains the possibility of converting them into authentic sentiments as we allow further experience to take root in our affective lives and develop our social positions (p. 230). Thus, we see that for Pfänder, analysis of affective intentionality, especially inauthentic sentiment, reveals the socially embedded nature of the self, how we participate emotionally in the social world, and furthermore, the ways in which our interactions with others help to shape our shared social reality.

Part V of the volume is devoted to collective intentionality and group personhood. Emanuele Caminada's contribution to this section will be of interest to Husserl scholars. He presents an examination of Husserl's social ontology and phenomenology of 'we-intentionality.' The first section of his essay sketches an outline of Husserl's social ontology oriented with respect to distinctions made in contemporary debates over where to locate the *collectivity* in collective intentionality, whether it be in the subject of the intentional acts, the mode of the act; or in the act's content (p. 286). His answer is that "Husserl, because of his radical understanding of the intertwining of noematic and noetic intentionality, cannot localize the collective moment of intentionality in the content alone, in the subject alone, or in the mode" (p. 286). Rather,

Husserl offers an “ideal typology” of social groupings that correspond to the three-fold division of intentional acts – cognitive, volitive, and emotional.

Caminada’s second section explicates the ways in which Husserl’s genetic phenomenology might account for a reduction to the We, rather than the I. In other words, Caminada searches for the special form of the phenomenological reduction that can disclose the structure(s) of we-intentionality (p. 281). In the end, he convincingly argues that “it is implausible to assume the existence of two separate capabilities, of I-intentionality and We-intentionality, between which each individual can switch” (p.292). Instead, we should understand Husserl’s account of the I and the We as two foci of the same first-person perspective. I found this image to be a useful one with an analogue in mathematics. Whereas a circle has one, central point around which it is oriented, an ellipse has two foci and cannot be understood properly without reference to both. Our horizons of understanding are elliptical, and the ego, rather than radiating from a single point in the center of our horizons, radiates from two foci – the first-person singular and the first-person plural. Each member of the pair is already implied in the other and they work together to determine the bounds of our ever-changing horizons.

Szanto and Moran’s *Phenomenology of Sociality* is an excellent resource for graduate students and professional academics interested in learning more about phenomenology’s engagement with the social and how phenomenology can make a positive contribution to current debates in social ontology, social cognition, collective intentionality, and philosophy of the emotions. It would make an excellent addition to any reading list for a graduate course in phenomenology. The volume is not for the uninitiated however. Undergraduate students and potentially some professional academics who are unfamiliar with the aims, methods, and vocabulary of phenomenology will have a difficult time with many of the contributions. But this is to be expected from such a specialized volume and does not detract from its overall value.

References

Hua I. Husserl, Edmund. (1973a). *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Edited by S. Strasser. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

This is a self-archived version of this paper.
The original may be found at: DOI: 10.1007/s10743-016-9197-5

Hua XIII. Husserl, Edmund. (1973b). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905-1920*. Edited by Iso Kern. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Ricoeur, Paul. (2007). *Husserl: An analysis of his phenomenology*. Translated by Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.