

## Husserl's Problem of Intersubjectivity

PETER HUTCHESON

Many of the commentators on Husserl's fifth meditation have not paid sufficient attention to the philosophical problem that Husserl addresses there.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, this has resulted in misinterpretations or unjust criticisms. For the most part, there are only very brief and incomplete presentations of Husserl's problem. Unfortunately, one cannot understand Husserl's descriptions and analyses fully unless one has a clear comprehension of what Husserl takes himself to be doing in the first place. There is a need, therefore, for a careful analysis and presentation of some aspects of Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity and a response to some of his critics.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will open with a sketch of two formulations of the same misinterpretation of Husserl's problem. I shall identify a couple of commentators who subscribe to some form of this misinterpretation and criticize their positions. Then I shall explain some aspects of Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity, responding to a few commentators in the course of the explanation.

The first formulation might result from a misunderstanding of paragraph 42 of *Cartesian Meditations*, especially the title of that paragraph. The title is "Exposition of the problem of experiencing someone else, in rejoinder to the objection that phenomenology entails solipsism".<sup>3</sup> The impression that Husserl proposes to refute solipsism is reinforced by the interlocutor's objection.

When I, the meditating ego, reduce myself to my absolute transcending ego by phenomenological epoché, do I not become *solus ipse*; and do I not remain that, as long as I carry on a consistent self-explication under the name phenomenology? Should not a phenomenology that proposed to solve the problems of Objective being... be branded as transcendental solipsism?<sup>4</sup>

By themselves, however, these passages do not directly give one the impression that Husserl proposes to refute solipsism. All that one may conclude from the passages is that Husserl plans to show that phenomenology *does not entail* solipsism. One does not need to prove the existence of other minds to accomplish that end. However, the reader is prepared to interpret Husserl's problem as the problem of other minds. For in the second meditation Husserl writes

And yet it is quite impossible to foresee how, for me in the attitude of reduction, other egos—not as mere worldly phenomena but as other transcendental egos—can become *positable as existing* and thus become equally legitimate themes of a phenomenological egology.<sup>5</sup>

So the interpretation which I believe is mistaken is not entirely without justification. Some references seem to count in its favor. Assuming for the time being that it is correct, we may ask “What is the position that Husserl plans to refute?”

There are two varieties of solipsism, one which expresses a metaphysical thesis; the other is an epistemological one. Metaphysical solipsism is the thesis that only I and my ideas exist. Epistemological solipsism, on the other hand, is the thesis that one cannot know or demonstrate that anyone other than oneself exists. The two positions are not equivalent, inasmuch as one can be an epistemological solipsist without being a metaphysical one. So if Husserl’s task were to refute solipsism, then he would argue that “other egos exist” or that “I know that other egos exist”. In either case, Husserl would be committing himself to the existence of other subjects, since ‘I know that p’ implies that ‘p’ is true.

Sartre believes that Husserl attempts to refute epistemological solipsism.

Because Husserl has reduced being to a series of meanings, the only connection which he has been able to establish between my *being* and *that of the Other* is a connection of *knowledge*. Therefore Husserl could not escape solipsism any more than Kant could.<sup>6</sup>

Sartre’s complaint that Husserl does not deliver the *existence* of other subjects corroborates my contention about his interpretation.

The Other here would be a kind of supplementary category which would allow a world to be constituted, not a *real being* existing beyond the world.... The Other is the object of empty intentions, the Other on principle refuses himself to us and flees. The only reality which remains is therefore that of *my* intention.<sup>7</sup>

Alfred Schütz, at least at one point in his critique of Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity, expresses the belief that Husserl formulates and tries to answer some form of the problem of other minds.

Now we must turn to the question which forms the subject matter of the Fifth Meditation. How can the objectivity of the world as a world for everyone and the *existence* of others be established within this egological cosmos?<sup>8</sup>

I intend to argue that Husserl does not answer either of these problems, since he does not attempt to answer either of them. For the “problem of other minds”, as it is called, is a problem that Husserl *cannot* answer from the phenomenological standpoint. In fact, Husserl does not, and cannot formulate any version of the problem of other minds within the

phenomenological attitude. It is consequently no surprise that he does not answer either of those problems. Husserl understood this quite well, and tried to answer his problem within the phenomenological attitude. What is the evidence for these assertions?

Suppose that Husserl straightforwardly refuted solipsism in the fifth meditation. If that were so, then Husserl could not do it along strictly phenomenological lines. For an answer to the solipsist in this way would constitute ontological commitment to the existence of other subjects. But performing the phenomenological reduction amounts to abstinence from ontological commitment. Post-epoché, one refuses to assert (or deny) straightforwardly that *anything* (with the exception of one's own consciousness) exists. The objects of one's intentions are considered as phenomena, or something constituted by one's actual and possible experiences, at least prior to the intentional analysis of the perception of other subjects.<sup>9</sup> Since existential commitments are ruled out of court by phenomenological reduction, problems which require such commitment in order to answer them are impermissible, too. So if Husserl refuted solipsism in the fifth meditation, he did not consistently follow phenomenological method.

Husserl understood quite well that he could not assert straightforwardly that others exist if he were to approach the problem of intersubjectivity phenomenologically.

What are others, what is the world, for me?—Constituted phenomena, merely something produced within me. *Never* can I reach the point of ascribing being in the absolute sense to others, any more than to the physical things of Nature, which exists only as transcendently produced affairs.<sup>10</sup>

That passage is weak evidence for believing that Husserl did not attempt to refute solipsism.

Other passages in the fifth meditation corroborate my interpretation. When discussing the problem that he will address, Husserl writes that

Imperturbably I must hold fast to the insight that every sense that any existent whatever has or can have for me—in respect of its 'what' and 'it exists and actually is'—is a sense *in* and *arising from* my intentional life, becoming clarified and uncovered for me in consequence of my life's constitutive synthesis, in systems of harmonious verification.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the fifth meditation Husserl writes

At no point was the transcendental attitude, the attitude of transcendental epoché, abandoned; and our 'theory' of experiencing others, *did not aim at being and was not at liberty to be anything but explication of the sense, 'others'*, as it arises from the constitutive productivity of that experiencing: the sense, 'truly existing others', as it arises from the corresponding harmonious syntheses.<sup>12</sup>

Since Husserl believes that he has sustained the phenomenological attitude throughout the fifth meditation and, as I have shown, understood

quite well that that precluded asserting (or denying, for that matter) the existence of other subjects, Husserl did not attempt to answer any form of the problem of other minds. Husserl explicitly says this in the passage which I have just cited. Thus, Sartre and Schütz are mistaken.

One may reasonably object: "But what about the sentence cited earlier, where Husserl anticipates positing the existence of other transcendental egos?" Is that not a counter-example to the interpretation forwarded here? One could, I suppose, take it that way. But the sentence is so singular, and contradicted by so many other passages (or the implications of them), that I believe that Husserl was not satisfied with that statement. I suggest that this is why Husserl marked the sentence in question for deletion.<sup>13</sup>

Even if one believes that the sentence should be included in the text, it still does not adequately support the interpretation I am rejecting. Note that Husserl says that it is impossible to foresee how the existence of other egos can be posited. That may be impossible to foresee precisely because that cannot be done. So the interpretation I am rejecting gives too strong a reading of the passage. It reads more into the passage than is there.

Husserl opens the fifth meditation with an interlocutor's objection, which constitutes the second formulation of the misinterpretation. That objection exploits the false proposition 'Husserl is a subjective idealist' as a premise. When the interlocutor challenges that "But what about other egos, who surely are not a mere intending and intended *in me*, but according to their sense, precisely *others*?"<sup>14</sup>, he is presupposing that Husserl thinks that the being of everything other than the intending ego is to be perceived.

This interpretation is corroborated by what the interlocutor proceeds to say. According to him, Husserl has not given transcendental realism its due.<sup>15</sup> Only my *ideas* are constituted in my consciousness. Beyond that, there is the world that exists in itself.<sup>16</sup> Because phenomenology restricts itself to an analysis of *my* consciousness, there is no way it can account for *other* consciousnesses.

Paul Ricoeur adopts this interpretation of Husserl's problem.

This objection is well known to us; it is solipsism. The Fifth Meditation arises from the transformation of this objection received from without into a challenge accepted by transcendental phenomenology entirely from within.<sup>17</sup>

What is this objection which is accepted as an internal criticism?

It is the interlocutor's objection. Ricoeur continues:

Solipsism has always been the common sense objection to *idealistic* philosophies, since according to common sense the other egos are not reducible to the representation one has of them. They are not even represented objects, unities of sense, which one can verify in a concordant course of experience. Others are other than I; they are other egos. Transcendental phenomenology is obliged to recognize this objection as a difficulty undermining it from within.<sup>18</sup>

This is a paraphrase of the interlocutor's challenge. So Ricoeur believes that the interlocutor's objection undermines Husserl's philosophy from within.

According to Ricoeur, a conflict results from trying to show how other subjects are constituted.

The whole Fifth Meditation will undergo the tension between the two requirements of constituting the Other *in* me and constituting him as Other.... But the latent conflict between the requirement of reduction [constituting the Other in me] and the requirement of description becomes an open conflict from the moment that the Other is no longer a thing but another ego, someone other than I.<sup>19</sup>

The reason why there is a conflict is that, according to Ricoeur, Husserl's theory of the constitution of objects is an idealistic thesis.<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur believes that it is this idealistic thesis that is ultimately responsible for Husserl's failure to resolve "the problem of the Other", as he calls it.

Right up to the end the descriptive spirit and the requirement of constitution tend to meet but fail to blend into each other, for according to the idealistic requirement of constitution, the Other must be a modification of my ego and according to the realistic character of description, the other never ceases to exclude himself from the sphere of 'my monad'.<sup>21</sup>

Now Ricoeur does not explain what he means, or takes Husserl to mean, by 'The Other must be a modification of my ego'. His endorsement of the interlocutor's objection as a challenge undermining phenomenology from within, however, offers a clue for interpretation. The interlocutor maintains that other subjects are not "a mere intending and intending in me, or mere unities of possible verification in me".<sup>22</sup> In the next sentence the interlocutor insists that Husserl has not done justice to transcendental realism, and proceeds to say that only my ideas are constituted by me. These ideas are opposed to the world that exists in itself. Presumably, then, these ideas exist by virtue of an individual's consciousness. Their being is to be perceived, since they are images created by me. This is the way that I make sense out of Ricoeur's contention that Husserl is an idealist. He and the interlocutor are saying that Husserl is a subjective idealist.

I believe that it is a fundamental mistake to interpret Husserl's philosophy, and the concept of constitution in particular, as idealistic.<sup>23</sup> But I shall not argue that point here, since idealism is irrelevant to Husserl's problem. Ricoeur and the interlocutor, to the contrary, believe that it is because Husserl is an idealist that he faces the problem. "Solipsism has always been the common-sense objection to idealistic philosophies, since according to common sense the other egos are not reducible to the representation one has of them".<sup>24</sup>

Now both Ricoeur and the interlocutor believe that Husserl's problem is the problem of other minds; and they believe that Husserl cannot

resolve the problem because the being of other minds is not to be perceived. However, the problem of other minds (as I showed in the first part of this paper) could be a problem even for a realist, provided that the realist did not take the existence of other minds for granted. Sartre is a prime example of a non-idealist that addresses the problem of other minds. So even if Husserl's problem were the problem of other minds, it would not be essential that Husserl be an idealist.

But there is a much more important issue. The fact is that Ricoeur and the interlocutor have misunderstood Husserl's problem. If they had understood it, they would have seen that Husserl's problem is *independent* of both realism and idealism. What is Husserl's problem?

Ricoeur's belief that the interlocutor's objection undermines phenomenology from within does not square with Husserl's objection to the interlocutor.

But perhaps there is some mistake in thoughts like these. *Before* one decides in favor of them and the 'self-understood' propositions they exploit, and then perchance embarks on dialectical argumentations and self-styled 'metaphysical' hypotheses (whose supposed possibility may turn out to be complete absurdity), it might indeed be more fitting to undertake the *task of phenomenological explication* indicated in this connexion by the 'alter ego' and carry through in concrete work.<sup>25</sup>

I emphasize the word 'before' because it tells us how Husserl understands his problem. Husserl is saying that the "task of phenomenological explication", which Husserl takes his problem to be, is a problem that one should try to resolve *before* committing oneself philosophically to various metaphysical hypotheses about other subjects.

But the priority of Husserl's problem is not simply temporal. Husserl's problem should be addressed *before* the problem of other minds because it is logically prior to the one concerning existence. I shall try to explain why this is the case in the next section.

1. Husserl's reply to the interlocutor helps us to understand one aspect of Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity. Here Husserl is suggesting that his critic *may not know what he's talking about*. In particular, the critic has failed to analyze what 'alter egos exist' *means* prior to committing himself to the existence of other subjects and to a certain way that they exist. Husserl's problem is to analyze the concept 'other subject', to become quite clear about the *meaning* of the concept. Husserl's problem is the same for propositions as 'other subjects exist'. Is this problem independent of both idealism and realism?

Indeed it is. In the passage which I have just cited Husserl is saying that his critic has been too hasty in deciding in favor of one metaphysical hypothesis against another. Husserl's reply to his critic is the same reply he would make to anyone who made metaphysical commitments prior to an analysis of meaning. Philosophers, then, have been too hasty in that they have tried to decide for or against such propositions as 'other subjects exist' *before* becoming absolutely clear about what the proposition means.

After all, one must be clear about what a proposition means before one can decide whether it is true or false. For no person could decide on rational grounds whether 'The slithy toves did gyre' is true or false. The metaphysician's practice is something like someone asserting that 'The slithy toves did gyre' is true (or false) without determining what it means, if anything. Husserl warns the interlocutor that his assertions may turn out to be "absurd" in the passage just cited.<sup>26</sup> To determine the meaning of a proposition does not involve commitment to its truth (or falsity). Since Husserl's problem is, in part, to determine the *meaning* of 'other egos exist' rather than to decide its truth or falsity, Husserl's problem is independent of *all* metaphysical theses, including realism and idealism. It is for the same reason that Husserl's problem is logically prior to the problem of other minds. For since to elucidate the proposition 'I experience other subjects' (and related propositions and concepts) does not entail commitment to the existence of other egos, and we must know the meaning of an assertion before we can rationally decide on its truth or falsity, the problem of other minds presupposes an answer to Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity, but not vice versa.

Now Husserl objects to the interlocutor's challenge and suggests that his phenomenological problem is prior to any commitments about existence. So, the interlocutor's objection does *not* "undermine phenomenology from within". Secondly, since Husserl is not trying to respond to the objection to idealistic philosophies (i.e., solipsism), the supposed dichotomy between showing how the other subject is constituted and describing how the alter ego is experienced (at least as Professor Ricoeur interprets those concepts) vanishes. For no idealistic thesis is at stake.

Of course, there is more than one passage that supports my contention that Husserl is interested in conceptual analysis, rather than the traditional problem of other minds. After briefly stating what he takes the problem to be, for example, Husserl says that

These experiences and their works are facts belonging to my phenomenological sphere. How else than by examining them can I *explicate the sense*, existing others, in all its aspects?<sup>27</sup>

Husserl wants to explicate the concept 'existing others', rather than establish the existence of others. Again, Husserl opens paragraph 44 of *Cartesian Meditations* by saying

If the transcendental constitution of other subjects and accordingly *the transcendental sense*, 'other subjects', are in question, and consequently a universal *sense-stratum* that emanates from others and is indispensable to the possibility of an Objective world for me is also in question, then the *sense*, 'other subjects', *that is in question here* cannot as yet be the sense: 'Objective subjects, subjects existing in the world'.<sup>28</sup>

The repetition of the word 'sense' and the inverted commas around 'other

subjects' are not in the text without reason. Husserl inserted them in order to emphasize that he seeks conceptual clarity.

Some remarks in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* on the problem of intersubjectivity confirm my interpretation.

Can the transcendental illusion of solipsism withstand this onward march of mere *concrete explication*? Is it not an illusion that can appear only *before* the explication, because, as already said, this fact—that others and the world for others have their sense in the from me myself—is a presented fact, and therefore *there can be no other problem here than that of clarifying this matter-of-fact, clarifying it, that is, as what is implicitly in me myself?*<sup>29</sup>

Although Husserl speaks of explication of a matter-of-fact here, this matter-of-fact is that others and the world have a definite sense which derives from me. So clarification of this matter of fact would be explication of the *sense* 'others' and 'the world'.

2. This does not, of course, exhaust Husserl's "problem of intersubjectivity", as I have called it. There is a host of other concepts that Husserl wants to clarify *by* explicating the concept 'other subjects'. Clarification of a few of these central concepts is part of what Husserl understands by the "problem of intersubjectivity". I shall concentrate on the concepts 'physical object', 'objective world', 'objectively valid result' and 'truth'.

The problem of intersubjectivity thus turns out to be, upon analysis, a host of philosophical problems, a "hierarchical set of problems".<sup>30</sup> For each of the concepts mentioned above presuppose the concept of intersubjectivity, as I shall try to show.

Take the concept 'physical object'. David Carr has rendered a service to phenomenologists who are trying to understand Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity by calling attention to two senses of the word 'transcendence' in *Cartesian Meditations*.<sup>31</sup> These two senses of the word 'transcendence' are quite helpful in analyzing the concepts 'physical object' and 'the world'. The first sense of 'transcendence' means 'not reducible to my actual acts of consciousness' (hereafter, 'transcendence<sub>1</sub>'). A table, for example, transcends<sub>1</sub> my consciousness in that it is the same table I could see in further perceptions. Now Husserl can account for transcendence<sub>1</sub> prior to introducing the concept of other subjects. He can account for it in terms of possible acts of my consciousness. For all of these acts, actual and possible, are mine. For example, to identify this as a table of which I see the top is to identify it as something which has an underside which I do not see but which I *could* see if I moved. This synthesis of identification (as the object of further possible acts of my consciousness) occurs whenever one identifies something as a table. This holds generally for physical objects, as no physical object is exhausted by my actual acts of consciousness.

But more is intended than that. If I identify something as a table, I identify it as something the underside of which could be seen *at the same*



*time* that I see its top side. That is, I identify it as transcending my consciousness in that I take to be something which is irreducible to my possible acts of consciousness. For if I see only the top side of this table, then it is impossible for me to see the underside simultaneously. Only another subject could see the underside at the same time. Thus, Husserl has to clarify the concept 'other subjects' in order to make sense of such concepts as 'table', 'chair' and, more generally, 'physical object'.

It is worth noting that Husserl is interested solely in understanding how it is *possible* for another subject to see, for example, the underside of this table. To identify something as a table is not necessarily to identify it as having an underside that is *actually* seen. So Husserl's clarification of the concept of a physical object in terms of intersubjective intentions yields only the explicated *concept*, rather than the *existence*, of other subjects.

Now this still leaves open a legitimate way to construe the conflict between description and constitution. But it is not one that I think Ricoeur recognizes. It is this: the other subject is experienced as irreducible to my possible intentions, or as transcending my consciousness in the strong sense. So, the description of how the alter ego is experienced shows that it is impossible for it to be constituted *by me*. For the alter ego must be constituted by *others* as well. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Carr have recognized this problem. I think that the point can be construed, after further clarification, as showing the primacy of intersubjectivity in phenomenology.<sup>32</sup>

3. To identify something as a physical object is to intend it as something *in the objective world*. The concept of the objective world is part of the horizon of the concept of physical object. So Husserl must render the concept 'other subjects' clear in order to make phenomenological sense of the 'objective world'.

But it soon becomes evident that the range of such a theory is much greater than at first it seems, that it contributes to the founding of a *transcendental theory of the Objective world* and, indeed, to the founding of such a theory in every respect, notably as regards Objective Nature. The existence-sense [*Seinssinn*] of the world and of Nature in particular, as Objective Nature, includes after all, as we have already mentioned, *thereness-for-everyone*. This is always co-intended wherever we speak of Objective actuality.<sup>33</sup>

Husserl's point is quite clear. Whenever we talk about the objective world or nature, we mean something which is experienceable by anyone. Clarification of the concept of intersubjectivity is therefore a prerequisite for comprehending 'nature' and 'the objective world' phenomenologically.

Of course, the concepts of space and objective time are implied by the concepts of the objective world and nature. They are intersubjectively constituted. So are all cultural objects.<sup>34</sup> We begin to understand the hierarchy of problems to which Husserl referred.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, many

conceptual roads lead to intersubjectivity.<sup>36</sup>

4. This is corroborated by the fact that it is not only the concept of the world which involves intersubjectivity; what we meaningfully *say* about the objective world also implies intersubjective accessibility.

Although he does not discuss the concept 'objectively valid results' at the beginning of the fifth meditation, it is clear that that notion is conceptually related to the results of a successful response to the problem of intersubjectivity. " 'Objectively [*objectiv*] valid results'—the phrase, after all, signifies nothing but results which have been refined by *mutual* criticism and that now withstand every criticism".<sup>37</sup> Clearly, the concept of objectively valid results is connected with science in the normative sense. If a scientist, in the broad sense, arrives at an objectively valid result, then it is *testable* (and thereby publicly accessible) and something about which other subjects can *talk* ("refined by mutual criticism"). If the result is objectively valid, and thus withstands every criticism, it is regarded as true. Consequently, the concept of a scientifically tested true statement presupposes communication and thus intersubjectivity.

This conception of truth does not hold simply for science. It is the everyday notion. For imagine someone saying that " 'S is P' is true", but adding that there is no possible intersubjective evidence relevant to its truth. Rational persons would say that that person is speaking nonsensically or contradicting himself.

Husserl explicitly discusses the connection between true statements and the concept of intersubjectivity in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.

For what we asserted as a logical characteristic of *predicational truth* is manifestly a characteristic also of the world of experience, prior to the truth and the science that explicate this world predicatively. *World-experience*, as constitutive, signifies, not just my private experience, but *community-experience*: The world itself, according to its sense, is the one identical world, to which all of us necessarily have experiential access, and about which all of us by 'exchanging our experiences—that is: by making them common—can reach a common understanding; just as '*Objective*' legitimation depends on mutual assent and its criticism.<sup>38</sup>

This holds likewise for the truths of logic.

The remarkable sense-determinations of the truth-concept that logic makes fundamental, the concept of an 'Objective' truth—that is to say: an *intersubjectively identical truth*—extend to all the propositions that it erects in its theory: its axioms and also its theorems.<sup>39</sup>

5. Husserl is, of course, especially interested in a proper subset of objectively valid results; these are the results of phenomenology itself. Husserl's "Cartesian" task is to make a radical beginning so that he can clarify the fundamental concepts of science.<sup>40</sup> If Husserl's philosophy is to be genuinely radical, then he must be able to provide an account of the scientific character of *phenomenology itself* (as well as of the "mundane" sciences).

If Husserl is to clarify the necessary conditions for the scientific character of the results of phenomenology, then he must analyze the notion 'repeatability of evidence'.<sup>41</sup> The evidence for Husserl's judgements in particular (and scientific assertions in general) must be repeatable by anyone. This is something that Husserl wants to understand by analyzing the perception of other subjects. For we must be able to identify and reidentify the objects of phenomenological reflection. Furthermore, we must be able to understand the assertions he makes about phenomena. Both of these conditions must obtain if Husserl's philosophy is to be *testable*. If Husserl's philosophy consists of a set of objectively valid results, a third condition must obtain. Upon testing Husserl's assertions, that is, we find that they are accurate or true. Husserl must be able to say "Anyone can consult his experience and confirm my judgements". To my knowledge, no commentator on the problem of intersubjectivity has realized that Husserl's delineation of and answer to the problem is an integral part of Husserl's attempt to clarify *phenomenology* radically.

Even in our fleeting glance at what is constituted in us—in me always, in the meditating ego—as a world, a whole universe of being, we naturally could not avoid being mindful of 'others' and their constitutings. By means of the alien constitutings constituted in my own self, there becomes constituted for me (as has already been mentioned) the common world for 'all of us'. *Here belongs also, of course, the constituting of a philosophy as common to 'all of us' who meditate together—ideally, a single philosophia perennis.* But will our evidence stand firm...? Will it not become unstable, since we have not carried out our methodic predelineations through to the point where the possibility of the being for me of others (as we all feel, a very puzzling possibility) and the more precise nature of their being for me are understandable and since the complex problem of their being for me has not been explicated?<sup>42</sup>

If Husserl is incapable of resolving the problem, then he must give up the important claim that phenomenology is the foundational science, since in that case he would be incapable of providing an account of one of the fundamental concepts of phenomenology and the "mundane" science. Husserl has to understand what it would take for phenomenology to be an intersubjective science. He understood this point quite well.

As beginning philosophers we must not let ourselves be frightened by such considerations. Perhaps reduction to the transcendental ego only *seems* to entail a *permanently* solipsistic science; whereas the consequential elaboration of this science, in accordance with its own sense, leads over to a phenomenology of transcendental philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

Husserl does not seem to have noticed here, however, that a solipsistic science is not a science at all. To be more accurate—if phenomenology *is* scientific, then Husserl has not phenomenologically grounded his belief that it is until he has clarified the concept of intersubjectivity and such related notions as 'evidence', 'truth' and 'intersubjective identifiability'.

It is noteworthy that I have not said that Husserl would have shown

*that* his analyses are objective upon successfully clarifying the concept of intersubjectivity. Rather, he will have shown what it would take for his analyses to be objective. The objectivity of various phenomenological analyses depends on *others*, not Husserl. That is, it is contingent upon others understanding Husserl's analyses, honestly consulting their experiences, and finding that what Husserl has to say is true. To be more precise, it is contingent upon the *possibility* of confirmation of Husserl's contentions by others. I am not begging the question of the objectivity of Husserl's analyses. Rather, I am pointing out the conditions that would have to be met in order for Husserl's analyses to be objective.

Since Husserl does not show *that* his analyses are objective, what does he try to clarify with respect to the objectivity of phenomenology? As I have explained, Husserl will have shown (assuming that his analysis is successful) how the objectivity of phenomenology is *comprehensible* from a phenomenological point of view. This is quite important to Husserl, as he maintains that no basic concept is rendered unanalyzable by adopting the phenomenological standpoint.

6. Like Descartes' *Meditations of First Philosophy*, Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* are ordered more or less according to the priority of each problem. Husserl conceives of his problems in *Cartesian Meditations* as forming a hierarchical set.

As a matter of fact, we shall see that, in a certain manner a transcendental solipsism is only a subordinate stage philosophically; though, as such, it must first be delineated for purposes of method, in order that the problems of transcendental intersubjectivity, as *problems belonging to a higher level*, may be correctly stated and attacked.<sup>44</sup>

In particular, it is no accident that the fourth meditation includes an analysis of the constitution of any ego, a prior problem in the hierarchy.

The point is that Husserl has to explicate how an ego *as such* is constituted before he can proceed to clarify how an alter ego is constituted for me. By treating his own consciousness as an instance of the kind "ego", Husserl uncovers the features that hold if anything is to be constituted as an ego.

This explication therefore concerns my de facto ego only so far as the latter is one of the pure possibilities to be acquired by his free-fantasy variation (fictive changing) of himself. Therefore, as eidetic, the explication is valid *for the universe of these*, my possibilities as essentially an ego, my possibilities namely of being otherwise; accordingly then it is valid also for every possible intersubjectivity related (with a corresponding modification) to these possibilities, and valid likewise for every world imaginable as constituted in such an intersubjectivity.<sup>45</sup>

That is, Husserl's investigation is eidetic, or holds for any ego whatsoever.

One feature of any ego whatsoever is that it is a system of intentionalities. "It is thus an essential property of the ego, constantly to have systems of intentionality..."<sup>46</sup> But not all systems are compatible with others.

But in a *unitarily possible ego* not only singly possible types are *compossible*, and not all compossible ones are compossible in just any order, at no matter what loci in the ego's own temporality.<sup>47</sup>

Instantiations of the universal kind "system of intentionality" are incompatible with one another. But if this is so, then Husserl has already made sense of a plurality of different consciousnesses in the fourth meditation. David Carr has put this well: "The monad as such a system of compossibilities makes no sense except by reference to other possible systems..."<sup>48</sup>

This permits us to delimit the problem of intersubjectivity more precisely. I concur with David Carr in thinking that 'alter ego' is not synonymous with 'a multiplicity of different egos'.<sup>49</sup>

But it is necessary to distinguish between *different egos* and *other egos*... The eidetic approach conceives of different egos with conceiving of any relation among them, other than their essence and their difference. But the concept of objectivity, introduced in the Fifth Meditation, places ego and alter ego in *intentional relation*, since the ego refers his world, or the things in it, to others. The ego in the fullest sense, i.e.: the monad, may differ from my own. But the problem now is to make sense of the alter ego *for* that ego, whoever he may be.<sup>50</sup>

What does this have to do with the problem of intersubjectivity? The first is that addressing the problem of the constitution of any ego is a prerequisite for analyzing how the alter ego is *for* one's own consciousness. For something must be constituted as *an* ego if it is taken to be an *alter* ego. The order in which Husserl addressed problems mirrors the conceptual point that 'alter ego' implies 'ego'. Secondly, Husserl's problem is *not* to conceive of a multiplicity of different consciousnesses (in the fifth meditation). For that has already been achieved by the eidetic character of phenomenological descriptions. It simply has not been "fulfilled".

7. Heretofore I have treated the interlocutor's objection as simply a misunderstanding of Husserl's phenomenology. But there is a legitimate criticism which is, perhaps, implicit in what the interlocutor says.

David Carr explains the point clearly:

A more accurate statement of the phenomenological procedure... is that it considers everything meant purely *as it is meant (cogitatum qua cogitatum)* and withholds any other attitude towards it... But... it could be argued that the alter ego is not susceptible of this kind of treatment: he cannot even be considered purely as meant; or, to the degree that he is, he is no longer an ego. Thus the concept of the ego in general is incompatible with the phenomenological concept of something given, *at least if the alter ego is to be considered transcendental and not merely worldly*. To the extent that he is given he is not a transcendental ego, and to the extent that he is a transcendental ego he is not given.<sup>51</sup>

I say "*perhaps* implicit in what the interlocutor says", for I believe that there is a good deal more in Carr's explanation than in the text. Carr's interpretation does explain the interlocutor's dim recognition that the other subject is a special case:

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?<sup>52</sup>

But there is no evidence that the interlocutor realizes the way in which the other subject is a special case, as does Carr.<sup>53</sup>

Still, the objection that Carr states more clearly has been advocated elsewhere by Sartre:

Now what ought to be demonstrated is that it is not the parallelism of the empirical 'Egos' which throws doubt on the person but that of the transcendental subjects. This is because actually the Other is *never* that empirical person who is encountered in my experience; he is the transcendental subject to whom this person by nature refers. Thus the true problem is that of the connection of transcendental subjects who are beyond experience... What I must attain is the other, not as I obtain knowledge of him, but as he obtains knowledge of himself, which is impossible.<sup>54</sup>

But most importantly, the paradox which I have presented is one that Husserl must resolve, and thus forms a part of the problem of intersubjectivity. For Husserl has to make phenomenological sense of the *co-constitutor* of the objective world; and any co-constitutor is on principle a *transcendental* subject. A consequence of this observation is that not all of Sartre's criticisms are off-base.

8. Although Husserl has not clarified his belief that phenomenology is scientific (at least prior to the fifth meditation), he does analyze some of the basic concepts of science in the first and third meditations. Since these concepts, which include 'evidence', 'truth' and 'reason', involve intersubjectivity as co-intended, Husserl's analyses of them are not fully *grounded* prior to the fifth meditation.

But those analyses are not there simply for the sake of conceptual clarity. For the results of these analyses amount to certain rules that Husserl must follow. For example, he must follow his "first methodological principle" to "neither make nor go on accepting any judgement as scientific *that I have not derived from evidence...*"<sup>55</sup> Husserl is demanding that his analyses be scientific before fully clarifying those concepts (or grounding them) by bringing the concept of other subjects into the picture. (Husserl's "first methodological principle" does not, of course, involve accepting the methods of the *de facto* sciences. That is, Husserl does not demand that his evidence be of a certain sort, such as the evidence through sense-perception. Husserl's "first methodological principle" is neutral with respect to the *kind* of evidence, inasmuch as Husserl demands only that there *be* evidence. In fact, Husserl insists that one must *not* demand a kind of evidence that is inapplicable to the subject at hand. Rather, one must accept those judgements for which one has the appropriate kind of evidence. But those judgements must be accepted only within the limits that the nature of the evidence permits.)<sup>56</sup>

Now if Husserl is to accept judgements only within the limits that the

nature of the evidence permits, then he must characterize the *kind* of evidence which pertains to various judgements and examine its *range*. This is, accordingly, a demand that Husserl makes for his analyses.<sup>57</sup> Naturally, this applies to the intentional analysis of the concept of other subjects. Husserl's responses to these questions are well-known. The kind of evidence which pertains to other subjects is perceptual, although the other subjects's mental life cannot be given directly.<sup>57</sup> And the evidence in which other subjects are given is not apodictic.

I believe that Husserl's analysis amounts to an indirect refutation of solipsism. I think that this is accomplished by his discussion of the evidence and experience relative to the judgement 'I experience others'. I say "indirect", since it is *not* the sort of refutation of solipsism mentioned earlier in this paper. Husserl does not demonstrate that alter egos exist. But there is an implicit response to certain arguments that a solipsist might forward.

A solipsist might argue that one cannot know that other subjects exist on the grounds that

...knowledge about existence and non-existence of everything outside the self originates in immediate experience, or 'the given', which is not strictly shared; and second, that to any given person, the intelligibility of existential claims originates in his own immediate experience.<sup>60</sup>

Since the consciousness of other subjects are not "given in immediate experience", one cannot know that there are other subjects. How would Husserl respond to this argument?

My response on Husserl's behalf is, of course, speculative, as he made only indirect comments on the refutation of solipsism. But I believe that he would complain about the ambiguity of 'immediate experience' first of all. It cannot simply mean that whoever finds out an empirical fact does so on his own, for that is neutral with respect to solipsism.

On one interpretation of the two theses cited above, they imply that a person knows only himself and his mental states. So whenever a person believes that he experiences (and thereby knows) another person, the surrounding world, or things in it, he actually experiences only his mental states. Husserl would point out that there are radical differences between how each of these are experienced.

Of course, that does not settle the issue. That we *take* our experiences to be of different "objects" does not imply that they are in fact different. Still, Husserl's descriptions clarify the phenomena; and the burden of accounting for these apparent differences lies with the solipsist. What *evidence* does the solipsist have for his judgement that all of his experiences are of himself or his mental states? If his judgement is scientific, then there must be some evidence from which it is derived.

The evidence which would seem to be relevant to that judgement would be one of two kinds: experiential or conceptual. But experience cannot support the solipsist. For in various kinds of experience we believe

that we experience things other than our mental states. It is true that some of the beliefs that we base on experience are "cancelled". I may believe that I see the front of a building, for example, until I walk to the other side and discover that it is a stage-prop. Alternatively, one may hallucinate or undergo a perceptual illusion and later discover that that was the case. But the correction of such judgements is based on *further experience*. It is a lack of harmony in pre-thematic anticipations that leads to cancellations, doubts, etc. However, a great number of our beliefs are never modified in this way. Our experiences of the world are, for the most part, harmonious. Experience *never* leads to the *general* conclusion 'I never experience other subjects, but only my mental state', although in a *particular* case I might conclude that 'I thought I experienced someone else, but did not'. This point about other subjects is a special case of a general truth that Husserl recognized about the natural standpoint.

'The' world is a fact-world always there; at the most it is at odd points 'other' than I supposed, this or that under such names as 'illusion', 'hallucination', and the like, must be struck *out of it*, so to speak; but the 'it' remains ever, in the sense of the general thesis, a world that has its being out there.<sup>61</sup>

So, experience cannot constitute the evidence for the solipsist's thesis.

Perhaps a conceptual analysis will show that the natural standpoint is fundamentally confused and thus support the solipsist's thesis. But an analysis of what we mean by 'I experience others', which Husserl does by clarifying the experience of other subjects and the evidence which pertains to that judgement, will not help the solipsist, either. For, briefly, what we mean by 'I experience another subject' is 'I have harmonious experience of what I take to be another subject, and none of those experiences conflict with that belief'.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, what we mean by 'I believed that I perceived another subject, but did not' is 'My experience of what I took to be another subject was not harmonious'.

The solipsist would object that harmonious experience of what one takes to be another subject does not *guarantee* that one *in fact* experiences another subject. To this Husserl would reply "granted". Indeed, the evidence for the judgement 'I experience others' is non-apodictic. But the point is that the solipsist forwards his thesis *only* by demanding a sort of evidence which *cannot* be had. The nature of the case, revealed by an analysis of the judgement 'I experience others', is such that there can be no *guarantee* (or apodictic evidence) for that judgement. One must carefully analyze the *meaning* of a judgment in order to understand what sort of evidence is relevant to grounding it. Lack of such analysis can lead to confused theses like that of the solipsist. The solipsist's thesis is thus comparable to the contention that one cannot see a physical object unless one can see all of its content simultaneously.<sup>63</sup>

The sketch of Husserl's response to solipsism is textually supported. Husserl believes that he has accomplished the task at the end of the fifth meditation.



Within the bounds of positivity we say and find it obvious that, in my own experience, I experience not only myself but others—in the particular form: experiencing someone else. *The indubitable transcendental explication showed us not only that this positive statement is transcendently legitimate* but also that the concretely apprehended transcendental ego (who first becomes aware of himself, with his undetermined horizon, when he effects transcendental reduction) grasps others: *other transcendental egos*, though they are given, not originaliter and in unqualifiedly apodictic evidence, but only in an evidence belonging to 'external' experience.<sup>64</sup>

This response indicates a problem that needed to be solved. Part of Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity is to show that solipsism is an absurd thesis that rests on certain unexamined presuppositions about what evidence confirms the judgement 'I experience others'.

But showing this is very different from giving the kind of straightforward refutation of solipsism which some of Husserl's critics have taken him to be attempting.

Southwest Texas State University

#### References

1. I am indebted to Professors John Biro, David Carr and J. N. Mohanty for their helpful comments on and criticisms of an earlier version of this paper. Whatever errors remain are, of course, my responsibility.
2. David Carr's publications on this topic are a notable exception to this rule, as he devotes considerable attention to Husserl's problem. However, I discuss some aspects of the problem of intersubjectivity which Carr does not explicate. Whereas he concentrates on the objectivity of the world, I pay attention to the objectivity of some of the things that we say about it.
3. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 89. I shall refer to this work simply as "CM".
4. CM, p. 89.
5. CM, p. 30, emphasis mine.
6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, New York, Washington Square Press, 1966, p. 318, first two emphases mine. I shall refer to this work simply as "BN".
7. BN, pp. 317-8, first two emphases mine.
8. Alfred Schütz, *Collected Papers III*, "The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl", trans. Frederick Kersten, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, pp. 56-7, emphasis mine. Hereafter referred to as "CPIII". It is somewhat misleading to say that Sartre and Schütz believe that Husserl tries to answer the problem of other minds. For the traditional problem of other minds is stated in terms of minds, rather than transcendental egos. And both Sartre and Schütz recognize, at least, that Husserl's problem is stated in terms of transcendental subjects. Nonetheless, Sartre and Schütz believe that Husserl tries to establish the *existence* of another transcendental ego. So Husserl's problem, according to Sartre and Schütz, is structurally the same as the problem of other minds. One needs only to replace 'mind' with 'transcendental ego'. According to Sartre and Schütz, then, the only difference is that Husserl does not attempt to establish the existence of something which is part of the world.
9. I say "prior to the intentional analysis of the perception of other subjects", since some phenomena are constituted as irreducible to my *possible* experiences after grounding that judgement in the fifth meditation. See the discussion of the two senses of 'transcendence' later in this paper.
10. CM, p. 52n., emphasis mine.
11. CM, p. 91.
12. CM, p. 148, emphasis mine.
13. CM, p. 31n.
14. CM, p. 89.

15. CM, p. 89.
16. CM, p. 90.
17. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. E. Ballard and L. E. Embree, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 116. I shall refer to this work simply as "AHP".
18. AHP, p. 116, emphasis mine.
19. AHP, pp. 116-7.
20. AHP, pp. 130, 136.
21. AHP, p. 130.
22. CM, p. 89.
23. It might be argued that I should classify Sartre's misinterpretation along with Ricoeur's, since Sartre maintains that Husserl is an idealist (BN p. 9). But Sartre does not interpret Husserl's problem as arising because he takes Husserl to be an idealist. In fact, Sartre (himself no idealist) tries to answer the problem of other minds.
24. AHP, p. 116.
25. CM, p. 90, first emphasis mine.
26. CM, p. 90.
27. CM, p. 90, emphasis mine.
28. CM, pp. 92-3, emphases mine.
29. Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, p. 242, emphasis mine. I shall refer to this work simply as "FTL".
30. FTL, p. 240.
31. David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974, pp. 86-7. I shall refer to this work simply as "PPH".
32. Peter Hutcheson, "Husserlian Metaphenomenology: A Study of the Status of Phenomenology as a Science", unpublished doctoral dissertation.
33. CM, p. 92; Cf. FTL, p. 233.
34. CM, p. 92.
35. FTL, p. 240.
36. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to note that the life-world (Crisis, p. 172) and the world of the natural standpoint (Ideas, par. 29) are intersubjectively constituted.
37. CM, p. 5, emphasis mine.
38. FTL, p. 236, first and last emphases mine.
39. FTL, p. 195, emphasis mine.
40. CM, pp. 4-5; see also Meditation no. 1.
41. CM, p. 10.
42. CM, pp. 87-8, first emphasis mine.
43. CM, p. 30.
44. CM, pp. 30-1, emphasis mine.
45. CM, pp. 84-5, emphasis mine.
46. CM, p. 65.
47. CM, p. 74.
48. PPH, p. 88.
49. PPH, p. 87.
50. PPH, p. 88, first emphasis mine.
51. PPH, p. 89, last two emphases mine.
52. CM, p. 89.
53. But it is quite clear that Carr knows that he is explaining what would make the passage plausible, rather than merely expositing the text. For he says "it *could* be argued". The reason that I bother to note that the interlocutor does not realize the way in which other subjects are a special case is that I have maintained that Ricoeur and the interlocutor are mistaken about this very point.
54. BN, p. 317.
55. CM, p. 13.
56. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson, New York, Collier Books, 1962, 24, p. 83. I shall refer to this work simply as "Ideas".
57. CM, p. 13.
58. CM, p. 111.
59. CM, p. 149.
60. C. D. Rollins, "Solipsism", in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v. 7, New York, Macmillan, 1967, p. 490.
61. Ideas, p. 96.

62. Of course, there could be disharmonious experiences when one still identifies something as another subject. But in cases like these, the disharmonious experiences are "cancelled".
63. This is not to say, of course, that all judgements can be confirmed by sense-experience. Indeed, Husserl strongly objects to empiricism on the grounds that empiricists presuppose that any judgement which is foreign to sense-experience is spurious (*Ideas*, p. 75). Husserl objects because it is the *meaning* of the judgement which dictates the way it is to be grounded. But it is clear that the judgement 'I experience others' is grounded in sense-experience.
64. CM, pp. 148-9, first emphasis mine.