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## THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERSONHOOD: CHARLES TAYLOR AND EDMUND HUSSERL

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*This paper argues that Charles Taylor's influential accounts of embodied personhood and agency are closer to the phenomenological accounts of personhood found in the mature Husserl (especially his Ideas II and in his ethics lectures) than, perhaps, he realises. Taylor acknowledges the influence of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger (through the lens of Hubert Dreyfus) but tends to see Husserl as imprisoned within the Cartesian tradition that begins from the certainty of self-consciousness. I shall develop relevant aspects of embodied, situated subjectivity found in Husserl and shared by Taylor ; and, finally, I shall reflect on the difficult problematic of the relation between natural and transcendental approaches to personhood.*

‘The great example that I’ve been battling with throughout my life is the whole epistemological tradition from Descartes. Descartes says in one of the letters that we get all our ideas from the impact of the outside world causing representations in our minds.’ (Taylor, 1995)

In this paper<sup>1</sup> I want to reflect on the considerable philosophical resources concerning the nature of the person which is to be found in the phenomenological tradition, specifically in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), in order to support and develop the Canadian

philosopher Charles Taylor's challenging analyses and reflections on personhood found across his life's work. It must be emphasized at the outset that Charles Taylor's approach of attending to sense (*Sinn*)<sup>2</sup>, and indeed, 'making sense' (Taylor, 1989, p. 8) is distinctly *phenomenological* and that he himself has characterized it as such. Thus, in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor speaks of his account of personal and identity as 'phenomenological' (Taylor, 1989, p. 32), and, more recently, has described part of his approach in *A Secular Age* as phenomenological (Taylor 2007).<sup>3</sup> In what follows I shall base my phenomenological account of personhood primarily on the writings of Edmund Husserl, but there are also, of course, extremely important resources in some of the more neglected figures of the phenomenological movement, especially Max Scheler<sup>4</sup>, Edith Stein (1989; 2000), and Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1960), among others, but space does not allow me to develop their particular approaches here.

In this paper I want to suggest that Taylor's account is much close to that of the mature Husserl (especially as found in his *Ideas II* (Husserl, 1952; 1989) and in his ethics lectures (Husserl 1988; 2004) than, perhaps, he realises. In so doing, I want to defend Husserl against the charge that he is somehow trapped within the Cartesian tradition that began from the certainty of self-consciousness, as characterized by Taylor. I shall develop some relevant aspects of embodied subjectivity shared by Husserl and Taylor; and, finally, I shall reflect on the difficult problematic of the relation between natural and transcendental approaches to personhood.

### **Personhood as a Philosophical Problem**

The concepts of 'person' and 'personhood' have re-emerged as a central concern of contemporary of philosophy of mind and action. The concept of personhood is fundamental to morality, law, and the health and human sciences, yet it lacks theoretical definiteness. It belongs, as Taylor says, in the background as part of the moral ontology that grounds our intuitions. Questions arise as to whether fetuses,

patients in a coma, dolphins or other creatures, are persons. Attempts to answer these questions simply highlight how poorly resourced our current thinking about personhood is.

Many efforts have been made to define what uniquely determines personhood. The concept of the person has its roots deep into classical Roman philosophy and also in the works of the Early Christian Fathers. The Greek *prosopon* means ‘visage’, ‘face’ or ‘mask’ and Clement of Alexandria complained of those women who turned their faces (*prosopa*) into masks (*prosopeia*, see Hart, 2009). *Persona* in Latin is thought to come from *per sonare*, the mask through which actors spoke. Boethius played a key role in defining the person as an individual substance of a rational nature as part of his explication of the Trinity.

Recently the philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker has claimed (somewhat pleonistically) that personhood is defined by possession of the first-person perspective:

...what’s unique about us are the features that make us persons, not just animals—features that depend on the first-person perspective (like wondering how one is going to die or evaluating one’s own desires). (Baker 2000).

According to Rudder Baker, personhood is not identical with being an organism:

The person endures as long as she has a first-person perspective; the organism endures as long as it maintains certain biological functions. The person’s persistence conditions are first-personal, and the organism’s are third-personal. Hence, it is possible for one to exist without the other. So, the person is not essentially biological; the organism is. (Baker 2000)

Deep and complex theoretical issues are raised by the concept of personhood. Is selfhood the same as personhood? Is (potential or actual) self-awareness or consciousness required for personhood? How does personhood relate to embodiment? Is the person identical with his or her organic body? Is personhood identical with selfhood and the domain of the ego? Is it dependent on memory? And so on. Taylor's approach offers a different picture, one that sidesteps many of these questions. Nevertheless, personhood or selfhood remains central for him. Taylor is a relentless opponent of the definition of personhood in terms of self-consciousness (whether in Locke or Parfit, see Taylor, 1989, p. 49). Furthermore, for Taylor, to be a self is not identical with being an organism (Taylor, 1989, p. 34). Personhood, similarly, is not a matter of being able to entertain second-order desires of the kind articulated by Harry Frankfurt (see Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?' in Taylor, 1985, pp. 1-44). Our condition is best summed up by Taylor's conception of 'embodied agency' which he sees not as a contingent feature but as essential to the human condition: our experience is necessarily that of embodied agents (see Taylor, 'Transcendental Arguments', in Taylor, 1995, p. 25).

### **Charles Taylor on Personhood and Selfhood**

Across his long career, Charles Taylor has offered several philosophically rich and provocative reflections on the nature of persons and selfhood (see, *inter alia*, Taylor 1976; 1985a; and 1988). Taylor's concerns generally have been twofold. On the one hand, he wants to map certain assumptions (often unarticulated) about human agency (inwardness, freedom, individuality, and so on) embedded in modern culture, and also to show how they condition, frame ('inescapable frameworks'), and at the same time distort our understanding. He is inspired by the Wittgenstein idea that we can be in the grip of a particularly powerful and insidious picture of how things are (*Ein Bild heilt uns gefangen*, *Philosophical Investigations* § 115).

Secondly, Taylor aims to develop a set of assumptions that counteract the prevailing 'representational epistemology from Descartes to Quine' (Taylor, 1989, p. ix), what he sometimes calls 'mediational epistemology' (Taylor, 2005, p. 26). As he acknowledges, Taylor uses the term 'epistemology' not to mean just the philosophical discipline, but more broadly to characterize an entire outlook towards knowledge that regards it as a correct representation of an independent reality (see Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology', in Taylor, 1995, pp. 45-37). Reality is *mediated* to us by irritations on our sensory surfaces, by language or whatever; all these views belong to this picture. Associated with this outlook, moreover, is a conception of the self as a disengaged, dispassionate, rational onlooker on the world. Importantly, as Taylor charts it, this conception of the self has had profound moral and political consequences. Taylor's approach is to highlight the inadequacies of this picture and offer a different one, inspired largely by Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Hegel and others. On his alternate view, we are embodied and embedded in a world in which we 'cope' in ways that are often pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic yet which involve *understanding* (Taylor, 2005, pp. 35-37). Even in our most detached theoretical approach to the world we are *agents* and agency here means also *interpretative* engagement; we are *construing* the world not simply *reflecting* it.

Taylor is a strongly historical thinker and recognizes that there is not one standard picture of personhood that has prevailed over time. Rather, the reverse, and we can be in the thrall of different pictures over time. In his major studies such as *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor has uncovered different models of the self operating in different periods of Western culture, e.g. the disengaged controlling self of calculative reason; the Romantic expressivist self that stresses integration of reason and sensibility; the modernist, multilevel, decentred self, and so on. He recognizes that selfhood is lived on many levels and is opposed to reductionist forms of explanation that focus on only one of these many levels (Taylor, 1989, p. 480).

In part inspired by the tradition of Kant (where persons are essentially moral centres and followers of rational laws that have been applied by themselves to themselves), Taylor is also deeply influenced by French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>5</sup> and by Hubert L. Dreyfus' reading of Heidegger (see Dreyfus 1991; 2005), which emphasises the manner in which agents are involved in 'coping' activity engaged in the world, as well as the hermeneutic tradition according to which humans are 'self-interpreting animals' ('Self-Interpreting Animals', in Taylor, 1985, pp. 45-75). Taylor writes:

Heidegger, for instance, shows — especially in his celebrated analysis of being-in-the-world — that the condition of our forming disengaged representations of reality is that we must be already engaged in coping with our world, dealing with the things in it, at grips with them. Disengaged description is a special possibility, realizable only intermittently, of a being (*Dasein*) who is always “in” the world in another way, as an agent engaged in realizing a certain form of life. That is what we are about “first and mostly” (*zunächst und zumeist*). (Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology', in Charles Taylor, 1985, p. 11)

On Taylor's view, persons—or selves (in his sense, Taylor 1989, p. 33)—are those beings whose situations are meaningful and have 'significance' ('Cognitive Psychology', Taylor 1985, p. 202) and 'import' ('Self-Interpreting Animals', Taylor, 1985, p. 54), i.e. have relevance for and are not indifferent for the subjects: 'We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us' (Taylor, 1989, p. 34). Emotions such as shame reveal situations which are experienced in a certain way by subjects and without those subjects the concept of 'shame' makes no sense. Or to put it another way, our lives do not take shape and make sense *without us* as actors in, interpreters of, and responders to situations (Taylor, 1989).<sup>6</sup> The question 'who' is of vital importance (Taylor, 1989, p. 29). As Taylor writes:

To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer. (Taylor 1989, p. 34)

On Taylor's view--as, I shall argue, in Husserl's phenomenology--the heart of embodied selfhood is the *person*, understood as the unified, goal-directed centre of action, bearer of rights and status, responsibilities and moral standing. From the Hegelian tradition, moreover, persons must be understood not as static entities but as having a history and inhabiting a social world with others. Persons connect to one another in social situations. Persons grow and evolve and have a sense of ownership and directedness in their lives (as developed in Taylor's *Sources of the Self*). Persons are, in Charles Taylor's terms, *respondents*, that is they can answer:

A person is a being who can be addressed and who can reply. Let's call a being of this kind a respondent. (Taylor, 'The Concept of a Person', in Taylor, 1985, p. 97)

To be a self is possible only with other interlocutors, involved in 'webs of interlocation' (Taylor, 1989, p. 22). Selves intersect with one another in a linguistic context of dialogue and discussion. I mention in passing that the concept of *narrativity* (as invoked by Taylor), which is intimately involved with this concept of interlocation, needs to be very carefully applied. Of course, to be a self is to be both the author of and perhaps also the hero in a story. But it is important to stress that persons do not write their own story in the sense of inventing it as creative authors, although they do tell stories about their evolving personhood and some of those stories themselves accrue to and come to define their personhood in particular ways, just as a rolling snow ball gather more snow that adds to it. How a person views her own childhood or her role as a member of a family is precisely *her* story, albeit that it may grate against the stories of other family members

about shared events. Narrativity invokes a complex hermeneutic situation, much explored by artists and dramatists.

On Taylor's account, in summary, persons are embodied, socially embedded, intersubjectively involved, historically conditioned agents and respondents. In relation to our topic, Taylor himself take his direction on embodied agency (see Taylor, 1995, p. 22) specifically from the phenomenology of Heidegger (mediated by Dreyfus) and Merleau-Ponty. Their insights, he believes, parallel insights to be found also in the different tradition of Wittgenstein and Polanyi, see Taylor, 1989, p. 460). Husserl is conspicuously absent from Taylor's account, but, to my ear, Taylor sounds remarkably close to the views of the mature Husserl, perhaps more so than to the anti-subjectivist Heidegger.

It may seem slightly out of tune with the broad tenor of Taylor's thought to insist on his relation to Husserl rather than with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, or Gadamer (whom I also count as belonging to the phenomenological tradition, albeit its hermeneutic wing, see Moran, 2000). Taylor largely accepts Dreyfus' picture of Husserl as himself caught up (despite his best efforts) in the representationalist tradition. Nevertheless, Taylor is positively disposed to the efforts made by the mature Husserl of the *Crisis* to break with representationalism and scientism. Here Taylor largely agrees with and indeed often reproduces Husserl's own break with traditional representationalist epistemology, the rejection of the primary/secondary quality distinction imposed by mechanistic science at the origins of modernity, and the rejection of naturalism and of scientific objectivism.

More generally Charles Taylor rejects the 'representationalist' account of the self found in modern philosophy where the self is seen as mirroring a universe that exists independently of it. Husserl too explicitly rejects his own earlier 'bundle' view (inherited from his teacher Franz Brentano), his 'complex of experiences' view, even his 'constructed self' view. For instance Husserl writes in his *Passive Synthesis* lectures:



The ego is not a box containing egoless lived-experiences or a slate of consciousness upon which they light up and disappear again, or a bundle of lived-experiences, a flow of consciousness or something assembled in it; rather the ego that is at issue here can be manifest in each lived-experience of wakefulness or lived-experiential act as pole, as ego-center, ...it can be manifest in them as their outward radiating or inward radiating point, and yet not in them as a part or piece. (Husserl, 2001, p. 17)

Taylor disagrees with Husserl, however, in relation to the latter's continuing affirmation of the central grounding role of Cartesian reflexive self-certainty. In his paper, 'Overcoming Epistemology' (Taylor 1995), Taylor argues that reflexive, self-given certainty had the status of a moral ideal in modern philosophy. He writes:

The power of this ideal can be sensed in the following passage from Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (1929), all the more significant in that Husserl had already broken with some of the main theses of the epistemological tradition. He asks in the First Meditation whether the "hopelessness" of the current philosophical predicament doesn't spring from our having abandoned Descartes's original emphasis on self-responsibility: [Taylor then quotes the following passage from Husserl in German]

Must not the demand for a philosophy aiming at the ultimate conceivable freedom from prejudice, shaping itself with actual autonomy according to ultimate evidences it has itself produced, and therefore absolutely self-responsible – must not this demand, instead of being excessive, be part of the fundamental sense of genuine philosophy? (Taylor 1995)<sup>7</sup>

For Taylor, Husserl's ideal of self-responsibility, as articulated here, is foundational for modern culture (Taylor, 1995, p. 7). In that paper, Taylor discovers certain anthropological associations which accompany this view of self-responsibility. Chief among them is the idea of human freedom involving a certain detachment or disengagement of the subject. For Taylor, on the other hand, even in theoretical activity humans are *agents* and not merely passive representers of knowledge.

Taylor is insistent that we cannot leap out of the human condition. Hence, objectivism and naturalism, which try to take a non-human stance towards the world and our knowledge, always already have failed. We can, according to Taylor, only understand from within the game that humans play, within the 'web of interlocation'.

In relation to the nature of the self, Taylor is a vehement opponent of the Lockean 'punctual', radically subjectivist, disengaged form of the self where all that matters is self-awareness or self-consciousness (Taylor, 1989, p. 172) "The punctual agent seems to be nothing else but a 'self' an 'I'" (ibid., p. 175) Rather my self-understanding has 'temporal depth' and 'involves narrative' (ibid. p. 50).

### **The Mature Husserl on Personhood**

There is much more to the concept of subjectivity and egoity in Husserl's phenomenology than the egoic subjectivism so familiar from his *Cartesian Meditations* (which is after all chiefly methodological in approach). Husserl made several eidetic (i.e. a priori essentialist) claims concerning conscious, embodied subjective life. For Husserl, as for Taylor, consciousness is *necessarily* embodied. Furthermore, and this has to be carefully construed to avoid an overly Cartesian emphasis, consciousness is necessarily *egoic* (*ichlich*), i.e. ego centred; all conscious acts and passions radiate from or stream into the ego. An egoless consciousness is, for Husserl, an a priori impossibility.

I cannot summarize Husserl's views of personhood here but I can briefly indicate the tenor of his thought. From *Ideas I* (1913) onwards, Husserl characterises it as an 'I-pole' (*Ichpol*) or 'I-centre'

(*Ich-Zentrum*), 'the centre of all affections and actions' (Hua IV 105). The I is a 'centre' from which 'radiations' (*Ausstrahlungen*) or 'rays of regard' stream out or *towards* which rays of attention are directed. It is the centre of a 'field of interests' (*Interessenfeld*), the 'substrate of habitualities' (*Cartesian Meditations*, Hua I 103), 'the substrate of the totality of capacities' (*Substrat der Allheit der Vermögen*, Hua XXXIV 200). This I 'governs', it is an 'I holding sway' (*das waltende Ich*, Hua XIV 457) in conscious life (Hua IV 108), yet it is also 'passively affected'. The Husserlian self is never a Lockean punctual self.

Persons in the Kantian tradition are understood as ends in themselves, deserving of respect. The mature Husserl was undoubtedly influenced by the Kantian (and Neo-Kantian) conceptions of the self as person understood as an autonomous (giving the law to itself), rational agent. At the centre of the person, for Husserl, is a *drive* for reason, but it is a drive sitting upon many other affective and embodied elements. In its full concretion' (Hua XIV 26), it is a *self* with convictions, values, an outlook, a history, a style, and so on. As Husserl writes in *Cartesian Meditations*: 'The ego constitutes itself *for itself* in, so to speak, the unity of a history' (CM, p. 75; Hua I 109). It is present in all conscious experience and cannot be struck out (*undurchsteichbar*). As the Husserl scholar Henning Peucker has written:

The ego as a person is characterized by the variety of its lived experiences and the dynamic processes among them. According to Husserl, personal life includes many affective tendencies and instincts on its lowest level, but also, on a higher level, strivings, wishes, volitions, and body-consciousness. All of this stands in a dynamic process of arising and changing; lived-experiences with their meaningful correlates rise from the background of consciousness into the center of attention and sink back, yet they do not totally disappear, since they are kept as habitual acquisitions (*habituelle Erwerbe*). Thus, the person has an individual history in which previous

accomplishments always influence the upcoming lived-experiences. (Peucker, 2008, p. 319)

This mature Husserl clearly casts the shadow which Merleau-Ponty felt on him as he wrote, as he put it in his famous essay ‘The Philosopher and His Shadow’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c).

### The Objectivist Threat

Both Husserl and indeed Charles Taylor identify the threats posed by *scientism* (‘Peaceful Coexistence in Psychology’, in Taylor, 1985, p. 135), and *objectivism*, which denies that the way humans experience the world is relevant to the objective description of the world. Objectivism maintains that there can be an observer-independent or so called ‘third-person’ *absolute* description of the world, one which removes all reference to anthropocentric conceptions and qualities, and indeed all human culture. This would be the true ‘view from nowhere’. Both Husserl and Taylor have shown what extraordinary problems arise when this methodological approach of the natural sciences is applied to the human sciences. There is a kind of false conception of objectivity in the social sciences (I have heard it explicated recently in a lecture by Peter Berger who claimed that as a sociologist he could simply put his own religious views out of account when investigating the religious beliefs of others). This is sometimes expressed (e.g. by Daniel Dennett or Oliver Sachs) in terms of the ‘visiting anthropologist from Mars’ who somehow can do ‘third-person’ ‘heterophenomenology’ (see Dennett 2003). But the Martian anthropologist, just like the British colonial observer, is going to incorporate his or her own values and convictions. Martian anthropology, though more distant from the human, is not more *objective* than anthropology or psychology done by humans on each other. It simply displaces the interests in the interest-relative descriptions—it is anthropology *by Martians*.

We are stuck then with human sciences done by and for humans. As one of my students once put it, ‘the problem with psychology is that

it is done by humans'—as if somehow a human psychology written by dogs would be more 'objective'.

The lack of a truly objective third-person (or observerless) platform does not mean that an appropriate level of (already interpreted) description cannot be found. It also does not mean that we descend into relativism or that all interpretations are equally valid. Husserl's conception of the disengaged transcendental spectator is certainly rejected by Taylor as belonging to the tradition of self-consciousness epitomised by Descartes. I don't think this the whole picture for Husserl—remember he wrote the *Cartesian Meditations* as one kind of introduction to transcendental phenomenology and the way in through the life-world shortly afterwards in his *Crisis of European Sciences* (Husserl 1962; 1970). Husserl believes in the social, embodied, engaged self. But there is still need, I believe for recognition, albeit qualified, of a self-reflexive or self-aware core in our conception of the socially situated, embodied person. Taylor also believes this. He writes:

Our humanity also consists, however, in our ability to decenter ourselves from this original engaged mode; to learn to see things in a disengaged fashion, in universal terms, or from an alien point of view; to achieve, at least notionally, a "view from nowhere." Only we have to see that this disengaged mode is in an important sense derivative. (Taylor, 2005, p. 46)

In other words, it is not that humans don't have the capacity to reflect in this neutral, detached third-person way, but that this capacity is a very distinctive and indeed higher order or secondary activity that rests on top of our more original 'coping' with the world. Husserl also sees the emergence of the transcendental attitude of the spectator as something that happened contingently in history, with the Greeks, and which marked a new stage in human development. Once it is acquired, however, this spectator standpoint drives inquiry

in a new infinite direction, although its relation to the life-world must never be forgotten.

### The Natural Attitude is an Attitude

In many respects Charles Taylor is an avowedly transcendental philosopher, identifying the conditions that make human experience possible. This allows a greater confrontation with Husserl. Taylor's acceptance that disengaged reason is one possibility of our embodied agency is crucial here.

One of the greatest discoveries of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is that the ordinary, everyday world of experience, the world of things, plants, animals, people and places, the pre-theoretical, pre-scientific world, is not just simply *there*, in itself, but is the correlate of a very specific attitude, namely, the *natural attitude*. The phenomenological concept of 'attitude' (*Einstellung*) here is very close to what Taylor calls 'orientation' (Taylor, 1989, p. 28). One asks questions from within one's orientation and rarely if ever reflects on the orientation itself. Once one recognises the natural attitude, the position known as naturalism can never be more than the objectification or reification of the correlates of an attitude.

For Husserl, moreover, as he makes clear in *Ideas II* (which was deeply influential on Merleau-Ponty), the natural attitude is the *personalistic attitude*. Husserl explains the personalistic attitude as

...the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with another in greeting, or are related to another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion. (*Ideas II* § 49, p.192; Hua IV 183)

Husserl further claims that the natural attitude (and its derivative the naturalistic attitude – which construed the world naturalistically, i.e. a dogmatising naturalism) is actually only a one-sided (Hegel

would say ‘abstract’) aspect of the fully concrete *personalistic* attitude. He even speaks of the ‘interlocking’ (*ineinandergreifen*) between natural and personalistic attitudes (*Ideas* II § 62). Nevertheless, he explicitly differentiates the personalistic attitude from the natural, and indeed maintains that the natural attitude is ‘subordinated’ to the personalistic (*Ideas* II § 49). The natural attitude is actually reached through a self-forgetting or abstraction of the self or ego of the personalistic attitude, through an abstraction from the personal which presents the world in some kind of absolutized way, as the world of nature (IX 419).

We live as persons in a *personalistic* world. The personalistic world is the *intersubjective* world shared with others; it is the communal world, the world of values and the space of reasons. The entire, objective, shareable, communable world is the constituted outcome of shared interlocking persons whom Husserl sometimes calls *monads*. He speaks of an ‘open plurality of other egos’ (*Formal and Transcendental Logic* § 104), and the ‘intersubjective cognitive community’ (FTL § 96). First and foremost our interaction is with others as persons, indeed the first ‘other’, for Husserl, is the personal other (e.g. the mother) not the encounter with physical material objects. Nature is not primary; persons are primary.

The person is precisely the subject as social and relational, according to Husserl, whose acts are judged from the standpoint of reason (IV 257) and reflection (XIV 48).<sup>8</sup> We encounter each other primarily as persons within the spiritual or cultural world:

That which is given to us, as human subject, one with the human Body (*Menschenleibe*), in immediate experiential apprehension, is the human person (*die menschliche Person*), who has his spiritual individuality, his intellectual and practical abilities and skills (*Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten*), his character, his sensibility. This Ego is certainly apprehended as dependent on its Body and thereby on the rest of physical nature, and likewise it is apprehended as dependent on its past. (*Ideas* II § 34, p. 147; Hua IV 139-40)

Husserl writes: 'The development of a person is determined by the influence of others' (IV 268). My person is not a different entity from my lived body; they are 'two sides of the undivided unity of experience' (Hua XIV 458). Again, I understand myself at different levels. I am a physical body under the physicalistic attitude, an ego under the psychological attitude, an embodied self in the psycho-physical attitude, and a person under the personalistic attitude. First and foremost, for Husserl, the person is a genuinely objective thing, constituted in objective time and belonging to the spatio-temporal world (IX 418). On the other hand, its essence is quite distinct from that of 'real things' (*Ding-Realitäten*, VIII 493). The personal 'I' is the I of abiding capabilities and convictions. It is more than an empty pole of the identity of the acts performed by it. The I, for Husserl, has a character through habitualization, through primal institution, and re-constitution.

### The 'Breakthrough' to the Transcendental Attitude

This discovery of the *natural-personalistic attitude* is a considerable advance beyond Kant's transcendental account of the transcendental ego. At least on one reading of Kant, the 'world of appearances' (*die Erscheinungswelt*) is actually the world as described in the natural sciences, that is, the Newtonian world of extended bodies, forces, and so on. Of course, Kant thinks that the *form* of this world comes from interaction with subjectivity and specifically with the a priori forms of sensibility (space and time) as well as the categories of the understanding (causation). Kant himself does not appear to have envisaged the possibility that the natural world could be other than it was conceived by science; in that sense he was a scientific realist. He also did not seem to worry that his position could be construed as a *relativism* based on the specifically human forms of sensibility and understanding (this form of relativism Husserl calls '*anthropologism*' in his *Logical Investigations, Prolegomena*). Treating the logical laws as describing the thinking of human beings as such leads to a kind of



‘species relativism’ (*der spezifische Relativismus*) or ‘anthropologism’ (*Anthropologismus*, *Prol.* § 36), a kind of subjectivism which extends to the whole human species.

*Anthropologism* maintains that truth is relative to the human species and, hence without humans, there would be no truth. Husserl understands Kant’s account of knowledge as a kind of anthropologism in this sense. He accuses Kant of misunderstanding the subjective domain as if it were something natural, and hence of construing the a priori as if it were an essential part of the human species (*Prol.* § 38).

Kant’s project involved laying down the features of *Erkenntnis überhaupt*. This is what must be the case for *all* rational, cognising beings not just those features that belong specifically to our *human* mode of sensing and conceiving, although that too must be factored in. But Kant also wanted to specify the conditions of *human sensibility* and understanding and to do this he had to perform a kind of ‘backwards reflection’ (Husserl’s *Rückbesinnung*) to identify the kinds of limitations that govern us, without stepping outside these limitations.

The problem is with the viewpoint of Kant’s *Critique* itself. From what standpoint is it written? As Paul Ricoeur would put it: ‘where is Kant, when he is describing the limits of human sensibility and understanding speaking from?’. Kant thereby did make the breakthrough to the transcendental way of doing philosophy. That is to say, he sought the conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge and recognised that those conditions included an ineliminable reference to *subjectivity*. The world is as it is *for us*. Objectivity is necessarily correlated with subjectivity which is not just empirical embedded subjectivity in the world but *transcendental subjectivity*.

Husserl takes the Kantian breakthrough to transcendental philosophy a step further with his recognition that the world of natural experience is correlated to the *natural attitude*. This natural-personalistic attitude, although it is the default mode of experiencing for all human subjects, is not the only attitude. In fact, even to identify it as an *attitude* (*Einstellung*) – a way of placing oneself into the world-- is already in some sense to have overcome the natural attitude, to have

bypassed or transcended it. This of course is simply the application of a Hegelian insight that to draw a limit is already to somehow be beyond that limit (but Husserl of course did not acknowledge Hegel in this regard). To reflect on life in the natural attitude is to have already entered or constituted the transcendental attitude which, according to Husserl, leaves everything human behind.

### Reconciling the Natural and Transcendental Approaches

There are great difficulties involved in reconciling the natural and the transcendental attitudes as two possible modes of awareness of humans. Husserl characterised the transcendental attitude as the attitude of the detached ‘non-participating’ spectator (*unbeteiligter Zuschauer*, Hua XXXIV 9), or ‘disinterested’ spectator (*uninteressierter Zuschauer*, XXXIV 11).

We now need to go further than Husserl in specifying the continuities between the engaged, embodied agent and its disengaged transcendental counterpart. When the meditating ego translates (via the phenomenological reduction) from the natural to the transcendental attitude, there is, as Husserl recognises, a continuity, namely, the acts of reflection are still being performed by the same ego. Husserl speaks of a ‘splitting of the ego’ (*Ichspaltung*) and the ego living a dual life – both as natural subject *in* the world and as transcendental ego *for* the world. How this paradox is to be resolved is one of the great themes of Husserl’s last work, *Crisis* (see especially §§53 and 54). There Husserl asks:

How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world, namely, constitute it as its intentional formation, one which has always already become what it is and continues to develop, formed by the universal interconnection of intentionally accomplishing subjectivity, while the latter, the subjects accomplishing in cooperation, are themselves only a partial formation

within the total accomplishment? (*Crisis* § 53, p. 179; VI 183)

Indeed, Husserl acknowledges, even to say that I who reflects is 'I' involves a certain equivocation (*Crisis* § 54(b), p. 184; VI 188). Yet, there is both identity and difference in this I. The reflecting ego is in a different attitude and different temporal dimension from the ego reflected on, yet there is a consciousness of the unity or 'coincidence' (*Deckung*) of the two.

There is a danger in regarding the ego in a Cartesian way as an unassailable and static foundation for all experience. It quickly becomes Kant's purely formal requirement that the 'I think' can accompany all experience. The Kantian conception of the 'I' is primarily as the performer of syntheses. Experience in order to be experienced has to be present or appear to some 'I'. It must be capable of coming to self-awareness of experience but beyond that it has no content. This is the very opposite of the Husserlian conception. Indeed, he speaks of a 'critical reinterpretation and correction of the Cartesian concept of the ego' (*Crisis* VI 188). For this reason, the critique of Husserl's transcendental ego as an unresolved legacy of Cartesianism in his philosophy—a critique, most certainly, by Heidegger and possibly also by Merleau-Ponty—is misplaced. The pure I—the I of transcendental apperception—is, for Husserl, not a 'dead pole of identity' (Hua IX 208), it is a living self, a stream that is constantly 'appearing for itself' (*als Für-sich-selbst-erscheinens*, VIII 189). It is sometimes described, in Hegelian language, as simply 'for itself' (*für sich*). In his Postface (*Nachwort*) to *Ideas I* written in 1930 he acknowledged that 'what specifically characterised the ego' had not yet been broached in *Ideas I* (Hua V 159). Husserl's transcendental self also has a history; indeed there is a history of the breakthrough to the transcendental attitude itself. In other words, the discovery of or 'breakthrough to' the transcendental attitude is an event in the world itself (carried out in ancient Greece and later decisively by Descartes).

I cannot go into the issues which distinguish the person from the transcendental ego, or even discuss Husserl's strange notion of 'transcendental persons'. For Husserl, the recourse to the transcendental I in the reduction in a certain sense puts aside the 'natural human' although I do not believe it ever leaves behind embodied personhood. I do think, however, that Husserl is mistaken to present the transcendental attitude as in a certain sense *non-human* and entirely that of the 'detached spectator'. It is better to think of Husserl as uncovering all knowing and engaging with the world is taking place from a *standpoint*. As Sebastian Luft puts it:

The generalization that Husserl enacts is not one from standpoint to no standpoint, but from our standpoint to standpoint-as-such. (Luft, 2007, p. 376)

I am sure that we can say, with Husserl, that the person is the concrete agent in the intersubjective, communal world acting in the personalistic attitude; but we cannot say that the person somehow disappears when we enter into transcendental reflection. There is, as we have seen, the continuity of the 'I' and the integration of an I within a 'we' ---within what Husserl calls 'transcendental intersubjectivity'.

### **Intimations of Self-Reflection in Embodied Sensuousness**

For both Husserl and Taylor, personhood is constituted in layers. It has at its highest level the self-reflective rational agent, one whose emotional and feeling life is shot through with rationality and purposiveness. Yet, the self, as Edith Stein puts it, 'sinks its taproot into nature' (Stein, 2000, p. 115), selfhood has its origins in the prereflective embodied agency which Dreyfus calls 'coping' and which Merleau-Ponty includes under his broadened conception of embodied *perception*. Self-perception, for Taylor, belongs to embodied activity of a 'living being who thinks' (Taylor, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Mind', in Taylor, 1985, p. 88).

In attempting to articulate this dependence of higher rationality on sensibility, Merleau-Ponty in his late work talks about the manner in which self-reflection at the higher conscious level is enabled by and indeed founded in the kind of inherent self-awareness and ‘doubling’ that is found in our sensory life. In his late essay ‘Eye and Mind’ (written in 1960; see Merleau-Ponty 1964; 1964a), as well as in his posthumously published *Visible and Invisible* (1964b; 1968) Merleau-Ponty emphasises the ‘intertwining’ or ‘interlacing’ (*l’interlacs*) that occurs when our seeing somehow sees itself seeing, drawing a parallel with the phenomenon of the act of touching which at the same time can touch itself (EM 162; 14). For Merleau-Ponty, there is an ‘inherence’ (*inhérence*) of seer in the seen and vice-versa (EM, 163; 14), an essential ‘undividedness’ (*l’indivision*), EM, 163; 15) between sensing and sensed (and, accordingly, between thinking and self-reflection). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty maintains that a body that could not touch itself, or see itself, and thereby ‘reflect itself’, would not be human: ‘there would be no humanity’ (EM 163; 15). For Merleau-Ponty, here developing an insight found in Husserl’s *Ideas* II, the reflexivity and reversibility of touching is the basis for and perhaps the true form of our self-conscious humanity. To touch oneself is to be in touch with oneself. Taylor has a similar view about how embodied agency begins in its embedded interpretative interaction with its surroundings. The mistake of previous forms of intellectualism and rationalism was to regard the ‘disengaged’ attitude as a pure mirror of reality, whereas in fact, it is the discovery of phenomenology, that this approach is itself a particular attitude and hence is a partial, conditioned and distinctly human way of engaging with the world.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ‘Charles Taylor Workshop’, University College Dublin, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010. I am grateful to Charles Taylor, Thomas McCarthy, Maeve Cooke, Rowland Stout, Peter Simons, Jim O’Shea, and the other participants, for their helpful comments. References to Husserl are given according to the *Husserliana* (abbreviated

to 'Hua') volume number followed by the page number.

<sup>2</sup> As early as his *The Explanation of Behaviour* (Taylor 1964), Taylor acknowledges his proximity to phenomenology and especially to Merleau-Ponty's notion of intentional sense (*sens*), see Taylor, 1964, p. 69 n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See also Ronald Kuipers' interview with Charles Taylor in *The Other Journal* (June 23, 2008) 'I spent a lot of time in the book describing phenomenologically what it was like to move away from Christianity, to reject Christianity really, and to be excited by Deism, by Jacobinism, by Nietzsche, and then more recently by Bataille, by Robinson Jeffers, and others'.

<sup>4</sup> Max Scheler, in his *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt Toward a Foundation of An Ethical Personalism*, (1913), was primarily responsible for developing the phenomenological account of personhood. For Scheler, the person is the 'performer of acts' or 'bearer of acts' and the 'world' is the objective correlate of the person. At the centre of the human is what Scheler calls the 'heart', the seat of love rather than a transcendental ego. The person is a 'loving being'. In later writings, Scheler insists that there is always a 'we' before there is an 'I' (see Scheler 1980, p. 67).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor told me in conversation in Dublin (February 2010) that he first discovered Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), on the recommendation of another student, while he himself was a student on a Rhodes scholarship at Oxford in the 1950s. He found the intellectual atmosphere at Oxford stultifying and was sufficiently inspired by Merleau-Ponty to seek out the French philosopher in Paris with the intention of studying with him. By the time Taylor met Merleau-Ponty, however, the latter had been elevated to the Collège de France and was no longer accepting doctoral students. Taylor, therefore, remained at Oxford but wrote a doctoral thesis deeply indebted to Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Ullrich Melle on Husserl's conception of personhood in Melle, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See Husserl, 1950, § 2, p. 47; trans. Dorion Cairns in Husserl, 1967, § 2, p. 6. Taylor in fact quotes the original German: 'Sollte die vermeintlich überspannte Forderung einer auf letzte erdenkliche Vorurteilslosigkeit abgestellten Philosophie, einer in wirklicher Autonomie aus letzten selbst erzeugten Evidenzen sich gestaltenden und sich von daher absolut selbstverantwortenden Philosophie nicht vielmehr zum Grundsinn echter Philosophie gehören?', see Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology', Taylor, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> In a text from 1921 Husserl recognises the Leibnizian source of this concept of the person, quoting from Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais* II 27 § 9 (see Husserl, 1973, p. 48).

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