

Teil II Gemeinschaftsbildung und sozialer Raum

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Social Space and the Question of Objectivity*

Introduction

In speaking of the social dimensions of human experience, one inevitably becomes involved in the debate regarding how they are to be studied. Which approach is to be preferred? Should we turn to neurobiology and the electro-chemical study of the brain or should we examine our personal experience of social interactions, seeking to understand the subjective performances involved in our recognizing and working with others? The hard sciences embrace what has been called the third-person perspective. This is the perspective that asserts that we must begin with what is true for everyone, that is, with what is available to both me and others (the “they” that forms the grammatical third person). The advocates of this position claim that those who begin by examining their personal experience fall into the subjectivism and relativism of the “true for me.” The priority of the third-person perspective appears when we begin to doubt our own perceptions. To resolve our doubts, we turn to Others: we ask them if they see what we see. If they do not, we assume that we must be suffering from a subjective illusion. In appealing to Others, we disregard our first-person perspective in favor of the third. Against this, it is argued that all descriptions of what is there for everyone must begin with first-person experience. The third-person perspective presupposes the first person as its basis. Without this, there would not be any experience at all.

This debate not only plays itself out between the humanities and the hard sciences, it is also present within the humanities and the social sciences. Thus, the practitioners of political science divide themselves between those who study voting patterns and other quantifiable aspects of political life and those who, like Alfred Schutz and Hannah Arendt, attempt to understand political life on the experiential basis of our social interactions. In philosophy, the debate occurs between the phenomenologists, with their attention to the experiences composing the lifeworld, and the analytic philosophers, who embrace what has been called the “linguistic turn” in philosophy. This is a turn from inner experiences, which are private and subjective, to their linguistic expressions, which are publicly available.

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Unlike the experiences that they report, such expressions are capable of being objectively analyzed and evaluated. In a broader context, the debate between the two perspectives occurs in multiple forms. It is present when we consider the automatic, autonomous technocratic processes that function in the background of much of our lives, e.g., the third-person processes that control the Internet as well as the social and commercial activities that daily occupy us. Politically, it appears when we ask ourselves the following: how far should technocrats, as opposed to politicians, be in control of governments? Should personal political interests or impersonal third-person procedures be allowed to dominate?

On the face of it, such debates appear irresolvable. Every “he” or “she” is ultimately an “I.” There are no third-person perspectives without first-person ones. Similarly, unless we are to embrace solipsism, every first person, every “I,” must acknowledge other “I’s,” other selves that for the “I” are part of the “they.” Both sides, then, seem partial in their perspectives. Each must, at least implicitly, acknowledge the truth of the other side. This, I am going to argue, points to a resolution of the question of priority of the “I” or the “they.” Neither side is prior since each side presupposes the other. This becomes evident when we examine how Others function in our concept of objective validity.

Objectivity and Others

As Kant pointed out, objective and universal validity are mutually implicit concepts. Objective validity implies being valid for everyone “because when a judgment agrees with the object, all judgments concerning the object must agree with each other.” In other words, insofar as each judgment states the same thing with regard to the object, each has the same content. Their agreement with the object is their mutual agreement. To reverse this, universal mutual agreement implies agreement with the object, for, otherwise, “there would be no reason why other judgments would necessarily have to agree with mine, if it were not the unity of the object to which they all refer and with which they all agree and, for that reason, must agree among themselves”.¹ If we accept this equivalence, then the objective world is an intersubjective world. It includes, by definition, the Others who confirm our judgments.²

Given that we cannot see out of another person’s eyes, the only way that we can explicitly confirm that our judgments agree is to speak with one another. Such

¹ Kant, 2001, pp. 62–63.

² In Eugen Fink’s words, the equivalence implies that we have formulated “the objectivity of objects by the character – if one will – of intersubjectivity.” The formulation is such “that one cannot establish between objectivity and intersubjectivity a relationship such that one or the other is prior; rather, objectivity and intersubjectivity are indeed co-original” (“Discussion--Comments by Eugen Fink on Alfred Schutz’s Essay, ‘The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl’” (Schutz, 1966, p. 86).

verbal agreement is our touchstone of the real. This, however, signifies that *the presence of the objective world is of a linguistic nature*. What is present as common to myself and my Others is not the perceptual presence that I access through my eyes and the Others through theirs. It is the agreed-on, publically present linguistic report of such presence. This, incidentally, is why being is not a “real predicate,” i.e., it is not some describable feature of the object.³ Intersubjective confirmation does not change the appearance of what we see. It only affects our interpretation of it.

What is the status of the Other who confirms our perceptions? How does she change our interpretation of perceptions from “true for me” to “true for myself and Others”? As is obvious, her perceptual consciousness cannot be the same as my own. Were the two identical, then our consciousnesses would merge and she would add nothing to my first-person report. A certain alterity, then, is necessary. The question of such alterity, however, raises again the debate between the first- and the third-person perspectives. At issue are two different conceptions of alterity. Is alterity to be viewed from an impersonal, third-person perspective, one which strips the Other of her personal characteristics – or is it a function of the Other’s individual features? These two conceptions can be distinguished by the “spaces” in which they function.

Cartesian Space

The Cartesian, impersonal space of alterity is given by the grid that Descartes introduced in his invention of analytic geometry. The grid is structured by the x - and y -axes, their intersection determining the center of a plane. Every point is measured from this center, being assigned a pair of numbers designating its distances from the x - and y -axes and, hence, from the center, which has the value (0, 0). One can, by transposing the axes, make, by turns, every point the center or the zero-point of the plane. This grid represents, in a geometric fashion, the Cartesian view of subjectivity. The center is the subject’s view of the world. It is the zero-point from which it measures distances. The subject can change its location and, hence, its spatial perspective on the world. Such shifts are the subjective analogue of another point in the graph becoming the zero-point.

If we understand confirmation in terms of this Cartesian space, the Other who confirms my perceptions is someone who I could have been had I observed the world from her position. She is another self, only differently located. Alterity, in other words, is a matter of her being “there,” while I am “here.” This is the sense of alterity that Husserl embraces in the *Cartesian Meditations*. The other person is like me, except that she views the world from a different position. Taking her

³ See Kant, 1998, B626, p. 673.

as “there,” the ego “constitutes for itself another ego, which, according to its own nature, never demands or allows fulfillment through direct perception.”⁴ This is because I cannot simultaneously view the world from the “here” and the “there.” The Other ego is like me insofar as I could view the world from her position. Such a view is *possible* for me. It is, however, *actual* for the Other. Engaging in it, she is *actually other*.

In this view, the alterity of the Other is spatial: the Other is a zero-point at a distance from me. The term zero-point implies a certain disembodiment. It includes none of the features that specify a person’s embodiment, be they those of race, gender, birth, or personal history. Stripped of such personal features, observers become mutually replaceable. Thus, in science, every investigator attempts, as far as possible, to abstract from such features in forming her judgments. Enacting Descartes’s famous mind–body distinction on a practical level, each investigator becomes an ideal witness whose observations are repeatable by every other properly trained observer. Objectivity, in this context, is based on such repeatability. Crucial experiments can be repeated with the same result. Such experimentation mirrors, on a scientific level, the conception that were I to take up the Other’s position, I would see what that person sees. As for the objectivity of the object, it exists in the coincidence of our observations.

Cartesian space accounts for another aspect of the objectivity of the object. In German, “objectivity” is rendered *Gegenständlichkeit*; etymologically, it signifies “standing against” a subject. This implies that the object transcends a subject’s experience, that it offers more than the limited set of experiences that a finite observer is capable of. In Cartesian space, transcendence is a function of the innumerable spatial positions that an object can be viewed from. The “infinite” or unlimited quality of the experiential object is correlated to an infinite set of possible observers, an “ideal” set filling all the points in such space. As for the object in itself, it is that which can be viewed from all possible positions.

The linguistic presence of this object has a special character – that given by the language of science. Such language consists of logical and, ultimately, of mathematical relations. These relations are capable of expressing the object as viewed from all possible positions. Thus, the equation for a circle remains the same, no matter how we view it.⁵ As can be inferred from its history, the linguistic turn in philosophy implicitly adopts this notion of presence.⁶ The turn begins with the anti-psychologism of Frege and his successors, as well as the attempt to combat

⁴ Husserl, 1963, p. 148.

⁵ If we wish to express the range of the particular perspectives of the circle, perspectives that, e.g., can present it as an ellipse, the formulae of projective geometry can be used.

⁶ Here, I follow the account of Hacker, 2013, pp. 926–947.

this through the use of a logically purified language. In Wittgenstein, the turn becomes the view that “All philosophy is a ‘critique of language.’”⁷ Thus, for Wittgenstein, the point of the *Tractatus*

is to express in an appropriate symbolism what in ordinary language leads to endless misunderstandings. That is to say, where ordinary language disguises logical structure, where it allows the formation of pseudo-propositions, where it uses one term in an infinity of different meanings, we must replace it by a symbolism which gives a clear picture of the logical structure, excludes pseudo-propositions, and uses its terms unambiguously.⁸

If we accept this, then philosophy accomplishes its task by clarifying the problems that arise from the features of natural language. It does this by examining and purifying the sentences of natural language that give rise to philosophical puzzles. If we ask why the focus is on language rather than on analysis of experience, the answer is to be found in the anti-psychologism that prevailed at the origins of analytical philosophy. The point of such philosophy was not just to escape the relativism of psychological descriptions by turning to language as an intersubjectively available resource. It was to reformulate the linguistic presence of the world according to the model presented by science. In such endeavors, the symbolism of the predicative calculus was supposed to take on the role that mathematics played in science.

Social Space

A very different conception of alterity occurs when we adopt the perspective that views the subject in terms of its personal history. Viewed concretely, such a subject is not an abstract zero-point. In fact, it is constantly being displaced from the center of its world. Such displacements occur whenever a subject reflects on itself, turning itself into an object. They arise when it judges its conduct, saying, e.g., “I should not have done that.” In such internal conversations, who speaks and who listens? Such duality indicates that when I call myself into question, I am split between the judging self and the judged self. The judging self places the judged self on the periphery. As objectified, it is displaced from the center. This displacement is a feature of the reflexivity that normally characterizes our subjective life.

Freud, in his account of the id and the ego, gives a psychological account of this split and the displacement it occasions. The ego, he asserts, arises from the id “under the influence of the real external world around us.” While the id designates our instinctual life, the ego “acts as an intermediary between the id and

⁷ “Alle Philosophie ist ‘Sprachkritik’” (Wittgenstein, 1955, p. 62).

⁸ Wittgenstein, 1929, p. 163.

the external world.”⁹ Its task is to satisfy the demands of both – i.e., to meet the demands of the child’s instinctual needs as well as the exigencies of the external world, in particular, the demands of the child’s parents and caregivers. The ego does this, “by gaining control over the demands of the instincts, by deciding whether they are to be allowed satisfaction, by postponing that satisfaction to times and circumstances favorable in the external world or by suppressing their excitations entirely.”¹⁰ Thus, the child, knowing that its parents would disapprove of some action, suppresses the impulses that would lead to it. This requires that the child view the action from his parents’ perspective. They form the center and the child, in an attempt to avoid their disapproval, is displaced to the periphery. It is this very displacement that generates the ego. The ego, in other words, arises from the repeated requirement for the child to consider his actions from an external standpoint. As such, its origin is the reflexivity induced by parents, siblings, friends, and so on – in short, all those who form his developing social existence. The ego, then, is not a simple identity. It involves the split of its being for itself, i.e., its being able to stand apart from itself and judge its actions from another perspective.

Levinas’s account of the split, while broadly similar to Freud’s, is distinguished by its focus on the temporal alterity (the “diachrony”) of the Other. Such alterity is a function of the Other’s having a different personal history, the result being that the Other’s past is “immemorial” in the etymological sense of the term. This past “cannot be remembered” because the Other’s memories are his own. So are the anticipations of what is to come, which arise from such memories. These anticipations affect how the Other interprets his situation. Since I do not share these, the Other will not always interpret our common situation as I do and act accordingly. In our relations, a potential for the unforeseen always remains. Using the term, the “Same,” to designate my conscious awareness of the Other, Levinas describes the experience of the Other as “a relationship in which diachrony is like the *in* of the other-*in*-the-same – without the Other ever entering into the Same.”¹¹ What happens is that, in attempting to make sense of the Other, I internalize him. The self that I internalize, however, is not my own, but rather that of the Other, who embodies a distinct history and, hence, a perspective that is different from my own. The result is the splitting of my own identity. In Levinas’s words, it is “the awakening of the for-itself [*éveil du pour-soi*]... by the inabsorbable alterity of the other.”¹² Thus, awakening me, the Other “confers on me an identity.” The Other does so, Levinas writes, by “placing my I in

⁹ Freud, 1989, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ Levinas, 2000, p.19.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22, trans. modified. See Levinas, 1993.

question.”¹³ I ask myself why my perspective, rather than the Other’s, is to be considered valid. This is a “questioning where the conscious subject liberates himself from himself, where he is split by... transcendence.”¹⁴ So split, the subject can confront itself – i.e., call itself into question.

In this Levinasian space, which is the space of “sociality,” I am always being pushed to the periphery. Each time I am called into question, I find that the center is elsewhere. In such space, the alterity of the Other is characterized by his having a different history and, hence, a different set of anticipations and interpretations. This alterity affects our practical projects and the significations that arise from these – the significations that designate the “what is it for” or the purposes of things. Because of our common culture, these meanings are generally similar, but they never completely overlap. As is obvious, alterity in this context is not simply spatial alterity; it is not something that a mere change of position could overcome. It also involves the temporal dimension of our existence, which, as past, cannot be changed.

What remains similar in Cartesian and social space is the fact that the objective world, the world that we share in common, has a linguistic, rather than a perceptual presence. Our access to it is through discourse. As Levinas puts this: “the objectivity of the object and its signification [as objective] come from language.”¹⁵ Also common to the two spaces is the fact that the objectivity of the world demands the alterity of the interlocutors, of their having distinct perspectives. For Levinas, however, the distinction is primarily temporal. It involves individuals with distinct histories. This leads him to focus on the fact that language is not some third-person object, but rather a process of personal communication. It is spoken by someone to someone else. It involves, in other words, the “I” and the “you,” the first and second-persons. For Levinas, it cannot be translated into an objective, third-person presence, one that could be rendered scientific through the use of mathematics or the predicative calculus. Objectivity comes, rather, from the process of constant correction.

In this process, the interlocutors do not speak of themselves. Rather, “[t]he signifier manifests himself in speech by speaking of the world and not of himself; he manifests himself by proposing the world, by thematizing it.”¹⁶ What he thematizes is, first of all, the sensuous presence of what he perceives through his embodied being. Beyond this, it is the sense of the perceived as given by his history and the pragmatic projects that grow out of this. In presenting the world to the Other,

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 110, trans. modified.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110, trans. modified.

¹⁵ Levinas, 1969, p. 96.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

he thus also presents himself in his sensuous enjoyment and use of the world. His Other, in talking with him, does the same. What is crucial for Levinas is that their conversation is ongoing. Because it is, “the proposition that posits and offers the world does not float in the air, but promises a response to him who receives this proposition.”¹⁷ One doesn’t just receive the proposition from the Other; one also receives “the possibility of questioning” him.¹⁸ Ongoing discourse is, thus, “an ever renewed promise to clarify what is obscure in the utterance.”¹⁹ As such, it maintains the *ongoing* presence of the objective world. It stands at the origin of its objectivity because it continually impinges on the speakers’ viewing it simply in terms of *their* enjoyment and *their* private projects – in short, *their* freedom to use the world as they will. The restraint on such freedom comes from each correcting the Other’s perspective. In this, it is rather like the breakdown of a tool, which, in Heidegger’s analysis, forces us to regard it directly instead of simply understanding it in terms of its “what is it for.” Similarly, such constant correction opens up space for the object to show itself, not according to the interlocutors’ individual perspectives, but “according to itself.”

Such showing is linguistic, but it is not cut off from its phenomenological base of enjoyment and use. What stands behind the ongoing discourse that presents the object “according to itself” is the fact that each of the interlocutors comes to the aid of the world that he linguistically presents. As Levinas puts this, the Other, in speaking, rises up “behind the said.” “Emancipated from the theme that seemed for a moment to hold him,” he “forthwith contests the meaning I ascribe” to him.²⁰ Thus, the world that he presents is not at the mercy of the interpretation of the Other. The alterity of the speakers, the fact that each, in his particular grasp of the world, exceeds the interlocutor, yields, in this constant correction, the alterity of the world. It makes the world irreducible to any individual, subjective apprehension. The world is objective, in the German sense of the word, “Gegenständlich,” by virtue of such alterity. Rather than being the correlate of an infinite set of view points, its objectivity corresponds to the fact that, in genuine conversation, there is no final word. In Levinas’s words, in such conversation, “speech is always a taking up again of what was a simple sign cast forth by it, [it is] an ever renewed promise to clarify what was obscure in the utterance.”²¹ Infinity, as a function of this “ever-renewed promise,” is temporal rather than spatial.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁰ Levinas, 1969, p. 195.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Intertwining and Objectivity

In comparing the first- and third-person perspectives, we have arrived at two different conceptions of objectivity. The third-person view is spatial. Engaging in it, I move from my first-person perspective to the third person by moving from the world viewed from my zero-point to the world viewed from all possible zero-points. This, as we have seen, is the world viewed mathematically. It gives us a third-person view of the alterity of the Other as someone spatially distinct from ourselves. By contrast, the first-person view is temporal. Here, I move from my first-person perspective, as given by my personal history, to the world that is given through the correction of this by my Others. Such Others have their own perspectives, which are formed by their histories. Thus, I speak from my first-person perspective as formed by my history. What I say, however, is a public object available to Others. My interlocutor responds to this, interpreting it according to her perspective. I respond by adding to what I have said, correcting her remarks. The Other does the same. The result is the ongoing objectivity of the world. It is the objectivity that we constitute through the continuous verbal activity that characterizes our social life.

Given that the world is both spatial and temporal, both the first- and the third-person views are required. Each, according to Kant, corresponds to a distinct form of perception. This is because, “time cannot be outwardly intuited, any more than space can be intuited as something in us.”²² Thus, external perception provides us only with spatial relations. We cannot, in any sensuous sense, see the past or the future. Since, what is past has vanished and the future has yet to appear, the world that we externally perceive is always now. To move beyond this instant and regard the past and the future, we must turn inward and, through “inner perception,” regard our memories and anticipations. The lesson that Kant draws from this is that “if we abstract from our mode of inwardly intuiting ourselves... then time is nothing.”²³ Without inner perception, we would have no perceptual access to time. Similarly, when we do turn inward, measurable space is also inaccessible. We cannot measure our representations. The chair I regard may be so many feet high, but I cannot put a measuring stick to my perception to determine its size. How large it appears depends on my approach to it. Given this split, we have to say that consciousness consists of temporal relations, while the external world is limited to spatial relations. Consciousness, then, can never be visually present as object in the external world. No third-person perspective, which concentrates on the spatial aspects of reality, is capable of grasping its first-person reality. This is

²² Kant, 1998, B37, p. 97.

²³ *Ibid.*, B51, p. 110.

why Levinas turns to language in its ongoing, temporal process of supplementing what has been said.

Here, it may be objected that science, in its equations, does capture time. Take, for instance, the familiar formula, velocity equals the distance traveled divided by the time taken to cover this distance. Is not time present in the equation $v = d/t$, as well as in countless other mathematical expressions describing our world? The difficulty with this concerns the way science measures time. Incapable of representing time through outer perception, it translates it into spatial relations – namely, those of the hands on a clock. The case is no different when science relies on the numerical readings of a digital clock. What is captured in both cases is what may be called a snapshot view of reality. In using such measurements, science captures time, not in its reality as a flow, but rather as it appears at the instant of the now. For example, the formula for velocity yields only results for specific distances and times. One can, of course, plot these on a graph, but then the representation is spatial. The equations that science uses, thus, work to drain time from reality. This is the reason why the laws of physics, as expressed in its equations, are reversible. They hold whether we run time forward or backward.

An equivalent argument can be made about the attempt to capture space by regarding the temporal relations of consciousness. Inner sense grasps space, not as a function of individual experiences statically regarded, but as derived from their rates of change. Thus, those who pursue this path note that, as we move among them, objects progressively show different sides. We interpret the different rates of their perspectival unfolding as indicating their different distances from us. For example, as the familiar experience of gazing from a moving car window shows, objects we take as close by have a higher angular rate of turning than those that we apprehend as further away. The three-dimensionality of our space is thus grasped through the time it takes for the objects surrounding us to exhibit their different sides. Given that these sides have no definite extension, this strategy is the reverse of that of science with its third-person perspective. The attempt here is to drain space from time.

To follow exclusively either strategy – that is, to limit oneself to external or internal perception – is to engage in an abstraction. Our concrete experience embraces both forms of perception. Their duality, in fact, is what gives us our peculiar relation to the world. Engaging in outer perception, we regard ourselves as a visible, extended object. Such perception places *us in the world* as one of many such objects. Here, the objective structure of the brain can be spatially exhibited, its neural functioning can be examined, and so on. The world we are in is a third-person world. Inner perception, however, places *the world in us*. The world becomes that which we access through our memories and anticipations. In Husserlian terms, the world is given here as a correlate of our temporal syntheses.

Without these, its temporal presence vanishes. Given that the world is both spatial and temporal, we must embrace both perspectives. With Merleau-Ponty, we have to assert that “I am in the world and the world is in me.”²⁴

This, however, does not mean that we can embrace both standpoints at the same time. What we confront here is the relation that Merleau-Ponty terms a “chiasm” or “intertwining.” It designates the fact that our selfhood, as embodied, has to be taken as both immanent and transcendent – that is, as both subject and object. To show this, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the touching of hands. My right hand when it touches an object functions as a *subject*. This means that, in its touch sensations, it serves as the immanent place of the appearance of the touched. The same, hand, however, can also be touched. As such, it becomes a transcendent *object* – i.e., a part of the externally appearing world. Now, although each hand can function as either subject or object, it cannot simultaneously function as both. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand.”²⁵ There is “a sort of dehiscence” or bursting open that “opens my body in two,” splitting it “between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching.”²⁶ This noncoincidence is essential to perception. Given that perceiving something is distinct from being it, “there must be a distancing of it.”²⁷ The hand that is touched must stand against the touching hand as an object. The consequence is that there is a constant oscillation between the two perspectives. We oscillate between externally regarding the spatial world and internally grasping its temporal presence. Our body as touched and touching is split between the two.

The two perspectives present here are distinct; yet, neither is intelligible without the other. Thus, from the third-person perspective, our embodiment thrusts *us into the world*. It makes us one of its appearing objects. Studying our organs of perception and our mental apparatus, we are able to examine the neurological processes without which perception cannot occur – the very perception that internalizes the world, i.e., gives it its presence in us. Here, the external world appears as the context that makes perception intelligible. This, however, does not mean we can reduce perceptual presence (and, hence, the first-person perspective) to a third-person account. The account finds neural processes that are *correlates* of our sensory experiences – i.e., of the appearing that we experience. When we see or hear something, patterns of activity occur among our neurons. But a correlate of consciousness is not consciousness itself. As the cognitive scientist, Riccardo Manzotti, writes, “When scientists look for AIDS or DNA, they

²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁷ Dillon, 2004, p. 298.

look for the thing itself, not a mere correlate.”²⁸ The same holds here. The fact that we can only arrive at a correlate of consciousness, and not the “thing itself”, is a function of the fact that the third-person perspective drains time from reality. But this, as we have seen, makes consciousness inaccessible.

To reverse the situation, it is also the case that the appearing that consciousness affords gives the context that makes the external world intelligible. Without it, we could not measure or number what appears. To state the obvious, the third-person study of the external world presupposes its presence. To explain this presence in terms of the processes of the external world thus presupposes the very presence (the appearing) that the explanation is trying to account for.²⁹ This, however, does not mean that we can reduce the external world to its perceptual presence within us. Insofar as the first-person perspective drains space from reality, we cannot find the extended world within us.

The fact that both perspectives are distinct, yet are mutually dependent for their intelligibility, signifies that our selfhood can be understood neither as a subject nor as an object. Its reality consists, rather, in the intertwining of the two. To show this, it is sufficient to observe that our bodily reality exhibits itself in such intertwining. It is both internal and external. Thus, the hand that touches an object acts as an internal place of disclosure. It is the venue for the appearing of the external object’s tangible qualities. The same hand, as touched, however, is also part of the external world. Merleau-Ponty expresses this as follows: “When my right hand touches my left hand while [the left hand] is palpating the things ... the ‘touching subject’ passes over to the rank of the touched.” It “descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world.”³⁰ It is, however, distinct from other objects in this world, since when I touch them, I do not feel *their* being touched. My body, then, is recognized as mine because it is internal and external. It is an external object – a part of the tangible world – that is also a place of disclosure of the tangible. In other words, it is in the world as a subject that, as worldly, can also be an object. Its reality, as my body, is neither that of a subject nor that of object. It exists rather in their intertwining.

Such intertwining is not identification. An identification would imply the absorption of one side by the other. It would return us to the attempt to reduce the first-person perspective to the third person or vice versa. As based on our intertwined reality, we have to say that these perspectives are themselves intertwined. Their intertwining is what characterizes our conceptions of objectivity

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 298.

²⁹ As the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1991, p. 278) expresses this: “I cannot go back to what appears to explain the appearing of appearing, since the understanding of appearing is presupposed in every thesis I might make about the appearing entity.”

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 134.

and, hence, our relations with Others. This signifies that we exist in both Cartesian space and social space. Each offers us distinct possibilities and opportunities in our social relations. The same holds with regard to the insights offered us by the sciences and the humanities – the so-called “hard” and “soft” sciences. The specific advantages that they offer should not lead us to forget that neither is intelligible apart from the other. It is because of this that each can call the other into question. In such questioning, we exhibit the intertwining that constitutes our embodied reality. A focus on such intertwining and the calling into question that manifests it opens up a novel field in the study of our social existence. It gives us a new perspective on the objectivity engendered by the intersubjectivity that defines us.

Summary

In speaking of the social dimensions of human experience, we inevitably become involved in the debate regarding how they are to be studied. Should we embrace the first-person perspective, which is that of the phenomenologists, and begin with the experiences composing our directly experienced lifeworld? Alternately, should we follow the lead of natural scientists and take up the third-person perspective? This is the perspective that asserts that we must begin with what is true for everyone, i.e., with what is available to both me and Others (the “they” that forms the grammatical third person). Both perspectives are one sided in that each presupposes the other for its intelligibility. The third-person perspective is Cartesian and, as I show, privileges space, while the first-person perspective is social in Levinas’s sense and presupposes time. Our reality, I argue, embraces both perspectives and is, in fact, set by their intertwining.

Keywords: Kant, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, objectivity, intersubjectivity, Cartesian space, social space, intertwining

Der soziale Raum und die Frage nach der Objektivität

Zusammenfassung

Wenn wir über die sozialen Dimensionen der menschlichen Erfahrung sprechen, werden wir unweigerlich in die Debatte um die Frage involviert, wie jene Dimensionen erforscht werden sollen. Sollen wir die Erste-Person-Perspektive einnehmen, die diejenige der Phänomenologen ist, und mit den Erfahrungen beginnen, die unsere direkt erfahrene Lebenswelt bilden? Oder sollen wir, alternativ, der Führung der Naturwissenschaftler folgen und die Dritte-Person-Perspektive einnehmen? Letztere fordert, dass wir mit dem beginnen, das für alle wahr ist, d.h. mit dem, das sowohl für mich als auch für andere (für das „sie“, das die grammatikalische dritte Person bildet) verfügbar ist. Beide Perspektiven sind insofern einseitig, als dass jede die andere für ihre Verständlichkeit voraussetzt. Die Dritte-Person-Perspektive ist kartesisch und, wie ich zeige, bevorzugt den Raum, während die Erste-Person-Perspektive im Sinne Levinas’ sozial bestimmt ist und die Zeit voraussetzt. Unsere Wirklichkeit, so meine These, umschließt beide Perspektiven und ist in der Tat durch ihre Verflechtung gesetzt.

Schlüsselworte: Intersubjektivität, Kant, kartesischer Raum, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Objektivität, sozialer Raum, Verflechtung

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