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<b>Title</b>	The we and its many forms: Kurt Stavenhagen's contribution to social phenomenology
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<b>Publication date</b>	2020-03-30
<b>Original citation</b>	Salice, A. (2020) 'The we and its many forms: Kurt Stavenhagen's contribution to social phenomenology'. <i>British Journal for the History of Philosophy</i> . doi: 10.1080/09608788.2020.1737914
<b>Type of publication</b>	Article (peer-reviewed)
<b>Link to publisher's version</b>	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2020.1737914">http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2020.1737914</a> Access to the full text of the published version may require a subscription.
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<b>Embargo information</b>	Access to this article is restricted until 18 months after publication by request of the publisher.
<b>Embargo lift date</b>	2021-09-30
<b>Item downloaded from</b>	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10468/9851">http://hdl.handle.net/10468/9851</a>

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**Forthcoming on the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. Please, refer to published version.**

**The We and its Many Forms: Kurt Stavenhagen's Contribution to Social Phenomenology.**

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**Abstract**

“We” is said in many ways. This paper investigates Kurt Stavenhagen’s neglected account of different kinds of “we,” which is maintained to be one of the most sophisticated within classical phenomenology. The paper starts by elaborating on the phenomenological distinction between mass, society and community by claiming that individuals partake in episodes of experiential sharing only within communities. Stavenhagen conceptualises experiential sharing as a meshing of conscious experiences infused by a feeling of us-ness. The remainder of the paper focuses on Stavenhagen’s distinction of various senses of us: when individual share preferences, have mutual respect, or emotionally evaluate the world according to a cultural tradition, they elicit a sense of us of different kind and, thus, form communities of different kind. Within phenomenology, Stavenhagen should be credited with the merit of having unearthed the aggregative, we-generating force of preferences, of respect, and of (certain) emotions.

**Keywords:** Experiential Sharing, Communities, Social Phenomenology, Kurt Stavenhagen, We-Experiences.

## 0. Introduction

An important line of research has recently started to uncover the vast body of insights secured by classical phenomenology on the fundamentals of human sociality, which is a topic that is currently occupying important debates in philosophy of mind and social ontology (see Bratman 2014, Gilbert 2014, List & Pettit 2011, Searle 2010, Tomasello 2014). By now, this line of research has established that members of the so-called Munich and Göttingen Circles of Phenomenology have extensively discussed issues including experiential sharing, the metaphysics of social and institutional facts, the relation between experiential sharing and social cognition (Salice 2015, Salice & Schmid 2016, Szanto & Moran 2016). Works by Husserl (Szanto 2016, Zahavi 2019), Reinach (Salice & Uemura 2018), Scheler (Salice 2016, Schloßberger 2016), Stein (Vendrell Ferran 2015, Szanto 2015, Gombocz & Salice 2006), von Hildebrand (Salice 2016, León 2019), Walther (León & Zahavi 2016, Zahavi & Salice 2016), among others, have been (and still are) subject to an in-depth interpretation, which not only considers them from a historical perspective, but also aims at showing their relevance to systematic questions.

This paper intends to contribute to this line of investigation by presenting the work of a phenomenologist that so far has been left at the periphery of this excavating work: Kurt Stavenhagen. Although his name has gone almost completely unnoticed in this strand of research, Stavenhagen devoted to social phenomenology the vast majority of his publications and, especially, three monograph studies (*The Essence of the Nation* of 1934, *Critical Developments in Folk Theory* of 1936, and *Homeland as Meaning of Life* of 1948 [1939]) and a long series of articles (of which two are particularly significant to the purposes of this paper: *Respect as Feeling of Solidarity and Foundation of Communities* of 1931 and *Charismatic Unities of Personalities*, 1933).<sup>1</sup> Arguably, only very few other phenomenologists have published as extensively as Stavenhagen on the grounds of human sociality, which makes current research's inattention to his contributions an even more unfortunate gap. The present article aims at filling this research desideratum by offering the first comprehensive view of Stavenhagen's social phenomenology in the literature. It is claimed not only that his description of experiential sharing reaches an unprecedented level of sophistication within phenomenology, but also that his account of the various mechanisms, which regulate the emergence of communities, significantly advances the phenomenological understanding of sociality.

It has been suggested, not implausibly, that Stavenhagen's long-standing interest in social phenomenology is nourished by the vicissitudes of his personal life (Spiegelberg 1965: 220). As he belonged to the German speaking minority in the Baltic countries, it might not come as a surprise that large parts of his philosophical reflection are concerned with issues related to social identity and group memberships (see Stavenhagen 1957: 308, Spiegelberg 1965, Rozenvalds 2000, Tilitzki 2002: 805ff). It also merits attention that, during the Nazi occupation of the Baltic countries, Stavenhagen took up the important chairs for philosophy in Königsberg (1939-1941) and Poznań (1941-1945). These facts could invite the conjecture of Stavenhagen's allegiance to Nazi ideology. This inference should be resisted, however.

Stavenhagen, who actively engaged in the political debate surrounding the question of German speaking minorities in the twenties and thirties, was not a member of the Nazi party, his political views were not aligned with – indeed opposed to – Nazism (see Stavenhagen 1932), and he was looked at by the party with profound “uneasiness [*Unbehagen*]” (Tilitzki 2002: 806, see also 789ff). Even more relevant to the purposes of this paper is the fact that the content of the above mentioned publications clearly reveals that Stavenhagen's understanding of the synonymous concepts of cultural nation or people (*Kulturnation* and *Volk*, 1934: 93) is far remote from the *Blut und Boden* characterisation promoted by Nazi ideologues in that turn of years, which

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Stavenhagen are mine. Stavenhagen's other important contributions are an investigation into the phenomenology of religious attitudes (1925), a Kant's biography (1949), and the posthumously published *Person and Personality* (1957), which is mainly concerned with philosophical anthropology.

he bluntly dismisses as nothing else than “pre-scientific magic” (1934: 65; 1934: 8). As this article will clarify, Stavenhagen considers the concepts of nation or people to point to a particular kind of communities: these are communities, which are founded in language, tradition, and in the self-representation the group has of itself (a “we-idea [*Wir-Idee*]”), but not in geographic—and certainly *not* in biological—features.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 1 introduces Stavenhagen’s position against the backdrop of the phenomenological distinction between mass, society, and community. Section 2 explores three main forms of communities: cohesive communities, communities of respect, and cultural nations or people.<sup>2</sup> In the conclusion, I sketch some lines of investigations for future research on Stavenhagen’s social phenomenology.

## 1. Mass, Society, and Community

In a recent paper, Amie Thomasson claims that, since the notion of a group is variegated and multifarious, philosophers should be more concerned with the pragmatic use ordinary language speakers make of that notion rather than aiming at a real definition of it (Thomasson 2016). Early phenomenologists would agree with the premise of Thomasson’s reasoning, but would reject its consequence. They would rather argue that Thomasson’s premise delivers the reason why one must put efforts into distinguishing various kinds of groups by identifying their distinctive features.

It is important not to misunderstand the task phenomenologists set for themselves, though. On the one hand, they worked towards a taxonomy of fundamental kinds of social groups (Scheler 1973: 519ff). Yet, on the other hand, they were aware that actually existing groups do not neatly fall under the kinds at the basis of this taxonomy, for they usually have mixed natures (Stavenhagen 1934: 27): they exemplify different kinds at the same time. For instance, families are constituted by a mixture of societal as well as communal features (community and society being two distinct kinds of groups, as discussed below). However, phenomenologists also contended that actually existing groups do tend to exemplify a single kind more typically than others (a certain family, e.g., could have features that are predominantly societal or communal). If that is correct, then sociological descriptions of actually existing groups presuppose a preliminary understanding of basic kind of groups (in terms of which actual groups are described). This, in the phenomenologist’s eyes, justifies the task of developing a sound taxonomy of those kinds.

The starting point of this taxonomy is the distinction between societies and communities, which has been originally laid out by Ferdinand Tönnies in his work *Community and Society* (1887). While all phenomenologists ultimately endorse that distinction (Scheler 1973, Stavenhagen 1934, Stein 1922, von Hildebrand 1930, Walther 1923), they importantly refine it in two different ways. First, they complement it with an investigation into the social attitudes that members typically adopt towards each other in the two groups. More precisely, they contend that different kinds of groups correlate with different kinds of social attitudes adopted by their members. Second, they introduce a third kind of group that remained unnoticed in Tönnies’ dichotomy: the mass or crowd. How do phenomenologists describe these three kinds of social groups?

<sup>2</sup> This is my terminology. Stavenhagen calls cohesive communities “charismatic communities” and communities of respect “aidesmatic.” “Charisma” is used in its old Greek meaning of “gift” and qualifies those communities where the individuals “offer themselves as a gift” to the others (1933: 36 fn3, this term, hence, is not used in its Weberian connotation referring to a character feature of some individuals, see Weber 2010). The adjective “aidesmatic” stems from the Greek (where the term for respect is *aidōs* [αἰδώς]) and so does “pragmatic” (*pragmata* [πράγματα], situation, but also action, Stavenhagen 1934: 47). It should be noted that Stavenhagen enjoyed a university education (and did advanced research) in classical philology in Göttingen, where he also established contacts with phenomenologists (see Stavenhagen 1957: 308).

Start with societies. What is typical about societies is that individuals become aware of the experiences of another individual and take these as reasons to form other (individual) experiences.<sup>3</sup> Suppose that Sam is sad at her failed exam and Pam rejoices in Sam's sadness, thereby savouring an episode of *Schadenfreude*. Sam becomes aware of Pam's emotion and reacts with resentment. Or imagine that Pam commiserates Sam in her sadness and, thus, sympathises with her, whereby Sam reciprocates with gratitude. In either case, the subjects become aware of the other's experiences and take them to be reasons for forming other affective attitudes: the individuals' affective experiences interlock in a specific way. Something similar may happen in the conative dimension. Suppose Pam intends to publish a paper and comes to know that Sam has the same intention. Sam and Pam may take their individual intentions to be reasons for forming other intentions: to maximise their strategic interests, they could decide to join forces in order to reach their goal (to publish a paper). In all these cases, Pam and Sam form (short-lived and small-case) societies. I will elaborate on further aspects of societies below, but it is important to emphasise already now that, in a society, one's experience impacts another's experience in the sense that it is consciously factored in one's emotional life or action planning.

Yet, there are other ways in which one experience can "impact" somebody else's experiential life. In the mass, such an impact is purely causal. For instance, imagine that, by diffusely talking with Pam about her failed exam and its consequences for her life, Sam's sadness passes to Pam—here, Pam becomes sad, but does not have a *reason* for being sad. She will be typically unable to report why she feels sad and may even ignore how she acquired her emotion: this is a case of emotional contagion (Stavenhagen 1936: 19ff). Sometimes, individuals may become aware of this psychological mechanism and exploit it, e.g., to regulate their emotions. Sam, who is in a bad mood because she didn't pass the exam, knows that, if she goes to Pam's party, she will be infected by the crowd's jolly atmosphere, which will help her coping with her sadness. Importantly, even in this last example, what characterises contagion is the fact that the agent does not have a reason for eliciting the emotion (and that is precisely what Sam intends to exploit). Interestingly, contagion may happen at the conative level, too (Stavenhagen 1936: 22, Scheler 2008: 37), where desires of an individual may pass to somebody else without the recipient having a reason for the desire. Think of fashion phenomena: it is often unclear to subjects what motivates their desire to buy a particular piece of clothing (which many in their environment wear) or to baptise a child with a certain name (which often recurs in a certain group at a certain time). Contagion is the mechanism that animates masses or crowds.

Mass and society are different kinds of groups, but there is an important respect under which they are similar. The experience that results in the subject after her experiential life has been "impacted" by the other's experience has a specific subjective property: "what-it-is-like-for-me-ness" (Zahavi & Kriegel 2015). This expression captures the idea that the experience feels like something *to me* (or is had in the I-mode, Tuomela 2007). This is reflected in the verbal reports of the experiences, which usually employ the first personal singular pronoun "I." True, in certain societies, especially those that emerge upon a strategic or "rational connection of interests" (*rationale Interessenverbindung*, Stavenhagen 1934: 32), individuals can and typically do refer to themselves by using the first personal plural pronoun "we": accordingly, Pam and Sam may frame their intention to write the paper together as "*we* intend to write the paper," where the pronoun is employed with a summative meaning (Stavenhagen 1933: 38). The summative meaning, according to which "we" just is "you and I," should be contrasted with the collective sense of the pronoun, which points to the group (*us*) formed by you and me (see Schmid 2018 on the difference between summative and collective meanings of the first personal plural pronoun).

<sup>3</sup> There are different ways in which a subject can become aware of somebody else's experience, but phenomenologists concur that the most fundamental one—from a developmental, but also conceptual perspective—is empathy. In empathy, the subject grasps the other experience in an intuitive or perceptual way (see Zahavi 2014a).

The collective sense of “we” is employed by members of communities and maps onto a different subjective property. Communal experiences, i.e., experiences shared among the members of a community, are permeated by *a sense of us*. This property could also be called “what-it-is-like-for-us-ness” (Stavenhagen speaks of ourness, *Unserigkeit*, 1933: 38): here, individuals entertain their attitudes from their first plural singular perspective (or in the we-mode, Tuomela 2007). The experience feels like ours to me *qua* community member. While other phenomenologists, too, subscribe to the existence of this subjective property (e.g., see Walther 1923), Stavenhagen originally expands on this property by elaborating on four interrelated features that characterise communal experiences (see also Salice 2018).

Suppose Pam and Sam share an emotion of sadness because their leisure trip to Japan must be cancelled due to some unexpected reason. Here, Pam’s and Sam’s emotions not only point to the same intentional object, but also evaluate it in the same way. Although necessary, these two conditions (identity of the intentional object and convergent evaluation of the object) are not yet sufficient to qualify the experience as shared or communal: certain summative scenarios may satisfy them (Walther 2013, Zahavi & Salice 2016, Searle 2002). What must be added to turn the summative into a collective scenario is “the demolition of a phenomenological wall” (Stavenhagen 1993: 39; Walther 1923: 74): Sam’s experience must impact Pam’s in such a way that, based on her awareness of Sam’s sadness, Pam lives through her experience as being one and the same with Sam’s, which is to say: the experience is lived through by Pam *as ours*. This emotion is not experienced as numerically distinct from Sam’s experience anymore, making us-ness an “immanent constituent of the experience” itself (1933: 38; 1934: 30). Call a “we-experience” an experience that has us-ness as its constituent or exemplifies “what-it-is-like-for-us-ness.”

If Pam and Sam live through a we-experience of sadness, the way in which they intentionally relate to the emotions’ intentional object undergoes a substantial modification. To capture this idea, which is the second feature that characterizes we-experiences, Stavenhagen appeals to Husserl’s mature theory of intentionality (Husserl 1976) and especially to the idea that noeses (what roughly coincides with an experience’s mode [Searle 1983] or manner [Chalmers 2004]) are always correlated to noemata (the intentional objects insofar as these are experienced). According to this idea, a change in the noesis necessitates a change in the corresponding noema. Now, we have seen that some of a subject’s experiences can be impacted by the mental states of others in such a way that the subject lives through these experiences as *ours*. Another way of putting this is that the noeses of (some of) our experiences are coloured by a peculiar subjective property: us-ness. When this is the case, Stavenhagen claims, the corresponding noemata acquire the feature of “being familiar to us” (“*sich bei dem gemeinsam heimisch fühlen*”, 1933: 39). One way to understand this idea is that, when an object becomes familiar to us, our experiences unveil an aspect of the intentional object that becomes visible only insofar as, and to the extent that, it is intended *by us*. Sometimes, such “familiarity” may motivate people to keep their collectively valued goods in secret. Imagine a group of friends, children or teenagers, keeping those things that are central to their relation in secret from adults or other out-group members: a particular toy, a game, or a book. It could be claimed that this form of behaviour is motivated by the in-group members’ sense that only they can understand those items properly. Those goods, that is, are preserved from the sight of those who are not in a position to appreciate their true meaning.

This second element has consequences for the very subject of the intentional act: if something is familiar to us in the sense that there is an aspect that the object reveals only to us (1933: 43ff), then it is not only to me and not only to you that the object is given, but precisely to us. This is the third feature that essentially characterizes we-experiences: their phenomenal subject is the group. Speaking of a “phenomenal subject” is not to postulate a group subject of the experience, however (Stavenhagen 1934: 29). It just means that the experience is lived through by the subject in that particular way insofar as the subject understands herself as group member. Since I am having an experience only to the extent in which I understand myself as a member of us, this is *our*

experience: *we* live through that experience *together* (analogously: if there is something that I own only insofar as you co-own it, it is ours: *we* own it).<sup>4</sup>

Living through a *we*-experience entails the disposition of engaging in pro-social behaviour. This is the fourth feature characterising *we*-experiences. When Sam and Pam share an experience in the sense just described, they are predisposed to help and support each other (Stavenhagen 1936: 32). Importantly, the motivation for such behaviour derives from the *we*-experience itself and does not rely on other factors like moral maxims, concerns for one's reputation, one's character traits (although it is not excluded that those factors could also play a motivational role in communal scenarios). Solidarity—thus understood as a disposition to pro-social behaviour grounded in *we*-experiences—characterises communities and communities alone. This, again, is not meant to exclude that instances of help and support are present in masses and societies, but there the members gain the motivation to perform those actions precisely (and only) from the other factors alluded to above.

At this juncture, it is important to highlight that the understanding of oneself as member of *us*, and thus the unification with the other, is itself intentional. *We*-experiences have double-intentionality: they consist in being directed to an intentional object in a particular manner and in relating to that very experience as an experience which is *ours* (see Scheler 1973: 519, Stein 2000: 137, Walther 1923: 84ff). Interestingly, the second intention (just as the first) can misfire. If it misfires, the subject experiences disillusion or disappointment (Stavenhagen 1933: 46—the term is used here in Husserl's sense to express an intentional act that is frustrated by contrasting evidence, Husserl 1984: 574ff): the subject has understood herself as group member, but has not unified because the other has not unified. Consider this case: Pam and Sam are sad because their leisure trip to Japan has been cancelled. Sam and Pam regret that, but Sam's sadness is transformed according to the four features spelled out above, whereas Pam does not reciprocate. She thinks that the event does not demand such an inflated emotional response. Or she is irritated by Sam because she takes Sam's profuse expression of sadness to be an indication of self-indulgence. So, whereas Sam does unify with Pam (Sam undergoes a *we*-experience), Pam does not. How to describe this scenario? Stavenhagen claims that it qualifies as summative—but in contrast to merely summative cases, it also involves something more: the unfulfilled unifying intention on Sam's side (Stavenhagen 1933: 39f).

Although Stavenhagen's description of shared experiences reaches an unprecedented level of phenomenological complexity, its contribution so far aligns with that of other phenomenologists in considering the possibility of shared experiences a distinctive feature of communities. Yet, Stavenhagen takes this description to be the starting point of further investigations into the origin of that very self-understanding as group member, which is so crucial to *we*-experiences: what prompts a move from a self-understanding as an individual person to a self-understanding as a group member? In dealing with this question, Stavenhagen delivers his most original contribution to social phenomenology, or so I argue. By investigating this transformation in self-understanding, Stavenhagen comes to the conclusion that this process is contingent on different sets of conditions. This translates into the idea that there are different kinds of communities, which is

<sup>4</sup> Stavenhagen concurs with many authors in contemporary debate in the idea that collective attitudes require identification with the group and, therefore, a self-understanding as a group member (important differences in their accounts notwithstanding, authors like List & Pettit (2011), Pacherie (2013), Gold & Sugden (2007) endorse this idea). However, Stavenhagen does not offer a particularly informative description of such a self-understanding. It appears rather uncontroversial that this self-understanding cannot be a mere belief: one can believe to be member of a multitude of groups without this belief having any impact on one's emotions, intentions, or actions. In previous work, I have suggested that this self-understanding may be described as a Pushmi-Pullyu Representation (Salice & Miyazono 2019, Millikan 2004). Accordingly, to acquire a self-understanding as group member is to acquire a representation of a hybrid kind which, at once, describes the subject as a group member and, concomitantly, directs her to act as such. This idea appears consistent with Stavenhagen's own view, as the considerations on the 'we-idea' at the end of subsection 2.3 may show.

a point that remained almost completely unexplored by Stavenhagen's fellow phenomenologists.<sup>5</sup> The next section addresses Stavenhagen's distinction between two kinds of communities, spiritual and pragmatic communities, and it expands on the three main forms of spiritual communities.

## 2. Spiritual Communities

To understand the specificity of spiritual communities, it may help to contrast them with pragmatic communities. Just as for spiritual communities, members of pragmatic communities can share experiences, which rely on their self-understanding as group members. What is peculiar of pragmatic communities is that such self-understanding derives from the worldly circumstances in which individuals happen to find themselves (which is why pragmatic communities sometimes are also called "vital communities" [*Lebensgemeinschaften*] or "communities of destiny" [*Schicksalsgemeinschaften*], Stavenhagen 1934: 46; 1948: 17f).

Imagine that Sam and Pam do not know each other, but destiny brings them on board of the same rescue boat, striving to save their lives after an accident in the cruise liner they were passengers of. The destiny of Sam is closely intermingled with that of Pam for one will be safe only if the other will be safe, too (Stavenhagen 1948: 74 fn1). This example is obviously extreme because of the rigid interdependence of the destiny of the parties involved, but other social situations (think of military comradeships or of neighbourhoods) may be described in similar terms: individuals here exemplify the property of "being more or less close in a situation and, because of it, being reliant on mutual services" (Stavenhagen 1934: 39; philosophy of social sciences speaks of these situations as satisfying the "same boat condition," where a given goal is satisfied if and only if it is satisfied for all group members, see Tuomela 2007: 50). Because of these circumstances, individuals unify and, by conceiving of themselves as group members, will share experiences with each other (which typically revolve around a sense of mutual responsibility, Stavenhagen 1934: 38f).

In spiritual communities, the way to achieve self-understanding as group member is entirely different. What triggers transformation in self-understanding is primarily the fact that the individuals have certain aggregative *attitudes*: e.g., they like each other, they respect each other, or they inherit emotions from other group members. Of course, social situations remain the background against which those attitudes are formed, but those situations are not such that they psychologically compel those attitudes in the individuals. They do not because they do not presuppose an interlocking of the individuals' personal lives (which is not to deny that individuals can have those aggregative attitudes also in same boat scenarios). I now turn to the three main kinds discussed by Stavenhagen.

### 2.1. Cohesive Communities

The socio-psychological term "cohesiveness," which expresses mutual attraction or liking (see Hogg & Abrams 1952: 84), is alien to Stavenhagen. However, the first kind of spiritual communities can be qualified as "cohesive" because mutual attraction is pinpointed as the thriving force that brings individuals together in these communities. Examples of charismatic communities include friendships, fandoms, romantic relationships. As this kind of community has been discussed elsewhere (Salice 2018), a rough outline of Stavenhagen's ideas may suffice for the purposes of this paper.

Suppose Pam comes to know that Sam has a passion for Japanese *kaiseki-ryōri* cuisine, just as she does. While scenarios like this include merely overlapping preferences (Pam happens to have an attitude that is of the same

<sup>5</sup> In addition to mass, society, and community, Scheler discusses the total person (*Gesamtperson*) as a further kind of group. It is controversial whether the total person identify a fourth, distinct, kind of group or a sub-kind of community, see Salice 2016.



type of Sam's and is directed to the same object), Stavenhagen maintains that these summative scenarios can easily turn into communal aggregations: imagine further that, after Pam comes to know of Sam's liking of *kaiseki-ryōri*, she forms the expectation that Sam also likes Japanese literature (as she does). If this expectation is frustrated, the distributive or summative scenario remains what it is—a matter of contingency. But if it is fulfilled, it may motivate a further expectation, say, the expectation that Pam likes travelling and exploring Japan (as Sam does). If this and subsequent expectations, too, are confirmed, Pam may not only begin to frame her's and Pam's experience to be *theirs*, she will also start to direct her preferences to Sam: she will start to like her. But why does having a preference matching the preference of somebody else sustains the expectation of further preferences' overlap? And why does preferences' overlap lead to experiential sharing and, eventually, to mutual liking?

Stavenhagen considers preferences (liking or disliking) to be motivated by long-standing concerns (*Grundhaltungen*) that shape our mental life. These fundamental concerns do not have a single intentional target, but rather delimit a whole domain of objects (in the broadest sense of the term “object”), which the subject considers *valuable* in a certain respect. For instance, Pam's passion for *kaiseki-ryōri* is motivated by, say, her long-enduring concern for elegance over opulence or for simplicity over baroque-ness. These concerns usually shape one's life by selecting one's whole range of single preferences. Now, when Pam becomes aware of Sam's preference, she takes this to be indicative of Sam's long-standing concern, a long-standing concern which may delimit the same domain of objects that she, too, considers to be valuable. That is why, according to Stavenhagen, Pam will expect that she and Sam entertain further overlapping preferences. Furthermore, if several expectations are satisfied, that delivers confirmation to Pam that her domain of valuable objects does indeed coincide with Sam's: they inhabit the same world of valuable objects *because* they share the very same concern. They, together, face and value the world in the same way and from the very same perspective. This sameness of perspective elicits a self-understanding as group member and, correlatively, a sense of us. This has two important consequences.

On the one hand, us-ness transforms the phenomenality of Pam's and Sam's experiences: since they have acquired an understanding of themselves as group members, this enables them to live through their preferences as theirs, collectively. On the other, depending on the extent to which the two domains mesh, the individuals become naturally pre-disposed to like each other: by realising that one appreciates the world in the same way as somebody else does, one also, by the same token, includes the other in one's domain of valuable objects, whereby one starts to like the other person (and vice versa). So, “mediate cohesive communities” (communities that gravitate around those objects in the world to which the members accord their preferences) tend to evolve into “immediate cohesive communities” (communities where the attitudes of the individuals—in addition to be directed to the world—also target the other community member). They tend to evolve in this way because mediate communities, in a sense, already are (a watered-down form of) immediate communities. The *raison d'être* of these two communities is identical: this is the same evaluative concern for the world, which has mutual attraction as its psychological counterpart.

## 2.2. Communities of Respect

Preferences, in virtue of their very nature, contribute to the formation of communities of a specific kind. The same can be said about respect (*Achtung*): this attitude has the power to aggregate individuals in a communal sense (Stavenhagen 1931). Therefore, an understanding of how communities emerge out of respect must presuppose a clarification of the very notion of respect Stavenhagen operates with. To do so, I first identify the specific intentional object of respect, I then move on to discuss the self-understanding of the respecting person, and finally I focus on the aggregative force of respect.

Respect is introduced as a member of a family of recognition attitudes, which includes trust, reliance, and admiration in the sense of “being impressed by somebody” (*imponieren*, Stavenhagen 1931: 14f). An

analogical proportion holds among these four concepts: respect is to trust what admiration is to reliance. The proportion is based on the ideas that reliance and admiration are directed to the other as a creature with certain psychological traits, whereas trust and respect are characterised as moral attitudes in the sense that they target the other as a moral person. Reliance and trust include a reference to the action of another person, to which the person targeted by the attitude is supposed to contribute (directly or indirectly). Respect and admiration are free of such reference.

Focusing on respect, what is the particular aspect under which the moral person is respected? Being a moral person, Stavenhagen claims, goes together with having certain moral rights and obligations. However, respect is not due to a person merely because of her rights or obligations. For one can have rights and obligations while ignoring their existence and, therefore, without acting on them, whereas respect tracks a particular aspect of moral agency.<sup>6</sup> Especially when it comes to obligations, one can be aware of having an obligation, but without feeling committed (*sich-verpflichtet-fühlen*, Stavenhagen 1931: 10) to act on that obligation. By contrast, if you feel committed, you take seriously—or you feel responsible for—the obligation that accrues to you:<sup>7</sup> this amounts to adopting a certain moral stance towards the world which can be expressed as follows: “there is a world, which demands certain courses of conduct” (1931: 20).

The moral person, insofar as she adopts this particular stance, is the target of what Stavenhagen calls “dispositional” respect (in contradistinction to “occurrent” respect, see below).<sup>8</sup> Dispositional respect involves an image (*Bild*, 1931: 19) of how this person faces the world of obligations: while the person is the focal target of attitude, the image is its non-thematic or peripheral object (Stavenhagen 1931: 22). Importantly, this image may be frustrated by the actions and attitudes of the (dispositionally) respected person, in which case respect may dissolve. For instance, Pam dispositionally respects Sam because of (what appears to her to be) a responsible attitude towards her obligations. However, at a closer inspection, Pam notices that, in certain cases, the motivational force of Sam’s sense of commitment is blocked by countervailing instances like fear or self-interest, in which case Sam omits to act on her obligation. Or Pam notices that Sam does act on her obligation, yet her action is not motivated by her sense of commitment, but, say, by fear or self-interest. In all these circumstances, Pam’s respect in Sam may not only fade, but even be replaced by the polar opposite attitude of respect: contempt (*Verachtung*).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, if the sense of commitment *motivates* one to act on the

<sup>6</sup> In making this restriction, Stavenhagen distances himself from the Kantian conception of recognition respect as an attitude owed to all persons in virtue of their dignity (Darwall 2013) and by distinguishing respect from admiration, he also signals that his notion of respect does not coincide with what is also sometimes called “appraisal respect” (Darwall 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Importantly, feeling a sense of commitment may or may not be warranted: it is warranted, if the obligation it is about exists, otherwise it is unwarranted. The distinction between sense of commitment and obligation is originally drawn by Reinach 2002 and recurs in contemporary discussions in cognitive sciences (Michael et al. 2016) and moral psychology (Tomasello 2019).

<sup>8</sup> As mentioned, the moral person can also be made target of another attitude: moral trust (*sittliches Vertrauen*). To be viewed as trustworthy is to be viewed as a person who considers as her obligation to contribute to somebody else’s (i.e. the trustor’s) endeavor. Trust is not reliance, because reliance responds to psychological, not moral, features of the self. That is why, given the psychological character of an individual, one can rely on her to contribute to one’s endeavor, although one may not trust her to do so. A similar consideration applies to admiration: a particular action may reveal the audacious character of its agent, which impresses us. However, this form of admiration does not correspond to respect because it doesn’t track moral features of the person.

<sup>9</sup> But how far can warranted contempt go? This question should be answered in the context of phenomenological axiology. Stavenhagen embraces the widespread idea of a mind-independent hierarchy of values (Scheler 1973), which includes vital and spiritual values in their rich taxonomy of values. These are values that are exemplified by human beings *qua* living beings and *qua* persons. So, even though it is legitimate to feel contempt for some individuals (in light of their disregard of obligations), Stavenhagen would contend

obligation, then the image is confirmed and dispositional respect turns into (or is corroborated by) actual respect. In this case, while the attitude of respect retains the image of the person as its peripheral object, its intentional object shifts—this not the moral person, but his or her actions.

At this stage one might wonder where the image of respect originates from. Stavenhagen contends that, to form this image, the subject must already be acquainted with the obligations grounded in the moral world (1931: 22). To put this differently, the subject can form the image of how another person stands towards those obligations because she already has an understanding of those obligations. Now, of course, the obligations of the other are not the *subject's* obligations. Yet, the subject, in respecting the other, consciously acknowledges the existence of those obligations that accrue to him or her while understanding that, if she was to find herself in the same situation of the other person, she would face—and, importantly, take seriously or be responsible for—the very same obligations.

If that is on the right track, one can draw the following interim conclusion. When respecting somebody, the subject is pre-reflectively given to herself as a moral person—as somebody who recognises obligations and is thereby disposed to have those obligations determining her course of actions.<sup>10</sup> But then, the image that, in respect, the subject forms of the other, concomitantly indicates an image of the subject herself and of how she sees the world and the obligations that are grounded in the world. All this amounts to saying that, in respect, one finds oneself and the other sharing the same world of obligations: “respect is to reconcile oneself together with another to a common moral life facing the world in its entirety” (Stavenhagen 1931: 23).

Just as in the case of cohesive communities, where sharing the same evaluative perspective towards the world prompts unification, so here is sharing the same moral perspective a trigger for unification. Respect establishes a common moral life of an “unilateral” (Stavenhagen qualifies it as “indirect”) nature: it is unilateral because, in principle, this life can unfold without the respected person reciprocating the attitude. However, this only is an intermediate step towards the formation of a fully-fledged community of respect, which is not any longer unilateral, but reciprocal.

The next step presupposes the idea that certain social acts require that their addressees respond to their addressors with acts of a specific kind. For instance, Scheler (in line with Reinach 2002 and von Hildebrand 1930) writes: “[r]eciprocity [*Gegenseitigkeit*] as well as equipollence [*Gegenwertigkeit*] [between certain social acts] is absolutely not based on the contingent reality of these acts, on specific persons who execute these acts, or on the presence of real mechanisms and factual forms of conveyance in which this reciprocity gains reality. *It rests on the ideal unity of sense of these acts as acts of the essence of love, respect, promising, giving orders, etc., acts that require as ideal correlates responses of mutual love, mutual respect, accepting, obeying, etc., in order to form a fact of an unitary sense.*” (Scheler 1973: 535f, trans. mod., my italics.). For instance, it lies in the essence of an act of questioning to be met by an act of answering and the absence of such an answer—failing a plausible explanation on the addressee’s end—will cause an “interruption of sense [*Sinnunterbrechung*]” (Stavenhagen 1931: 34).

Scheler suggests that respect asks for mutual respect, but he does not elaborate further on his intuition. Stavenhagen does. It is precisely because, in respect, one appreciates the moral stance adopted by the other in

that their spiritual and vital values still demand to be appreciated as such. This means that warranted contempt is directed only towards a person’s specific traits, but not towards the whole person as such. (If it were directed towards the whole person, it would be unwarranted precisely because it would disregard this person’s positive values.)

<sup>10</sup> Analogously, Stavenhagen argues, the subject is pre-reflectively aware of her lived-body (*Leib*) and of the relations it enters with the environment, which will determine her behaviour (typically in a non-reflective way), Stavenhagen 1931: 22.

facing his or her obligations that the other, too, is under rational pressure to respect the subject. The other should appreciate that the subject recognizes the existence of the obligations she is facing and is also prepared to act on them, if these accrued to the subject.

Not always is respect met with reciprocal respect (a case which will cause dismay in the respecting person). But if this happens, then a “mutual” (or “direct”) community of respect comes into existence. Stavenhagen writes: “In line with the essence of respect, the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ find themselves as determined to the ideally same affective and agentive conduct by the same ethical world. [...] An aidesmatic community of two persons is [...] fully constituted, when the two communal companions are given to themselves as living in conformity to the same ethical personal image [*als einem gemeinsamen sittlichen Personbild nachlebend*]” (1931, 35). Once a community comes to life on the ground of mutual respect between two persons, its life can be enriched in two ways.

The first occurs when two subjects happen to face one and the same obligation. If the individuals have already formed a community of respect, then this impacts their experiential life and, more specifically, the sense of commitment they elicit towards the obligation. Because the two individuals conceive of themselves as group members, their two numerically different episodes of sense of commitment are now experienced as one or as *theirs*, collectively. Not any longer: I face an obligation, which happens to be the same obligation that you face, but rather: we now face one and the same obligation.

The second is that dyadic communities of respect can grow into communities with  $n > 2$  members. Suppose that Pam respects Sam. In this case, Pam faces one and the same moral world together with Sam. Now imagine that Sam respects Kim. The same can be said about the relation between Sam and Kim: they, too, face the same moral world. And if Pam comes to know about Sam’s respect for Kim, Pam will respect Kim as well, even though, perhaps, she never met Kim and never will. Respect for Kim is rationally demanded of Pam: since she shares the same moral world with Sam and so does Sam with Kim, she should also share it with Kim (and if Kim does not act upon her obligations as it is expected of her, then Pam and Sam will experience disappointment). Furthermore, since Pam respects her, so is Kim under a rational requirement to reciprocate that attitude and, thus, to respect Pam.

Although the main examples of communities of respect discussed by Stavenhagen are medieval and early modern groups like estates of the realm (*Standesgemeinschaften*) or guilds, his description can be extended to other groups as well. Central to communities of respect is the notion of honour: to being worthy of respect is to have honour. Some features that are attached to honour are the following (Stavenhagen 1931: 43ff). Only honourable persons can be members of communities of respect. Honourable persons can be judged only by other honourable persons. Not reacting to (esp. offensive) behaviour of an honourable person is (itself) offensive. Although it would exceed the purposes of this paper to further explore this conjecture, it may be suggested that “learned societies” like scholarly societies or academic associations (but also less commendable groups like criminal gangs), insofar as they are regulated by (explicit or implicit) codes of honour, display similar features and could thus be described as communities of respect.

### 2.3 (Cultural) Nations

Cohesive communities and communities of respect require, at least at their earliest stages of formation, face-to-face encounters among their members for the machinery of community building to be set in motion. This presents a limitation and a problem for any taxonomy of kinds of communities. The limitation is that human beings often are members of communities with individuals they will never encounter in their life (Stavenhagen 1934: 48f)—consider the existence of the Japanese nation: it would be obviously presumptuous to stipulate that the existence of that group depends on face-to-face encounters between its members. However, equally

presumptuous would be to deny the existence of such large-scale communities. But then the problem that arises is to identify the mechanisms that are responsible for the emergence of communities of this kind.

Large parts of Stavenhagen's 1934 monograph on the essence of nation are devoted to the dismissal of various attempts at defining the notion of a (cultural) nation based on objective features. Objective conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of a nation. They are not sufficient because individuals with different biological features, but also, say, with different passports may nevertheless constitute a nation. They are not sufficient because individuals with the same biological features and/or with the same institutional memberships may nevertheless *not* constitute a nation. The main reason why neither biological nor institutional features are relevant to nationality is that national communities are spiritual communities: they require, for their existence, that their members have appropriate mental attitudes. But then, what are the attitudes that determine memberships to a nation?

The discussion of the previous subsections suggests that being a member of a spiritual community is a matter of adopting the same perspective from which the world is confronted and evaluated. In cohesive communities and in communities of respect, this common perspective is, in a sense, *discovered* by the individuals. That very discovery brings the community about by transforming the self-understanding of the individuals. By contrast, when it comes to nations, individuals grow into a community of this kind by *inheriting* their communal perspective towards the world. Discovering that fact does not bring about the community, it just makes transparent their group memberships to its very members. However, how do individuals inherit that communal perspective?

To answer this question, Stavenhagen again invokes Husserl's theory of intentionality and, in particular, the idea that intentional acts require meanings to be directed towards objects and facts (Husserl 1984). How exactly the notion of meaning should be spelled out phenomenologically remains a matter of debate, but Stavenhagen does not discuss that problem (and neither do I in this paper). What is more significant for the issue at stake is that, according to Stavenhagen, meanings do not only fulfil a denotative function. More precisely, meanings typically also have evaluative content. Terms of natural language usually convey "thick" concepts, which "express a union of fact and value" (Williams 2006: 129). And the evaluative component of a thick concept is generally fixed by the linguistic community the speaker belongs to (Stavenhagen 1934: 54ff). From this one can infer that growing in a linguistic community goes together with inheriting the system of values that is inherent in that community. Yet, this is not the only (or the most important) consequence to be drawn. The salience that language assigns to certain values is first and foremost relevant to the individual's affective life. Stavenhagen here operates within the framework of the phenomenological theory of emotion, according to which emotions respond to evaluative properties that facts and objects exemplify (Scheler 1973, von Hildebrand 1916, Mulligan 2010).

The established link between values, emotions, and group memberships allows Stavenhagen to construe the notion of "emotional tradition" (*Gefühlstradition*, 1934: 49, 75), which puts the sensitivity towards values fostered by a certain community in a relation with the individuals' emotional reactions that respond to those values. In passing, that link also shows that, contrary to what one might be inclined to think, nations do not necessarily presuppose linguistic communities (although they usually do): what matters is that the acquired sensitivity towards values generates an emotional tradition. The ways in which this sensitivity is acquired are manifold and language is one important—but also only one—way of acquiring it (Stavenhagen 1934: 81).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> To put this differently, it is possible to imagine paradigmatic scenarios—these are scenarios where individuals learn how to elicit appropriate emotive responses (de Sousa 1990)—that do not involve language.

If being part of an emotional tradition is to evaluate the world the way a community (one's community) does, then individuals, who emote according to an emotional tradition, *de facto* are members of a nation.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it is important to notice that such *de facto* form of group memberships does not have to be accompanied by a self-understanding as group member on their members' ends. In other words, the experiences (especially the emotions) that members live through *because they are members of a community* could still be entertained from the members' first personal perspective, i.e., without exemplifying us-ness. This is conducive to a form of self-deception for, in situations like this, an individual's experiential life remains partly opaque to her. This invites the question as to how an individual can steer clear of that opacity.

Stavenhagen argues that, for an individual to discover her memberships to a cultural nation, is for this individual to acquire a *we-idea* (*Wir-Idee*). A *we-idea* (sometimes also called "a community's self-consciousness") is a more or less vague representation that the community has of itself, which is described as such: "[t]his self-consciousness [...] is the public opinion that the community traditionally has of its own essence. The self-consciousness of a community, e.g., contains indications on the kind of unity [*Einssein*] of the community members, on its foundation, and on that as which 'we' are one" (Stavenhagen 1934: 26). And further: "[i]nsofar as the *we-idea* objectifies the communality [*Gemeinsamkeit*] given in one's feelings and, as it were, grasped in one's grip, it now cannot any longer be overlooked or evaporate" (Stavenhagen 1934: 44). So, the *we-idea* "entifies" the community (Tuomela 2007: 20) by providing indication to individuals as to what unifies them and makes them members of that community. And, in so doing, the *we-idea* contributes to dissolve the opacity that characterises the members' experiential life as it enables them to realize that some of their lived-through experiences have its origin in their group membership.

It merits attention that acquiring a *we-idea* is not merely to acquire a doxastic (or "theoretical") representation (a point which is often signalled by the expression "*existential we-idea*," Stavenhagen 1934: 25f, 61). On the one hand, a *we-idea*, by colouring our experience with us-ness, immediately shapes our conduct or behaviour, e.g., by eliciting pro-social behaviour: "a traditional circle [*Traditionskreis*] becomes a community if the theoretically conscious communality [*theoretisch bewußte Gemeinsamkeit*] of the emotional life, which relies on an invisible tradition and is experienced as 'naturally,' becomes an existential communality [*existentielle Gemeinsamkeit*], that is, [...] if the individuals subject to a tradition become conscious of the way in which they, in a traditional and solidary way, love and hate, respect and despise, rejoice and suffer etc." (Stavenhagen 1934: 59f). On the other, even though *we-ideas* can be assessed with respect to their truth or falsity, what mainly matters from the perspective of social phenomenology is whether they are *endorsed* or not. For instance, the *we-idea* that membership to a particular nation depends on biological features is patently false because, as seen, nations are spiritual communities, and yet this is not preclusive for it to operate at the communal level. If endorsed, that *we-idea* will shape the members' self-understanding and, by extension, the nation itself.

This brings Stavenhagen's discussion on the verge of political philosophy: for a *we-idea* is at the basis of the institutional organization that a nation gives to itself. This is why Stavenhagen considers cultural nations to ground state nations (Stavenhagen 1934: 98ff). It exceeds the purposes of this paper to explore Stavenhagen's political philosophy, but it may be relevant to conclude this section by developing some brief considerations on this issue. On the one hand, Stavenhagen's social philosophy is consistent with, and actually conducive to, a conservative form of communitarianism (as this was defended, e.g., by two of his main philosophical references: Scheler and von Hildebrand). On the other, the main aim of Stavenhagen's social phenomenology (as this has been reconstructed in this paper) is to fulfil descriptive desiderata and, in particular, to answer questions related to the psychological pre-conditions of our social identity. Therefore, it could be claimed that Stavenhagen's answers to those descriptive questions do not straightforwardly translate into a political

<sup>12</sup> These evaluations inform a group *ethos* (*Sitten*): these are actions community members find (un-)appropriate to do or to omit in given circumstances (Stavenhagen 1934: 82f).

position. Such a translation necessarily requires further arguments, which this paper neither scrutinized nor presented.

### 3. Conclusion

The main purpose of this article was to introduce Stavenhagen's social phenomenology by emphasising its original aspects against the backdrop of the debate on we-intentionality in classical phenomenology. These have been identified in his particularly detailed description of we-experiences and, perhaps more importantly, in the diversified account of kinds of communities that he developed. Stavenhagen should be credited with the merit of having unearthed the aggregative, we-generating force of preferences, of respect, and of emotions. However, these ideas constitute only a limited set of his contributions and also one that this paper could expose only to the level of detail adequate to its main purpose.

There are at least two ways in which his thought could be made subject of further investigations, the pursuit of which will be a task for future research. First, his positions in social phenomenology are closely connected with other strands of his research. To fully appreciate Stavenhagen's positions, it would be important to understand how it relates to his—and his fellow phenomenologists'—descriptive psychology, axiology, and to the theory of (especially: social) action. Second, the resonances between Stavenhagen's social phenomenology and certain positions currently debated in social philosophy will appear as particularly striking to everybody familiar with contemporary discussions, to mention but few: Gilbert's theory of joint commitments (2014), Helm's view about communities of respect (2017), or Zahavi's investigations into social identity (2014b). How Stavenhagen can contribute to these debates is a page of phenomenology that still has to be written.

### 4. Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Jason Dockstader, Danny Forde, Jamie Murphy, and Dan Zahavi for their comments on previous drafts of this paper. My gratitude also goes to Saulius Geniusas, Kevin Mulligan, and Genki Uemura for helping me retrieve Stavenhagen's publications.

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