
Intersubjectivity and the Project of a Phenomenology of the Social World

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Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the guidelines of a phenomenology of the social world in the wake of Alfred Schutz and José Ortega y Gasset. While the latter was not, for a long time, acknowledge as a phenomenologist, the former is a well-known critique of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity and of the possibility of grounding a community of transcendental Egos. Both, however, remained faithful to some basic phenomenological tenets, namely, that individual subjectivity has a relational character, the circumstances in which men live are a part of their life, and life is characterized by its openness to the world. On this basis, they both carried out a phenomenological description of social existence, stressing its two main assumptions: 1) there are things that must be taken for granted; 2) habitualities, typical constructions, and systems of relevance are the primary ways of dealing with social events and other fellow citizens. In different ways, they both showed that the traditional objections opposed to phenomenology regarding its capacity to address mundane human existence stemmed from a misunderstanding of its basic tenets and intentions.

Keywords: Mundane Phenomenology, Intersubjectivity, Natural Attitude, Habituality, Social World

1. Introduction

The traditional objections addressed to the possibility of a phenomenological theory of the social world – at least regarding the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and his immediate followers – are well-known: phenomenology is an egology (or, even worse, solipsism), Husserl's constitution of the alter-ego is useless to an understanding of human relations in the natural attitude, and Husserl's theory of higher-level intersubjective communities (families, social groups, classes or state organs, among others) simply ignores how they came into existence, how they work and how they legitimate their functioning.

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As in all allegedly clear-cut diagnoses, the former diagnosis has its share of truth and its share of error. We will advance the hypothesis – to be proved later on – that perhaps some interpreters of Husserl’s philosophy have not looked at the parts of his philosophy of which a social scientist and a political scientist can get more benefit. Jürgen Habermas was one of them, focusing his analysis mainly on Husserl’s theory of the crisis of European sciences in the two well-known *Crisis* essays of 1936 (Habermas, 1969: 147-148)¹. Since Husserl, according to Habermas, shares a Platonic idea of the function of theoretical knowledge and its connection with human praxis, he fails to notice that social sciences can play a critical role regarding the prevailing social order. Moreover, Husserl failed to notice, says Habermas (1969: 152), that the inherited concept of theory was closely connected with an ontology that took the cosmological order as the pattern of a well-grounded human social world. Such a concept of theory could only deprive it of any normative power to evaluate human praxis and criticize the established social habitualities. Notwithstanding, it is also true that some phenomenologists thought they could offer an interesting social and political analysis of 20th Century societies drawing on Husserl’s philosophy. Among them, we can name Alfred Schutz, Ortega y Gasset, before the Second World War and after, among many others, Lester Embree, Maurice Natanson, and Hans Blumenberg².

Before the 1960s, two important books addressed social theory from a phenomenological point of view: Alfred Schutz’s *Phenomenology of the Social World* and Ortega’s posthumous masterpiece *Man and People*. In the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty also published an important book on political philosophy, *Les Aventures de la Dialectique*. Perhaps we should claim priority to some important papers from Felix Kaufmann on Philosophy of Law. However, Husserl’s articles for the Japanese journal *Kaizo* were written at the early twenties, although little attention was then paid to them. The relation of phenomenology to Social Sciences (and even to Political Philosophy) was almost ignored from the mainstream accounts of phenomenological philosophy, especially if those accounts focused on Edmund Husserl. Things have changed in the last decades.

¹ I am not saying that social sciences can take no profit from the analysis undertaken in the *Crisis* book. I am only saying that this book addresses, in the first place, a question concerning the transcendental achievements of consciousness, on the basis of which it already "has" its world before all physical or social sciences.

² Perhaps one could also mention Claude Lefort, although his political philosophy was mainly inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy.

My aim in this paper is not of a historical character. Others have already told the story of the relations between phenomenology and the Social Sciences. Instead, I will focus on the thought of two philosophers, Alfred Schutz and Ortega y Gasset, who shared a lot of things in common and addressed – although not exactly in the same manner – two important philosophical issues for the foundation of the social sciences: the objective meaning of social acts (regardless of the subjective intentions of the social agents) and the anonymity of social reality. For a different reason, they seem to take an egological point of departure. We will see what this means and why a phenomenological analysis of the social world may legitimately be egological at its point of departure¹. Of course, this also means that we don't understand "egological" in the usual sense, which goes back to Descartes' *Ego cogito*. Ortega thought he had put phenomenological investigations of the social world on the right track from the beginning, (1) when he stressed the fact that individual life is the authentic form of life and everything that happens in the world passes through it; and (2), when he added that an individual life is not the life of an isolated subject because an isolated subject is only the half of a concrete individuality; the other half is the circumstance in which he lives. A similar path (but not wholly identical, as I will try to prove at the end of my paper) was to be followed by Schutz, since 1932, when he stressed that social reality is subjectively experienced but always socially constituted (Eberle, 2009: 502).

Notwithstanding, since an egological starting point is not mandatory in phenomenological research of the social world (it would hardly fit Merleau-Ponty's and Sartre's stand-point, for instance), one must also ask what other distinctive traits make phenomenological research, or why the label phenomenological is suited to it. My answer is very simple. Research is phenomenological as long as it meets the two following requirements: if its starting point is the lived experience that social agents make of their relations with other fellow human beings, and not what social sciences (namely, sociology, political science, or economics) say about it; if the practice of the phenomenological method means a concern with the essence of the phenomena that are being investigated rather than with its contingent content (Natanson, 1973: 4). This phenomenological research is undoubtedly also transcendental in scope since it addresses the conditions of possibility

¹ We won't address directly in this paper the problem of the existence of a collective subject, although Schutz' notion of "we-relations" can point in that direction. We will make some references to Merleau-Ponty's thought about this issue, who, at a certain time of his philosophical development, looked at the proletariat (in more or less orthodox Marxist terms) as an example of a collective subject. Nevertheless, as we will see, he changed his opinion on that matter.

of social interactions; at the same time, it may have an ontological character since it also aims to grasp the modes of being of the beings that engage in social relations, as well as the modes of being of those relations.

However, this phenomenological research about the possibility of a social world does not need to begin necessarily (as Husserl did in the 5th Cartesian Meditation) by addressing the problem of intersubjectivity in order to ground the existence of a community of transcendental Egos. Above all, I think that research of the kind of the one conducted in this paper – following Schutz' and Ortega's path – can be carried out independently of an answer to the questions Husserl raised in the above-mentioned book. My next section is dedicated to this issue.

2. Two “non-standard” phenomenologists

We find the distinctive character of the phenomenological method mentioned above, exemplified in the works of the two phenomenologists that will guide the present research: Alfred Schutz and Ortega y Gasset.¹ Besides, they have in common the fact that they both practiced phenomenology, mistrusting its idealistic interpretations. This does not mean, however, that they shared the criticisms that the first generation of Husserl's disciples (the Göttingen phenomenologists) addressed to the master. They both looked at transcendental reduction as the appropriate methodological device to carry out their analysis.² Nevertheless, they both believed that transcendental reduction was not incompatible with a realistic stance, i.e., with phenomenological analysis that is not worried, in the first place, with the status of the Ego after the reduction. Schutz explicitly claimed that he was just following a path that Husserl himself had declared legitimate in the 1930 *Nachwort* to *Ideas I*. Since in ordinary life, human beings are not concerned with constituting phenomena, as these are studied after the phenomenological reduction, social

¹ It could be argued that phenomenology, since it is worried with essential structures, is unable to think the radical change of these structures, namely, revolutions. We can only say that, according to phenomenology, the natural relation with the world (physical or social) supposes its existence, i.e., that the world is already there before man begins, in the natural attitude, to reflect upon it. So, any essay of overthrowing social or political reality has to begin by an understanding of its characteristics. Phenomenological reflection allows to give this understanding a higher level of exactness.

² Ortega resorts to the Spanish word *desasirse* in order to characterize the phenomenological attitude. We cannot enter here in a detailed presentation of the exact meaning of the word. Here we can only take for granted that it means the same as that methodological attitude phenomenologists name *epoché*.

sciences can also, according to Schutz, concern themselves with the phenomena corresponding to the constituting ones in the natural attitude.

As is well-known, several phenomenologists thought that an idealist stance was the natural consequence of Husserl's philosophical turn that was best documented by the publication of *Ideas I* in 1913. Schutz and Ortega, on the other hand, carried out a mundane phenomenology. Of course, if they wanted to remain phenomenologists, while carrying out analysis of the social world, their main concern had to be with the essential structure of these phenomena, not with their particular or contingent instantiations. They both followed a path opened by Husserl in the 1st Section of *Ideas I*. Their goal was to grasp, by means of an eidetic reduction, the *a priori* invariant structures of a society composed of living minds. The social sciences, however, pose specific problems to eidetic reduction. In Husserl's analyses, the apprehension of eidetic invariants can take as its starting point the individual phenomena that, later, will be recognized, by the phenomenologist, as just their instantiations. The social world, however, is a world already typified according to the pragmatic needs of rational social action. It will therefore be necessary to take into account this subjective meaning that the world already has for the agents. I will return to this point above in section 4, when I will address the meaning of types for Schutz.

In the domain of social and political philosophy, Schutz and Ortega thought they were following the same path. Out of curiosity, I will mention a passage of a letter from Schutz to Recasens-Siches, professor of Law at the University of Mexico, dated the summer of 1958, where Schutz emphasizes the coincidence of points of view between the two authors. Speaking of his 1932 work, *Der Sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Schutz says: "It is a book with which Ortega was obviously familiar, as he mentions my name several times, in a very nice way." (Hermida-Lazcano, 1996: 46) Schutz meant the several references Ortega made to his book in *Man and People*, where the Spanish philosopher shares some of the criticisms Schutz addressed to Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations*.

The egological starting point of Husserlian phenomenology can give rise to some misunderstandings. The same can be said of the phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity; many were inclined to think that, for phenomenologists, social relations were just intersubjective relations that had surpassed a certain extension and encompassed a great number of people. To put it in Schutz's idiolect: it is, for some, as if a face-to-face relation (or a Thou-orientation) could be extended to the point of becoming a relation in the

sozialen Mitwelt.¹ If an analysis of this alleged extension were the intended aim of phenomenological research, the critique addressed to phenomenology, of ignoring that social relations are much different from a great number of intersubjective relations, would be perfectly correct. Neither Husserl nor Schutz, however, were the victims of such a naïveté², and neither was Ortega³. Moreover, we know that Ortega was very critical of the theory of the origin of the state defended by the Spanish Krausists, especially Sanz del Río, who looked at state power as a kind of extension of parental authority. The intersubjective relations that have their origin in the family, namely, the relations of the children to their father, are not, according to Ortega, the origin of society and state (Morón Arroyo: 1968: 280). The state is a congregation of independent units that aim to achieve a common project.

That's why it may not be useless to remind (even if we do it briefly) of Husserl's intentions⁴. It is worth remembering the problem that Husserl wants to solve in his 5th Cartesian Meditation and, for that, we need to bear in mind a fundamental topic of Husserl's phenomenology: recognizing the meaning of what appears implies resorting to the modalities of intentional life where such appearance was constituted. Husserl's questions are, then, the following: in what kind of intentionalities are the Alter-ego and the community of Egos constituted? What distinguishes the constitution of the Alter-ego from the constitution of a spatial-temporal thing? In what kind of primordial experience do someone gain access to the other?

The investigation carried out in the *Cartesian Meditations* does not concern, therefore, the constitution of the community of real human beings, who live in the real world,

¹ For a first analysis of what *sozialen Mitwelt* means see Schutz (1974: 245). The English translation of this book calls the *sozialen Mitwelt* the "world of the contemporaries" (Schutz, 1972: 176). Regarding the Thou-orientation (*Dueinstellung*, in the German original), I must add that, for Schutz, it does not always mean an awareness of the other's behavior, and much less an empathetic relation with him. For instance: I have a Thou-orientation to someone who sits next to me in a bus, even if I never looked at him or exchanged words with him.

² The point of departure of Merleau-Ponty seems to have been a little different. The French philosopher took as his point of departure the somatological condition of human beings, i.e., what he called *la chair*. Human beings have lived bodies and not physical bodies. This fact gives their actions a contingency and indeterminacy that have deep consequences in the political and the social level. Claude Lefort (1986: 32) called our attention to this. We will come to this issue below. Notwithstanding, intersubjectivity also played a significant role in the political philosophy of the French phenomenologist. For him, however, the proletarian class was the only that could be able to make intersubjectivity socially effective, since the proletarian condition abolished the distinction between masters and slaves (see Aron, 1970: 66).

³ Ortega says explicitly that the intersubjective (or interindividual) relations may entail the concealment of the social if one doesn't make the necessary distinctions. Ortega even goes so far as to criticize Max Weber for making this confusion (Ortega, 2009: 375).

⁴ In the following lines we will stick to the way Husserl addresses intersubjectivity in the 5th Cartesian Meditation. The 3 volumes of *Husserliana* on intersubjectivity put us, most of the times, inside a different context. Later, we will make some references to these important investigations.

according to the natural attitude. In the natural attitude, there is no need to speak of the constitution of the other, nor the community of Egos engaged in the constitution of a community of transcendental subjects. This last problem, moreover, is the business of the phenomenologist. To emphasize that the community of Egos in question in the 5th Meditation is not a community of real human subjects, Husserl also designates it as a monadological community. If, in the natural attitude, there is no problem with the constitution of the other fellow human being, it's because the other human being is an element of mundane experience, and the modalities of his appearance – although corresponding to different cognitive styles – are typified according to the characteristics of that experience. In other words, in the mundane experience, the appearance of the other seems to be a well-grounded assumption that needs no further clarification. By the same token, an understanding of the thoughts of other human beings seldom is problematic, whoever this other may be: a relative or a friend, a judicial authority, a post-office clerk, or a law enforcement agent.

Schutz notes that, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl's problem consists in developing a transcendental theory of the experience of the alter-ego that can also ground a transcendental theory of the objective world as a world for us. Husserl's strategy, of which I will make a sketchy presentation later, consists in the suspension of all constituted productions that could have taken place in intentional achievements whose origin refers to a subjectivity alien to mine, making appear a world that is equivalent to nature reduced to my sphere of belonging. Schutz's position is that not only did Husserl not resolve the problem of constituting a transcendental theory of the objective world as a “world for us,” but also that, within the framework of transcendental philosophy, this problem has no solution (Schutz, 1959: 337).

3. The appearance of the other as a fellow human being

We said earlier that an ontological science tries to grasp the modes of being of certain kinds of beings or entities. For instance, beings that have a certain extension and a special-temporal location belonging to the region will call “nature”. Numbers cannot belong to the same region, although mathematical physics would be impossible without them. Social beings are not physical beings nor logical-mathematical entities. They are living beings endowed with consciousness, i.e., with the capacity to carry out purposive

acts and establish relations with other living beings in order to achieve common ends. Conflict, of course, is a permanent possibility. Otherwise, human societies would never have felt the necessity of a government. One of the tasks of a government is the defense of the weaker against the attacks of the stronger. This means that human beings are able to reflect on what they and others do and to reciprocate with each other.

As we have seen, it belongs to anyone's natural experience of the world the appearance of other bodies identical to his own, that is, of psychophysical units identical to the one he himself is. I will leave aside, to simplify my exposition, the specific problems posed by the appearance of the animal body. I will concentrate on the human body and the modalities of our experience of it¹. And, of course, there is something that anyone easily understands: I only have a direct experience of the human body as long as this body is my own body. I won't be able to feel someone else's pains or joys or the specific sensation of effort when someone is moving from one place to another. I also won't be able to see what's around me as if I stood in the place that another body currently occupies and other equally obvious things. Of course, I will be able to occupy sometime in the near future the position that this other body occupies now, but then I will no longer see exactly what he saw when he occupied it². The differences will be minimal; in many cases, for pragmatic purposes, they will even be null, but it is impossible to deny that they somehow exist.

But let's admit that it was possible for both of us to change places so that I would see what the other saw when he was in the place that is now occupied by me. Ortega asks if the possibility of this changing of places – with its corollary, the congruence of perspectives, in the sense in which I recognize that I am seeing what he would see if he were still where I am now – would be enough to guarantee the identity of my body and the body of the other, except for the differences in location (Ortega, 2010: 222). Answering no, Ortega affirms the irreducible difference between the experience that I have of my body, based mainly on the sensations of pleasure and pain that it offers me, and the

¹ Making this abstraction I take some risks, moreover in the present context where the rights of life in general and of animal life in particular are about to be consecrated in some national constitutions, including the Portuguese. Anyway, even if our concept of subjects of rights has been considerably enlarged, the grounding of political power and the establishment of a normative context of action are still the affair of human beings.

² I will skip here a rather difficult issue that has to do with the social experience of time. In the example I gave above, it is presupposed that intersubjective relations ground the notions of succession and simultaneity. In the basis of intersubjectivity, one's own inner experience of time becomes objective time shared by everybody. To put it in other words: in the lifeworld experience the social agents believe that two different clocks may be synchronized. This belief is enough to deal with lifeworld issues and, at this level, needs no correction.

experience that I have of the body of the other, essentially of a visual and tactile nature. We can still reckon here what was perhaps the most important tenet of Ortega's social philosophy that I mentioned in the first section of this paper. In his view, "my life" is the radical reality because it is the only form of life to which I can have direct access and everything that happens can only happen to me as long as it enters my own life. If the objects of my present behavior did not enter my life in the first place, I could just resort to the experiences made by others or to what has already been written in textbooks. All my philosophical endeavors would be useless (Natanson, 1973: 6). However, this forces me to acknowledge that social life cannot be equivalent to radical reality; when I am engaged in some kind of social relation (for instance, with a police officer, who makes me stop my car for breaking the speed limit), I am living according to patterns that cannot be exclusively mine. (I will come back to this issue in the final section of my paper. I believe that it largely explains the difference between Ortega's and Schutz's social philosophies.)

That's why the other is always a danger, according to Ortega. Not that other human beings will always threaten me, but I must reckon, from the beginning, since I encountered him for the first time, that I don't know what his intentions towards me can be, that his seemingly friendly attitude may hide future unfriendly projects; in other words, I must be cautious and take precautions. In a very fine analysis of the meaning of greetings, Ortega claims that greetings – like, for instance, an ordinary handshake –, whose exact origin and meaning are most of the times ignored, are, in fact, a socially accepted way of taking precautions before engaging in a more intimate relationship with a stranger.

Since this may be a rather strange way of reasoning, let's try to see at least the coherence of this reasoning with other no less important tenets of Ortega's social philosophy and also with his anthropology. I have said above that for the Spanish philosopher, "my life" is the radical reality. This means that, for instance, when a police officer makes me stop my car because I broke the law when I didn't stop at a red light, this social relation – the police officer's command and my compliance with it¹ – is not a radical reality. However, this is only a special case of the general situation of someone entering in my own life, the only life that I know, so to speak, from within. The police officer's command is a special case because, since he and I are two human beings living in a social context, I know in advance that he is more than a human being for me: he is someone endowed

¹ Of course, I may not comply with it. However, this is not what happens in normal cases, where expectations regarding the other's behavior are generally fulfilled.

with a special power that the legal system grants him; and me too, I am more than a human being for him: I am someone that can be stopped by law enforcement agents in certain circumstances provided for by the same legal system. Although this police officer addresses me, we don't just stand face-to-face; his addressing me is not a Thou-orientation, but instead a social relation.

Now, for Husserl, the primordial experience of the alter-ego seems to be of a visual kind. We intuitively grasp an analogy between the other's somatic body and our own. Visual experience may be the basis (as we will see in a moment) of the recognition of the other as someone similar to me, as a fellow human being, so to speak. However, our experience of the other goes far beyond the visual domain, as Ortega (2010a: 241-242) rightly recognized. Recognizing another human being is expecting some kind of reaction based on acquired social habits of dealing with others. Schutz's notion of We-relation already encompassed this important dimension (Schutz, 1974: 233). In fact, Schutz stressed that when two different persons reciprocate, each of them brings to this actual face-to-face relation a set of habitualities and a stock of knowledge that was obtained through previous intersubjective experiences. Schutz introduced some relevant differences in the phenomenological concept of habitualities, which he inherited from Husserl's late philosophy. If we read one of the most thorough explanations that Husserl gave of this concept, in § 25 of *Experience and Judgement*, we can easily see that the German philosopher was addressing the solipsistic perceptive experience of spatial-temporal objects. The primary sensitive capture of an object continues in a process Husserl calls "explication" (Husserl, 1999: 136). With the aid of this word, Husserl is telling us that the capture encompasses past similar experiences, as well as it anticipates future ones. Those past experiences have not vanished since they left sedimentations in the subject. Habitualities is another name for the set of sedimentations that the present experience makes available again. For Schutz, instead, habitualities have, in the first place, to do with the cultural basements of socialized human beings.

So, Ortega remains faithful to the phenomenological tradition when he says that expectations may be of a positive or a negative kind. Notwithstanding, he is also making some innovative contributions. That's why *Man and People* is important to the foundation of the social sciences. To understand the social world, we must, first, understand the nature of man. The fact is that no one will ever be able to know in advance which of the two

(positive or negative) possibilities any new encounter will make real. That's why human beings are always a possible danger to each other.¹

This, however, is not the most important thing. For, even if one, for example, defends, as Alfred Schutz also does, that my perspective and that of the other can become congruent from the moment I change places with him and each of us starts to see what the other saw a moment ago, the essence of the difference between me and the other is not – like Schutz also stresses – in the fact that my body is “here” for me and his body “there” (Schutz, 1990b: 316). I believe that Ortega recognized there is a difficulty here when he argued that the problem is not the fact that I see a body “over there”, but in knowing whether there stays, in fact, a human body. Husserl, as is well known, spoke here of knowledge – though not of reasoning – by analogy. This analogizing process goes through four phases:

1. First, the knowledge of my own self.
2. Secondly, the recognition of my body as my somatic body.
3. Thirdly, the recognition of the somatic body of the other through analogical apperception.
4. Lastly, the presentation of an alien psyche as something that inhabits this body and gives it the character of the somatic body that I experience.

This process, as I think it's easy to see, is based on three assumptions: that the knowledge of myself precedes knowledge of the other; that it is through the body of the other that his psyche becomes present; and, finally, that for grasping a somatic body the sexual difference is not relevant.

We are now going to try to grasp what Husserl understood by all that so that we can then grasp what Ortega will say in this regard and see if, criticizing Husserl, he remains faithful to his own intentions or not. To be able to do so, it is convenient to pay attention to the precise moment in which, in the text of the *Cartesian Meditations*, analogical apperception intervenes. Let us begin by remembering that the entire Husserlian analysis is carried out under the regime of the “phenomenological reduction”, in other words, everything that appears to consciousness is seen not as real, existing in the spatial-temporal world, but only as mere apparition. Only to the extent that what, in the naïve

¹ This also means that no human being can ever be fully transparent to the others. Merleau-Ponty seems to have acknowledged this fact after a period in which he believed that a homogeneous society could be attained, due to the political action of the proletariat. Regarding the end of these illusions, we can read the Epilogue he wrote to *Les Aventures de la Dialectique* (1955: 273 ff.). For a rather critical account of these pages, see Aron (1970: 85 ff.)

attitude, is considered as real transcendence in relation to consciousness is reduced to a mere appearance will it be possible to proceed with an analysis of the intentionalities that constitute transcendence as such and the transcendence of the alter-ego in particular. Only the phenomenological reduction will allow an analysis of the intentional achievements that constitute the body of the other as a somatic body analogous to mine.

However, this analysis implies a previous moment. An analysis of intentionalities is a transcendental analysis, which aims to determine what happens when, in the experience of the other, we transfer to him, without thematically realizing it, the characteristics of our own body and why it is legitimate to do so. We must not forget that Husserl mentions the phenomenon of *pairing* (Husserl, 1950: 141), which is at the basis of the analogizing process, as a kind of passive synthesis. Now, something similar happens in the experience of objects. In the natural attitude, the pregiveness of any objectivity is accompanied by the transfer, to the current experience, of sediments of past experiences. This transfer process is an outcome of specific, intentional achievements (for the most part, without an active contribution of the Ego), which genetic phenomenology proposes to unravel. In the case experience of the other, something similar happens, which phenomenology also strives to clarify.

As I already said above, Schutz doubts that it is possible to ground an intersubjective relation between transcendental alter-egos. However, at least in the 1957 conference in Royaumont – i.e., after having the possibility of reading the *Crisis* book, published in 1954 in the Husserliana series –, Schutz might have thought that he was following a line of thought opened up by Husserl himself. In § 54 of this book (that belongs to the 3rd Part, never published during Husserl's lifetime) we see a retrieval of the problem addressed in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl asks: who carries out the transcendental constitution of the world, we as human beings or we as transcendental subjects? However, this is not a mere repetition of the old question because this transcendental subject is now baptized a functioning subject (Husserl, 1954: 187). I quote:

Concretely, each “I” is not merely an ego-pole, but an “I” with all its accomplishments and accomplished acquisitions, including the world as existing and being such. But in the epoché and in the pure focus upon the functioning ego-pole, and thence upon the concrete whole of life and its intentional intermediary and final structures, it follows *eo ipso* that nothing human is to be found, neither soul nor psychic life nor real psycho-physical human beings; all this belongs to the “phenomenon,” to the world as a constituted pole.

Shutz argues that a functioning subject constitutes the world but does not need to be constituted because, in the end, he is not something, but only a function. Certainly, a functioning Ego is not a man, but this only means that the mundane causalities (psychical, physical or other) are not the reason for the constitution of the world. Consequently, how an Ego endowed with a transcendental function constitutes another Ego is a meaningless question. An Ego just encounters other Egos in the world they live together. A phenomenological analysis of the social world is, from now on, freed of the problem of intersubjectivity in the terms in which it was posed by Husserl.

5. Which things are taken for granted?

All that has been said, in spite of the necessary acknowledgment of several limitations in Husserl's analysis in the 5th Cartesian Meditation, can also show the importance of this phenomenology of the appearance of the alter-Ego. In the first place, it is evident that an alter-Ego is never an Ego, i.e., is never someone absolutely identical to me. A community of Egos can only be envisaged as a task. However, this task can only be carried out as a process between beings engaged in a project of living in common or of mutual understanding. On the other hand, this project is not something that may be one day achieved once and for all: precisely because we are speaking of Egos – i.e., centers of free outward-facing intentional activities – a common living is bound to ensure freedom for all.

One important characteristic of Ortega's social and political writings is the fact that the Spanish philosopher always takes into account a factor that is prior to society and political systems and conditions of social and political life. This factor is the kind of man that prevails in social relations and eventually occupies governmental cabinets and other political offices. We may regret that Ortega had only scarce interest in economic issues and that his extensive knowledge regarding historical matters had no equivalence regarding the economy. Otherwise, maybe he could be able to see that some of his most famous anthropological types are not equally distributed by all layers or classes of society. Perhaps his anthropological types are most common in what is usual to label, with the help of a rather imprecise concept, the "middle classes." There again, however, Ortega was very attentive to a social phenomenon that was characteristic of the 20th Century, namely,

the rise of the middle classes that he describes so well in *The Revolt of the Masses*¹. (As far as I know, Ortega never uses this concept of “middle class”; it is also true that it is most common nowadays than in his time, in part because the social reality to which it points out has become progressively more evident since the second half of the 20th century.) This phenomenon is most visible in the fact that physical and social spaces that were occupied by a privileged minority are now full of people: this happens in the seaside as well as in theaters, in sports events as well as in restaurants. Of course, we are dealing with a positive phenomenon, up to a certain extent: it is a symptom of the historical level of our Epoque. In other words: the problem is not with the masses as a social phenomenon but with the emergence of the mass-man.

“Mass-man” is a phenomenological concept. This means that it is fitted to describe a visible phenomenon – in this case, of a sociological kind – that refers to another less visible or even hidden level.² Perhaps one may be inclined to define a “mass-man” as someone who acts and thinks like most of his contemporaries. This would only be half-true, since in every society of any historical epoch, at least in normal situations, we can find a similar phenomenon. We must keep in mind that Ortega is speaking about 20th-century society. What is specific to the 20th century, according to him, is the fact that there are men who think they can live as heirs. This means that they think that no special effort is needed to keep society at the level it has already reached.

The Schutzian concept of “taken for granted” could be of some help here, although Ortega is thinking of something slightly different. For Schutz, two things are taken for granted in our lifeworld experience. In the first place, the fact that the world exists. That’s what Husserl called *Urdoxa*. This world taken for granted is the natural world and the social world, without the distinction between them being thematically made in the natural attitude, although it always has to be taken into account, at least for pragmatic reasons. In the second place, we take for granted the existence of other fellow human beings. This “taken for granted” concept plays an important role in a phenomenological theory of the

¹ Ortega was writing in the 1920’s. Perhaps nowadays the phenomenon we are trying to describe goes far beyond the middle classes. Anyway, it is not a universal phenomenon. As is Ortega’s time, it is more visible in Europe and North America.

² The fact that, for Ortega, this is the way phenomenology proceeds is more clearly stated in his first book, the *Meditations on Quixote*. In a forest, for example, what we see from the outside is different from what we see once we are in the inside. The inside, that is hidden to someone who looks at the forest from the outside, is so visible as the inside. In every case, to see what is hidden, or lies behind the surface, we must develop the appropriate organ of vision. Since Heidegger’s *Being and Time* it is common, above all in French phenomenology, to label this “the phenomenality of the phenomena”. As we can see, Ortega was in possession of a similar concept already in 1914.

social world. Ortega, however, in *The Rebellion of the Masses*, gives it a moral character, and not only a descriptive one. In other words, Ortega is not only interested in the “ontological complicity” (to borrow an expression of Pierre Bourdieu) between man and world but also in an attitude that perverts that complicity. This happens because, for the peculiar anthropological type he is trying to grasp, the “taken for granted” is a heritage that one does not feel obliged to care for, still less retrieve the past intentional achievements that were at the origin of the inheritance.

Now, the types Ortega is talking about are different from the types in a Schuzian or a Weberian sense. The Schutzian types are tools that men produce in their everyday experience in order to be able to deal with similar circumstances. These types are a kind of sedimented knowledge that allows men to expect, in their present action, outcomes identical to the ones of previous actions. For Max Weber, instead, types are a device for the social scientist; they allow a process of structuration of the manifold of social phenomena by abstracting from personal or contingent factors that do not pertain to the essence of these phenomena.¹ The anthropological types Ortega speaks about have different meaning because they answer different questions. This question – the philosophical or anthropological, not the scientific or the common sense one² – is the following: what kind of human beings correspond to the historical level of an Epoque?

One could ask: is the rise of a new anthropological type the cause of social and political changes, or is it the other way around, i.e., are the social and political circumstances the cause of the rising of a new anthropological type? Ortega seems to think (rightly, we must add) that a cause-effect relation has no place here. The two factors condition each other. A social and political circumstance can only exist as long as there is an anthropological type that enables it to remain in effect. We could also mention the famous analysis of the French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville – with which Ortega was familiar³

¹ Of course, for Schutz types also have an epistemological function. However, Schutz wants to show that Weberian types are higher-order constructions based on the lower-order constructions men resort in their lifeworld experiences. The analysis of this issue goes beyond the aims of this paper.

² It's almost needless to say that the scientific and the common-sense questions are different, since in the first case we are dealing with an essential feature of the scientific method in the social sciences, while common sense types are only relevant for social agents engaged in lifeworld experiences (Schutz, 1976: 71). Nevertheless, some connections between the two must obtain. In social sciences we must find a correlation between the objective meaning a social scientist ascribes to a social action and the subjective meaning the actors are willing to reckon in what they do. This correlation is the only way to guarantee the objectivity of scientific knowledge.

³ In *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega mentions Tocqueville only once, in the Introductory section titled “Prologue to the French”. Ortega had in his personal library a copy of the 17th edition of *De la Démocratie en Amérique* and wrote a small paper (in 1950 or 1951) about the French author that the editors of the *Obras*

– about the rise of American democracy and of a kind of human being that was willing to live according to the rule of the majority.

5. Paramount reality: persons and things

This difficulty has important consequences for the theory of intersubjectivity. Ortega recognized it no less than Schutz. But there is an important difference between the two which I cannot fail to mention, though it would deserve a development which I cannot do here. This difference has to do with the characterization of the other as a “danger”, which constitutes the salient feature of Ortega's theory of intersubjectivity and, moreover, grants him a particular place among phenomenologists in addressing this theme. As we know, for Schutz, in the lifeworld experience of the other, any relationship with him is marked by a process of typifications: a set of sedimented experiences that form part of the stock of knowledge that the lifeworld puts at our disposal. This stock will pre-determine my expectations regarding this relationship and bring about a system of relevances, thanks to which I can know what we have in common – i.e., what is relevant for both of us – and what differentiates us. Now, Ortega takes up the notion of typification. But he gives it a completely different scope because, according to him, the intentions in which the other is constituted as such, that is, by which he sees his anonymity and neutrality reduced, gaining more precise contours, have their starting point in a presumption of threat and mistrust.

Let us look at all this from a different perspective. Husserl, as is well-known, is in quest of a primordial experience and of the kind of intentional achievements that pertain to it. In his late philosophy of the lifeworld, it seems to exist two different kinds of primordial experiences. One may call the first a perceptive experience: the experience of things and objects as they are given in the natural attitude: we see houses and trees, hear automobiles in the streets and birds singing in the trees, we have tactile experiences resulting from the contact of our somatic body with the things that surround us, etc. But, in the second place, we have social experiences. They also have a primordial character and, sometimes, they refer to the same things that have been perceived: automobiles, for instance, are immediately perceived as products of human industry, to which is attached a

Completas, published by Alianza Editorial entitled “Tocqueville y su tiempo”. The editors of the critical edition of Ortega's work kept the title (Ortega, 2010b: 362 ff).

certain social utility (and also, sometimes, the mark of a certain social status). Schutz resorts to William James to label these two dimensions of the lifeworld our “paramount reality.” He means that we never put it in doubt – that is the specific *epoché* of human subjects engaged in lifeworld experiences –, at least as wake normal adults and have with it the specific relation that we call labor. We could perhaps add that in this paramount reality some noemata are classified as tools, and others are classified as raw material.

However – immersed, so to speak, in the natural attitude and without any specific theoretical concern –, we feel obliged to make a distinction here that overlaps the two mentioned dimensions. From the objects we perceive and from the persons with whom we engage in a social relation, we don’t expect the same kind of behavior towards us. In *Man and People*, Ortega made a distinction between coexisting and resisting; things resist us – i.e., due to the laws of physics, we cannot make with them whatever we want –, whereas persons coexist with us. (Once again in this paper, I will have to put aside the problem of the coexistence between human beings and animals.) As the Spanish philosopher says, it is more difficult to deal with someone that coexists than with something that resists. The latter is more predictable than the former. The variety of human reactions turns the other into a possible danger to me.¹ Things that happen in the world, like storms or earthquakes, may be menacing, but they are not dangerous, according to the sense Ortega gives to this word.

This problem of the “danger” that another fellow human being represents must be distinguished from the normal existence of misunderstandings that can be cleared up by mutual communication. Why did I say that misunderstandings are normal? Because the subjective meaning assigned to actions or events hardly can be the same, even for people who belong to the same national, religious, or linguistic communities; streams of consciousness are always individuated, and I and the other would have to be the same person for misunderstandings never to come to the fore. Of course, as Schutz rightly points out, every event of communication of the intended meaning of an action presupposes that the interpretational scheme of discourse is approximately the same or will substantially

¹ Of course, Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, seems to state similar ideas. The other man, he says, is someone for whom I can become an object or, in other words, something that is seen, while, for myself, I am always a subject, i.e., someone tanks to whose vision the world comes into existence. Sartre goes on to say that in order to discover myself as someone who is being seen it is not necessary that I find a pair of eyes gazing at me. A noise behind my back may be the signal that someone is seeing me and making me the object of his gaze (Sartre, 1943: 303). There are, however, some important differences. For Sartre, the fact that the possible gaze of the other makes me an object has a tragic character, since I become, even if only for a slight moment, deprived of my subjectivity; moreover, habitualities or systems of reference play no role in Sartre’s analysis. The gaze is not socially conditioned, but only a possibility of objectivation.

coincide (Schutz, 1990b: 322), in the case of the communicator and the case of the addressee. Moreover, since communication is only effective within the reality of a common world, the possibility of overcoming misunderstandings – either for the communicator or for the addressee – seems to be always possible. (Notwithstanding, it is also possible that human beings will never be able to surpass the level of a “specific typicality” (Vaitkuz, 1990: 87) when they want to understand other human beings.) Anyway, the “danger” Ortega speaks about is another thing. However, where lies the origin of the differences between him and Schutz?

In my opinion, the differences have to do with the notion of primordial reality, or “paramount reality,” if one wants to keep the Schutzian concept. For Ortega’ the other’s human life is only hypothetical; it has, as Schutz rightly stresses, a second-degree reality (Schutz, 1990a). Although this secondary reality is generally taken for granted (i.e., I look at others as if they have the same reality as my own reality), and although the oblivion of my genuine life in its radical solitude is almost always the rule, I can only be aware of the reality of the other from outside, so to speak. For Ortega, social relations are the consequence of this necessary oblivion. That’s why, albeit he departs from Husserl in several respects, Ortega, like Husserl, fails to see (at least according to Schutz) that only a previous experience of the other’s existence makes possible a common social environment and the eventual misunderstandings grounded on it. The danger of which Ortega speaks about will always come second.

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