HUSSERL'S APPROACH TO THE THEME OF THE PERSON

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ABSTRACT
The concept of the person, which is central to ethical reflection, has been critiqued and seriously challenged on multiple grounds in contemporary philosophy. The phenomenological approach, as distinct from an anthropological perspective, understands personalism not as a doctrine but rather as an attitude. Accessing the person via the phenomenological route leads to the emergence of a pluralist and open personalistic perspective, both in terms of determining who or what may be defined as a person (a human being, an animal, or persons of a higher order), and at the ethical level, where it suggests a non-formal and anti-hierarchical ethics. In light of these considerations, the phenomenological approach and specifically the line of inquiry developed by Husserl offer the contemporary ethical debate scope for appealing to the concept of the person, while making a minimum or residual use of it that is not weighed down by excessively demanding anthropological or metaphysical assumptions.

KEYWORDS
Husserl, Phenomenology, Person, Ethics, Animal, Social Person.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE THEME OF THE PERSON AS AN ISSUE OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSTITUTION

In this paper, I put forward two hypotheses: 1. that to inquire into the person in the work of Husserl, we need to take the notion of personalistic attitude as our starting point, asking ourselves how personalism may be phenomenologically derived and in what sense we may define it as an attitude still before defining it as a doctrine. In other words, what is meant by attitude and what differentiates this particular stance from other attitudes? This is a tricky question, because if we introduce the concept of attitude as a precondition for speaking about the person, then we must also inquire whether attitude is not perhaps a prerequisite for the person itself; 2. that consequently Husserl's approach to the person - which is phenomenological rather than anthropological - yields a pluralistic and open model of

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the person that we may analyse in two regards. First in relation to the problem of determining the person: who and what is the person, what types of person are there, and how do they relate to one another? And second with respect to the ethical implications of Husserl's thinking about the person, and their progressive shift towards a non-formal and antihierarchical ethics.

My aim in this reading of Husserl, given the genealogical deconstruction and critiques of the concept of the person produced by a number of twentieth-century theoretical and philosophical approaches,[1] is to argue that, in light of such - largely reasonable - objections to the notion of the person, phenomenology allows us to retain this concept, albeit making minimal or residual use of it.

2. THE *PERSONALISTIC* ATTITUDE [EINSTELLUNG]

Historically, the concept of the person has come to the fore in specific contexts that nonetheless share some identifiable characteristics: from theological and legal-political fields, usually with ontological or metaphysical underpinnings, to their implications for anthropological studies. One of the most marked distinctions drawn by Husserl is surely that between the anthropological and phenomenological perspectives on the theme of the person. Indeed, the question of the divergence between anthropology and phenomenology arises precisely when he broaches the notion of the person. In the second part of *Philosopie als strenge Wissenschaft*, in the context of his critique of historicism, Husserl on the one hand recognises Dilthey's outstanding contribution to the study of the sciences of the spirit or human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), but on the other emphasizes that, precisely in terms of attitude, worldview (*Weltanschauungen*) philosophies tend to address the theme of the person by transferring a naturalistic attitude to the sciences of the spirit, thus practicing anthropology rather than phenomenology. The latter point is reiterated in multiple appendices to the *Ideen II*.[2] Husserl's observations do not escape Heidegger, who comments positively on them, specifically as they are stated in *Ideen II*, in § 10 of *Sein und Zeit*. This establishes the distinction between a phenomenological and an anthropological approach to the person. Leaving aside the fact that Husserl and Heidegger never agree to respectively define one another's work as purely phenomenological or purely anthropological, it is clear that

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[1] These critiques have ranged from ethno-anthropological discussions - notably the seminal work of Mauss (1980, pp. 331-362) - to twentieth-century antipersonalist objections, such as the radical theories put forward by Weil (1957, pp. 11-44) and current criticisms from the field of biopolitics, including lines of inquiry into the 'impersonal' as an ethical resource, cf. Esposito (2007, pp. 80-126).

[2] Cf. Hua IV, pp. 377-393. Unless otherwise specified in the reference list, the English translations of citations from foreign-language sources are my own.

both distinguish between an interpretation of the person based on the phenomenological method, and an interpretation based on the anthropological method[3]. In other words: between a descriptive and an analytical-deductive approach.

This clarification aside, surprisingly, many of Husserl's theoretical propositions continue to feature metaphysical implications, terms, and concepts that are highly traditional and clearly identifiable in more purely anthropological approaches to the person: in a specific sense, the person entails the notions of freedom, will and self-responsibility. However, despite this appeal to an idea of the person that is classical in many respects, it is Husserl's approach to the person that is different, and this allows him to describe the personalistic attitude [4].

In the second volume of *Ideen* (1912-1928) - the key reference work on the theme of interest to us here - Husserl's inquiry into phenomenological constitution in the broadest sense describes reality (*Wirklichkeit* as opposed to *Realität*) according to a well-established division: nature on the one hand and the spiritual world on the other. However, his constitutive analysis of the spiritual world represents a new departure with respect to his earlier analyses of natural reality. And indeed, he twice feels the need to distinguish between the natural and personalist approaches: first in § 34, before launching into his description of the animal nature (to point out that the dimension of the spirit is lacking from these constituent analyses) and a second time at the beginning of the third section proper, that which is most salient to our topic. If these elements of Husserl's thinking are not easily ordered or situated within the overall framework of the work, and if Husserl himself finds it difficult to present his constitutive inquiry in terms of a progressive

[3] On this theme, Husserl's key reference authors from the history of ideas appear to be Dilthey and Leibniz. Dilthey is mentioned more frequently, for example in the *Einleitung in Ethik* of 1920/1921 (Hua XXXVII, p. 104), while Leibniz (*Nouveaux Essais* II, 27 §9) is cited in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* (Hua XIV, p. 48), in relation to the concept of person. On his relationship with Heidegger, see Husserl *Nachwort zu den Ideen I* (Hua V, pp. 138-162). Heidegger was certainly familiar with *Ideen II*, and consequently with the theme of the person in Husserl and the specifics of the personalist attitude. Comparing Husserl with Scheler, he preferred Scheler's approach, but ultimately criticized both authors' notions of the person, arguing that they similarly failed to address "the question of the 'personal Being'", cf. Heidegger (1977, p. 73). As earlier stated, the concept of person in Husserl first appeared in *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (Hua XXV, pp. 3-62), while the monad was introduced for the first time in the 1908-1911 papers on intersubjectivity. In his 1932 lecture on *Phänomenologie und Anthropologie*, Husserl set out to dispel a series of misunderstandings: anthropologism and psychologism stand in opposition to the other school of modern subjectivism, represented by transcendentalism, and later by phenomenology itself. Yet, at the end of the lecture, he himself pondered "why psychology and, if you will, anthropology, is not in reality one positive discipline among others [..], among the natural science disciplines, but has an internal affinity with transcendental philosophy" (Hua XXVII, p. 181).

[4] For broader introductory background, see: Moran, D. and Cohen, J. (2012, pp. 309-312), Semerari (1996, pp. 305-324). Even internally to Husserl's own thinking, if we look for example at the second part of *Ideen II* which deals with the spirit, the topic is organized according to a relatively traditional schema: 1. the sense of the opposition between nature and spirit; 2. the sense of the fundamental law of motivation; 3. the sense of the ontological priority of the spiritual world with respect to the natural world.

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development, this is because the phenomenological approach is neither deductive nor emergentist. Consciousness generally, and consequently the person, are neither an end-point nor epiphenomena; we are not looking here at a hierarchical system in which the top emerges from the bottom as an outcome. On the contrary, the person phenomenologically *corresponds* to an attitude and at the same time *becomes visible* thanks to an attitude. In other words, if we accept that the person is already phenomenally 'there' by virtue of its self-givenness, the challenge for the phenomenologist is to better determine *how* the person is given by looking at this spiritual or personal dimension because - as Husserl put it in *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* (1907) - "*Phenomenology carries out its clarifications in acts of seeing, determining and distinguishing sense.* It compares, it distinguishes, it connects, it places in relation, it divides into parts, it separes off moments. But it does all this in the act of pure seeing. It does not engage in theory or mathematical construction; that is, it offers no explanations in the sense of deductive theories " (Hua II, p. 43).

More specifically, Husserl develops this perspective when he begins to see that in addition to idiopsychic and physiopsychic dependencies (the soul depends on itself and on the body), there are further dependencies that cannot be psychologically or naturalistically explained but are nonetheless constitutive: dependencies on others as personal beings and on the world around us, in all its determinations ranging from near/familiar to alien, but in any case always situated in a plural and historical-cultural context. His inquiry therefore turns to describing the different forms of conduct that in a given human environment and social circumstances constitute - and thereby make recognizable - the person. Each person then has his or her own specific intentional correlates: not other human beings, but other persons, in Husserl's terms "home-comrades" (*Mitgenosse* or *Heimgenosse*), who constitute and share the same familiar world, the same *Umwelt* and therefore the same social objects, tradition, history, community and so forth, within broader or narrower circles of belonging. This means that the spirit, or the person, is not speculatively deduced, but rather, that, under the phenomenological gaze, different eidetic perspectives come into view: these are not hierarchically ordered, but differential, plural, and interwoven.

The first requirement is to define what we broadly understand by an attitude, an *Einstellung*. Indeed, as observed by Ricoeur – who was in line with the phenomenological tradition on this point - the concept of *Einstellung* is the gateway to a theory of the person: "To get away from abstractions, I, for my part, feel the need to pin down the *attitude-person*. First of all, the person is that entity for which the notion of *crisis* is the essential mark of its situation [...] to perceive my situation as crisis means to have lost the knowledge of my place in the universe (one of Max Scheler's latest works is entitled *The Human's Place* [Stellung] *in the Cosmos*). To perceive oneself as a displaced person is the first constitutive moment of the

personal attitude" (Ricoeur 1992, p. 199). *Attitude* is both the French and English translation of *Einstellung*. In *Krisis*, Husserl himself states that "attitude, generally speaking, means a habitually fixed style of willing life comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style, comprising the ultimate ends, the cultural accomplishments whose total style is thereby determined. The individual life determined by it runs its course with this persisting style as its norm" (Hua VI, p. 280). Broadly speaking, we might say that an attitude is almost a point of view, a disposing of oneself or being disposed that defines and multiplies one's points of view, a prism that refracts the light. But this immediately raises key theoretical questions: Is this *Einstellung*, this point of view with the power to open or close different spheres of experience, passively given or actively acquired? Is it not the case, as the above citation suggests, that in order to define attitude at a more general level we must already have assumed certain components of the personalist attitude, corresponding to the notions of style of life, will, and interest? So, which of the various attitudes precedes all the others? Again, the problem to be resolved is one of interwoven and refracted perspectives. It appears that we are always already in an attitude, always already making a distinction.

The basic distinction drawn by Husserl is between the naive or natural attitude (also referred to as the *doxastic* attitude, indicating belief in the existence of a natural reality that is simply there for us, or "on hand") and the transcendental or phenomenological attitude. In the transcendental attitude, via the practice of the *epoche*, the world is only suspended, temporarily "put out of action", and thus phenomenologically investigated by bringing to bear the different attitudes. The naturalistic attitude on the other hand is the *Einstellung* of the natural sciences, which engage in naturalization (also the basis for anthropological personalism, according to Husserl). But the natural attitude is not equivalent to the naturalistic one: the former is practical, a primordial *doxa*, while the latter reduces to objectivism. We are forced to acknowledge that phenomenological rationality has to do with attitude, and it is not difficult to work out that this is a paradoxical statement: first, can well-founded reason be tied up with something as subjective as an attitude? We might say that an attitude is very similar to a posture, despite the multiple theoretical problems associated with the latter term. Attitude refers to a global mode, or way, of acting, a complex of acts. This concept is clearer in the French and English translations of *Einstellung*, attitude, and even clearer in the Italian translation, *atteggiamento*, which has the same root as the Italian word for act: *atto*. *Einstellung* contains the notions of placing-in, situating ourselves, and actively being in a given way in a given context; therefore, we may reasonably argue that it includes an active component, but on the other hand also the contextual dimension of being situated-in.

This leads us to the personalistic attitude: the attitude we are always in "when we live one another, talk to one another, shake hands with one another in greeting,

or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion. Likewise, we are in this attitude when we consider the things surrounding us precisely as our surroundings and not as 'Objective' nature, the way it is for natural science" (Hua IV, p. 192). Herein lies the difference between this attitude and the naturalistic attitude, which views the human being as an empirical or psychophysical ego. To reflectively access the personalistic attitude, we must position ourselves at the constitutive level, that is to say, the specific level at which meaning is produced via acts that are characteristic and constitutive of the spiritual sphere. Thus, we are looking at eidetically different *Auffassungweisen* or modes of apprehension. Specifically, acts of the ego come into contact with other acts of the ego, constituting a *Personenverband*, a "community of persons" or a personal bond, which is governed by the fundamental law of motivation and organized around a key term, that of the person.[5] Hence the personalistic attitude - we do well to remind ourselves - is oriented towards that which is already there and is available to description following a guiding thread (*Leitfaden*): in other words, it is available to static phenomenological analysis. The person therefore serves as a transcendental guide, offering the possibility, at the descriptive level, to distinguish "between the 'I that I am' on the subject side and the 'I that I am' as Object for myself, and Object, which is, in the existing 'I am', represented, constituted, and perhaps intended in the specific sense: the me [*das Mich*]. What is intended here is 'the person' constituted for me, the Ego which has consciousness as a self" (Hua IV, p. 265). If this holds at the level of the constitution of the ego-person, it will be even more strongly the case when it comes to the distinction between the person and his or her deposit of cultural and collective accomplishments.

It is clear that the spirit is not an add-on to a presumed first constitutive level of experience, but rather corresponds to a specific dimension of experience. In this regard, Husserl does not hesitate to claim that the personalistic attitude is not naturalistic but natural: that is to say, we are already in it, and it is, ultimately, practical. This is why his description of the constitution of meaning in the spiritual world represents a fresh start, a new beginning. However, once he has separated and distinguished between the two attitudes, he is faced with the need to define how they are related to one another, and in this respect, Husserl speaks of "contamination" and "priority", ultimately arguing that the naturalistic attitude is subordinate to the personalistic one. The last remaining question, then, is how we move from one attitude to the other: "A change in attitude means nothing else but a thematic transition from one direction of apprehension to another, to which correspond, correlatively, different objectivities. We are dealing here with radical changes of such

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[5] See also Hua I, pp. 156-163. Note the difference between Husserl's approach here and his line of reasoning in *Ideen II* which was still largely framed in terms of static rather than genetic constitution.

kind, with transition to apprehensions of fundamentally different phenomenological types" (Hua IV, p. 221). At bottom, the transcendental attitude acts as a prism for the other possible attitudes, in the sense that it allows us to reflectively multiply our points of view; yet this attitude, like all attitudes, is interwoven to some degree with the personalistic attitude, insofar as it is practical and natural. It is here that we come up against the unsolvable crux of the matter, namely that it is not possible for us to identify one original attitude or posture, but rather we may surmise that there are multiple active-passive postures, which intersect and combine with one another, while at the same time remaining radically different from one another.[6]

Rather than entering into the noematic correlates of the intentionality that constitutes the world of the spirit, it is more useful – given our level and focus of inquiry – to re-examine the multiple distinctions proposed by Husserl to explain the intertwining of elements that constitute the person, namely the distinctions between attitude, disposition, character, habitus, and style. Again, but this time in relation to the constitution of the person, Husserl suggests that a position of existence is constituted via a complex active-passive dynamic, thus once more evoking the intricate question of the *Einstellung* and whether it involves the assuming of a position or already being placed in that position.[7]

In a broad and general sense, we may order Husserl's complex and sometimes variable descriptions of these elements as follows: the spiritual 'I' is investigated with respect to its 'subsoil' [*Untergrund*] and this applies to both the unreflected I [*Ich*] and the reflected one [*Mich*]; in other words, our task is to study the connections between the different strata in the constitution of the ego, but - crucially - in relation to the constitutive process: we are not looking to identify a hierarchical structure, but to follow the method of regressive inquiry [*Rückfrage*] that is typical of Husserl. This means once more examining, but at the phenomenological level (both static and genetic), classical concepts and categories that have traditionally

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[6] Importantly, while discussing the theme of the *Einstellung* in the *Abhandlungen* of *Krisis*, Husserl points out the following paradox: "For yet a third form of universal attitude is possible (as opposed to both the religious-mythical attitude [...] and the theoretical attitude), namely, the synthesis of the two interests accomplished in the transition from the theoretical to the practical attitude, such that the *theoria* (universal science) [...] is called (and in theoretical insight itself exhibits its calling) to serve mankind in a new way, mankind which in its concrete existence, lives first and always in the natural sphere" (Hua VI, p. 283). We fall into the natural attitude as a matter of course, while maintaining the theoretical attitude requires effort. Ultimately, the *epoche*, or critical stance must constantly be renewed, in line with the strange attitude that in *Krisis* Husserl presented as follows: given the practical natural attitude, philosophy introduces a theoretical attitude; while the first is applied to specific fields of experience, the second is a universalizing style. Alongside these however, Husserl adds, there is also a new type of practice, which is a synthesis of praxis and theory: it is an attitude of the third kind that might perhaps be summed up as a critical monitoring of our own existential involvement in experience.

[7] Cf. Ricoeur 1986, pp. 87-140 and Housset 1997, pp. 179-205. For a diachronic treatment of the concept in Husserl, see Hiroshi (2004).

been debated from an anthropological perspective, both within philosophical anthropology and within classic pragmatic anthropology: habituality [*Habitualität*] or habits [*Gewohnheiten*], dispositions [*Dispositionen*], character [*Charakter*], habitus [*Habitus*], abilities [*Vermögen*], and style [*Stil*].

Although Husserl does not always distinguish between these concepts with the same degree of rigidity, it is feasible to propose a systematic way of organizing them. Consistently with its retrospective nature, the regressive inquiry or questioning back process leads us to uncover the deepest stratum, that of passivity, which constitutes the tendencies of the ego: at this level, Husserl draws a distinction between primary passivity (including the temporal flow of experience and associations) and secondary passivity (the sedimentation of experience). Keeping firmly in view the simultaneous presence of the passive and active domains, in the former, which concerns motivations, we find habits and habitualities: and these, from the point of view of the psychological 'I' or real empirical 'I', configure dispositions. In general, Husserl uses the word *Disposition* to refer to a stable trait: a real disposition does not concern the sphere of personal attitude, but the psychological sphere; indeed the correlate of a disposition is the real empirical 'I' - which is not perfectly equivalent to the real psychological I - because it is the psyche as really connected to the real living body. When such a disposition has the pure ego as its correlate, then it is a *habitus*, reflecting the permanence of acts in the sense that it is fact become possibility (in other words, it is not a property of a thing, an *Eigenschaft*, but a *Beschaffenheit* - a term that authors have variously translated as 'property', 'permanent characteristic', or 'determination', but which I prefer to render as 'conformation'). All this in the passive domain. In the other domain, we find the more active abilities, those possessing the character of 'I can': essentially, the capacity to engage in cognitive, evaluative, and voluntary acts. Thus, the *habitus* is not a mere habituality. It becomes consolidated as the outcome of different kinds of influence. The relative incidence of these different influences can shape, on the one hand, general typicalities - primarily the result of social and cultural influences - and on the other, individual typicalities. The latter, when observed from the point of view of the human or everyday ego (which encompasses the body as well as the permanent traits that manifest themselves in the course of lived experience), represent character (both properties of character and original character and, a distinction reminiscent of that drawn by Kant between empirical character and intelligible character). Viewed from the point of view of the person, they form a *style*.

3. CRITICAL PERSONALIST PLURALISM

Husserl's thinking about the person is dynamic and grows increasingly richer over time. Central to his line of reasoning is the notion of the pluralization of atti-

tudes with a consequent plurality of correlates[8]. The consequences of this approach may be traced in two directions. First, it allows for different types of person, or rather their different determinations (let us not forget that, in Husserl, movement entails progressive determination following transcendental guides); second, it impacts the ethical consequences of Husserl's discourse - as might be expected, given that the person is traditionally the linchpin around which the moral perspective revolves.

With regard to the types of person, Husserl does not restrict the metaphysical concept of the person to the human being. Thus, as we have seen, he does not view the human being as coinciding with the person, holding that only in a specific sense is the person characterized by rationality, freedom, will, and responsibility. However, it is equally true that when Husserl engages in descriptive analysis, the so-called "dispositive of the person" (the notion that the person coincides with the highest dimension of the human being, thereby implying that the lower dimensions of sensibility, drives, and in general the vital impulse that goes with corporeity are of lesser value), effectively breaks down. In a certain respect, this is apparent both when focusing downwards and when focusing upwards, as Husserl's theorising on the phenomenology of the animal [*Tier*] and the so-called personal unities of a higher order [*Personale Einheiten höherer Ordnung*], respectively, suggests.

3.1.   *Animals and persons of a higher order*

Animals are there in a world they share with us and, albeit to a different extent and in a different form, stand in reciprocal connection with us: their somatic and behavioural typicalities are invariably to be viewed as perspectives that are correlated with a single co-constituted world. Here, Husserl is concerned to show that difference is constitutively produced, rather than based on rigid divisions adopted a priori. "But we must first ask: why do I call them beasts and why do I distinguish them from men? Perhaps because of their completely different kind of living corporeality? But are the beings with the characteristics of horses in Gulliver not authentically human beings? And are our horses not essentially different from those rational beings with the bodies of horses? (Hua XV, p. 622).[9] Clearly Husserl, enmeshed in a philosophical tradition that wielded great influence over him, mainly distinguishes, for structural reasons, between "person" and "animal", where the person is understood to be the human person. In *Ideen II*, he theorizes that persons are specifically characterized by rational self-responsibility; while in his un-

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[8] Husserl developed the two concepts of the person and the monad in parallel throughout his work, shifting increasingly towards the theorization of an open dynamic of constitution that is similar to refraction through perspective-altering prisms: thus, the *Monadenall* respresents a dynamic of pluralization rather than recognition of a pre-given plurality.

[9] Cf. also Hua XV, pp. 174-185.

published writings he is sometimes more open. For example, he suggests distinguishing between "relations with animals as instinctive irrational beings and with higher animals that are closer to the level of human beings" (Hua XIV, p. 178); even going so far as to argue that "The animal's instinctive existence [*Dasein*] and its existence as it continuously develops with respect to the various dimensions of the life of consciousness, through the arousal and fulfilment of instinct, and with respect to the habituality of the ego: the correlation of the surrounding egological world in the given and pregiven style of the life of egological consciousness and, on the other hand, in the style of a 'personal' being, of being as an identical person who, there, in this life, lives in relation to the 'world'" (Hua XLII, p. 98)[10].

If it is true that the concept of person is not related in any way to the permanence of a substance, but to a process of constitution over time that produces sedimentation and consequently a style, in the case of the animal there is no such identifiable returning to and resumption of dispositions and habits. Hence, it is difficult for Husserl to define the animal as a person in the full sense; however, he does contend that animals live in an authentic *Umwelt* which is their *Heimwelt*, and that they are, in their own way, social and generative beings, albeit that this social and generative dimension is not entirely equivalent to the cultural and historical dimension that is peculiar to man. Clearly Husserl does not limit himself to making these general distinctions, but attempts a more detailed analysis with a view to illustrating, apart from an animal's de facto being there, the differences between animals, in the plural, and humans, again in the plural: hence, the distinctions he comes to draw between animals of higher and lower order (Husserl's bestiary features monkeys, bees, and jellyfish), or his distinctions among the animals in our own *Heimwelt* - those that are common to Europe, as he himself puts it - and among these, wild versus domestic animals, and the specific mode of somatic perception displayed by each (the jellyfish, the cat, etc...), as well as specific intersections or possibilities of contamination. These are such that, though sharing the same *Lebenswelt*, we inhabit different *Umwelten* or surrounding worlds - as is also the case among human communities - whose degree of proximity or distance determines whether they are *Fernwelten* or *Nahwelten*, obviously not in the spatial but in the constitutive sense. With this line of reasoning, Husserl makes the hypothesis of a less rigid way of thinking about the clear distinction between animals and people seem a little more feasible.

When Husserl directs his attention upwards, - not cautiously as when approaching the theme of animals, but with confidence - he insists on attributing the status of person to the social person, which he also defines as a personality of a higher order. Socialization, when examined from a genetic perspective, may undoubtedly

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[10] The possibility to extend personhood to animals remains for Husserl an open problem, as the debate demonstrates. See: Depraz (1995), Lotz (2006), Painter (2007), Bayle (2013), Di Martino (2013).

be observed to derive from a passive tendency, but this tendency is taken up and developed through a constellation of specific person-to-person acts[11]. Thus, people identify with social roles, becoming socially recognisable figures and progressively constituting themselves as personal unities of a higher order, or social persons [*Gemeinschaftpersonen*] at increasingly wider levels: elective communities, families, peoples, and states.

These personalities of a higher order are constituted and maintained by means of mutual exchange. Again Husserl's description becomes more refined, differentiating between the acts and forms in which social persons are constituted, from the dual perspective (similar to his earlier noted distinction concerning the singular but not plural person) of the person in the nominative and the person in the accusative: "On the other hand, it is a *sole and unique* world that is constituted in the intersubjective association, a world in which there are levels. The subjects in communication with one another constitute personal unities of a higher level, the sum total of which, extending as far as actual and possible personal ties do, makes up the world of *social subjectivities*. To be distinguished from this world of social subjectivities is the world correlative to it and inseparable from it, the world *for* these subjectivities, the *world of social Objectivities*, as one might say" (Hua IV, p. 205)[12].

Produced by a teeming multiplicity of intentional acts, the person is neither a stable deposit nor a substantial substrate, nor, in the case in hand, a sort of spiritual objectivity; rather, it is the social acts themselves that constitute in increasingly solid form these social persons, which like all other types of person, bear the characteristics of the historical-cultural and generative dimension, in this case, the handing on of a legacy. For this to happen, acts of cognition, desire and will must be flanked by specifically social acts, which in practice are acts of communication. Once again, as we can see, describing a person means pluralizing and refracting identity: on the one hand, we have the opening up of identities to an ever-wider community dimension that is cultural and historical-generative; on the other hand, we have the plurality of communicative acts that feed this dimension and keep it alive: "expression" [*Ausdruck*] is a form of communication, which however is interwoven with "mutual understanding" [*Wechselverständnis*] and finally "concordance" [*Übereinstimmung*].

In a text that is one of Husserl's broader-ranging explorations of the theme, along with the *Essays on Renewal* published in *Kaizo* between 1922 and 1924, we find an attempt to order this constitutive interweaving of the concept of person. In *Gemeingeist II. Personal unities of a higher order and their correlates*, written between 1919 and 1921 (Hua XIV, pp. 192-204), Husserl further elucidates aspects of his thinking that lay the ground for the concept of collective intentionality and

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[11] For a detailed discussion of various forms of social constitution in Husserl, see Moran (2017).
[12] See also Hua XXVII, pp. 3-94.

his subsequent inquiry into the phenomenology of the social world: first, the distinction concerning collective beliefs and actions; but this is not sufficient: alongside operations involving a shared will (beliefs and actions), we have other operations that do not feature any common will - for example, drawing on the deposit of language can be an individual act (and in this sense, it is evident that communicative relations may be both unilateral and reciprocal).

This line of reasoning yields a sort of analogy between the social person and the individual person, emphasizing even more strongly however that social phenomena may be assigned personal status because they entail a communicative consciousness, albeit one that is independent of its bodily substrate: "The common personality, within the plurality of wills distributed in individual persons has a will that is constituted in a unitary way for all, which has no other place and no other substrate than that of the communicative plurality of persons" (Hua XIV, p. 108). A communicative plurality becomes a social person insofar as it is a communicative unity, a uni-plurality, a distribution of meaning.

3.2.   Critical personalist ethics[13]

Husserl's further development of the theme of the person from the 1920s onwards inevitably has ethical implications for his inquiry, coming to reorient it. Pluralism and consequently the critical nature of ethical choices, and the related theme of decision-making, become more prominent concerns for him. Under pluralistic conditions, conflict becomes more intense from an existential point of view, and responsibility poses many more dilemmas.

Husserl's thinking about ethics may be divided into three main phases: the first phase, corresponding to his time at Göttingen, is reflected in a series of lectures on axiology and ethics delivered in the period 1902-1914, and contained in Hua XXVIII (*Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre*); the second phase is represented by his summer semester lectures between 1920 and 1924, which are published in Hua XXVII (*Einleitung in die Ethik*), and in his articles for *Kaizo* over the same period (1922-1924); while his third and last stance on ethical issues may be dated to the 1930s in Freiburg, and is articulated in Hua XLII under the subtitle "Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik und Spätethik".

The first ethical framework posited by Husserl is a formal ethics and a true axiology of values, based on Brentano's precept of "choosing the highest among attainable goods"; it presupposes the teaching that goods are comparable and thus ranked according to the principle that lesser goods are subsumed under greater ones. Hence, Husserl first sets out to formulate a purely formal ethics. Next, he introduces a key change to this early framework in his 1920s lecture series on ethics by emphasizing the importance of the person; this is apparent in the first of these

[13] Cf. Melle (2007), Monseu (2010) and Luft (2010, pp. 221-240).

lectures - which precede those based on historical inquiry – in which he sets out to provide preliminary and systematic definitions of ethics: "The unity of assigning an end, which permeates the unity of a human life in the form of the absolute pretension of duty, is crucially related to the unity of personality, to the extent that personality is that which wills in willing and acts in acting, and to the extent that the qualities of its character, in a way that is evident and coherent with experience, together condition the direction of the will" (Hua XXXVII, p. 8). From this new perspective, the formal component of Husserl's ethical framework diminishes in importance, along with the axiological approach, while the taking on of self-responsibility and consequently appropriation of one's life choices come to the fore in an intertwining of individual and social ethics; ultimately, Husserl's second perspective on ethics is based on the model of self-regulation: "Let us focus once more on the peculiar quality of *specifically personal acts.* That which contradistinguishes the essence of man is the possibility, rather than being prey in a passive and constrained manner to one's own drives, inclinations and emotions, to act [...] in authentically 'personal' and 'free' activity" (Hua XXVII, p. 24). This sheds light on Husserl's choice of the expression *renewal* to sum up his ethical perspective of the 1920s, a renewal that he conceptualized as concurrently individual and suprapersonal.[14]

The fourth group of texts in Hua XLII concerning the ethics of Husserl's later Freiburg period is focused far more on the person - even more than on the personality - and on the plurality of persons. Within such a framework, individuals' preferences, vocational leanings, and choices exerts a decisive influence on how they orient their lives. Husserl's introduction of the issue of love accentuates the individual and subjective dimension of his ethics even further: we have different values and make different choices as a function of what we love: "The original phenomenon of specifically personal values of personal love and specifically personal desires, of wills and then choice that freely distinguishes between that which is loved and that which is desired or between that which is loved and that which is loved [...] the particular hesitation, the particular concrete choice of one and the concrete rejection of the other, but always within love [...] As a personal individuality, in [making] such a choice, I am in conflict with myself. In sacrificing a good, I sacrifice myself and the pain of the sacrifice is insuperable" (Hua XLII, p. 415). The critical dilemma is at the heart of this latest version of Husserl's ethics, in which the individual and the universal can no longer be put back together. When the universe of values becomes a constellation of perspectives, ethics become conflictual and the ethics of reconciliation via rational solutions is flanked by an ethics of crisis, vocation, and sacrifice.

The critical and pluralistic outlook characterizing these texts sheds light on the notion of personalism in Husserl's work more generally: his ethics of personal

[14] Cf. Letter from Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 8 July 1917 (Hua Dok. III.III, pp. 178-179).

values and plural choices - albeit no longer anchored to a stable axiology, as in the initial phase of his ethical inquiry, nor to the development of social ethics and thus of personalities of a higher order or the renewal that he advocated for in the early 1920s - bears witness to a pluralist and constitutive understanding of personalism that is consistent with his underlying personalistic perspective, as earlier defined.

4. CONCLUSION: LIMIT-PHENOMENA AND UNIQUENESS

To conclude, let us examine two of the conceptual pillars underpinning Husserl's approach to the theme of the person. Specifically, the personalistic pluralism developed by Husserl rests on the notions of limit-phenomena and uniqueness.

1. In his latest writings - see Part IV of *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie (1908-1937)* entitled "Reflexionen zur Ethik aus den freiburger Jahren" (Hua XLII, pp. 264-527) - Husserl distinguished, in truth with difficulty and with a degree of ambiguity, between border problems and threshold problems, *Grenzprobleme* and *Randprobleme*:[15] the former (border problems) concern classical metaphysical or ethical-religious themes as they recur in phenomenological discourse; the latter (margin or threshold problems) are not given this label because they are of secondary importance, but because they arise in the context of constitutive analysis as limitline cases or threshold-phenomena. As such, these phenomena - in the logic of the Husserlian discourse - require us to maintain the threshold, but also to think of it as a transition. In the final analysis, border problems may be dealt with when they are approached as threshold problems.

For example, the metaphysical theme of death imposes itself on phenomenology, but cannot be analysed directly; rather it is approached by going back to the figure of sinking into a deep or dreamless sleep and examining the differences and similarities between falling asleep and dying. Hence, such liminal experiences bear a double meaning: on the one hand, they entail appropriation, in that they push the description of the boundary of what is our own to its utmost limit; but on the other hand, this first meaning joins recurrently with a second aspect of the liminal experience that entails transgression or contamination. The distinction between border and threshold - according to the logic of Husserl's argument - is required to circumvent rigidly formal metaphysical models and to move towards figures that are more porous and facilitate transition, albeit it not by eliminating differences but rather by multiplying them.

To return to our discussion on the relationship between men and animals, Husserl theorizes a *Nahwelt* (near world) located between the *Heimwelt* (familiar, home world) and *Fremdwelt* (alien world): he does not address the question of the

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[15] See Steinbock, 1995, Section 4, pp. 170-270.

animal – which indeed is on his list of ultimate problems, "Birth, death, generation, animal *Dasein* [*tierisches Dasein*], drive, instinct" (Hua XLII, p. 561) – on the basis of rigid metaphysical divisions. In play here is the fundamental distinction between the normal and the abnormal or in a broader sense between the familiar and the unfamiliar, which corresponds to the distinction between that which is "own" and that which is "alien". The person in the specific sense is unavoidably the starting point from which Husserl initiates his inquiry into the person more generally; however, he did not frame these distinctions as rigid - as in the case of historical-cultural otherness - but on the contrary as pluralized, so as to identify differences via threshold-phenomena, and specifically via those that give rise to contaminations.

2. At the end of *Ideen II*, Husserl no longer frams the individual as equivalent to the person, viewing the latter as richer than the former, given that the individual is reached by a process of "stripping down". But, at the same time, he claims that the richness of the person is tied up with its uniqueness. This uniqueness is more than the individual, in that it given as difference and plurality that are open to the world in specific forms and ways that may be described phenomenologically. Personality [*Persönlichkeit*] and person [*Person*] do not coincide: the greater richness of the person with respect to the individual does not depend on the fact that the person has a recognizable personality, a store of qualities and properties: "Thisness [*Diesheit*] is a *form*. What distinguishes this 'something' from another 'something' precisely as 'something'? 'Nothing', insofar as there are no qualities, no substantial contents, which would allow a distinction. The form of the this *is not a what-ness* [*Washeit*], and in that sense is not an essence. It is universal in the sense of the form [...] Spirits are [...] not unities of appearances but are instead unities of absolute nexuses of consciousness; more exactly, they are egological-unities". (Hua IV, pp. 300-301). To put this another way, the *Diesheit* is not a genus that appears in a this [*Dies*]. On the contrary, its richness lies in the specific form of its uniqueness. Such a view prompts us to recognize complexity in uniqueness, we might say its pluralization. Perhaps Husserl is suggesting to us that the residual use of the term person as *hecceitas* consists in thinking of the person as a never given place, around which are given the infinite refractions of our human experience, which is ever-different and ever unique.

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