

Can Transcendental Intersubjectivity be Naturalised?

Abstract

In the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl presents an account of intersubjectivity within the context of transcendental phenomenology. The account is an attempt to describe how the sense *alter ego* (*other I*) is constituted from within transcendental subjectivity. Amongst other things, this involves saying what is it to have an experience as of another. Or, to put it in other words, it involves giving the necessary and sufficient conditions of having an experience as of another. Husserl's answer to this question is constrained by a number of theoretical commitments: (i) it must be arrived at without violating the transcendental reduction, (ii) it must be arrived at via the eidetic method, and (iii) it must not be circular, that is it must not make ineliminable reference to subjective states that have the content *alter ego* (or whose content is founded on – has as a necessary condition – that sense).

As is well known, Husserl's positive account has been subject to a number of searching criticisms. After introducing the context and content of Husserl's account in more detail, I address some of these criticisms. Some are answerable within Husserl's self-imposed confines, others are not answered so easily. I go on to examine whether a broadly Husserlian account can be bolstered by results from developmental psychology. It is in considering this possibility that I address the question whether transcendental intersubjectivity can be naturalised. The question is not whether intersubjectivity, the phenomenon, can be accounted for naturalistically. Rather, the question is whether Husserl's transcendental theory of intersubjectivity can be recast in a naturalistic fashion. As such, it is important to discern whether Husserl's theory can withstand criticism, for it is only if the account is found wanting that the interest of a naturalistic version becomes evident. As I shall argue, the results of this naturalistic account are in some respects promising, but remain inconclusive.

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