Lifeworld Foundation and the Scientific Image

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Abstract

Is a primacy of the lifeworld compatible with the scientific discovery of new (kinds of) objects?

I propose a framework for thinking about the phenomenological notions of "world" and "lifeworld". Filling this out with a more specific notion of "existing physical thing", I find two domains of science in Husserl: the "world of science", founded on the lifeworld and criticized in the *Crisis*, and the "physical substratum" of the lifeworld, introduced in *Phenomenological Psychology*. The former is only instrumental; the latter allows for genuine scientific discovery.

Eddington sits down at two tables,

1. One of them "familiar [...] from earliest years", an object of "that environment which I call the world"

2. The other is "mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed."
(Eddington 1928, ixf.)

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Husserl and other phenomenologists hold a version of

PRIM   **The lifeworld is prior to the world of natural science**

Outline

The General Posit

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- The general posit is shared between any pair of non-solipsistic subjects.
- The natural attitude contains more specific presuppositions: two subjects may or may not be said to "share a lifeworld", however we fill out this notion later.

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- I will use the *concrete lifeworld* as the basic notion: this is the world of the natural attitude in which a specific life is situated. The other notions of lifeworld can be understood in its terms, although I will not talk about the eidetic lifeworld today.

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What is relevant for discussing Eddington's tables are effected acts that posit physical things.

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- All layers combine into the objectual sense of a posited thing

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2. From a community of actual subjects to a community of all possible subjects in communication and relations of empathy (cf. *Ideas I*, §48, Hua3-1)

Outline

Passivity and the existential sense of a physical thing

This framework is general enough to articulate different interpretations of the lifeworld: some might e.g. claim a primacy of affordances over other layers of sense. I will focus on what I take to be a Husserlian version.

The passive givenness of sensation has afforded them a special place in Husserl's phenomenology. At least in his early work, even the intentionality of perception requires the apprehension of non-intentional sensation. [1]

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- Only a disappointment of the passive layers (1.-2.) disappoints the existential sense of a physical thing.

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- The notion of a shared lifeworld allows for a natural transition to Husserl's "physical substratum" of the lifeworld

The Physical Substratum of the Lifeworld

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- "[...] we recognize that the concrete experiential world admits of a purifying reduction by means of which we attain a closed realm of pure reality as an all-inclusive structure which pervades the experiential world everywhere. [...] This material world is manifestly prior in itself to the world of culture. Culture presupposes men and animals, as these in turn presuppose matter. [...] We can manifestly go one step further back abstractively. For, if we abstract from the psychic characteristics of the animal realities, thus, if the originally mental is also disregarded, then only pure matter is left everywhere, as that which is absolutely mindless."

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Physical Existence as Ideal Fulfilment

That a physical thing x exists, means so much and no more than that in the possible courses of perceptual experience in benign conditions, it would be evident to the members of a communicating intersubjectivity (of existing and possible egos) that some of us can be bodily affected by x.

The Idealized World of Science

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- This apprehension constructs idealized entities with actively constituted, mathematically determinate layers of sense
- But idealized entities cannot be sensorily present – they have no passive layers of sense

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"Reality" as whatever applies to observable physical things

- Whether or not the transcendental reduction undermines the mind-transcendence of everyday objects: it should remain legitimate to speak of observable everyday physical things as real objects; the phenomenological clarification can only reveal what we mean by "real" and maybe, whether we have read too much into it.

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- The question was whether the relevant notion of reality can make sense of imperceptible (kinds of) objects that are introduced in scientific theories

Instrumentalism and the Idealized World of Science

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2. Scientific idealization is an interpreting apprehension, not a form of synthesis.
3. Entities introduced in scientific theories have no passive layers of sense (implication of *2.*)
4. From 1. and 3.: Idealized objects of the scientific world cannot have the same existential sense as physical objects in the lifeworld
5. 4. rules out (REC)
6. A denial of (POS) then leads to (INSTR) about the idealized world of science

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I argued that Husserl prepares a version of (4.) in *Phenomenological Psychology*. Let me contrast this to the other ways one might try to achieve a form of (REC)

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The problems with categorial intuition for scientific discovery: it gives access to the wrong kind of objects. Categorically intuited objects are

- Abstract
- Not spatio-temporally individuated
- Given through active, not passive syntheses

Founded Perception with Appresentation

When discussing the givenness of other subjects, Husserl runs into a problem that shares some similarities with that of imperceptible particles [3]. One could think that in e.g. in manipulating an electron beam, unobservable entities are "appresented" like other egos when understanding a facial expression.

Problems with expanding this to account for imperceptible entities:

- Appresented contents seem to be such that they could be adequately given but in a concrete case are not (because I am not the person feeling the pain)

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- Physical things are *necessarily* incapable of adequate givenness. There is always another backside waiting ot be revealed. Where are the open horizons of further determination in appresentations?

- What is passively given is always the tool, or the screen, or the medium; not the imperceptible object

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The Ideal Community of Possible Egos

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- A different approach is based on the reference to possible beings which "see better and further" (*Ideas I*, §52) – or maybe just differently
- Such beings could constitute a sensible meaning for (humanly) "imperceptible" objects

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- One might worry that reference to merely possible subjects is too permissive; and possibly allows to introduce unintelligible things-in-themselves through the backdoor of possible divine beings
- I think this worry can be addressed by requiring that the possibility of such beings can not be just a logical possibility, but must be motivated by actual experience

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- Even if one has never lost a sensory capacity, there is nothing unusual about encountering *actual* beings with other sensory capacities

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- This can be made salient by e.g. imagining new sensory organs that replace the laboratory equipment; or that the tools join one's body to form a cyborg

- Imagine the quasi-tactile experience of touching a transparent ball that can only be touched with protective gloves. The possibility of a being which does not need gloves is evident.

- The possible-ego strategy generalizes this idea to more complex cases. In manipulating charges with an electron beam, it is (to a lesser degree) evident to the experimenting scientist that she or he is producing real changes, subject to their will. And like the apparatuses, there could be a being that is directly affected by the imperceptible electron beam.

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- This qualifies this approach as a form of reconciliation (REC) in response to Sellars' puzzle.
- The motivation of *possible* experience in *actual* experience means that even the "physical substratum" cannot be made sense of without the *actual* world of lived experience. The primacy of the lifeworld (PRIM) remains a primacy of the actual concrete lifeworld, not merely possible lifeworlds.

Thank you for your attention

Slides are available at `gregorboes.com/dl`

Any comments are highly appreciated, also any time via

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