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The Phenomenology of Empathy

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Introduction

Empathy - the experience and grasping of foreign subjects and their experience

- The Other’s experience is given in a in a unique non-perceptual kind of awareness or experience
- Subjectivity and constitution of personhood, is maintained
- The Other’s experience if non-primordial
- Colloquial sense of empathy of “being in the other person’s shoes”

Things that empathy are not:

- A feeling of oneness
- A projection of feelings
- Privileged understanding of how the other person feels

Psycho-Physical Causality

The Lived Body (Leib)

- The psychic Ego, the substantial unity that appears in one’s stream of consciousness, is maintained
- The lived body is a dynamic whole, there are distinct knowable parts but only in abstraction
- Foundation upon which empathy is possible
- Must consider one’s lived body as a spatial point in the world among many (OPE 63)
- In empathy, there is already comprehension of the Other’s body as a lived body

The Soul (Seel)

- The psychic Ego, the substantial unity that appears in one’s stream as the identical bearer of them, the psychic Ego (OPE 40)
- Soul and body are in union in a singularly, intimate way. They are indivisible (ideas II 330)
- Relation between soul and body is not through mediation, but animates the lived body (ideas II 330)

Psycho-Physical Causality

- The soul, together with the lived body, forms the psycho-physical individual (OPE 50)
- Psycho-physical causality is the reciprocal relation between the soul and lived body
  - Bodily feelings such as sluggishness and moods such as cheerfulness influence bodily changes and experience
  - Feelings terminate themselves through expressions by utilizing psycho-physical causality

The Phenomenological Method

- Background of Phenomenology and its method
- Response to Descartes’s rationalism and mind-body dualism, current theories of positivism and empiricism
- Husserli credits Descartes for discovering the transcendental ego, but did not fully uncover its depth
- Instead, Descartes moved towards a transcendental realism rather than the transcendental subjectivity (2nd, 3rd, and 6th Meditations)
- Husserli’s transcendental Ego brackets the existence of the objective world, turns towards the Ego’s experience

The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me - this world, with all its Objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as the transcendental Ego, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché (CM 511)

Intentional analysis

- To intend something is just to say that there is a relationship with an object, and moreover, this relationship is meaningful
- Noesis, the intentional act, and Noema, the intended object
- In recollection there’s the recollected, in judgement the judged, in imagination the imagined, and so on
- Noesis of empathy is the empathic act, noema is the Other and the Ego’s experience
- Appearance and Identity
- Identity is the totality of appearances, always transcending appearances because it is present in every one
- Can do intentionality analysis on both identity and appearance
- Identity of the Other in empathy is the Other in her Otheness
- The core fulfillments of empathy are intending (1) the feeling as joy, (2) the joy as my friend’s joy, and (3) my friend as another subject
- Primordiality and Non-Primordiality (Originary and Non-Originary)
- Related to immediate perception and givenness of the object
- Ex: recollection is a prordial act but non-primordial in content, the past experience is represented
- In empathy, it too is a prordial act but non-primordial in content
- The empathizer is a prordial awareness that a foreign consciousness is having a prordial experience of her own, the empathizer does not go through the Other’s experience

Takeaways and Conclusions

Our analysis gives new meaning to the everyday, colloquial use of empathy

Not only have we attempted to understand the nature of empathy, we also see that empathy is essentially linked to self-knowledge and self-reflection.

The Role of Feelings

- For Stein, feelings give rise to subjectivity because it qualifies the constitution of objects given through theoretical (in the general sense) acts such as perception, imagination, etc.
- “For as [the subject] feels, it not only experiences objects but it itself. It experiences emotions as coming from the “depths of its I.” (OPE 98)
- Spiritual feelings gives us the object in value
- For Stein, there is a hierarchy of values

Levels of Empathy

- Given the constitution of the individual, we can see there differing levels of empathy
- Empathize the Other in her totality
- Sensual empathy, empathizing with the Other’s lived body and spatial orientation
- Spiritual empathy - recognition of the Other’s experiences and values
- Retetered empathy - awareness of the Other’s values helps me understand my own values

Constitution of the Individual Diagram

Spirit and the Will

- Similar to feelings, the will externalizes itself through psycho-physical causality, fulfilling itself through action (OPE 55)
- Therefore, the will is experienced with the lived body as a whole
- The will can be affected by one’s psychic state and body, and if the will is strong enough, it can overcome these influences
- The will is not subject to causality because it is subject to motivation
  - Rational lawfulness
  - Will’s essence is an authentic experience of freedom and creation
- Spirit [Geist] is the realm of values
- The spiritual subject is not restricted to its biological history.
- History created through spirit is cultural and intelligible
- Spiritual subject is an intelligible, meaningful, experiential whole

Bibliography