

The phenomenology of empathy

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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 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



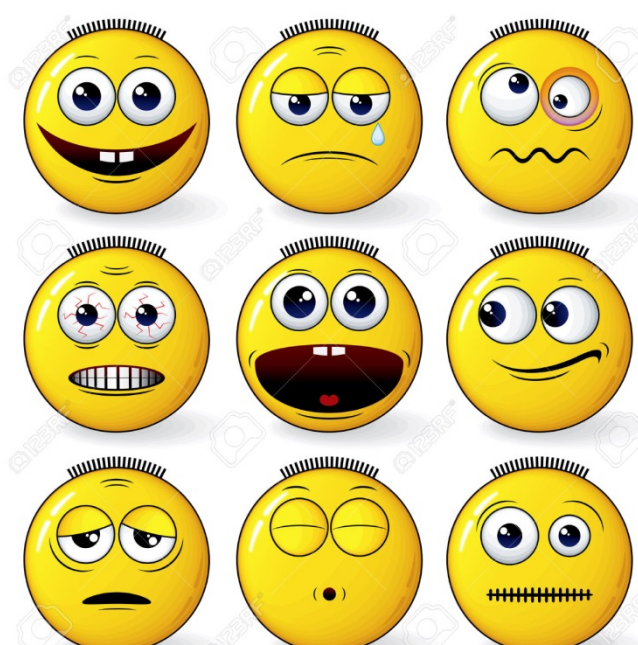
Psycho-Physical Causality

The Lived Body (*Leib*)

- First-person experience of having a body, this body is "my own"
- Ambiguous nature of subjective and objective experience, body space of "zero-point of orientation" and physical body
- 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 also 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 (*Seele*)

- 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* §30)



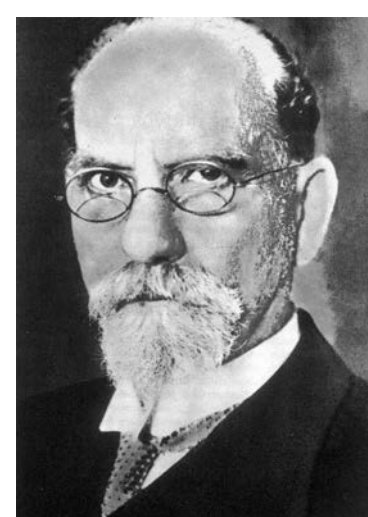
- Relation between soul and body is not through mediation, but animates the lived body (*Ideas II* §30)

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

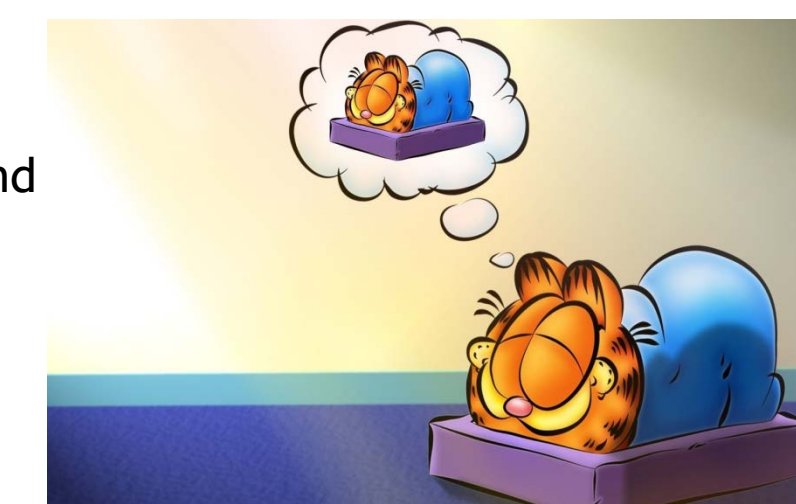


Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology

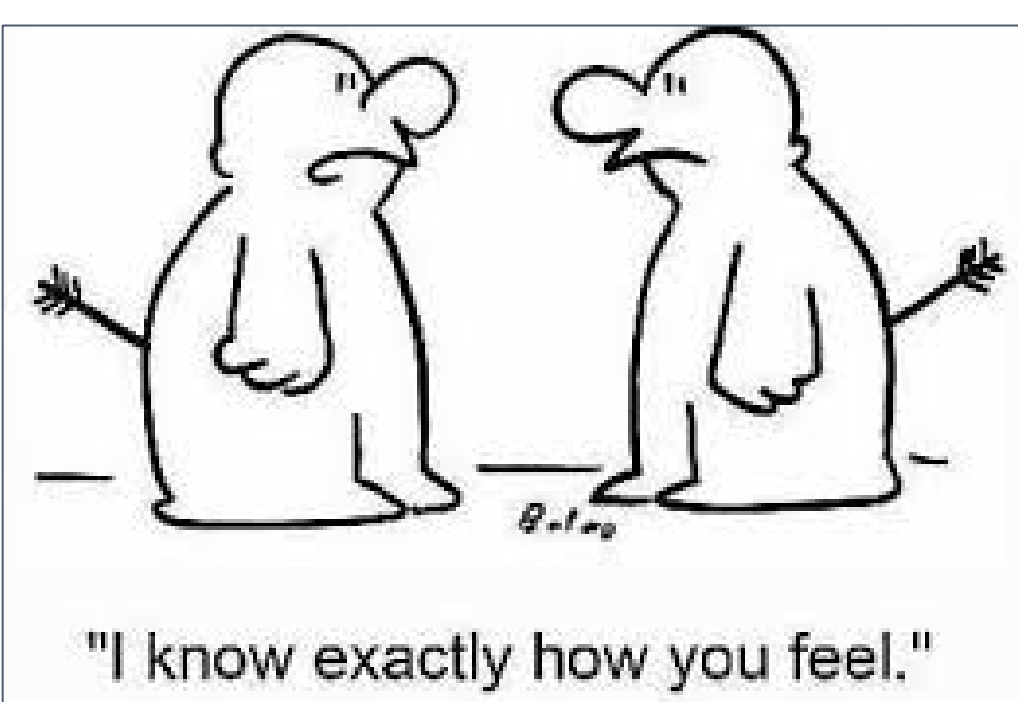
- Background of Phenomenology and its method
 - Response to Descartes's rationalism and mind-body dualism, current theories of positivism and empiricism
 - Husserl credits Descartes for discovering the transcendental ego, but did not fully uncover its depth
 - Instead, Descartes moved towards a transcendental realism rather than the transcendental subjectivity (2nd, 3rd, and 6th Meditations)
 - Husserl'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 §11)

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 Other'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 Otherness
 - 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
- Primordality and Non-Primordality (Orinary and Non-Orinary)
 - Related to immediate perception and givenness of the object
 - Ex: recollection is a primordial act but non-primordial in content, the past experience is represented
 - In empathy, it too is a primordial act but non-primordial in content
 - The empathizer is a primordial awareness that a foreign consciousness is having a primordial experience of her own, the empathizer dose 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

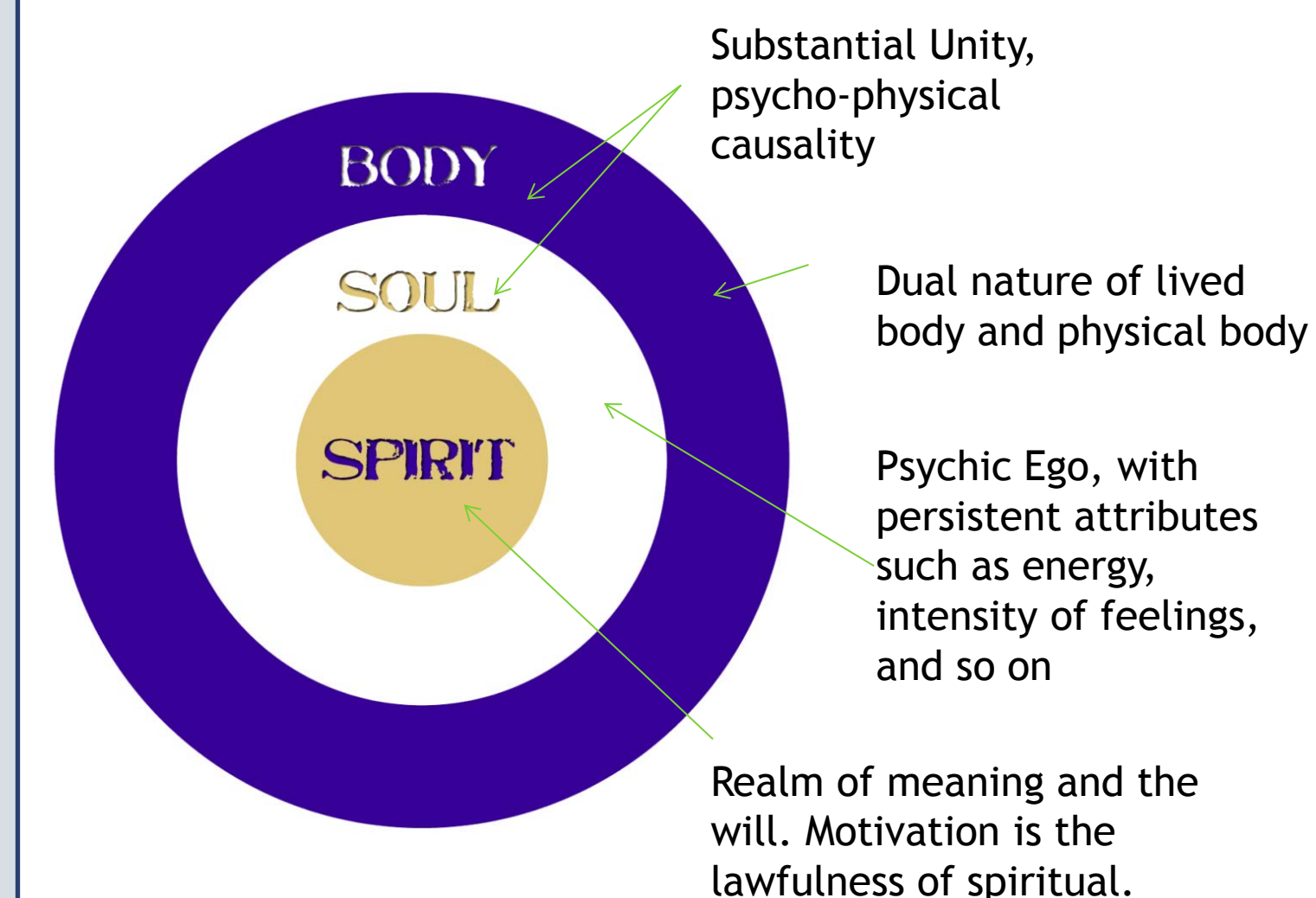
- For Stein, feelings give rise to subjectivity because it qualifies the constitution of objects given through theoretical (in the general sense) acts such as perception, imagination, etc.
 - "For as [the subject] feels, it not only experiences objects but it itself. It experiences emotions as coming from the "depth 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
- Reiterated 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



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