Intersubjectivity, Interculturality, and Realities in Husserl’s Research Manuscripts on the Life-World (Hua XXXIX)

Thomas Nenon

The recently published research manuscripts\(^1\) for the most part from the 1920s and early 1930s that were edited and arranged by Rochus Sowa under the title *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution*, deal with a whole array of issues related to the structures and genesis of our everyday experience of the world and the different kinds of things we relate to within it. They are by far the most extensive and richest reflections by Husserl on topics related to the life-world published up until now.

Prior to their publication, there have been several other sources of texts related to the life-world and the topics discussed in these manuscripts. The term “life-world” itself is of course best-known from Husserl’s claim in his last major publication, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, that the starting point not just for philosophical analysis of the foundations of science, but also for any adequate description of our everyday experience that is the ultimate ground for all of the specialized sciences must begin with an analysis of the life-world and the things within it that are the objects of such experience. However, instead of providing a systematic or even extensive description of the life-world there, he concentrates in the first half of the book on retracing the steps by which the modern scientific notion of an idealized and mathematized “nature” as the proper object of knowledge emerged, then in the second half of the book on comparing leading modern philosophers’ approaches to questions in ontology, epistemology, and philosophical methodology to a phenomenological approach that would take the life-world and its essential rootedness in structures of subjectivity as its starting-

---

\(^1\) Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution*, edited by Rochus Sowa as Volume XXXIX of the *Husserliana* (Springer: Dordrecht, 2008). Citations from this volume will be listed by page numbers in parentheses within the text or in footnotes. All translations are my own. For passages where the German text is particularly important, the German original will also be included in a footnote.

T. Nenon (F)
Department of Philosophy, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN, USA
e-mail: tnenon@memphis.edu

point. Yet he says little about the actual structure of the life-world itself in that work. The more detailed analyses presented in *Experience and Judgment* and in *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis* contain detailed descriptions of the life-worldly experience of physical objects (“Dinge”) and how we come to form judgments about them, and thus overlap with some of the material presented in these research manuscripts, and the same could be said of the analyses one can find in various texts assembled in volumes XII–XV of the *Husserliana* under the heading of “intersubjectivity,” especially in the latter two of them that contain texts from the end of Husserl’s Göttingen period and from the Freiburg years. One recalls the brief remarks from the *Formal and Transcendental Logic* in which Husserl points out that, if the aim is to present a “logic of truth” – what one might term a logic of “soundness” instead of merely a “Konsequenzenlogik,” logical analysis of validity –, then one would have to go beyond the bounds of a merely formal logic and have recourse to the “life-world” that is the ultimate source of truth for the various judgments that are presupposed as premises in any actual arguments whose form is consistent with the demands for valid arguments that are the identified in various versions of formal logic. In the *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, he also shows how these forms emerge from and therefore mirror the formal structures of judgments, i.e. first-order knowledge of objects of experience in the life-world, but here too the range of topics discussed is more narrowly focused in light of the concentration there on the question of the nature, limits, and origin of formal logic itself. Even in the Supplementary Texts to the *Crisis* that appeared a few years ago as Volume XXIX of the *Husserliana* that do indeed mention the life-world countless times, the focus is less on the structure of the life-world itself than on questions about how the theoretical attitude emerges out of the life-world, how the philosophical attitude itself arises, and how transcendental philosophy is different from psychological reflections on mental life. Of course, the most extensive discussion of these topics that will later in Husserl’s development come to be addressed under the specific heading of the life-world that were available prior to the appearance of this selection of research manuscripts has been the *Ideas II*. That earlier work still remains invaluable because it provides a general framework within which to locate the much more expansive and detailed analyses presented in *Husserliana* XXXIX that are arranged around specific topics such as “The Horizontal Structure of World Experience and the Experience of Real Things in the World” or “General Aspects of the Temporal Constitution of the Life-World and the Aspect of Their Constitution in Periodicities.” As near as I can tell, the life-world research manuscripts do not contradict any of the general findings presented in the *Ideas II*, but they do add many specific additional insights and, in particular, they go into much greater detail on the way that Husserl’s increasing shift to a genetic approach to those questions can add to what we learn in the general overview laid out in the *Ideas II*.²

²One other important and helpful text about the genesis of value judgments and of normative standards of reason in the life-world is an excursus to the lectures Einleitung in die Ethik. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920 und 1924 (Hua XXVII), pp. 259–320.

In this essay, I would like to begin by concentrating on just a few topics that are striking because of the counter-points they represent in comparison to some positions and views much more commonly associated with Husserlian transcendental phenomenology – and even with his reflections on what he means by life-world as presented in the *Crisis*, the supplementary volume to the *Crisis*, and in *Experience and Judgment*. I will then follow up in more depth what Husserl has to say here that adds new insights or more detailed analyses of the essential relativity of human experience, and I will do so with a special emphasis on Husserl’s remarks on how embodiment and intersubjectivity also throw a new light on what we have now come to call questions of “interculturality.” At the end of the essay, I will try to indicate how what he calls “realities” (as opposed to “relativities”) continue to play a crucial role in our life-worldly experience, and how we need to think of our experience of “realities” as itself dependent upon the relativities in human experience that modern science had mistakenly attempted to eliminate or claims it has overcome.

Two general points are particularly noteworthy in these manuscripts. The first is what I will be calling Husserl’s “ontological realism.” His emphasis on the foundational role that natural objects, “realities,” play which in these texts seems at first to reverse the emphasis that Husserl had placed in the *Ideas II* on the foundational priority of the personalistic attitude that permeates our everyday lives in the *Unwelt* over against the naturalistic attitude that leads to the view of nature that guides modern natural science. I will ultimately argue that this impression is somewhat misleading, and that the arguments for the priority of “realities” can be traced back not to an attempt to reduce all objects back to nature in the sense of modern natural science, but rather to the crucial role that “realities” play in mediating interpersonal communication. The second striking point is the way that he stresses that “realities” and “relativities” are not actually opposing, but have to be thought together. The “realities” we encounter in the life-world exhibit very different and much more complex structures than the mathematically idealized and non-intuitive entities that populate the realm of nature as the correlate of modern natural science or belong to reality as it has been conceived by modern philosophical approaches oriented on that ideal.

Generally speaking, Husserl has normally been taken at his word – and often criticized – for his characterization of transcendental phenomenology as a form of “idealism.” But even in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl first gained philosophical notoriety by defending the legitimacy of what Frege had called a “third realm.” His refutation of the attempt to reduce ideal entities – the laws of logic – to either of the two realms commonly accepted as existing in much of modern philosophy, namely to either to the physical or to the psychological realm, is well-known. In the “Prolegomena” to the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl made clear that the arguments he presented about the irreducibility of logic to psychology or any other empirical discipline, also apply to mathematics and its objects; and then in the investigations themselves, he also includes “meanings” among the entities populating the realm of non-real, ideal objects as well. It was these features of his philosophy that attracted many of his early followers in Munich and Göttingen who
calls “multiplicities” (Mehrheiten): “It is essentially possible to move on to other real things, and to determine them and synthetically to construct them categorically into higher levels of foundation, that at once relate several realities and ever more multiplicities and multiplicities of multiplicities” (68). What he is describing here as multiplicities are things like classes or groups of things, i.e. “cows” or “trees,” and then the way that they can also be grouped with other groups to give us more general groups of things like “mammals” or “animals.” It is important to note, though, that this process of the recognition of individuals in terms of the kinds of things they are in our daily experience is not the same thing as the subsuming of intuitions under concepts. In describing how we recognize individual objects in terms of the kinds of things they are, he says: “Experience always has the structure of familiarity (Bekanntschaftsstruktur), even if the object is one we have never perceived before: the very being of a kind of thing (Artmaßigkeit) and this in different levels of “generality” (Allgemeinheit), that should by no means be interpreted as conceptual universality (Allgemeinheit) based on comparison and an anticipatory emergence of something common. The latter presupposes rather the generality that is implicit in the structure of kinds (the structure of familiarity)” (65). Allgemeinheit in daily life takes the form of generality in terms of similarities, recognition by association with things that we are already familiar with. It does not usually imply explicit judgments in terms of universal concepts with clearly defined contours that express the essential predicates that a thing must possess to be a member of this class of things.

So HUsserl does recognize the possibility, even the necessity of categorical syntheses that generate multiplicities, classes of things as such, and even classes of classes of things, but in these manuscripts he does not describe the world as composed of the realities, on the one hand, and classes, on the other, but as ontologically composed of the realities that are recognized in terms of the types and kinds and these realities are the building blocks upon which all of the higher levels of categorical objects are founded. Similarly, when he speaks of ideal objects here, we find a passage where he talks about ideal entities as nonetheless “real” precisely because, even though they have being and we can predicate things about them that are true and false, and even though we can consider ideal objects on their own, they have Dasein in the world through the relationship to things that actually exist, realities. This too is consistent with a position we could loosely term Aristotelian – a position that HUsserl espouses in the Logical Investigations as well. Most importantly perhaps, is the fact that human beings as subjects (what in some places he calls “pure egos” as the most abstract level of formal self-awareness) are also unique kinds of realities because, even though pure egos are different ways of seeing ourselves than seeing ourselves as persons or than seeing

---

3 Ideas I, §49 (Hua III, 104).

4 Compare on this point Simo Pulkkinen’s chapter in this volume, “Life-world as an Embodiment of Spiritual Meaning: The Constitutive Dynamics of Activity and Passivity in HUsserl,” p. 22.

5 See Text 29, §2 (pp. 298–300).
our mental lives as what he calls “souls,” egos are nonetheless numerically identical with human beings since it is part of the essential structure of even the pure ego that it is aware of itself not only in its purity as an “ego-pole,” but that it is necessarily also aware of itself as identical with a specific individuated person, an empirical ego with a history, that it necessarily also has an awareness of its bodily states and of other things we experience through the mediation of the body. So in this sense even the “pure ego” is a stratum or “Scheicht” of a comprehensive organism that in each case also necessarily possesses a bodily aspect so that each person, and even the “pure ego” itself is also aware of him- or herself as a person who is located in space and time and can be perceived by others. I will return to this point later.

In the Second Logical Investigation, Husserl had discussed the way that ideal objects such as classes of things, “species” he calls them there, can be the object of intentions and expressed through meanings, and it becomes clear that meanings themselves are also ideal entities (though he will later qualify this position and make clear that, although both logical principles or meanings are ideal entities, they are very different kinds of ideal entities with very different origins). This has been taken as evidence that Husserl is in some sense a Platonist, arguing for the independent existence of universals such as meanings or values. What is often overlooked is the way that the Third Logical Investigation also establishes that some meanings, the dependent meanings, necessarily point to other meanings, the independent meanings in which they are founded, because the former depend on the latter for their existence. The common example is colors and surfaces. Even though “to be a color” and “to be a surface” mean different things so that colors are not reducible to surfaces or the other way around, colors are always actually encountered only as the colors of some surface that has that color and – and although Husserl doesn’t say it there, we can only find surfaces as surfaces of things in the broadest sense. And Husserl’s own analyses are consistent with this approach. Husserl begins his analysis of meanings in the First Logical Investigation with an investigation into expressions. Meanings are actually found as the “geistige” aspect of a concrete physical thing, a word, a sentence that has a physical side as well so that it is correct to say that meanings do not exist on their own, but only in something like a written or spoken word or sentence that itself is the concrete reality in which meanings are founded. So Husserl’s overall position is that meanings are distinct from expressions and cannot be reduced to them, but this is far from a Platonist view that meanings exist all on their own. This point will also be crucial for Husserl’s emphasis on the centrality of the experience of “realities” and hence of “embodiment” for the life-world experience of any kind of entities whatsoever, including those that are not themselves “realities.”

The foundational relationships described in the Third Logical Investigation, then, function much along the lines of the Aristotelian between the kinds of things like forms that can exist only as the properties of other things and the kinds of things – substances – that can exist on their own. So Husserl’s ontology of the world as the sum of realities then is in some sense like the Aristotelian view that what there are most truly are substances that can exist on their own and properties that cannot.

What does it mean to say they exist on their own? Here it is important to remember that Husserl addresses these things, these realities, in terms of how we experience them. Husserl is consistent with his approach from the outset of addressing objects in terms of the meanings through which we intend them and the possible fulfillsments that would confirm that our intentions are indeed justified, that these objects do indeed exist and in the ways we intend them, or in the Ideals in terms of the necessary correlation between noesis and noema and the structures of reason that lay out the kinds of experiences that would count as the givenness of the objects themselves. In the life-world essays, the intentions through which objects present themselves to us are most commonly called “experiences” – Erfahrungen – and the world and the objects that populate the world as described through an analysis of our experiencing of the world, the various kinds of realities we encounter there in our daily lives, and various other kinds of categorical and high-order practical realities that we construct on the basis of our experiences of these realities through high-order synthetic acts. Experience itself is what Husserl calls here the “Urtatsache,” the basic fact that is the starting point for all further phenomenological analyses (233). And here, in spite of what I have been calling Husserl’s ontological realism, he ends up showing how these experienced realities necessarily involve a whole host of traits that reveal the insufficiencies of any philosophical account of the objects of our experience without recognizing the role of “subjective” aspects of our experience, “relativities” he calls them, that are constitutive for any experience as such.

The most important and most basic relativity is that the things we call and think of as objects are always accessible to us in terms of the actual or possible experience of them. Even things that we think of as inaccessible and unknowable for us are posited on the basis of the experience of objects that we are familiar with and do experience. So, for Husserl, to talk about “the world” or “objects within the world” without reference to the subjects who experience them, the ways they experience them, and the structures of that experience makes no sense. Over and again, Husserl emphasizes that the terms “subject” and “world” are two poles of the one basic phenomenon that is given to us, namely experience. So, to echo Kant’s famous dictum, whatever is a priori necessary for the experience of objects will at the same time be a condition for the possibility of the objects of experience, and – to make a point that Kanti is less clear about – for the experiencing of the object and hence for subjectivity in general because subjects are not things, but what are sometimes called “the dative of experience,” those to and for whom objects (whatever kinds of objects they may be) are given in experience as an event. Moreover, for Husserl, “experiencing” is not limited simply to perceiving. Rather the objects of experience are things that matter to us, things we not only perceive, but interact with, that influence us and how we are, and things we sometimes ourselves influence and shape. This general view is reflected in Husserl’s assertion that the “geistige” realm, the realm of mental activities, encompasses three basic kinds of functions, namely judging or believing in a general sense (“Meinen”), valuing (“Werten”), and willing or acting (“Wollen,” “Handeln”). Each of these three realms presupposes or is
"founded in" the prior realm without being reducible to it and each of them at bottom has a bodily capacity. So one of the most basic a priori requirements for experience is that the subject of experience must be embodied and embodied in such a way that are objects are not only given to us, but given in ways that matter to us, and that this embodiment involves the capacity not just for the passive givenness of those objects to and for us, but also for the active shaping of the world and objects within it. Hence the experience of reality will also be relative to some form of embodiment and for each of us it will be relative to the specific form of embodiment we have and the ways we can physically, emotionally, and intellectually find possibilities for overcoming the initial limitations that our specific embodiment and other empirical limitations place on us.6

First of all, the body is necessarily and most basically the seat of affections. Our awareness of objects, even of non-real objects, is mediated by the ability to be affected in a bodily way through them. We know about them through the way that they affect our bodies. What kinds of things we can learn about them and how we do that depends upon the specific nature of our bodies. We see colors, hear sounds, feel hot and cold, rough or smooth textures. We don’t see ultraviolet light, hear very high-pitched sounds, or perceive magnetic fields directly. The metaphor that modern philosophy has developed to name the information we receive through the way things affect our bodies is “impressions” – Husserl uses the German terms “Empfindungen” or often “Empfindnisse” for them, stressing the receiving of them more than just the product. However, one of Husserl’s key insights was that the subject and even the body is not passive in the process of perception, and that the ability to sort through the succession of perceptions to discover what objects are like also involves the perception of our bodies themselves, their positions relative to the rest of the objects in the world, and changes in those bodies, as well as the ability to move and position parts of our bodies or the position of the body as a whole in order to get more or better information about those things. Husserl’s name for these distinct but related abilities is kinaesthesia, a term that most narrowly refers to our ability to sense the position and movements of parts of our bodies without having to rely on other senses such as sight or touch. For instance, if you hold one of your hands behind your back and spread the fingers so that they are not touching each other, you still can sense how many of your fingers are extended and how many are not ("Are you holding out one finger or two?"). If you wiggle one of those fingers, you can sense that movement (kinaesthesia) without seeing it or feeling it touch one of the others. I know if I am looking up or down without looking in a mirror and not just because of the changes in the things I see when I shift my gaze. Husserl points out how important this sense is in sorting out which changes in the things I am seeing are due to changes in the things in the world and which ones are due to changes in my body – a process as a whole that he also occasionally refers to as kinaesthesia. And finally, the changes are not always or perhaps even usually accidental. We move around “to get a better look.” We do not just wait for impressions to come to us, we do something to get better access to them or – put more correctly – to put ourselves in a position to have the impressions that help us know the things we want to know about better, i.e. more completely, more clearly, or more reliably perhaps. So kinaesthesia in the broadest sense involves the “I can” in a full bodily sense that includes the ability to move ourselves and manipulate the surroundings in which we experience objects so that we get a better idea of what things there are in the world and what they are like.7

So the body is not only the seat of affections but also the source of mobility in the world. Our bodies are, as Husserl famously calls them in numerous investigations, “the null-point of orientation” for us. To say that all perceptions are perspectival, then, is to say that realities are given to us as located in some position relative to the position of our bodies, but also to say that they are given to a great extent in the way they are because of the specific make-up of our bodies and the way that they mediate and influence the kinds of impressions we have.8 Husserl’s notion of “Abschattungen” refers to both of these kinds of perspectival relativities, but also to the fact that the experience of a specific reality may involve different sets of our senses, but normally not all of them at once (it is not easily possible to see what you are eating and taste it at exactly the same moment, for example).

Moreover, it is only through the movements of our bodies that we can interact with and change the realities that populate the world – and, as Husserl points out in other places – even our interactions with non-real objects such as mathematical entities are mediated by the interaction with some sort of realities as well, such as writing on a white-board, a piece of paper, or a napkin. The world is not just something we perceive, but something we shape to our own ends.

Where do these ends come from? According to Husserl’s theory, we as persons are capable of regulating and setting our own ends. But whenever we do so, it is always against the background of passivities whose ultimate origins include aspects of our corporality. The first of these “passivities” has already been mentioned, namely the body as seat of affections through which things in the world show themselves to us in various ways that are related to the make-up of our bodies themselves. It is through the body that we receive information about things and events in the world, so to speak. But it is also important to mention that the

---

6If I am a human ego, then I am one as the ego of this one single body in which I operate, and operating in it not only have it, but, by means of it, I have the world in general as existing for me and, as a further consequence, the world as the realm of my actual and enabling practice (vermöglichen Praxis) (247). Text 24 (pp. 243–250) makes clear that embodiment is not merely one of the essential structures of the life-world as a fundamental structure of egoic life, but also that it involves being affected, stimulated, and involved in practices by and with the world.

7Ignacio de los Reyes Melero describes this phenomenon in terms of the notion of “concordance”. See his contribution to this volume, The Body as a System of Concordance and the Perceptual World.

8This is true, by the way, not just for bodily states. Husserl describes how changes in my mental states, for instance, when I take “Santonin”, also influence the way that objects appear to us.
affectivity of the body involves not just its ability to provide us "information" about the world, but that it does so in ways that we experience as pleasant or unpleasant, attractive or unattractive – sometimes in a vague and general way, sometimes in very specific ways such as "too loud" or "too cold": "The concrete fact of life bears within itself the basic decision between the ego, the identical ego of life, existing as an ego in its egoic ways of conducting itself, of being touched by something, of being aroused, awakened, affected, moved by something, to state it briefly: being affected, and subsequently to that of acting, actively conducting oneself towards them in different modes" (689). 9

This passage makes clear that the receptivity that is here opposed to the activity of the ego's conduct, consists not just in receiving information about the world, but in being affected in ways that matter to us, that "interest" us in various ways. We are stimulated, awakened, touched in manners that evoke responses. At the level of a pure passivity, 10 we could speak of stimuli that almost automatically call for certain actions as responses. Our hand automatically withdraws from the hot surface, a loud noise causes us to turn around and see what is going on without having to make a "decision" to do so.

As Husserl embarks into the difficult question of reconstructing what childhood must be like and of the most elementary affectations, he discusses the necessary structures that we have to suppose were at work in the constitution of things like visual fields, but even there – or perhaps most particularly there – the ego is not merely passive, and its interest is not merely in gathering information: "The ego is always already an ego with abilities (Vermögen), an ego with kinesthetic senses, but also always already an ego that possesses non-egoic, hylistic elements, that affect it in the mode of a Gemüt in joy and suffering, and against which it actively, first of all kinesthetically, reacts" (472). 11 Of course, as former passage illustrates, as grown human beings, we are not just active in the sense of "reacting" passively and do not necessarily always simply follow those immediate urges, but can also respond to them actively in a further sense, not just in actions in the sense of interactions with things in the world, but also in our own responses to these immediate impulses.

This consideration leads in the direction of a different point, namely that human life as "geistige" is something that we as persons not only experience, but also shape and perform, but that is a different point to which I will return a little later. But even at the most elementary stages, Husserl makes clear, what is perceived is perceived as affecting our Gemüt in welcome or unwelcome ways that evoke active responses. What is important here is to see that Husserl’s three-fold distinction of cognitive activities into the theoretical, the axiological, and the practical – which corresponds to the three-fold strata of theoritical predicates, values or axiologic predicates, and practical predicates in terms of means and ends, necessarily correspond to three fundamentally different aspects of the capacities of the body in our experience. We never – even in our reconstructed childish lives – experienced simple sense data, but rather things that have some positive or negative value for us – at first simply at the bodily level – and evoke a (bodily) response. Husserl asks "Is the sensibility of our impressions not simultaneously a sensibility of instincts and thereby interwoven with intentionalities of feelings? Does it not contain a habituality that takes on a habitual genesis based on continued fulfillments or lack of fulfillments, and hence within the form of temporalization and association, and is always already there?" 12 And the answer for Husserl is, of course, clearly "yes." They are referred to as "instincts" precisely because the responses they evoke do not presuppose any authentically egoic activities or reflective self-consciousness that is aware of and attends to these responses as appropriate.

However, even at this lowest level, our experiences are colored by what he calls "value intentionality." Things matter to us and evoke responses, and these experiences and the results of our responses point to possible confirmation or disconfirmation in the course of further experience – here in the form of more "associations." At higher levels, we can form second-order mental states, feelings about our feelings and actions, beliefs about the well-foundedness of our other beliefs and feelings, and these can change our responses and our actions, but at the most basic level, these can be traced back to our bodily capacities for being affected in ways that provide us information about other things in the world that we are not, that matter to us, and that we can and do respond to in a bodily way. But even in our adult lives, Husserl maintains, "I pose . . . general genetic questions and encounter there also the instinct in addition to the acquired habituations, I also find transformation of the instincts during the course of a life, but – viewed from the inside – they are always still instincts" (476). 13

The passivities related to our embodied experience continue to exert themselves throughout our lives, be they the passivities of the immediate givenness of certain features of things in the world, of the ways they matter to us, or the responses they evoke in us. Hence Husserl’s position regarding the foundational dependency of values on perceptions, or rather on representations (Vorstellungen), and of actions


10 For a more extensive discussion of the notion of "pure passivity," see Pulkkinen’s chapter in this volume, pp. 17 ff.

11 "Ich ist immer schon Ich von Vermögen. Ich von Kinetischen, aber auch immer schon Ich, das ein Nicht-Ichliches, ein Hylistiche, das es in der Weise des 'Gemüts' affiziert in Freude und Leid, und wogegen es aktiv, zunächst kinästhetisch reagiert."

12 "Ist die Empfindungsinnlichkeit nicht zugleich Instinktsinnlichkeit und dabei mit Gefühlsinntentionalität verwoben? Ist darin nicht eine Habitualiät, die eine Schicht des habituellen Genesis aus fortgangehen Erfüllung oder Nichterfüllung annimmt, also innerhalb der Form der Zeitigung und Assoziation, und doch immer schon da ist?"

13 For a more comprehensive study of Husserl’s theory of instincts from a phenomenological perspective, see Lee (1993).
recognize only "objective" (supposedly non-subjective) theoretical predicates as genuine predicates of an entity. The geistige world is not the natural world of theoretically determinate realities, but rather the practical world in which our understanding of value-predicates and ends is constitutive for our experience of the realities (and idealities) that we experience there. The description of the life-world as one that is above all a practical world also casts a new light on the issue of the "types and kinds" of realities that we encounter in the world that surrounds us. Of course, they exhibit characteristics that can be described in terms of strictly theoretical predicates, but the way we normally experience and classify the types and kinds of objects we find around is in terms of their practical relevance for us. We see houses, pencils or pens, streets and cars and not just surfaces or colored objects. We see them as possible use-objects whose meaning we "understand" because we understand the practical uses to which they can be employed, because we ourselves have goals and priorities, and see them in terms of positive or negative evaluations of the way they further or impede practical possibilities we have ourselves have or understand in others.

I mentioned above that the fact that one of the central aspects of our bodily relativity is that the kinds of experiences we can and do have of things are mediated by the particular abilities and states of our bodies. "Normal" human beings see certain colors, but cannot see others without some sort of additional mechanical aids—irregular goggles for instance. The same holds for sounds, tastes, and all other sensory abilities. What other animals can normally see is different—they might see colors or hear sounds we can't or perhaps lack some of the abilities we have. They might be able to sense things like electromagnetic fields that we have discovered only over the last few centuries with the aid of modern scientific theories and technologies. Some human beings might have more heightened or a wider range of sensory abilities than normal; others, e.g. the color-blind or people who have spent too much of their lives at rock concerts, might have less. It is also the case that how we perceive the sense properties of an object will depend on the circumstances, whether it is day-light or dark, or if there is a lot of background noise. What we in the life-world think of as the real sensible properties of the realities we encounter in our daily lives, depends not just on the object and the specific sense impressions we are given, but also on a range of other "relativities" like the abilities and limitations of our own bodies, and the circumstances under which we perceive them. A person who is color-blind still knows that the light at the top of a stop light is red even if what others would call red appears as grey to him. We see a dog look up and know that the dog is hearing something we can't, so we conclude that something is going on that we can't perceive. Just like kinaesthesia involves taking into account the awareness of our own bodily positions and activities in the perceptual process, so too do we constantly factor in our awareness of the abilities and limitations of our bodies and the circumstances in which we find ourselves as we strive to figure on what is actually going on around us. "Normality" is of course not the same thing as optimality. It is normal that we can't hear the sounds a dog can hear. We commonly

---

14 For a more detailed discussion of passivity, see also Pulkkinen's chapter in this volume.
think of optimality in terms of the circumstances and our bodily position (daylight, being close enough to hear or see something), but it also has to do with the state of our body (which is why we cleanse our palate before tasting an fine wine) and sometimes even in overcoming its limitations through technologies like a microscope, a telescope, or a radar screen.\(^{15}\)

Part of the story of the genesis of modern science is the attempt to overcome the limitations of such “relativities” either through the invention of new technologies or through the reliance on those properties that can be measured and calculated without reference to specific human abilities (recall here the whole discussion of primary vs. secondary qualities, the project of defining colors in terms of wave lengths instead of our everyday “subjective” perceptions). Of course, Husserl’s point about the continued dependence of modern natural science on our life-worldly experience is that even the scientist still has to see something that counts as evidence of those objective properties, such as black and white or red lines on a print-out, flashing lights of some color on a meter, or a specific sound that signals and counts as evidence of what the scientist thinks she is “finding” in the lab. When the researcher instructs a new apprentice researcher into the lab, she uses the everyday language of the life-world when she tells her which things to look for when using the apparatus, waiting for the red light to come one or tracking the different colored lines on the screen of the computer or on the printout of the results. And even if she has adopted the philosophical position of a naturalistic or even a physicalistic ontology according to which everything in the world is simply constellations of molecules or electrical charges, she doesn’t describe the machines they are using in terms of their molecular structures, but rather describes them (accurately and much more appropriately) as spectrometers, electron microscopes etc., i.e. in terms of the uses they have in the activities of the life-world of scientific research.

There is much more that could be added on that topic, but there are two other dimensions of the life-world that also must be mentioned as central aspects of the “relativity” of the life-world, namely, first of all, the historicity of the life-world that is also an essential element in the constitution of the realities that we encounter there, and secondly, its intersubjective or – better stated – the social and interpersonal character of the life-world.

To the first point: Historicity itself has both an individual and a social dimension. The \textit{geistige} life of a person is not just a succession of experiences, but as experience always involves the incorporation of each new event or experience into an always already existing context. We saw a brief description of the way that every reality is always perceived in terms of types and kinds that have been built up based on their similarities with previously experienced realities.\(^{16}\) Whatever is new is never grasped as something completely and fully new, but rather at best as something unexpected that is nonetheless categorized and classified in terms of its similarity and dissimilarities with other realities that also populate what is always the one continuous world in which it shows up. Moreover, each new experience always gives rise to new tendencies that reinforce or modify previously established tendencies in the way that we make sense of subsequent experiences:

Indeed it is a basic principle (\textit{Grundgesetz}) that whatever we have postulated as valid in the unity of life through any position-taking acts (in experiencing, judging, valuing, willing, etc.) for the first time – in originally establishing (\textit{ursifianten}) acts, as we also call them –, remains valid until further notice. Each act establishes a lasting (habitual) validity that extends beyond the momentary act. This means that the acts that occur throughout ones further life subsequent to the originally established ones and possess a meaning and character of validity consistent with the earlier ones do not emerge merely as instances of the same belief conjoined with memories of the earlier acts and ultimately of the originally establishing ones, but rather all such acts show themselves as repeated actualizations of one and the same belief that is still valid based on the original establishment. The new instances of these acts in the mode of a belief that is repeated as still valid perform a re-establishment (\textit{Nachsichtung}) and, depending on the completeness of the actualization, exercise different degrees of reinforcement. Lacking such reinforcement, the subsequent force exerted by the original establishment increasingly wanes, as does its motivational force in the broader context of consciousness.” (47)

Two things are noteworthy here. First of all, Husserl is very clear that he is using beliefs (\textit{Meinungen}) here as an example of just one kind of position-taking, but that the genetic structure of originary establishment, reinforcement, and reestablishment is a basic structure of mental life that sets up tendencies for all subsequent mental life and applies not only to theoretical beliefs, but to values, desires, and practical decisions as well. Secondly, Husserl explicitly acknowledges the possibility of error, of having a prior conviction be refuted so that a reality that one had previously postulated shows itself as being different from the way one had thought or as illusory. What cannot be negated, what cannot turn out to be an illusion, however, is the world itself as the pre-given horizon for the experience of specific individual realities:

For us as subjects of a natural life there are not only things that we see (each of them with a horizon of familiarity regarding the unseen rear sides <whose manifestation> is eventually to be expected, however, as a mixture of determinate sense and horizonsense), and on top of them those that we don’t see, which are valid for us because we have seen them before and we still possess them as valid. Rather, in every waking moment of life a whole world is there for us, a world that reaches into the infinites of space and time (and which is structured in particular ways according to a real-categorical typical pattern). (3)

Whereas in the \textit{Ideen I}, Husserl had still maintained the cogency of the idea of an “annihilation of the world,”\(^{17}\) in these manuscripts he criticizes Cartesian

\(^{15}\) De los Reyes Melero, in his chapter in this volume, discusses “normality” and “optimality”; Sara Heinämaa, in her contributions to this volume, offers a detailed discussion of the different kinds of anomalies and abnormalities that can be distinguished within Husserl’s account of the constitution of the life-world.

\(^{16}\) For a detailed discussion of association and pairing, see Pulkkinen’s chapter in this volume.

\(^{17}\) See FN 3, above.
approaches that entertain such wrong-headed notions.\textsuperscript{18} When he now comes to view the idea of a pure consciousness with a merely contingent relationship to a world (ohne Weltbezug) the non-existence of which is supposed to be conceivable, as lacking any phenomenological basis, this means that he also cannot imagine a consciousness without a concrete relatedness to really existing objects even if specific individual objects may be different than the subject takes them to be or might not exist. What doesn’t change and cannot be disconfirmed is the structure of the world as such, a unity over time. Moreover, as we saw at the beginning, it belongs to the sense of individual realities and hence to the world as a whole that they have “validity” not just as solipsistic unities but rather are “vorgegeben” in the sense that they are there and at least in principle accessible to anyone, including not just other humans but other animals.\textsuperscript{19}

One sense in which experience is relative is that it is historical, i.e., it always occurs against the background of prior experiences. The world is not just a set of currently existing realities, but involves all the things that emerge for us as they do against the backdrop of our prior experiences that set up more or less determinate expectations for how things will unfold in the future. Even though we are often mistaken about individual realities, that doesn’t mean that the world itself unravels, it means that we make adjustments against the background of our entire experience, including the new unexpected ones, to our notions of the world that normally evolve instead of completely collapsing.\textsuperscript{20} And in order to make sense of the new realities we encounter, we must assume some patterns, not exceptionless laws, but at least patterns of persistence and change. On the subjective side, this means that our experience itself has a history with patterns of continuity and change; correlative, on the object side, it means that the world and the realities within it exhibit patterns that can be recognized and used for sorting things and dealing with them in terms of their types and the typicalities that are associated with them.

So the world turns out to be pre-given in two senses: first of all, as the apriori horizon of any experience whatsoever, and secondly in the particular historically evolved background into which any newly experienced reality is incorporated. This second sense involves both the individual experiences of the specific experiencing subject, but also as the broader horizon of the “world we all share in common,” the intersubjectively accessible world of experience that itself has a historical genesis that extends far beyond (and far back behind) the experience of any individual subject. The world is vorgegeben as never having an absolute beginning or being from or for one absolute person, also though as aufgegeben, as something that must be constantly reconfirmed and shown to be consistent with the experience of others.

“Under the title, ‘world of universal experience,’ I not only have an existing world and, within it, other existing subjects, but rather under this title I have universal communal subjectivity, living, accomplishing, apperceiving, activity comporting itself in this or that way in relation to what it apperceives, in a community bringing together what is apperceived as identical by individuals, etc. and I have constantly laid out in advance (vorfindlich) as the result of specific common performances an ‘objective’ uniquely so determined world, always being enriched by new performances and always also presupposing a constantly performing (immerzu leisitende) subjectivity . . .” (45).

Hence another aspect of the historical nature of the life-world and persons within it is that individual human beings find themselves always as parts of communities, literally groups who share certain commonly accepted beliefs, values, and ends. Much of what I believe, value, and will is attributable not just to my own personal history, but to the experiences of the communities in which I was raised and in which I find myself. Husserl lists family as a basic form of community, but also communities that have a geographic determinacy, a homeland or territory such as a city, a region, or a nation, but there are communities such as certain professions or interest groups that share specific unique beliefs, values, and ends but are not geographically defined. In any case, though, the world is always already pre-given to me before I ever undertake active reflection in terms of a set of sedimented theoretical, evaluative, and practical position-takings that the specific community shares and that define it as a community. These communities, then, are cultures in at least two senses: (1) they share not only beliefs, but certain commonly accepted values and practices that define them, and (2) these shared beliefs, values, and practices are the result of specific historical experiences and responses to them that shape those communities and become part of the sedimented backdrop for all further experiences and actively personal position-takings.

Each community therefore also has its own Umwelt or surrounding world not just as the specific kinds of realities that happen to exist in the geographic territory in which they find themselves, but as a set of common understandings of the significance of those realities, their values, and their uses.\textsuperscript{21} The notion of Umwelt involves not only relative spatial and temporal orientations and predicates that derive from them, but also predicates related to our normal sensing, the normal practices, and the common values of that community — i.e. their culture. Of course, not everyone belongs to the same communities or cultures, which is why it makes sense to talk of home worlds and alien worlds (Heimwelten und Fremdwelten).

\textsuperscript{18} See for instance, Text 25, pp. 251–258.

\textsuperscript{19} In her chapter in this volume, Sara Heinimaa offers an extensive discussion of the ways that for Husserl animals do and the ways they do not belong to a common world with adult humans.

\textsuperscript{20} De los Reyes Melerio explains why the notion of a complete collapse is nonetheless not unintelligible in his contribution to this volume.

\textsuperscript{21} See, for instance, p. 32: “The world becomes a human world, divided into communities, the communities [each] related to a historical tradition that belongs essentially to it, in which a common culture arose that is accessible to every one of them and as a whole is identifiable, commonly valid for all.”
The *Heimwelt* is the *Umwelt* in which I know and understand the shared beliefs, values, and practices of this community and in which they serve as the default beliefs, values, and practices of that culture for me. The *Fremdwelt* is the culture with which I am not familiar or whose beliefs, values, and practices I do not share. Part of what it means to say that I am not a member of that group is to say that their history is not part of my own, whereas part of what it means to be a member of one's own community is that this shared history is part of my own history. That does not necessarily mean that I cannot reflect upon it, take a stance towards it, and perhaps modify or reject some parts of it, just as my own personal history does not by itself determine my future beliefs, values, and actions as a person, since as a person I can reflect on my own specific beliefs, values, and ends that I may hold as a result of my shared cultural background and my own personal history, assess them critically for their justification and appropriateness, and as a result develop different evaluative stances and feelings towards them that can change my own individual feelings and actions.

The realities I encounter in the *Umwelt* are not just things whose perceptual properties I know about, but rather entities like houses, cars, or carriages, whose uses I understand and whose values I also comprehend. As a member of a community I understand these commonly shared uses and values even if I am personally indifferent to them. To use an example that is of course not Husserl's: I do not have to have a personal interest in riding a motorcycle to recognize immediately what a Harley-Davidson motorcycle is for and I do not have to have or desire one to know that they count for many or most people in the general community in which I live (America in general, Memphis in particular) as a status symbol or to know that owning and riding one would count as unusual or gauche among most academic philosophers.

Intercultural differences then are not simply or even primarily a matter of different perceptual encounters in the narrow sense of disagreements about the perceptual features in the narrow sense of the realities we might each encounter. It is not usually a matter of one group seeing yellow and another green or one group seeing something as 3 cm long that another group perceives as 2 m long. Groups occasionally do disagree about which events actually ever happened and how they happened, but normally those differences do not stem from different perceptual abilities of their bodies, but from having different interests and histories that lead to different interpretations of what happened or make it convenient or important to highlight and remember or downplay and forget those same events.

That is why the modern scientific approach to the avoidance or resolution of cultural difference in its attempt to abstract from all relativities is misguided. It abstracts from value and practical predicates as merely subjective or cultural relativities in the view that what is must be the same for all and hence cannot be subjectively or culturally relative. It then proposes to address what we take to be the perceptible properties of things in ways that are not relative to our own specific forms of embodiment and hence not dependent upon the specific capacities or lack of them that I or anyone else may have or even upon the specific capacities of human bodies in general. So blue and red (along with ultraviolet and infrared) become measurable wave-lengths that are the same regardless of individual differences or even of differences across the specific perceptual capacities of different species. The project of natural science is to eliminate the dependence on such relativities. Armchair ontologists or academic philosophers who take this project to provide the ultimate arbiter of "what there really is" come to claim that such narrowly defined natural objects and their natural, measurable objective properties are the only things that truly exist. The key to intercultural understanding, according to this project, would be to avoid any such relativities altogether and reduce questions of truth and validity to the standards of verification that are consistent with the approach of the modern natural sciences. The ontology of the natural world would then be, to use Boyle's formulation, particles in motion, or - to use a more recent view, different kinds of molecules in different arrangements that show up for us as the realities we perceive in our daily life. If we wanted to speak truly, we would be describing things in terms of their molecular, atomic, or sub-atomic structures.

Husserl’s critique of the life-world shows us that this project is misguided for at least two very basic reasons. First of all, it is impossible. Even the scientist does not walk into the lab and see arrangements of molecules or fields of electrical charges. She sees spectrometers and computer screens, devices for measuring and tracking, other devices for recording or reporting the results of her work. She doesn’t see wave lengths, but rather silver switches or black buttons to turn the machine on. She has specific interests and goals and undertakes actions to achieve them. She never leaves the life-world, but just lives in a specific one, namely that of the lab scientist.

Secondly, even if it were possible, it would not resolve cultural differences because that is not what they are about. Cultural differences are not usually about the molecular structure or even about the narrowly defined perceptible qualities of things. They are usually about different values and interests, different priorities and different views about what is important or not, what kinds of actions are acceptable, and how people should think and act.

In fact, the view that all real questions, all questions with genuine truth values can be reduced to theoretical scientific questions and reasonably adjudicated with the methods it recognizes as valid, is not only not helpful but pernicious, because it relegates all cultural differences to the realm of the irrational. But Husserl’s conception of reason involves the claim that not all values and ends are equally valid and equally acceptable. Reason involves not escaping these relativities, but looking at how they arose in order to understand them. It involves the willingness to look at our own beliefs, values, and practical priorities and practices, assessing their justification and limitations, and being willing to change them. That is why Husserl proposes an investigation into the rationality of the life-world as an alternative to
the narrowly defined rationalism of modern natural science as the appropriate project for philosophy in general and phenomenology in particular. 22

Nonetheless, however, as embodied subjects, our interpersonal and intercultural communications and understandings, even about non-real objects, necessarily involves realities. To communicate about very abstract, perhaps non-intuitive mathematical entities or philosophical issues, I have to use things like words or gestures, marks on a blackboard or a napkin, or click a key on a keyboard or a button on a remote control to bring up a powerpoint presentation that will show on a screen or a wall - all of which are realities. And even perceiving others as other subjects or persons also involves perceiving them as realities: “In order to have others self-given, I must already have been given his corporeal body” (30). In order to understand others, we have to see or hear actions, gestures, or words. But at the same time, all of these actions involve relativities - they have to be in some language we understand, using some colors we see or sounds we hear given the nature of our own bodies. They will be located here or there, but perceptible from the specific position of the audience. And there have to be people that share the common practices of sitting in a lecture, being initiated into high-level mathematics or philosophy, and they have to care about it. The point is not to overcome relativities that make it possible for the realities to be there for us and to mean something for us but for us to find common relativities for us as embodied and historically and culturally located subjects for whom these realities have meanings.

In closing just one brief remark about optimality. Throughout these manuscripts, the optimality that Husserl most often discusses is optimality of perception. At the same time, the analyses make clear that perception is not only accompanied by, but generally also guided by values, interests, and decisions that are not strictly theoretical and are not directed to knowledge for its own sake. It would be an interesting question to augment these discussions by consideration of the optimization of values, of optimizing right actions, of the best life. Of course, in a few other places, for instance in the Kaizo articles and in his lectures on ethics, especially the 1920 and 1924 volumes on ethics, Husserl does explicitly address these issues, albeit in a fairly general way. The task then would be to take what we can learn from the analyses presented in the life-world volume, augment them with what Husserl tells us about values and willing in those other writings, and see what this would tell us about the most important questions for us as embodied persons living in a world together with other human beings (and animals) and how this can help us deal with contemporary issues about human life and humane interactions with each other in our world today. In this much, Husserl is certainly right, namely that the natural sciences alone and other sciences oriented strictly on their models cannot even begin to address those problems.

22 The life-world manuscripts build on Husserl’s general conception of reason that I have described in another essay, Nenon (2003).

References

