

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF:  
CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

The meaning of the Self is situated at the heart of our consciousness as the central referential point of our social being. On the one hand, human life and personality are dramatically shaped by social interrelations. The relationship we have with Others serves as a means of social identification of the Self. On the other hand, the nature of the Self can be conceptualized only in the way of its differentiation from the Others. An individual is a causal agent for these relationships in a sense that one's individual existence is intrinsically linked to various social configurations. This duplicity is inherent to the problem of the Self.

While the Other is the overt part of our conceptualizations, attention to the Self tends to be tacit or subsidiary. When we enter social interactions, we rather draw attention to what we are (or what we represent), so the constitutional nature of the Self remains in the "blind spot" of our reason.

Our Self-perspective is usually presented by an ambiguous mix of singular and plural tenses. Our language reflects this duplicity in the usage of the terms "I", "we", "me" and "us". Appealing to the cultural context for the purpose of social identification and Self-maintenance, we tacitly refer to the mix of our individuality, sociality and humanity. We tend to take their unity for granted and are not usually motivated for *a priori* distinction of them. Rather the meaning of the Self emerges by means of *a posteriori* reflection. Our Self appears as the outcome of the conceptualization of the bonds of agency, interests and circumstances which find their locus in the psychical and conscious being of an individual.

1. EGO AND ALTER EGO AS A CONSTITUTIVE PROBLEM  
OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

The basic insight which gives rise to social phenomenology traced back to E. Husserl's works. He was the founder of phenomenology, who declared the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) to be the finite province of meaning of human

reason and activity. But for the present study it is more significant that not wanting to be accused of solipsism, in his latest work (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*) E. Husserl turns to the cognitive procedure which is not *reduction*, but *production*. While in his early works (*Logical Investigations*, *Ideas to Pure Phenomenology*) he seeks to find the basic, unquestioned foundation of human cognition, i.e. implicit presuppositions upon which any science and philosophy are actually based, his latest work (*Crisis*) was inspired by the opposite intention. He seeks to make a phenomenological description of constitutive process which give rise to intentional objects, the Other (Alter Ego) being the most significant among them.

Edmund Husserl clearly sees the eminent danger of solipsism as the possible consequence of his conception of the phenomenologically transcendental reduction. Alfred Schutz reminded, when asked why E. Husserl refrained from publishing the second volume of his *Ideas to Pure Phenomenology* (*Ideen*), he answered that at that time (1913) he did not find any satisfactory solution to the problem of intersubjectivity, or Alter Ego existence. The founding father of phenomenology clearly recognized that the attack on this problem presupposed carrying out still further analysis of the constitutive activities of consciousness. Edmund Husserl faithfully believed that he offered the desired solution of the *Alter Ego* problem in the Fifth of his *Cartesian Meditations*<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, he did not succeed there in eliminating some difficulties. The main difficulty consists in the fact that within the framework of transcendental philosophy, the problem of intersubjectivity is inconsistent by its nature. Having performed the phenomenologically transcendental reduction and analyzed the constitutional problems of the consciousness, built up by the activities of the transcendental subjectivity, E. Husserl singles out within the transcendental field what he calls “my own peculiar sphere” (primordial sphere) by eliminating all the constitutive activities which are related to the subjectivity of Others. This could be done in the way of abstracting from all the meanings referring to Others. What still remains is strictly my private primordial sphere in the most radical sense of the word. In short, if the phenomenologically transcendental reduction brackets *the natural attitude*, in the framework of which the others are simply taken for granted, the so-called *thematic reduction* – as far as I can see it – seems to be a kind of cognitive activity within this particular sphere aimed at solving the problem of intersubjectivity as such.

Edmund Husserl presupposes that within the primordial sphere, the object which can be controlled by the activities of the meditating ego can be singled out. He calls it “my own body” and ascribes to it all the sensorial fields.