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From the “*geistige Ich*” to the “*Ich mit-verstrickt*” and Back: Husserl and Schapp on the Narrative Constitution of the Self

Abstract:

The relationship between the father of phenomenology and the father of the philosophy of stories has been described as a departure of Wilhelm Schapp from Edmund Husserl, following the turn to transcendental idealism marked by the publication of *Ideen* (1913). This supposed rupture is taken to ground Schapp’s narratological reinterpretation of phenomenology. Nevertheless, Schapp’s work – particularly *In Geschichtenverstrickt* (1953) – remains deeply indebted to Husserl’s phenomenology, and the relation between their respective projects is more complex than a simple rupture would suggest. While their points of departure – Husserl’s *reine Ich* and Schapp’s *Ich-verstrickt* – are undeniably different, it would be unfair to dismiss phenomenology for its transcendental idealism, apparently incompatible with an approach centered on an empirical subject entangled in a network of stories. This paper aims to overcome this dichotomy by showing that Husserl’s phenomenology and Schapp’s philosophy of stories meet at what constitutes the subject of an intersubjective world.

Keywords:

phenomenology, narrative philosophy, Husserl, Schapp, intersubjective world

Introduction

This paper advances the thesis that, despite the evident divergences between their respective philosophical projects, the relationship between Husserl's phenomenology and Schapp's philosophy of stories is more nuanced than a simple rupture would suggest. The underlying conviction is that there exists a point of intersection at which the two frameworks enter into a genuine dialogue, thereby allowing for a passage from one to the other. This point can be identified in what both authors recognize as the subject of the intersubjective world. This implies that, upon closer examination, Schapp's narrative turn is conceptually more indebted to phenomenology than he himself acknowledged, and that, although Husserl does not explicitly theorize stories, he does not deny the constitutive role of narrativity in the formation of the self. The particular conception of the self at stake will be critically examined in the discussion that follows.

In Geschichtenverstrickt, published in 1953, constitutes the first systematic formulation of Schapp's philosophy of stories. Far from emerging abruptly, this work represents the outcome of a long intellectual development extending over several decades. As Daniele Nuccilli notes in the preface to the Italian translation of the work, edited by him, the conceptual premises of this project can already be traced back to Schapp's doctoral dissertation, defended in Göttingen in 1909 under Husserl's supervision and published in 1910 under the title "Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung (Contributions to the Phenomenology of Perception)." It is here that the gradual process of detachment from Husserlian phenomenology begins, a process that Burkhard Liebsch describes as leading Schapp from being a faithful disciple of Husserl to a "genuine heretic,"¹ and that finds its culmination in the motto, sounding almost like a prophetic announcement: "The story stands for the man."² Thus, while the first part of the work remains intertwined with a certain phenomenological stance, the second part, through the replacement of the man within a network of stories, marks the definitive detachment that severs all remaining ties with Husserlian phenomenology. After all, it may be argued that this detachment represented the necessary tribute to be paid to pave the

1) Liebsch, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, 26.

2) Schapp, *In Geschichtenverstrickt*, 103. Cited in text as GV. Unless otherwise noted, translations from Schapp's works are by the author.

way for what Schapp himself regarded as the fourth revolution in the history of Western thought, following those associated with Thales, Bacon, and Kant.

What, then, is the precise nature of this detachment? Without anticipating aspects that will later serve to clarify the points at which Husserl and Schapp diverge, it is appropriate to pause and address this question. Both Husserlian phenomenology and Schapp’s philosophy of stories share a fundamental commitment to the authority of experience. For both thinkers, experience (*Erfahrung*) constitutes not only the starting point but also the ultimate horizon of philosophical inquiry. Yet, the kind of experience at stake in each case still requires clarification.

It is well known that Husserl accords a central role to experience, to which the opening paragraph of the first book of *Ideen* is devoted. With experience begins the so-called natural theoretical attitude, whose ultimate horizon is the world, understood as the “sum-total of objects of possible experience and experiential cognition.”³ Through experience, the *omnitude realitatis* comes to the fore, first and foremost in its most original form, namely as that which appears and is given in the mode of perception. Thus, while experience, as the foundation of all possible knowledge, stands at the beginning of every philosophical inquiry that seeks to give an account of what is given or appears within it, and to which any attempt at justification must ultimately be referred, philosophy, insofar as it aspires to be a rigorous science, cannot undertake this task without a necessary critical turning away from experience itself. In this sense, Liebsch maintains that experience must be legitimized by phenomenology, comparing phenomenological reductions to a kind of *momentum destruens* that nevertheless proves indispensable if experience itself is to be validated in the first place. As he writes: “Phenomenologists agree, at most, that the appearance, manifestation or existence of something, as well as the justification of these concepts themselves, must be at the beginning of all philosophy... . The crux of phenomenology, however, lies precisely in the fact that answers to this question cannot simply be gleaned from naïve experience.”⁴ Phenomenology is not content with merely taking for granted what is presented in naïve experience; rather, as an eidetic science, the science of pure essences, it is tasked with purifying what is given in experience, “to keep everything

3) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, 6.

4) Liebsch, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, 23.

away from what appears that seems to obscure, conceal or transcend what appears as such.”⁵ Consequently, that which is ultimately described phenomenologically as given (*Gegebenheit*) cannot in any way be equated with mere empirical fact, while at the same time remaining inextricably inseparable from it; rather, it is the result of a laborious process aimed at consulting things in their own self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*).

It is precisely at this point that the divergence between Husserl and Schapp begins to take shape. For whereas Husserl regards the critical suspension of experience as a necessary methodological step to secure its philosophical legitimacy, Schapp resists this gesture, insisting instead that philosophy must remain within the bounds of that which constitutes both its point of departure and its ultimate horizon, namely experience itself. Yet the experience at stake is of a specific kind: according to Schapp, experience is possible only in the mode of narrativity. This entails that it is only through narrative experience that the things of the “seemingly inexhaustible so-called outer world” (GV, 3), that Husserl conceives as always already given to us, can genuinely come to appearance. Indeed, it is precisely through stories that “the world, in all its most disparate aspects, acquires its intelligibility.”⁶ Stories thus represent the horizon of meaning without which it would not be possible to account for experience. This implies that, contrary to what phenomenology maintains, no critical turning away from the narrative experience is required by Schapp’s philosophy of stories. Whereas for Husserl it is necessary to bracket experience in order to clarify its essential structures and to avoid misunderstanding it, for Schapp it would instead constitute a serious misunderstanding if philosophy were to step outside narrative experience, thereby refusing “to take on a historical form.”⁷ Human beings are always already entangled in stories, and as such, there is no neutral standpoint outside them from which the world could be consulted; rather, everything can be approached only from within the narrative horizon in which it is inevitably enveloped at the very moment of its givenness. This is why Liebsch writes that “every supposed essence of a thing or the experience that unfolds for it must always be the result of an examination that can only be valid until further notice and demands that one search for deviations.”⁸

5) Ibid., 24.

6) Schapp, *Reti di storie*, 20.

7) Liebsch, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, 28.

8) Ibid., 35.

However, if it is indeed the case that phenomenology acknowledges the necessity of bracketing experience, this bracketing should not be interpreted as a withdrawal from experience. Instead, it serves to shed light on the transcendental field, which does not transcend experience but clarifies its conditions of possibility, ultimately allowing a return to it. In this sense, it could be argued that Husserl’s initial distancing from experience occurs precisely for the sake of experience itself, in order ultimately to return to it with a more adequate – namely, evident – grasp of its essence as the essence of the world. This grasp, in turn, elucidates the very significance of this return. In light of this, while Schapp’s philosophical project eliminates the intermediate step of critically suspending experience, it would nevertheless be unfair to dismiss Husserl’s phenomenology on account of its transcendental idealism, which might appear incompatible with an approach centered on an empirical subject entangled in a network of stories. Thus, to overcome this dichotomy is precisely the purpose that this paper sets out to achieve. After all, even the phenomenologist Klaus Held observes that “the frequently stated opposition between transcendental phenomenology and the so-called natural attitude must be dismantled; otherwise, people will not be convinced that philosophy makes sense for them in this attitude that determines their everyday lives.”⁹

The paper proceeds in three steps: the first section will critically examine the divergent starting points of Husserl and Schapp, contrasting the concept of the pure ego with that of the entangled ego. The second section will be devoted to presenting and elaborating the central thesis of the paper. Finally, the third section will, following a suggestion by Liebsch, briefly touch upon the relationship between narrativity and the phenomenology of the social sciences.

1. The “*Reine Ich*” vs. the “*Ich-Verstrickt*”

Since Schapp himself emphasized his distance from Husserl, it seems appropriate to begin by reconsidering the differences in their respective points of departure, while allowing their deeper affinities to emerge. Let the discussion therefore start by comparing the grammatical subjects of the two philosophical approaches: Husserl’s pure ego and Schapp’s entangled ego.

9) Held, *Husserl und die Griechen*, 155.

It has been previously noted that, although experience constitutes the initial point of departure for phenomenological analysis, such analysis necessitates a methodological withdrawal from experience before it can return to it after its clarification. Yet what remains once the world has been bracketed, together with the empirical subject that belongs to it? What remains is that which resists every attempt at reduction and is therefore designated as a phenomenological “*residuum*”¹⁰: that whose being cannot be called into doubt, namely the pure ego (*das reine Ich*). It is indeed true that Husserl defines it as a “transcendancy”; yet this is a peculiar kind of it, namely “a transcendancy within immanency.”¹¹ Once again, it becomes clear that the pure ego is not to be conceived as an external entity, nor does it involve any attempt to escape the world with its empirical determinations. Rather, what is at stake is the identification, within experience itself, of something that resists every change, something immutable, unaffected by changing circumstances: a sort of atemporal and aspatial substratum (*hypokeimenon*). While, in fact, “any cogito can change, come and go, ... the pure Ego would, however, seem to be something essentially necessary.”¹² In other words, the pure ego is a transcendancy because, contrary to what happens in the case of empirical subjectivity, it remains the same throughout the changing flux of its lived-experiences. For this reason, there is no need to enter into the infinity of this flux in order to grasp what it is; rather, a single experience suffices, namely, that to which Husserl refers as “the reflexive shift of focus that goes back to it as a center of functioning.”¹³ At the same time, this also means that the pure ego remains identical over time, as a “unity of endless immanent time,”¹⁴ such that it can always become conscious of itself as the same subject of all past, present, and future *cogitationes*. The pure ego thus appears as an absolute, simple, and clear selfhood, an identical unity and immanent necessity that neither arises nor vanishes, even though it may “step forth” and “step back,” expressions that allude to the fact that it is not always present in the mode of wakeful awareness. This happens

10) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, First Book, 132.

11) *Ibid.*, 133.

12) *Ibid.*, 132.

13) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 111.

14) *Ibid.*, 119.

because, as Husserl states in the *Analyses Concerning Active and Passive Synthesis*, “wakeful life has, so to speak, a background of non-wakefulness, ... a broad horizon of background lived-experiences to which the ego is not present and ‘in’ which it does not reside.”¹⁵ The pure ego is thus always present, as Alice Pugliese has aptly defined it, in a kind of intermediate state between wakefulness and sleep, which, as she explains, arises from “the dialectic between pure ego and consciousness, in their mutual relationship.”¹⁶ In other words, the field of consciousness is wider than the lived-experiences that take the form of an ego-cogito actively carried out in wakeful awareness by the pure ego. It is a field that “may knock on the door of the ego, but it does not – always – ‘affect’ the ego, the ego is deaf to it, as it were.”¹⁷ Yet wakeful life and the background of non-wakefulness share a fundamental feature: both have their pole in the pure ego. The pure ego is therefore not to be conceived as a *tabula rasa* waiting to be filled; it “is not a box containing egoless lived-experiences, nor a slate of consciousness upon which they light up and disappear again.”¹⁸ Rather, these lived-experiences constitute the very life of the pure ego, from which it cannot be separated, just as they themselves cannot be thought except as the “medium” of its own life. As Husserl summarizes:

The Ego is the identical subject functioning in all acts of the same stream of consciousness; it is the center whence all conscious life emits rays and receives them; it is the center of all affects and actions, of all attention, grasping, relating, and connecting, of all theoretical, valuing, and practical position-taking, of all enjoyment and distress, of all hope and fear, of all doing and suffering, etc. In other words, all the multi-formed particularities of intentional relatedness to Objects, which here are called acts, have their necessary *terminus a quo*, the Ego-point, from which they irradiate.¹⁹

15) Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 18.

16) Pugliese, *Io Puro, Io Reale e Storicità Immanente del Soggetto*, 56. My translation.

17) Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 19.

18) *Ibid.*, 17.

19) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 112.

Now, Schapp explicitly maintains that “if we start from stories and history, our point of departure is diametrically opposed to Husserl’s” (GV, 171). Schapp identifies this point of departure with stories themselves, while at the same time insisting that to every story necessarily belongs someone who is entangled within it. Moreover, “story and being entangled in stories belong together so closely that one can perhaps not even separate them in thought” (GV, 1). This claim strikingly recalls the relation between Husserl’s pure ego and its lived-experiences. Yet, in Schapp’s philosophy of stories, what functions as a counterbalance to the pure ego is the entangled ego (*Ich-verstrickt*). Schapp’s guiding conviction is that it is only through entanglement in one’s own stories that access to what the human being truly is becomes possible. This is the meaning of the enigmatic motto quoted in the introduction, which encapsulates Schapp’s philosophical stance. Unlike the pure ego, however, the entangled ego reveals itself only through stories, and thus only within experience itself. For this reason, it can no longer be described as an immanent transcendency, but rather as an absolute immanence. This means that we cannot “lift our heads out of this historical world to look at it from the outside. We can also not get out of our story or get into our stories, as we can get out of a train” (GV, 127). However, even in this way, we never truly grasp the man, because he is obscured by every attempt at objectification, so that we can only come closer to him through his stories.

Schapp maintains that we are closest to him in our current stories, those in which we find ourselves presently entangled. At the same time, however, he cautions against speaking of lived experiences in this context: “One might perhaps be tempted to speak here of lived experiences. This would indeed still conform to ordinary usage; yet there is the danger that the unity of the story would thereby be lost from view. We maintain, however, that every experience belongs to a story” (GV, 121). In other words, together with their entangled ego, stories constitute a coherent unity that does not encompass only the current lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) but extends both backward and forward through pre-story and post-story. In this sense, on the one hand, “every story can once again break forth from its place within the horizon – while on the other – the future history must already be present in the horizon of the present” (GV, 142). Thus, future stories already permeate past ones, while past stories continue to live on in the unfolding of the future, and both past and future constantly transform into the present. It should be noted, however, that a similar relationship exists

between the pure ego and its experiences, since the realm of the pure ego also contains past experiences that can always be recalled to consciousness as memories, just as the future is ever-present as a horizon of expectation. One may therefore say that, analogously to the pure ego’s temporal unity with its experiences, the entangled ego likewise forms a unity over time with the stories in which it is entangled, albeit with the crucial difference that this unity is not, and cannot remain, identical.

Two further aspects reveal a close structural affinity between the entangled ego and the pure ego. First, the entangled ego exhibits a foreground (*Vordergrund*) and a background (*Hintergrund*), such that “the real movement, which perhaps belongs to every story, runs in the foreground, while the characteristic of the background is rest and persistence, yet in such a way that everything can break forth from it” (GV, 91). This configuration recalls the distinction between wakeful and non-wakeful life in Husserl’s account of the pure ego. Second, across the totality of the stories in which it is entangled, the entangled ego functions as their unifying center (*Mittelpunkt*), holding them together in a manner analogous to the pure ego’s role as the egological pole of its intentional acts.

From what has been said, it follows that Husserl’s pure ego and the ego entangled in stories fulfill, so to speak, a structurally analogous function. However, if a point of articulation between the two perspectives can indeed be identified, it should not be sought in their respective points of departure, despite the numerous affinities they share. A decisive difference nevertheless remains: whereas the pure ego, insofar as it is atemporal and aspatial – and thus ahistorical – remains *a priori* identical to itself throughout the flux of its lived experiences; the entangled ego is inevitably modified by the stories that befall it and in which it is entangled. This modification is not accidental but follows precisely from its entanglement in those stories, that is, from its intrinsically spatial, temporal, and historical character.

Before proceeding further, and before clarifying where such a point of articulation between Schapp and Husserl may instead be located, it seems appropriate to note at least two further considerations. The first concerns a possible objection to Schapp, who repeatedly feels compelled – as has also been observed above – to emphasize the extent to which his investigation diverges from Husserl’s. This becomes particularly evident in chapter three, entitled *A Look at Our Method – No Investigation of Essence*. It is a clear statement of intent: an investigation of essence would indeed constitute a falsification of the story and its entangled ego, since Schapp’s aim is not to arrive at

universal propositions regarding them, an outcome that would be impossible, given that the entangled ego changes along with its stories. The idea is precisely that man constantly discovers himself in the entanglement within his stories, and that therefore nothing is definitive, but everything holds only until further notice. This perspective is also evident whenever Schapp, almost placing his hands forward, asserts that any attempt to grasp this entangled ego is not, and cannot be, anything other than a mere approximation. Moreover, describing man as perpetually entangled does not amount to a description of human essence; rather, it signifies an ineliminable existential condition, which “has the same magnitude as Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, especially if we meditate on the moment of ‘thrownness.’”²⁰ It is therefore no coincidence that the subtitle of the work reads “the being,” not the “essence” of man and of the thing.

Schapp explicitly maintains that his approach neither aims at objectifying stories nor at formulating universal, *a priori* propositions about them. Nevertheless, his analyses appear to engage with precisely this type of claim, insofar as they describe what seem to function as essential structures of narrative experience. If Schapp’s methodological commitments are taken seriously, such claims should be understood as *a posteriori* judgments, grounded in experience and therefore, in principle, always open to revision. This would imply that even the features ascribed to stories must remain revisable. In this sense, it should be conceivable, at least in principle, that one might one day come to experience narrative life differently, for instance, discovering that within the unity of one’s story the past no longer figures within the horizon of the present. Yet for Schapp, this possibility is systematically excluded, so that his account inadvertently lapses into the very kind of universal claim it seeks to avoid, revealing a methodological tension at the core of his approach.

Another point is that, while preoccupied with avoiding the transcendental turn, Schapp appears to overlook a crucial aspect of Husserl’s phenomenology: namely, that the pure ego, despite not being a “real” subject, is not something isolated. Rather, it maintains a relation to the real, empirical ego in such a way that, on the one hand, the pure ego has the real ego as the object of its apperception, and on the other, the real ego always includes the pure ego as “its apperceptive nuclear content.”²¹ More impor-

20) Nuccilli, *Narratological Structure of Intersubjectivity*, 146.

21) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 117.

tantly, it is only when the pure ego undergoes what Husserl calls a “realizing apprehension” that the real, empirical ego can truly appear. To say that the pure ego undergoes a realizing apprehension means that the identical pole of lived experiences is no longer apprehended merely as a transcendental function, but is constituted as a real, temporally determined subject, dependent on worldly circumstances – that is, as an empirical ego knowable only through experience, which “leads us into the endless possibilities of ever new circumstances, among which the real shows what it is, in the manner of its dependencies.”²² Through this realizing apprehension, the pure ego is concretely sealed as a real subject in experience. In this regard, one might say that “the pure ego always and only gives itself as the empirical ego, finding its fulfillment in the reciprocal.”²³ It is to this real, empirical ego that we must now direct our attention.

2. The Narrative Constitution of Subjectivity in the Intersubjective World

If the entangled ego has been opposed to the pure ego, this is because such a contrast serves to clarify why the former cannot yet constitute the point of convergence between Husserl and Schapp. On the one hand, it is crucial to recognize that, despite certain affinities, Schapp’s stories are not comparable to the lived experiences of the pure ego. This holds even if, as has been clarified, Husserl does not restrict these lived experiences to merely actual ones, but understands them as belonging to a horizon that always encompasses past and future experiences, foreground and background alike, all of which have their egological pole in the ego. On the other hand, the entangled ego risks being understood as a subject still conceived in fundamentally singular terms, albeit always entangled within its own personal stories. What is instead decisive for Schapp is the originally co-entangled character of experience: not an ego that subsequently enters into relations with others, but a subject that is from the outset co-entangled with other subjects within a shared narrative horizon. Indeed, it is not only the case that we – “our neighbors, friends, acquaintances, every single individual” (GV, 1) – are always entangled in our own personal stories; it is also the case that the stories in which others are entangled concern us just as our

22) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Third Book, 100.

23) Buriano, *L’arcadell’origine*, 46.

own stories concern them, insofar as we are subjects co-entangled together in the same world, whose horizon is constituted by the plurality of these interwoven stories forming the narrative framework that both envelops the world and, at the same time, allows it to appear. As Daniele Nuccilli has aptly noted, “it is within such a mutual connection that we come to understand our being and our relations to others and to things. In doing so, we bring to light the essential framework of co-entanglement.”²⁴ It is precisely this co-entanglement that holds the key to understanding the narrative structure of the intersubjective world and the constitution of the subject who inhabits it. In a passage of remarkable evocative power, Schapp brings co-entanglement to life when he recounts the encounter between Odysseus and his faithful dog after twenty years of adventures. The dog’s tail wagging at the sight of Odysseus, despite its advanced age preventing it from approaching him, together with the tears that Odysseus conceals beneath his disguise as a beggar, becomes eloquent testimony that their individual lives remain co-entangled within a shared story. Homer’s narrative thus emerges not as an isolated or accidental story of co-entanglement, but as an allegory of this primordial dimension, which acts as a bridge across the abyss that incessantly opens not only between humans and animals, but, more fundamentally, among human beings themselves.

Similarly, it can be argued that it is precisely the original co-entanglement of the self – the state of mutual implication between individual stories – that forms the bridge capable, as far as possible, of spanning the abyss between Husserl and Schapp, between phenomenology and the philosophy of stories. At either end of this bridge stand, on the one hand, the co-entangled ego, and on the other, the real ego. However, before examining the precise nature of this real ego, it is worth pausing to ask why Schapp seems unable to acknowledge this bridge, why he appears blind precisely where a dialogue with Husserlian phenomenology would be feasible. It is within the very domain of co-entanglement that such a dialogue seems to open, yet Schapp appears to have deliberately left this possibility unexplored. This cannot be attributed solely to his explicit skepticism toward any attempt at objectifying and reducing stories to essential *a priori* structures; there must be another underlying reason, rooted in other significant differences of perspective.

24) Nuccilli, *Narratological Structure of Intersubjectivity*, 147–48.

To comprehend the nature of these differences, it seems useful to recall what Schapp states when, shifting the focus from the individual ego to the collective “we,” he observes that one might be first tempted to approach this formation as one approach the species of lions:

In this way, we might, as it were, gather human beings into the species of humans, much as an external observer who stands as far removed from the human being as we are from the lion might do. This species of humans would then be roughly equivalent to “man,” or “human beings as a whole,” or “all human beings.” Between these humans there would exist relations analogous to those between individual lions within the species of lions. The individual would thus be ordered into a series... . If we pursue the term *human being* further in this direction by equating it with *lion*, the result is not that what the term *human being* refers to, or is meant to refer to, becomes clearer (GV, 192–93).

This suggests that the human “we” cannot be accessed merely by the way of the body. Such an approach, at best, produces the biological conception “we, humans,” but it obscures the specifically human dimension. As entanglement constitutes the distinctiveness of the human and allows the individual to be apprehended within their personal stories, the proper path to understanding the human “we” lies within the narrative horizon, in which the ego is always co-entangled with others. As Schapp emphasizes, if “we allow the field of expression to speak along with us, then we find ourselves in the midst of stories” (GV, 192), namely, we find ourselves always entangled and co-entangled, and it is precisely through this co-entanglement that we grasp the meaning of the expression “we, human beings.” It follows that any attempt to abstract from the dynamic field of expression that unfolds within the dimensions of entanglement and co-entanglement, and instead take mere matter as a starting point, amounts to a form of obscuration with respect to the stories themselves. In this sense, Schapp asserts that “the so-called object of biology – body and life in the sense of biology – is an obscuring” (GV, 192).

Moreover, this applies not only to the understanding of the human being but also extends to the objects of our surrounding world, which Schapp addresses in the first part of his work, insofar as they present themselves from the outset as peculiar

types of formations, defined as “things-for” (*Wozuding*). Although these objects cannot themselves be said to be entangled in stories – since entanglement pertains only to living beings – they are far from being mere material entities of the inexhaustible, inanimate external world. Rather, they function as a point of intersection between human stories and the external world, insofar as they are human-made and embedded within the story of their creator, thus intelligible in relation to it. The meaningful horizon of a thing-for encompasses the moment of its genesis, namely its very production, which goes back to the human being whose decisions, plans, and manual activities brought it into existence at a particular moment of their personal story. It is for this reason that Schapp observes that “through the thing-for, we do indeed encounter in some manner this being “human being,” to which, ultimately, all our efforts are directed” (GV, 17). This way, the thing-for acquires its own story and simultaneously constitutes “the fulcrum of Schapp’s shift from analyses of perception to analyses of entanglement.”²⁵ It, thus, becomes evident in which sense a thing-for is not and cannot be merely a matter endowed with certain properties. This is not to deny, however, that it is composed of matter, since, according to Schapp, every thing-for has its “from-what” (*Ausweis*), yet the order is inverted, so that “the thing-for, the work, is primary in relation to matter and first raises matter out of nothingness through the activity” (GV, 21). In other words, it is the work, the thing-for, that constitutes the starting point for any reflection on matter. In this regard, Schapp warns that “there is a particularly great danger of failing to recognize how the rigid body primarily appears as a thing-for, is given as a thing-for, when it is torn out of these contexts and reduced to matter, understood as matter, made absolute as matter” (GV, 52).

But how does all this relate to Husserl? In the supplements bridging books 2 and 3, Husserl clarifies that through realizing apprehension, the pure ego acquires the spatio-temporality that inherently belongs to the real empirical ego by virtue of its grounding in the living body (*Leib*). At first glance, Husserl might appear to assert something opposed to Schapp, as realizing apprehension seems to prioritize material reality. Yet this materiality cannot be understood as mere matter among other things, since it manifests at the same time as body and as a material thing. In other words, it is “a material thing, of a certain nature, which is not merely a material thing but is

25) Nuccilli, *The Character of Things*, 123.

a Body, i.e., a material thing which, as localization field for sensations and for stirrings of feelings, as complex of sense and as phenomenal partner and counter-part of all perceptions of things ... makes up a fundamental component of the real givenness of the soul and the Ego.”²⁶ This means that alongside corporeal matter, the psyche is also given, fused with it in such a way as to form that peculiar unity of experience through which the psychic acquires its place in objective space and time. This constitutes the basis for what Husserl describes as the “naturalization” of consciousness. This real ego corresponds to the naturalistic attitude, that is, to the human being as conceived from the standpoint of naturalistic observation, a subject constituted by psychophysical and idiopsychic dependencies in virtue of its grounding in the living body. However, while these dependencies certainly come into play, they do not always occupy an essential role. Husserl is acutely aware that it would be a serious mistake to assume that this exhausts the constitution of the ego, and he makes this point explicitly in a passage of fundamental significance:

One who is wont to think in the way of natural science will immediately say here that “in Objective truth” the individuality in the nexus of individualities dissolves into a nexus of Bodies in physical nature, with which is linked a system of psychic correlates to which idiopsychic regulations belong... . Thereby, in a way to be explained by “natural science” (physical and psychological), it happens that, in the psychic unities, Ego-subjects are constituted and therewith acquire representations of other people and of a surrounding world in the widest sense and work out modes of representation in which they see themselves as directly related to this surrounding world.

The question will be whether this answer suffices. At any event, if we, in the way indicated, let the psychic- Ego be constituted by psychophysical and idiopsychic components of apprehension alone, we are still not making a decision in favor of this answer.²⁷

26) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 165.

27) *Ibid.*, 149.

Previously, we discussed the realization of the pure ego through realizing apprehension. It should now be added that, in the realization of the pure ego within the empirical ego, there is realized that return to experience which, for Husserl, encloses the very meaning of any phenomenological inquiry. Yet it is not sufficient for the pure ego simply to undergo a realizing apprehension in order to become real; something further is required. Husserl indeed claims that “the pure ego becomes a real ego only through intersubjective exchange, namely where the self is recognized and constituted in relation to others.”²⁸ In fact, while the pure ego exists as absolute selfhood, the same does not hold for the real ego, which is constituted not only in relation to the former and its manifolds of appearances, but also in relation to “an intersubjective consciousness, that is, in relation to an open manifold of pure Egos separated from one another like monads or in relation to an open manifold of their streams of consciousness which, by reciprocal empathy, are unified into a nexus which constitutes intersubjective objectivities.”²⁹ In other words, solipsistic experience alone proves insufficient; the constitution of the ego as fully real presupposes the encounter with alterity through empathy.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that even the apprehension of the natural object “human being” already entails an intersubjective dimension, albeit operating at a naturalistic level. Yet even this is insufficient, for nature “points beyond to another realm of being and of research, i.e., the field of subjectivity, which no longer is nature.”³⁰ It is striking that, in the introduction to *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl observes that “retrogression to the world of experience is a retrogression to the ‘life-world’ i.e., to the world in which we are always already living and which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance.”³¹ But the moment we presentify to ourselves this world in all its vitality, as soon as we see before our eyes the boundless variety of relations that men have within it – from those through which individuals engage with the objects of their environment to those through which they communicate and interact with one another – we no longer encounter mere living bodies, the physical-psychic

28) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, First Book, 100.

29) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 118.

30) Ibid., 180.

31) Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 41.

entities of the natural sciences. Rather, we find ourselves in an essentially different attitude compared to the naturalistic one, an attitude in which “we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with one another in greeting, or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion.”³² This attitude corresponds to what Husserl characterizes as the “personalistic” attitude typical of the spiritual world, that is, the world in which human beings, in their engagement with the objects and persons of their surrounding environment, find themselves in certain relations of dependence. Crucially, these dependencies are not merely physiological or psychic; rather, they are grounded in the individual’s characteristic dispositions and take the form of motivation, which governs the spiritual world.

In consideration of this, the return to the world cannot be regarded as a simple retreat into the experience of an isolated subject. Rather, it must be understood as the recovery of the originally intersubjective horizon in which the subject constitutes itself as a personal or spiritual ego in relation to others. In this world, the physical Body “is a thing, one that has spiritual significance, that serves as *expression* (my emphasis) ... for a spiritual being, for a person and his spiritual activity.”³³ Here, a remarkable convergence with Schapp emerges: if one begins from the personalistic attitude, the body is no longer apprehended merely as matter, but as a medium through which the field of expression is allowed to appear and to “speak along with us,” precisely as Schapp suggests. In this sense, within the personalistic attitude, one might say that there is a reversal in the foundational order so that spirit assumes primacy, and through it, matter – that is, the body – appears. The same holds for the objects of our surrounding world, which are not encountered as mere material things, but as works of art, literary products, symbols, practical objects, and objects of value. In a word, they are objects endowed with sense, which is constantly liable to be transformed through ever-new personal acts of the ego. Thus, it becomes evident that the subject-object relation achieves a whole new sense once it is approached from within the personalistic attitude, as opposed to the naturalistic one. The latter abstracts from meaning and reduces both subject and object to natural determinations, whereas the

32) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 192.

33) *Ibid.*, 214.

former discloses a domain in which objects appear as bearers of sense, inseparable from the meaningful practices and relations in which they are embedded. A closely related insight can be found in Schapp, who writes:

When we concern ourselves with matter, when matter as such appears before us, we are on a completely different level than when things-for (sic) appear before us. We can also express this ... by saying that what seems to appear before the “spiritual” gaze as cup, table, chair is individualized into the single cup, the single chair, the single table, whereas what appears before us as gold, silver, iron, wood is individualized into a piece of gold, a piece of iron. The talk of genus and individual, or, as one also says, of universal object and individual, thus seems to be different in these two levels or, let us provisionally say, domains of objects (GV, 16).

It follows that the difference between the two domains, as Daniele Nuccilli aptly observes, lies in the fact that “when one focuses on the ‘what’ of an object of use, whether it is a cup, a table, or a chair, what emerges before the spiritual gaze is the concept that grasps the meaning of the thing-for and the meaning-context in which it is embedded, beyond the matter of which it is composed,”³⁴ while the same cannot be said, in Husserlian terms, of the naturalistic domain of matter.

The same applies to the persons of the surrounding spiritual world, those whom the ego immediately recognizes as its “companions,” not “as opposed objects but as counter-subjects who live ‘with’ one another, who converse and are related to one another, actually or potentially, in acts of love and counter-love, of hate and counter-hate, of confidence and reciprocated confidence, etc.”³⁵ These are the individuals to whom one approaches to speak, to whom one writes letters, but also those whose lives one follows through newspapers. Once again, one cannot fail to recall Schapp’s claim that every psychic act – whether affective, such as pleasure, joy, sorrow, love, and hatred, or volitional, such as promises, commands, renunciations, pardons, and decisions – “can only appear within the context of a story. It cannot be detached

34) Nuccilli, *The Character of Things*, 121.

35) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 204.

from stories and has its being only in stories” (GV, 149). These stories may be the closest ones, in which the individual is co-entangled with friends, or more distant, universal narratives, in which each person is co-entangled as part of the same humanity. Indeed, just as “the degree of extension of the ‘we’ depends on the extent of co-entanglement,”³⁶ so too does the shared spiritual world, the world of social subjectivity of which the spiritual ego is part, extend “as far as actual and possible personal ties do.”³⁷

Considering the above, it cannot fail to be noticed that the spiritual world, whose grammatical subject is the personal ego, is the very same world in which Schapp’s subject is always co-entangled with others. Taking this into account, it seems more accurate to argue that the relationship between phenomenology and the philosophy of stories should not be conceived as a rupture, but rather as a shift in perspective, or, in Husserlian terms, a change of attitude. Schapp himself, as we have seen, frequently refers to different levels from which things can be considered. It follows that if one wishes to shed light on the narrative constitution of the human being within the interweaving of stories in which he is always already co-entangled, the point of departure cannot be the natural attitude, but must be the personalistic attitude. In conclusion, it is the ego of the spiritual world that enables the transition to the co-entangled ego, functioning as a bridge that spans the apparent abyss between Husserlian phenomenology and Schapp’s new philosophy of stories.

3. Narrativity and Phenomenology of Social Sciences

The conclusion reached does not seek to negate the evident differences between Schapp and Husserl, which have been carefully examined, but rather aims to narrow, so to speak, the conceptual distance that appears to separate their respective approaches. Even granting this, one point demands further emphasis: the issue at stake is neither primarily which ego constitutes the point of departure, nor simply a matter of a shift in perspective. Rather, it concerns a transformation of the fundamental question at the core of the two philosophical projects and of what is intended to be accomplished through it. It is therefore appropriate to recall once again the words of Liebsch:

36) Schapp, *Reti di storie*, 19.

37) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 205.

By drawing attention to our being entangled in stories, Schapp bursts the framework of the Cartesian project that still remains wholly binding for Husserl. While this project, in its innumerable paraphrases of the *cogito*, revolved around the core question of what we are – whether a *res cogitans* or a transcendental ego manifesting itself as evident self-giveness in time, which for Husserl could by no means be a “constituent part” of the world – and how indubitable certainty could be grounded upon this, Schapp instead raises the question of *who* (our emphasis) we are, as beings unavoidably entangled in our own and others’ stories, that is, as standing in a historical relation to others, whom we can at best trust or believe.³⁸

Thus, the radical shift, as Liebsch emphasizes, lies in Schapp’s philosophy of stories relinquishing the claim to be a first philosophy, a role traditionally aspired to by Husserlian phenomenology. In doing so, however, Liebsch continues:

The very sense of a First Philosophy is indirectly but fundamentally called into question, insofar as a highly consequential rival emerges in relation to this question. This rivalry does not take the form of a purely theoretical problem of self-knowledge, but rather that of a radical practical crisis, one that renders any reliance on oneself and on others deeply problematic. No philosophical theoreticism in the tradition of a First Philosophy can adequately respond to this eminent historical challenge; at most, such a response can be expected from a social philosophy that takes our historical entanglement seriously without, however, delivering us over to it in a fatally total way.³⁹

The question that now arises is whether a social philosophy of this kind can exist, one capable of addressing the challenge at hand, that is, of approaching it from the perspective of entanglement without simultaneously claiming to be a first philosophy. Without pretending to offer a definitive answer, the suggestion is that the roots of such a philosophy can already be traced in the work of Alfred Schütz. This latter indeed

38) Liebsch, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, 47.

39) *Ibid.*, 47–48.

appears to have succeeded in combining Husserlian phenomenology, while nevertheless dissolving the so-called *Cartesian project* that bound Husserl, taking instead as his starting point “a more practical world, in which subjects act without thinking that it could be different from how it appears in everyday life, and which each individual immediately identifies as intersubjective and common, in its practicality, not in the transcendental sphere of the ego.”⁴⁰ It is precisely from this social world that, for Schütz, “orientation toward the other and a common ‘we’ can take shape,”⁴¹ that is, the dimension – using Schapp’s terms – of co-entanglement and the we-story (*Wir-Geschichte*) grounded therein. By virtue of the fact that this intersubjective social world is immediately experienced as meaningful, insofar as it “is not created out of merely material objects – but also includes – all the meaning-strata which transform natural things into cultural objects, human bodies into fellow-men, and the movements of fellow-men into acts, gestures, and communications”⁴² – and insofar as it recognizes from the outset the narrative constitution underlying the formation of human identity and sociality, the social phenomenology inaugurated by Schütz – while deeply indebted to Husserl – appears particularly well suited to respond to these concerns.

4. Concluding Remarks

We began by emphasizing the differences in the starting points of the two philosophical projects, Husserlian phenomenology and Schapp’s philosophy of stories, highlighting how they rest on fundamentally different claims: on the one hand, the aim of establishing a first philosophy, a rigorous science that, as such, investigates the essential constitution of experience and its correlates in order to return to it; on the other, the goal of articulating the ineliminable existential condition of human beings within the dimension of entanglement and co-entanglement. Thus, despite the emerging affinities, the pure ego has been contrasted with the entangled ego. At the same time, however, and regardless of these significant differences, an attempt has been made to show that a point of mediation between the two projects can be established through the realiza-

40) Bifulco and Pecchinenda, *Narration in the Phenomenology of the Social Sciences*, 44.

41) Ibid.

42) Schütz and Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, 5.

tion of the pure ego, its becoming real in the act of a realizing apprehension. And if it is true that the ego is real insofar as it is understood as a body, that is, as matter, it is equally true that this alone is not sufficient, since it constantly points beyond to another kind of reality, the one Husserl defines as the “human subject,” that is, the person.

But as long as “I do not insert him in the association of persons with reference to which we are subjects of a common surrounding world, but instead take him as a mere annex of natural objects, which are mere things, and consequently take him as a mere thing himself,”⁴³ such a human subject cannot be encountered. Indeed, “each ego can, for himself and for others, become a person in the normal sense, a person in a personal association, only if comprehension brings about the relation to a common surrounding world.”⁴⁴ In other words, becoming a normal person requires engagement and interaction with others. Yet, as has been argued, this world of the human person – which Husserl defines as spiritual – is, with all its vitality of relations, precisely the world in which the ego is always co-entangled with others, and in which things primarily present themselves as things-for. In other words, it constitutes the intersubjective world of shared meanings in which human beings are always already co-entangled, and which comes forward through the spiritual gaze. This is precisely why the spiritual ego has been related to the co-entangled ego, conceived as the two poles that together bridge the apparent abyss between phenomenology and the philosophy of stories.

Yet Schapp, concerned with distancing his own project from those elements of Husserl’s philosophy perceived as incompatible, appears blind to what is in fact compatible, thereby committing the same error as “who sees everywhere only nature, nature in the sense of, and, as it were, through the eyes of, natural science, is precisely blind to the spiritual sphere, the special domain of the human sciences.”⁴⁵ In other words, by focusing on separating himself from phenomenological analyses aimed at uncovering essences – whose purpose is to clarify and distinguish the correlates of each attitude for theoretical reasons – Schapp risks overlooking that, in reality, the distinction between attitudes is never sharp, and one continuously slips from one attitude to another. Moreover, for Husserl, human beings do not experience the world from

43) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 200.

44) *Ibid.*, 201.

45) *Ibid.*, 200.

a purely naturalistic perspective, and even scientists, who are accustomed to perceiving nature everywhere through the lenses of their blinders of habit, are constantly aware that they are subjects, like all other persons within their surrounding world.

The difference, rather, lies in the fact that, for Husserl, both the body and the personal ego are equally real and therefore legitimate, whereas for Schapp only the gaze, which apprehends everything through the filter of stories in which one is always co-entangled with others, can be considered legitimate. The co-entangled ego, in this respect, “remains the only vantage point from which to observe the world and from which, through co-entanglement, the openness to historicity can be perceived as the locus of collectivity.”⁴⁶ For Husserl, by contrast, it is also fully legitimate to regard the human being as matter; instead:

It becomes an injustice only if we do not acknowledge at all that the naturalizing of persons and souls can allow us to recognize only certain relations of dependency of Objective existence and continuity which obtain precisely between the natural world of things and the personal world of spirits, insofar as both belong to the unity of the Objective spatio-temporal world of realities. Further, it is an injustice if we do not acknowledge that nevertheless spirits make possible and require still another and more significant mode of research precisely in this respect, that they have, as Ego- subjects, a being properly their own, that, as such, they are required for all matters and all research into these matters as the subjective counter-parts, and that they thus, in their intentional life, relate to the world in the form of their surrounding world.⁴⁷

In light of these considerations, without detracting from Schapp’s contribution – who, through the notion of “entanglement,” has given expression to the human condition in which we all find ourselves – although Husserl does not explicitly address entanglement and co-entanglement within stories, it can be concluded that he does not in any way deny the narrative constitution of man as a subject, understood as a person of his own spiritual world.

46) Schapp, *Reti di storie*, 20.

47) Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Second Book, 200.

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