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THE EGO AS SUBSTRATE OF HABITUALITIES: EDMUND HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE HABITUAL SELF

abstract

Husserl's phenomenology offers a very complex treatment of the full conscious person as constituted out of its capacities and habitualities. Human existence develops itself habitually through its intentional meaningful practices both individually and communally. Habit can be found at all levels in the constitution of meaningfulness (Sinnhaftigkeit), from the lowest level of passivity, through perceptual experience, to the formation of the ego itself, and outwards to the development of intersubjective society with its history and tradition, to include finally the whole sense of the harmonious course of worldly life. Husserl uses a range of terms to express his concept of habit including: Habitus, Habitualität, Gewohnheit, das Habituelle, Habe, Besitz, Sitte, and even Tradition. Husserl's account deeply influenced Ortega Y Gasset, Alfred Schutz, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. This paper will give an overall analysis of Husserl's conception of the habitual self.

keywords

Husserl, phenomenology, habit, self, sociality, tradition

Each individual has his or her habits.

(*Jedes Individuum hat seine Gewohnheiten*, Husserl, Hua XIV, p. 230).

The Ego as Substrate of Habitualities.

(*Das Ich als Substrat von Habitualitäten*, *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl, Hua I, §32, p. 100/66.)¹

1. The Genetic Phenomenology of Habituality

In general, Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is an extraordinarily rich source of insights and analyses concerning the nature of the self and its relation with others approached from the phenomenological point of view, that is, from the point of view of intentional sense-making by and between conscious subjects. His phenomenological investigations over many years explore the rich and multi-layered life of intentional consciousness and experience from the lowest levels of what might be described as a kind of Humean "pre-egoic" passive association, where experiences hang together and are clustered in an orderly harmonious way temporally, prior to explicit conscious organization, right through the formation of a stable and abiding self with its capacities and abilities and then again, on to the highest level of cultural cooperation, living together (*Mitleben*) and "being-with-one-another" (*Ineinandersein*) in what he terms the "life of spirit" (*Geistesleben*). In *Cartesian Meditations* § 34 Husserl locates this discussion of the habitual ego within a new area of phenomenology which he names "genetic phenomenology":

With the doctrine of the Ego as pole of his acts and substrate of habitualities, we have already touched on the problems of phenomenological genesis and done so at a significant point. Thus we have touched the level of genetic phenomenology. (Hua I, § 34, p. 103/69)

Husserl even speaks of the possibility of an overall genetic "phenomenology of habitualities" (*Phänomenologie der Habitualitäten*) (Hua XV, p. xxxviii)².

The mature Husserl always thinks of individual conscious selves as being in entangled correlations with other selves in what he somewhat misleadingly terms "empathy" (*Einfühlung*) and its cognates, *Miterleben* ("co-experiencing"), *Nacherleben* ("reliving"), *Einempfindung* ("sensing-in"), and *Hineinversetzen* ("projection" or "introjection")³. Indeed, one could say, without exaggeration, that Husserl's mature phenomenology is primarily a phenomenology of communal and intersubjective life, a phenomenology of spirit that effectively re-invents Hegel although with any pretense at dialectical progression but with a sense of appearance, negation, cancellation and sublation (*Aufhebung*), as we shall see.

1 Hereafter cited as Hua I with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

2 Hereafter cited as Hua XV.

3 See Moran (2004).

2. Habit as an Operative Concept

Habit is one of Husserl's operative concepts, concepts on which he does not offer an explicit methodological reflection. Moreover, Husserl's analyses of habituality do not appear frequently in his published works, but may be found scattered through the *Nachlass*, especially in the volumes on intersubjectivity (Hua XIII, XIV and XV) as well as in *Ideas II* (Hua IV)⁴. For instance, Husserl's *Ideas I* (Hua III/1) mentions "*Habitus*" only once at § 96 (Hua III/1 224), where Husserl speaks approvingly of the phenomenological "habit of inner freedom". Indeed, the term *Habitus* does not appear at all in the *Crisis of European Sciences*⁵ although *Habitualität* occurs about a dozen times. The term *Gewohnheit* has only a few occurrences there. In terms of the works published in his own lifetime, Husserl's readers initially encountered the concept of "habit" and "habituality" primarily through a few key references in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Hua I, especially §27, and §32) and later in *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl 1938). *Habitus* appears only twice in the *Cartesian Meditations* although the term *Habitualität* is somewhat more frequently found.

Habit is discussed quite frequently in the posthumously published Husserliana volumes such as *Ideas II* (Hua volume IV, especially §§29 and 56), Husserliana volumes XIV and XV on intersubjectivity, *Phenomenological Psychology*⁶ lectures of 1925 (Hua IX), and in Husserliana volume XI on passive synthesis⁷. Husserl frequently employs the phrase "abilities and dispositions" (*Vermögen und Habitualitäten*). This in his *Phenomenological Psychology* lectures (1925), he speaks of the personal ego as having various "abilities and habitualities" (Hua IX, p. 136; see also §41, p. 206, where he speaks of the 'ego as a pole of activities and habitualities', [*Das Ich als Pol der Aktivitäten und Habitualitäten*])⁸. Habituality, in this sense, usually combined with human personal abilities and activities to form what Husserl calls, in *Cartesian Meditations* and elsewhere, an "overall personal style" (*Stil*).

Central to Husserl's analyses of spirit is his understanding of habitual life in the familiar world. This is always a life where meanings are encountered or lived

4 Hereafter cited as Hua IV with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

5 Hereafter cited as Hua VI with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

6 Hereafter cited as Hua IX with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

7 Hereafter cited as Hua XI with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

8 He speaks positively of the "personal subject of habits" (Hua IX, p. 286). Similarly, in *Crisis of European Sciences* Husserl speaks of the specific "activity and habituality of the functioning ego" (*Aktivität und Habitualität fungierenden Ich*) (Hua VI, p. 109); and of the "peculiarities of human life and human habitualities" (Hua VI, p. 141n). Every ego has to be considered as an ego pole of acts and habitualities (*als Ichpol seiner Akte und Habitualitäten und Vermögen*) (Hua VI, p. 187).

through as “always already there” (*immer schon da*) or “pregiven” (*vorgegeben*). The everyday world of experience has a deep degree of stability, commonality, normality, familiarity, and even comfort. It is the common context and horizon for our collective concerns. It is indeed both constituted out of and forms the intentional counterpart to our habitual lives. In this regard, Husserl has a phenomenology of the self in everyday life, even if, because of the demands of his transcendental point of view, he methodically suspends commitment to this everyday life through the transcendental *epochē*. Precisely because everyday life has a pregiven, taken-for-granted character, it is invisible in the analyses of the positive sciences. The operations of this hidden intentionality need to be made visible and Husserl gradually realized this required a major suspension of our naïve worldly-commitment or *Seinsglaube*, belief-in-being. For Husserl, everyday life is natural life, life in the natural attitude. This is a life lived in obscurity, the unexamined life, life lived according to everyday habituality, life lived “with blinders on” as Husserl often says.

Husserl’s phenomenology of habitual life discovers habit as present at all levels of human behavior from the lower unconscious instincts and drives (that have their own peculiar individuality or idiosyncrasy), bodily motility right up to the level of autonomous rational life in culture⁹. Thus he speaks not just of bodily habits or traits of character but of peculiar and abiding “habits of thought” (*Denkgewohnheiten*) (Hua IX, §24, p. 142¹⁰; and Hua III/1¹¹, p. 5/xix, see also §108). These habits of thought include scientific habits of thinking (Hua III/1, §33) that are accepted without question and that it is the function of the transcendental *epochē* to disrupt and thereby expose.

The life of habit, what Husserl often simply abbreviates to the Latinate term *Habitus*, moreover, is not just a matter of intellectual attitude or *conviction* (*Überzeugung*), it can also be a matter of perceptual tendencies, desires, feelings, emotions, even peculiar moods. Husserl recognizes the complex character of our “feelings” (*Gefühle*), as well as our intertwined emotional and affective “states” (*Zustände*), acts of empathy, sympathy, love, fellow feeling, and so on, as well as acts of willing (important for our ethical lives). In this sense, personal love, for Husserl is described as a “lasting habitus” (*dauernder Habitus*) (Hua XIV, p. 172). All of these can have a habitual character, a particular style of being lived through, and as a result they can be sedimented into layers that encrust the psyche and form the “abiding style of the ego” (*der bleibende Stil des Ich*) (Hua XIII, p. 400).

9 For a fuller treatment of the classical treatments of habit (Aristotle, Hume) as well as for a discussion of Husserl’s influence on Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu, and others, see Moran (2011).

10 See also Hua IX, §5, p. 55, where Husserl speaks of the “habits [*Gewohnheiten*] of natural scientific thinking”.

11 Hereafter cited as Hua III/1 with page numbers from the German text followed by those of the English translation.

Husserl employs a wide range of terms to express his concept of habit and the habitual, including: *Gewohnheit*¹², *Habitus*¹³, *Habitualität*, *das Habituelle* (Hua XIV, p. 195). Occasionally, he even uses the Germanized version of the Greek *Hexis* (Hua XIII, p. 400; Hua XIV xxiv) and he often speaks quite generally of “possession” (*Besitz*), or “having” (*Habe*, Hua XIII, p. 400), of a skill, a routine, or a decision, a point of view, anything that can become literally incorporated in one’s body or confirmed as an abiding trait in one’s character—even one that perhaps is now cancelled out¹⁴. Most frequently, Husserl deploys adjectives (*gewohnheitsmäßig*, *habituell*) that connote the “habitual”. Generally speaking, and I am really basing this on my own reading of the Husserliana volumes, Husserl employs the familiar German term *Gewohnheit* to refer specifically to habits of thought, ways of thinking influenced by science, psychology and so on (see also Hua VI, p. 145). In line with his overall discussion of habit and of human capacities, Husserl deploys a number of words including “dispositions” (*Dispositionen*), and “abilities” (*Vermögen*). Habit is thereby intimately connected with powers, capacities, disposition, the ability to exercise a skill, execute routines, embody successfully a range of activities, such as playing a musical instrument, dancing, driving, reading, and so on. Habit, for Husserl, is also connected with higher activities of the ego involving knowledge, moral practical wisdom and the formation of a stable character, as well as the overall achievement of a stable intersubjective life with others. In this regard, Husserl says that the word ‘*Sitte*’ (custom) summarizes this idea of habitual action and behavior in the social sphere (Hua XIV, p. 230)¹⁵. Husserl is deeply aware of and attempts at least to sketch in outline, in his research manuscripts, as we shall see, some of the collective social practices that contribute to the constitution of custom and culture. In this regard, human existence involves not just bodily, psychic and personal habits of the individual but more collective habitual states such as the use of language, involvement in games and social practices, and the overall capacity to belong to a “sociality” (*Sozialität*), the capacity to recognize, appreciate and follow the norms and values of one’s culture—all these are outcomes of habituality. It is through habituality that one becomes acculturated and can live in attunement with cultural norms. Nevertheless habituality is not a

12 The term “*Gewohnheit*,” for instance, does not occur at all in *Cartesian Meditations*.

13 The Latin term *Habitus* is found in ordinary German with the meaning of “manner” in the sense of mannerism, e.g. in phrases such as “he has an odd manner” (*Er hat einen komischen Habitus*).

14 On Husserl’s use of the word *Habe* and its etymological connection with “*habitus*”, see Cairns (1976), p. 7.

15 Hua XIV, p. 230: “Jedes Individuum hat seine Gewohnheiten. Wie steht individuelle Gewohnheit und bleibende Entschiedenheit (bleibende Urteile, Werte, Entschlüsse für das Individuum)? Sitte ist ein Titel für sozial gewohnheitsmäßige Handlungen, ebenso hat die Sprache ihre sozial gewohnheitsmäßige grammatische Form, und zu allem sozial Gewohnheitsmäßigen gehört ein Sollen, das des ‘Üblichen,’ des Normalen, sich Gehörenden. Aber Wissenschaft und Kunst? Ist Sitte an sich schon Kultur? Sie kann in Kultur genommen werden, möchte man sagen.”

set of blind or unconscious processes, it is intentional through and through.

3.
The Starting
Point: The
Psychic
Subject as a
Unified Flow of
Experiences

Especially in his *Ideas II*, Husserl considers the constitution of the human being, progressively, from a number of standpoints that he normally divides into the physical (the purely natural), the psychical and the spiritual. Human beings as physically embodied belong to nature and are subject to natural laws, causation, and so on. But human beings are also psychophysical, living organisms or what Husserl calls *Leibkörper* that have animation, motility and so on, as directed by psychic states and acts. Human beings are also personal subjects who interact on the “spiritual” or cultural plane.

According to Husserl, *habit*, along with association, memory, and so on, belongs to the very essence of the “real psychic subject” (Hua IV, §30), which is treated as a subject of properties and not to be construed as identical with the “pure ego” (*das reine Ich*). According to Husserl, to this psychic subject belong every personal properly, the intellectual character of the human individual and the totality of his or her intellectual dispositions, his/her affective character, practical character, every one of his/her spiritual capacities and aptitudes, mathematical talent, logical acumen, magnanimity, amiability, self-abnegation, etc. (Hua IV, p. 122/129). Following the older tradition of descriptive psychology, Husserl is happy to call this psychic subject “soul” (*Psyche*) in so far as it is understood as having a body but not being identical with its body.

The psychic subject is essentially and by its nature in constant flux, it cannot be considered – unlike strictly material objects—as a static entity with unchangeable properties:

Every lived experience leaves behind itself a wake of dispositions and creates something new as regards psychic reality [*Jedes Erlebnis hinterläßt Dispositionen und schafft in Hinsicht auf die seelische Realität Neues*]. Hence this reality itself is something constantly changing. (Hua IV, §32, p. 133/140)

Husserl always emphasizes the importance of thinking the psychic subject as a flow (*Fluß*) (Hua IV, p. 133) in its totality and interconnection with other subjects. Thus he writes:

Moreover, it has to be noted in this connection that what belongs to the *full* psychic unity as manifold [*als Mannigfaltiges*] (in analogy with the schema or the material thing) is the current *total state of consciousness*, whereas the singular, abstracted out, lived experiences are, in this respect, “states” [*Zustände*] of the soul in its fullness only

insofar as they fit within the total consciousness and are, in their total nexus [*Gesamtzusammenhang*], transitional points for particular avenues or manifestation. (Hua IV, §32, p. 133/141)

Human beings are layered and formed by their lived experiences. If we begin by considering the individual human being in its flowing life of consciousness, there is a corporeal or bodily *habitus* that invokes a person's overall 'bearing', 'form', i.e., how they physically present themselves. In this regard, Husserl speaks of a person's bodily *Habitus* (see Hua XIII, p. 76, for instance, where he criticizes the Munich psychologist Theodor Lipps' understanding of human bodily expressions and talks about expression as a "bodily habitus")¹⁶. Memories, skills, practical abilities are literally *incorporated* in the body, in the way we hold ourselves, move our bodies, walk, sit, eat, look weary, adopt a defeated air, and so on¹⁷. Some people have a more or less 'innate', 'natural' or 'given' sense of balance, an ability to feel their way through water when swimming, a joy in hearing sounds (Husserl speaks of this as belonging to sheer facticity, *Ideas* II §61, in that different people simply enjoy different kinds of sounds, colors and so on, i.e. one's favorite color), and so on. Training can build on and amplify these nature abilities and capacities. For Edith Stein, for instance, who follows Husserl in this regard, capacities can be strengthened through "habituation"¹⁸. One can practice sitting up straight, not slumping one's shoulders, and so on. Nevertheless, there is an extremely deep inalienable individuality to human experiencing. Each of us has a familiar gait or a specific tone of voice, set of facial expressions, even favorite strings of words.

Some babies just are attracted to certain sounds or colors; some prefer one kind of movement over another. Gradually distinctive tastes and inclinations in food, color, smell, taste, emerge, and these last through life. Husserl here speaks of certain attractive stimulus or allure (*Reiz*) that comes to prominence and elicits an individual response. Husserl even says: "We may even allow originally instinctive, drive related preferences" here (see Hua XI, p. 150/198). Each individual has his or her own "style" (*Stil*) (Hua IV §61), and indeed the natural world also runs along its own "total style" (*Gesamtstil*). To describe reality and human beings as running along in a harmonious course is not to see it as something automatic or mindless. Habit for Husserl is connected with rational deliberation and intellectual scrutiny but this is not its primary characteristic. The key characteristic of habit in Husserl's analysis is its

16 In this sense, certain gestures, facial expressions, mannerisms of various kinds exemplify an individual's style.

17 See for instance, Young (1990) and Sheets-Johnstone (2003).

18 Stein (1917), p. 56/51.

“lasting” or “continuous” (*dauernd*) character, the fact that it attaches to the ego and modifies it permanently.

There are, of course, *intellectual* habits as well as corporeal or bodily habits. Intellectual habits in particular are initiated by acts of the ego—specific position-takings or decisions. Habits need to be initiated. They also need to be ‘bedded down’ or burned in through practice and repetition. One swallow does not make a summer. Developing or changing a habit, moreover, may require deliberation and alert self-scrutiny. Giving up or resisting a habit, e.g. smoking, requires the development of *new habits*, new overriding and deflective routines. It also requires a certain second-order stance towards my first-order instincts, I experience a strong and unshakeable desire to smoke; at the same time, I perhaps desire to stop smoking; I desire to curb my desire to smoke. I stand in a judgment of negation in front of my compelling desire and hence it is now an altered desire. As Husserl writes in *Ideas II*:

[T]he personal Ego constitutes itself not only as a person determined by *drives* [...] but also as a *higher, autonomous, freely acting Ego*, in particular one guided by *rational motives* [...]. Habits are necessarily formed, just as much with regard to originally instinctive behavior [...] as with regard to free behavior. To yield to a drive establishes the drive to yield: habitually. Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by such a value-motive [...] and to resist these drives. (Hua IV, §59, p. 255/267; with translation change)

One can desire to fulfill, negate or enhance another desire. There are higher levels of self-awareness here. One can embrace a desire (the desire for another person, for instance) and make it not just a project (in the Sartrean sense) but as filled with the meaning of being a central characteristic of my own existence and character. Desires and stances towards them are all caught up in the complexities of meaning-investment or sense-constitution.

4. **Husserl on Convictions (Überzeugungen) and Their Sublation (Aufhebung)** The Fourth Cartesian Meditation contains an important Section (§32) entitled ‘The Ego as Substrate of Habitualities (*Das Ich als Substrat von Habitualitäten*)’ (Hua I, §32, p. 100/66) which treats of the formation of a stable ego through its habits. It is this Session that originally attracted the attention of Pierre Bourdieu, who went on to make a major theme of habit¹⁹. Here Husserl primarily talks about the manner in which a conscious decision (a freely performed act of judging, e.g. “I become thus and so

¹⁹ See Bourdieu (1990), pp. 52-65. See also Bourdieu (1985) and Bourdieu (1977).

decided”) can become sedimented down into a habitual property attaching to one’s character such that the original decision can even be forgotten. But nevertheless, it can be re-activated if I return to it again. Husserl writes:

[I]t is to be noted that this centering Ego is not an empty pole of identity, any more than any object is such. Rather, according to a law of “transcendental generation”, with every act emanating from him and having a new objective sense, he acquires a new abiding property. For example: If, in an act of judgment, I decide for the first time in favor of a being and a being-thus, the fleeting act passes; but from now on am abidingly the Ego who is thus and so decided, “I am of this conviction”. That, however, does not signify merely that I remember the act or can remember it later. This I can do, even if meanwhile I have “given up” my conviction. After cancellation [*Durchstreichung*] it is no longer my conviction; but it has remained abidingly my conviction up to then. As long as it is accepted by me, I can “return” [*zurückkommen*] to it repeatedly, and repeatedly find it as mine, habitually my own opinion or, correlatively, find myself as the Ego who is convinced, who, as the persisting Ego [*als verharrendes Ich*], is determined by this abiding habitus [*diesen bleibenden Habitus*] or state. (Hua I, §32, pp. 100-101/66-67).

This is not a new thought for Husserl. He says something very similar much earlier in his *Ideas II*:

If I acquire anew [*neu gewinne*] an old conviction, while executing the appropriate judgement, then the acquired conviction (a lasting acquisition [*ein bleibender Gewinn*]) “remains” [*verbleibt*] with me as long as I can assume it “again”, can bring it again to givenness for me in a new execution. I may also abandon the conviction, now rejecting the reasons for it, etc. Then again I can turn back to the “same” conviction, but in truth the conviction had not been the same throughout. Instead, I have two convictions, the second of which restores [*wiederherstellt*] the first after it has broken down [*niedergebrochen war*]. (Hua IV, p. 114/121)

These very interesting passages indicate how, for Husserl, transient episodes of belief actually can turn into stable and even unconsciously held convictions. Husserl is always interested in the way these convictions can be re-awoken, re-affirmed, or even cancelled or negated, yet, as he says in a way nothing gets lost. Thus, in a similarly most interesting and

important passage in *Experience and Judgment*, § 25, Husserl emphasizes that no experience is ephemeral but rather every leaves some kind of lasting “trace” (*Spur*). Even a conviction repudiated is still a conviction-that-once-was believed. This “trace” becomes accommodated into a habituality which eventually has the character of an “empty” practical possessing. These habitualities are precisely not memories; they lie somewhere deeper in the ego’s character itself. Indeed, they may even have been *forgotten as convictions*; certainly the original foundational moments, *Urstiftungen* that gave rise to them and inaugurated them can be forgotten. I may have forgotten what led me to my conviction or resentment. I cannot remember the incident that motivated me to dislike someone. Nevertheless, a new sense or meaning has been acquired, an object (substrate) is perceived with certain properties (explications). Thus he writes:

No apprehension is merely momentary and ephemeral. To be sure, as this lived experience of the apprehension of a substrate and an explicate, it has, like every lived experience, its mode of original emergence in the now, to which is adjoined its progressive sinking [*Herabsinken*] into corresponding non-original modes: retentional reverberation and, finally, submersion [*Versinken*] into the totally empty, dead past [*leere, unlebendige Vergangenheit*]. This lived experience itself, and the objective moment constituted in it, may become “forgotten”; but for all this, it in no way disappears without a trace [*spurlos*]; it has merely become latent. With regard to what has been constituted in it, it is a *possession in the form of a habitus* [*ein habitueller Besitz*] ready at any time to be awakened anew by an active association [...]. The object has incorporated into itself the forms of sense [*Sinnesgestalten*] originally constituted in the acts of explication by virtue of a knowledge in the form of a habitus [*als habituelles Wissen*]. (Husserl 1938, §25)²⁰

In all of these discussions Husserl has most interesting things to say about the peculiar process that he calls *Durchstreichung*—a term more usually associated with Heidegger and by Derrida. The concept of *Durchstreichung*, crossing-out or cancellation, is actually quite common in Husserl (see Hua XIII, p. 367; Hua XIV, pp. 124; 142, 153, etc.). For Husserl, moreover, in relation to intentional life, what is cancelled and crossed out is still retained as that which is crossed out. I can say that I used to have such and such a conviction but then I abandoned it. Nevertheless, I am now both the person

²⁰ Husserl (1938), §25, p. 137/122.

who (a) had the conviction (b) cancelled it and now (c) hold a different perhaps opposite conviction. One never really leaves anything behind in the sphere of the person; everything is taken up and carried on even in a cancelled or modified manner. Everything is *aufgehoben*, to invoke Hegel's term that is often translated as "cancelled" or "sublated" but which Cairns renders as "revoked". Indeed Husserl uses this exact term when he writes in *Cartesian Meditations*:

If it aims at a terminating deed, it is not "revoked" [*aufgehoben*] by the deed that fulfils it; in the mode characteristic of fulfilled decision it continues to be accepted: "I continue to stand by my deed". [*Tat gerichtet, so ist er durch diese Erfüllung nicht etwa aufgehoben, im Modus der Erfüllung gilt er weiter — ich stehe weiter zu meiner Tat.*] (Hua I, §32, p. 101/67)

In this recognition of cancellation, modification, taking-up-again, and re-validation, Husserl thinks of the formation of the ego almost like an onion. It is made up of layers that cover and include lower layers, except that the layers interact and modify each other. One could also use the analogy of a snowball rolling downhill and taking up new layers of snow that it integrates into itself. When the self makes a decision, this decision attaches itself to and marks out the self as a whole. The self is permanently changed or marked even by the things it abandons and rejects. Through these indelible convictions, I have the constituted sense of being a "fixed and abiding personal ego [*als stehendes und bleibendes personales Ich*]" (Hua I, §32, p. 101/67).

Decisions and beliefs form into convictions and these convictions become sedimented into dispositions or even marks of character. These convictions become possessions or "havings" of an ego. Having a conviction is not at all the same as *remembering* that one once decided something. A conviction indicates a more permanent psychic state; it is a mark of one's character. Furthermore, what was decided can be returned to and *reactivated* without having to run through the associated judgments of evidence. As Husserl puts it in his *Intersubjectivity* volume *Husserliana XIV*:

I am not only an actual but I am also a habitual ego, and habituality signifies a certain egoic possibility, an "I can" or "I could", or "I used to be able to", and this being-able-to become actual refers to actual ego-experiences, even an actualization of ability. In a word, I am (and without this there would be no I, I can not think of myself otherwise),

an ego of abilities (Hua XIV, p. 378, my translation)²¹

Notice that Husserl includes “I used to be able to”. In other words, we retain past achievements in sedimented form: I used to be able to run a five-minute mile or whatever. Even if I can no longer do it, I remain the person who could do it at one time.

Like Max Scheler, who discusses the stratification of our emotional life in his *Formalism in Ethics* (1913), Husserl is deeply aware that our whole character with its convictions, values and emotional stances are layered over on each other in very complex intertwined ways. To offer one example, in *Ideas II*, Husserl writes with some subtlety about the attitude involved in nursing a grudging or harboring a resentment:

We still need to examine more closely how the persistence [*Verbleiben*] of “the” lived experience is to be understood. I have a lasting conviction, or I “nurse a grudge” [*Ich “hege einen Groll”*]. At different times I do have different lived experiences of the grudge (or of the judgment), yet it is only “the” grudge coming again to given ness; it is a lasting grudge [*ein bleibender Groll*] (or a lasting conviction). The judgment of determinate content as lived experience lasts a while (immanent duration) and then is irretrievably gone. A new lived experience of the same content can subsequently emerge—but not the same lived experience. It may emerge in such a way, however, that it is only the former conviction returning again, the former conviction that had been carried out earlier and is now again being carried out, but it is the one lasting conviction, the one I call mine. (Hua IV, p. 113/120)

There are very complex structures of identity in question here. What constitutes the identity of a mental state? How do we know that the grudge or resentment is the *same* one? Husserl puts quotation marks around “the” lived experience. In one sense, each experience occupies a unique place in the temporal flow of conscious processes, but we also have a sense of the *same* experience returning. I constitute the feeling as the *same* feeling as before. Husserl is aware that we can constitute a feeling or a conviction in different ways. Thus people can re-awaken an old anger and again be

21 The German reads: “Ich bin aber nicht <nur> aktuelles, sondern auch habituelles Ich, und die Habitualität bezeichnet eine gewisse ichliche Möglichkeit, ein ‘ich kann,’ ‘ich könnte,’ ‘ich hätte können,’ und das Können wieder sich verwirklichend weist hin auf Ichaktualitäten, auf aktuelle Icherlebnisse, eben als Verwirklichungen des Könnens. Mit einem Worte, ich bin (und ohne das wäre ich kein Ich, ich kann mich nicht anders denken) ein Ich der Vermögen.”

angry or one could revisit the anger with a degree of embarrassment or discomfort. Or I could get trapped in reliving the same old emotion over and over again without resolving it, cancelling or sublating it. Husserl here is developing a phenomenology that could contribute greatly to psychological or psychoanalytical discourse. Of course, we cannot go into it here, but the inner temporality of the emotion is at stake here. Some people know when to let go of a grief, grudge, or an anger; others live it in a manner which is characterized by what Kierkegaard called repetition. There is no growth only going back over and over the same grievance. Managing the temporality of emotional life could call for a deep phenomenology of the inner temporality of habit.

As we have seen, Husserl recognizes that convictions, decisions, etc., attach to the ego and give it a lasting, permanent character despite the flow. *Habitus* has to be understood as an enduring “state” whereby I can be said, in Husserl’s language, to “abide” by my decision. The decision *inhabits* or *informs* me. Through these acquired decisions that become convictions I constitute myself as a stable and abiding ego, someone with, Husserl says, “a personal character” (Hua I, §32, p. 101/67). Overall, as Husserl writes in his *Intersubjectivity* writings, the ego is stabilized by its fixed habits and possessions:

I with my firm habitus, with determinate habits of self-having, acting, thinking and speaking, and so on. [*Ich mit seinem festen Habitus, mit bestimmten Gewohnheiten des Sich-gehobens, Wirkens, des Denkens und Redens, usw.*] (Hua XIII, p. 244)

Husserl often compares the formation of a stable sense of ego with the perceptual formation of a stable sense of the perceived object. In perception, we glimpse only profiles and adumbrations (*Abschattungen*) nevertheless we constitute the perceived object as having a stable existence independent from our perceivings. Similarly in rememberings or in forming of resentments or grudges there is the noetic dimension and also the noematic dimension (the grudge itself, Hua IV, p. 115). In many of his analyses Husserl is primarily interested in what one might call the noematic dimension of the experience—what makes a particular habit or disposition the same one as before. But at other times he is interested in the noetic dimension, how the grieving or grudging is constituted as such, how it relates to the ego, and so on. Let us now consider how habit is related to the concept of “attitude” (*Einstellung*).

4.
Habit as Mind
Set or Attitude
(*Einstellung*)

In an even larger sense, habit is also understood by Husserl as the manner in which an overall ‘attitude’ or ‘stance’ or ‘collective mindset’ (*Einstellung*) is lived through. *Einstellung* is a term that Husserl took from the psychological tradition but he gave it a unique sense. There are any number of attitudes that humans can freely adopt but he usually talks about the natural attitude and the personalistic attitude (see Hua IV, §62). Elsewhere he talks about “the subjective attitude” (*die subjective Einstellung*) Hua XIII, p. 91). In the 1935 *Vienna Lecture* Husserl defines an attitude as a style of life:

[A] habitually fixed style of willing life comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style, comprising the ultimate ends, the cultural accomplishments whose total style is thereby determined (Hua VI, p. 326/280).

Interestingly, “habit” in terms of an overall attitudinal stance is discussed by Husserl already in his 1910/1911 *Logos* essay “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science”²². There, Husserl’s writes of ‘habitus’ (he uses both terms: *Habitus* and *Gewohnheit*) as an overall disposition of, for instance, a natural scientific researcher:

In keeping with their respective habits of interpretation [*herrschenden Auffassungsgewohnheiten*], the natural scientist is inclined to regard everything as nature, whereas the investigator in the human sciences is inclined to regard everything as spirit, as a historical construct, and thus both thereby misinterpret whatever cannot be so regarded. (PRS, p. 253/294/Hua XXV, pp. 8-9)

This essay is one of the key texts that introduces the idea of the natural attitude – which of course gets its canonical formulation in *Ideas I* §27. In “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science” he writes

It is not easy for us to overcome the primeval habit [*die urwüchsige Gewohnheit*] of living and thinking in the naturalistic attitude and thus of naturalistically falsifying the psychical. (PRS, p. 271/314/Hua XXV, p. 31)

And again:

²² Hereafter cited as ‘PRS’ with English pagination followed by pagination of the German original and then the pagination of the German edition in the Husserliana series.

Experience as personal habitus is the precipitation of acts of natural, experiential position-taking that have occurred in the course of life [Erfahrung als persönlicher Habitus ist der Niederschlag der im Ablauf des Lebens vorangegangenen Akte natürlicher erfahrender Stellungnahme]. This habitus is essentially conditioned by the way in which the personality, as this particular individuality, is motivated by acts of its own experience and no less by the way in which it takes in foreign and transmitted experiences by approving of or rejecting them. (PRS p. 284/329/ Hua XXV, p. 48)

There is, furthermore, a difference between the habit (*Habitus*) of the natural human in his or her daily living and that of the phenomenologist. The mature Husserl has a sense of habitus as forming an essential part of the character or attitude of natural life and also of expressing the self-consciously adopted stance of the phenomenologist. Husserl regularly speaks of the “theoretical habitus” (Hua XXVIII, p. 402) of the scientist and philosopher and even of the “habitus of the *epochē*” (Hua XIII, p. 208). In a supplement written around 1924 to the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Husserliana volume XIII), Husserl writes:

The *habitus* of the phenomenological *epochē* is a thematic *habitus*, for the sake of obtaining certain themes, the discoveries of theoretical and practical truths, and to obtain a certain purely self-contained system of knowledge. This thematic *habitus*, however, excludes to a certain extent the *habitus* of positivity. Only in its being closed off to the latter does it lead to the self-contained unity of phenomenology as “first” philosophy, the science of transcendental pure subjectivity²³.

He contrasts the ‘phenomenological habitus’ of personal self-observation to the more usual habitus of anonymous and unquestioned living in the natural attitude. In this sense, *habitus* expresses the manner in which stance-taking is informed by a certain discipline or practice of viewing and considering. In the phenomenological reduction, the habitual survives but

23 See Husserl (2006), p. 123; Hua XIII, p. 208: “Der Habitus der phänomenologischen Epoche ist ein thematischer Habitus, um gewisse Themen, Wahrheitserkenntnisse, theoretische und praktische, zu gewinnen und ein gewisses rein in sich geschlossenes Erkenntnisssystem. Dieser thematische Habitus schliesst zwar in gewisser Weise den der Positivität aus : nur in seiner Abgeschlossenheit gegen den letzteren führt er zur abgeschlossenen Einheit einer Phänomenologie als der ‘Ersten’ Philosophie, als der Wissenschaft von der transzendental reinen Subjektivität.”

in altered form. As Husserl puts it in his *Intersubjectivity* volume XIV:

But through the phenomenological reduction, I put the world out of validity, only my world-experiencing, my world-believing, my world-vouching, my corresponding habituality and so on, remain available but now as purely subjective. (Hua XIV, p. 399, my translation)²⁴

The key point is that Husserl believes that human beings have the capacity not just to live within certain overall attitudes but to alter them through an act of will. Attitudes can be changed (*Einstellungwechsel*) or altered or switched (*Einstellungsänderung*). As a result of these alterations of attitude, new objectivities come to light. This is the key to Husserl's "correlationism". Let us now turn from the individual to the social.

5. **Social Habituality**
(*Gemeinschaftshabitualität*),
Custom and
'Tradition'

As we have been insisting, Husserl talks of habituality not just in relation to the formation of an individual person and his or her character but also in relation to the social and cultural spheres, the sphere of "spirit" (*Geist*). Husserl often speaks of *Geist* to mean generally culture. He talks of *Gemeingeist* (Hua XIII, p. 92) which means literally "common spirit" but which in ordinary German has something more of the meaning "common sense". Already in 1910, Husserl is emphasizing that human beings are not just beings in the natural world, but seen from the right attitude also spirits, belonging to the "world of spirit" (*Geisteswelt*). He writes:

All lived bodies are not only bearers of sensations, etc., and "organs" of the mind, but also are "expressions" of the mind and of the life of the mind, and as such they are bearers of significance; they are beaers of meaning for all interpretations, which is the condition of the possibility of social life, being the life of the community²⁵.

In this regard, in a text from 1921/1922, Husserl speaks not only of the habituality that belongs to the "single ego" (*Einzel-Ich*), but also of "a social habituality" (*eine Gemeinschaftshabitualität*), which may also be called

24 See Hua XIV, p. 399: "Aber durch phänomenologische Reduktion setze ich die Welt ausser Geltung, nur mein Welterfahren, mein Weltglauben, -ausweisen, meine entsprechende Habitualität usw. bleibt erhalten, eben als rein Subjektives".

25 Husserl (2006), pp. 168-69; Hua XIII, p. 93. The German reads: "Alle Leiber sind nicht nur Träger von Empfindungen etc. und 'Organe' des Geistes, sie sind 'Ausdrücke' des Geistes und Geisteslebens und als solche sind sie Bedeutungsträger, Bedeutungsträger in jeder Eindeutung, die Bedingung der Möglichkeit des sozialen Lebens als eines Gemeinschaftslebens ist."

a“tradition” (*eine Tradition*, Hua XIV 230)²⁶. Husserl recognizes that both individuals and social and ethnic groupings have their own habitus. Thus he writes about shared physical similarities: “we count races [*Rasse*] in this way in so far as the commonality of outer physical habitus goes hand in hand with social characteristics” (Hua XIV, p. 183)²⁷. We recognize people on the basis of familiar patterns, family resemblances (including physical traits), social typicalities, and so on, precisely those schemata, sometimes called “stereotypes” (not necessarily in a prejudicial sense) by psychologists and “types” (*Type*) by Husserl, Weber and Schutz. In *Ideas II*, Husserl writes: “Personal life manifests a typicality, and each personal life manifests a different one” (Hua IV, p. 271/284). I come to understand others initially through these types—what kind of typical motivations are at play, and so on. Husserl speaks about the self-constitution of the ego but it is important to stress that the ego does not constitute itself solely through active stance-taking (*Stellungnahme*) and being a self-reflective *cogito*. The ego constitutes itself in the unity of a history and hence it is understood as living a life. The ego arises out of ‘life’:

I am the subject of my life, and the subject develops by living; what it primarily experiences is not itself, but instead it constitutes objects of nature, goods, instruments, etc. What it primarily forms and structures as active is not itself but things for work. The Ego does not originally arise out of experience—in the sense of an associative apperception in which are constituted unities of manifolds of a nexus—but out of life (it is what it is not *for* the Ego, but it is itself the ego). (Hua IV, §58, p. 252/264)²⁸.

Husserl is describing a dynamic conception of selfhood lived out through

26 Hua XIV, p. 230 (1921/1922): “Verflechtung des Einzel-Ich und seiner Positionalität in die Gemeinschaft: Konstitution einer Gemeinschaftshabitualität, der Tradition, die immer schon besteht mit dem Momente der Stiftung der Gemeinschaft, da sie selbst nur ist durch Stiftung einer intersubjektiven Habitualität oder Tradition. Das Parallele natürlich für das Einzel-Ich, es ist nur in fortgesetzter Stiftung von Habitualität (seine individuelle Tradition) und [hat] also auch seinen wesensmässigen Anfang (schöpferischen Ansatzpunkt) in einer ersten Stiftung, durch sie es sich selbst als habituelles Ich stiftet.”

27 See Hua XIV, p. 183: “Die Rasse rechnen wir hierher, sofern die Gemeinsamkeit des äusseren physischen Habitus Hand in Hand geht mit derartigen Gemeinschaftscharakteren.”

28 Hua IV, p. 252/58: “Ich bin das Subjekt meines Lebens, und lebend entwickelt sich das Subjekt; es erfährt primär nicht sich, sondern es konstituiert Naturgegenstände, Wertsachen, Werkzeuge etc. Es bildet, gestaltet als aktives primär nicht sich, sondern Sachen zu Werken. Das Ich ist ursprünglich nicht aus Erfahrung — im Sinne von assoziativer Apperzeption, in der sich Einheiten von, Mannigfaltigkeiten des Zusammenhanges konstituieren, sondern aus Leben (es ist, was es ist, nicht *für* das Ich, sondern selbst das Ich).”

its habitual activities: “The Ego exercises itself; it habituates itself, it is determined in its later behavior by its earlier behavior, the power of certain motives increases, etc.” (Hua IV, §58, p. 253/265), it acquires capacities, sets itself goals. It settles into a style of life, surrounds itself with what makes it feel at home, comfortable, secure. There is, to paraphrase St. Augustine’s phrase *pondus meum amor meus* (*Confessions*, Book XIII, ch. 9. Para. 10), a certain “weight” to habitual experience, it settles the ego down into a stable course of living. Habit gives a person *gravitas*, as it were. As Husserl writes:

I am the subject that is used to being pleased by such and such matters, that habitually desires this or that, goes to eat when the time comes, etc., i.e. the subject of certain feelings and of certain habits of feeling, desire, and will, sometimes passive [...] sometimes active. (Hua IV, p. 256/269)

Moreover, personal development is intrinsically influenced by others. Husserl describes the human being as a *socius*, a member of a community, a citizen. He writes in *Ideas II*: “Others’ thoughts penetrate into my soul” (*Fremde Gedanken dringen in meine Seele ein*) (Hua IV, §60c, p. 268/281). Husserl says that one acquires the habitus of others, more or less as one takes over a habitus in the area of individual experience. There is an instauration and then in some form an assimilation. I may first experience the feelings of others as a demand on me – but later I can submit to that demand and assimilate it so that it becomes in some way my own feeling (Hua IV, p. 269). We live always in a communalized world. Thus members of a family may display common habits. People in a certain area develop similar accents, and so on. They also experience their communal context as a set of determinations and also as a set of norms that govern them. They experience this network of customs and social institutions as powers, as Husserl writes around 1910:

The human being lets “himself” be influenced not only by particular other humans (actual or imagined) but also by social objectivities that he feels and apprehends as effective objectivities in their own right, as influencing powers. He is afraid of “the government” and carries out what it commands. He views such and such individuals, for instance, the police officer, etc., as representatives of the government only; he fears the person who is an official representative. The customs, the church, etc., he feels as powers, too [*Er empfindet auch die Sitte, die Kirche*

etc. als eine Macht]. (Hua XIII, p. 95)²⁹

Husserl expands his account of communalization and life in tradition to the full sense of human cooperation in the formation of a common history. Husserl frequently speaks of the complex interweavings of human subjects in collective social life in its concreteness and historicity. Thus in the “Origin of Geometry” text, Husserl writes:

We can now say that history [*Geschichte*] is from the start nothing other than the vital movement [*die lebendige Bewegung*] of the being-with-one-another [*Miteinander*] and the interweaving [*Ineinander*] of original formations [*Sinnbildung*] and sedimentations of meaning [*Sinnsedimentierung*]. (Hua VI, p. 380/371; trans. modified)

Husserl speaks of intentional life as an intersubjectively interwoven life lived in history and in tradition. We are subjects, or what he calls “intersubjective for-itselfes”. Husserl writes already in 1910:

[M]inds are present to me as addressed or addressing me, as loved or loving me, etc. I do not live in isolation; I live with them a common, integrated life, in spite of the separation of subjectivities³⁰.

Husserl’s analysis of cultural tradition and the manner it is transmitted, preserved, distorted and renewed was later taken both by Heidegger (in his analyses of the relation between arts and world) and by Hans-Georg Gadamer with his concept of the effective working out of history. For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, all understanding (*Verstehen*) requires an initial presumption concerning what is being understood. Understanding requires “pre-judgement” (*Vorurteil*) and our prejudgements are formed by what Gadamer calls “effective history” or the “history of effect” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*, the historical working out of the effects of actions in which we are inevitably involved: “[T]hat in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work”)³¹. Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method* (1960):

The illumination of this situation—reflection on effective history—can

29 Husserl (2006), p. 172.k

30 Husserl (2006), p. 168; Hua XIII, p. 92.

31 Gadamer (1960), p. 284/300. Here and in subsequent citations the page numbers of the German edition precede those of the English translation.

never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are. To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete. All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call “substance,” because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity. This almost defines the aim of philosophical hermeneutics: its task is to retrace the path of Hegel’s phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it. (Gadamer (1960), pp. 285-86/301)³²

Whereas Gadamer refers to Hegel, he could also have invoked Husserl’s meditations on historical communal life in tradition. For Husserl, human beings live subjective and intersubjective lives, in the subjective or personal attitude. But Husserl differs from Gadamer in believing it is possible, through the radical application of the transcendental *epochē* to gain the position of the disengaged transcendental spectator which allows the intentional workings of this engaged life to be uncovered and understood. At least in its essential necessities such a life can be understood and its intentional character displayed by transcendental phenomenology. Or, at least, that was Husserl’s dream.

32 Gadamer: “Auch die Erhellung dieser Situation, d. h. die wirkungsgeschichtliche Reflexion, ist nicht vollendbar, aber diese Unvollendbarkeit ist nicht ein Mangel an Reflexion, sondern liegt im Wesen des geschichtlichen Seins, das wir sind. *Geschichtlichsein heißt, nie im Sichwissen Aufgehen*. Alles Sichwissen erhebt sich aus geschichtlicher Vorgegebenheit, die wir mit Hegel >Substanz< nennen, weil sie alles subjektive Meinen und Verhalten trägt und damit auch alle Möglichkeit, eine Überlieferung in ihrer geschichtlichen Andersheit zu verstehen, vorzeichnet und begrenzt. Die Aufgabe der philosophischen Hermeneutik läßt sich von hier aus geradezu so charakterisieren: sie habe den Weg der Hegelschen Phänomenologie des Geistes insoweit zurückzugehen, als man in aller Subjektivität die sie bestimmende Substantialität aufweist.”

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