

The problem of intersubjectivity in Western philosophy: Boundaries of the communicative approach

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1. Introduction

The problem of intersubjectivity emerges as an answer to the possibility of building a coherent structure of communicative rules and norms that can regulate the communication process itself. Currently, the notion of the complex and ambiguous role of the organizing principles of the origin of communication themselves is being developed upon rethinking communication as a linear model of Ch. Cooley and G. Lasswell. Moreover, the question of adequate formation of meanings and their interpretations in the process of transmission arises if the premise initially contained predetermined unique components of personal experience or individualization. Another equally important aspect is the possibility of expanding the meaning of the existence of communication itself as a primary horizon that differs from the category of intersubjectivity. It appears pertinent to define the boundaries of applicability of the communicative approach and to test the phenomenological approach in the area of social philosophy using an interdisciplinary approach to reveal the various strategies of philosophical search. The key objective is to analyze the applicability of the category of intersubjectivity in revealing the correlation between the Self and the Other from the perspective of social phenomenology and its methodological basis.

In modern philosophy, the category of intersubjectivity is associated with the ontology of the social world and is defined as the possibility of human interaction with each other based on common attitudes, intentional objects (Husserl, 2019) and meanings that are attributed to them. Examination of the foundations of social interaction requires the analysis of two interrelated aspects – the formation of the Self against the background society, and the substratum, which ensures the interpretive potential and interaction within society. The subject of intersubjectivity was defined within the movement of phenomenology, although for the phenomenology itself the subject of socially oriented interpretation of consciousness is not of paramount importance. The research of the foundations of social interaction can be found in the works of M. Scheler, E. Stein, E. Levinas and J-P. Sartre that address the concept of the Other. The Other is perceived as the one in whom the Self finds its opposite, as the one who disturbs the Self, and in this disturbance the Self turns to reflection about the Self.

2. Philosophical approbation of the concept of the Other

It is generally believed that society originates from the phenomenon of the Other. The existential interpretation of the Other and the Self relations fails to capture the entire breadth of interaction in instances where the mass subject is intended, since such an approach explains the intimacy of the experience of both sides. Meeting with the Other, with the Body, presupposes a

considerable separation from (Zahavi, 2015: 37), and the sense of *separation of the world between many people* is evidently not the same. The number of philosophers who addressed the subject of the sociality of consciousness is extremely limited, and their work coincides mainly with the post-Husserl period of development of phenomenology, which is referred to as phenomenological sociology.

Direct prerequisites that influenced the phenomenological sociology are contained in the works of German classical philosophers. For instance, to Hegel, a consciousness that does not understand its objectivity cannot recognize true freedom and cannot comprehend its historical destiny (Hegel, 1990). Outside the society, an individual has no possibility to exceed his limits; he remains in the universality of his thoughts, as an impersonal point devoid of qualities. That is, an individual is incapable of self-determination and is doomed to a solipsistic abstraction of existence without correlation with his negativity. An individual is distinguished by the capacity for the experience of the Other, and without cognizing it, he remains at the level of an animal. Subsequently, Marx, reinterpreting Hegel's legacy in a social context, developed these theses into the dialectic of sociality – the alienation of the individual from himself in the form of activity and the subsequent finding of himself through overcoming this alienation in the community (Gasparyan, 2007: 25-32). From a negative standpoint of human self-determination, the intersubjective world represents a set of objects created by human hands that share values that are common to people. The substantive similarity of phenomenological and Marxist interpretations of intersubjectivity has become the subject of numerous research studies (Waldenfels & Broekma, 1977).

Immanence of sociality is stated in the works of M. Heidegger, whose mentor was Husserl, in his *Mitsein* concept. Coexistence is a condition of being-in-the-world and its attribute, rooted in the very structure of being, and it does not require identification of its genesis. The Other is found in the communal objects, it is always implied by them even in the modus of indifference on the part of the existent. Heidegger did not aim to study social problems, but he is credited with the initial understanding of the inevitable fitting into society, expressed in the concept of *das Man*. *Das Man* represents a social construct, an impersonal public nature, an “unsilent” majority that exists in everyday life. *Das Man* is the opposite of “one’s”. “Some people believe”, “someone once said”, “it is believed that” indicate the introduction of common ideas and meanings into the mind of an individual, and the task of the latter is to overcome the dissolution of himself in public opinion. It is possible to say that *das Man* is an inverted understanding of the Frank's “we” – only among other people the Self is able to truly find its own, and here it is able to lose itself. The specific nature of the discussed question invariably leads to the fundamental ontology of M. Heidegger, which is identified as merely one of the possible ways of philosophical reflection of the category of intersubjectivity. However, the scope of the subject cannot be limited only to describing the specifics of an individual's existence without disclosing the organizing function of social reality.

In the modern Western philosophy two aspects – what is the Self and what is the society-in-itself – tend to merge in a unified interpretation of the communicative reality that consists of a set of meanings shared by each individual. Essentially, intersubjectivity becomes synonymous with social communication (Burova, 2016: 52). This interpretation of intersubjectivity was developed largely due to the works of A. Schütz. Schütz explored and developed the concept of intersubjectivity formulated by Husserl. Following him, the sociologist acknowledges the Others' active and constitutive intentionality. Coexistence of meanings defines the perceived world and the subjects of action that exist in it. Thus, the world always acts as a world of the Other Selves, a world of cultural patterns and structures of interactions (Schutz, 2004).

Within the framework of phenomenological sociology, Schütz studied the concept of intersubjectivity in terms of everyday social behavior/reflections of individuals and sought to establish the ordinary in the diversity of social interactions. The subject area of phenomenological sociology and the essence of social life becomes what Heidegger opposed. According to O.E. Burova, the problem field of the intersubjectivity phenomenon changes its vector of development – interest of researchers shifts from the realm of ideal (spiritual unity) to the realm of practical and semantic (the world of bodies, things and words) (Burova, 2016: 51). Indeed, as evidenced by the general situation in the social sciences of the second half of the twentieth century, the social exteriorizes into everyday interactions – H. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, P. Bourdieu's genetic structuralism, A. Touraine's actionism, etc. The basis of intersubjective relations is isolated in selected studies of phenomenologists (M. Merleau-Ponty, M. Richir, M. Henri); humanitarian studies operate in the natural setting of unreduced reality and explore relations within the already existing society.

3. Specificity of revealing identity in social constructivism of P. Berger and T. Luckmann

In the framework of social and philosophical theories, the approach of P. Berger and T. Luckmann is remarkable in its originality, which is reflected in revealing the correlation between the function and structural organization of any social phenomenon or event. Implicitly based on the phenomenological approach, the inseparability of subjective and objective in the social environment is distinguished. Ultimately, social phenomena represent a variety of functions and structures that fill social reality. A hermeneutic circle is formed, which breaks in social and philosophical research by emphasizing a single phenomenon that may be both social institutions and the process of socialization of the individual. The latter case reveals the initial attitude of philosophers to understand the mechanisms of establishing a unified space of interpersonal interaction. By eliminating the opposition of the subject to the object, Berger and Luckmann argue that all phenomena are completely interconnected in the context of the unified social reality. It is notable to identify the problem of reducing the personality to a social phenomenon, but it is resolved by highlighting a different sphere of relations that lie outside the rational context.

To reveal the specificity of a phenomenon, the scientists reason for the existence of a social structure that performs the organizing part in the diversity of social phenomena. In the course of internalization, social structures may be contrasted with social reality as the subject contrasts with its object. Therefore, the subject and the object are correlated, but not as a direct contraposition or otherwise as an equivalence, but rather as a concept that is constantly evolving and dynamical. As is evident, Luckmann and Berger's approach to research is neither structurally functional, since social reality is rooted in a variety of social phenomena that are intentional in relation to the researcher, nor phenomenological in Husserl's interpretation. The scholars define their unique position as social constructivism, thus distancing themselves from both philosophical phenomenology and structuralism.

Social structures emerge not as a result of the work of a scholar who observes social relations, but as a result of the organization of social institutions, groups and societies driven by a desire for self-identity. P. Berger combined the concepts of identity, organization, development and transformation into the concept of internalization. The validity of such term is determined by one of the prerequisites of social constructivism, which is that all social phenomena are interconnected, and only through their constant interaction separate social functions and relations are identified. Society as a whole constitutes a complex construct that consists of two levels of reality – subjective and objective. A “surface level” is added to these levels, which is constantly changing or undergoing social transformation. Meanwhile, revealing the presence of social transformation becomes accessible for analysis only through particular manifestations of internalization. In the course of socialization, an individual perceives the heterogeneity of society (the presence of several levels of organization) and participates in the creation of a “surface level” or in the “constantly recreated experience of other people” (Berger, 1963: 118). It is important to note that at this stage the process of transmitting primary meanings is not revealed; it is acknowledged either as a given or a social fact. It appears beneficial to supplement social constructivism with a developed system of correlation of individual aspirations to identity (in the given context identity is implied as self-identity) and with the existing social area of norms (which is expressed in specific interpretation of the “social control” term) (Berger, 1963: 68-69).

Social constructivism not only criticizes the previous tradition of structuralism, but also provides a crucial assessment of an individual's capacity for self-realization. The process of interaction between society and the individual is reflected in the unfortunate conclusion: “very few people, ..., are in a position to re-evaluate what has thus been imposed on them” (Berger, 1963: 117). By means of the phenomenological approach, an attempt is made to justify the existence of an individual's freedom in society, which may become a condition for the freedom of identifying individuality given the existence of regulatory norms of social reality. From this perspective, Berger and Luckmann's concept correlates with the general intention of social phenomenology and even the theory of communicative action. Yet,

it seems appropriate to critically reexamine the process of establishing shared meanings and their subsequent influence on individuality.

There are other examples of synthesis of phenomenological categorical apparatus that was reinterpreted by Schütz with modern actionist philosophical trends. Specifically, M. Geiger and O. Becker unveil the complexity of the process of ontological description of aesthetic aspects (Becker & Richir, 2019: 99-100). However, their philosophical research is focused on revealing the aesthetic experience and identifying appropriate categories of the fine and the ugly. Theories that reveal correlation of reality of social life and human existence are of interest precisely for social phenomenology, and particularly in the context of intersubjectivity problems. The concept of communicative action of J. Habermas acts as a striking example of communicative interpretation of intersubjectivity that absorbed phenomenological orientations. There, intersubjectivity is expressed in procedural rationality, which is inherent in the subjects of action and ensures the ability to communicate. Subjects are capable of communicating and reaching consensus provided that each of them is able to correctly interpret the situation of his position and that of his interlocutor. Communicative situation establishes the area of shared meanings, outlines social roles (points of view) and horizons of mutual perspectives of interlocutors, which Habermas defines as intersubjectivity (Habermas, 2001a: 201). It implies that there have been significant changes in the perception of intersubjectivity. The ability of individuals to understand each other has shifted from the sphere of consciousness by which it was originally justified to the adequately comprehended communicative situation.

4. Communicative approach and intersubjectivity

Subsequent developments of the possibility of the existence of social identity of individuals have deviated significantly from the original phenomenological understanding. For instance, intersubjectivity, perceived as culturally conditioned typicalization, emphasizes the fundamental inaccessibility of the Other's experience. In linguistic and socially significant gestures, a shared area is established, the horizon of similarly perceived meanings that provide the potential for contact, but do not guarantee absolute awareness and acceptance of meanings by subjects. In this regard, Goffman's remark that each participant of the interaction is expected to suppress his immediate inner feelings becomes particularly important. This observation is essential to express such a view of the situation that, according to the scholar's beliefs, will be sufficient to be accepted by others, at least temporarily (Goffman, 2000: 40). Intersubjectivity, as understood by Habermas, represents a universal consensus that equally deprives each subject of sincerity. Consistent behavior of participants in a communicative situation does not imply that the subject indeed understands the purpose of actions, the context of occurring events and the social roles of communicants.

It is necessary to address in greater detail the foundations of the communicative approach and discourse theory of J. Habermas, in which the category of intersubjectivity acquires its specificity. Differences between theoretical and practical discourse are found to be the key element of the entire discourse theory, which is outlined in “Theory of Communicative Action” (Habermas, 1981) and later in “Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action” (Habermas, 1988) and “Explanation of the Discourse Ethics” (Habermas, 1991). Theoretical discourse permits to define the boundaries of knowledge and the requirements that are imposed on the scientific search for reliable knowledge. In turn, practical discourse establishes the normative nature of the pragmatic and, in particular contexts, determines the moral validity of consensus building. Achieving the unified communicative space and, consequently, the equality of all its participants is the most important objective for the communication theory as a whole. Habermas tested transcendental philosophical tradition until the formation of the fundamental foundations of the practical theory of discourse ethics. This results in the formation of a universal theory, which, on the one hand, possesses its own methodological approach (communicative) and, on the other hand, has indisputable practical significance. Intersubjectivity loses its significance when constructing discourse as an ideal model of communication, since the logic of reasoning in theoretical discourse and the logic of moral reasoning in practical discourse take precedence. The situation of consensus in a well-structured communication means coherence between theoretical and practical discourse. It seems reasonable to assume that the ideal model of exactly pragmatic structure of communication has been achieved, which is considerably broader than just practice and which differs from theory. The unifying basis for theoretical and practical discourse is not the problem of constructing social reality, but the principle of universalization. In “Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action” Habermas explicitly stipulates that with the “introduction of the principle of universalization, the first step to justify the discourse ethics has been taken” (Habermas, 1988: 86). Thus, the discourse and theory of communication that is aimed at determining the possibility of discourse itself reveal precisely the normative and ethical foundations of communication.

The German philosopher attempts to solve the alien linguistic situation and introduces the concept of the life-world, which can be defined as a preliminarily comprehensible context of a situation of action. That is, the uncritically perceived set of knowledge and perceptions that is inherent to the agent. However, the ultimate localization of the philosopher’s view on a specific subject does not solve the problem of the authenticity of consensus and does not eliminate Goffmann’s criticism. The rationalistic approach of Habermas does not address a number of parameters that affect mutual understanding between individuals, from the affectivity of the interlocutors and their irrational urges to the difference in semantic understanding of the same words. Yet the following point is important in the project of communicative action. Habermas relies on the rationality of two people to the extent that communication allows them to interact on the same basis. In the foreword to “The Inclusion of the

Other”, B.V. Markov, following the logic of Habermas’ reasoning, notes that communication involves recognition of each other and therefore does not require authority (Habermas, 2001b) . Communication presupposes the creation of such an environment where it is possible to talk and negotiate due to the horizontal positions of its participants. They *are able*, with varying degrees of success, to reconstruct the situation from which the interlocutor is speaking, and this ability is not determined solely by similar life experiences. When mentioning the theory of communication of Habermas, one cannot help but refer to the theory of the communicative society of C.-O. Apel, his colleague and simultaneously his opponent. In elaborating the concept of communication, Apel emphasized the crucial role of linguistic structures in building a unified sphere of meanings, which is, in turn, connected with the influence of the cultural and historical context on individuality by means of language. The problem lies in the fact that linguistic structures and discourse ultimately inevitably condition the life of every individual, shattering the boundaries of individual perceptions of morality and social norms. The question arises concerning what can be defined as a criterion of morality and normality if social norms can also transform and contradict ethics in its genuine sense. Extrapolating this notion to the problem of intersubjectivity, the question emerges of the possible existence of predetermined conditions of communication that limit the process of transformation of ethical and normative foundations, making both practical and theoretical discourse possible. However, Habermas’ primary goal is not to reveal the predetermined nature of the communication process (which explains the lack of emphasis on this topic), but rather to pragmatically formulate communication as a means of implementing social life without violence. Only by ensuring communication between different actors (including states) can mechanisms of “universal reconciliation” be created. By changing the subject-object relation (or linear model) to communication into a subject-subject structure, the possibility of achieving equality of all subjects of communication is postulated, where each participant is able to indicate his active position. Ultimately, it is possible to achieve consensus or moderation, which leads to the emergence of discourse.

5. Conclusion

The problem of identifying the definition of intersubjectivity is stipulated by the inevitability of integrating various philosophical strategies of research. On the one hand, initially in Husserl’s interpretation intersubjectivity exists as a category; on the other hand, in social phenomenology intersubjectivity acquires the meaning of concept (which is determined by the formation of a new model of historical and philosophical research – the problematization of the initial foundations). In Berger’s specific theory of social constructivism intersubjectivity is a process that represents the organizing basis for overcoming the opposition of the subject to the object. The definition of intersubjectivity cannot be reduced either to fundamental ontology and trends of existential philosophy or to the theory of communicative action, since Habermas defines discourse as a normatively

constructed field of communication based on predetermined rules. Normativity establishes boundaries for examining the possibility of distorting and transforming the meaning itself, the initial communication message and its subjective context. Revelation of the definition of intersubjectivity lies in the approbation of normative statements of the discourse, yet at the same time it requires a rational reflection of one's individual perceptions, where the complexity of identifying the Self in relation to the Other is invariably revealed at a deeper level of consideration.

The following three themes constitute an objective enhancement of the content and critical reinterpretation of the category of intersubjectivity: 1) the problem of constructing the Self, 2) the question of the correlation of the Self and the Other in the social sphere of interpersonal relations, and 3) the ambiguity of the impact of historical and cultural context on the formation of intersubjective relations from the standpoint of social and phenomenological analysis. It is probable to solve the problems of intersubjectivity in the field of phenomenology of communication, provided that the issue is resolved as to whether it is possible to assume the meaning of alter ego, what is the mechanism of this assumption and how the other Ego certifies itself as being (Husserl, 2019: 118). That is, it is necessary to research and comprehend the process of establishing the communicative horizon. The shift of research into phenomenological prism cannot rely solely on rationality, as is the case with Habermas. The philosopher replaces active creative consciousness with rationality that is immersed in context, which, in fact, makes the subject a superfluous element. Following this logic, the system of social relations reproduces itself in situational rationality, an individual does not need to find himself in society. In order to reveal the formation of universal mechanisms of communicative situations, it is essential to reconstruct the primary pre-subject intents of communicators, which are identified in the phenomenological system.

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