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**Lebenswelt and Its Relations to Culture**

Nicola Liberati  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Pisa  
Via Prato 32, Viareggio (LU), 55049  
Italy  
Email: [liberati.nicola@gmail.com](mailto:liberati.nicola@gmail.com)

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to understand if the *Lebenswelt*, which is the life-world, has to be considered as something “natural” and fixed in any possible culture, or as culturally embedded. In the first case, we will have a common starting point to anchor any kind of cultural construction, while in the second, any object melts into the culture where the subject lives. My work will be structured in two main parts: the first will analyze the relation among *Lebenswelt*, sciences and praxes deriving from common living and from the subject's professional life. In the second, attention will be focused on the nature of the primal world highlighted in the previous part.

**Lebenswelt between Praxes and Scientific Theories**

Firstly, we will consider the classical Husserlian relation between the *Lebenswelt* and the world of scientific theories. They are related to the *Lebenswelt* because they draw validity from its objects. They create their objects by an act of idealization, starting from what is already present in the *Lebenswelt* in a vague way, turning a common and vague object into an exact and idealized one.<sup>1</sup>

They produce idealized objects by identifying the exactness of the objects,<sup>2</sup> and tend to substitute the *Lebenswelt* with the idealized world.<sup>3</sup> There is also another important relation that works in the opposite direction. While the *Lebenswelt* gives validity to the scientific theories, as they are founded on it, the scientific theories change the life of the subjects by modifying and moulding their praxes, their goals and their motivation in the common living. We have a relation starting from the *Lebenswelt* and directed toward the scientific theories and an opposite relation connecting scientific theories to the praxes of the subjects in their everyday life.

We can introduce the *naturalistic* and the *personalistic* attitude of the subject in order to clarify the idea. The subject can live in a world where the *Lebenswelt* is completely gone and is substituted by an idealization. This naturalistic attitude has to be opposed to the personalistic one. While in the naturalistic attitude the subject lives as a “bundle of physical properties”,<sup>4</sup> in the personalistic attitude the same subject is conceived as a living being in its “spiritual” activities.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the personalistic attitude includes motivation and praxes of the subject; it is related to the life of the subject itself and so any kind of professional world is related to this attitude too.<sup>6</sup>

The personalistic attitude gives the fundamental ground where the natural attitude, which is derived from science at the theoretical level, draws its validity. Thus the personalistic attitude is related to the scientific one, as it gives it “validity”. This means that the personalistic attitude is related to the *Lebenswelt*, because it is related to the pre-theoretical level.<sup>7</sup>

This schema poses a problem that can be highlighted by focusing our attention on the two concepts of *Lebenswelt* used. While the first is related to the foundation of the validity of sciences and their objects, the second is based on the common life of the subject. Therefore, we can ask ourselves if these two *Lebenswelten* are different or not. If they are not different, we will be faced with a clear problem, because the *Lebenswelt* would be founding the sciences and at the same time would be modified by them.

Husserl distinguishes very clearly the first *Lebenswelt* from the second, by the exclusion of the personalistic attitude from the first. Any kind of personal “interest” and motivation toward the *Lebenswelt* is taken apart. This primal *Lebenswelt* is related to the objects as they are perceived by the subject. It is a-cultural and a-practical, because there is no “personal interest” in it. The first *Lebenswelt* concerns the objects as perceivable, while the second is about the practical life of the subject and considers them “use-objects”.<sup>8</sup> Thus we can clearly separate the two concepts of *Lebenswelt*. One comprehends the objects on their pre-cultural level, where any kind of professional praxis is excluded. This is what I will call “*Lebenswelt-one*” from now on. The other one, which I will call “*Lebenswelt-two*”, is related to the cultural level, where any object is intended as fraught with professional praxes. Now we can reconsider our initial schema focused on the foundation of sciences and analyze which *Lebenswelt* the scientific theories are founded on (the pre-cultural or the professional one).

Certainly the objects of the scientific theories are derived from the *Lebenswelt-one* by idealization. Indeed, ideal objects are constituted starting from the common objects as they present themselves without any kind of cultural infiltration. A cube is an idealization starting from a typical object such as a dice or a box, where any kind of practical usage referred to the *Lebenswelt-two* is excluded. This fact could tempt us to found scientific theories on this a-cultural and primal world.

However, the objects of scientific theories are not founded only on this world, but they are also produced by the subject thanks to their professional life. Straight lines and cubes are founded on idealization, but geometry is founded on the practical and professional praxis of land surveying.<sup>9</sup> As we can see, the praxis of land surveying introduces practical goals and motivation that are part of what we included in the *Lebenswelt*-two, which is the world with the professional life of the subject. Thus these objects are founded not only on the a-cultural level, but also on the cultural one.

At this point it is clear that the previous schema has to be heavily modified because the *Lebenswelt*-one, the primal and the a-cultural one that pre-exists to any possible culture, does not found the scientific theories anymore. The objects, on which the scientific world is based, are internal to the *Lebenswelt*-two, because the cultural level cannot be taken apart anymore. We have a new schema where the *Lebenswelt*-one founds any kind of possible object of the *Lebenswelt*-two, but it is this second *Lebenswelt* that founds the scientific theories and is modified by them by the introduction of their goals into the professional life of the subject.

As Tetsuya Sakakibara highlights, there are two different and important kinds of the subject's forgetfulness. One operates between the world of the scientific theories and the *Lebenswelt*-two: the subject "forgets" the *Lebenswelt* from which the scientific world is derived.<sup>10</sup> The second one works between the two different *Lebenswelten*: while the subject lives in a world embedded within culture, they "forget" the primal world, the subject forgets that their *Lebenswelt*-two is founded on an a-cultural main core.<sup>11</sup> Obviously this new point of view does not exclude the possibility for the subject to "reach" the lower layers. While they live in *Lebenswelt*-two, they can refer to the *Lebenswelt*-one in some way: directly or by abstraction.

In the case of a direct perception, the subject lives in a world where the primal objects are perceivable by themselves without any kind of intrusion from the cultural level. In the other case, the subject lives in a world where the *Lebenswelt*-one is completely hidden by the *Lebenswelt*-two

and they cannot “see” the primal object without introducing the cultural level from the other *Lebenswelt*. The objects are presented related to their praxes and, in order to reach the primal object of *Lebenswelt*-one, the subject has to eradicate by abstractions any cultural incrustation. For example, a compulsive gambler would perceive the dice as something that can be used in a game to win or to lose. They cannot perceive the primal object without including praxes derived by their professional life and they need abstraction in order to reach something primal not related to a praxis.

Otherwise, in the first case, where the primal objects are directly perceivable, the gambler would perceive the dice by its primal givenness without any reference to the praxes related to it. They would perceive it as something posed in front of them, as something that can be rotated showing the hidden faces and so on. With this example, we can highlight the main problem we have. What is this primal world? What does the *Lebenswelt*-one comprehend?

### **About the “Nature” of the *Lebenswelt*-one**

The answer can be found by including the *Leib*, that is, the *living body*, into our analysis. The *Lebenswelt*-one is related to the *Leib* and its activity. Here the culture is not taken into consideration because we are focused only on the relation between the “primal object” of the *Lebenswelt*-one and the *Leib* of the subject.

We are interested in the possibility of having a flow of experience related to the *Leib* of the subject with their kinesthesia and their “*ich kann*”. It is related to the possibility of action of the subject considering their power to actively live in the world using their *Leib*. The subject can move themselves and act, producing a change in the perception of the object. The possibility of having an experiential flow and not the actual content of such a flow is important.

We were thinking about the *Lebenswelt*-one as something constituted by “primal” objects, objects that were a-cultural, pre-theoretical and pre-professional, something that exists in every world because they were the foundational ground for every culture, while its “nature” is quite different. *Lebenswelt*-one contains no object at all. What lies in the *Lebenswelt*-one is a relation and not a content of the experience.

Thus our schema has to be modified once more, because we have to exclude the *Lebenswelt*-one due to its absence of objects. There are no objects in the *Lebenswelt*-one and so it cannot be included in our analysis on the existence of some primal objects shared by any culture. However, at the same time, we have to face the necessity from which the *Lebenswelt*-one was generated. Perceptual objects present themselves as a-cultural.

Thus while the *Lebenswelt*-one has to be excluded from our schema, it should be included by the necessity of such an a-cultural level. *Lebenswelt*-one cannot be constituted by objects, and there is the necessity to have a distinction between objects that are explicitly cultural and objects that seem to be a-cultural. Therefore, to maintain this distinction, we have to split the *Lebenswelt*-two into two sub-levels. Obviously, the term “a-cultural” needs the brackets, because we are supposed to be in the *Lebenswelt*-two and so every object is culturally embedded by definition.

Summing up, we have four levels. The *Lebenswelt*-one, which is not constituted by any objects, but gives the fundamental ground for any kind of superior construction. The part of the *Lebenswelt*-two regarding the “a-cultural” objects. The remaining part of the *Lebenswelt*-two, composed of the objects explicitly culturally embedded, such as the dice that evokes some particular praxis to the compulsive gambler, and finally, the world composed of the scientific objects.

This kind of schema that we have structured, derived from the Husserlian analysis, does not seem to answer our question about the existence of a level of primal objects. It suggests a sub-level of the

*Lebenswelt*-two, which is at the same time cultural and a-cultural. It is cultural because it is under the *Lebenswelt*-two and so it is related to the professional life of the subject in some way. At the same time, it is a-cultural because it is posed to the subject as natural and a-cultural and they give themselves as the *starting point* for any culture.

In order to solve this duplicity, we can introduce the two different analyses offered by Husserl: the *static* and the *genetic* one. The static analysis is focused on studying how the world “works”. That means that it is focused on how the objects present themselves to the subject explicating their structure. In this analysis the primal world is considered the ground zero where it is possible to develop any kind of further objects such as the cultural or the scientific ones.

The genetic analysis instead is focused on how this ground zero is constituted by studying how the “primal” objects are cultural sedimentation stratified one on top of the other. The objects are taken into account as a complex production through time and so they are considered to be culturally constructed. This analysis does not focus its attention on the fact that the same objects give themselves as primal, but that there is a history behind them. They are not different due to some change on the material of their objects, but due to a different approach of research. While the static one is oriented to the study of the present object on how it is perceived by the subject, the genetic one is related to the history of these objects.<sup>12</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Our question on the existence of a primal world common to every culture has a double answer that depends on the type of analysis we are interested in. The primal world given to the subject exists, if this means that there is a common ground on which any activity of the subject's community draws its validity. In this case it is primal, natural and a-cultural. We cannot say that this primal world is a cultural construction denying its status of primality because our world is founded on this primal

level. However, we cannot consider it as invariable through time and take it as invariable for any culture because it is a cultural sedimentation, which means we can consider its historicity without considering its validity. This validity is related only to the previous analysis where we take the primal world as a-cultural. Everything is related to the kind of analysis we are in and the goals we want to achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details see James W. Garrison, “Husserl, Galileo, and the Processes of Idealization”, *Synthese* 66.2 (Feb., 1986), 330.

<sup>2</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten (1918-1926)*, Husserliana vol XI, HuaXI, M. Nijhoff, 1966, 190; Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, Claassen Verlag, 1964, §83a.

<sup>3</sup> See Sebastian Luft, “Husserl’s Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction: Between Life-World and Cartesianism”, *Research in Phenomenology* 34.1 (2004)

<sup>4</sup> See Maria Vilella-Petit, “Naturalistic and personalistic attitude”, *Analecta Husserliana* XCIII, 208; Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Husserliana IV, HuaIV, M. Nijhoff, 1952, p. 143; *ibid.*, 183; *ibid.*, 191

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 140

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, Husserl is not so clear about it. At times he seems to exclude any kind of



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professional motivation from the personalistic attitude. In other cases, he stresses the importance of the “usability” of the objects as something related to the personalistic attitude. Obviously the introduction of the usability of the object introduces also the professional life of the subject in the personalistic attitude. The object is conceived not only as a perceivable object but also as embedded by praxes derived from by the actual life of the subject. Every experience had by the subject in their actual life creates the “shape” of it.

<sup>7</sup> It is necessary to highlight how any kind of science, both the natural and the human, is related to the theoretical activity. See Adam Konopka, “The role of *Umwelt* in Husserl's *Aufbau* and *Abbau* of the *Nature/Geist* distinction”, *Human Studies* 32.3 (2009), 329. And both of them are founded on the fundamental ground of the practical level of the *Lebenswelt*. See Husserl, HuaIV, 183; Edmund Husserl, *Natur und Geist: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1927*, Husserliana XXXII, HuaXXXII, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, 116.

<sup>8</sup> See Husserl, HuaIV, 182; See also Thomas Nenon, ““*Umwelt*” in Husserl and Heidegger”, Proceedings 43rd Annual Meeting of the Husserl Circle 2012, <http://www.husserlcircle.org/HC%20Preceedings%20Boston%202012.pdf>: 5.

<sup>9</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, Husserliana vol VI, HuaVI, M. Nijhoff, 1976, §9a.

<sup>10</sup> See Tetsuya Sakakibara, “The relationship between nature and spirit in Husserl's phenomenology revisited”, *Continental Philosophy Review* 31.3 (1998), 265.

<sup>11</sup> Sakakibara identifies this kind of forgetfulness as the one between the authentic and spiritless nature from the unauthentic one. (See *ibid.*, 265).

<sup>12</sup> We cannot fall into skepticism because we have to remember that the *Lebenswelt*-one, even if we

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have excluded it from our schema, is still valid. Thus any kind of culture has something to share even if any kind of content is taken apart and what remains are relations “only”.