



Delft University of Technology

## **Closing the Empathy Gap Technology, Ethics, and the Other**

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# **Closing the Empathy Gap**



# Closing the Empathy Gap

## Technology, Ethics, and the Other

### Dissertation

for the purpose of obtaining the degree of doctor  
at Delft University of Technology  
by the authority of the Rector Magnificus, Prof.dr.ir. T.H.J.J. van der Hagen  
chair of the Board for Doctorates  
to be defended publicly on thursday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019 at 12:30 o'clock  
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....no man is an island, entire of itself

John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624)

To my parents, the first philosophers in my life



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The central objective of this thesis has been to uncover the particularities, characteristics and the relevance of the relation between Self and Other. I intended to show that without the Other, the Self remains a pre-reflexive being. Isolated and reduced to itself. Now, after having completed this thesis, I feel that I myself can agree to this conclusion. The project of writing a thesis has showed me, to paraphrase Husserl, how little I can manage on my own. In fact, as it appears to me, most of this thesis is not strictly my own as it is conceived in interaction with others. I therefore wish to express my gratitude to all others who have been part of the journey I undertook about five years ago.

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I hope that this thesis is a starting point and I hope to continue working in the field of philosophy. I hope to continue doing that as part of these structures of love, friendship and support.

Cees Zweistra, 6 augustus 2019, *St. Etienne-des-Sorts*

# Abbreviations

## Works by Levinas

DF	<i>Difficult Freedom</i>
TI	<i>Totality and Infinity</i>
RTB	<i>Is it Righteous to Be?</i>
DEH	<i>Discovering Existence with Husserl</i>
EE	<i>Existence and Existents</i>
TO	<i>Time and the Other</i>
TIH	<i>The Theory of Intuition in Husserl</i>
OTB	<i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i>
HUO	<i>Humanism of the Other</i>

## Works by Heidegger

T	<i>The question concerning Technology</i>
LOH	<i>Letter on Humanism</i>
BT	<i>Being and Time</i>
BP	<i>Basic problems of Phenomenology</i>

## Works by Sherry Turkle

AT	<i>Alone Together</i>
RC	<i>Reclaiming Conversation</i>
LS	<i>Life on the Screen</i>

# Introduction

The central aim of this investigation is to address a phenomenon that in the relevant empirical research-literature is referred to as the “empathy gap” (cf. Konrath, et al., 2011; Turkle, 2015). The empathy gap, as I will understand it, is a failure to establish successful contact between the subject (Self) and exteriority. Exteriority in this context, refers to a reality that is external to the Self and cannot be reduced to it. Insofar as this failure is caused by the technological mediation of social relations, the empathy gap can also be referred to as a form of technologically mediated *solipsism*. Addressing this challenge, in the context of this research, means two things. First, I will use the concept of “empathy ethics ” with the aim of *diagnosing* the empathy gap. From the perspective of empathy ethics, it will appear that the empathy gap, as a form of solipsism, constitutes a *sui-generis* ethical challenge. The challenge is that the Self will be deprived of exteriority and otherness as means allowing a *verification* and *validation* of its concept of the Good Life. In the gap there is only Self and no external perspective. This research will show that it is a challenge that is partly brought about by the technological mediation of social relations because of the structure of this relation. A structure which allows for, or affords a weaker form of a *dialogue*. Second, I will propose a *cure*. This cure consists of an attempt to re-establish contact with exteriority by articulating what a structure would look like which is successful in connecting the Self with exteriority. When this contact is made, the empathy gap will be closed.

The central question that will be addressed throughout this research is the following:

*How do technologically mediated social relations bring about an empathy gap and how can an empathy ethics overcome this empathy gap?*

My philosophical frame of reference throughout this research is derived from the phenomenological tradition. The phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas (1905 – 1996) will be my main interlocutor as his concept of ethics will allow me to flesh out the particular ethical challenges that are brought about by the empathy gap and make preparatory steps towards a closure of the empathy gap. Levinas’s account of ethics will be used throughout this research as a source of inspiration.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

Because Levinas has not provided a ready-made concept of what ethics is that can sufficiently tackle the issue at hand, I will complement Levinas's account of ethics. This entails the inclusion of insights from, amongst others, the empathic approach to intersubjectivity in the phenomenological tradition, posthumanistic ethics (of technology) and Albert Borgmann's concept of "real ethics" (cf. Borgmann, 2006). These accounts of ethics provide both a notion of ethics as "self-care" and a possible way to link ethics with technology. The elements of self-care and its relation to human-technology relations are not present in Levinas's philosophy and ethics. In the following, the structure of this research will be outlined.

Part I is an attempt to offer a first glimpse of the phenomenon "empathy gap" from an empirical perspective. For this, I will make use of empirical research drawn from sources which include, amongst others, Sherry Turkle (Turkle, 2011; 2015) and Konrath et al. (Konrath, et al. 2011). From their empirical perspectives, a preliminary articulation of the challenging features of the empathy gap will be given. This articulation is a starting point; as this research will show that the empathy gap is not a problem on its own, but a symptom of solipsism, which is the actual challenge.

As will be explained in part I, solipsism is the condition in which the subject is deprived from external points of verification and external sources from which it can draw the meaning it projects on the world. This thesis proposes perspective which will make clear that the condition of solipsism also gives rise to relevant ethical challenges that remain hitherto unaddressed in ethical approaches of technology (i.e. Borgmann, 1984; 2006, Foucault, 1984, Verbeek, 2011), which I will discuss. Solipsism appears as an ethical challenge according to a notion of ethics which will be derived from Levinas's work. According to this notion of ethics, the actions proper to ethics – i.e. (self) criticism, reflection and goodness – are enabled through a relation the Self needs to have with an *external* source of meaning and point of verification. This relation has the *structure of a dialogue* and affords a dialectic process of meaning-constitution. From the proposed perspective, it will become clear that the relation with the Other offers the prototypical structure of such a dialogical relation. The ethical challenge of the empathy gap is the situation in which it has become impossible to construct any form of meaning through a dialogical relation with something exterior. This occurs because the Self has become interiority only. This can partly explained through the way in which technological mediation operates in social relations.

In order to reveal that, the underlying problem of the empathy gap is the problem of solipsism, an attempt is made to move from an empirical analysis of the empathy gap, to a more normative and ethical explication of this phenomenon. To achieve a ethical explication, I will come up with a concept of ethics which conceives the social relation as an *ethical relation*. Levinas's account of ethics offers such a concept and is all the more relevant because in this account the phenomenon of "mediation" is problematized. Albeit from a perspective that is not directly applicable to the context in which the challenges of technological mediation are confronted. I will however make an interpretive move and seek to show that the way in which the phenomenon of mediation is challenged in Levinas's account of ethics, mediation can analogously be challenged in the context of the empathy gap.

Technology appears to be a materialized form of intentionality (cf. Ihde, 1990), and for that reason it falls within the scope of Levinas's critique of the concept "intentionality" (cf. TI, 44: Ricoeur, 1992: 336).

It must be noted that in my reading and application of Levinas, I will be mostly using the "early" Levinas. I will use especially *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1961), his first seminal philosophical undertaking. This implies that I will be leaving aside Levinas's second major work, *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas, 1978) although I will frequently make use of other material, such as essays and interviews, conceived before and after this work. I will focus on *Totality and Infinity* because this work includes a concrete, ontological analysis of the Self, the Other, and the relations in and between the two. The concreteness of this work, in comparison to *Otherwise than Being*, makes it better suited for and more applicable within the scope of the current investigation.

Part II offers an analysis of the concept of "empathy". I will discuss how this concept evolved within the phenomenological tradition through the work of Theodor Lipps (1851-1915) and Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Then I will proceed by discussing phenomenological positions that criticized Husserl's conceptualization of empathy. These include the positions of Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905- 1980) and Emmanuel Levinas. I will conclude this part by bringing in a few empirical perspectives on empathy. I will do that because these perspectives allow me to make a crucial step, namely the fusion of the concept "empathy" with the concept "ethics" as conceived of by Levinas. The merger of these concepts results

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in the concept “empathy ethics”. With this concept I can prepare the steps required to close the empathy gap.

Part III comprises a partly empirical analysis of the relation between technological mediation and the empathy gap. I will show how technologies might *amplify* and *reduce* our ability to connect to something exterior. Basically, I will assess to what extent technologies allow for relations with exteriority that have the structure of a dialogue. That is, relations in which beings with a degree of independence encounter one another and construct meaning in the course of this encounter. I will focus my discussion on the effects of Social Information and Communication Technologies (SICTs). With SICTs I have in mind social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. These technologies will offer the paradigms that allow me to challenge and discuss the relation between technology and exteriority. This part will also bring in some more nuanced perspectives that will show that empathy and technology are not necessarily hostile to one another. It will appear that relations with and to exteriority come in degrees, measurable by the extent to which beings in that relation have a degree of independence and for that reason are able to show a level of *resistance*. The level of resistance determines the degree of independence and with that, the degree in which the relation appears to have the structure of a dialogue.

Part IV is a preparation for the subsequent parts V and VI. In this part I will discuss two important phenomenological routes concerning the position of otherness in general and the Other in particular. These routes can be classified as “contact theories” (cf. Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015) as far as in these approaches, *engaged* contact with the world has (epistemological) priority over the *disengaged* relation with the world. However, it will appear that the Husserlian route includes the Other whereas the Heideggerian route ignores the Other and lapses into an antihumanism. As will be shown in part IV, a contact theory that does not include the Other lacks a satisfying account of the way in which *successful* contact with the world is established. A contact theory without the Other will remain within the sphere of the Self. Successful contact with a world outside the Self is not made. With this discussion the two final parts have been prepared.

In part V the Heideggerian route to human-technology relations will be discussed in more detail. This part will reveal that central to these approaches is a Heideggerian antihumanism. It is for that reason that these positions are referred to as “post-Heideggerian” rather than that they are classified as “the American School” (cf. Feenberg, 1999:6), or posthumanistic and postphenomenological philosophies of technologies. This part will also show that, although these positions have moved beyond Heidegger to some degree, they remain Heideggerian in one fundamental aspect: an explicit account of the Other and otherness is absent in their accounts. Insofar as that is the case, these positions will prove to be unqualified to properly address and account for the empathy gap. However, they will also provide some of the building blocks that will become necessary in order to construct the empathy ethics that is capable of curing the empathy gap. These blocks are elements of a relation that restores contact with exteriority through a dialogue-like relation between Self and world. These blocks consist of the importance of sociality in our relation to technology (Borgmann), the ethical and existential relevance of embodiment and risk (Dreyfus), understanding the specific structure of human-technology relations (postphenomenology), and developing an ethics of technology (Foucauldian posthumanism).

Although the aforementioned steps are necessary steps towards an empathy ethics, they will ultimately not succeed in providing a satisfactory account of the empathy gap as constituting a *sui generis* ethical challenge that requires its own ethics. This is the case because, as philosophies inspired by Heidegger, a specific concept of *self-care* is ultimately central to their ethics. Care-for-the-Other might appear as a derivative ethical phenomenon but post-Heideggerian approaches have no account of the specific relevance and function of otherness. Rather, the focus is on authenticity (i.e. ownness) and an exploration of the world as correlate of the Self, a world *for us*.

Part VI offers an ethical approach which complements post-Heideggerian philosophies of technology by implementing otherness in the context of ethics and human-technology relations. This will be done in the following way.

First it will be shown what exteriority is and to what extent it has a humanistic foundation. Second, the functions of this exteriority will be discussed. Third and finally, the elements will be gathered that need to be present in a structure that is able to connect the Self with exteriority in the context of human-technology relations. The elements are the Self, the Other, and the “mediator” between the

## Closing the Empathy Gap

two. This part will show that the elements in this structure need to have a specific form in order to function successfully. The Self needs to have an internal *receptive* structure for the Other and otherness (cf. Ricoeur, 1992). The Other needs to show some degree of *resistance* in order to qualify as an Other (cf. Ihde, 1990). And the “mediator” needs to be one that allows for a dialogue and, through that, a dialectic process of meaning-construction (cf. Levinas, 1969). Once that has been achieved, contact with exteriority is restored and the empathy gap, understood as a form of solipsism, will be closed. Furthermore, we will have a point of orientation and verification that could guide human-technology relations in ethics (self-care), politics, and design.

# Methodology: paradigmatic analysis and the empathy gap

Using empirics in a philosophical investigation like this presents us with difficulties. Not only is the objective of philosophy different from that of an empirical investigation, philosophers often struggle with the proper method in applying empirics in their investigation. The objective of a philosophical investigation, like this one, could be to structure and clarify concepts. An objective that could let itself be *informed* by empirical findings without claiming that it has offered an empirically validated account of the subject matter it seeks to clarify conceptually. In the context of this investigation the primary aim is to investigate what the concept “empathy gap” actually means. What challenges are implied by this concept? How does it relate to philosophical literature on the matter of empathy and what are the ethical implications – if there are any – of this gap? A philosophical investigation, like this one, is primarily aimed at addressing these questions.

And yet, it is also a phenomenological investigation. Or better yet, a *postphenomenological* investigation. Phenomenology, from a certain perspective, could be referred to as quasi-empirical investigation. Postphenomenology makes a stronger claim regarding the use of empirics (cf. Verbeek & Rosenberger, 2015). In order to qualify as a postphenomenological investigation it is *necessary* to include empirical research, whether it is firsthand data or data derived from the work of others. Every philosophical position that is discussed in this research connects to phenomenology and many to postphenomenology. In order for this investigation to qualify as a candidate for discussion with these positions, the matter of the way empirical findings are used in this investigation, should be settled.

There is an easy way out. As will become clear, this investigation abounds with empirical literature regarding the empathy gap (cf. Konrath, et al. 2011; Turkle, 2015) and its connection with the technological mediation of social relations. It is possible to settle the matter of the methodology regarding the usage of empirical findings, by showing that this research makes use of empirical data to substantiate the claim that there is an empathy gap and that this gap is causally connected to specific technologies. The question appears to be settled when this method is used.

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This seems to be a rather unsatisfactory solution insofar as empirical findings in this position continues to give way to a *descriptive* analysis, in this case the analysis of the empathy gap. That a descriptive analyses is unsatisfying has been emphasized by Borgmann as we can learn from the distinction he draws between “paradigmatic explanation” and “scientific explanation” (cf. Borgmann, 1984). A scientific explanation, as Borgmann understands it, seeks to make the world intelligible by discovering the laws that govern certain events. It reveals what “is” in the sense of events that occur in accordance with empirical laws. Through its method, scientific explanation offers outcomes that are compelling by themselves and for that reason are referred to as *apodeictic* explanations. An explanation with this structure has one downside to it, which concerns Borgmann in particular. Scientific explanations state what *is*, but fail to give an account of what ought to be *done*. Ethics, as the argument goes, cannot be derived from facts.

Paradigmatic explanation, by contrast, is able to provide the guidance an ethics attempts to give. That is because of the structure this kind of explanation has. As I read Borgmann, a paradigmatic explanation has five elements.

First, it defines what Borgmann calls a “focal concern” (Borgmann, 1984: 77). A focal concern, in the context of this research, could be the specific relevance of *exteriority*. The starting point is to debate – in an ethical or political context - this concern over and over, until one can agree to its specific relevance. When the focal concern has been granted its relevance, paradigmatic explanation commences.

This brings me to the second element in the structure of a paradigmatic explanation. This is the “crucial force” (ibid.) or *pattern* which endangers the focal concern. According to Borgmann, a pattern “is more concrete and specific than a law and yet more general and abstract than a unique focal thing” (ibid., 73). This means, in other words, that it is some identifiable tendency which endangers the focal concern. The crucial force in the context of this research could be the empathy gap.

This crucial force needs to be discovered. This discovery is the third element of a paradigmatic explanation. As to how the crucial force can be discovered, Borgmann discusses four ways, which seem not to be entirely clear and well-distinguished from one another. The way in which the pattern is discovered, could amount to the following. Basically, the discovery of the crucial force comprises of a *narrative* and a more *empiric* element. In the narrative element, it is possible to

## Methodology: paradigmatic analysis and the empathy gap

relate experiences of the crucial force and show how these give testimony of the presence of a pattern that endangers the focal concern in question. In the empiric element, it is possible to relate concrete instances, examples, or paradigms in which the crucial force becomes visible. In the case of this investigation, these are the concrete example of the ways in which specific technologies tend to give way to the empathy gap.

After the crucial force has been uncovered, it will be brought into ethical and political discussion again. This is the fourth element of paradigmatic explanation, which will *motivate* and propel this discussion. Its primary aim is to motivate to act. When action has thus been initiated, it will become possible to decide on further action. This is the fifth element of paradigmatic explanation. This action could be to initiate further (scientific) research or other actions that are aimed at addressing the crucial force which endangers the focal concern.

The attraction of this method is not its clarity. What makes it attractive is its allegiance to *action*, a purpose that seems to be proper to an ethical analysis. In the context of this research, it allows the reinstitution of exteriority. It allows a way of articulating exteriority which remains faithful to its original promise of initiating action. That is, its tone doesn't need to be overly nuanced, since it is aimed at providing triggers for action. It is in that sense that this research reflects the purpose of a paradigmatic explanation. It is paradigmatic insofar as it shares its directedness to action. The unclarity of paradigmatic explanation makes it impossible to proceed with it, without further elaboration on what such an explanation actually entails. Furthermore, paradigmatic explanation in Borgmann's style has been met with serious criticism (cf. Feenberg, 1999; Verbeek, 2005). For example, according to Feenberg, Borgmann's position is untenable because it hearkens back to a time in history in which life was good because it was pre-technological and in close connection to its (natural) surrounding. Borgmann's position however, neglects to engage in a careful exploration of the possibilities and constraints that come with new technologies. Thus it evaluates current day technology from a perspective of a utopian yesterday which has never existed. Furthermore, Verbeek argues that Borgmann's position lacks a critical foundation because he "selectively supports his outline of the technological pattern" (ibid.,190).

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Borgmann discovers what he has already decided on from the start: modern technologies reduce meaning by reducing engagement.

An approach which seeks to uphold its activist agenda by using a version of paradigmatic explanation needs to take into account the limitations of paradigmatic explanation. A new version of it is therefore needed. What could this entail? It needs to have more clarity, avoid the romantic trap and provide more empirical foundation for its claims. Translated in the context of this research, this amounts to the following, viewed from the elements a paradigmatic explanation typically has.

The *focal concern* in this investigation is exteriority. There is no trouble in defending this position because, it connects to a longstanding phenomenological tradition and its value is readily grasped, once brought in confrontation with its (Heideggerian) phenomenological counter position: *authentic* selfhood.

The *crucial force* in this investigation is the empathy gap. This element from Borgmann's analysis has been met with considerable criticism because, for example, he reduces all technologies to one single pattern (cf. Verbeek, 2005). In this investigation, this can be avoided. First of all, this investigation focuses itself primarily on what I call Social Information and Communication Technologies (SICTS). It is primarily through the interaction with these technologies that the empathy gap, as a pattern in Borgmann's sense, comes to light. Secondly, this pattern has been discovered following an empirical assessment. It has been my objective to further flesh out and articulate, from a philosophical-ethical perspective, what this pattern actually amounts to. I do not claim to have discovered it. The pattern rather has an *apodeictic* status. Denying it would place a high burden of proof and argument on the side of the one denying it.

The discovery of the empathy gap (third element) is concerned with the concrete examples which exhibit the empathy gap. The examples that I have chosen are derived from empirical literature which explicitly aimed to assess the relation between technology and empathy. The examples are in that sense uncontroversial. Furthermore I have also paid attention to more nuanced perspectives. The conclusion that I have reached in this dissertation makes a justified claim to offer a balanced perspective.

The fourth and fifth elements of paradigmatic explanation are uncontroversial. Once it is possible to provide convincing arguments regarding the three other

### **Methodology: paradigmatic analysis and the empathy gap**

elements it seems indeed uncontroversial to use the outcomes of a paradigmatic explanation to initiate further research, action, discussion, etc.

## Part I

### Diagnosing the empathy gap

In this part I will diagnose the empathy gap. The question that I seek to answer in the course of this part is: “What is the empathy gap?” The answer to this question will be sought in six chapters, each of which offers an element of the question that will be answered in this part.

In chapter 1 I will show what the empathy gap is as defined in the context of empirical research which investigates the effects of technology in the social relation

After that, I will analyse why the empathy gap is problematic. This is done from an empirical as well as an ethical perspective. Chapter 2 contains the empirical analysis, and chapter 3 the philosophical-ethical one. The latter chapter includes a discussion of Levinas’s account of ethics, in order to show why and how this account of ethics could be fruitful in analyzing the empathy gap. Chapter 4 deals with the question whether and to what extent it is possible to work with Levinas’s account of ethics. This discussion is needed because working with Levinas in its “pure form” confronts us with many difficulties in the context of this research. It will become clear that it is needed to take some important steps *beyond* Levinas.

Chapter 5 discusses the concept “mediation”. This chapter contains a discussion of various accounts of the phenomenon mediation, including technological mediation.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will discuss in what sense mediation could be a challenge, seen from the ethical perspective that I invoked in chapter 3. This chapter offers the philosophical diagnosis of the empathy gap. In the course of this part, I will have discussed all the relevant aspects of the empathy gap. I will have a definition, know what its causes are, show why it is problematic, and establish a preliminary direction for attempts to close it.

# 1 The empathy gap and its causes

This research is an inquiry into a phenomenon that in the relevant research-literature is referred to as “the empathy gap” (Konrath et al., 2011). The term empathy gap was initially coined by Carnegie-Mellon researcher Loewenstein (Loewenstein, 2005). Loewenstein used the term in a context different from the context in which I use the concept throughout this research. Initially, the empathy gap was used as a term that would capture the *affect-influenced* character of decision making. For example, Loewenstein observed that when one is in anger (what Loewenstein called a “hot” affective state) it is difficult to imagine what it is like to be in calm (cold) state and vice versa. His conclusion was that our current situation affects our capacity to imagine what it would be like in a different situation. The empathy gap therefore could also be described as a failure in *successful* imagination. More specific: a failure in the successful imagination of what it would be like in a condition *outside* the Self. As Loewenstein writes:

When people are in an affectively ‘cold’ state, they fail to appreciate how ‘hot’ states will affect their own preferences and behavior. When in hot states, they underestimate the influence of these states and, as a result, overestimate the stability of current states. (Loewenstein, 2005)

This can also be translated as a failure in our ability to successfully imagine a situation or state of affairs that reaches beyond the current condition of the Self.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore a failure in successful contact with a world outside the Self. The empathy gap, as I will be using this concept throughout this research, bears a semblance to the original context in which the term was used. In the context of this research, the empathy gap also refers to a failure in successful imagination and a failure to establish contact with a world outside the Self. I will use this concept in a context where the failure in imagination is a condition that is caused by or enhanced through the technological mediation of social relations. It is a failure to imagine situations from an other’s point of view and (because of that) a failure

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<sup>1</sup> In the course of this investigation, I use capitals for words like “Self”, “Other”, and “Face” to denote their philosophical meaning and distinguish them from the meaning these words also have in our daily language.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

in our ability to advance self-reflection and develop feelings of compassion, care, and concern for the Other. To phrase it otherwise: the empathy gap is a form of technologically mediated *solipsism*.<sup>2</sup> How does that come about?

In her most recent book, *Reclaiming Conversation* (Turkle, 2015), Sherry Turkle has made the relation between empathy, technology, and the technological mediation of social relations the central theme of her research. Although the book is primarily about conversation – or lack thereof – it is through conversation that we advance and train our empathic skills. Empathy comes natural to us but it does require training and practice in the form of embodied conversation. For example, we need to practice “the ability to read faces, read bodies and voices” (Turkle, 2016. “how technology can impact human connection”. Filmed 26th April 2016 for the 9<sup>th</sup> episode of *Pioneers*, HuffPost Originals) in order to keep our empathic potential in good shape.

In her book, Turkle has used a school, which she calls the Holbrook School, as a “laboratory” where she has done the field-work. At Holbrook, Turkle observed the first signs indicating that the current generation seems to be struggling with its ability to connect to others. As Turkle relates the concerns of the dean of Holbrook:

Twelve-year-olds play on the playground like eight-year-olds... They don't seem able to put themselves in the place of other children. (RC, 3)

This is a simple definition of the empathy gap. According to this definition, the “gap” occurs whenever we become less able to take up the perspective of the other and develop feelings of concern and compassion for the other because of that. The chief cause of this, according to Turkle, is the erosion of our skills to have conversations with others. Although we seem to have more conversations than ever before, our technologically mediated conversations are different. Turkle argues that they are different, because mediated conversations are not “artless, risky, and face-to-face” (ibid., 362). Online conversations are not artless because we can edit our responses and the risks are smaller because we are not physically present before one another so we can control our weaknesses and avoid confronting those of

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<sup>2</sup> I will return to the matter of solipsism in part II when I discuss Husserl's concept of empathy. At this point, it suffices to note that solipsism is a confinement of the Self that causes epistemological and ethical challenges that I will gradually uncover throughout this research.

others. According to Turkle, the erosion of the ideal face-to-face conversation and the occurrence of the empathy gap are causally connected. As she write:

Since it's so often that we speak to each other while literally holding our phones, it's not surprising that that we begin to see evidence of an empathy gap. (Turkle, 2016 " The Empathy Gap: digital culture needs what talk therapy offers." *PsychotherapyNetworker*, November/December 2016. <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/magazine/article/1051/the-empathy-gap>)

How does that come about? What is this empathy gap? The gap Turkle refers to in the quotation is the gap that was first identified in 2011 by a research team led by Sarah Konrath (Konrath et al., 2011). This study established a connection between a decline in dispositional empathy in birth cohorts after 2000 (the so-called millennials) and the frequency, manner of use, and content of personal media technologies as used by this generation.<sup>3</sup> The study concluded that empathy, as measured on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis 1980a), has dropped with over 40% in the birth cohorts after 2000. Of the four scales that are measured on the IRI, empathy scores on the subscales Perspective Taking (PT) and Empathic Concern (EC) declined in particular. The study speculated that among the chief causes of this drop was the rise of new media after 2000:

One likely contributor to declining empathy is the rising prominence of personal technology and media use in everyday life. Clearly, these changes have fundamentally changed the lives of everyone. (...) With so much time spent interacting with others *online* rather than in reality, interpersonal dynamics such as empathy might certainly be altered.<sup>4</sup> (Konrath, et al., 2011: 188)

Turkle refers to the decline in dispositional empathy as the empathy gap. The gap is the flipside of what empathy is according to Turkle. To her, empathy is our ability to imagine what it is for the other to be in a certain state of mind.

The empathy that I'm talking about is a psychological capacity to put yourself in the place of another person and imagine what they are going through. (...) We suppress this capacity by putting ourselves in environments where we're

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<sup>3</sup> See also Twenge and Campbell: *the Narcissism Epidemic*, 2009, Atria, New-York.

<sup>4</sup> As the study speculated, one other likely contributor to the decline in empathy, is the change in parenting and family practices (cf. Konrath, et al., 2011: 189). The focus of the current investigation is on the relation between empathy, ethics and technology. Other likely causes are not covered.

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not looking at each other in the eye, not sticking with the other person long enough or hard enough to follow what they're feeling. (RC, 169)

The erosion of conversation has a causal connection to the emergence of the empathy gap. Because as Turkle understands it, being able to imagine what it is for someone else to have a certain experience implies that we attend to the other through the acts of speech and listening. There needs to be a mutual exchange of perspectives that takes place in the interplay between speech and listening. Why is that the case? In order to understand what it means for the other to be in a certain condition, we need some information *from* the other. We don't need a projection of our own prior experiences upon the other, what we need is information about the other's internal, first person's perspective. What we need, Turkle argues, is *conversation* to inform us about how it is for the other to be in a certain condition. By thus provided information, something new gets added to our existing body of knowledge. In order to reach a mutual exchange of perspectives, the best conversation is the moment:

In which you listen intently to another person and expect that he or she is listening to you; where the discussion can go off on a tangent and circle back; *where something unexpected can be discovered about a person or idea.* (ibid.,23, italics mine)

Conversation is not the mere exchange of information. As Turkle envisions it, it is a process of *discovery*. What we might discover is a new and different perspective. A perspective that we have not and could not have derived from our own experience or worked out by ourselves. It is a perspective that we conceive through the aid of someone else. If we wish to gain access to how it is for the otherfor the other, we should therefore engage in conversation as the medium through which we gain insight in the first person's perspective. More specifically, however, this needs to be face-to-face conversation in a literal sense. We need to have a body and a face in front of us because then we will tap in on important contextual knowledge: "In person we have access to the messages carried in the face, the voice, and the body" (ibid.). In online conversations, this context is lacking.

The argument that Turkle puts forth in *Reclaiming Conversation* is that modern social (media) technologies make it increasingly difficult to keep up with the ideal, face-to-face, form of conversation. Conversations via social technologies give a sense of *control* over the situation. Because these conversations are not real-life, it is possible to edit messages, prepare responses and shield us from the impact

of our messages. As one of Turkle's interviewees puts it rather bluntly: "What's wrong with conversation? I'll tell you what is wrong with conversation! It takes place in real time and you can't control what you are going to say" (ibid., 22). A situation in which there is control can also be seen as a situation in which we remain *in* ourselves and fail to connect with something external. It is through control that we fail to make contact with the other, with how it is for the other to have an experience. According to Turkle, technology is to blame for this, because it filters out confrontation or alters confrontation to the point where it fails to provoke changes in the Self.

So far we have seen that, according to Turkle, the empathy gap yields an increased difficulty to imagine what it is *for another* to be in a certain situation. In order to get the other's perspective, we need to have conversations. But not any conversation. We need conversations in which there is a risk and a direct confrontation with differing, conflicting, and opposing perspectives.<sup>5</sup> As we saw, technologies could function like *screens* that remove the tangible context that we need in order to have this kind of conversation. They can also function as *filters* in the sense that other perspectives are filtered out, because what we get to see online becomes increasingly tailored to our Self. In part III we will come across this phenomenon as the "filter bubble" (cf. Pariser, 2011). Screening and filtering, as can now be tentatively articulated, seem to be the technological causes leading to a diminishment on the *cognitive* side of empathy (Davis, 1980; Konrath, et al. 2010).<sup>6</sup> There is however also an *affective* side to empathy, and this refers to the ability to develop feelings of emotion, compassion, and care for the other. EC refers to an ability to *feel for the other*.

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<sup>5</sup> When Turkle connects technology to the emergence of the empathy gap, she is referring to any technology that is capable of diminishing our attention for the other in his or her immediate, "flesh and bone" presence. Smartphones are the paradigmatic example of devices that yield the promise of endless possibilities of better places to be (Cf. Turkle, 2017), thus diminishing our attention for the other. In part III, this claim will be partly nuanced.

<sup>6</sup> In part III, I will elaborate on the definition of empathy as applied in Konrath's investigation. It will then become clear that the element Perspective Taking (PT) refers to the cognitive side of empathy because it refers to an ability to imagine situations from the other's point of view. This is a cognitive capacity. Empathic Concern (EC) refers to the affective side of empathy, because it implies an ability to develop feelings of emotion, care, and concern for the other. These are more affective feelings.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

Turkle frequently cites Konrath et al.'s research (cf. Konrath, et al., 2011) on changes in empathy as the study which provides the empirical background for the case she makes in support of conversation. As we will see in more detail in the next part, the study of Konrath et al. measures empathy on the multidimensional IRI scale (Davis, 1980), which includes the measurement of both affective and cognitive sides of empathy. Thus when Turkle refers to a decline in empathy, she refers to a decline in both PT and EC. Although Turkle's definition of empathy seems to highlight the cognitive aspect of empathy, her study also includes examples of the effect of technologies on the affective side of empathy. To give an example:

In this atmosphere (which prefers technology over face-to-face interaction), we indulge a preference to apologize by text. (...) now we have alternatives that we find less stressful: we can send a photo with an annotation, or we can send a text or an e-mail. We don't have to apologize to each other; we can type, "I'm sorry". And hit send. But face-to-face, you get to see that you have hurt the other person. The other person gets to see that you are upset. It is this realization that triggers the beginning of forgiveness. (RC, 32)

According to this quotation, a failure in empathy entails a failure in having sympathy and concern for the other's feelings. Empathy is not only the ability to imagine how something is for the other, it is also *caring for the other*. This element of empathy falls within the scope of EC as measured on the IRI scale. According the IRI index, EC is defined as: "other-oriented feelings of sympathy for the misfortunes of others" (Konrath, et al, 2011). A failure in having these feelings for others is therefore part of the empathy gap as it is understood and discussed by Turkle.

At this point it is possible to propose a first definition of the empathy gap. According to this definition the empathy gap is a failure in our ability to imagine a situation from the other's point of view because we lack information from the other. This causes a diminished degree of self-reflection which in turn leads to a diminished ability to participate in other-oriented, active ethical behavior. This failure is (partly) caused and enhanced by the technological mediation of social relations. Mediation here has the form of *screening* and *filtering*.

In this definition, the elements "from the other's point of view" and "other-oriented" are crucial, because they show that any empathic act is "focused on the other" (Coplan, 2014: 13). An empathic imagination is not an imagination "based on our own experiences" (ibid.). Rather, it is an imagination for which we draw

on information that we get from the other and that we process into acts that are focused on the other. Empathic imagination is the moment in which we succeed in making successful contact with a reality that is outside our own reality. To put it otherwise, in Coplan's own wording:

When I successfully adopt the target's perspective, I imagine being the target undergoing the target's experiences rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target's experiences. (ibid.)

The definition of the empathy gap presented in this chapter will be adhered to throughout the current investigation. In the next chapter I will present a first sketch, mainly from an empirical psychological and sociological perspective, which will show why the empathy gap is problematic. As will become clear, this is a perspective that requires elaboration.



## 2 The empirical diagnosis: why the empathy gap is problematic

Turkle's most recent book is about conversation. Although empathy is but one of the positive outcomes of conversation, it is an important dimension of it. Conversation is what she calls an "empathic art" (RC, 7). A way of learning to relate to others in a way that provides "intimacy, community and communion" (ibid.). These in turn are amongst our "most fundamental human values" (ibid.). The technologies that cause the empathy gap pose a challenge to the flourishing of these values, but in the meantime they offer an opportunity to better articulate them:

Technology asks us to confront our human values. This is a good thing because it causes us to reaffirm us what they are. (ibid.)

What are these human values? The capacities for "intimacy, community, and communion" (ibid.). For Turkle, these are among our "most fundamental human values" (ibid.). The actualization of these values requires empathy, and empathy in turn requires conversation. We can understand what the challenge of the empathy gap is by having a closer look at what the value of conversation is for Turkle. She discerns three levels at which conversation takes place. They translate as follows:

- *Monological conversation*: these are the conversation we have with ourselves;
- *Dialogical conversations*: these are the conversations with friends, acquaintances, and strangers;
- *Political conversations*: these are the conversations in the workplace, in politics, and at a communal level.

Turkle draws this distinction following a metaphor she has derived from the American essayist Henry Thoreau. It is a metaphor, which appears in *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854). According to the metaphor there is a "chair" for each level of the conversation, as Turkle writes "[Thoreau] said that in his cabin there were three chairs – one for solitude, two for friendship and three for society" (ibid., 10).

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The first chair is for solitude and conversations we have with ourselves. Solitude is a *condition* for empathy. The ability to be alone, to self-reflect and develop a secure sense of Self is a condition to enter into dialogue with others. The argument is that before one is able to listen to others and attend to their stories and needs, one needs to have a secure sense of Self. In Levinas's idiom: one needs to have a *separated* being. A secure and stable sense of self is needed in order to prepare for conversation. Conversations that take place outside the single chair provide the material via which we advance self-reflection. This is a circle that is broken by technology (cf. RC 10-11). Social technologies erode the capacity to be alone and engage in self-reflection, as they offer easy ways out of solitude. With the smartphone, the world and social connections are readily at our disposal. What do we lose when we lose the capacity to be alone? We lose "the capacity to reach out to others and see them as separate and independent" (ibid., 61).

The second chair requires others. It comprises conversations in the sphere of friends, family, and strangers. Why would we need these conversations? In Turkle's analysis, we need them to build up empathy and gather the material that we need to advance self-reflection. Why do we need that? For example, Turkle writes:

When you have a growing awareness of how much you don't know about someone else, you begin to understand how much you don't know about yourself. (ibid., 172)

Empathizing is the skill that enables us to take up the the perspectives of others and, through that, advance the knowledge of both ourselves and others. Knowledge of the other does not mean that we need to comprehend the other completely. Knowing the other implies an *asymmetry* between our knowledge of the other and the other's self-knowledge. This asymmetry can only be bridged *partially*. For that we use conversation. Conversation does give us information about the other, and thus puts a halt to our framing of the other. Framing in the sense of reducing someone else, to something the Self has made of the other. The frame actually is the Self. Conversation is a way of suspending our judgement about someone else. Our judgement is suspended until we have provided the someone else with an opportunity to express herself. It is in that sense that the asymmetrical relation between Self and someone else is *partially* bridged. Partially because we do have information from someone else, but we still are not the Other. We have come closer to the other, but we remain a Self.

Conversation is therefore not primarily about self-expression. It is better understood as a medium through which we offer someone else an opportunity to express herself. Through that expression we gain new information that we can use to advance knowledge about ourselves, others, and the world. Why is that important? As Turkle understands it, this is intrinsically interwoven with what we are as human beings: knowledge and attention craving beings. As such, we seek to connect to others in order to gain knowledge and aspire for the truth. It is human to reach out to others because it is in and through the other that our desire for knowledge can be satisfied. When we fail to connect to someone else, we fail to accumulate knowledge and in that sense, the empathy gap hinders us in our existence as beings that crave knowledge and community.

The third chair is the public world. Conversation in the public world includes conversations we have in the workplace, in education, and in politics. Why do we need conversations here? Again, to gain insights that we could not have worked out by ourselves. Technology intervenes at this level. For example, through an e-mail sent in the workplace “you lose the ability to see how someone thinks on their feet” (ibid., 275). Conversations in classrooms are also “third-chair” conversation. We need education in order to advance knowledge, but this aim is best served when an element of risk is present in the educational process. We need that to make actual progress:

In a classroom, one should ‘walk’ toward embarrassment. Students should feel safe enough to take the risk of saying something that might not be worked through or popular. Students will get over feeling embarrassed. It may be easier to contribute anonymously, but it is better for us all to learn how to take responsibility for what we believe. (ibid., 240)

When we lose the ability to empathize, “something human” is lost. This something is, according to her, an innate desire to connect. We also lose the opportunity to advance our self-reflection. The loss of these two abilities is why Turkle argues that the empathy gap is a challenge.

Why a decrease in empathy constitutes a challenge, according to Konrath et al., is not worked out extensively in their investigation. It does however follow from the way in which they define two of the important sub-scales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1980). The IRI is the index which the study applied in

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order to measure empathy. Of these subscales, the most important ones, according to Konrath et al., are PT and EC.

EC is “the most prototypical concept of empathy” (Konrath, et al., 2011: 181). People scoring high in EC are less lonely, have “fewer negative agentive traits (e.g., boasting, verbal aggression; Davis, 1983c), are more emotionally reactive and have a higher self-control” (ibid., 181). This translates into positive prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Thus, people scoring high on EC have higher care for (non-human) animals. Also, high scores in EC are associated with more hours spent volunteering and giving more to charities and people in need (cf. ibid., 182). Furthermore, a high score in PT is generally a good prediction of a corresponding high score in EC. The better we are able to imagine ourselves to be in the other’s shoes, the more likely it is that we will translate this knowledge into prosocial behavior such as volunteering and giving to charities. (cf. Konrath et al., 181 – 183).

Like EC, PT is also associated with prosocial behaviors. For example, PT is associated with low social dysfunction such as shyness, loneliness, social anxiety, boasting, verbal aggression (cf. Davis, 1983c). Furthermore, people scoring high on PT are better able to understand others and act in the interest of the other accordingly. Finally, a high score in PT is associated with higher self-esteem and lower self-reported anxiety.

A drop in the markers for EC and PT would lead to the erosion of the mentioned positive, prosocial behaviors that correlate to both EC and PT. From Turkle’s perspective, a drop in EC and PT will erode our sense of what it means to be human and cause the erosion of our ability to advance self-reflection. However important and useful the perspectives of Konrath and Turkle are, what seems to be lacking in these accounts is the ethical perspective. The empathy gap is not just a failure in successful imagination; it is a failure in making a successful connection with the Other as an ethical source.

### 3 Preparing the philosophical diagnosis: Levinas's concept of "ethics"

#### 3.1. Levinas and the morality of social relations

In the previous chapter an attempt was made to show to what extent the empathy gap constitutes a challenge. With Turkle and Konrath et.al., showed that the empathy gap is challenging because it diminishes our human values, is detrimental to our capacities to advance self-reflection, and makes it less easy to engage in pro-social behaviors.

This is a starting point according to which the referred challenges are challenges in an empathic context. Apart from the fact that it is necessary to define "empathy", we could also propose a different perspective on the social relation.<sup>7</sup> According to this perspective, the social relation is not an empathic but rather an *ethical* relation. It is a relation in which the Other becomes the source (agent) and recipient (patient) of ethical action. When this perspective is invoked, the social challenges (i.e. the empathy gap) that were indicated in the previous chapter show themselves as *ethical challenges*. The empathy gap in turn becomes an ethics gap because the relation with the Other as source and object of ethics is challenged by the technological mediation of social relations. This will be made visible in the next chapter in which an analogy will be made visible between technological mediation and the way mediation is challenged from Levinas's perspective.<sup>8</sup>

But first it must be shown that it is possible to invoke a perspective, according to which the social relation is not merely an "empathic" relation, and that the empathy gap gives rise to challenges in the context of ethics. I will do this through an exposition of Levinas's account of ethics, because his account is a unique and seminal attempt to locate the starting point of ethics not in the Self, as Kantian ethics maintain, and also not in the (technological) power relations that surround

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<sup>7</sup> In part II I will analyse and define the concept "empathy" by drawing on the phenomenological tradition.

<sup>8</sup> As I will make clear in the following chapters, when I refer to technological mediation I do not necessarily refer to technological mediation *theory*.

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us, as Foucauldian posthumanistic ethics have it. Rather, it is an attempt to locate the starting point of ethics outside the Self, in the social relation with the Other.

When ethics is construed as an intrinsic element of the social relation, it is possible to show that the empathy gap gives rise to an *ethics gap*. When this has been demonstrated, it is also shown that the scope of ethical concern for an ethics of technology needs to be widened. Ethics should not only focus on the loss of autonomy caused by our technologically mediated being (cf. Verbeek, 2011), but also on the loss of *heteronomy*. The scope of ethical concern within the ethics of technology can therefore be widened. What I will show, and what is made visible by the empathy gap, is that the absence of the Other gives rise to a moral blind spot. Because when we lose sight of the Other, we will lose one of the *sources* that give shape to our *moral* subjectivity. Moreover, we will lose sight on the Other as potential *patient* of moral action. These perspectives can be made visible and brought into a relation with the empathy gap with the help of Levinas's account of ethics. It is an ethics that allows me to show why the empathy gap is problematic in the first place and it points to the direction of an ethics in which the empathy gap is closed.

In the following sections I will outline what Levinas's ethics amounts to. I will discuss what the relations are in the Self and the relations to the Other, and how this analysis is relevant in the context of the current investigation. This is schematized below. In the subsequent chapters, I will further elaborate and flesh out the relevant elements of this schematic picture of Levinasian ethics.

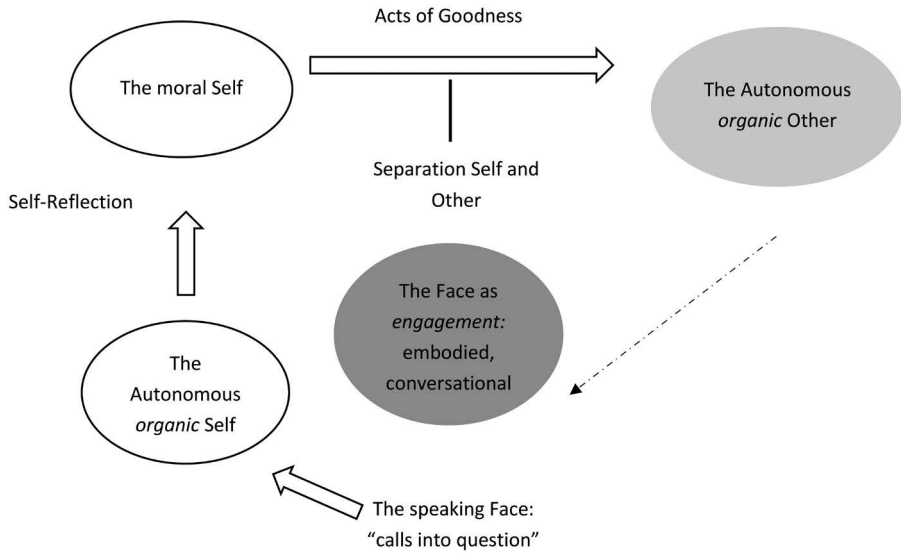


Fig. 1: structure of Levinas's ethics

## 3.2. The Economy of being

In this section I will discuss Levinas's concept "economy". The discussion will focus itself on the three elements of this condition that are important for this research. First, I will discuss what the relations are that constitute the economic dimension of being. This entails a discussion of the concept "Enjoyment" (*jouissance*). Secondly, I will discuss what actions are required in order to succeed in living a life of Enjoyment. In this discussion I will touch on the subjects of *freedom* and *temporality*. Finally and thirdly, I will discuss in what sense life, in the economic dimension of being, amounts to the condition of "ontological solitude" (cf. TO).

Levinas's existential analysis, worked out in *Totality and Infinity*, draws a sharp division (*Séparation*) between the Self (*Le Meme*) and the Other (*L'Autre*). The existence of the Self is marked by relations with the world, which Levinas terms "Enjoyment" (*jouissance*). With this distinction, Levinas's analysis of subjectivity opposes that of Heidegger. For Heidegger the subject (*Dasein*) is completely immersed in the world. It lacks a *concrete* interiority. Levinas's Self does have an inner structure and this structure consists of the human-world relation which Levinas terms Enjoyment.

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With the concept of Enjoyment, Levinas has found an alternative for Heidegger's analysis of the way we are in the world. Enjoyment is an alternative for Heidegger's analysis of "how" we are in the world and "who" we are or become in the course of being-in-the-world. According to Heidegger's analysis, things show themselves in their utility. They have some purpose, they are in that sense not "in themselves" but always things that *are in-order-to*. Beings, for Heidegger, have the essential structure of usefulness, things are utensils or *tools*.<sup>9</sup> According to Levinas, things are not *only* tools. Heidegger's analysis has not exhausted the possible ways in which we encounter beings. As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, "how" things are is not only discovered in their usefulness:

The things we live from are not tools ... in the Heideggerian sense of the term. Their existence is not exhausted by the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as having the existence of hammers, needles, or machines. They are always in a certain measure ... objects of enjoyment.(TI, 110)

Food is not a means for living. "While hunger is a need", eating is "enjoyment" (TI, 111). Food has no purpose beyond that it provides satisfaction and that is what the essence is of the relation of Enjoyment: "that an energy that is other ... becomes in enjoyment my own energy, my strength, me" (ibid.).

Levinas's concept of "Enjoyment", furthermore, can be contrasted to Heidegger's concept of "care" and thus offers an alternative to Heidegger's analysis of "who" we are or "become" in the course of our existence. Care, in Heidegger's concept, points to the way we are in the world. Care amounts to *deciding* what life projects we want to engage in. We choose life projects because we care, because we want to become someone, a specifically desired "who". On the other hand, life understood as "care" also shows that we are driven by needs: we take care of the things we encounter in the world, because we need them to accomplish our life projects. Ultimately, we are driven by the need to become an authentic Self. It is for that reason that the human subject embarks on its life projects and is always directed to the future in order to achieve them.<sup>10</sup> Levinas's Self is not so much directed to a future or to a something that it is not yet: "life is an existence that does not precede its essence" (TI, 112). Thus for Levinas, it is *in* the acts of living

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<sup>9</sup> Heidegger's tool-analysis will be worked out more extensively in part IV.

<sup>10</sup> Our existence precedes our essence. Our future-directed way of being in the world, comes prior to an essential and deterministic mode of being.

that we live a Good Life. It is in every instance of our existence that we are living. Life is not a condition of the future, it is rather the here and now. As Mensch has noted in his commentary on *Totality and Infinity* (Mensch, 2015), an ancient parallel for this analysis is found in Aristotle.

As Aristotle writes in his *Ethics*: “Life is in itself good and pleasant. We can see that from the very fact that everyone desires it” (*Ethics*, 1170a26, p. 266). Life for Aristotle is the conscious awareness of our well-being. This is immediate in the sense that it accompanies all our actions.<sup>11</sup> The immediate presence and Enjoyment of our life acts is what constitutes the *content* of our life. As Levinas writes:

Action itself... enters into our happiness. We live from acts. What I do and what I am is at the same time that from which I live. We relate ourselves to it with a relation that is neither theoretical nor practical ... The final relation is enjoyment, happiness. (TI, 113)

Happiness motivates us to act. We do what we are doing not in order to satisfy our needs, but rather in order to be happy: “What we live from does not enslave us; we enjoy it” (TI, 114). The acts of enjoyment give substance to the Self, it “acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the ‘other’” (TI, 76). The substance thus acquired is an *organic* substance. The dimension of Enjoyment is a *material* dimension to our being and already points to a possibility in the Self to live completely *for itself*: “The famished stomach has no ears ... is for itself ... the self-sufficiency of enjoying measures the egotism or the ipseity of the ego” (TI, 118).

In Levinas’s analysis we are in-the-world, as Enjoying beings. The Self, in that sense, is “at home” (*ibid.*, 37) in this world because the world and the environment in which we are “affords the means” (*ibid.*) by which we can rework our surrounding world into a place that befits our possibilities and needs as embodied beings. The Self, as Levinas construes it, is a being that through working, dwelling, and possession integrates the alterity of the world into the Self. (cf. TI, 38). What does that mean according to Levinas?

Enjoyment, as Levinas understands it, grants freedom insofar as it is a relation in which we live a life that is happy *because* of its needs. In this happiness we experience a sense of freedom because it is through the continuous enjoyment of our life-acts, that we constitute a world *according to ourselves*. Enjoyment is privative

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<sup>11</sup> For Levinas, the relation of Enjoyment is a non-intentional relation and in that sense also an *immediate* relation. I will not pursue this discussion in the scope of this research.

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action: no one can Enjoy in our place. It is in that sense that Enjoyment grants us a measure of freedom.

This freedom is a freedom without *security*. Something, some actions and conditions, need to secure that we are able to live a life of freedom and happiness. This security, in Levinas's analysis, is provided by *labor* and the *home*. Labor points to the efforts we undertake in order to procure a secure future for ourselves. Labor is "work" in the sense of all the actions we perform in order to provide a safe and secure space in which we can enjoy the fruits of our labor: food, possessions, free time, etc.<sup>12</sup> Or as Levinas has put it: "thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun" (TI, 75). These are all the "contents of life" from which we live and which make us happy. They are procured by labor but they require in the meantime a condition. For Levinas, this condition is the *home*.<sup>13</sup> The home, Levinas writes, is not merely a tool like it was for Heidegger. The home has a privileged position. It is not a means for action, but rather the *condition* for action:

The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement.  
(ibid., 152)

What Levinas is pointing to, is that whenever we are deprived from our home and out in the streets, it is pointless to speak of such things as "care" or "enjoyment". These only become possibilities once we are relieved from a bare struggle for survival. The home provides this condition. As Levinas points out, an idealist perspective on the subject seems to have neglected this concretization of human existence (cf. TI, 153).

At this point there is a basic picture of Levinas's analysis of the economic dimension of our being. It is a dimension which points to our essential structure as "happy" beings. A condition we acquire through "labor" and conditioned by "the home". Economic being is also an ethical structure, in the sense that Levinas construes it as the condition for our ability to engage with the Other in a "genuine" ethical relation; we can do that only starting from a separated and satisfied being:

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<sup>12</sup> That what is procured by labor is referred to as "possession". Possession alone touches substance; the other relations with the thing only affect attributes. (...) Because the thing is not in itself a thing can be exchanged and accordingly be compared, be quantified, and consequently already lose its very identity, be reflected in money (TI, 162).

<sup>13</sup> The home is also the place in which we get the first imprint of "the Other" in the form of the caregiver. I will not further explore this element of the home here.

Egoism, enjoyment, sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority – the articulations of separation – are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other which opens forth from the separated and finite being. (TI, 148)

Because separation or “ontological solitude” is an ethical condition, it is relevant to further explore what the condition of ontological solitude amounts to.

Enjoyment reduces us to our Self, or as Levinas writes: “Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution” (ibid., 118). This Levinasian construal of economic life stands in sharp contrast with Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein, which in its everydayness is never alone, separated, or isolated, but always immersed in the world and the worlds of others. Levinas has a deviating analysis.

For Levinas, the relation of Enjoyment is a relation in which we integrate the otherness of the world in the Self. Although this relation strives after exteriority (it is in contact with a world outside the Self), this is not an exteriority which is “other in an eminent sense” (ibid., 33). Throughout relations of Enjoyment, we remain “at home” (ibid., *chez-soi*) in the Same.<sup>14</sup>

In Levinas’s early works, written before *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas refers to this condition as “ontological solitude” (TO, 42).<sup>15</sup> This is Levinas’s account of the challenge, referred to by Husserl and Sartre as *solipsism* (cf. Sartre, 1943; Husserl, 1963). Solipsism, according to them, is the condition in which we are confined to our own being, limited to our own consciousness and ways of giving meaning to the world. Within Levinas’s analysis, we are similarly primarily *solus ipse* or “monadic beings” (TO, 42). This follows from Levinas’s analysis of the Self and its relation to the world.

The first relation between the Self and its world is one that has the structure of “appropriation and integration” (Peperzak, 1993: 160). The condition of “ontological solitude” results from this mode of being in the world: “the solitude of the subject results from its relationship with the existing over which it is master” (TO, 67).

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<sup>14</sup> “The Same” is a technical term Levinas employs to describe the subject-object and subject-subject relations throughout which the “I” remains an identity, a Self, a consciousness, and Ego. As Levinas writes about the Ego: “It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification” (TI, 36).

<sup>15</sup> These are: *Time and the Other* (Levinas, 1987) and *Existence and Existents* (Levinas, 2001)

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This analysis is, as Mensch has noted, a Hegelian theme that reappears in Levinas's analysis.<sup>16</sup> As Kojève, whose Hegel interpretation has guided Levinas, writes in his introduction to Hegelian philosophy:

If he changes [the world, CZ.], his change remains 'private', purely subjective, revealed to himself alone, 'mute', not communicated to others (Kojève, 28).

It is through the ways in which we are in the world that we integrate the world in the Self and become identical with the world. How are we in the world, in the economic dimension of existence? As we saw, that is primarily as *embodied* beings. That is as beings that eat, drink, sleep, and go on vacations. These are the organic relations we have with the world and they constitute us in who we are on an organic level.

That what we acquire as embodied beings is what remains private, disclosed *for ourselves* and (not yet) communicated to others. We live a Good Life, but this is life that is not yet put into question by the Other. As Levinas clarifies his position:

One can exchange everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by existing. In as much as I am, I am a monad. It is by existing that I am without windows and doors, and not by some content in me that would be incommunicable. (TO, 42)

What does Levinas mean with this? What Levinas is basically pointing to, is that it in every life-act of the human being – be it eating, drinking, sleeping, or travelling – we reach for something outside the I, but we ultimately remain within the I. All the acts of life are to a certain extent a *failed act of transcendence*: we ultimately incorporate the otherness of the things we acquire through our embodied capacities (i.e. eating and drinking) into our Self. The way in which we relate to the world through knowledge, possession, and – ultimately – as Enjoyment keeps us in solitude because in these acts we never transcend ourselves. We remain within the limited sphere of the body through which we take in the world as something that nourishes us. In a simplified way the idea that Levinas is pointing out, is the following. We eat an apple and we enjoy eating it, this experience is non-transitive. Nobody can eat in our place and Enjoy the act of eating.

Ontological solitude is a condition which is not easily overcome. Even the normal and everyday social relation does not bring us out of this condition but

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<sup>16</sup> That is Hegel through the perspective of Kojève.

rather confirms us in our solitude. Through our normal social relations, we remain enclosed in the Self:

We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships. Through sight, touch, sympathy and cooperative work, we are with others. All these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the Other. But I am not the other. I am all alone. (...) Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad. (TO: 42)

The empathic act, in the quotation translated as “sympathy”, does not give us “the other qua other” (ibid).<sup>17</sup> Empathy, as Levinas understands it, is a modality of a relation of knowledge, a relation that grasps its object in its objectifiable, outward appearance. This relation does not successfully reach the Other, it remains a self-knowledge which is subsequently projected upon the Other. It is in that sense, that the normal relation to the Other is a *mediated* access. We encounter the Other not *as* Other but rather as a product of *our* ways of giving meaning. That renders it a mediational relation in which the mediator is the Self.<sup>18</sup> Access to the Other is also mediated by things, by our cultural context and – to make it concrete - by the Other’s clothing:

In the world the other is (...) never separated from things(...), not only do institutions (...) put us into relationships with persons, collectivities, history, and the supernatural, but in the world the other is an object already through his clothing. (ibid.,30)

Things can, like ideas do, bring us in a relation with the Other, but that does not mean that we have reached the Other in what makes the Other an Other: her internal perspective or her “freedom” (TI, 39) as Levinas calls it. In order that we cut through the mediators that connect us to the Other and reach the Other *as* Other, as a being “according-to-itself” (*kath’auto*, cf. TI 50-51), something is needed.<sup>19</sup> What is needed will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>17</sup> It is likely that Levinas with the concept “sympathy” had in mind Max Scheler’s position on intersubjectivity. This position indeed referred to intersubjectivity as *together-feeling*, a phenomenon Scheler referred to as sympathy (Scheler, 2009)

<sup>18</sup> I will return to this theme in the next section, when I will discuss “conversation” as means to access the Other.

<sup>19</sup> The notion “according-to-itself” will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.3. The Other: Levinas's account of the social relation

In this section Levinas's account of intersubjectivity – the social relation – will be discussed in four subsequent paragraphs. I will discuss the elements which constitute the social relation according to Levinas: metaphysical Desire, conversation, and goodness (cf. TI,39). First, Levinas's account of metaphysical Desire is discussed in contrast with “ordinary” desire” the relatively transcendent relation that was discussed in the previous section. Metaphysical Desire will be discussed because it is through this Desire that the Self enters in contact with other subjectivity and, through that, with “exteriority”. Then Levinas's notion of the Face, which comprises the elements of goodness and conversation, will be discussed. I will focus on Levinas's construal of the Face as the *speaking* and *embodied face*. These dimensions of the Face refer to “conversation” and “goodness” as the two other elements of the social relation as discerned by Levinas. This discussion will show that both conversation and embodiment engage us in the world of the Other. To put it otherwise: it is through the speaking, embodied Face that we come in contact with exteriority (i.e. the perspective of the Other).

#### 3.3.1. Metaphysical Desire and the Other

In the previous sections, we came across the Self as a being that lives *for-itself* in the dimension of Enjoyment. In this dimension, its actions are motivated by a physical desire to satisfy its needs. The Self is construed as an *organic* being that has the prime objective to satisfy its needs and Enjoy its being in the here and below. There is, however, in Levinas's analysis, a different dimension to the Self, which he refers to as “metaphysical Desire”. This Desire does not strive after fulfillment, as ordinary desire does. It is destined for “the elsewhere”, and the “otherwise” and the “other” (TI, 33). What metaphysical Desire strives after is not something we can possess, like we can possess the bread we eat and the water we drink. These things are, as we saw, integrated and incorporated in the Self and they provide it with its organic substance; it enables existence on the organic level. The entities that can be possessed have *relative* otherness. They have an otherness that ultimately falls under our powers. As Levinas writes, things and experiences can be possessed and can lose their otherness “like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate” (ibid.). These things can be made part of our identity as “thinker or possessor” (ibid.).

The Other has a different form of otherness, the Other is “absolutely other” (TI, 29). What does that mean? We cannot comprehend the Other completely because we will forever lack the Other’s internal perspective. The Other, Levinas writes, is a being “according to itself” (cf. TI, 50-51). We have only access to the Other in her outward appearance but never completely grasp what it is *for-the-other* to have a certain experience. The metaphysical relation (i.e. the relation with something outside the organic, physical Self) which is proper to our relation with the Other “can not properly speaking be a representation, for the Other would therein dissolve into the same” (ibid., 38).

Representing the Other is “mediating” the Other (ibid., 44) and this act is, according to Levinas, proper to western philosophy. A thing is represented whenever it is “conceptualized” (ibid.) and another is represented whenever it is brought under my domination through “terror” (ibid.). Terror here can be seen in a broad sense, as any act that denies the Other’s freedom. An Other, we will see in the next two paragraphs, remains Other when approached through *language* and *goodness*. Conversation provides us with some of the content of the Other’s internal perspective; it gives us access to the foreign consciousness of the Other. Goodness acknowledges the Other in her right to a Good Life and is also an act in which the Self turns away from a preoccupation with its own existence and turns towards the Other.

The Other is thus Other in an absolute sense because she has a world of her own (like the Self has) and a perspective of her own. The Self cannot erase this perspective and in that sense the Other is also the free one, the being that falls outside our control and outside our powers (cf. TI, 39). When we seek to predict the Other’s behavior, the Other’s future, and the Other’s concepts of the Good Life, we cannot help but to rely on our own previous experiences. This, however, does not give us the Other. We will remain in the Self. It is this reality of the Other, this unpredictable mode of existence, which cuts across objectivity and objective knowledge as the relation proper to the relation with the Other. When we seek to relate to the Other we need a different mode than that of knowledge. This mode is what Levinas will call “ethical” (cf. TI, 50).

Why do we Desire otherness and the Other? What binds us in a relation with the Other? Is it not possible to ignore the Other and live in a world “according to ourselves”? In the previous sections we came across the Self as an organic being, with needs which it strives to satisfy. The Self is however more than an organic

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being. The Self is also a *truth-aspiring being*. And “truth is sought in the Other, but by him whom lacks nothing” (TI, 62). This is what connects us to the Other. Levinas’s concept of “truth” runs counter to that of Heidegger. For Heidegger truth is “disclosure”. A specific disclosure, as Mensch has remarked. It is a disclosure of beings in their relation to us (cf. Mensch, 2015: 46) and their function in our life project. Things are “known” and encountered in truth (as how they are) as part of a pragmatic relation in which the measure is Dasein: things are useful (i.e. true) insofar as they are able to provide for the needs of Dasein. For Levinas this account of the truth is not acceptable. It renders the world “according to me” and fails to provide with some (intersubjectively founded) measure of objectivity. As Levinas writes:

To recognize truth to be disclosure is to refer it to the horizon of him who discloses ... The disclosed being is relative to us and not *kath'auto*. (TI, 64)

Why is that problematic? A world that is not able to resist the Self, which is not objective in the etymological sense of the concept “objective”, is not able to challenge the Self.<sup>20</sup> The Other, however, is such an objectivity, a being that is able to stand against our truth claims. What is more, the Other is able to call them into question (cf. TI, 40). With the notion of the Self as the being that is “called into question” by the Other, we have Levinas’s notion of ethics (ibid.). Why should we let ourselves be called into question? What is the motivational force to establish such a relation with the Other, that the Other is ceded a right over the Self? (cf. TI, 40).

First Levinas writes: “A world that has lost its principle, anarchical, a world of phenomena (...) does not answer to the quest for truth (...) it suffices for enjoyment.” (TI, 65). What Levinas points out is that an existence proper to a human existence does seek to lift itself from mere organic functioning. It strives after the truth that can be found in the Other as the one that opposes our private disclosures and opinions held true. In that way the Other offers a gateway to the truth. An intersubjectively founded truth: it is through the Other that the world becomes more than the world *for me*. Through the Other we get a common world. This dimension of Levinas’s analysis is inspired by Kojève’s reading of Hegel (Kojève, 1980). Because, as Kojève writes, the human being that seeks to lift itself from

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<sup>20</sup> According to Mensch, Levinas refers in this context to “objectivity” in the sense of *Gegen-ständlich*. That is, a being able to stand against the truth claims we make (cf. Mensch, 2015: 47).

animal life, from the satisfaction of its desires, “risks his life by turning towards other human beings. Beings that can ‘recognize’ me as an autonomous value” (Kojève, 1980: 7). The human being, therefore, is a being that is able to lift itself above organic existence through its relation to other human beings. Other human beings can recognize the Self in what it is, beyond its organic existence. The Desire for this recognition is inevitable; it is interwoven with who we are as human beings.

Secondly, there are traces of an ancient, Aristotelian argument, present in Levinas’s account of Metaphysical Desire (cf. Mensch, 2015: 47). According to Aristotle, the pursuit of theoretical knowledge is more excellent than practical knowledge. The latter is directed “either to our pleasure or to our necessities” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 918b22-25). Practical knowledge is for those who are not free and lack the leisure needed in order to engage in theory. The latter is the quest for the truth with no aim other than to attain the truth. Unlike practical knowledge, theoretical knowledge is *disinterested*.

The Desire for the Other is the Desire for the truth and, insofar as we are truth-aspiring beings (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*), this Desire comes “natural”, it is interwoven with who we are and therefore we will strive for its acquisition. This innate Desire binds us in a relation with the Other, which is the only being that has the potential of satisfying it. But although for Levinas Desire is part of the subject’s constitution, I will argue that this Desire is also a form of a *skill*. It is a potentiality that requires training and practice in order to flourish. This calls for an ethics in the realm of the Self, an ethics thus of self-care which is not present in Levinas’s analysis. I will work out a preliminary account of this ethics in the next chapter.

### 3.3.2. The Face

Throughout this paragraph, I analyze the elements of the social relation. In the previous paragraph I discussed the element “metaphysical Desire”. In the upcoming paragraphs, I will discuss *conversation* and *goodness*. Before going there, I will discuss the Face. Because both conversation and goodness somehow “belong” to the Face. The Face, is an important concept in the Levinas of *Totality*

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*and Infinity*.<sup>21</sup> The Face can be seen as a metaphor that accounts for the Other in her singularity. The face is that what we see, however what makes the Face “a Face” is not at the level of the seen. The Face is a symbol of that what renders the Other’s individuality and otherness in relation to the Self. As Mensch writes, commenting on Levinas’s discussion of the Face in *Totality and Infinity*:

I can phenomenologically describe and objectively represent its [the Face’s, CZ] physical features. The Face, however, is not a catalog of such features. (...) I do not see *what makes them eyes* – that is, their seeing. Both what they *have seen* and *will see* escape me. (Mensch, 2015: 114)

What we do not see is the internal perspective of the Other. We do see or know what it is *for the Other* to experience something. The Other remains, like the Self, a singular being, separated from the Self by her way of being-in-the-world. And yet, the Other’s Face is there, also as something that seeks to enter in contact with the Self. It *engages* the Self. But what “is” the Face? Can its positive features be outlined? No, then we will say that the Face consists of skin, bones, hair, eyes, ears, etc. We can present the Face in its phenomenal presence, but we will still have failed to grasp “the Face” and with that, the Other in her singularity.

The proper relation to the Face is therefore not one of vision. By contrast, the Face *conditions* vision. Better still, it conditions *proper* vision. For Heidegger, the conditions for world-disclosure are to be found in Dasein itself. In its everydayness, Dasein finds itself absorbed in the world and lacks the distance that is needed to form a vision about the world. But once Dasein is cut loose from the world, it will regain a proper stance towards the world. This stance is something it gains after it has found a possibility to become authentic in itself (cf. BT, 249).

Levinas’s Self however does not derive the “light”, that the Self needs for understanding (cf. Plato, *Republic*) from itself. It needs the Other and the Other is revealed as Face. What the Other allows us to do, is to gain access to an external or objective perspective. Starting from this perspective we are able to measure, challenge, and test the way in which we are. The external perspective allows us to start questioning ourselves, for example: are we living a Good Life, should we

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<sup>21</sup> In Levinas second major work, *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas, 1978), the concept still appears but without the central importance attached to it in *Totality and Infinity*. This partly as result of a critique on Levinas’s concept of the Face, offered by Derrida in his essay *Violence and Metaphysics* (Derrida, 1978). I will briefly return to this critique in part VI.

change something about ourselves and our attitudes, etc.?’ These questions are prompted by the Other as the being in relation to whom these questions become relevant. The Face allows for this insofar as the Face enters in a relation with the Self through conversation but, as a being that is not the Self, also remains exterior to the Self. Insofar as the Face enters into relation with the Self through discourse, it allows the Self to verify the way in which it lives and put to test its privately held concept of the Good Life. The Other, as the exterior being, allows us to criticize and correct the ways in which we are. The Other is in that sense a principle and external point of verification:

The relation provides the transcendence that ‘clears’ space for disclosure. It does so by discourse since the Face of the Other is a speaking face. The Other does not just speak, but comments on what he says, adds to it and corrects it. (Mensch, 2015: 118-119)

### 3.3.3. The speaking face: the ethics of conversation

Conversation is what brings us in a relation with the Other. How does that come about? Speech cuts across the Other’s phenomenal presence as a certain “what”. In that sense, speech as a means to get access to the Other stands opposite *vision*. Vision reduces the Other to an image, to something the Self makes of the Other. For example, when we “see” the Other, we “see” that he or she:

Is the president of the State Council,” or “He is mr. So-and-so’. The answer presents itself as a quiddity; it refers to a system of relations. To the question *who?* answers the non-qualifiable presence of an existent who *presents himself* without reference to anything, and yet distinguishes himself from every other existent. (TI, 177)

Speech reveals us the Other as the Other is “in itself”. Why? Because it is in speech that we offer the Other an opportunity to *express herself*. Speech allows the Other to reveal herself as a being that is not according to me, but “according to itself”. It is in conversation that the Other explains herself and provides her perspective. When we have contact with the Other as a reality “according to itself”, we will have made contact with exteriority. Because conversation has this basic structure within Levinas’s analysis, conversation can serve both an epistemological and an ethical function. I will start by discussing the epistemological function of conversation.

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Conversation in its epistemological function is, Levinas writes, a “struggle for the truth” (TI, 74). How should we envision that? Conversation is the moment in which two separate (economic) beings leave their private, organic existence and make their entrance in the public, through a dialogue with the Other. In this dialogue we present *our* ideas and beliefs about the world and the Other. The Other does the same and when the dialogue thus commences, the Other is able to correct and challenge our ideas, beliefs, and opinions. The Other, to put it otherwise, is able to *falsify* our statements. The Other is able to do so because the Other is an external being, a point of verification *outside* the Self. What we get here is a notion of *intersubjectively grounded objectivity*. It is in the course of the conversation that we create common grounds. Conversation is the moment where the “the common plane is wanting or is yet to be constituted” (TI, 73). Conversation in fact constitutes this common plane (cf. Mensch, 54).

An element of this epistemology is that knowledge, as envisioned by Levinas, is acquired in a *non-maieutic* but dialectic relation.<sup>22</sup> What does that mean? Maieutics is the relation between Socrates and his pupils. Socrates, as he explains in the Platonic dialogue the *Thaetetus*, knows nothing by and of himself. That is, he does not know more than his pupils do. That makes him unqualified to be an instructor, someone thus who “forces” knowledge on his pupils. Socrates’s function is more modest. As a *midwife*, he brings back to the surface knowledge that had been forgotten (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150b). Knowledge according to this account is not *instruction*. Socrates’s pupils do not receive anything *from* Socrates. He is the midwife that helps to give birth to the knowledge that was locked up in the pupil. Knowledge then is *recollection*.

Levinas’s model is different. It is also through the Other that we acquire knowledge. But the Other is not a passive midwife. The Other is active, the Other reveals herself and then knowledge is added to our existing body of knowledge through *revelation*. Knowledge is the process through which we *receive* what was not in the Self prior to the arrival of the Other. That is what the Other does. The Other, Levinas writes, “introduces into me what was not in me “ (TI, 203). What

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<sup>22</sup> Socrates in Plato’s *Thaetetus* compares his work with midwifery: “I myself am barren of wisdom. The criticism that is often made of me – that it is a lack of wisdom that makes me ask others questions, but say nothing positive myself – it perfectly true. Why do I behave like this? Because the god compels me to attend to the labours of others, but prohibits me from having any offspring myself.” (*Thaetetus*, 150b)

was primarily not there before the arrival of the Other is “reason” (cf. TI, 204). What the Other plants in us, is the capacity to reason, to question and to criticize. The Other is able to do that because, as an exterior being, it is able to test our beliefs and opinions and thus enables us to construct veritable knowledge. This is the epistemological function of conversation. The ethical function is linked to this account, but is in some ways also distinct from it.

In its ethical function, conversation is the moment our image of the Other is shattered. Our image of the Other, what we have made of the Other based on our Self, reduces the Other to a static being, to an instant, a “plastic form” (RTB, 166) as Levinas calls it. Conversation, by contrast, is a continuous movement, a flow. It is the going back and forth of arguments, the exchange of ideas, and the revelation of the Other. When the Other “announces” itself in this way, we have a being that is able to stand against our ideas, opinions, etc. This has an ethical component to it, insofar as it is in this way that we are able to arrive at (self-)criticism. Before the arrival of the Other we lived the Good Life of our organic, economic being. But with the arrival of the Other we are forced to enter the public, we cannot remain in our organic existence because we confront a being that questions us, that asks us to provide reasons for our actions and our account of the Good Life. This event is what Levinas calls ethics:

A calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the spontaneity of the same – is brought about by the Other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. (ibid., 43)

This ethics relates to conversation, insofar as it is in conversation that we start to reason and are able to be questioned by another who is, like us, in the possession of reason. But not every conversation serves this function.

First, in order it to have this ethical function, conversation requires “presence”. This presence, for Levinas, is ideally a real-time and face to face presence. This presence most optimally serves the purpose of conversation, which is to receive something (a perspective, an idea) *from* the Other, in order that we correct and supplement our own prior set of opinions. Why is that the case? The Other as “presence” is an “interactive” being. It comments on its words, adds to them, and corrects them. In conversation we confront the Other as this living being. In a static encounter in which there is no interactivity, it is possible to fixate the Other

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and reduce her to some image we have made of the Other. When that happens, we have a conversation in which we do not leave ourselves and therefore fail to make contact with exteriority.

Secondly, as Levinas shows, there are conversations that do not have the purpose of mutual disclosure, mutual correction and struggle. There is also “rhetoric discourse” (cf. TI, 71). A rhetoric discourse has the objective of manipulating, seducing and controlling the Other. It does not offer the Other an opportunity to express herself and therefore, it does not strive to have the opinions of itself challenged by the Other.

### 3.3.4. The embodied Face: ethics as goodness

When we speak, Levinas writes, we offer the world to the Other (cf. TI, 173). Speaking is in that sense already a gift to the Other. It provides the Other meaning, a meaning that can thenceforth be called into question by the Other. But giving is also *material*. The relation with the Other is not only one of conversation, reason, and (self) critique. The second relation with the Other is a relation of goodness. Like conversation, goodness is a relation with exteriority insofar as it is through goodness that we leave aside the preoccupation with ourselves and turn to the Other. Goodness is caring for the Other. It is caring for the relation that binds us with exteriority, it is making sure that this bond remains intact. That goodness is material, and, according to Levinas, is expressed in the Face. The Face as vulnerability is an invitation to kill, but also on it is inscribed what the works of goodness are supposed to be: caring for the Other in her material misery (cf. RTB, 166).

The Face, Levinas writes, engages us in this ethical way. According to Levinas, this relation is comparable with the way in which Heidegger’s “tools” (*Zeuge*) engage us in a pragmatic way. Knowledge of tools, as we will see in more detail in part IV, is primarily *non-theoretical* knowledge. Theory, in Heidegger’s analysis, is a derivative form of knowledge which is founded on a primordial, pragmatic relation in which we come to know how to use tools by actually using them. Tools are primarily known as things that have a certain utility. They are disclosed as having this utility. Knowing a tool is knowing how to handle it. In a likewise manner, we “handle” others. As Levinas writes:

The meaningfulness of the face is the command to responsibility. To say this in a Heideggerian way: when Heidegger taught us that tools, like the

knife, the fork, and also, for example, the street, “fall into my hands,” and are ready-to-hand for me before I objectify them, it is not because this possibility is based on knowledge. This possibility is not to be grounded in a meaning either, because here meaning itself is grounded “in the hands”. I think the face in exactly this manner. (ibid., 135)

The Face comes to the assistance of the words addressed to the Face. Coming “to the assistance” of his words, in this context, means that the Face already points into the direction of the work proper to ethics. This is: giving, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. Goodness does not weigh, calculate, or measure. Goodness simply acts in “face “of the misery it confronts. For this account of goodness Levinas has found inspiration in Vasili Grossman’s war epic, *Life and Fate* (Grossmann, 1960). In this book, goodness appears as the resistance against political oppression. In that sense, goodness does not mediate like politics and a political frame would do. It cares for friend and enemy alike. As Grossman writes:

The good is not in nature, neither is it in the sermonizing of prophets, the great social doctrines or the ethics of philosophers. Yet simple people carry in their hearts the love for everything that is alive (...). It is thus that there exists, next to that great, so terrible Good, the human good in everyday life. This is the goodness of an old woman who, by the side of the road, gives a piece of bread to a passing convict; it is the goodness of a soldier who passes his water bottle to an injured enemy (...) (Grossman, in RTB, 217)

This is a possible way of relating to the Other *unmediated*. I will work that out in part VI. At this point it is important to note that because of that, “goodness” is one possible way of relating to exteriority. That is the case because in goodness, one leaves the preoccupation with the Self behind and turns towards the Other. There is an element of “holiness” (cf. RTB, 218 ) implied here as Levinas refers to it. That is, it is to a certain extent an ethics of exceptions. An ethics for the few who are “mad” (ibid.) enough to care for the death of the Other, more than they do for their own. In a way, this marks the distinct character of this account of ethics and that is also what makes it powerful. But this power is also its weakness, if this is to be an ethics that can serve the purpose of being the ground for inspiration of empathy ethics, which is to say: an ethics that does not operate by exceptions, but must rest on ethical practices that actually guide us throughout our relations with others and technology. Therefore, some steps need to be made beyond Levinas, as I will do in the next chapter.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

### 3.4. From the empathy gap to an ethics gap

We have seen what, from an empirical perspective, the empathy gap amounts to. In the previous sections, we have come across a concept of ethics, according to which the social relation *is* ethics. Through this perspective, it is possible to rephrase the empathy gap as an *ethics gap*. Why? Because the empathy gap points to a relation that does not function in a way that is needed in order to qualify for an ethical relation in the concept of ethics I have provided. For this relation, we have seen from Levinas's perspective, it is necessary that we develop other-oriented knowledge and other-oriented feelings of emotion, concern, and compassion. When we relate to the Other in this way, the social relation can be called "ethical" in its Levinasian concept. A "gap" in this relation thus constitutes an ethics gap.

Why is it important to show that there is a relation between the empathy gap and Levinasian ethics? Levinas's concept of ethics sheds a different light on the value we should attach to our relation with the Other. From his perspective, the Other appears as the starting point and patient of morality. The Other is not a mere companion but rather the one that "calls me into question" in order to awaken a moral consciousness in the Self. Without the Other, the Self remains in a "moral sleep" because it fails to establish genuine external and transcendental connections. The Self, in Levinas's account, is essentially solipsistic and it is the Other who awakens the Self and opens up a window in the Self towards exteriority and transcendence. Ethics is the gateway to exteriority and is therefore non-mediationalist. A mediationalist account renders the subject *solus ipse*. The moral potential of the Self is, as a non-mediationalist account shows, unlocked through the Other. In order to reap these potential gains, we should develop a proper relation to the Other. A relation with the Other is proper when it succeeds in giving us the Other *as* Other. We have seen that "conversation" and "goodness" are the means via which we establish this relation.

The empathy gap points to the situation where the relation with the Other has become *improper*. We fail to develop other-oriented knowledge and other-oriented feelings of compassion and care. And these failures are (partly) caused by technology. The empathy gap and the ethics gap thus refer to the same phenomenon in which it is technology that cuts us loose from the Other and because of that confirms us in our existence as beings *solus ipse*, an existence in which we remain locked up in ourselves. Reframing the empathy gap as an ethics gap has further conceptual gains to it.

First of all, linking the empathy gap with ethics allows me to introduce a new field of ethical concern in the current existential, (post)phenomenological and posthumanistic approaches within the philosophy and ethics of technology. In these approaches, as will be further outlined in part IV, the Other is missing. The areas of ethical concern in these approaches are primarily related to the Self and its relation to the world. For example, as Verbeek notes:

A few centuries ago the Enlightenment, with Kant as its major representative, brought about a turnover hitherto unequalled in ethics by moving the source of morality from God to humans. Do contemporary analyses of the social and cultural role of technology now urge us to move the source of morality one place further along – considering morality not a solely human affair but also a matter of things? (Verbeek, 2011:12)

Verbeek will answer the question in the affirmative. Morality is not just a human affair but rather the outcome of a complex interplay between humans and technology. Technology thus has removed the human from its central place in ethics by becoming a new moral patient as well as a new and active moral agent.

The empathy gap, rephrased as an ethics gap, shows that a more encompassing approach to the ethics of human-technology relation does include a further exploration of the relation between the Self, Technology, and the Other. The empathy gap, as can be seen from Levinas's ethical perspective, is not just a derivative ethical challenge that could be addressed within a posthumanistic ethical account of human-technology relations. It constitutes a *sui generis* ethical challenge because the empathy gap refers to a challenge, caused by technology, with regard to the Other, which is a *sui generis* source of ethics.

Secondly, the empathy gap, framed as an ethics gap, opens up more structural options to close it. It will become apparent that as an ethical challenge, the gap can be overcome by adopting and applying the proper ethical practices. These practices have been granted a proper place in an account of ethics that in this investigation is referred to as empathy ethics. The further development of this ethics is what I will do in part VI.



## 4 The need to move beyond Levinas

As I explained, I will use Levinasian ethics for two reasons. First I will use his ethics to diagnose the empathy gap. Levinas allows me to articulate the gap in a more profound manner and enables me to link it to ethics. The empathy gap is not just an empathic issue; it is rather the symptom of a *sui generis* ethical challenge that is brought about by the technological mediation of social relations. Second, I will use his ethics to work out a possible “cure” that allows me to close or bridge the empathy gap. Within this latter project, however, it will appear that there is the need to move beyond Levinasian ethics in its original form. Why is that the case?

We have already come across Levinas’s definition of ethics as a “calling into question of the Self by the Other”. The question however is whether Levinas himself has written an ethics in the sense of a set of prescription that guide us in the decisions we need to make in order to live a Good Life. Usually an ethics is that what provides guidance to such questions as “what ought I do”, “how should one live” or “what is the best life for mankind” (cf. Perpich, 2008: 3). Kantian ethics, consequentialism and (adaptions of) Aristotelian virtue-ethics are ethical approaches in which this guidance is present.

At first sight, Levinas’s ethics seems to offer an answer in response to the aforementioned questions. In “economic life”, we live or should strive for happiness. Life is not just “care” as it was for Heidegger, it is ultimately, for Levinas, Enjoyment. This implies an account of *how* one should live (with the aim of acquiring Happiness). This is an account which is not present in Heidegger’s analysis, which is merely an ontological and descriptive analysis of existence. Furthermore, in social life, we ought to act in the best interest of the Other: we ought to develop the right optics.<sup>23</sup> The guidelines for that are given with the Face that speaks. Although these are preparatory steps towards an actual ethics, what seems to be missing are the concrete guidelines for the appropriate practices. For

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<sup>23</sup> Levinas refers to ethics as *optics* (TI, 29). This is an allusion to Aristotle, according to whom ethics is a mode of perception that has its own special organ which is *character*. Character, however, is something we acquire through the process of training and through practising the moral and intellectual virtues. From this allusion, it can be drawn that Levinas’s ethics is also an ethics that requires practice and training for its development.

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example: how do we engage in *proper* discourse, when should we give, and how should we give? Levinas's ethics in its pure form is at risk of leading to arbitrariness. He writes that the first relation to another is one of ethical engagement but this engagement might also be ignored or refused by the subject. Thus one acts ethical in Levinas's concept of it once one is prepared:

To throw oneself into the water to save someone, without knowing how to swim, is to go to the other totally; without holding anything back of oneself; to give oneself to the other totally. (RTB, 128)

Who does such a thing? These are acts of the few, of the "holy", Levinas would reply. And although this is an ethics of the exception, no one, Levinas writes, "would contest its supreme value" (ibid., 225).<sup>24</sup> I will also not do that. Especially not because it is in such accounts of our relation to the Other that the particularities of Levinas's ethics come to the fore as an ethics that seeks to maintain its humanistic foundation. Levinas's ethics, as a defense of otherness, singularity, and "the human" is an ethics that holds particular relevance in an age that has professed the "death of humanism" (cf. HUO). There is value in his defense that I seek to uphold. But how can that be done in a way that makes Levinas's ethics fruitful within my current field of exploration without moving too far away from the unique and distinct value of Levinas's own program?

Much of the potential difficulties disappear if Levinas is used in the proper way. That is, not as an ethics in the sense of guidebook that provides guidelines for the appropriate ethical practices one should engage in. Levinas has not written with that pretention. By contrast, as he has written: "my task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning" (EI, 90). In the meantime, he has written that it is "no doubt possible to construct an ethics in function of what I have just said" (ibid.). What is needed therefore, in an attempt to apply Levinas's ethics, is to reform it into an actual ethics that gives prescriptions as to how we should be and how we should behave (cf. Foucault, 1995: 90). As we have

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<sup>24</sup> The full quotation is: 'I do not argue for human holiness; I only say that man cannot contest its supreme value (...). In 1968, the year of the contestation in the universities and around the universities, all values were 'up in the air' except that of the other man to which one had to devote oneself. The young people who devoted themselves to all sorts of amusements and disorders went at the end of the day to visit the striking workers at Renault as though they were going to prayer. Man is a being who recognizes holiness and the forgetting of the self.' (RTB, 225)

seen, ethics for Levinas is the social relation. That means, the “value” of the social relation is not epistemological as it was for Husserl or more existential as it was for Heidegger. The value of the social relation for Levinas is that it has “moral content”. Better perhaps: it is a relation that has moral *potential*. As he writes:

My whole effort consists in thinking sociality not as a dispersion but as an exit from the solitude one takes sometimes for sovereignty, in which man is ‘master of himself as he is of the universe’, in which domination is experienced as the supreme perfection of the human. I would contest this excellence. I understand sociality, peace, love of the other as the good, better than domination, better even than coincidence with the other. (RTB, 58)

The social relation has moral potential. A potential that is actualized the moment it is somehow embedded in an ethics of economy. There is a similar way in which Albert Borgmann conceives of the relation between something that has moral authority of its own (the Other for Levinas, nature for Borgmann) and a moral practice in which this authority is articulated:

To enter a natural area is to be greeted and astounded by life in its own right. At the same time, the life of nature engages you most deeply if you understand it in the context of cultural information, that is, within the space of intelligibility that is circumscribed by information about the history of the place. (Borgmann, 1999: 223)

Thus one could say that the Other has moral authority of itself. There is no need to construct an ethics in function of that. Apart from the fact that such a view is not in accordance with the limits of Levinas’s original project, it lacks a necessary *realism*. It fails to acknowledge that although one can insist on the Other having a moral authority of itself which does not need further articulation, it clearly adds to the Other’s proper functioning when this value is in fact articulated and embedded in the appropriate ethical practices.

It appears that Levinas’s ethics is not tailor-made. If Levinas’s ethics is to be used and applied within a certain context, this can only be achieved once some decisive steps beyond Levinas’s ethics have been made. The steps for this are prepared by Levinas, but the next move is to be made by the one who is using Levinas. This is in accordance with Levinas’s own evaluation of his project, but also in accordance with what Levinas has presented us with. In the final part, the

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steps towards an application of Levinas's will be made. In that part I will propose "empathy ethics" as the complementary form of ethics which Levinas's ethics needs.

## 5 Theories of mediation

### 5.1. The concept of “mediation”

As we have seen in the chapters 1 and 2, the empathy gap is a failure to make successful contact with an external reality. As was made visible, this is (partly) caused by the technological mediation of *social* relations. A further substantiation of this claim will be provided in part III. A key notion here is “mediation”, because, as we saw, technological mediation is among the causes of the empathy gap.

It is thus needed to get a better grasp on what mediation is, viewed from a philosophical perspective. In the following sections, I will discuss in what way mediation relates to the empathy gap. I will show that there is a congruency present in the way mediation is conceptualized in the various contexts discussed in the following sections. It will become clear that any mediation implies that contact with reality – be it the reality of objects and/or subjects – is made through something and that this something is productive. A mediated experience, in other words, is a *transformed* experience and as I analyze it, it has at least the following characteristics:

- (1) The Self is a relation with an external reality. This reality is the “world”. The world is the meaningful relational whole that consists of objects, subjects, and the co-constitutive relation between the two;
- (2) The relation with the external world is established “only through” something;
- (3) The something is an “intermediary”. The intermediary is either:
  - (a) Derived from the Self: consciousness, concepts, etc.
  - (b) From exteriority: technology, culture, history.
- (4) The intermediary is a “something” and occurs, for example, as:
  - (a) A thing or a technology;
  - (b) Language (conceptual mediation);
  - (c) Culture;
  - (d) History.
- (5) The intermediary something is in fact a mediator because it is “productive” in the sense that it shapes the Self, the world, others, and the relation between these poles.

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As we will see in the upcoming sections, some approaches take “mediation” to be a challenge. According to these positions, there is being “in itself” – the Other – and mediation is the phenomenon which transforms “being in itself” to a form of being “according to us”. This position is already present in Cartesianism but, arguably, finds its radicalization in the (early) Husserl. Other positions, including Technological Mediation Theory (TMT) see mediation as some form of ontological necessity and a phenomenological answer to the modernistic quest for “being in itself”. They follow Heideggerian phenomenology, according to which all that exists is mediated existence (cf. Westphal, 2008: 20). For this position there is no “being in itself” but only mediated being or “being according to us”.

### 5.2. Epistemological mediation

An account of what epistemological mediation amounts to is offered by Dreyfus and Taylor in their book *Retrieving Realism* (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015). The classical example of a mediationalist account of epistemology, according to them, is present in Descartes and his construal of the subject-object (world) relation. As Dreyfus and Taylor quote Descartes: “I am certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the ideas I have within me” (Descartes in Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015:2). This is the original account of what “mediationalism”, as they define it, amounts to. This knowledge is mediationalist because knowledge of the outward world is acquired “only through (by means of) these inner states, which we can call ‘ideas’” (ibid.). Dreyfus and Taylor call this account of knowledge mediationalist because of what they call the “crucial phrase” (ibid.). The crucial phrase is not that knowledge is arrived at “only through” something, but rather only through some inner states. Mediationalism, in its Cartesian fashion, is mediation through an *internal* reality.

Mediation of the world therefore is imagining or *representing* the world through internal, priorly existing ideas and believes. This Cartesian mediationalism is according to Dreyfus and Taylor a still dominant epistemological perspective. For example:

Take the ‘linguistic turn’. For many philosophers today, if we wanted to give contents of the mind, we should have recourse not to little images in the mind, but rather to something like sentences held true by an agent (...). This shift is important, but it keeps the mediational structure intact. (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015: 3)

The “only through” structure however recurs in various other domains. It is also present in “materialism” which advocates the position in which there is – contrary to Descartes – only material substance to which also mentality belongs. Although this approach has sought to move beyond Cartesianism, according to Dreyfus and Taylor it remains caught up in a similar structure. The “only through” structure here could have the following form:

Our knowledge comes to us through ‘surface irritations’, the points in our receptors where the various stimuli from the environment impinge.  
(Dreyfus and Taylor, 3)

This resembles a mediationalist human-world relation because it is “only through” our receptors that knowledge arises. As the argument goes: changing names does not change the metaphysical structure of the argument, which is still very much Cartesian. In this account, mind remains a world-independent entity that is able to project knowledge on the world.

This structure reappears in current day Kantian epistemologies. In Kantianism, knowledge is derived from the “categories”, which add meaning to the raw material received by “intuition” (cf. Dreyfus and Taylor, 5). Again, knowledge is ultimately world-independent and derived from the self as a sort of container that projects meaning on a world consisting out of mere matter and extension. What is central to all these mediationalist accounts of knowledge is that there is an “inner depiction of outer reality” (ibid.: 10). The “only through” structure of mediationalism therefore actually means: only through the agent or the subject. It is the subject who has the locus of truth and meaning inside it, and it is he who determines the meaning outward reality has. Man has become the measure for all meaning there is.

According to Dreyfus and Taylor there are four defining characteristics of mediationalism as they conceptualize it.

The first one, we have seen it, is the “only through” structure. The features through which the world becomes represented in the agent are:

Representations or depictions, either ideas, or beliefs, or sentences held true. Or they can be seen, following the critical [Kantian, CZ] tradition, as categorial forms. (ibid.)

Second, according to the mediationalist account, the content of our mind (the knowledge) can be “analyzed into clearly defined, explicit elements” (ibid. 11).

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Knowledge of the world consists, according to this account, of bits of information or “ideas” (ibid.) that are present in a world-independent mind. Ideally for this account, it would be possible to make an “inventory of what we know” (ibid.).

Third, to justify our beliefs we are limited to these formulated elements. In other words: in providing justification for our beliefs about the world, we are limited to the matter that is present in our mind and this matter is the information about reality in the form of already existing representations.

Fourth, all these approaches, whether or not they admit to it, remain caught up within the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. In this dualism, matter is mere extension and meaningless whereas it is the mind in which all meaning resides. Accounts of subjectivity that are present in contemporary philosophy of mind, such as the computer-model of mind and the brain-in-a-vat thesis, demonstrate that this age-old dualism remains influential to date.

What are the effects of this mediationalism and why is that problematic according to Dreyfus and Taylor? The positions I discussed share a Cartesian epistemological structure. The subject is the locus of all meaning and all knowledge is ultimately self-knowledge. Originally, mediationalism in its Cartesian style was designed to counter skepticism. As the ancient version of the sceptic way of reasoning goes:

For every type of claim to knowledge, a counterclaim could be made to seem plausible. Do we think we can be sure of the existence of physical objects around us? Well how about the stick which looks bent in water? (ibid. 6).

The sceptics made this argument with the aim of showing that it is impossible to attain knowledge beyond the phenomenal world of appearances. The “real” world of things, true independent from their appearance, does not exist. For the sceptics, this was important to show, because it would provide a certain peace of mind (*ataraxia*) about abandoning the scientific project. Descartes, however, sought to counter the sceptics by inventing an inner world of “ideas” that, detached from the outward reality, could indeed yield the veritable knowledge a scientific project is after. This knowledge would however not be reached through or from the world, but rather from the Self in a process of critical introspection. For this reason, Descartes needed to detach the subject from the world of mere appearances and discover a world that would prove to be immune to the sceptic argument. Mediationalism in this sense is a certain concept of what sound knowledge is about. The criterion for that is that something can count as true when the agent, after a process of

critical introspection and following the right method, has judged it to be “clear and distinct” (Descartes, 2006: 17). But the detached, mediationalist picture also has ethical ramifications. As Dreyfus and Taylor understand it:

It (mediationalism, CZ) is strongly valued insofar as it is seen as inseparable from freedom, responsibility, and the self-transparency which we gain by reflection on our thinking. But the objectification of the world which it achieves is also the condition of a certain control over it. (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015: 25)

What is challenging about the mediationalist picture? Dreyfus and Taylor discern two possible lines of critique.

According to the first line, it is impossible that knowledge is entirely representational. After all, we are not just minds that float freely in the world. We are embodied beings that are in contact with a world of values, a history, language, sociality, etc. And theory of knowledge that would do justice to this concreteness of being should account for the epistemological value of *experience*. It should account for a contact with the world according to which we do not take in the world as a neutral field of information that we process into science. Contact implies a mutual, co-dependent relationship. In the final part I will show that this “contact” leads to a *contact theory* which seeks to account for the value of experience in an epistemological context.

Second, according to the other line of critique, a theory of knowledge cannot rely on an *individual* representationalism. It challenges a monological account of knowledge and seeks to show that our grip on the world is “first of all shared, and then only secondarily imparted to each one of us” (ibid. 28). This critique of a *monological* epistemology resonates in Heidegger’s account of sociality. However, for different reasons, it also resonates in Husserl’s as well as Levinas’s account of sociality. I will discuss these positions in the next part.

### 5.3. (Husserlian) phenomenological mediation

In his early writings, Levinas heralds the novelty of Husserl’s reinterpretation of the concept “intentionality” and its link with consciousness. For Husserl, as Levinas reads him in his early *the Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Levinas, 1973), “intentionality” and “consciousness” are concepts that can be used interchangeably. In Husserl’s interpretation, in what Levinas will come to judge as a rather unsuccessful attempt to move beyond Descartes, consciousness is not

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immanent. Consciousness is not a self-contained domain that represents the world through copies and images of that world. In this concept, the “real” world (in itself) remains forever outside our grasp. We can only have knowledge about an “ideal” world but this knowledge does not reach its ultimate object: *the* world. For Husserl, by contrast, what is revealed in consciousness is the world. As Levinas writes:

We have said that intentionality is not the mere representation of an object. Husserl calls states of consciousness *Erlebnisse* – what is ‘lived’ in the sense of what is experienced – and this very expression connects the notion of consciousness to that of life. (TIH, 53)

Intentional consciousness is not about the world, as if “the world” would remain hidden, resting in itself and out of reach of our consciousness. The world is (phenomenally) present in us or, better perhaps, it is *for us*. But as Levinas already saw and comes to criticize, the trouble is what consciousness does with the world it finds present in consciousness and how it relates to its sources. For example, as Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, the Husserlian constituting subject is not *marked* by its past, it merely *utilizes* its past (cf. TI, 125). That means that the subject is not placed in a world, not brought into a co-constitutive relation with it. Rather, the Husserlian subject still rides high above the world which it is in and “utilizes” (past) experiences to project meanings upon a world. What Levinas comes to realize is that Husserlian consciousness is not a genuine relation with the world (and itself). Rather, consciousness is still a *productive* entity. The process of meaning-giving is not relational but emanates from the Self and is then projected on the world. Intentionality is an act through which we represent the world in such a manner that it has the potential of becoming meaningful. The tree becomes a tree once we have first made an image of that tree. Our intentional correlate is not *the* tree, but the tree as represented in consciousness.

Representing the world, the tree *as* tree, the car *as* car, etc. is giving a meaning, a sense to objects. Where do we derive these meanings from? We already had them or we use them – like we use our past – as “fixed” images that we project on the world. When intentional consciousness represents the world, in the meantime it *identifies* the world: it makes the world one with the subject. Intentional consciousness recognizes in the outward world something we already knew prior to the intentional act. The world, otherness, does not “teach” us. *We* bring forth the world. Intentional consciousness, in its Husserlian concept, is therefore according to Levinas not transcendental. Consciousness as understood by Husserl identifies:

The identity of the same unaltered and unalterable in its relations with the other is in fact the I of representation. The subject that thinks by representation is a subject that hearkens to its own thought. (TI, 126)

How does intentional consciousness represent the object *for-itself*? It transforms the object, Levinas writes, into something that has a “value”. The intentional object that is present in consciousness is therefore an image, but an image of a particular kind. It is an image of the world as a world of values, of meaning, of a sense that we possess and project on the world. A world that “exists” but only as an intentional correlate of the Self who has produced this world.<sup>25</sup> The world as it is intentionally present in us, therefore is the world:

Of objects of practical use and values. The qualities that make things important to us (*Bedeutsamkeitsprädikate*) or dear to us, that make us fear them or want them, etc. (TIH, 44)

How do we create this world of values? We visualize it. Visualizing it means transforming it into a mental image or picture that can count as knowledge. The world as represented by consciousness is a world that is a world that is “seen, thought, desired, remembered, and so forth” (Kenaan, 2014: 16). The representational human-world relation, according to Levinas, therefore is a relation in which it is “always the same that determines the other” (TI, 124). Exteriority, a being that remains “in itself” or “according to itself”, can not have its proper place in this analysis.

What Levinas is basically pointing to is that Husserl’s concept “intentionality” promised to bring us into relation with the world, but ultimately failed to do so. It remains entangled in the Cartesian account of the human-world relation which I discussed in the previous section. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas refers to this Husserlian (still very much Cartesian) human-world relation as “phenomenological mediation” (TI, 44) and “ontological imperialism” (ibid.). It is mediationalistic and imperialistic because consciousness, as the representing and identifying entity, makes contact “through a third term which I find in myself” (ibid, 44). Although phenomenology has promised us otherwise, we are still not in a relation with the world.

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<sup>25</sup> This concept of phenomenology leads to solipsism: the world becomes a world “according to me”. Exteriority has no place in this account.

### 5.4. Technological mediation theory

I will discuss Technological Mediation Theory (TMT) extensively in part V. In this section, I will focus on the way in which the concept “mediation” is applied in TMT. My aim is to show that there is a typical pattern present in technological mediation that makes it comparable to the forms of mediation which have been discussed in the previous paragraphs. It is therefore also vulnerable to a similar line of critique. This pattern is that it is through “something” that a contact with the world is made and that this “something” is productive. Mediation, in other words, is *transformation*.

Technological mediation maintains that technologies are “not neutral ‘intermediaries’ between humans and world, but *mediators*: they actively mediate this (the human-world, CZ) relation” (Verbeek, 2005: 114). A key underlying notion here is “technological intentionality” (Ihde, 1990: 141). As Ihde understands technological intentionality:

Technologies, by providing a framework for action, do form intentionalities and inclinations within which use-patterns take dominant shape. (ibid.)

Technologies have a certain directionality, inclination or script that gives shape to the way they are used. From a postphenomenological perspective, it is therefore possible to extend the notion of technological intentionality beyond its original concept in Ihde’s work. Technologies are not merely *inbetween* subject and object. They actively shape how both subject and object are. The “intentionality” of a technology is that it *mediates* between subject and object. And as a mediator it is not neutral. Technology as materialized intentionality “codetermines how subjectivity and objectivity are constituted” (Verbeek, 2005: 116).

To make clear in what sense this form of mediation relates to Cartesian mediation, it is useful to pay attention to the way in which the concept “intentionality” is applied in the context of postphenomenology (cf. Verbeek, 2005: 108–110). In this context intentionality is, in an interpretation of its original Husserlian form, seen as the basic structure of consciousness. Intentional consciousness is not “in itself” like Cartesian consciousness, but always directed to the outward world. Intentional consciousness is a relational consciousness in the sense that it makes visible how subject and world act upon one another. The world in this account is unlike the Cartesian world, not external to the subject but always in a way intertwined with the subject. What we get here is an account according to which:

Reality-in-itself is unknowable, for as soon as we experience or encounter it, it becomes reality-for-us: a world. There exists neither human beings in themselves nor world-in-itself. (ibid.,110)

According to the postphenomenological perspective, this is a step beyond Cartesianism. Why? Because it has placed the subject back in the world again. However, we are not just in the world. More specifically, we are “always in ‘our’world” ( ibid. 121). Phenomenology has attempted to show that the Self and the world are not separated from one another. The subject is always *in* the world and the world *in* the subject. This is what an account of consciousness as intentional consciousness has achieved. Furthermore, this account of intentionality is connected to technologies. From the perspective of TMT, technologies are a kind of materialized intentionalities.

The intentional relation between human beings and world is as it were extended or stretched out through artifacts. (ibid. 123)

We thus remain in an intentionally mediated world, which, as we saw, is not “the” world but remains “our world”. What “our” world is through a technological mediation, is a transformed world. Transformed through technology, but still in the phenomenological category of the *for itself*.

In what sense is intentionality an achievement? Measured by the standards of Husserl, the philosopher who granted the concept its phenomenological connotation, it is better seen as a challenge and a starting point. The challenge being that phenomenology still has to deliver its promise to connect the subject to *the* world and not merely *my* world. This culminates in Husserl’s development of the phenomenon empathy, which will be explored in the next section. What is the challenge of intentionality?

Intentionality in its Husserlian form is a *radicalization* of the Cartesian position. A position which is characteristic of what the (early) Husserl sought to achieve. The phenomenological reduction ( Husserl’s version of the Cartesian systematic doubt experiment ) does not so much give us *the world*. It gives us the world as it appears *for us*. This position does not lead us away from Cartesian mediationalism, but rather *confirms* it. Why? Because mediation does not bring us to any “reality-in-itself but rather reality-for-them” (Verbeek, 2005: 112). From the perspective of TMT, this is merely seen as an expansion, concretization, and application of the phenomenological insights regarding intentional consciousness and its relation

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to world. It has not accounted for the challenge that an intentional consciousness leads to contact with a world which turns out to be a world *for us*. Insofar as this is the case, it is possible to connect TMT with Cartesian mediationalism in the way I described this position. I now return to a brief exploration of the concept mediation in TMT.

The way technology mediates can be categorized according to four different dimensions: the ontological dimension, the epistemological dimension, the practical dimension and the ethical dimension (cf. Kiran, 2015). Every dimension allows for a different perspective on what mediation achieves.

From the *ontological* perspective, technologies *reveal* and *conceal* dimensions of us and the world we live in. This perspective on what technology does, is central to Heidegger's early phenomenology of the "tool" in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927/2010) and his later reflection on modern technology in *The Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger, 1977). Central to both approaches is that technology is not a merely useful artefact, an instrument that we use in order to achieve some prior set objective. Rather, technology provides access to the world and the specific worlds of ourselves and others.

The *epistemological* dimension to technological mediation is central to Don Ihde's work in post-phenomenological philosophy of technology (Ihde, 1979; 1990). Again, for this perspective technologies are not just instruments we use for measuring and scientific research. Technologies, by contrast, make "present or represent" (Kiran, 2015: 129) an object. Better put, they make something "manifest" (ibid.) itself. That is: technological mediation makes an experience of world (and self) possible that would not have been possible without it. But access to the world is again not neutral. As Ihde writes in his *Technology and the Lifeworld* (Ihde, 1990):

For every revealing transformation there is a simultaneously concealing of the world, which is given through a technological mediation. Technologies transform experience. (ibid., 49)

The structure of magnification and reduction is not necessarily to be seen as referring to a potential "loss" and "impoverishment" of the mediated experience. How should we see it then? Rather as a means towards "new ways for reality to manifest itself" (Verbeek, 2005: 134). For example:

Most people gesticulate when they speak on the phone. Not being able to ‘transfer’ such gests, is that a blatant loss for communication? Of course not, the phone enables us to speak to persons not present; even though it is unable to convey the bodily gestures we often depend on in face-to-face conversation.<sup>26</sup> (KIRAN, 2015: 128) The *practical* dimension of technological mediation seeks to account for the ways in which technologies *enable* and *constrain* certain practices. With a concept derived from Gibson (Gibson, 1982), it could be said that technologies *afford* certain uses, while in the meantime constraining others. For example: “A handle affords grasping, a sufficiently small stone affords throwing, and a sharp object affords piercing.” (ibid., 131)

When it becomes clear that technologies are active and co-shape our existence, it appears to be possible to make the step towards ethics: some moral practices are afforded by technologies, whilst others are constrained. The structure of this is, according to Kiran, one of *involvement* and *alienation*. For example, welfare technologies such as assistive technologies in hospitals reveal this structure:

As involving technologies (they) allow users to create a better and more dignified life with them than without them. However, assistive technologies also imply alienating aspects. For instance, some care receivers report that they feel controlled and dehumanized when living in a smart house. (ibid., 136)

What we can learn from this discussion is that technological mediation is two-sided. In an assessment of technology, this two-sidedness should be taken in to account. That is what I will do in part III, when I assess the relation between information and communication technologies and empathy and the empathy gap. But there is more to technological mediation. It also points to our inability to access the world, ourselves, and others as “beings in themselves”. Technological mediation, like mediation through “symbols, language, culture and history” (ibid., 125), makes it impossible to have neutral access to the exterior world. There is

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<sup>26</sup> Obviously, this claim holds true only when embodied presence has no communicative significance. I will not dive into a discussion at this point, but it clearly follows from my analysis of communication that embodied presence adds a significant component to the information uttered in speech acts, to the extent that the absence of embodiment can in fact be analyzed as a loss and not merely as a difference. At this point, however, I am merely exploring what technological mediation amounts to and how it relates to epistemological, phenomenological, and ethical mediation.

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always the structure of amplification and reduction: “mediation makes something stand out and come into focus, while other things disappear or fade from view” (ibid.).

The perspective on mediation that I will discuss challenges this view when it comes to mediation in the *social* relation. According to this perspective, mediation occurs whenever, in the relation with something external, this external being is transformed into a being *for us*. Mediation is in that sense a reduction and transformation. A “being in itself” does not exist for this perspective. What the next section makes visible, are the ethical challenges that arise whenever “being in itself” does not exist. When that is granted, there is only a transformed being and a being *for us*. The challenge this confronts us with is the absence of an external perspective, a perspective which is outside the subject. The ethical perspective that I will offer shows why we need this perspective and why it is possible to locate the condition for this (i.e. the external) perspective, in the Other.

### 5.5. Levinas’s concept of “ethical mediation”

When Levinas refers to mediation, he refers to the situation in which it is through “something else” that we relate to the world and the Other. This “something else” is a “third term” that has received various forms in the western philosophical tradition:

This third term may appear as a concept thought. (...) The third term may be called sensation. (...) It may appear as Being distinguished from the existent. (TI, 42)

Mediation has been characteristic of western philosophy, Levinas argues and its movement “consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it” (ibid., 46). It is possible to discern two dimensions in Levinas’s concept mediation. First there is “normal” *proper* mediation. Normally we encounter somebody as a something, as something that is somehow mediated by our opinions, by the ideology and context we are in. There is no *neutral* access to the Other. As Levinas writes:

Usually one is a ‘person’: one is professor at the Sorbonne, vice-president of the State Council, somebody’s son, everything that is in one’s passport, the way we dress, the way we behave. (EE, 69)

When we mediate something, we provide it with a form. A form is applied in such a manner that we can recognize, categorize, and “know” that something. The relation with the Other normally is a relation of “hermeneutics and exegesis” (Levinas, in Kenaan, 2014: 32). That means that when we meet someone, we naturally give meaning to this encounter. We see a facial expression and we draw from it that the Other is sad or in a happy mood. We meet the Other dressed and we judge from that what kind of person he or she is. This is “normal”, according to Levinas, insofar as it is because of this mediation that a normal, social life is possible. Within society, Levinas writes, encounters are organized in such a way that the “timidity” (ibid., 32) one experiences in the confrontation with others is alleviated. In society, confrontations are generally understood as “unhealthy” (ibid.). Social life needs something, a third and mediating term, for it to remain normal and without the burdens of constant confrontations. In order to achieve this normality, we organize mediations:

It is through participating in something in common, in an idea, a common interest, a work, a meal, in a ‘third man’ that contact is made. Persons are not simply in front of one another; they are along with each other around something. (EE, 32)

The mediated relations through which we form a world – the world where we “take walks, lunch and dine, visit, go to school (...)” (EE, 36), this world is a “sincere world” (ibid.). A mediated world is a world in which we are at home. Mediation is necessary. But although mediation is necessary it might prove to be harmful towards the Other taken as a *who*. As a *who*, the Other is a singular and unique being that announces her “who-ness” by expressing herself, independent of the Self. According to Levinas, this takes place in a relation, an ethical relation, and as an ethical relation, it has the prime task of putting the mediated relation, which ignores the Other and its individuality, into question.

From an ethical perspective, mediation can therefore be evaluated as harmful when it leads to the “forgetting of the Other” (RTB, 108). That is, when we deny the Other’s existence as a being that is “according to itself” and *as such* concerns me. When we “Face” the Other, we acknowledge the Other’s right to be and our responsibility to care for that being:

But I think that to approach the face of the Other is to worry directly about his death, and this means to regard him straightaway as mortal, finite. (RTB, 135)

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How do we Face and not ignore the Other? Otherwise put: how do we mediate the Other according to Levinas? First there is some form of ideological mediation and secondly, a material form of mediation.

First of all, mediation in its Levinasian style appears to be some kind of compelling *attitude* towards the Other: “you turn towards the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them” (Levinas in Kenaan, 2014: 30). It is not as if the Other can be reduced to these outward phenomena. The Other *becomes* this in an attitude that we apply with the aim of avoiding confrontation. Qua attitude, it is somewhat similar to Sartre’s concept “gaze”. As Sartre writes about the gaze:

The gaze of the Other holds ... the secret of what I am ... The Other’s look fashions my body ... sculpts it, produces it as it is, *sees* it as I shall never see it ... He makes me be, and thereby he possesses me. (Sartre in Kenaan: 2014: 65)

Levinas’s gaze is a reversal of this Sartrean gaze. According to Levinas, it is the Self who gazes the Other and because of that denies the Other its existence “according to itself”. Through the gaze, the Other becomes a being that fits in the categories that we apply in order to know the Other. We then reduce the Other to an image:

[in] looking at you like an image, one knows the color of your eyes, the form of your nose, etc. (it) is to look at the face while defacing it, like any other plastic form, eliminating the signification of the responsibility with which its nudity and strangeness encumbers me. (RTB, 49)

To gaze at the Other is to hold the Other captive in an objectifying perspective that we derive from ourselves. It is denying the Other’s freedom, her manifestation “according to itself” (*kath’auto*) and a way of transforming the Other to the standards of the Self. We do that when we visualize the Other, and reduce the Other thus to an instant picture which is derived from categories in the Self. Whenever we “see” another we might reduce the Other to an object. That is, whenever we think that whatever we see is all there is. When we reduce the Other to her outward appearances – the way the Other dresses, her color, complexion, etc. – we will see the Other but will also miss what is specially Other about the Other. Seeing the Other through perception means that we take the Other at first face value. This doesn’t do justice to the Other.

What is Levinas's argument here? Does the gaze literally refer to vision, to our eyes and the way in which we objectify something through by looking? As I read Levinas, this is not the case. As an attitude it refers to ways in which we encroach upon and "envelop" (TI, 194) the Other. Vision in that sense is metaphor for a relation to the Other in which it is the Self who is and remains central. Conversation is of a different order. As Levinas writes, "speech cuts across vision" (TI, 195). Whereas vision reduces the Other to an instant, to a perception here and now, without paying attention to (the Other's) context, speech and conversation are an ongoing process of discovery and revelation. We do not reduce the Other to a momentous image, we let the Other reveal and announce herself through language. Vision is a metaphor for a reductionist attitude towards the Other. Is there something that does *afford* this attitude? It is anything that disables the Other to express herself, to provide the content of her inner perspective. It is in that sense that any (public) form can afford the reductionist attitude. To phrase this with a citation that we came across earlier:

Usually one is a 'person': one is professor at the Sorbonne, vice-president of the State Council, somebody's son, everything that is in one's passport, the way we dress, of behaving. (EE, 69)

Seeing the Other as a person, as an ensemble of a set of characteristics of which we can have knowledge, is a reduction of the Other according to Levinas. A reduction of the Other to the Self. We have "objectified" the Other.<sup>27</sup> When we thus reduce the Other, we rely on prior knowledge. On categories and (linguistic) frames that we already possess, prior to our relation with the Other. Everything can thus function as a mediator. It can be prior beliefs about the Other, it can be the way the Other dresses and the images this provokes. It is everything that we allow to stand between us and the Other.

Mediation, as we saw, can be an attitude. An attitude which reduces the Other to the Self. But secondly, mediation can also have a material form, as Levinas

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<sup>27</sup> The objectifying act in its Husserlian sense is the act through which we 'name' a perception. This is the signifying or theoretical act. As Levinas writes: "meanings aim at their objects; intuition, and in particular perception, reaches them" (TIH, 73). Although perception might succeed in actually "reaching" its object and provide us with knowledge (the adequation between the meant and perceived object) the meaning-giving act is prior for Husserl.

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made explicit in his early essay *Existence and Existence* (Levinas, 1978/1988). In this essay, Levinas observes that we normally and for the most part meet Others that are clothed. Materiality matters, clothing in this example. It presents us the Other in a specific way. We can assess from clothing –uniforms, for example – what someone’s occupation is, their social status, or what they aspire to be. This is normal, but that does not make it ethical. As Levinas writes:

In the world the other is indeed not treated like a thing, but is never separated from things. Not only is he approached and given in his social situation, (...) not only do institutions like the arrangements which make things accessible to us, put us into relationships with persons, collectivities, history, and the supernatural, but in the world the other is an object through his clothing. (EE,31)

But apart from materiality, Levinas also refers to “the context” (Levinas, in Kenaan, 2013: 32) in which the Other appears, as a mediator. What is this context? The “cultural whole” (ibid.) and this makes the Other visible, intelligible “like a text by its context” (ibid.). Normally we meet the Other *from* the world like we meet Heidegger’s other *from* the world, mediated and not confrontational.

Levinas’s mediators include “intermediate persons, truth, dogma, work, profession, interest, dwelling, or meal” (EE, 98). In fact everything that is capable of organizing a communion between the Self and the Other is a potential mediator that lets us escape from “the fearful face-to-face relation” (ibid.) with the Other. How do we escape from the mediating attitude? We need to develop a new and proper optics. But how do we develop such a new optics? As Kenaan writes in his *Ethics of Visuality* (Kenaan, 2013):

Without a sensitivity and, perhaps, a new sensibility regarding the singular, there is hardly room to go any further with Levinas (...). Allowing the singular to appear would thus require that we learn how to suspend the world, push out the horizon, learn how to meet it on its own. (ibid., 48).

With Levinas, we can articulate what improper mediation is. We can also point in the direction where the solution should be found. That is, we can point to an ethics-for-exteriority in which we recognize the Other as a singular being through receiving the Other as Other. But how we could train vision and acquire the proper optics is a matter on which Levinas remains silent. This calls for empathy ethics.

## 5.6 Løgstrup and ethical mediation

The Danish philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905-1981) has much in common with Levinas, both biographically and philosophically (cf. Bauman, 1984). They studied at the same time in Strasbourg and Freiburg, were both influenced by Heidegger, Husserl, and Bergson and they both developed an ethics designed as an alternative for the pre-dominant humanistic ethical systems at the time. They also have developed ethical frameworks that bear striking similarities. These similarities make it interesting to compare their accounts, especially because mediation is the prime challenge to both their ethical projects. As we will see, although their accounts of mediation differ, the ethical imperative is to reach the Other, and mediation is the phenomenon that interferes with that obligation. Mediation restrains us from reaching the Other.

When it comes to the similarities between Levinas and Løgstrup, three stand out (cf. MacIntyre, 1997). First of all, responsibility towards the other is for both of them prior to the individual's decisions. Second, the responsibility is for both of them infinite. There is no way in which I can ever say that I have completed my ethical duties. Third, responsibility is not the result of following rules. Given these fundamental similarities and the fact that Løgstrup devoted a significant portion of his main work, *The Ethical Demand* (Løgstrup, 1997), to the discussion of the concept "mediation", it will prove to be useful to discuss his concept of mediation.

As shown before, both Levinas and Løgstrup maintain that ethics is a response to a demand that comes from the other, from a source outside the Self (cf. Critchley, 2012).<sup>28</sup> Just like Levinas's, Løgstrup's account is in confrontation with both Kantianism and Utilitarianism (cf. MacIntyre, 1997) as ethical approaches that highlight the rule-following structure of any ethical conduct. For Løgstrup ethics is not about following rules but rather about a *spontaneous* and therefore *unmediated* response to an ethical demand.

For both Levinas and Løgstrup it is crucial that an ethical act is motivated by a concern for the Other and also is an act that is initiated by the Other.<sup>29</sup> Where

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<sup>28</sup> Løgstrup seeks to contrast his concept *demand* from *command*. Characteristic of a command is obedience to some authority that has power over us. Characteristic of a demand is, as Løgstrup phrases it, that it "arises from the fact that we *owe* something. Just as one speaks of demands in purely economic contexts: due to our debts, one places demands on us." (Løgstrup, 291).

<sup>29</sup> It is also a critique.

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Levinas points to the asymmetrical character of the social relation, Løgstrup refers to it as a “one sided” relation. The concern for the other is a concern which for Løgstrup is based on the fact that my world and the world of the other are intertwined.<sup>30</sup> The bond between the self and the other is according to Løgstrup founded on “trust”. Trust unites the self and the other and trust gives rise to the ethical demand. As Løgstrup writes:

The fact is that there is a demand. The demand is implied by the very fact that a person belongs to the world in which the other person has his or her life. Because they belong to the same world, they hold something of that others persons life in his or her hands. It is therefore a demand to take care of that person’s life. But nothing is thereby said about how this caring is to be done. (ibid., 22)

The starting point of Logstrupp’s ethical analysis is the existence of a basic level of trust between human beings. Without trust, normal life would not be possible:

Trust is not of our making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts her of himself into that person’s hands either by showing or claiming trust. (ibid., 18)

Trust is a manner - although mostly with hesitation, Løgstrupp admits - of being open towards another. It is through trust, that we deliver ourselves “over into the hand of another” (ibid., 14). The phenomenon of trust reveals that human beings are not like isolated worlds that exist opposite one another. According to Løgstrup, trust shows that we belong partly to the other. Our world and the world of the other are mutually intertwined through the trust we place in one another.

Through the trust which a person either shows or asks of another person, he or she surrenders something of his or her life to that person. Therefore, our existence demands of us that we protect the life of the person who has placed his or her trust in us. (ibid., 17)

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<sup>30</sup> We have seen that Levinas’s starting point is different insofar as Levinas’s analysis starts with separation. Levinas however also takes as his starting point that the original condition of the human being is not the Hobbesian condition in which man is a wolf towards the Other. The original condition for Levinas is goodness that goes from the one individual towards the Other.

A part of our world is surrendered to the other. For example, “we determine the success or failure of our spouse’s marriage” (ibid. 26). The other, although remaining an individual throughout, depends partly on us and vice versa. We are to a certain extent in “one another’s power” (ibid., 28). This is not problematic insofar as a mutual level of trust ensures that we do not abuse that power. Basically this is what the ethical demand amounts to: that we should abuse our power but act in the best interest of the Other. What is acting in the best interest of the Other? We should determine what is best for the Other, but we *are* not the Other and we do not and should not control the Other. That we belong partly to the Other does not grant us the right to control the Other. Ethics as responding to a demand stemming from the Other is in constant risk of “violating that other person” (ibid., 29). This is because it is impossible for us to take up the other’s point of view as if we were the other, and also because we normally act from outside an ideology. In other words, our access to the other is normally “mediated” (ibid., 29).

What is mediation for Løgstrup? Generally, mediation is that which restrains us from acting in the best interest of the Other (cf. ibid.). Mediation is the movement by which we reduce the other to the self. Mediation is in that sense a form of distance by which we let “something” stand between us and the Other in such a way that we effectively fail to connect to the Other. However, as Løgstrup makes clear, the unmediated relation also poses a challenge. For Løgstrup, the love relation is the prime example of an unmediated relation. That is because in the love relation as understood by Løgstrup there is no longer a *distance* between the partners involved. The two have become united without some intermediary between them.<sup>31</sup> In the love relation thus:

The one partner simply wants to possess the other, one might say, as an unattached individual who exists and realizes him or herself solely through his or her relation to the other (...) In an absolutely exclusive manner the one partner wants to possess the other for him or herself. (ibid., 31)

Hate is also an unmediated relation. Hate is like love in that it denies “the other person his or her own existence. Hate lives by this complete impotence, and it

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<sup>31</sup> The passionate love-relation which is present in the works of D.H Lawrence, the works discussed by Løgstrup.

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consumes a person” (ibid. 35).<sup>32</sup> An unmediated relation, according to Løgstrup, is a relation in which the individuality of the partners in the relation is dissolved. There has been achieved a complete union and identity between the partners. The unmediated relation is a relation without *difference*. This is ultimately not what Løgstrup’s project is after. He is in search of a relation in which the partners in the relation remain separated from one another and yet are united through responsibility for one another.

In a mediated relationship the fusion without intermediaries is not present. Characteristic of a mediated relationship, as Løgstrup envisions it, is that the relation takes its shape *around* something. There is a distance between the partners which is installed by an intermediate something, which Levinas referred to as a “third term”. Løgstrup refers to it as a “bridge” (ibid. 40). This intermediate thing, or common interest, enables individuals to encounter one another without having a falling out due to a direct confrontational encounter. Intermediaries are, for example, the subjects about which one talks in conversations with strangers in order to keep the conversation going; that what we do in order to avoid awkward silences:

This gap between persons may be bridged in many different ways. But one thing is certain: if persons are to encounter one another in a manner which is redeeming and liberating to the individual’s spirit and energies, it will be effected through something intermediate. We must be united in some common enterprise, some common interest or distress. (ibid.)

Given that love is indeed immediate and common social life insofar as guided by norms is mediated, Løgstrup proves to be critical of both ways of relating to the other: “that which mediates may lead to violation, but the lack of mediation may do so as well” (ibid. 29). What then should we do in order to act in the best interest of the other without violating the other?

The ethical demand requires of us that we act in the best interest of the Other. What we think that is best for the Other is mediated and therefore something needs to ensure that we actually do act in the best interest of the Other. What is

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<sup>32</sup> Note Levinas’s critique on the Platonic notion of love as fusion. Plato develops this notion in the *Symposium* in which he defines love as the ‘reunion of the two halves of one sole being’ (Symposium.). Love – for which Levinas also uses the word Metaphysical Desire – is not a desire for a fusion. It is a Desire for the truth. A relation in which both partners cease to exist as separate individuals.

that? What is best for the Other, Løgstrup writes, is “something which one learns from one’s own understanding of life” (Løgstrup, 22). But this understanding, we have seen, is a mediated understanding. What appears to be Løgstrup’s solution is that we enter into a genuine *dialogue* with the Other. A dialogue in which we let the other express him or herself in order to enable another escape from our encroachment upon the Other.

A genuine dialogue is not a mere attempt to “please the other” (ibid.24). That is a conversation in which we let the Other be, but only because of a lack of interest on our side. A genuine dialogue is also not “an attempt to change other people” (ibid.). With these forms of conversation we do not reach the Other. A genuine dialogue enables the Other “to remain sovereign in his or her own world” (ibid.). In this relation we aim to “free the other person from his or her confinement and to give his or her vision the widest possible horizon” (ibid.).

The ethical demand requires us to take care of the Other, in the best interest of the Other. But we come to know only what is best for the Other whenever we let the Other speak. An unmediated relation with the Other, for Løgstrup, is an act of care for the Other that is necessarily accompanied by conversation in order to prevent encroachment. As we have already seen, this account of the unmediated relation is paralleled in Levinas’s analysis.

### 5.7. Institutional mediation: justice versus goodness

The preface of *Totality and Infinity* is the first occasion on which Levinas directly mentions the concept “politics” in contrast to “morality”. The two concepts stand opposite one another. It is helpful in a further understanding of what Levinasian ethics and his notion of mediation is, to further elaborate this distinction. In this distinction the term “Goodness” plays an important as the opposite of the concept of “justice”. As we have seen previously in paragraph 3.3.4, the concept “Goodness” is the concrete form of ethics in which we turn to the Other instead of the Self. And, next to conversation, Goodness is one of the two unmediated relations with the Other.

In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes:

War is not only one of the ordeals – the greatest– of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means – politics – is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naivety (TI, 21).

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What we see here, is the opposition between the rational, rule-following structure of a system, and the immediacy of Goodness. In contrasting ethics with politics, Levinas thus contrasts “Goodness” with “justice” (cf. RTB, 207). Goodness is the execution of ethics, whereas justice is the execution of politics. In his concept of “Goodness”, Levinas has been inspired by the Russian author and novelist Vasili Grossman. In an interview from 1988 Levinas writes about this inspiration:

Vasili Grossman, in *Life and Fate* – such an impressive book, coming right after the major crisis of our century – goes even further. He thinks that the little act of goodness (*la petite bonté*) from one person to his neighbour is lost and deformed as soon as it seeks organization and universality and system, as soon as it opts for doctrine, a treatise of politics and theology, a party, a state and even a church. Yet it remains the sole refuge of good in being. Unbeaten, it undergoes the violence of evil, which, as little goodness, it can neither vanquish nor drive out. (ibid, 207)

Justice is an institutionalized form of goodness. But as “goodness” emanating from the institute, and being distributed to the many, justice is already always an *injustice*. That is the case because the justice of the state does not grasp the human in its individuality, its singularity and transcendence. Instead of grasping the individual in its particularities – in that what makes one a singular being – it reduces the individuals to a genus, that belongs to some sort of generalizable class. In other words: politics mediates the Other.

Goodness, by contrast, does not calculate and reason (mediate) like justice does. It is a “goodness without thinking” (ibid., 217). It is a “mad goodness” (ibid.). And why is it mad and without thinking? It does not think in the sense that it does not calculate. Goodness is directed to the Other, more than it is concerned with the Self. Goodness acts immediately in response to a demand, to a “moral solicitation” that is given with the Other’s presence. Goodness does not reduce the Other to what Levinas calls “plastic forms” (ibid., 116). It doesn’t reduce the Other to our prefixed profile of the Other. This profile is a form in which we represent the Other as a being that is not the rightful patient of any moral action. Anti-Semitism and other racist profiles are examples of ways in which we reduce the other into a plastic form. A form in which we neglect our responsibility by reducing the Other to some class that is not worthy of our moral attention.

As Grossmann writes about this goodness, in a quotation that we already came across:

The good is not in nature, neither is it in the sermonizing of the prophets, the great social doctrines of the philosophers. Yet simple people carry in their hearts the love for all that is alive; they naturally love life, they protect life. (...) It is thus that there exists, next to the great, that so terrible Good, the human good in everyday life. This is the goodness of an old woman who, by the side of the road, gives a piece of bread to a passing convict; it is the goodness of a soldier who passes his water bottle to an injured enemy, the goodness of youth that feels sympathy for old age, the goodness of a peasant who hides an old Jewish man in his granary, etc. (ibid., 216)

The wounded soldier who gives his fellow man water is not thinking or *representing* the Other *as* something. He does not apply the concept “enemy” to the Other. Would he have done that, would he have somehow “represented” the Other, he would have *defaced* the Other. Would the wounded soldier have defaced the Other, he would have realized that this Other was the enemy, a German or Russian soldier and, because of that, not someone he would be responsible for; one is not responsible for enemies. Without thinking, Goodness forgets these preoccupations of the Self and turns towards the Other without any reserve.

The problem with this concrete form of ethics is that it might operate properly in a world in which there are only two people. But we are always with more. There is also always “a third party” (ibid., 115). Within a state there are not only “unique persons offering themselves to the compassion of my responsibility” (ibid.). Within the state an individual appears:

Within a logical order or as a citizen of a state in which institutions, general laws and judges are both possible and necessary. (ibid., 116)

Does ethics disappear within the state? There is a constant danger, Levinas writes, that this is the case. Institutions “leap in” for our personal responsibility for the Other, alleviating us from the burden of the Other and leading to a potential forgetting of the initial ethical engagement which constitutes the “authentic” relation with the Other.

Ethics is the one-on-one or face-to-face relation. It is the relation in which the Other engages us ethically. Politics is the opposite of this: it is the execution of

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responsibilities that would have otherwise been executed by the Self towards the Other. In the state, in the political domain, the relation with the Other is not ethics but rather justice. This is not necessarily bad. The State is a necessity, it is what Levinas calls “the Greek moment” (ibid., 67) in our society. Greek because, according to Levinas, rationality entered our culture with the Greeks. The rationality that allows us to reason, calculate, and mediate. Justice is a form of mediation. Society needs this because in a society we are with many and the many require that we start to judge, reason, and calculate. The face to face relation does not exist within the State:

We live in a human multiplicity. Outside of the other, there is always a third, and a fourth, a fifth, a sixth. In my responsibility I am exclusively responsible toward one even while thinking with regard to the others, but I cannot neglect anyone. Here I am obliged to think the other as under a genus or within a State. (...) One must judge, one must know, one must do justice. This is the moment where all the Greek wisdom is essential. (ibid.)

Ethics is Goodness and Goodness is, according to Levinas, executed within face-to-face relations. The ethical relation, however, is a *utopia*. In reality we live in a multiplicity, we live in a society in which there are always more than two people. Goodness within society takes the form of Justice and Justice is executed by the State. The State is according to Levinas not there to keep the human in check who – according to the Hobbesian principle – is “a wolf to the other man” (ibid., 68). Levinas’s concept of the “original condition” is one in which there is the *possibility* of man to be good to its fellow man. This possibility is the first building block of Levinas’s ethics and the State for Levinas “comes to supplement the work of interpersonal responsibility” (ibid., 67). Politics is therefore for Levinas a *social* politics. It executes the initial work of goodness on the level of the State. Ethics is within Levinas’s analysis prior to politics and its function is to keep politics in check. It provides a measure for verification: a State is good insofar as it comes close to the initial ethical relation that for Levinas is characteristic of the face-to-face relation. Ethics keeps politics in check and politics for Levinas also *requires* ethics: it is impossible for a State to function if it is not based on an initial ethical relation between the members of the State. Ethics as a responsibility from the one to the other precedes the work of charity that in Levinas’s ideal of the State is executed by the institutions of the State:

Justice, which comprises comparison between men and judgement upon men, and consequently the return of the unique to the community of genus and therefore the genesis of the political, of the State and its institutions, all of this at the same time presupposes the for-the-other of responsibility which was our starting point (*ibid.*, 108).

The State cannot function unless it is founded on the ethical relation between members of the state.

To conclude: for Levinas politics is the extension of ethics. Ethics covers the one-on-one relation and politics the relation that includes “the third”. There is and remains a close connection between ethics and politics, justice and Goodness. Ethics is that what we do out of responsibility for the Other, out of the demand the Other places on us. Justice is what is done when there are contrasting and conflicting responsibilities. In Levinas’s account, ethics remains primary, and politics and justice need to mirror and shape themselves based on what ethics as Goodness would have done in a specific context.



## 6 The philosophical-ethical diagnosis

### 6.1. The problem with mediation

In chapter 5 various concepts of mediation were discussed. It became apparent that a unified account of mediation is not easy to construct. I have made this visible in the table below:

POSITION	OPPOSING-THEORY	MEDIATOR BETWEEN SELF AND WORLD	EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES	EXISTENTIAL/ETHICAL CONSEQUENCES
MEDIATION-ALISM (CARTESIANISM, HUMANISM )	Scepticism	The Self: consciousness, ideas, mental substances	An account of knowledge as acquired through: -inner/outer distinction; -method; -monology.	Ethics as <i>disengagement</i> which provides: -freedom; -autonomy; -aontrol.
TECHNOLOGICAL MEDIATION THEORY	Mediationalism	Technology	Knowledge as technologically mediated knowledge that has the structure of <i>amplification</i> and <i>reduction</i> .	Action as mediated action that has the structure of <i>enabling</i> and <i>alienating</i>
ETHICAL MEDIATION	Phenomenological mediationalism	Things, ideas, language, institutions	Dogmatism: the Other is not granted a role as a meaning-producer. Knowledge is a maieutical process.	The absence of an account of otherness or exteriority leading to: -de-individualization of the Other -the Other as imaged -the Other as copy/reproduction of the Self
PHENOMENOLOGICAL MEDIATION	Mediationalism	Intentionality	-knowledge is produced by the Self -knowledge as identification	Reduction of Otherness to the Self
INSTITUTIONAL MEDIATION	Ethics	Politics, institutions	None relevant	Injustice: one is not grasped in one's particular context but reduced to a class

Table 1: theories of mediation

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Although a single and unified account of what mediation amounts to is difficult to conceive, it is fair to say the objective of all of these accounts is to succeed in connecting the Self with the world. However not all accounts succeed in actually connecting the Self with the world, as we have already seen by the criticism on Cartesian structured mediation-theories. The positions of ethical mediation and technological mediation are most relevant in the scope of this investigation. For that reason I will discuss the problems connected to these positions in the following two sections.

According to Dreyfus and Taylor (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015), a Cartesian structured account is confronted by the following two challenges:

- It does not account for the epistemological, existential, and ethical value of *experience*. It relies solely on *representation* for the construction of true, veritable knowledge;
- It does not account for the social bedding of knowledge and ethics. It is *monological* instead of *dialogical*.

These two criteria can be used to test whether a theory is successful in providing us access to the world. These two criteria are connected to one another in a way that is *implied* by Dreyfus and Taylor but not made explicit, which effectively makes their attempt to expand beyond Cartesian mediationalism unsuccessful. This is because they fail to account for the need to include exteriority in order to escape from the Self.

Regarding the first line of critique, Dreyfus and Taylor argue that a theory that relies on representation takes the world to be a *neutral* field. In such an approach, the subject remains the source of meaning which is subsequently projected on the world. According to this position, the world enters the subject on a sensory level as bits of raw data. The subject processes this data into knowledge, and this knowledge becomes something that represents the world in degrees of adequacy. According to them, (Heideggerian) phenomenology undercuts this account. It shows that the beings in the world are not neutral, but have some sort of “script” (cf. Verbeek, 2005: 115) that guides the way in which we use them. For Heidegger beings have the essential structure of in-order-to (Cf. BT, 66). In that sense they

are not neutral, but act on the subject and vice versa. Subject and world are co-constitutively intertwined (cf. Verbeek, 2005).

As was already seen by Heidegger, but does not have made its way into TMT, things have no meanings “in themselves”. Their meaning, as Heidegger already points out, is constructed through a source *outside* things *in* sociality. This brings me to the second line of critique, raised by Dreyfus and Taylor, against mediationalism.

This is the critique that a mediationalist position is *monological*. It has no account of an otherness – a not-Self – in relation with which meaning becomes constructed. It has for that matter no account of the place of a dialogue and dialogue-like relations in the construction of meaning. It is central to the thesis of this investigation that a dialogical relation is central and prior to any other relation with world. This implies however that there is some “thing” with which there can be a dialogue; a thing thus which is not according to the Self, but rather according to *itself*. This being, as Levinas’s analyses points out, is the Other.

Drawing on the second line of critique, there is one central argument that can be put forth as a critique of both technological mediation *theory* and the effects of technological mediation itself. The central line of this argument is that TMT does not address the second challenge because it maintains that “intentionality” and “technological intentionality” are the means that establish successful contact with the world. As we already saw, this is not the case because through (technological) intentionality, there is only world *for us*. There is no “world in itself” and in that sense, there is no outside. In a relation in which there is no outside, there is no such thing as a “dialogue” because there is no thing with which there can be a dialogue, or the dialogical structure has become weakened. This is because there is no thing “according to itself”. When there is no such being, it is difficult to envision how meaning is constructed, if it is not either implied that there is or has been a dialogue or when the meaning is again derived from the subject. This is a loop that can be visualized in the following way:

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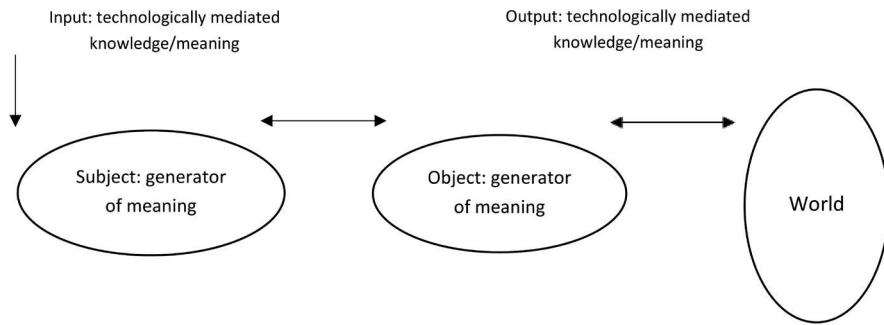


Fig. 2: Meaning and the structure of the technologically mediated relation

The mediationalist structure remains intact here, because it is not accounted for how meaning becomes introduced in the subject-object relation from a source *outside* this relation. Why are we in need of this “outside” and is there an “outside”? Is it not the case that there is only transformed or mediated being?

To begin with the first question, if there is no outside, there remains only an inside and with that only a world that is transformed and mediated *for us*. Would that be the case, we would indeed remain even further entangled in the Cartesian solipsistic loop. The world and objectivity would remain outside our grasp. This is not what TMT, as a contact theory, has promised. It promised to bring us the world and not only a world *for us*. That is, it has promised us to expand beyond Cartesian dualism and reunite human and world. A world that is only *for us* fails to achieve this union. It is a phenomenological affirmation of Cartesianism, precisely as Husserl envisioned his initial project.

This brings us to the second question: is there an outside? Is there a non-mediated and a non-transformed being? This question brings us in the scope of a phenomenological account of empathy and Levinasian ethics because, although we normally encounter mediated and transformed being, it is possible to find in the social relation a being “according to itself”. A being that *should* not be transformed because we would then divest ourselves of a gateway to exit the self-loop. It would become impossible to have a dialogue and we would thus remain in the monological challenge that any mediation theory confronts. In the next section, I will investigate what this challenge amounts to from an ethical perspective.

## 6.2. The problem with mediation in social relations

The ethical perspective which I invoke maintains that the Self needs contact with something exterior. Whenever there is mediation in place, it could effectively be that this contact is not established. Thus the Self remains the same because there is no relation with the Other. This is what the ethical challenge of mediation, as I conceive it, amounts to.

We have seen that when we mediate the Other according to Levinas, we transform the Other into a being that is “according to me”. Mediation in this context functions as a filter: the Other is reduced to our interpretative horizon. We get to see and confront the Other as *we* like to see the Other. The element “we” or “Self” should be seen in a broad context. It is a reduction of otherness to any label or form that is present on the side of the Self. Mediation thus amounts to the reduction of the Other to the Self. The ethical relation, by contrast, gives us access to the Other “according to itself”. It is unmediated in the sense that no filter stands between the Self and the Other which effectively reduces the Other to the Self. This filter can be the interpretative horizon, already existing on the side of the Self. It can also be materiality that effectively produces a likewise effect. Unmediated here should be seen in the specific sense of *not mediated by the Self*. This is a critique of any position that maintains that there only world *for us*. How can we expand beyond being *for us*? The argument has been that this can be achieved in the social relation, in which we encounter beings that are like us “according to themselves”.

We do let the Other be “according to itself” when we engage with the Other through the means of “conversation” and “goodness”. When we do that, we “confront a notion of meaning ... independent of [our] initiative and [our] power” (TI, 51). And by having that, according to Levinas, we have an ethical relation:

Insofar as the Other, in teaching us, calls us into question. To be taught, we have to wait upon the Other, on what she has to say, that is, on her interpretation that may not be our own. (Mensch, 2015: 39)

What does “according to itself” mean? For the application of this concept, Levinas has found inspiratio in Plato (cf. Mensch, 2015; Westphal, 2008). A being *kat’auto*

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in its Platonic concept referred to independent beings or substances.<sup>33</sup> Beings that for their existence do not depend on other beings but rather are the condition for other beings. An example is Beauty, as Plato relates in *the Republic* (Republic, 476b). There Plato makes distinguishes between the few (philosophers) who can apprehend Beauty itself, whereas the rest can never go beyond “beautiful sounds and colors and shapes” (ibid.). Beauty is something that is able to manifest itself, although there are few who can grasp it immediately.

The platonic Forms or Ideas - Beauty is an Idea - are beings *kath'auto*. The Other is *like* an Idea, Levinas writes (cf. TI, 38). The Other is like an idea because it is, like the Platonic forms, a being “according to itself” and because of that it is able to contest the relativism that is present in the idea of man, or the Self as the measure of all things. The Other is a being that contests this idea of man as the measure of all things, because the Other is not a being that can be measured according to *my* standards. This is important for Levinas because a world that has lost its principle, its *Form*, is a world that “does not answer to the quest for truth [and] only ‘suffices for Enjoyment’” (TI, 65). A world deprived of the Other is a world deprived of a principle, and that is the meaning of ethics according to Levinas: to provide our being with a principle that is not derived from the Self. The principle has to have an objective validity. An objectivity that is, in contrast with Cartesianism, *intersubjectively* founded.

The Other is a being that is like a Form. Levinas does not argue that the Other is a substance in its classical (Platonic, Aristotelian) concept. In that concept, a substance refers to being (be it transcendent as it was for Plato or immanent as it was for Aristotle) that is independent of us, eternal, etc. (cf. Aydin, 2003: 13-18). The Other is a being that is, like us, in the process of *becoming*. But the Other is

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of “substance” entered philosophy after Aristotle and refers to that which is “identical, uniform, and independent” (Aydin, 2003: 28). The notion *kath'auto* - actually it is *auto kath'auto* - appears in the context of Plato's Theory of Forms. Forms are beings *kath'auto* or *ousia*. The forms provided, amongst others, the foundation for stable knowledge. Without forms, knowledge would be reduced to merely subjective appearance. The forms, which are prior to the Self and will outlast it, provide a point of verification. Appearances are not true insofar as they conform to the standards of the Self, but rather when they conform to the Ideas. The Forms provide a point of verification for the truth because they are firm, durable, pure, uniform, etc. (cf. Aydin, 2003: 15-17).

like a Form in that the Other is not something that can be reduced to the Self, and because of that, the Other can provide the measure for veritable knowledge like Plato's Forms did. For Levinas, this knowledge is, as we have seen, primarily "moral" knowledge. The Other as a being that I am not, is the being par excellence that "can call me into question". How does the Other call us into question?

First of all, Levinas writes, when the Other remains "according to itself", there is the possibility of the encounter between competing worldviews. In other words, when "free" beings meet, there is the possibility of criticism. When we speak to the Other, Levinas writes, "we offer things that are mine to the Other. To speak is to make the world common" (TI, 76). When we do so, we make our private concepts of what the truth is public, and by making them public, we subject them to the criticism of the Other. As Mensch comments:

What the Other does is allow us to call into question such [private, CZ] disclosures. Faced with the Other's different interpretation, we are called to justify the interpretations that guide our own disclosures. (Mensch, 49)

If we seek to give our life some objective value, some principle that stretches beyond our own principles, we need to confront a being with principles that are different from our own principles. A mediated being, in Levinas's concept of mediation, is a being that is identical to us and for that reason not capable of providing us with instruction. Failing to let the Other express herself as a being *kath'auto* is "to corrupt the Other's freedom" (TI, 70). And when we corrupt the Other's freedom, we transform her into a Slave. A Slave is not the independent being, the Master, that is able to teach us. As a Slave, the Other is dominated and not capable of teaching us. Thus whenever we dominate the Other by refusing her the possibility of expression, we deprive ourselves of a potential gateway to the truth. What we therefore get ethically, is "the place" where criticism commences and this criticism is needed to give balance and principle to our existence. The unmediated Other, therefore, is the Other who can instruct and offer us new insights. This is the ethical significance of the Other as a *teacher*.

Secondly, the Other as a being *kath'auto*, is respected as the potential and rightful patient of moral action. This can be seen in two ways. First, the Other *kath'auto* appears as the free being which for that reason needs to be respected and protected. The Other *kath'auto* manifests herself as a world in itself, a freedom that ought not to be enslaved by us. Second, the Other as the being *kath'auto* manifests herself as a being that needs to be taken care of. The Other, unmediated by us,

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“forces” itself upon us in a way Heidegger’s tools “force” us to handle them. The Other *kath’auto* cannot be ignored; ignoring the Other would amount to mediating the Other. In order to show this feature of the Other, Levinas draws an analogy between the way we relate to the Other and the way we relate to Heideggerian tools. The basic idea of this analysis is that we do not understand tools by theoretically reflecting on these tools, but rather by a pre-reflective handling of them. The relation with tools is a relation in which we understand tools by using them within our everyday practices. The ethical relation with the Other has exactly this form:

When Heidegger taught us that tools, like the knife, the fork, and also, for example, the street, “fall into my hand”, and are ready-to-hand for me before I objectify them, it is not because this possibility is based on knowledge. This possibility is not to be grounded in a meaning either, because here meaning itself is grounded ‘in the hands’. I think the face in exactly this manner. The face is not face because I see it, nor because I recognize the colour of your eyes, or the form of your lips. That wouldn’t be seeing the face or approaching the face. (...) But I think that to approach the face of the other is to worry directly about his death, and this means to regard him straightaway a mortal, finite. (RTB, 135)

Meeting another ethically is to be worried about the Other’s life and death. This is according to Levinas not the result of a choice on the side of the subject. It is because the Other concerns us in an ethical sense without the Self making this explicit choice. To relate to the Other is already to be entangled in the life and fate of the Other.

To summarize, mediation of the Other is problematic because we will lose sight of the Other’s ethical significance. This significance becomes apparent when the Other manifests itself as active ethical *agent* (the Other as teacher) and active ethical *patient* (the Other who solicits us into ethical practice). It is through mediation that we lose a proper sight on this ethical significance that is given when the Other is and remains *kath’auto*.

### 6.3. The problem with technologically mediated social relations

This section is a tentative analyses of the problematic aspects of technological mediation, viewed from the perspective on social relations that has been layed out in the course of the previous section. The focus is therefore on the problematic aspects of the technological mediation of social relations. The problematic aspects

of technological mediation, as indicated in this section, will be worked out in more detail in part III.

As was shown, technological mediation comes with the promise of connecting the Self to the world. It is through technology that we leave ourselves and connect to “the world”. Through the way in which the concept intentionality appears in TMT, it could be further noted that “the world” has become *my* world. There is, from the perspective of TMT, only a world that has transformed from “the world” into “my world”.

The ethical perspective brought forth in this part challenges intentionality and in likewise manner “technological intentionality”. It points to the failure of intentional consciousness to connect to something the Self is not, and shows how an “intentionally” mediated world confirms the Self in world “according to itself”. It is through intentional consciousness that we remain isolated in ourselves and fail to connect to the world as something that is exterior to the Self. This is problematic insofar as exteriority is needed as a point of verification, as ethics defined as a “calling into question of the self”. Only something that is exterior is able to bring about such questioning.

The paradigm of the empathy gap shows that the challenge of technological intentionality is not a mere play with words. It points to the effect that some technologies promise to connect us to others – i.e. exteriority – but fail to do so. We attempt to connect with the world, with something or somebody we are not, and yet we remain in ourselves. How should we envision that? Like any technological mediation, the mediation of social relations comes in the structure of amplification and reduction.

The technologically mediated relation with the Other can be formalized as follows: “(I-telephone) – you” (Ihde, 78). And like every technological mediation it comes in the structure of amplification and reduction. The effect of technological mediation on the social encounter is that:

Your presence is that of a voice. The ordinary multidimensioned presence of a face-to-face encounter does not occur, and I must at best imagine those dimensions through your vocal gestures. (ibid.)

Some elements of a technologically mediated experience are amplified and others are reduced. As we will see in part III, analyzed from Levinas’s perspective, Social Information and Communication Technologies (SICTs) can be assessed according

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to this structure of amplification and reduction. The result of such an analysis is that SICTs confront us with a challenge. In its basics structure, this challenge is that it might be the case that we fail to make contact with a reality outside ourselves, because of the reductionist aspects of the technologically mediated relation.

It can be the case, in the social context, that technological mediation gives us a measure of control over the situation because the tangible, embodied context is left out. The absence of the “flesh and bone” face gives us control over our message (we can edit what we say). Furthermore, in online encounters we migrate from presence through the body to presence *as* information. Information, as we will see in part III, engages us differently than real life engagement. Information does not have a “commanding presence” (cf. Borgmann, 2001). Also, we can change and edit our outward appearance and we need not account for the effects we produce in the other because of what we say and how we say it. As Turkle relates the experience of one of her interviewees:

In my family we have our disagreements in Gchat conversations. It makes things smoother. What would be the value proposition of disagreeing with each other face-to-face? (RC. 103)

The technologically mediated situation offers more options for control over the situation. We have control over our own and the other’s reactions, messages, emotions, etc. We are not dragged into a context where things can get messy. We become more like spectators. In the tangible context we are at “risk” (RC, 128). The risk of confrontation with emotions and with regret over something we said to hastily.

Thus technologies, and especially SICTs, give us a measure of control over the situation. From the (ethical) perspective I have proposed, this effectively comes down to a failure on our side to step outside the boundaries of our Selves and make contact with the world of the Other and to allow information from the Other to enter our world. In a controlled situation we remain *in* ourselves. Because of that there is no dialogue with something external to the Self.

The challenge a technologically mediated relation needs to live up to is whether it succeeds in the promise it delivers: to connect us to the world outside the Self. Insofar as it gives us the kind control over a social situation that comes with not being physically present and in the context, SICTs might have the opposite effect. This effect can be referred to as *screening*: because there is a screen between the Self and the Other, successful contact with the Other is not made because there

is no embodied encounter. The Self remains in its world “according to itself”, unchallenged by a dialogue-like relation with something external to it. Screens give way to a weaker dialogical relation between the Self and its world.

In a similar manner, the failure to make contact with the world outside the Self may be *embedded* in the technologies that we use. This effect has come to be known as the “filter bubble” (Pariser, 2011). The basic idea is that the algorithms which operate behind search engines and SICTs lead to a world that becomes increasingly tailored to our own previous likings. As Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, once remarked:

The technology will be so good, it will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that has not in some sense been tailored for them. (Eric Schmidt, in Pariser: 47).

By tailoring a world around us that conforms to our already existing beliefs, technology effectively shields us from making contact with confronting ideas – “meaning threats” (ibid. 89) as Pariser calls them – which challenge our opinions and lead us on the track towards new knowledge. As Siva Vaidhyanathan has aptly described this process in her the *Googlization of Everything* (Vaidhyanathan, in Pariser:91) :

Learning is by definition an encounter with what you don’t know, what you haven’t thought of, what couldn’t conceive, and what you never understood or entertained as possible. It’s an encounter with what’s other – even with otherness as such. The kind of filter that Google interposes between an Internet searcher and what a search yields shields the searcher from such radical encounters. (Pariser, 91)

Insofar as technologically mediated relations give us control over the other, they follow the pattern of what is morally valued in the “mediationalist” account of the human-world relation, according to Dreyfus and Taylor’s perspective on mediationalism. Mediation is a moral stance. According to Dreyfus and Taylor, the disengaged and mediational account of the human-world relations fulfills a primarily epistemological purpose. For example:

It reflects a stance of critical awareness, unwilling simply to take things on authority, or to accept, the first-off, easiest, most convenient interpretation. (Dreyfus and Taylor, 24)

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This is enabled by an agent who, disengaged from context, could be critical about this context. It however has also ethical ramifications. A disengaged perspective is strongly valued because it is seen as “inseparable from freedom, responsibility, and self-transparency” (ibid.). The latter is something which we gain through the reflection on our own ideas. But it has a downside to it. As Dreyfus and Taylor write, “the objectification of the world which it (the disengaged agent, CZ) achieves, is also the condition of a certain control over it” (ibid.). As they further explain:

As long as we see ourselves in a cosmos which manifests certain moral and spiritual meanings, our attitudes are or ought to be determined by the significances which are inherent in things. But once we come to see the world as mechanism, a domain of efficient causation, but without inherent purpose, then we are free to treat it as a neutral field where our main concern is how to affect our own purposes. (ibid. 25)

Mediation, as we have seen, from Levinas’s perspective, is challenging for similar reasons. When we mediate the Other, the Other is transformed into a being “according to me” and falls for that reason under our powers. The Self remains in control of itself, and the Other is, in function of that, also controlled. In this situation, the Other fails to be the external source that is able to challenge the Self’s concepts of a Good Life. And also, the Other fails to count as a patient of moral action.

From an empirical perspective, it could be shown that this is precisely one of the effects of the technological mediation of social relations: we remain in control of ourselves and gain control over the Other. What the “empathy gap” points to, rephrased within a Levinasian idiom, is an increased difficulty in our abilities to experience exteriority, embodied in a concrete Other. For that reason we are not shocked by the Other to the extent that we expand beyond ourselves to enter in contact with something new.



## Part II

### What is empathy?

In this part I will answer the question: “what is empathy?” This question is relevant because I will show that it is possible to merge the concepts “empathy” and “ethics” into the concept “empathy ethics”. I will then have a *sui generis* ethical position which takes side with both phenomenological and empirical perspectives regarding the nature of the social (intersubjective) relation. Phenomenological, in this context, refers to Husserlian phenomenology. Heideggerian phenomenology, I will show, has a different perspective on the social relation.

The first chapter discusses how the concept “empathy” emerged and in what way this became a concept that could capture the specific nature of intersubjective intentionality. This chapter marks the beginning of the Husserlian phenomenological position regarding intersubjectivity.

Chapter 2 discusses the Heideggerian position. This position is a complete reversal of the Husserlian position. According to the latter position, the Self and the Other are intertwined from the start. The question is not how to relate to the Other, but rather how we could free ourselves from the Other. The project is not to uncover otherness. Rather, it is about uncovering ownness.

Chapter 3 introduces an ethical perspective on the social relation. This perspective goes “beyond” empathy although it retains the empathic structure. This already points to a possibility to merge the concepts empathy and ethics.

In chapter 4, this possibility will be further substantiated by offering an overview of the way in which empathy is conceptualized in empirical research literature. This exposition will culminate in a merger of the concepts empathy and ethics.

In the final chapter, chapter 5, I will discuss what the concrete implications are of a successful merger of the concepts “empathy” and “ethics”. I will discuss what the orientation and function is of this account of ethics.

# 1 Empathy as subject-subject intentionality

## 1.1. The psychological position: Theodor Lipps's position on empathy

Empathy is an English translation of the German word *Einfühlung* (*feeling into*). The word was introduced into English (Debes, 2015: 287) in 1909, by the psychologist Edward Titchener. It is likely that Titchener has borrowed the term from the German psychologist Theodor Lipps (Debes, 2015: 287). Lipps had written extensively on the challenges which he categorized under the concept “empathy”. For Lipps these problems were at first particularly present in the realm of aesthetics, and later taken from that context into the realm of intersubjectivity. Lipps maintained that the kinds of experiences in these two regions resemble one another to a large extent. We will soon see that this has important ramifications for Lipps's overall construal of the intersubjective relation and his application of the concept empathy within this relation.

Lipps was the first psychologist who applied the concept empathy in the sphere of social cognition, the intersubjective realm in which an epistemic problem is present, namely “the other minds” problem: how is it possible to have knowledge of a mind that is not ours? That was novel. Before Lipps, empathy was primarily used as a concept that sought to capture and explain what went on during the experience of aesthetic pleasures (Zahavi, 2014: 104). At first, on Lipps's account, empathy relates to the same experience. Empathy, at first, was the process by which we “project parts of ourselves into external objects” (Lipps, 1907b, 355). This comes about, for example, when we “experience trees or mountains as animated or be-souled, if we hear the wind and experience it as having a melancholic sound” (ibid.). The experience, thus, by which we project parts of ourselves into external objects. At first, it was this relation that Lipps referred to as an empathic relation. But he came to view the social relation as a similar relation. For that reason, he took the concept out of aesthetics and applied it within cases of social cognition. How does empathy operate in that context, according to Lipps?

His approach is interesting because it has had great influence on the phenomenological tradition and still continues to have considerable influence (Zahavi, 2014) within what is currently known of as “simulation theory” (Coplan and Goldie, 2014). In order to get Lipps's argument straight, it is first necessary to discuss what is known of as “the argument from analogy” (Debes, 2015: 287).

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This argument, which I will now explain, was at the time – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the predominant way of coming to grips with “the other minds” problem. Lipps’s sought to refute the analogical argument that was predominant at the time. What was this argument and what was wrong with it, according to Lipps?

Dan Zahavi points out that there are more versions of the argument from analogy. One version goes like this (cf. Zahavi, 2001: 151, Zahavi, 2014: 121). It starts with assuming that the only mind we have direct access to, is our own mind. The minds of others can only be accessed in a *mediate* way, through expressions perceivable on and movements of the other’s body. In what way can this provide the self with knowledge about the other’s mind? I start with my own mind and body and notice that they are linked: when I cut myself with a knife, I will be in pain. When I therefore see that another cuts herself, I will *infer*, based on my own experience, that the other is also in pain. In order to make the inferential claim, I derive from my *own* experience. In this case, there is no empathic knowledge of other’s; there is only introspective knowledge of ourselves which is then taken to resemble the other’s conscious states.

Lipps rejects this argument because it fails to acknowledge that empathy is a *sui generis* modality of knowing. In his model, it is a mode of knowing with its own peculiar characteristics that exists next to *introspection* (self-knowledge) and *perception* (knowledge of external objects). What marks the distinct character of empathic knowledge is that we experience an external object as belonging to one’s *own* psychic life. In empathic relations, we “penetrate and suffuse that object (the external object, CZ) with one’s own life” (Lipps, 1909: 224 quoted in Zahavi, 2014: 130). The empathic relation therefore, as it can be drawn from this quotation, contains an element of *simulation* and *projection* (cf. Zahavi, 2014:130). This argument could be reconstructed as follows. When I have experienced a certain feeling of sadness in the past, I *imitate* this feeling the moment I perceive it in others and it will provoke the same feeling it earlier had for me. In other words, when I perceive that the other is sad, I will project my own (previously experienced) feeling of sadness onto the other and thereby come to know what conscious state the Other is in. The Other in Lipps’s empathic-model thus:

Is consequently made by myself out of myself. His inner being is taken from mine. The other individual or ego is the product of a projection, a reflection, a radiation of myself. (Lipps, 1905, quoted in Zahavi, 2014:131)

Whenever we empathize with another, we do that through our own previous experiences. The other is “taken out of mine” in the sense that whenever we perceive a certain qualitative state of mind in the other, we reproduce that state of mind in our selves (we become angry upon perceiving anger) and thus succeed in empathizing with other. Following the aforementioned quotation, Lipps’s own argument concerning empathy can be summed up in the following way (Debes, 2015: 288):

- Certain sensory objects are immediately graspable;
- That is, in some cases, perception and comprehension of an object occur at once;
- Affective appearances (e.g. anger) or affective changes (i.e. realtime changes in affective expression, e.g. from calm to angry) are such objects;
- Of course we don’t see anger or hear anger. That is, we don’t see or hear the mental state. We see and hear its expression;
- Thus, if we do immediately comprehend what we see or hear, then we must experience the affect itself internally, simultaneously with the perception of the affective expression. That is, we must *imitate* it inwardly, even if only unconsciously.

Upon reading this argument, we might get a bit confused as to where Lipps stands in relation to the analogists. What is the actual difference between his model of empathy and theirs? It appears as if, as phenomenological critics have in fact argued, Lipps’s own argument falls within the same class of arguments (cf. Zahavi, 2013: 131).

What we perceive when we perceive anger or sadness is meaningless for Lipps. What has meaning is only what we *ourselves* reproduce qua similar feelings in ourselves, whereby we draw on past and similar experiences. Because of that, Lipps’s theory has not offered empathic knowledge but rather a particular form of self-knowledge (Ibid.). Husserl adds to this critique that Lipps’s account of intersubjectivity will never be able to offer “new” knowledge: we can only understand in others what we have gone through ourselves and are thus able to reproduce upon encountering another human being (ibid.). Of all the phenomenological criticisms of Lipps’s position, my focus will be especially on Husserl’s position. This is because his model reappears as point of reference in the

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criticisms of Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas, which are the other phenomenological positions I have included in this chapter.

### 1.2. The phenomenological position: Husserl on empathy

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) is the founding father of phenomenology. In order to understand his argument regarding “empathy”, I will briefly discuss his account of phenomenology. Phenomenology is understood by Husserl as an expansion of Cartesianism (DEH, 15). And Husserl seeks to expand beyond Descartes in a way that we have become familiar with. For Descartes, consciousness was unable to transcend itself in a way that could offer genuine (“clear and distinct”) knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Consciousness could only have knowledge about ideas present inside consciousness. For Descartes, the real world remained a sphere closed in itself, about which we would never be able to have veritable knowledge. Husserl also starts his philosophical project with the Cartesian ego. That is, Husserl also starts with the concept of the ego as a “thinking thing”, where thinking amounts to having cognitive acts such as doubting, affirming, denying, etc. (cf. Descartes, 24). For Descartes, these acts were like *images* and representations of a “real” world. That is where Husserl has moved beyond Descartes. For Husserl the tree that we perceive is not an image of a real tree that we can never have knowledge about. On the contrary, the tree as we make present for us through perception actually *is* the tree.<sup>2</sup> Consciousness is therefore not an immanent sphere, closed in itself. The very nature of the Husserlian consciousness is that it transcends itself. To be conscious of something means that we have made contact with a real world. Here a problem arises, because when being and my having consciousness of it are equated, we fall within a solipsism and extreme subjectivism. When the world has become the world insofar as it is present in *my* consciousness I will have lost external criteria to verify my account of the world. That is why Levinas accused phenomenology of being an “egology” (cf. DEH, 30).

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<sup>1</sup> The Cartesian criterion for veritable and true knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> This is important because it is according to Husserl the starting point of any scientific project that we accumulate knowledge starting with “the nature of the things themselves” (Husserl, in Franck, 2015: 27). Thus the tree as present in consciousness can be the starting point of any science.

Descartes found the way out of solipsism through God.<sup>3</sup> Husserl finds his way out of solipsism through the Other. And he needs the Other if his phenomenology seeks to live up to his original project of being a new and rigorous science. As Levinas restates a remark Husserl made in the *Cartesian Meditations*: “it is in the essence of objective truth to be truth for everyone; this intersubjective world is thus ideally presupposed in the very essence of truth” (ibid. 30; Husserl, 1977: 92). Although this notion is already present in the early Husserl (of the *Cartesian Meditations*), it rose to particular prominence in the later Husserl (cf. Zahavi, 2003). But before Husserl was able to arrive at the Other as the external source, leading out of solipsism, he had to settle the challenge as to how we actually encounter the other. How do we phenomenologically make sense of our relation to another, who must remain “Other” if we seek to avoid solipsism?

To begin with, unlike a common sense account of empathy, empathy is for Husserl not an emotion like, for example, pride, embarrassment, or shame. Empathy is defined by Husserl as “the intentionality in one’s ego that leads into the foreign (*fremde*) ego (this) is the so called empathy” (Husserl, 1962: 321). This definition deviates from Lipps’s account. For Lipps, the other is a projection of ourselves: “we make the other psychological individual out of ourselves” (cf. Zahavi, 2013: 131, quotation modified). For Husserl this is unsatisfactory because what Lipps basically admits is that there is no original way of knowing the Other. The Other remains “the object”, closed in itself, and we remain the subjects, unsuccessfully attempting to transcend ourselves. We have seen that this account of human-world relation is phenomenologically unsound for Husserl, as it admits to a two-world ontology: one world is the world of immanent consciousness and one world is the world of transcendent being *in itself*. Husserl however sought to give an account of a relation to the world, in which the world as present in consciousness in fact is the world. Being, consciousness, and world are synonymous concepts for Husserl. There must therefore be a way in which the Other is originally and intentionally present for us. Empathy, as Lipps also unsuccessfully claimed, is for Husserl a specific and *sui generis* mode of intending and thereby making (phenomenally) present or *knowing* a subject. If that is the case, what is the intentional structure of empathy and how did Husserl work it out? In order to make sense of that, we need to take a brief look at the general structure of Husserlian epistemology.

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<sup>3</sup> See Part III

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In his analysis of ways of intending an object, Husserl makes a distinction in the levels of *directness* in which an intentional relation “reaches” its objects and thereby offers knowledge. Husserl thus makes a distinction between *signitive*, *pictorial*, and *perceptual* modes of intending an object. Each intentional structure refers to a level of “directness, originality and optimality” (Zahavi, 2014: 125) in which the intended object becomes phenomenally present in consciousness.

The lowest form of knowledge is signitive speech-acts. For example: we can talk about a house. But without having seen one ourselves in pictures, or having walked through the house, something is lacking in this form of knowledge which we gain in speech-acts. The intended object appears within this structure *less optimally* than in other modes of intentionality. If we talk about a house of which we also have pictures, the knowledge becomes more direct, more optimal, and so to say more true. We have in that instance so called *pictorial* knowledge. We can point to the pictures of the house and explain that we are talking about *this* particular house; we can show the house on the picture to the person we are talking with. This is a more optimal form of intentionality but there is one higher level of optimality. When we are in front of a house, the object of our intention is physically present (*leibhaftig gegeben*). In Husserl’s model, this is the highest, most direct form of knowledge (cf. Franck, 2014). The question becomes where empathy can be located: what kind of intentional structure does empathy have? Can we only talk about the Other, can we only form pictures of the Other or talk about her as if the Other were a picture? Can the Other be present for us in the flesh, can we, in other words, *perceive* the Other? Husserl’s answer appears to be two sided: perceiving the other is both possible and impossible.

We actually do perceive another’s pain as being indeed the other’s pain but we will never originally know what it is *for-the-Other* to be in the other’s state of being. What remains missing is the first person’s perspective. But still, it seems as though it is possible that we in fact do perceive the other’s pain. For Lipps, this remained impossible. Seeing another’s pain and being able to recognize it would only be possible if we had gone through that pain ourselves first. But this does not give us access to Other, it only explains how *we* are in a certain situation. There is a way of reaching the Other as Husserl insists, but how? The answer is actually easy and conforms to common-sense attitudes. It is through the Other’s body, through the Other’s facial expressions that we see that the Other is in pain. The Other, in

her likeness to me as embodied being, is first experienced as an embodied being and from there the step is made to Other's private, mental life. Why the body?

First of all, in Husserl's analysis, the Self *is* a body. We are in the world as lived bodies that experience the world as embodied beings. For example, we do not merely *see* a bird fly by. We *watch* it. We follow the bird's movement. We adjust head, eyes, and upper body. Perceiving is not something that happens to us, we *do* it (cf. Taipale, 2014: 57). We have this experience of ourselves in an immediate way. From that we also draw that there is a difference between Self and Other, because the Other is not given in this way. Thus our "incarnate being" (ibid. 79) marks the difference between Self and other like "one's own moving hand is given differently than the moving hand of the other" (ibid.). But embodied self-awareness also links us to the Other, how does that come about?

The starting point is our incarnate self-experience. We experience our own body from *within*. Not as a mere "object" but as thing that experiences, senses, performs, etc. (cf. Taipale, 2014: 81). The foreign body is experienced in a similar way. The Other's body is experienced and with that we *appresent* the Other's body as having a corresponding experiential interiority (ibid.). Is the Other an analogy of the Self? In the sense that we infer from our own connection between body and mind that other embodied beings also have a mind? Husserl would deny that because if that would be the case, there is really nothing new in our experience of others. We would still be limited to our Self. Empathy is not a reproduction of our Self. Instead, Husserl would argue that we perceive the Other through a process he refers to as "coupling" or "pairing" (cf. Zahavi, 2003:133; Franck, 2015: 112; Husserl, 1977: 112- 113).

When we perceive an embodied other, we see the Other as a *lived body* like we are (cf. Taipale, 2014: 82). We do not see the other as an object. We also do not see in the other what we ourselves have gone through first. We see the Other's actions as belonging to a lived body, to a being thus with an interiority like us. Coupling and pairing are reciprocal. We do project what we see on the lived, embodied Other. There is a process of mutual modification. Throughout interactions with the Other, there is a "mutual awakening" (Zahavi, 2014: 132). Our whole body of knowledge thus is a co-production of the Self-Other relation. When we "know" that the expressions we see on another's face are expressions of a certain emotion, say pain, distress, happiness, etc., we know that because we pair the Other's body

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with our own. In the actual encounter with the Other, we can verify our account of what the Other is going through and thus gradually accumulate our body of knowledge which we subsequently use in every new encounter with the Other.

Our consciousness is in that sense filled with sedimentations of previous experiences. The reservoir of experiences we have acquired throughout our lives serves as the foundation upon which we interpret new experiences. As Zahavi writes about the concept “pairing”: “my current understanding of X will, in short, be aided by my previous experience of something analogous” (Zahavi, 132).

It is in this way that we are able to empathize and thus understand another’s situation. We see pain, and we know this is pain by relying on our own previous experiences of pain. When we see the Other as a being with certain emotions, beliefs, and other cognitive acts or mental states, we see another in what Husserl calls a *personalistic* way. That is the ordinary, everyday way of relating to another as being a composite of mind and body. A composition that is again analogous to the way in which we experience ourselves as composites. To see the Other as just a body without mind would be what Husserl calls the *naturalistic* way of seeing an other. This, however, is alien to phenomenology, for which the experience of the other also gives us the Other. The Other is not a being that “hides” beyond its appearance in consciousness. We seem to be close to Lipps again, but that is not the case. Important for Husserl is that although it is possible to empathize with the Other, there remains also an (at first sight) unbridgeable gap between Self and Other. This gap is not present in Lipps’s account of empathy in this way.

We have seen that empathy is possible through a process Husserl calls “pairing”. This concept solves the problem of how another being can be phenomenologically present. Now that this problem is solved, what is the purpose of the other in Husserl’s project? This purpose is to be found in the difference that remains between our perception of the Other and the Other’s first person experience. This difference cannot be made undone through empathy, but does not count as a failed form of empathy. Precisely because the Other remains Other as the being having the first person perspective, the Other is the one through which we can escape the problems relating to solipsism, and the problems connected to that position, for example that we lack a measure for objective knowledge in that condition (cf. Stein, 63-64).

That we do not have complete access to the Other is in Husserl’s model not a failed or incomplete form of perception. It is not as if it is needed for a successful

empathic relation that we have a complete and total grasp of the Other. Empathy by and of itself recognizes the transcendence of the Other or the “asymmetry” (Zahavi, 2014: 130) between Self and Other. For Husserl, empathy is a specific way of knowing, characteristic of subject-subject relations. But although empathy gives us knowledge of the Other, the Other does remain a transcendent being. That is vital within Husserl’s approach. Because when we relate to Others we gain new perspectives on the world. Through this we are enabled to escape from the imprisonment within the boundaries of our own individuality. As Stein writes, commenting on this Husserlian insight:

Were I imprisoned within the boundaries of my individuality, I could not go beyond “the world as it appears to me”. At least it would be conceivable that the possibility of its independent existence, that could still be given as a possibility, would always be undemonstrable. But this possibility is demonstrated as soon as I cross these boundaries (of our own individuality, CZ) by the help of empathy and obtain the same world’s second and third appearance which are independent of my perception. (Stein, 1989:64)

The meaning the world has *for me* becomes affected and can be verified the moment we encounter another who experiences the same world. The arrival of the Other constitutes for Husserl the possibility of an objective world. The Other makes evident that the world is not only a world *for us* but a world that is there *for everyone*. Our experience of the world therefore, for Husserl is an experience that is *mediated* through our experience of Others. Husserl makes it quite clear:

Here [within intersubjectivity, CZ] we have the only transcendence which is really worth its name and anything else that is also transcendent, such as the objective world, *depends* upon the transcendence of foreign subjectivity. (Husserl, 1974: 248, quoted in Zahavi, 2014)

For Husserl the objective world is only experienced as objective because we encounter others who experience the same world. The risk that we are only “*solus ipse* (only self)” (Husserl, 1999: 135) is avoided because we encounter transcendent other beings who offer a warranty that the world is more than just *our* intentional correlate.

Asymmetry between the Self and the Other serves an *epistemic* purpose in Husserl’s analysis. The Other is a condition for the possibility of truth. Truth, in this context, means that something is true for more than the single subject (thereness-for-everyone, cf. Husserl, 1977: 92). But the Other is also the one who

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furnishes the self with the possibility of *identity* and the advance of *self-knowledge*. As it comes to the acquiring of identity, Husserl writes that it is through the other that we gain a perspective on ourselves as embodied beings (cf. Stein, 1989:63). As Zahavi writes, it is through:

The appearance of the other body reminds me of the possible appearance of my own body, it reminds me of what my own body would be like if it appeared over there. (Zahavi, 2014: 135)

We have seen that it is through our own embodiment that we are able to empathize with the Other. This is different from the simulationist account of intersubjectivity. This is because Husserl emphasizes the existence of interplay between the Self and the Other; the Other is not taken from the Self. We can, so to say, “read” the Other’s state of being from his or her face through our own previous experience, but once we misconceive the state the Other is in, something *new* gets added to our experience. The relation is, in contrast to the simulationist account, relational. This new experience then gets added to the sedimentation of other previous experiences, thus adding to the becoming of our subjectivity. This becoming is mediated through the Other (cf. Zahavi, p. 141). What this shows within Husserl’s analysis is, that the way I appear for myself through introspection depends to a large extent on the way others perceive me. Our state of being, therefore, from a Husserlian perspective, is fundamentally a “being-for-one-another” (Zahavi, 2014: 141): I and the Other are co-constitutively intertwined.

There remains one phenomenological difficulty that needs to be settled. We have seen that we perceive the Other through the Other’s embodiment. We know about the Other’s states of being through a process of pairing with our own history of being. What we do not know is how it is *for-the-other* to experience a certain state of affairs. And yet this knowledge is a necessary condition if we seek to advance our knowledge of ourselves and the world. Would we be left to an outward perception of the Other – the perception of the Other as embodied being – we would remain within the horizon of our perception and our interpretation of the world. If we wish to expand beyond our Self, we need to find a medium which transcends beyond the sphere of ownness. We would need to be able to reach the Other, because then we would acquire a source of knowledge that cannot be reduced to our Self. This source would enable us to verify and potentially correct our initial beliefs. But how do we reach the inner states of the Other’s mind? Husserl addresses this problem

in a manner that we have already encountered in Levinas's account of the way we can relate to the other.

The way we relate to the other's inner being, to the other's first person perspective is through *conversation*. According to Husserl this is the medium through which we enable the Other to express him or herself, thereby potentially adding new insights on our side. As Husserl writes:

Leibniz said that the monads have no windows. But I think that every psychic monad has infinitely many windows – namely, every truly comprehending perception of a foreign lived body is such a window. And each time I say, 'please dear friend' and my friend responds to me with understanding, then through our open windows, an I-act of my I is passed over into the I of my friend and vice versa; a reciprocal motivation has established a real unity between us – yes has actually established a real unity. (Husserl, in Zahavi: 139)

The other therefore is a special being because it expresses itself. And because the Other is an expressive being, the Other is not like an object that "can be thematized by me" (ibid.). Rather, the Other as a speaking subject is a point of orientation through which the world and my being gradually unfold themselves. I will now turn to Heidegger's account of empathy. We will see that this account differs starkly from that of Husserl and the two final approaches I will discuss at the end of this chapter.



## 2 Empathy as derivative phenomenon

In the previous empathic approaches to intersubjectivity, we have seen that empathy is approached as a *sui generis* mode of intending another human being. Husserl departs from the isolated individual (monadic being) who, through the empathic act, comes in contact with the other human being (again). Heidegger has a different starting point. This starting point is called the “ontological approach to empathy” (cf. Zahavi, 2001) because Heidegger seeks to show that it is part of our being-in-the-world to be with others. In other words: Heidegger’s human being (Dasein) is a being that is “social from the start” (ibid.). We will see that it is only because of this ontological connection with others that empathy as derivative knowledge structure is enabled. As Heidegger writes in his *History of the Concept Time* (Heidegger, 1985):

In order to give a more accurate portrayal of the phenomenal structure of the world as it shows itself in everyday dealings, it must be noted that what matters in these dealings with the world is not so much anyone’s own particular world, but that right in our natural dealings with the world we are moving in a common environmental whole. (HCT, 188)

We have seen that Husserl’s subject starts off in isolation, as a solipsist, but is united with the Other human being again through the act of empathy. Heidegger, on the contrary, takes as his starting point that we are intertwined with others as much as we are with the things we encounter in the world. This is the everyday way of being in the world and our existential objective is to free ourselves from these alien sources and become authentic selves. This is a reversal of Husserl’s project. The starting point for Heidegger is a shared existence. We are what we are through others and the world is what it is through the meaning bestowed on it through others. It is *through* others that the world – as the meaningful whole it is for us – becomes a possibility.<sup>4</sup> To put it otherwise, sociality in the meaning of *togetherness* (not intersubjectivity, as for Husserl) is the *a priori* condition for the existence of

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<sup>4</sup> The world according to Heidegger is not just the ensemble of separate beings – such as “houses, trees, people, mountains, stars” (BT, 63) – but the meaningful whole these beings become through our pragmatic dealing – skillful coping, as Dreyfus calls it (Dreyfus, 2014).

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world because we do not live in isolation, but are part of a social structure which hands over meaning to us. It is within this context that Heidegger's position on sociality is developed, as Olafson writes:

If a theory that does justice to ... *Mitsein* (being-with) were to be developed, it would have to take into account such facts as that what I uncover as a hammer, say, has been previously used (and thus uncovered) as a hammer by others, and that it is normally from these others that I have learned what a hammer is an how to use one. (Olafson, 143)

That is precisely what Heidegger does. We have seen that the later Husserl has developed a comparable argument, for example when he writes: "what I generate from out of myself (primally instituting) is mine. But I am a 'child of the times': I am a member of a we-community (...). And these have influenced me: I am what I am as an heir" (Husserl, 1973). But although there is some congruency here between the position of Heidegger and Husserl, the latter does insist that intersubjectivity – which implies separation – does exist as the necessary condition for the possibility of objectivity. This separation is absent in Heidegger's analysis of intersubjectivity. In fact, the fundamental problem for Heidegger remains how to isolate Dasein from the mass (*das Man*, the They) and preserve Dasein's authenticity in relation to the conforming and leveling influence of the mass.<sup>5</sup>

According to Heidegger we do not meet others empathically as if they are separated from us. The gap between the Self and the Other, implied by the empathic approach, does not exist for Heidegger. Then how do we meet Others, according to Heidegger? We meet Others as belonging to the world which we share with the Other. We do not meet the Other as the "individual who", rather we meet the Other as an absorbed "what". That is, we meet Others and understand who the Other is because we recognize in the Other that she is like the Self a being that is absorbed in its world. We grasp the other through the way she has engaged herself in the world. As Heidegger writes:

I do not understand the other in this (empathic, CZ) artificial way, such that I would have to feel my way (*Einfühlen*) into another subject. I understand

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<sup>5</sup> In the next part we will see that there is some inconsistency in Heidegger's analysis of our relation to "the they". On the one hand there is the positive influence of others as "the one" who make normality possible. On the other hand, the they are "the one" from whom Dasein needs to escape in order to find its authentic possibilities.

him from the world in which he is with me. (Heidegger in Ference-Flatz, 2015: 493)

When we relate to other human beings, we do so not through empathy, but we “understand” them as belonging to the same world as we do. That means we do not have *direct* access to the Other. We meet the Other *via* the world. For example, imagine two workers cobbling a street:

In this work situation, one worker lays the stones while the other knocks them into place. Each worker is related to the other in his activity and comportment. When one worker understands the other, the understanding in question does not involve grasping some hidden mental occurrences. There is no problem of other minds. (Zahavi, 2014: 191)

According to Heidegger, we know enough about the Other when we know her through the way she expresses herself in her works. Empathy, as the intentionality leading us towards foreign consciousness, is not how we relate to the Other normally and also not how we *need* to relate to the Other. We always have a direct experience of the Other insofar as the Other has expressed herself in her works. The value of otherness and transcendence is not grasped in this analysis.

Instead, for Heidegger, we have a primordial relationship with things. Things are for Heidegger more than just “material” and “extension”. The room, for example, is not “the space between four walls” (BT, 68). Rather, the room, in Heidegger’s analysis, is first of all encountered as something “useful for living” (ibid.). This is the primordial way of relating to things, that we recognize them as *useful things* (*Zeuge*).<sup>6</sup> Through our interactions with useful things, we create something Heidegger refers to as “world”. But tools do not only give rise to the possibility of “world”, they also bring us in contact with other Dasein. As Heidegger writes:

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<sup>6</sup> This is where Heidegger’s phenomenological project differs from Husserl’s project. Husserl remained Cartesian in the sense that for him phenomenology amounts to an “investigation and inspection of self-evident meanings in our mind” (Dreyfus, 1991: 33). For Heidegger, phenomenology is about uncovering the typical ways in which we are “in” the world. That is, according to Heidegger, we should not “posit an ‘I’ or subject as that which is primarily given” (BT, 72). There is not first subject and then world. The subject is to be understood *as* an absorption in the world. This immersion is the starting point of Heideggerian phenomenological analysis.

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The work produced refers not only the what-for (Wozu) of its usability and the whereof (Woraus) of which it consists. The simple conditions of craft contain a reference to the wearer and the user at the same time. (...) Thus not only beings which are at hand are encountered in the work, but also beings with the kind of being of Dasein for whom what is produced becomes handy in its taking care. (ibid., 70)

Tools disclose a world – although leaning on a priori sociality – and this world is shared with others. Tools refer to the existence of other Dasein, whom we recognize as Dasein because they are like us. What does that mean? We recognize them as beings that are like us occupied with the process of world-making. We are what we are doing, for Heidegger, and that is also how others are and how we come to recognize them as beings which are “what they are doing” (ibid., 126). Our understanding of others therefore is primarily mediated through tools. For example:

(...) the poorly cultivated field along which I am walking appresents its owner or tenant. The sailboat at anchor appresents someone in particular, the one who takes his trips in it”. (Heidegger, 1923, cited in: Ference-Flatz, 2015)

Empathy, as Husserl understands it, implies separation between human beings, and this separation, according to Heidegger, is not how we are in the world. We are primarily in the world as sociality and it is through this sociality that world has become possible. Through this analysis, Heidegger has shown that the difference between Dasein and others (*Mit-Dasein*) is only a manner of speaking that has no ontological validity:

If this word (empathy) is at all to retain a signification, then it is only because of the assumption that the ‘I’ is at first in its ego-sphere and must then subsequently enter the sphere of another. The ‘I’ does not first break out ... since it already is outside, nor does it break into the other, since it already encounters the other outside. (BT: 145)

Separation is not how we are in the world. We actually are, through the world we share and which marks our relation with the Other, “immersed” (ibid., 127) in the life of others: “we enjoy and amuse ourselves, like das Man; we read, perceive and judge about literature and art, like das Man perceives and judges” (ibid.). Claiming that we can have and should have empathic knowledge of others conceals this ontological given, the fact that we belong to “the They” and lack individuality with

respect to others. As Heidegger puts it: “everybody is the other and nobody is (a) self” (ibid.,171).

This does not mean that empathy or knowledge of other minds in general is not problematic for Heidegger. Empathy only appears at the moment the social relation “breaks” (Zahavi, 2001: 154), the moments in which we feel “lonely” (cf. Ference-Platz, 2015). That is, whenever we experience the Other as “missing”, we experience the difference with the Other and only in those situations does empathy re-establish the relation with the Other. The structure of this form of empathy is however something that Heidegger has not worked out:

But the fact that “empathy” is not a primordial existential phenomenon ... does not mean that there is nothing problematic about it. The special hermeneutic of empathy will have to show how being-with-one-another [Miteinandersein] and a human being’s knowing of himself are led astray and obstructed by the various possibilities of being which human being himself possesses, so that genuine “understanding” gets suppressed, and human being takes refuge in substitutes; the possibility of understanding the other correctly presupposes such a hermeneutic. (Heidegger/Macquarrie, 1927: H125)

A special hermeneutic is needed in order to uncover the authentic relation with other Dasein because we normally relate to others inauthentically. That is, we meet others as belonging to the world we share with others and this is inauthentic insofar as we (mis)take the Other – as a foreign source – to be a part of our own identity. To rephrase this in Scheler’s wording: “a man tends, in the first instance, to live more in others than in himself; more in the community than in his own individuality” (Scheler, 2009)

But is it altogether impossible for Heidegger to meet others authentically? It is suggested that Heidegger has made some steps in the direction of the development of this analysis, with the analysis of *caring-for* (Fürsorge, solicitude) as one of the *existentials* of Dasein.<sup>7</sup> What is this mode of relating to another? Heidegger has not worked out in detail what this relation could consist of. As he writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Existentials are the typical and everyday ways in which Dasein is “in” the world. A Heideggerian existential analytic therefore uncovers Dasein in its position “vis-à-vis itself, things, others” (Dreyfus, 1991: 16). These positions translate as Care (*Sorge*), Concern (*Besorge*) and Solicitude (*Fürsorge*).

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There is the possibility of a concern [*Fürsorge*] which does not so much leap in for the other as *leap ahead* of him, not in order to take “care” [*Sorge*] away from him, but to first give it back to him as such. This concern [*Fürsorge*] which essentially pertains to authentic care [*die eigentlich Sorge*]; that is, the existence of the other, and not to a *what* which it takes care of, helps the other to become transparent to himself in his care and *free* for it. (Heidegger/Macquarrie, 1927: 115/H122)

As we will see in the next paragraph, Levinas has criticized Heidegger for the way in which the latter understands being-with-another (*Miteinandersein*) As Levinas puts it:

In Heidegger, the ethical relation, *Miteinandersein*, being-with-another, is only one moment of our presence in the world. It does not have the central place. *Mit* is always being *next-to...*(RTB, 177)

What according to Levinas remains missing in Heidegger’s analysis of sociality is the confrontation, what Levinas calls the face-to-face relation with another. A relation in which there is no immersion but rather a separation which will function as the condition for the possibility of ethics. In the next chapter I will discuss Levinas’s position together with Sartre for they are both phenomenologists which seek to highlight – although for different reasons – the confrontational character of social relations.

### 3 Beyond empathy

Husserl translated the term *Einfühlung* into a concept that captures the intentional relation which “reveals the conscious life of others” (TIH: 127). Heidegger analyzed the social relation on the ontological level as being-together and ultimately as *immersion*: in our everyday mode of existence we belong to as mass, we are absorbed by “the they”. From this analysis it follows that empathy becomes visible only as a derived relation, founded on and enabled by an everyday understanding of the other. Heidegger suggested that it was also possible to relate authentically and empathically to others, but these are relations he did not further explicate. The focus is primarily on revealing an *authentic* Self rather than an authentic relation with the other.

In this chapter I will outline the approaches brought forth by Sartre and Levinas. These two approaches have in common that they highlight the transcendence of the intersubjective relation, although for different reasons, point out the confrontational character of the social relation. Given this, they actually go, as Zahavi puts it, “beyond empathy” (Zahavi, 2001). They ultimately end up attaching ethical relevance to this relation, which is a second commonality between these approaches and explains why I will discuss these positions jointly. I will first say something about Sartre’s position before I move on to a short discussion of Levinas’s position within the history of phenomenological reflection on the intersubjective relations.

#### 3.1. Sartre, intersubjectivity and the phenomenon “shame”

At first, Sartre seems to agree with Heidegger’s analysis, in which it appears that we encounter others in a derivative way via the mediation of tools and artefacts. In a similar vein, Sartre argues that meeting “the Other is not only an encounter at every turn of the road” (Sartre, 1943: 567). The encounter is not (always) the confrontation with the stranger. We also meet others because we find “instrumental complexes” (ibid.) which are endowed with a meaning that stretches beyond the meaning the free individual could project on them. In other words, the meaningful whole the world is, has acquired this meaning through the works of others. This implies that we are not alone in the world, but share it with other beings that are like us: intentional, meaning-bestowing beings. But eventually, Sartre seeks to distinguish

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his position from Heidegger's. He constructs an argument that bears semblance to Levinas's argument, although it is applied with an altogether different purpose.

Sartre accused Heidegger's analysis of failing to grasp what Sartre held to be the "original and fundamental relation to others" (Zahavi, 2001: 157). Heidegger understands our relation to others as a *being-with* and most importantly as a derived and mediated being-with: we encounter tools and the tools refer to the existence of others. That is how we become aware of the given that we are not alone in the world. For Sartre, however, prior to the tool-mediated encounter with others, we have already had *confrontational* encounters with concrete others. This confrontation (our appearance as *being-for others*) is within Sartre's approach the primary relation with others. In contrast with the being-for relation, Sartre claims that "the empirical image which may best symbolize Heidegger's intuition is not that of a conflict but rather a crew" (Sartre, 1943:292).

In contrast with Heidegger's position, for Sartre, the encounter with the Other is a primordial relation which *precedes* our other epistemological or ontological relations to the world. Why is that important? In Sartre's philosophical project, it is important that there exists a difference between Self and Other, which does not exist for Heidegger. As we have seen, we appear as an indistinguishable part of others within Heidegger's analysis. We belong to the They, there is no difference, no *transcendence* between us and the Other.

As beings that are similar to others, that lack the possibility to mark fundamental and unbridgeable differences with others, we are, according to Sartre, left to *solipsism*. That means we are locked-up in ourselves and do not have a "bridge" that connects us to the outside world. The problem of solipsism, of life in a world bereft of confrontational others, was also seen by Husserl. As he writes about this condition: "when I (...) reduce myself to my absolute transcendental ego (...) do I not become *solus ipse* (only self)?" (Husserl, 1999: 135) We have seen that Heidegger has avoided the solipsistic challenge by showing that others are an existential of Dasein. The form the positive make-up of Dasein, they are a defining part of its existence.

Sartre rejects this position, believing that an escape from confinement to the Self can only be arrived at once the relation with the Other is somehow reconstructed as confrontational. There must be a "moment" in which the Self is confronted with others in such a manner that it will become impossible to deny both the existence of the Other and the Self.

This leads us to Sartre's analysis of the phenomenon shame. Sartre remarks that the peculiar and phenomenologically relevant thing about relating to another subject is that this subject is able to "perceive and objectify me" (Zahavi, 2001: 158). The Other, in Sartre's analysis, not only appears as an object of our perception but also as a subject that perceives *me*. This, Sartre argues, is the primary relation to others. The peculiar thing about this relation, in contrast to subject-object relations, is that in the intersubjective relation we appear *for others* as an object of their perception. The Other is present as "the one who looks at me" (Sartre, 2003: 293) and makes an object of me, the Other makes me aware of my existence as a being for-the-Other.

The Other, within Sartre's analysis of intersubjectivity, is the one that "mediates between me and myself" (Zahavi, 2014: 213). That is what shame does, according to Sartre: it reveals something about myself and this revealing is mediated by the Other. What we are ashamed of in shame is how we appear for others:

Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an original fall, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have 'fallen' into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am. (Sartre, 2003: 312)

The self-awareness that the subject receives through the Other is a proof that other minds exist; the danger of solipsism is overcome. The confrontation between Self and Other is also the starting point of intersubjective conflict: the Other fixates the Self and the Self struggles to escape from being caught in the Other's gaze which cannot be controlled by the Self.

This is impossible because the first-person perspective is missing. I do not know *how* I appear for the Other and yet I know that I do appear in some way. This is how the intersubjective relation works, and the best thing we can do is come to terms with it. We should therefore acknowledge that, in a sense, the I, who has introspective knowledge of itself, is in the meantime also partly another. I am in a way an object for the Other, held captive by a gaze I seek to escape from (Cf. Zahavi, 2014: 212-214).

In his analysis of the subject-subject relation, Sartre deviates sharply from Heidegger's account in which intersubjective confrontation was not present. But

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there are also similarities. The most important one is their shared perspective on the importance on a version of “authenticity”, “selfhood” or “ownness”. For both of them, it is because of the Other that we are “inauthentic” (not derived from the Self) and the intersubjective struggle is a struggle in which the gain and loss of being authentic is at stake. It is because of this that we need another account of intersubjectivity in which this relation is not construed as inauthentic and a potential peril to the coming into being of the subject. For that reason, I will now move to Levinas’s account of intersubjectivity.

### 3.2. Levinas and the phenomenological tradition: intersubjectivity as ethics

This brief discussion of Levinas’s position is included in order to show where Levinas stands with regards to the phenomenological tradition on intersubjectivity. This will become important because Levinas, in his account of intersubjectivity, continues on a route that has been paved by Husserl. For Husserl, it becomes increasingly difficult to show that the whole world – including the Other – is an intentional correlate of the Self. The phenomenological position, according to which the whole world is a world of meanings that intentional consciousness has bestowed on the world, becomes an untenable position for Husserl. As he writes, the way in which the other appears for consciousness does away with the illusion:

Everything I, qua transcendental ego, know as existing in consequence of myself, and explicate as constituted in myself, must belong to me as part of my essence. (Husserl, in Kenaan: 57)

The Other is not part of the Self. The Other is “not taken from me”, as Lipps has argued. Rather, the Other is confronted as the non-I, as an I “according to itself”. As Kenaan notes, and as has already become clear by now, this is a theme that Levinas has further explicated and unraveled in his relation between the Self and the Other. In this analysis, the Self and the Other appear as monadic beings that relate to one another through metaphysical Desire, conversation, and goodness. But although Levinas seems to side with the empathic tradition up against the ontological approach, he has also moved beyond the empathic approach towards intersubjectivity. Together with Sartre, Zahavi ranks Levinas among the transcendentalists:

(...) just like Sartre, Levinas also takes the problem of intersubjectivity to be first and foremost a problem of radical otherness, and he explicitly denies that any form of intentionality (including empathy) will ever permit us to

understand this encounter. Intentionality is a process of objectivation, and it only lets us meet the other by reducing the other to something it is not, namely an object. (Zahavi, 2001, 159)

In contrast with Husserl's empathic and Heidegger's ontological approaches, Levinas seeks to understand the social relation primarily as an ethical relation. Levinas does not deny that the Other is known empathically or that we can "belong" to the Other, as it is case in Heidegger's analysis. Levinas makes an attempt to show that it is (also) possible to construe the social relation as a primarily ethical relation founded on the Other's radical alterity. Such an account of the social relation has been notoriously forgotten by western philosophy, Levinas claims, as "every philosophy is – to use Husserl's neologism – an egology" (CPP, 50). That is, every philosophy has ultimately remained an inquiry into the Self and its identity because its "window" towards externality, the Other, has been neglected throughout the history of western philosophy. We have seen, from Husserl's and Sartre's account of intersubjectivity, that Levinas is perhaps too radical in this claim and does not do enough justice to a development in phenomenology towards the inclusion of the Other and otherness.<sup>8</sup> As we have already seen, Levinas's account of the transcendent present in the social relation and its character as the foundation of every other human-world relation is perhaps the most far-reaching account of transcendental intersubjectivity within the phenomenological tradition. This provides some merit to his claim.

In short, what Levinas adds to the other phenomenological positions I have discussed in this part, is his *moralization* of the relation with the Other.

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<sup>8</sup> In his early essay on Levinas's philosophy, *Violence and Metaphysics* (Derrida, 1978), Derrida already points to this neglect in Levinas's reception of Husserl. This is how Levinas, quoted by Derrida, presents the traditional account – including that of Husserl – of the intersubjective relation: "decency and everyday life incorrectly lead us to believe that the other is known through sympathy, as another like myself, as alter ego" (Levinas, in Derrida, 1978). This is however an incorrect representation of Husserl's stance on the problem of intersubjectivity. On the contrary, as Derrida writes: "Husserl does not cease to emphasize that this (the inclusion of the Other in the Self, CZ) is an absolute impossibility. The Other as alter ego signifies the Other as Other, irreducible to *my* ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego. The egoity of the Other permits him to say 'ego' as I do; and this is why he is Other, and not a stone, or a being without speech *in my real economy*" (Derrida, 125).



## 4 Empathy from an empirical and analytical-philosophical perspective

### 4.1. An empirical-philosophical approach to the concept of “empathy”

This chapter presents an overview of empirical perspectives on what empathy is. In this section, I start with a philosophical perspective that gets its inspiration from empirical neurological research (cf. Coplan, 2014). This perspective is derived from Amy Coplan, a philosopher specializing in the field of empathy. Coplan’s perspective is relevant within the scope of this chapter for two reasons.

First it explicitly seeks to take into account relevant empirical research in the field of empathy. And therefore gives us an important intermediate step towards a merging of the account of empathy, as present within empirical research-literature, with the philosophical account of empathy and ethics, as present in the phenomenological tradition.

Second, it is important to propose this perspective because the features of empathy as discerned by Coplan resemble Levinas’s account of intersubjectivity. It shows that it is possible to link Levinas’s ethics with some of the predominant positions within contemporary philosophical research on the matter of empathy.

In an essay, contributing to the anthology *Empathy, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Coplan & Goldie, 2014), Coplan writes that the most popular definitions of empathy include – whether or not cumulatively – the following elements:

- (a) Feeling what someone else feels;
- (b) Caring about someone else;
- (c) Being emotionally affected by someone else’s emotions and experiences, though not necessarily experiencing the same emotions;
- (d) Imagining oneself in another’s situation;
- (e) Imagining being another in that other’s situation;
- (f) Making inferences another’s mental states;
- (g) Some combination of the processes described in A- F. (ibid., 4)

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The question then becomes how to choose between these sometimes competing concepts. In their influential biological account of empathy, De Waal & Preston, argue that these varying concepts of empathy can be integrated in one single model (ibid. 4; cf. De Waal & Preston, 2002). This model is termed the Perception- Action Model (PAM). According to this model, empathy occurs whenever the perception of another's state of affairs leads away from the self (subject) and towards the other's (the object) state of affairs (cf. De Waal & Preston, 2002).

Coplan however adopts a different point of view, for which she is informed by recent developments in neuroscience, psychology, and the philosophy of mind. According to this model, empathy has three essential features, which are: affective matching, other-oriented perspective-taking, and Self-Other differentiation (cf. Coplan, 6). I will now briefly discuss these features and see how they could create space for an ethical understanding of the phenomenon empathy.

Affective matching occurs, according to Coplan, when “the observer experiences affective states that are qualitatively the same as those of the target” (ibid.,). Affective states are, according to Coplan, what is cross-culturally defined as basic emotions: fear, anger, sadness, joy, and disgust.

The second feature, other-oriented perspective-taking occurs whenever we “attempt to simulate the other's experiences from the other's point of view” (ibid., 10). This is to be distinguished from our default mode of empathizing, which occurs whenever “I imagine what it's like *for me* to be in *your* situation” (ibid. 9). According to Coplan, this latter view should be excluded from the definition of empathy for it does not lead us any closer to the other.<sup>9</sup> As she writes:

I contend that self-oriented perspective-taking leads to a type of pseudo-empathy since people often mistakenly believe that it provides them with access to the other's point of view when it does not. (ibid.,12)

Other-oriented perspective taking, by contrast, is an attempt to imagine how it is *for another* to experience a certain state of affairs. In Coplan's account, this is the only true form of empathy as it leads us “towards the target's experiences rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target's experience” (ibid.,13). This

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<sup>9</sup> Note the semblance between this concept of empathy and that of Lipps and the phenomenological critique of this concept.

requires much of us in terms of “mental flexibility” (ibid.) as this attempt requires us to move beyond our own perspectives.

One final essential feature of empathy within Coplan’s conceptualization is Self-Other differentiation. What happens when this fails is described by Coplan as follows:

The observer recognizes that the other is a different person and successfully adopts the other’s perspective but ends up experiencing the other’s perspective as his own. (ibid., 16)

This is undesirable as we become too much enmeshed in the life of the other and fail to represent how it is *for another* to experience a certain state of affairs. We will become overly focused on how it is *for us* to be in a certain situation, leading to “personal distress, false consensus effects, and prediction errors” (ibid., 17).

With her framework, Coplan has attempted to show that empathy is a sui generis mode of *experiential* understanding that provides knowledge about “another person’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior” (ibid.). To say that it is an “experiential” understanding, is to say that it is through empathy that we seek to acquire what it is *for another* to have an experience. It is an attempt to gain access to the other’s body of experiences, knowledge, and emotions. It is through empathy that we seek to get the first person’s perspective on an experience without reducing the experience to our experience. This mode of understanding is, according to Coplan, different from what a scientific explanation seeks to achieve in an attempt to acquire some knowledge (about the other). A scientific explanation seeks to access the Other based on a “third person” perspective.

What we acquire through a successful empathic act is an understanding of the other person from the inside. According to Coplan, adding this layer of knowledge allows us to escape from solipsism. This solipsism has, according to her, been the dominant position in western philosophy. As she quotes Gilbert Ryle on this: “the mind is its own place and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe” (ibid., 18). Empathy offers a way out of self-enclosed being and enables us to reach the Other, once the three elements as discussed above are included –

This structure is compatible with Levinas’s account of intersubjectivity as ethics, as I will show with a few quotations that are drawn from interviews with Levinas as well as from *Totality and Infinity*.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

First, Levinas takes affective-matching to the extreme when he writes that in the ethical relation “it does happen that a man dies for another, that the being of the other is dearer to him than his own” (RTB, 191). The ethical relation for Levinas implies an imaginative element according to which we reach the Other effectively whenever we succeed in imagining how it is *for-the-Other* to die.

Second, the element of other-oriented perspective-taking is crucial for Levinas. Relating to the Other implies that we *receive* something from the Other, that we let the Other reveal herself to us. In that sense the relation with the Other is a non-intentional relation insofar as it is in this relation that we receive, through conversation, from the Other perspectives that we have not and could not have produced by and of ourselves. That is because in Levinas’s account it is through language that we enter the public realm, languages brings us into a relation with exterior being. Exterior being is the being of the Other. It is because of that, that we receive from the Other perspectives that were not yet known to us. To relate to the Other via conversation, is for Levinas “to be taught” (TI, 96-97). And to be taught, means to enter the world through the Other. Ethics thus is relating to the perspective of others.

The Self-Other distinction, which Coplan considers essential for any empathic relations, is also at the core of Levinas’s ethics. In an interview Levinas admits to this:

The achievement of knowledge consists of grasping the object. Its strangeness is then conquered. (...) In the ethical relation, the other man remains other to me. Despite our exchanges, he remains that which I – closed up in myself – am not. (RTB, 191)

Levinas’s ethics consists of affectivity, other-oriented perspective-taking, and self-other differentiation. For that reason it is justifiable to equate, to a large extent, Levinas’s ethics with the non-phenomenological empirical perspectives on empathy. This is important to show because it proves why an empathy ethics can be derived from Levinas’s account of ethics and be put into practice as an ethics that can address the empathy gap as a *sui-generis* matter of ethical concern.

### 4.2. The empirical-psychologists perspective

In the previous section we have seen what the basic features are of empathy from an empirical-philosophical perspective. In this section I will discuss how empathy is defined by Turkle and Konrath et al.

The first one is Turkle's perspective. In an interview Turkle makes clear how she has defined empathy throughout *Reclaiming Conversation*:

(...) the empathy that I'm talking about is a psychological *capacity to put yourself in the place of another person and imagine what they are going through*.  
(...) We suppress this capacity by putting ourselves in environments where we're not *looking each other in the eye*, not sticking with the other person long enough or *hard enough to follow what they're feeling*. (Turkle, 2016. italics mine)

This definition is to a large extent compatible with Coplan's definition. It also points to another dimension of empathy that is missing in Coplan's definition, but remains important throughout Turkle's approach: empathy is also about some form of care or *compassion* for the other. In her book Turkle writes that empathy is (also) what binds people in "intimacy" (RC, 20), "compassion" (RC, 361), "consideration" (ibid.), "care" (ibid.). What Turkle adds to Coplan's definition of empathy is what we will come across in the next paragraph as the dimension of "empathic concern" (EC, Davies, 1980).

Turkle has also devoted several pages of her book to the skills we need in order to master the art of empathy. Empathy, according to Turkle, is a capacity that comes natural to us but is also in need of development. We need to work on our empathic skills. The central skill, in this regard, is the capacity to engage in face-to-face conversation. This kind of conversation is important because, as Turkle argues, once we are physically present to one another, we "learn to make eye contact, to listen and to attend to others" (RC, 7). The development of empathy requires physical presence. Not only to enable us to "read" the other based on the other's facial expressions, but also in order to be confronted with the other's physical vulnerability. The experience of the other's vulnerability is an important building block of empathy. As one of Turkle's interviewees puts it:

How could the computer ever, ever have clue ... about what it is like to have your father come home drunk and beat the shit out of you? To understand what is going on here you need to know what it feels like to be black and blue and know that it's your own father who is doing it to you. (LS, 111)

Empathy in Turkle's concept therefore requires *physical* interaction and *conversation*. Once these conditions are met, we build on our empathic skills. That means for Turkle that we are enabled to first take the other's *perspective*, second to experience

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a *difference* between us and the other, and third to develop feelings of compassion and *care* for the other. But why is empathy important for Turkle?

We have seen that empathy is important for Coplan because it enables us to escape from *solipsism*. In Coplan's approach, empathy primarily serves an epistemological purpose. For Turkle, empathy has a fourfold function.

First, the empathic relation does have some *existential* value. It adds meaning to our life to be with others. As Turkle writes, conversation enables "intimacy, community and communion" (RC, 7).

Second, there is *intrinsic* value to empathic relations. These relations are intrinsic insofar as they confirm us in our *humanity*.

The third value is closer to the ethical account of sociality as we have seen it in Levinas's approach. That is, as Turkle argues, it is through empathy that we advance "self-reflection" (ibid.). It is through face-to-face interaction and conversation that our behavior is mirrored to us through the Other. As Turkle writes, "we feel what we see on the face of another" (ibid., 342). One of Turkle's interviewees described it as follows:

I saw her face. My mom was almost crying. That can't be conveyed via text (...). In terms of sparking real reflection, there is something that is conveyed in emotions and facial expressions... The way it made me feel didn't come from words. (RC, 131).

The fourth value is that it builds the capacity to be in *solitude*. This is the capacity to be alone and advance our self-reflection without the negative connotation of loneliness. The latter is the condition in which, according to Turkle, we experience a certain want. Solitude is a positive condition and for Turkle the precondition of our capacity to see others as "separate and independent" (ibid., 61). By viewing others as such, we can "listen to them and hear what they have to say" (ibid.).

With Turkle's position, the scope of Coplan's definition of empathy can be widened. It is possible to add the dimension of "empathic concern". Furthermore, Turkle's account enables us to understand how empathy is formed and shaped and what its objects are.

In 2011, a research group headed by Sarah Konrath (Konrath, et al., 2011) conducted a study to measure the levels of empathy among millennial college students in comparison with previous generations. The study found a drop of 40%

in especially two of the four markers the study applied to define empathy.<sup>10</sup> In the study, Konrath applied a definition of empathy which measures empathy on four subscales. These include the cognitive and affective aspects of empathy. According to the study, empathy is mostly defined on either the cognitive level (also known as Perspective Taking (PT)) or the emotional level (Emotional Concern (EC)). Instead of picking one of these parts of empathy, Konrath sought to apply a more complex concept of empathy, as measured on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1980) which contains four distinct scales on which empathy is measured.

The first scale is PT. This scale measures people's tendencies to imagine the point of view of others. The second scale is EC. This scale measures people's other-oriented feelings of sympathy with the misfortunes of the other. A typical question on this scale would be: "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me" (Konrath, et al., 2011:181). According to the study, this is the most commonly used subscale and people scoring high on this scale tend to engage in pro-social behaviors such as volunteering (cf. *ibid.*). The third scale is less relevant within my approach and according to Konrath et al. the "least desirable subscale" (*ibid.*). This scale is the Fantasy Scale (FS) and it measures people's tendency to identify imaginatively with fictional characters in books or movies. The fourth and final scale is Personal Distress (PD).

Connected to the scales on the IRI test, correspond prosocial behaviors. For example, people scoring high on EC and PT are more likely to spend their time volunteering and are generally more emotionally sensitive towards others. There is, the study indicates, a strong connection between high PT and EC scores and the development of feelings of care and responsibility towards others. In Konrath et al's investigation, empathy is thus defined as a combination of four scales, on which the subscales PT and EC are most important.

### 4.3. The biological perspective

A final empirical perspective I will add to the relation between ethics and empathy is a biological perspective. For this perspective I will draw on the way in which empathy is conceptualized in the Perception Action Model (PAM) of empathy, as developed by De Waal and Preston (cf. Preston & De Waal, 2002). This perspective

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<sup>10</sup> The study also mentions counter examples. I will not present these examples as I – at this point – have no intention of engaging in critical debate with the study. I am merely interested in the way the study conceptualizes empathy.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

will be further substantiated with empirical findings drawn from De Waal's work (cf. De Waal, 2009). What is particularly interesting in this account of empathy is its concept of empathy as an unmediated relation to others. The PAM model of empathy was first developed by De Waal and Preston (Preston & De Waal, 2002) in 2002. According to this model, empathy is:

*A shared emotional experience occurring when one person (the subject) comes to feel a similar emotion to another (the object) as a result of perceiving the other's state. This process results from the fact that the subject's representations of the emotional state are automatically activated when the subject pays attention to the emotional state of the subject (De Waal & Preston, 2002).*

The element "perception action" in the PAM-model refers to the way in which the subject mimics the object's behavior once this is perceived. Thus:

*If the subject witnesses the object swinging a hammer, then the part of the subject's brain that is used to swing a hammer is activated. (Preston, 2007)*

According to the PAM-model, the object's state of affairs must be represented by the subject. That is, the object's state must somehow be matched within the subject. A representation therefore leads the "subject to feel the emotions of the object" (ibid.). This is, according to Preston, the sine qua non for empathy: we must develop in ourselves the feelings the object undergoes. Furthermore, the empathic response is an immediate or *automatic* response. That is, the subject's representation of the object's state of affairs will lead to a direct response. For example:

*If the object displays a facial expression or a body posture indicating sadness, the areas in the subject's brain that represent those movements and that feelings are automatically activated (...), such as the jerking of a leg in a soccer fan before the big kick or the drawn facial expressions of movie-goers in an intense moment. (ibid.)*

In the PAM structure, the automatic response to the other's condition is necessary. It is according to this model impossible not to have this response, although it is not necessary that the subject actually *attends* to the object. Attending means that we consciously pay attention to what the object's condition is; that we actually do something. Attending might be the result of the automatic response but is not necessary for it, because it is also something that we can block. The automatic

response is not something that can be blocked. We are “wired” to have this response although the corresponding action might be blocked:

For example, people turn their heads away from the homeless man and change the channel in response to a plea for aid for impoverished children. (ibid.)

In this example there is an automatic response to the object’s state, but the subject makes a decision not to act. The PAM account of empathy attempts to predict the moment a subject will attend to the object. Generally, “subjects are predicted to attend to objects that require a response” (ibid.). For example:

Human children are more motivated to help when they have a responsibility for the object’s distress (Chapman et al, 1987) and monkeys that are trained to cooperate for food dramatically increase conciliation (Cords & Thurnheer, 1993).

These parts of the model are required. If something intervenes and undermines the “integrity of the process” (ibid.), then the model will not work. If something inhibits our potential to attend to an object, then empathy will not occur. For example

When we start referring to people as belonging to an ‘unpleasant class of inferior specimen (...) [or call them] disease-ridden-rats (the Nazi’s about the Jews). (De Waal, 2009: 214).

In the natural state, there exists empathy between primates, according to the structure of the PAM-model. That means that we are likely to attend to another in a way that matches the object’s state whenever we have perceived the object’s state. The old Hobbesian proverb *Homo homini lupus*’ (*Man is wolf to man*, De Waal, 2009) does not go for us, as De Waal observes. In a “natural” state, we are not wolves to one another. On the contrary, empathy comes natural to us unless inhibited or shielded away: “we’re all interconnected, both bodily and emotionally” (De Waal, 2009).

However, as De Waal’s empirical findings indicate, empathy requires a face: “despite the importance of body postures and movements, the face remains the emotion highway: it offers the quickest connection to the other” (De Waal, 2009: 82). This is necessary in a literal way but “the face” also refers to the other’s “individuality” (De Waal, 2009: 214). This individuality can be removed. We can put ideology, technology and other mediators between the subject and the object.

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We thereby block the natural inclination to act immediately and empathically upon perceiving a condition the other is in.

### 4.4. Fusing empathy (phenomenological and empirical style) and ethics (Levinasian style)

Throughout this part I discussed the phenomenon intersubjectivity from a phenomenological perspective. It became clear that, within this tradition, intersubjectivity is understood as an empathic, ontological, or ethical relation. It also became clear that the Levinasian ethical approach can be seen as an expansion of Husserl's empathic approach to subject-subject intentionality. Furthermore, it became clear that the way in which empathy is conceived in the empirical positions bears striking similarities with Levinas's concept of "ethics". That is relevant insofar as this allows me to rework "Levinasian ethics" into an "empathy ethics". It then becomes possible to refer to "Levinasian ethics" as a *sui generis* ethical position and the empathy gap as a *sui generis* ethical challenge.

Drawing on the accounts of empathy offered in empirical as well as phenomenological literature, it becomes visible that Levinasian ethics and phenomenological-empirical empathy share the following foundational characteristics:

- *Exteriority*: it is primarily and fundamentally an account that connects the Self to an exterior being. To that end, exteriority implies *separation*. That is, it implies a relation between beings that have a degree of being *for themselves*. Prototypically, this is the separation between Self and Other. Again, prototypically, this separation does have a foundation in the *body*. Embodiment thus appears to be an important determinant for the coming into existence and maintenance of difference. For example, because embodiment points to *perspectivity*.
- *Cognition*: the cognitive act that brings us in a relation with the Other is similar in both ethics and empathy. Cognition then is not the act that grasps and reduces the Other (to the Self) but is an act that is Other-oriented. It is an act that maintains the Other "according to itself" (*kath'auto*), because we need to get information *from* the Other in order to expand beyond solipsism. This points to the need to have a relation that is *like a dialogue* in the sense that it is directed at the Other and maintains the Other "according to itself".

- *Care*: in the empathic and ethical approach to intersubjectivity some element of care or compassion is present. Furthermore, this act of care is also other-oriented and immediate in the sense that it is a non-premediated response to an ethical situation.

These three characteristics allow me to fuse the concepts of “empathy” and “ethics” into one unified concept that I will term “empathy ethics”. This concept places ethics within a social relation that is construed as an empathic relation in its phenomenological as well as empirical connotation. This means that it is a relation that shows a degree of a dialogical structure.<sup>11</sup> In calling this account of ethics “empathy ethics”, I will also have a concept of ethics that allows me to view the empathy gap from a different, and ethical, perspective. Thus the empathy gap can be construed as an *ethics gap*, a gap that disconnects us from the exteriority, which we need as starting point for an ethics that aspires to expand beyond the Self.

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<sup>11</sup> I will return to a further discussion of this structure in part VI.



## 5 How to construct empathy ethics ?

In order to further work out the content of empathy ethics, I will need to make steps beyond Levinas's original ethical project. I have already made some preparatory remarks in that direction in the previous part. Now that we have an idea of what an empathy ethics might consist of, it is possible to provide a more detailed account as to what alternations are needed in Levinas's account of ethics.

The changes that need to be made might appear to abandon Levinas's project altogether, particularly because it will appear to be necessary to develop a notion of "self-care" as part of an ethics inspired by Levinas. We will need a form of self-care that will provide the space in our "economy" in which we can "welcome" the Other.

Within our "economy" we will need to develop what Sherry Turkle calls "empathic arts" (cf. Turkle, 2015). Applied within Levinas's ethics, these are the arts of conversation, listening, and the practice of goodness. It will appear that I move far beyond Levinas when I attempt to unite the concepts "self-care" and "care-for the other" within Levinas's ethics. Since Levinas's whole attempt was to locate the starting point for ethics outside the subject in the Other. And yet, and especially in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas seeks to show that the realm of the Self, the realm of Economy, is a necessary condition for ethics. He made this clear in *Totality and Infinity*:

To be I, atheist, at home with oneself, separated, happy, created – these are synonyms. Egoism, enjoyment, sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority – the articulations of separation – are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other, which opens forth from the separated and finite being. (TI, 148)

This is a condition of being, that has not been offered its own ethics, although this seems to be necessary if we are to maintain this condition and turn it into a condition in which the Self somehow "knows" how to relate to Others. How should we speak with the Other? How should we do good to the Other and when? These questions need to be addressed within an ethics for our "economy". This is also how I read the following quotation from Levinas:

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My task is not the construction of an ethics; I try to find its meaning. (...)  
No doubt that it is possible to construct an ethics in function of what I just  
said. (EI, 73)

From this quotation, I have drawn that Levinas's ethical project should not be seen as a complete and definitive ethical project. Levinas has pointed to the Other as a potential new source for ethics. Starting from there, an ethics can be constructed and brought into a relation with the Self. That means, it is necessary to provide the Self with guidance as to *how* it should relate to the Other. If that is not done, and our relation to the Other is left to the arbitrariness of the Other's vocation that might and might not resonate in the Self, most of the potential richness of Levinas's approach to ethics will be lost.

Most central to empathy ethics is that it advocates a relation with exteriority that has the fundamental *structure of a dialogue*. This means that it is an articulation of the way in which the Self could relate to another *for itself* and thus constitute a relation with something that is exterior to it and cannot be reduced to it. This fosters a relation that is like a dialogue, a confrontation between independent worlds, which through confrontation makes an attempt to settle for a common world. In function of that, an ethics of *self-care* needs to be constructed that enables the Self to have a relation with something it is not and cannot be. Furthermore, this relation needs to take into account the specific constraints that block this relation. To that end, it takes into account the role of technology in its degree of restraining or affording this relation.



## Part III

### Technology and the empathy gap

In part I, I offered a tentative analysis of the relation between technology and the empathy gap. I showed that the empathy gap is a failure to establish contact with a reality external to the Self. I showed that this failure could be caused and enhanced by certain technologies, for example, social media technologies. I pointed to the effects of screening (physical distance) and filtering (the “filter bubble”) as concrete causes of this failure. The basic structure of these causes is that in any of these cases the relation between Self and the world has a *weaker form of dialogue*. It is due to the form of these relations, in this case because they are technologically mediated, that the Self effectively remains to be locked in itself. The structure of these causes is that they promote a Self – Other relation that has the form of a monologue. That means that there is a *weaker* degree of confrontation with a being “according to itself”.

This part is an elaboration of this analysis. In this part I will answer the question: “what is the relation between empathy, the empathy gap and technology”?

I will proceed as follows. On the one hand, this part will underscore the conclusions I reached regarding the relation between technology and the empathy gap. In that regard I will elaborate on the “filter bubble” and “screening” as the concrete technological causes which contribute to the empathy gap by weakening the dialogical relation that is needed to expand beyond the Self. I will add “informationalization” as a third cause. This analysis by no means claims to have exhausted all possible technological causes for the empathy gap. It merely intends to illustrate in what sense technologies, in degrees, could promote monological human-world relations and weaken dialogical relations in the course of it. I use empirics to substantiate this position. I have chosen these three causes because it is through these causes that this potential effect of technological mediations can be made visible.

On the other hand, I offer a counter perspective according to which technologies in fact could *contribute* to empathy. That means that technologies enable a degree of confrontation with something that has a degree of being “according to itself”.

That is, they connect to something that shows to have a degree of *resistance*. Taken together, it appears to be necessary to offer a balanced perspective regarding the relation between empathy and technology. This part will work towards this perspective and this perspective mainly consists of uncovering the elements of a relation that is successful in connecting to exteriority, that is, with a being that has (a degree) of being “according to itself”. In doing so, it will provide the subject matter that empathy ethics should concern itself with.

In chapter 1, I will explain what kind of technologies my research is focused on. Generally, these are social media technologies, such as Social Networking Sites (SNSs). I neither claim nor argue that SNSs are the only cause of the empathy gap as I define it. They merely offer themselves as concrete instances of technologies that cause a widening of the empathy gap, and they are linked to it in relevant research literature.

In chapter 2, I will discuss the negative relations between empathy and technology. I call them “negative” insofar as they contribute to the empathy gap. In this chapter I will discuss the technological causes in the form of informationalization, filtering, and screening.

In chapter 3, these findings will be nuanced by empirical findings which show that technologies could in fact contribute to empathy

In chapter 4, I will show that this calls for a balanced perspective towards the relation between the empathy gap and technology. Furthermore, I will show that this balanced view could be linked to Levinas’s own evaluation of technology.



# 1 Social Information and Communication Technologies

The aim of the current investigation is to offer an assessment of computer-mediated communication and computer-mediated social interaction. Computer-mediated (social) interaction is a part of what has been called “the intimate technological moment” (Rathenau, 2014:6). What is intimate in today’s technology is that it is “nestling itself within us and between us, has knowledge about us and can act like us” (ibid., 7). The technologies that are between us are the social media platforms that connect us to the other, often via the hardware technology of our smartphone. Of the intimate technologies that are between us and the other, I give special attention to the role of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and the way in which they mediate communication and social interaction. An SNS can be defined as:

A web-based service that allows individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection a 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

In the context of this investigation, SNS’s that are linked with the empathy gap are web-based platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, etc. Despite the fact that SNS’s have become very popular in recent years, they are in fact not new. The first SNS dates back to 1997 when the internet platform *Sixdegrees* was launched. Sixdegrees was the first user-generated SNS. It lasted until 2001 and is currently defunct. Since the launch of the SNS *Six Degrees* in 1997, SNSs have become a global phenomenon. I will discuss SNSs within the context of this research because SNSs are among the technologies that are causally connected to the empathy gap (Konrath, et al., 2011). SNS’s are not a peripheral phenomenon. The use of SNSs is widespread and a crucial part of today’s standard culture of social interactions. In 2011, the year the study was conducted, social media were on the rise with 100 million people accessing Facebook on a monthly basis and with 50% of the American internet users having online social profiles (Konrath, et al. 2011). These numbers are already outdated. As of 2016, the number of Americans using Facebook had risen to 162 million and the worldwide use of SNSs has risen

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in a likewise way. As of 2018, the number of users is over 2 billion and still rising (Statista, 2018).

In the first quarter of 2017, Facebook reached, worldwide, the point of 2 billion users (Statista, 2017). Whatsapp followed with 1.2 billion users, and Youtube reached 1 billion users (ibid.). A PEW research study from 2016 shows the divisions of social media users within the United States:

Nearly eight in ten online Americans (79%) now use Facebook, more than double the share that uses Twitter (24%), Pinterest (31%), Instagram (32%), or LinkedIn (29%). On a total population basis (accounting for Americans who do not use the internet at all), that means that 68% of all U.S. adults are Facebook users, while 28% use Instagram, 26% use Pinterest, 25% use LinkedIn, and 21% use Twitter. (Pew Research, 2016)

As the figures show, Facebook is by far the most popular and widely used SNS. But social media are not the only instance of technology being blamed for its role in the fostering of the empathy gap. In fact, in Turkle's (recent) work she draws our attention to the *hardware* technology that we use to mediate our access to online social networking sites: the smartphone.<sup>1</sup>

It appears to be reasonable to focus attention on the role of smartphones in our daily (social) life. For example, the German psychologist Manfred Spitzer discusses the impact of smartphone-use on what he calls "digital illnesses" (Spitzer, 2015). He does that because smartphones are everywhere and have penetrated every corner of life. In 2011, 90 % of the world population had access to a mobile telecommunications network (Spitzer, 2015: 51). In 2017, over 2.3 billion people worldwide possessed a smartphone (Statista, 2017). Smartphones are not necessarily connected to digital illnesses. They can be used for rather innocent purposes, as a 2015 PEW-research indicated (PEW, 2015). The study found that smartphones are quite often used to look up information about important life events. These events could be job applications, information about health, and online banking. The study found that 62% of smartphone users used it to get information about health, 57% to do online banking, 44% to look up information

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<sup>1</sup> As early as 1998, before the surge in use of personal computers, Bill Gates had forecasted the arrival of smartphones "people want information everywhere they go. They want it on a small device. They want it in their car. They want it combined with their wireless telephone" (Bill Gates, in Briggs & Burke, *a Social History of the Media*, 2017: 281).

about real-estate, etc. (PEW-research, 2015). These seem to be rather “innocent” activities and it seems far-fetched to conclude that the effects produced by these activities could give rise to the ethical challenges which are implied by the empathy gap.

But although smartphones can be used for what could be called innocent purposes, other research indicates that smartphone usage has considerable negative influence on social relations. For example, as Turkle points out, smartphones distract our attention and are highly addictive. One indication of that is another PEW-study referred to by Turkle (PEW, 2014). The study reveals the etiquettes we currently apply whilst using our smartphones. According to the study, at least 89% of the smartphone users did use the smartphone during another activity, such as talking to others. What this indicates is that the span, depth, and scope of *attention* within social relations is changing. And attention in turn is, as Turkle observes, the precondition for the building of conversation and therewith empathy. Attention, it could be argued, is an attitude that connects one to another. This can be further illustrated with a study Turkle refers to.

According to this study the very presence of a smartphone during a conversation disturbs the quality of the conversation and is therefore detrimental to our empathic skills. Why? Because the smartphone is the physical symbol of the potential “elsewheres” (Turkle, 2017) we could be in. The presence of the smartphone reminds us of the possibility to be elsewhere, to be in a place that is presumably better than the current place and condition we are in. As Turkle quotes the research findings:

In fact, research shows that when people are together, say for lunch or a cup of coffee, even the presence of a phone on the table (even a phone turned off) does two things. First, it changes what people talk about—it keeps conversation light because the phone is a reminder that at any point, we might be interrupted, and we don't want to be interrupted when we're talking about something important to us. Second, conversation with phones on the table or even phones on the periphery of our vision, interferes with empathic connection. Two-person conversations that take place with a phone on the table leave each person feeling less of a sense of connection and commitment to the other. (Turkle, 2016)

Although most respondents in the Pew study claimed that having a phone at a conversation added something to it— they could look things up, share experiences,

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etc. – in the meantime, 82% of them found that it also deteriorated the quality of the conversation.

Smartphones are also highly addictive. In 2014 the Smartphone Addiction Inventory (SPAI) was developed (Pavia, et al., 2016; Lin, et al., 2014), based on the Chinese Internet Addiction Scale (CIAS). The SPAI measures four negative aspects of smartphone addiction:

Compulsive behavior that has negative effects on interpersonal relationships and the amount of time spent on the smartphone; functional impairment related to the influence that the use of the smartphone has on time management and sleep; withdrawal related to the tendency to be impatient, irritable, and intolerable without smartphones and tolerance, which refers to the tendency to spend more and more time using the smartphone. (Pavia, et al., 2016)

A high score on these scales indicate a socially problematic relation with smartphones.

Evidently, smartphones and SNSs can be used for many good and healthy purposes. But there is a downside to it which links smartphones and SNSs to the empathy gap as I understand and explore it throughout this research. I will elaborate more on the upsides and downsides of this technology in the next two chapters.

This chapter has indicated that SNS's and connected technologies – such as smartphones – are widespread and deeply penetrated in every aspect and corner of society. This chapter has also indicated that empirical research indicates certain downsides to the presence of SNSs in our society. With that, I have made visible what technologies I have linked to the empathy gap and furthermore, justified my discussion of them because of their widespread presence in today's societies.

## 2 The empathy gap and technology: negative relations

### 2.1. The amplification and reduction of empathy through technology: negative transformations

In this chapter I will discuss the relation between the empathy gap and technology. The structure for this assessment is derived from postphenomenology. It will therefore include an assessment of technologies in the categories of amplification and reduction (cf. Ihde, 1990). From a post-phenomenological perspective, a technology mediates between subject and world, and through this mediation both subject and world are changed and transformed (cf. Ihde, 1990; Verbeek, 2005). What and who we are, and what the world is for us, is different when experienced *through* a technology. Technology transforms experience. Furthermore, transformation is assessed in the categories of amplification and reduction. What does that mean and why is that relevant in the context of this chapter?

The notion of amplification and reduction indicates that some elements of an experience or phenomenon are accentuated through technological mediation, and others are not. For example, when Galileo Galilei first viewed the moon through a telescope:

The moon became larger, magnified, but was also displaced – telescopically it was taken out of the night sky and relocated within the field of telescopic vision. It lost its place in the expanse of heavens and became a more focal, particularized object. (Ihde, 2002: 58)

Every technological development, as a post-phenomenological perspective attempts to show, has this structure: something is highlighted and something else becomes obscured. Although the terms amplification and reduction might suggest otherwise, they are in no way meant to point to an enrichment or impoverishment of a certain technologically mediated experience. They merely show different ways in which reality manifests itself through differences in technological mediations.

As I intend to show, however, the different manifestations of reality are such that a causal connection with the empathy gap can be established. In the examples I will discuss, the amplification and reduction points out the measure in which a

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relation is established that has the structure of a dialogue. An amplification leads to a promotion of a monological relations between Self and world, and a reduction leads to a decrease in dialogical-like relations between Self and world.

In my discussion I pay particular attention to the following transformations:

- *Informationalization*. This transformation points to the role of technologies as “re-ontologizing” (Floridi, 2014) technologies. The transformation is from a “real” ontology to an ontology as information.
- *Filtering*. This transformation is focused on the way in which (algorithmic) technologies filter our relation with the world in such a way that “the world” increasingly becomes “my world”. The transformation here is from diversity (or otherness as it might be called) to sameness.
- *Screening*. This transformation focuses on the way in which technologies install a (physical) distance in social relations. The transformation is from (spatially) direct to (spatially) distant relations.

I focus on these three transformations for two main reasons. First, in the empiric literature on the relation between empathy and technology, “filtering” and “screening” are discussed explicitly as being causally linked to the empathy gap. The effect of “informationalization” is added because it is deemed to be a central transformation of our currenday lifeworld (Floridi, 2014) and will show to have important ramifications for empathy and empathic relations.

Second, the elements of empathy – separation, cognition and care – imply a relation with the Other to which the aforementioned transformations are of particular relevance. Namely, empathy implies confrontational relations between beings that have a degree of being-for-themselves. This degree is changed through the effects of screening, filtering and informationalization. The more being exist *for-themselves*, the more the relation between them will be a relation that has the structure of a dialogue.

That does not mean that I have exhausted all possible relevant transformations. I have chosen the transformations that make clear that the relation between the empathy gap and technology cannot be ignored. It is in that sense a paradigmatic analysis. In the following sections I will discuss the technological transformations that are listed in the table below.

(Technological) cause	Transformation	Amplification	Reduction
ICT-driven technologies.	<i>Informationalization</i> : the transformation from embodied “commanding presence” to presence as information	Existence as information is highlighted.	Embodied existence is reduced. This negatively affects the experience of <i>separation</i> , because information has a weaker form of being for-itself.
Algorithm-driven technologies.	<i>Filtering</i> : the algorithmic filter transforms a world of diversity into a personalized world	Prior and already existing preferences on the side of the subject/self are highlighted.	Exposure to difference, otherness and newness is reduced. The other as <i>cognitive</i> source and different being is reduced from sight.
Algorithm-driven online social networking sites (SNSs)	<i>Screening</i> : From direct exposure of the self to the other, to a controlled experience of both self and other.	Self and self-control is highlighted.	The other is reduced as: -embodied being. The other as patient/subject of <i>care</i> is reduced from sight. -source of new information. The other as <i>cognitive</i> source is reduced from sight.

Table 2: negative relations between technology and the empathy gap

## 2.2. From embodied presence to presence as information

As information-ethicist, Luciano Floridi has noted that every generation thinks that it is special, but: “sometimes it is 16 December 1773 and you are in Boston, or it is 14 July 1789 and you are in Paris” (Floridi, 2014: vi). Clearly, our time ranks among the revolutionary moments in history. This is the case, Floridi argues, due to current-day developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In this context, Floridi has in mind developments within nanotechnology, the Internet of Things, Web 2.0, etc. In other words, all the technologies of our time that are:

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Creating and shaping our intellectual and physical realities, changing our self-understanding, modifying how we relate to each other and ourselves, and upgrading how we interpret the world. (ibid.)

As Floridi argues, technology shapes us, the world, and our perspective on the world. Technology has always done that, but ICTs of our time are special because they yield a particular, *informational* perspective on the world. More radically, under the influence of ICTs we are migrating from the *biosphere* to the *infosphere*. In a minimal sense, the infosphere is that part of reality that is dominated by computer-computer interactions. In this minimal perspective, it can be equated to *cyberspace*. That is the parallel universe of computer games, online SNSs, etc. In a maximal way, it refers to the whole of reality that becomes, under the influence of ICTs, interpreted as an ensemble of information. This is life in the infosphere. To live in the infosphere comes with the experience of living *Onlife*. This is a condition in which the distinctions between online and offline have become blurred (cf. Floridi, 2014: 42-44). The virtual and technological have entered every corner of our life. In online environments, we can no longer make the distinction between real persons and for example Chatbots. One aspect of the Onlife experience is thus what Turkle refers to as “the robotic moment” (Turkle, 2015: 354). As one of her interviewees relates his experiences in an online computer game:

So on day one, you meet some characters and they're just programs. On day two, they are people ... So, from day to day, you can't keep the robots straight from the people. (Turkle, 2015: 354)

An additional aspect is that our everyday lifeworlds are becoming increasingly informationalized. We wear smartwatches, our car is connected to our smartphone, and our smartphone to our homes. In other words, this is the moment of the Internet of Things (cf. Floridi, 43-44) in which every corner of our life is somehow tracked and monitored by smart ICT-devices.

How can the migration from “real life” to life on an informational level be analyzed? What are the potential ethical consequences of an informational perspective?

If information is an ensemble of signs that inform us *about* reality, then the more information there is and the more we possess it, the more responsible we will become. That at least is one of the perspectives that Floridi seeks to uphold:

The more any bit of information is just an easy click away, the less we shall be forgiven for not checking it. ICTs are making humanity increasingly responsible, morally speaking, for the way the world is, will be, and should be. (Floridi, 2014: 43)

Another perspective is, however, also possible. This perspective becomes visible when different levels of information and their respective meanings are carved out. A perspective that draws a distinction between information, reality, and corresponding levels and layers of meaning is that of Albert Borgmann in his book *Holding on to Reality* (Borgmann, 1999). I will discuss this perspective because it offers an opportunity to draw a distinction between levels of engagement that are acquired by different levels of information. This will be the difference between *direct* and *indirect* knowing.<sup>2</sup> Borgmann shows this distinction:

I know *of* Death Valley; I know *that* it is arid and contains the lowest point in the United States. But, I must confess, I do not know *it*. I know *of* Toni Morrison; I know *that* she wrote *Tar Baby* and received the Nobel Prize. But, I regret to say, I do not know *her* (Borgmann, 1999: 14).

Borgmann argues, that a direct form of knowledge is directed at its object immediately. Whilst indirect knowledge is directed at the object through something else, an informational or signitive intermediate. There are levels in information and directness. The first and immediate relation is with a thing itself.<sup>3</sup> A thing is at the end of the semantic line: it is a sign of itself. Information can be about something, but the thing has only a reference to itself. A thing, Borgmann writes, has “an eloquence” (Borgmann, 1999: 31) of itself. It speaks for itself for it has a “commanding presence” (ibid.). An example of this “commanding presence” is the way in which “nature” was approached by ancient native-American cultures. For example:

In the earlier West, things stood out from their background so vividly that they appeared to speak to humans. Bears, coyotes, blue jays, and meadowlarks addressed one another and occasionally humans. But rocks too could speak and listen, and an entire valley could show itself to be the

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<sup>2</sup> This account of levels of directness and corresponding levels of meaning has a parallel in Husserl’s account of knowledge. I have discussed that in part II, section 1.2.

<sup>3</sup> A thing, as we will see in part V in more detail, is for Borgmann a “Heideggerian thing” in the sense that it engages us and gathers through that a world around it; the thing is a gateway to the world.

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remnant of a gigantic rattlesnake as was said of the Jocko valley in western Montana. (ibid. 29)

Here nature is a sign of itself.<sup>4</sup>

The next stage is that of a “sign”. Significance then becomes mediated. A sign refers to a “thing” but it is not the thing itself. As Borgmann writes:

The eloquence of things makes it possible for signs to be *about-some-thing*. A sign cannot contain a thing entire; but, given human intelligence, it can convey and provoke the impression a thing would leave on a person. (ibid.)

A thing generates meaning out of itself whereas a sign refers to a meaning outside itself. It *refers* to the original meaning that is present in the thing that conveys a meaning in itself. Signs can be natural signs or cultural signs. As signs they convey information about some reality. A natural sign is however more like a “trace”, it does not come in the way of reality itself and after a period of time, it dissolves back into its natural context. A cultural sign, by contrast, “shapes reality” (ibid. 57):

Natural information emerges of itself, intimates rather than conveys its message, and disappears. Cultural information, to the contrary, is wrested and abstracted from reality, carries a definite content, and assumes an enduring shape. (ibid. 59)

Cultural information is the information of books, of language and works of art that somehow seek to make sense of reality. In the semantic chain, according to Borgmann, reality comes first, then natural information, and after that cultural information.

The final stage is when information itself becomes a reality. According to Borgmann, this is the case with the reality of virtuality or what Floridi calls the “Onlife Experience”. The informational reality we live in is, according to Borgmann, produced by Information Technologies (IT). Although from a certain perspective, a book is also an IT, Borgmann uses a more narrow definition that includes most of today’s electronic computing devices. They are different from the old IT’s for their ability to make information pliable:

By digitizing it, making it abundantly available by collecting and storing astronomical amounts of it, and putting it at our disposal through powerful processing and display devices. (ibid. 171)

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<sup>4</sup> Although it seems to me to be embedded in a social construction of this meaning.

Information technology constitutes a reality of its own, measured in bits and visualized on screens. It has achieved the moment that signs and reality coincide. An instance of this is, according to Borgmann, “virtual reality”. This is the information-driven world of online games, SNSs, etc. What is the specific character of this informational reality and how does it compare with the other forms of information? An informational reality such as an online game does not “provide information about the world out there, (...) it aspires to be richly and engagingly informative within” (ibid. 184). An informational reality “constitutes a reality of its own” (ibid. 186).<sup>5</sup> It is a reality “that can be entertaining and captivating as much as games, novels, and television haven been in the past” (ibid.). And yet, as Borgmann argues, it fails to have a “commanding presence” of itself, because any informationalized being is “sealed off from the pleasures and pains of ordinary reality” (ibid.). Therefore, whatever we encounter in virtual worlds is “untested, unwarranted, and merely mimicked” (ibid.).

The virtual or informationalized world has its own ways of engagement. But what seems to be consistent is that any informational reality “constantly needs to draw on actual persons to sustain its virtual vigor” (ibid. 188). Borgmann’s basic argument is that whenever informational reality is detached from the “flesh and bone” situation out of which it originates, there will be a corresponding decline in meaning. Information and reality are therefore in need of a proper balance. As Borgmann writes:

Within virtual reality, commanding presence takes the form of personal intelligence. The latter is borrowed from actual reality (...) We lose interest in a creature that is sealed off from the pleasures and pains of ordinary reality (ibid. 189).

The extent to which virtual reality has as a “commanding presence” is borrowed from reality and it continues to engage insofar as the original imprint remains to be there. Computer communication leaves out the body, the face and the natural information conveyed by that. Because of that, the communication is not backed up by “commanding presence” but draws on a prior original imprint.

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<sup>5</sup> Floridi seeks to make a different move in claiming that the development in information technology actually leads to an overall informational perspective. The infosphere is not “cyberspace” but rather an all-encompassing informational perspective on the world.

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Borgmann's argument can be summed up in the following way. Reality has something to it, that virtuality and the other *as* information does not convey. Reality has a "commanding presence". This notion could also be seen as a reference to a being that shows a stronger degree of being *for itself*. It offers a stronger resistance to the one relating to it. Insofar as it does that, it is more exterior to the one relating to it and thus offers a better way out of the Self. Thus a relation with some being that has "commanding presence" is a relation that has the structure of a dialogue. There is confrontation with a *for itself* that makes it possible for the being relating to it to expand beyond itself. It is enabled to connect with something exterior. When that has been brought about, we can tap in on the value that we gain from having an external perspective. This includes the possibility of gaining a perspective on ourselves, to advance self-criticism, and to come in reach of knowledge as objective knowledge.

### 2.3. The filter bubble: from diversity to the same

The phenomenon of the filter bubble is the paradigmatic example of the way in which it could be embedded in a technology to cause the empathy gap. With embedded, I mean that the way in which the technology causes an empathy gap, is inscribed and designed *in* the technology. The phenomenon of the filter bubble dates back to December 4th 2009, the moment that, according to Eli Pariser, the "era of personalization began" (Pariser, 2011: 3). It was on this date that Google made a change towards personalized search results. The "standard Google" ceased to exist at that very moment:

Starting that morning, Google would use fifty-seven *signals* – everything from where you were logging in from, what browser you were using, to what you had searched before – to make guesses about who you were and what kind of sites you'd like (ibid.)

The personalized internet is what has been referred to as the "filter bubble" (ibid.) As Pariser admits, there have always been filter bubbles. But there are differences with the one I am referring to.

First, in the filter bubble you are alone. In the old days, small villages or an interest in one cable channel (say football) created a bubble, but you were in there with others. The online bubble is a web that is tailored according to your *personal* liking. The filter bubble is not shared with others. Secondly, the bubble is invisible. The criteria that are applied in the creation of the bubble are opaque and

not transparent to the greater public. Thirdly, according to Pariser, the difference between the old and the new bubble is that we did not choose the latter. For example: “when you turn on Fox News or read *The Nation*” (ibid., 10) you make a conscious decision about the kind of filter you use to make sense of the world. Online, the filter is hidden and embedded in the technologies that we use to connect to others and the world.

Filters are not altogether bad. The influx of information on the internet is vast so that a filter might help in selecting the relevant elements in this flow of information. But it has a downside to it that relates to the empathy gap.

Essentially, the empathy gap is the situation in which, due to a particular technological mediation, we fail to make contact with a reality outside ourselves. I have referred to this condition as solipsism. As Pariser defines the bubble:

Like a lens, the filter bubble invisibly transforms the world we experience, by controlling what we see and don't see. It interferes with the interplay between our mental processes and our external environment. In some ways, it can act like a magnifying glass, helpfully expanding our view of a niche area of knowledge. But at the same time, personalized filters limit what we are exposed to and therefore affect the way we think and learn (Pariser: 83).

The bubble is a version of a technologically mediated solipsism. What is the challenge that comes with a technologically mediated solipsism? From my ethical perspective, it cuts us lose from the other as an ethical source. Personalization renders us a world that is most literally “according to me”. The Other as a deviant world – a “meaning threat” that is “according to itself” – is a world that we do not encounter inside the bubble. Is this claim too radical and one-sided? It does not seem so. Websites such as Google and Facebook are programmed so that the search results and news items that show up on our news feeds are increasingly tailored to our previous likings. The idea is as simple as effective:

People who bought the *Iron Man* DVD are likely to buy *Iron Man II*; people who enjoy cookbooks will probably be interested in cookware. (ibid.,)

However effective this idea is, it is not neutral. First of all, we do not know what the criteria are that the algorithm uses for its selection. Second, the belief in personalization is not neutral. It departs from a view on the self and the world, according to which confrontation, otherness, and the non-transparent are

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phenomena that we need to overcome. As Facebook's Sherryl Sandberg has it: "People don't want something targeted to the whole world – they want something that reflects what they want to see and know" (ibid., 110).

The bubble has downsides to it. The bubble confirms us in our pre-existing body of knowledge and filters out the kind of information and ideas that are deviant from what we currently would agree to:

The personalized environment is very good at answering the questions we have but not at suggesting questions or problems that are out of our sight altogether. (ibid., 91)

In that sense it could be argued that the bubble has negative implications for creativity. Thus with every click we confirm our identity without discovering something that is radically different. The bubble also obstructs empathic skills, the courage to confront the other, and the worldviews that we do not share. The filter mediates our contact with the world such that our exposure to different, opposing, and challenging perspectives is narrowed down. The bubble confirms us in our existing beliefs and keeps confirming them up until the moment we actually become one with our existing beliefs and opinions or, it becomes difficult to escape from them. For example:

You look up your old college girlfriend Sally, mildly curious to see what she is up to after all these years. Facebook interprets this as a sign that you're interested in Sally, and all off a sudden her life is all over your news feed (...). From Facebook's perspective, it looks as though you have a relationship with this person, even if you haven't communicated in years. For months afterward, Sally's life is far more prominent than your actual relationship would indicate. (ibid.)

What makes it challenging is that this mediated perspective is embedded in the technologies that we use in order to make contact with the world.

The filter bubble and technologies that give rise to this phenomenon constrain the human-world relation in which there is a confrontation with a being "according to itself". These technologies promote a relation that confirms us in ourselves and for that reason it affords a monologue-like relation with the world.

### 2.4. Screens: from empathic connections to focus on the self

In part I we have seen that there are indications which demonstrate that there is a relation between the empathy gap and the technological mediation of social

relations. I uncovered this connection by drawing on research from amongst others, Konrath et al. (Konrath, et al., 2011). In the same research, it is indicated that whilst empathy is on the decline, narcissism is on the rise. Narcissism, as we will see, is a form of solipsism. Insofar as it is caused by technological mediation, I will refer to it as solipsism *afforded by technology*. That means that technologies in this case actively give way to a form of solipsism. This is different from the filter bubble, insofar as in the latter the effects are designed *in* the technology.

Narcissism as I will refer to it throughout this section is a personality disorder. In psychological research it is measured on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). The inventory includes the following characteristics of a narcissist and correlated behavior. It typically involves “a very positive” (Twenge & Campbell, 2013) view of the self, “self-obsession” (Blachino et al., 2015), and an “aspiration to attain self-gratification, achieve dominance, and satisfy ambition” (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). When it comes to the behavior of narcissists, they tend to be less likely to focus on “interpersonal intimacy, warmth, or other positive long-term relational outcomes” (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Narcissists “brag and show off” (ibid.), use relations “as an opportunity or forum for self-promotion” (ibid.), and make others in relationships “generally suffer” (ibid.). The difference between someone just having high self-esteem and the narcissist is located here. The latter “does not value relationships” (Twenge & Campbell, 2013). Finally, narcissists tend to think of other people “primarily in terms of their utility rather than as interdependent relationship partners” (Campbell, 1999). Narcissists tend to have one or more of the previously mentioned characteristics. How does this relate to technology?

Research has shown an increase of 30%, in the markers associated with narcissism among the millennial generation (Twenge & Campbell, 2013). The study compared college students up until “the boomers” and included a total of 49,818 respondents (cf. ibid.) in the research. In order to establish the changes over time, the study compared the outcomes with research conducted previously in generation X. From the comparison, the increase could be established. The results were particularly alarming in the years between 2002 and 2007, the years in which the first online social networks, such as Friendster, Myspace, and Facebook, saw the light (cf. ibid.).

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In the investigation, the correlation between the use of online social media and the increase in narcissism is made explicit. The study notes for example that narcissists thrive in online communities because online relations are considered to be “shallow” (ibid.). Narcissists prefer these relations over what are called “emotionally deep and committed” (ibid) offline relations. Second, narcissists are drawn towards online communities because these environments are “controlled” (ibid.). Online, as research indicates, we have the power to choose which parts of ourselves we show, thus deciding what others see and think of us. Narcissists tend to do well in environments in which they can talk about themselves and “gain esteem from public glory” (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). Narcissists are particularly good at this kind of “self-regulation strategies” (Twenge & Campbell, 2013) and social media are well equipped to facilitate this kind of behavior. It is therefore no wonder that narcissists seem to be “at home” (ibid.) on social media, as one study calls it. Narcissists are “absorbed in Facebook, live and breathe Facebook, and cannot imagine life without it” (Blachino et al., 2015). Based on the research I have included here, it remains unclear whether social media are only enhancing existing inclinations towards a narcissistic personality disorder, or actually *causing* the disorder.

What seems to be clear, however, is that narcissists tend to become addicted to social media more easily (Andreassen, et al., 2016) because social media “fulfill a need for affiliation and confirms the sense of an idealized self” (ibid.). Narcissists use their social media profiles differently than non-Narcissists do. Narcissists tend to update their profiles more (cf. Buffardi & Campbell, 2008), select more favorable pictures of themselves (cf. Kapidzic, 2013) and in general have more friends on SNSs, in the case of this study, Facebook (cf. Gentile et al., 2012). Narcissists are more easily inclined to take selfies and post them on their social media profiles (cf. Sorowski et al., 2015). In short, in research literature, there is an established correlation between the use of social media and the enhancement of the character traits linked with narcissism.

The relation between technology and narcissism needs to be nuanced. Jean Twenge also blames a particular form of parenting, the celebrity culture, and the millionaire culture (cf. Twenge & Campbell, 2013) for the emergence of the narcissism epidemic. That money and celebrity status attract youngsters and give rise to narcissistic tendencies is also the conclusion of a Pew Research study conducted in 2007 in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2007). This study

found that for 64% of the 18-25 years old students, getting rich was the most important goal in life. Only 30 percent found empathic, pro-social behaviors such as volunteering and donating to charities worth striving for. A general tendency towards materialism is also identified in the study of Konrath et al. as one of the causes that empathy is in decline and that “the emphasis on the self is on the rise” (Konrath, et al., 2011). The study also identifies the content of post-2000 reality television, changing family and parenting practices such as that parents might be “more controlling, and less warm and responsive, less focused on teaching children to imagine other’s feelings” (ibid.) as possible causes. Lastly, Konrath’s study suggests that an increase in expectations of success is amongst the causes on the decline in empathy. The atmosphere in colleges is much more focused on individual success and, as she notes, students “are becoming less empathic because they are feeling too busy on their paths to success” (ibid.).

Furthermore, Konrath’s study also identifies a few counterexamples that would indicate that there is in fact not a decline but actually a rise in empathy. There are for example studies which show that there is rise in the number of college students involved in volunteering (Bachman, Johnston & O’Malley, 2006) and the volunteering rates between 2008 (26,4% of the population) and 2009 (26,8% of the population) have actually increased (cf. Konrath et. al, 2011). However, regarding the latter, by 2015 the volunteering rate had dropped to 24,9% (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2015). With regard to these numbers, Konrath remarks that the rate of volunteers amongst people in their 20s, the group closest to the group she has studied, has dropped. By 2017, the rate amongst this group was 18,4% (ibid.). Konrath also cites studies which indicate a decrease in crime. This is different from studies which link criminal behavior with low empathy, a drop in crime rates might indicate the opposite of her conclusion. But as Konrath notes, this needs to be nuanced as some crime numbers have actually risen: crimes against the homeless, racism, and violence against the LGHBT community.

Despite these nuances, millennials themselves do not hesitate to blame social media for increases in narcissism. A national poll, conducted in 2009 in the United States, indicated that 57% of the inquired college students blamed social media such as “Facebook, Myspace and Twitter’ (Twenge & Campbell, 2013) for the rise in narcissism. Twenge herself has also found a causal relation between social media and the rise of narcissism.

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The experiment Twenge set up was simple. She chose a group of students and gave them an exercise. She let one (control) group plot the route they have taken on campus on Google-maps and the other edit their Myspace profiles. After that, she let the students fill out the NPI. The ones who had been working on their Myspace profiles scored significantly higher on the NPI-index (Twenge, 2013:114). The “Myspace group” scored especially high on items such as “I like to be in the center of attention” and “I like having authority over other people” (Twenge, 2013:114). Although this is merely an experiment and not a carefully constructed study, it seems clear to Twenge that “social networking sites shape the way teens and the twentysomethings view their worlds” (ibid.). Whether or not SNSs are actually causing narcissistic behavior and tendencies, it seems to be clear that they play an important role in accommodating already existing tendencies which focus on “the self”, or as it is called in relevant research, “a lower prosocial behavior” (Konrath, et al., 2011). Online social media create what Konrath calls a “buffer” between individuals that makes it easier to ignore others’ pain or even at times inflict pain on others (Konrath, et al., 2011). This stands in contrast with offline relations, which are deemed to be healthy and require “the sharing of positive communal emotions such as sympathy, appreciation and affection” (Konrath, et al., 2011; De Vries, 1996).

Again, we have a situation in which technologies promote monologues. In this case it is because the technologies in place afford behaviors that are focused on the Self. Screens, taken as a metaphor for distance, disconnect us from the perspective of the Other on our Self. We can block this “gaze” because screens install a distance that shields us from this gaze. From this a case could be made in favor of real-time encounters with Others. But although this encounter offers the prototypical structure for any encounter, it will show that making this case goes beyond what this investigation intends to offer. Namely, revealing the basic structure of a relation that connects to exteriority. This will also be the intention of the balanced perspective that will be offered in the final section of this part.

### 3 The empathy gap and technology: positive relations

#### 3.1. The amplification and reduction of empathy through technology: positive transformations

In the previous chapter, I discussed the negative relations between the empathy gap and technology. I showed that three technological transformations stand out in this context: informationalization, filtering, and screening. This chapter aims to show, that technology, on the other side might in fact also contribute to empathy and empathic dispositions. I will focus on the relation between empathy and photography in particular and then include one section in which I will discuss various technologies that are positively associated with the building of empathy. This exposition shows that the relation between technology and empathy is marked by ambiguity.

(Technological) cause	Transformation	Amplification	Reduction
Photography	From real-life engagement to engagement through a technological mediator.	Disengage from original context thus magnifying the range of potential witnesses.	The correlation between real-life presence and active response.
Video games and empathy apps, etc.	From real-life engagement to engagement through a game (simulation versus reality)	Disengage from embodiment thus magnifying fluidity (see: technologies as post-modern power, cf. Turkle, 1995).	Limitation to embodied, incarnate conditions for promoting empathic behaviors.

*Table 3: positive relations between technology and the empathy gap*

#### 3.2. Empathic engagement through photography

In his study of the effect of media images on empathy (Kaplan, 2014), Kaplan employs a definition of empathy according to which empathy is “the involvement of

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psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (Kaplan, 2014:260). Departing from this definition, Kaplan assesses the impact of photography on our empathic disposition towards another's condition. His assessment offers us a first criterion with which we can make a distinction between technologies that are successful in fostering empathy and those that are not. That is why this exposition is relevant within this chapter.

In his article, Kaplan investigates effects of images, transmitted to us through communication technologies, on three distinct levels of empathy. The first is what Kaplan calls "Vicarious Trauma" (VT). This is a reaction to an exposure to images that show the pain of others, causing one to turn away or think distracting thoughts, unable to endure the feelings aroused. The picture is too graphic to provoke any empathic reaction. The second level is what Kaplan refers to as "Empty Empathy" (EE). This is the "numbing effect", produced by the continuous exposure to violence, which causes one to eventually ignore the source of the initial empathic response. The third effect is what Kaplan calls "witnessing". This is a response to other's misery by what he calls "pro-social" behaviors. That is, seeing a certain image might in fact move us to act. I will gradually further unpack these correlations between empathy and images and arrive at some measure for determining to what extent images might play a role in causing empathic responses.

A clear example of VT, according to Kaplan, is the iconic picture of the Vietnamese girl Kim Phuc, on the run after her village has been napalmed. Kaplan argues that a first response to this picture might be one of empathic identification. Something like: what if this happened to me? But after this first response, shock sets in. The initial response therefore is *sympathy*, soon to be followed by a shying away from identification of the events we are exposed to. It is simply too much or too overwhelming. One sees the picture but gives no active response.

The second effect is EE. Kaplan defines this as "empathy that does not result in pro-social behavior" (ibid., 264). EE is a growing numbness towards suffering. Kaplan identifies two prime characteristics of the kind of images that arouse feelings of EE. The first is images which come to us in *succession*. We just see image after image of some kind of catastrophe where "each image cancels out or interferes with the empathic impact of the prior image" (ibid., 264). Second, these images show suffering without *context*, they present a *fragmented* picture of the

suffering and thus fail to promote active feelings of empathy. This is the kind of fragmentation Kaplan saw present in the coverage of the Darfur crisis in 2004. Refugees were covered by the media and exposed as “dots in the sand” (ibid.,). But the suffering of the other, the refugee in Darfur, is, as Kaplan remarks, not transmitted to us. These images fail to drag us in the context as actual witnesses. As Kaplan remarks:

The ‘Others’ [on the image below, CZ] were only indicated by the ‘dots’ on the aerial image. To complete the situation, we would need to be presented with the perspective of ‘the Other’ who remains invisible. (ibid., 264)

These pictures might arouse feelings of empathy but this level of empathy does not result in any concrete action. These pictures often arouse feelings that come close to “sentimentality” which is not actually reaching out to others, but remains “preoccupied with our own tears” (ibid., 265).

Another effect, caused by an exposure to misery depicted on photographs, is what Kaplan calls “witnessing”. This effect is what he finds aptly described in Susan Sontag’s response to images of concentration camps. Sontag experiences her life as divided in two parts:

Before I saw those pictures (I was twelve), and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. (...) When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying. (Sontag, 1977)

This response contains an element of VT but it also has something to it that he refers to as “the ethics of witnessing” (Kaplan, 265). Sontag is not only shocked by the images. Her response is not only in the category of VT. Sontag is also profoundly *transformed* by the pictures. They kept “haunting” (Sontag, 1977). Transformation, according to Kaplan the starting point of moral action, is what marks the difference between pictures that arouse VT and those that arouse ethics. How does a picture do that?

In order to arouse ethical feelings, an image needs to be “an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalization for mass suffering offered by established powers” (ibid, 268). There is a particular kind of image which does that job. These are pictures which make one a witness to the scene, *as if* one were at the scene. Witnessing, or better, *ethical* witnessing involves an element

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of VT and empathy *proper*. That is, there needs to be shock first and then a response of “deep and enduring identification” (ibid, 270). An example of this, according to Kaplan, is the sequences of images released after the hurricane Katrina which hit New Orleans in 2005.

What these pictures do, according to Kaplan, is that they drag us into the scene and make us witness to the horrors exposed on the picture. Involvement in the scene, exposure to the suffering “bodies and faces” (ibid. 272) of others, is what enables a picture to move us into action. Important here, as Kaplan notes, is that the viewers had “a sense of the whole situation and could vicariously experience the impact on many, not just individuals” (ibid, 270). This effect of this witnessing is: “wanting to change the kind of world where injustice, of whatever kind, is common” (ibid.). For Kaplan this requires context, the ability to identify with the fate of the many instead of merely empathizing with an individual’s pain.

The point that Kaplan seeks to make is clear. Pictures evoke responses we refer to as “empathic” and they do so in different levels. The more a picture engages us in its physical and real context, the more our reactions will be of a kind Kaplan refers to as “ethical”. This is a measure that can be used in the further exploration of technology’s potential in the construction of empathy.

### 3.3. The empathic-ethical potential of photography

In this paragraph I use Sontag’s essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Sontag, 2003) to show in what way technologies might arouse feelings of empathy and ethics. The technologies in this case are pictures. In addition to my exposition in the previous section, this case study also offers a possible way of connecting technology in a positive way to empathy.

Sontag argues that pictures are “a means of making real (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (ibid., 6). Thus pictures of human horrors – war, famine, catastrophes – often serve the purpose of moving us into action, by making us witness to some horrendous situation. As Sontag observes, pictures indeed do evoke reactions and emotions but they do so, she argues, within a context of *prior* beliefs and attitudes. Pictures do not arouse feelings of empathy per se, and do not do so by themselves. To put it otherwise: the medium might convey a message, but only for those already prepared in a way that is attuned to the message the picture seeks to convey. The photograph might

fulfil or complete an already existing intention. It might provoke an intention but does not *create* one. Not everyone's reaction to a picture similar. A picture lands in a context and this context already patterns our response to the pictures we come to see. In other words, a *picture does not speak for itself*. For example:

To an Israeli Jew, a photograph of a child torn apart in the attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in downtown Jerusalem is first of all a photograph of a Jewish child (...) To a Palestinian, a photograph of a child torn apart by a tank round in Gaza is first of all a photograph of a Palestinian. (ibid., 9)

Pictures have no message in themselves. They reinforce, Sontag argues, already existing beliefs. A picture that refutes these beliefs is easily dismissed as "staged" (ibid.). Pictures therefore convey messages for those that are not on the scene, the privileged Sontag refers to in the previous quotation. In order for pictures to successfully convey messages, the pictures need to be as "real" and as "authentic" as possible:

For the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance. Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don't have the look that comes from being 'properly' lit and composed. (ibid., 23-24)

The effect of pictures, Sontag argues, is stronger than that of other media such as film and television. That is because a pictures centers our attention, it drags us into one moment, place, and event. Our attention gets tunneled in a particular event, of which the image is the trace. Pictures are successful because they have the image of being real and objective (cf. Sontag, 2003: 23). And yet, pictures are anything but objective. In effect, pictures are nothing of themselves. They require context in order to get meaning. They are not objective because they always have a specific view, they are the result of a specific moment in which something catches the attention of the photographer. As Sontag writes: "to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude" (ibid., 41). An image of the war is not just an image, it is *someone's* image of the war. They are also not "real". That is, what the picture attempts to convey is always subject to interpretation. As Sontag writes:

Whether the photograph is understood as a naïve object or the work of an experienced artificer, its meaning and the viewer's response depends on how the picture identified or misidentified; that is, on words (ibid., 26).

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To rephrase this in a Levinasian-Husserlian way: pictures depend on intersubjectivity in order to get meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Pictures have moral authority for Sontag when they are not *staged*. According to her, art and morality seem not to go hand in hand. When aesthetics is involved, our attention moves away from the subject matter and turns towards the picture itself. A picture needs to make us move, but not in an aesthetic sense. A moral response is required: outrage, compassion, etc. The camera brings us close, “magnifies” (ibid., 57), as Sontag writes, what is there to be seen. But it also reduces. The camera shows us the mutilated bodies that could as well have been “pigs” (ibid.). It might also reduce our willingness to act, as there is a “mounting level of acceptable violence and sadism” (ibid., 90).

We can take in only a limited amount of violence. We tune out and are eventually numbed. Compassion, Sontag writes, is “an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers” (ibid.). Technology mediates between us and the victim seen in the photographs. What Koplan called “empty empathy” is however a quickly adopted emotion. We feel sympathy for the misfortunes of those “encountered” on the picture, but that might make us think that we have already done something. It might actually hinder us in our actions and deliberations. As soon as this emotion enters, we will return to or remain in a condition of passivity (cf. Sontag, 91).

What we see here is that pictures are not neutral. They magnify (and emphasize) elements of a situation, whilst reducing other elements in the meantime. With regards to the non-neutrality of pictures, Sontag writes that:

Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes: sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan. (Sontag, 2003: 76)

And in patterning our relation to the scene, the image magnifies and reduces elements of the scene. It magnifies some of our perception whilst at the same time reducing other elements of it. In their attempt to move us to act, photo’s “objectify” (ibid.). They magnify the situation by making it more beautiful, horrible, or flattering, depending on the effect they seek to produce within the audience. They reduce by providing a specific view of the situation; a view that already patterns our potential reaction to the photo.

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<sup>6</sup> I will work out this account in more detail in part V.

In her early and influential book, *On Photography* (Sontag, 1971), Sontag launched a defense of reality against the spectacle of a world oversaturated with images. Reality would disappear under the influence of media, reduced to an abundance of “representations” (ibid., 97). This would also influence the normal standard of responsibility towards an event experienced in real life. A response that would, for Sontag, consist in something concrete. In an action appropriate to the event or situation the picture has represented to us. This response would become imperiled. The reaction in the form of concrete actions and reflections would be replaced by the distanced look of the spectator, which would become the standard while “our capacity to respond to our experiences with emotional freshness and ethical pertinence [was] being sapped” (ibid., 97).

Sontag has however nuanced her earlier views. Pictures still might have a numbing effect, but they can also play in an important role as “an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn” (ibid., 104). Ethics thus for Sontag is more than some concrete, physical action. It is also “remembering” (ibid., 103). The picture is capable of evoking that process of reflection, because the picture binds us with history. It is through the picture that history comes to live again and starts to play a role in the shaping of our current set of beliefs. Pictures represent history to us and in that sense they serve as a *memento mori*, “as objects of contemplation to deepen one’s sense of reality; as secular icons, if you will” (ibid., 107).

Rather than giving an objective account of a situation, photographs *construct* a situation and by constructing it, they pattern our reaction to it. But as we have already seen, without this reaction the picture remains silent. The picture always lands in a context and ultimately the context decides. Or, more precisely: it is the interplay that decides. A picture lands in a context and stirs reactions in that context, but these reactions in turn construct what the meaning of the picture ultimately is. This conclusion already points to what an empathy ethics can contribute within the ethics of technology. It accounts for the missing side of an ethics of technology that focuses too much on what technology does, thereby ignoring the social embedding of technologies. This theme will be worked out more thoroughly in part VI.

### 3.4. Empathy enhancing technology’s: video games and empathy apps

The relation between video games and empathy has been investigated for quite some time. It has been established (Belman& Flanagan, 2010) that video games

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might enhance both the cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy. Games thus encourage cognitive perspective-taking and they also spark an affective response to the plight of others (cf. Belman & Flanagan, 2010; Boltz, et al. 2015). How do games do that? Generally, this happens when the game takes into account four explicit design principles. Games could be designed for “empathetic play” (Belman & Flanagan, 2010).

First of all, it should be made explicit that in the game the building of empathic skills is an important learning objective. If this is not made explicit, research shows that the players involved will not develop their empathic skills (cf. Batson, Chang, Orr & Rowland, 2002).

Second, the desired behaviors should be made explicit in the design of the game. The game should recommend certain desired (i.e. empathic) responses to a certain situation. These recommendations could be made through iconic (symbolic) or realistic representations.

Thirdly, the game could be designed explicitly for taking perspective and developing empathic concern. If the game seeks to be successful in promoting adopting different perspectives, it should be able to change the self-concept of the players involved (Belman & Flanagan, 2010). How could it do that? The game could put people in a position that is different from the one they are in, thus adding to the development of one’s ability to take the perspective of another (ibid.). Furthermore, in putting one in the shoes of another, the game could also promote feelings of emotional concern (ibid.).

Finally, the game could include some similarity to the player and the characters in the game and, through that, enhance one’s capabilities to empathize with others. Although, with regard to the latter, there is also research that indicates a reverse response: the more likeness between oneself and the other there is, the less empathic the responses will be.

What can be drawn from this exposition, is that there are some technologies – i.e. games – that actually promote empathy, and they do that in a game that mimics real-life situations. In addition to games, I will discuss empathy apps as technologies that are designed with the purpose of closing the empathy gap that was – partially – caused by technology in the first place.

Sarah Konrath, who led the research team that found evidence for the existence of the empathy gap (Konrath et al. 2011), has designed an app to close it. It is called

the Random App of Kindness (RAKi). The motivation to design the app was the decline in empathy in the millennial generation in connection with the belief that empathy is something that can be trained. The empathy app is designed to make this training more efficient. Because although the training programs in real life, face-to-face settings have shown to be effective (Konrath, 2017), they are too expensive to be used in a widespread manner. Instead, Konrath and her team have designed an app in which a game trains the participant in, amongst others, emotion recognition, perspective-taking, and cooperation (ibid.). The game mimics real-life situations and has proven to be effective. Users that have played the game proved to be more compassionate and willing to help after two months of using the app (ibid.). Again, it is a game that promotes empathic acts and attitudes through a training in mimicked real life situations. Moreover, this app seems to be effective and contribute to the enhancement of empathy.

This chapter did not have the intention to offer a complete and exhaustive overview of positive relations between technology and empathy. It merely aimed to offer the indication that these positive relations exist and that they call for a balanced perspective on the relation between empathy and technology.



## 4 Empathy and technology: a balanced perspective

A balanced perspective on the relation between empathy and technology does justice to the empirical findings that I have presented in the previous two chapters. These findings indicate that although there is indeed a causal connection between the empathy gap and technology, it is well imaginable that some technologies might in fact contribute to the enhancement of empathic behaviors and dispositions. This ambiguous relation between technology, empathy, and ethics can also be connected to Levinas's own appreciation of technology and its role in society.

An example is present in an interview from 1987 with the title *On the Usefulness of Insomnia* (RTB, 235). In this interview Levinas makes the following remark which points to the existence of negative correlations between empathy and social media technology. In the interview he expresses his concerns on the connection between technology and his account of ethics:

Q: We live in a society of the image, of sound, of the spectacle, in which there is little place for a step back, for reflection. If this were to accelerate, would not our society lose humanity?

E.L: Absolutely. I have no nostalgia for the primitive. Whatever be the human possibilities that appear there – they must be stated. Though there is a danger of verbalism, language, which is a call to the other, is also the essential modality of the 'self-distrust' that is proper to philosophy. I don't wish to denounce the image. But I contend that in the audiovisual domain there is considerable distraction. It is a form of dreaming which plunges us into and maintains the sleep of which we were just speaking. (RTB, 235)

The "moral sleep" is there because the Self has failed to make contact with the Other as the external source that awakens a moral consciousness in the Self. Thus a relation that fails to spark critical reasoning is a relation that causes a "moral sleep" in the sense of a self-enclosurement. A relation that sparks critical reasoning has the structure of a conversation or a *dialogue*. Within this relation, there is the confrontation between two beings that are each (in degrees) *for themselves*. Conversation, in its ideal form, offers the prototypical structure of such

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a confrontation. This is the perspective opened by Levinas and that makes this perspective relevant as a source that could be used in evaluating whether or not some relation connects to exteriority, and, because of that, awakens the Self from the dogmatism (cf TI, 43) which is there when there is no *window to externality*. This offers a central point of evaluation for every relation, including relations with and through technologies.

Drawing on this insight, it is not surprising that Levinas does not denounce the potential of technology in the construction of ethics and empathic responses altogether. Relations with exteriority come in degrees. This perspective could be linked to a remark that is taken from an interview conducted in 1990, which was subsequently published under the title *In the Name of the Other* (RTB, 190). The quotation is interesting, because it clearly shows that, for Levinas, it was very well imaginable that ICTs could serve as a positive mediator of the moral vocation that is given with the Other. As Levinas remarks:

Q: do you agree with Heidegger's understanding of modernity as a form of decadence?

E.L: I do not. For him, it is tied to a denunciation of technology. I claim that without technology, we would be in no position to feed the Third World. I know of no more frightening images than some of the scenes of African life on television; and those children! Nothing is nobler than exposing man's misery. (RTB. 190)

Levinas here refers to two positive correlations between technology and ethics. The first is one that he worked out more extensively in an essay under the name *Heidegger, Gagarin and Us* (Levinas, 1969). In this essay, Levinas argues that technology frees mankind from enslavement by nature. Nature, Levinas argues, is there to feed mankind and technology comes to the aid of this purpose. Second, Levinas indicates that empathic responses could be provoked by images. It is not necessary to have the Other at our doorstep in order to respond with active ethical behavior.

When these two positions are connected with my exposition in the two previous chapters, it does become possible to have a more balanced perspective on the relation between technology and empathy. This balanced perspective basically entails that empathy ethics is an ethics that advocates a relation between Self and not-Self (i.e. the world, the Other) that has the *structure of a dialogue*. This

entails the possibility of a confrontation between the elements in the structure that provokes some action in the Self, for example: self-reflection, active ethical behavior, etc. Any relation which provokes this reaction does to some degree have the structure of a dialogue. A relation with and through technology could have this effect and also a relation with a human not-Self. The central objective of empathy ethics is to reveal, advocate and promote dialogue-like relations, because in these relation the Self is enabled to escape from itself and enter into a relation with what is exterior to it. From this central objective, some other dimensions of empathy ethics could be drawn. Thus empathy ethics does at least the following:

- It analyzes the structure of a dialogue and its function;
- It articulates the relevance of exteriority. Because it is only through a relation with exteriority that something that has the structure of a dialogue, becomes possible;
- It analyzes what exteriority “is” and in what degree it is found in human and non-human beings. The latter includes an analysis of the degree in which technologies *a)* connect to exteriority and *b)* to what degree they could be an exteriority or otherness themselves;
- It analyzes structures and ways of being that most optimally facilitate a degree of exteriority;
- It analyzes what the ingredients are of a successful relation with something exterior. As we saw, this implies an analysis of the phenomenon mediation, insofar as the latter is something that could block a successful relation with exteriority;
- In the context of technology, it assesses to what extent technologies promote dialogue-like relations That means, it is assessed to what degree technologies successfully connect to exteriority.

## Part IV

# The place of the Other in phenomenological contact theory

The aim of the discussion in this part is to show that phenomenological contact theories can be roughly divided into theories that includes the Other, and theories in which the Other is not included. The question that will be addressed is: “what is the role of the Other in Heideggerian and Husserlian phenomenology?” The Heideggerian route towards the other and otherness seeks to make contact with the world, but, as we will see, that otherness (incarnated in concrete humanity) is decreasingly relevant as that what either conditions contact with the world or is itself one of the points of contact. By contrast, we will see that, in Heidegger’s developing project, the other is gradually removed from the stage altogether. What remains is a contact between Being and Dasein. This is a relation in which there is no account of otherness and its epistemological, ethical, or existential relevance.

Both Heidegger and Husserl have worked out a contact theoretical relation between human and world. A contact theory argues that knowledge and meaning do not reside in the detached and disengaged agent, but in the *interaction* and interplay between the agent and his environment (cf. Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015; Aydin, 2015). A contact theory is an attempt to overcome mediationalism. The central thesis I put forth, however, is that this attempt is successful only when the Other or otherness is granted a place in human-world relations.

This part shows that, with Husserl, a phenomenological tradition has commenced that includes the Other, in contrast with Heideggerian phenomenology, which does not include the Other and provides no account of the value of otherness.

This part consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I will show how Husserl’s initial account of phenomenology lapses into a solipsism. The world for intentional consciousness becomes a world *for us*. This is not an achievement, but a phenomenological challenge, which Husserl overcomes with the introduction of empathy. I will show how the function of empathy gradually becomes central to

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Husserlian phenomenology. This discussion builds on part II and adds to it why and how otherness and the Other are needed in a phenomenological project that seeks to expand beyond mere subjectivism.

The second chapter is a discussion of early Heideggerian phenomenology. This exposition prepares us for the post-Heideggerian philosophies of technology that will be discussed in the next part. For this reason I will discuss what Heideggerian phenomenology amounts to and what the central thesis is of this project. Also, this chapter will show what the role of the Other and otherness is in the early Heidegger. It will become visible that although others do have a place, Heidegger's project is ultimately to uncover the possible authenticity of the Self. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger hopes to disclose authenticity *in* the Self. A relation with something exterior is not needed.

The third chapter will show how humanity is gradually removed from any central position in Heidegger's phenomenology. It will show how this project develops towards an antihumanism. With the removal of humanity, Heidegger has also removed otherness from his project, although this is the locus of otherness according to Husserlian phenomenology. It could be argued that Being comes to fulfill the role of the Other and otherness, but this account lacks concreteness. Moreover, in the positions which I discuss in the next part, the implications of Heideggerian antihumanism remain unaccounted for.

Revealing these two differing positions regarding the Other and otherness has important consequences for the overall aim of this research, which is ultimately to close the empathy gap. As this gap refers to a failure in successful contact with the Other, this contact can only be restored starting from an approach in which the Other is somehow made relevant as contact point and/or condition for successful contact (with the world).



# 1 The place of the Other in Husserl's phenomenology

## 1.1. Cartesianism and the invention of the other

A discussion of the place of the Other in Husserl should start with Cartesianism. This is where Husserl himself starts. Phenomenology, according to Husserl, is not aimed at refuting Cartesianism. It should better be seen as an *expansion* of Cartesianism. As Husserl writes in his *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1977):

Accordingly one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism, even though it is obliged – and precisely by its radical development of Cartesian motifs – to reject nearly all the well-known doctrinal content of Cartesian philosophy (ibid. 43).

Phenomenology is indebted to Descartes and has moved beyond Descartes. What is this Cartesianism and how does it link to the Other, otherness, and solipsism? In the course of this section I will elaborate on that.

In his voluminous study on Enlightenment, *Radical Enlightenment* (Israel, 2002), Jonathans Israel remarks that with Descartes “the true beginning of modernity and enlightenment of men’s ideas came” (Israel, 2002: 24). What was this modernity? As Heidegger has put it, it is a new focus on the subject and the belief that “the subject is accessible immediately and with absolute certainty” (BP: 122- 123). This certainty is discovered by Descartes through the application of a method of systematic doubt. As Descartes writes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Descartes, 1986), he believed he had to accomplish the task of “the general demolition of (his) ideas, in order to achieve anything in the sciences that was stable and likely to last” (Med I: 12). In order to succeed in this aim, Descartes “had to show that all his opinions were false” (ibid.). So in each one of his ideas, he has to find at least some reason for doubt at least insofar as our knowledge of them is derived from the existing scientific frameworks (of his time).

As Descartes argues, he has acquired all his ideas so far from or through the senses. And senses deceive us from time to time, as it is “with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance” (ibid.). For example: objects that are distant

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appear to be smaller than they are in reality. Even that what seems undoubtable – that we are reading this text now and are holding a computer, book, or piece of paper – can according to Descartes be doubted, because it is possible that all that seems real is in fact merely a dream. It appears that every knowledge, arrived at with the standards so far, is doubtable and at the end of the first mediation, Descartes finds himself “amidst the inextricable darkness of the problems (he has, CZ) now raised” (ibid.,15).

In the next (second) mediation Descartes shows that what can be doubted also does *not exist* (cf. Meditations: 9-12). But this does not go for the mind, *even* if God were a “deceiver of supreme power” (Med II:17). This deceiving God, Descartes writes, “cannot bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something” (ibid.). Our knowledge of (external) objects can be doubted and that what can be doubted also does not exist except for the mind. But what is the mind, the I that exists although everything else falls prey to a systematic doubt, that it can stand trial against Descartes’s methodological doubt? According to Descartes it is “a thinking thing” (ibid.). A being that exists as long as it thinks; whenever we stop thinking we will cease to exist. As long as the mind thinks, it exists, doubting amounts to thinking. Thus a “thinking thing”, is “a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions” (ibid., 19). Descartes has found the absolute and certain existence of the mind. But how does the mind arrive at sound knowledge? After all, that was the reason Descartes engaged in his methodological doubt in the first place.

Descartes argues that secure or “clear and distinct” (ibid. 21) knowledge can be arrived at by a “process of mental scrutiny” (ibid.). Knowledge is not to be found in the things (the *res extensa*) as materiality is subject to change, variation, and

alteration.<sup>1</sup> The stability needed in order to build up a genuine science is therefore not to be found there. This stability can be found in mind alone. However, there is something peculiar about this view. As we saw, Dreyfus and Taylor qualify it as a *mediationalist* way of thinking. Whenever we think something, whenever we have knowledge about an external world, we will have that through the ideas that are (already) present in us:

I am certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the ideas I have within me. (Descartes in: Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015)

Thus whenever we seek to have knowledge of an external world, we need to search for that knowledge in ourselves, in the ideas that make up the content of our minds. As Dreyfus and Taylor read Descartes, this means that the source of all true knowledge is to be found in a world-independent I. The *res cogito*, as separated from *res extensa*, amounts to a *representational* concept of what knowledge is:

The reality I want to know is outside the mind; my knowledge of it is within. This knowledge consists in states of mind which purport to represent accurately what is outside. (ibid.,2)

Through this picture of the subject, we arrive, as Heidegger observes, at a *transcendental* philosophy and transcendental knowledge “which does not relate to objects, not to beings, but to the concepts that determine the being of beings” (BPP, 128). These concepts or *ideas*, which for Descartes are representations of reality, are known to us through introspection. They designate a space in which “true” knowledge is possible only once it is cut loose from the outside sensory reality in which every kind of knowledge remains vulnerable to skepticism.

Here we have the picture of what Cartesianism in its most basic structure comes down to: the drawing of a strict division between human and world, between sound knowledge and illusion. Sound knowledge is the knowledge we acquire

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<sup>1</sup> Descartes proves this with the example of a piece of wax. Quoting Descartes at length on this example: “Let us take, for example, this piece of wax. It has just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not yet quite lost the taste of the honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered; its color, shape and size are plain to see (...) in short, it has everything which appears necessary to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire, and look: the residual taste is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound, But does the same wax remain? (Med. II, 20).

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introspectively, by reflecting on the ideas that are present in us. Descartes arrives at this conclusion following his observations of the piece of wax in the end of the second meditation. When the qualities of the wax change – because it is put in the fire or alters because of some other external influence – it is still recognized by the mind as being the same piece of wax. But this “sameness” or “identity” is not present in the wax: it is “perceived by the mind alone” (Med.II, 21). And knowledge of the mind, through introspection, then becomes the source of all “clear and distinct” knowledge of the world outside the I:

I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone (...) and I now know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else. (ibid., 23)

With Descartes, knowledge of the outward world is gained through introspection and what we then acquire as knowledge is a *representation* of the outward world. Why is that solipsist and how does Descartes escape from that deadlock?

By solipsism, I have in mind the position that Zahavi described as “a position that either claims that there only exists one single consciousness, namely one’s own, or that argues that it is impossible to know whether there are in fact any other subjects besides oneself” (Zahavi, 2003: 109). Descartes has proved that he exists (as consciousness) but in the third meditation it appears that it is even possible to doubt that existence because, as he writes, “some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived in matters which seemed most evident” (Med III:25). The matter he is referring to in this context is his existence as a “thinking thing”.

The problem Descartes discovers is the absence of an *external* criterion for the verification of his ideas and his existence. What Descartes needs and is searching for in the third meditation is an *external consciousness*. It appears that this consciousness, for Descartes, is God. For that reason Descartes seeks to establish first whether God exists and second, if God exists, whether it could be possible that He is a deceiver.

Descartes argues that the ideas that we find present in our consciousness represent (are pictures of) an external reality and also have an (external) cause. There is nothing in the mind that does not correspond to some real thing. Furthermore, the more an idea is an idea about a substance, the more reality it has for Descartes. As he writes: “the idea that gives me my understanding of supreme God, eternal, infinite, (immutable), omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all

things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances" (ibid., 28). This idea, however, cannot have been produced by the mind alone, for Descartes argues that "something perfect cannot arise from something that is less perfect" (ibid.). From this Descartes concludes that he is not alone in the world:

If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. (ibid., 29)

It turns out that this "other thing" is God. God for Descartes is "a substance that is infinite (eternal, immutable), independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful and has created both myself and everything else" (ibid., 31). As these are ideas of more perfection than the (human) mind could have produced by himself, it follows for Descartes that these ideas cannot have been produced by the finite intellect but has been put there by God himself. So we have "an idea of the infinite" and this proves the existence of God, because we ourselves could not have produced this idea. God is a being that we cannot completely grasp but we can somehow reach God in our thoughts.

What is the "function" of God for Descartes? The finite human being depends on this God as the being in whom "all the treasures of wisdom" (Med, IV, 37) are present and also as the being who guarantees the subject that it is not mistaken in its idea that the human being exists as a "thinking thing". That is because God, as a perfect being, could not be the malicious deceiver, leading the human being into error even when it comes to the final ground for certainty: the idea that human beings exist as long as we are thinking. The Cartesian "thinking thing" is not alone in the world but is grounded in a more perfect (other, foreign) consciousness.

Interestingly, this account of the Cartesian relation between the human subject and God is used by Levinas in an analogous way for his account of the intersubjective relation. That is, Levinas, in his account, uses the structure of this relation and its objective. Thus, like Descartes's project, the Self for Levinas is also in need of an external consciousness. A consciousness that is "according to itself" (not produced by the Self) so that the Self can have a measure through which it can verify its own accounts of what is true, good, etc. Unlike Descartes, however,

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this being is part of the world. It is not God, but encountered in the social relation. How does Levinas apply the Cartesian subject-God structure in his own project?

As we have already come across in the discussion of Levinas's position, the I and the Other are separated and this separation is needed in order to make ethics possible. How is contact made between beings that are separated? We have seen that this is done through *conversation*. This is best seen as referring to a relation that has the structure of a dialogue, it does not necessarily refer to actual conversation. It points to a relation in which there is a constructive encounter between beings that have the structure of a *for itself*. But what is conversation according to Levinas? As he writes:

To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other, beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. (...) Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (TI, 51)

To be in conversation with another human being is for Levinas to be in relation with the infinite. That is, in its Cartesian fashion, to be "in a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it" (TI, 50). And because the Other *remains* exterior, it is possible that we are taught by the Other, that we receive knowledge that we have not and could not possibly have produced by ourselves. The "idea of the infinite" is for Descartes an innate idea that we cannot have derived from ourselves but which is placed in us, "like the mark of a craftsman stamped on his work" (Med, III, 35). How is that for Levinas? Levinas also writes that the idea of the infinite is "put in us" (CPP, 145). The Other is not a being that we produce out of ourselves, the Other *reveals* herself to us through her Face. The presence of the Other is a revelation and not a production of the Self. What we gain here is in insight in what kind of structure is necessary to connect the Self with exteriority.

### 1.2. The absence of the Other in Husserl's early and intermediate phenomenology

We have seen how, in the philosophy of Descartes, first (self) consciousness is discovered as the locus of being and meaning and how we – after applying the right method – can discover true knowledge inside our minds. We have also seen

how this consciousness relates to an exteriority which Descartes names God, and how this exteriority functions as a *warranty* that debunks the final skeptic argument that it is possible that we are deceived by a malicious God who makes us think that we exist whereas in fact we are merely dreaming. But Descartes demonstrates that God exists and also that he is good. This way he has acquired the final *external* point of verification he needed. In other words, it is ultimately through God that Descartes escapes from solipsism. In this section I will uncover in what way Husserl expanded beyond Cartesianism with the development of his concept “intentionality”. I will show that this development is not enough. The world as present before intentional consciousness is a world *for us*. The relation with an objective world has not been established yet.

Just like Descartes before him, Husserl’s phenomenology starts off as a solipsism. This is necessary for Husserl, as Zahavi writes, in order for us to realize “how *little* the single subject can manage on its own” (Zahavi, 2003: 111). In other words, only when we reduce the subject to her internal conscious life will it become clear that this residue of knowledge is actually not derived from ourselves. But we are not there yet. What a phenomenology finally leads to, is an examination of the nature of subjectivity, as this is the place where meaning manifests itself. This examination will demonstrate that this subjectivity is nothing in itself. We first have to uncover what the conscious life of the solipsist consist of and then we have to study how we (methodologically) arrive at this life.

The starting point of Husserlian phenomenology is what he calls “the absolute existence of consciousness” (Husserl in Levinas, 1995: 26). The Husserlian consciousness is like that of Descartes. Being conscious, for Husserl, means “to think” and refers to “any state such as: ‘I perceive, I remember, I imagine, I judge, I desire, I want’ and similarly, all analogous states” (ibid.). To this consciousness we have, unlike our relation to the transcendent world, immediate and complete access. An internal perception, Husserl writes, “schattet sich nicht ab” (ibid.) or is “adequate” (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> We will see that the difference between internal and external perception offers a way to demonstrate that there is a difference between

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<sup>2</sup> An external perception of, say, a table is only a partial perception. We never perceive the complete table at once, we perceive the table in partial perceptions (*abschattungen*). This is important to show because it reveals that there is a difference between natural and phenomenal existence.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

the existence of the “real” object and that of the “intentional” or phenomenal object. This is important to show, because for Husserl it indicates that there is a phenomenal world, the world of the subject in which the world appears (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 47). This phenomenal world will become the subject matter for the study of phenomenology as envisioned by Husserl. This subject matter will provide philosophy with its own field of exploration *vis a vis* the natural sciences.

To return to consciousness, it indeed exists in an absolute sense – as a world in itself, like the Cartesian account of consciousness – but it also qualifies as an *intentional* consciousness. The latter would imply that consciousness, unlike the Cartesian consciousness, is relational. What does that mean? It is perhaps helpful to discuss this crucial Husserlian notion of intentionality, by showing what positions on intentionality it seeks to challenge.

The first position is one in which consciousness is depicted as a *container*. In this picture of consciousness, the relation with the world outside consciousness is established *only* when there is a causal influence on consciousness from an external object (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 14). According to Zahavi, it is easy to show why this account is wrong, because:

When I am thinking about *absent* objects, *impossible* objects, *non-existing* objects, *future* objects, or *ideal* objects, my directedness toward these objects is obviously not brought about because I am causally influenced by the objects in question. (ibid., 14)

We can think of objects and states of affairs that do not (yet) exist and therefore a picture of consciousness as a self-enclosed container that is activated through an *external* cause, is a wrong concept of consciousness. This position is called the *objectivist* account of intentionality. It is objectivist because it maintains that intentionality is relation between two objects (the mind and the object) that are in the world. If this account is untenable, it might be that the *subjectivist* account of consciousness is a more adequate concept of what consciousness is and how it intentionally relates to the world.

As intentionality is a relation between consciousness and its object, both related need to exist. But since the object does not always exist (for example: the unicorn), consciousness needs to be understood primarily as an immanent perception. We do not relate to the world, but only to an immanent reality. Husserl gives two reasons why this account is wrong, both of which show that the transcendent

object in fact does exist. For example, the identity of something does not depend on the subject. We can think, with two different mental acts, about one and the same object. Would the object have been immanent, this would not have been possible. There is a second way in which it can be shown that there is a difference between *internal* perception and *external* perception.

Unlike immanent perception, transcendent perception (of the external world) presents the world partially and from a perspective. The object as it is presented to us is never given in its entirety: we cannot see the backside of a table. The object, Husserl argues, transcends our perception of the object (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 16). That does not mean that the complete object is unknowable (as the Kantian thing in itself), but that it is as an identity that consists of the connection of previous appearances. Our consciousness however is not given in a *spatial* perspective. We have, Husserl writes, complete access to consciousness.<sup>3</sup> We have this mode of access to consciousness, but we lack the same capacity to access an object (the object is transcendent). Hence it is proven for Husserl that “the object intended is not part of consciousness” (Zahavi, 2003:19).

The third position is a *representative* theory of the relation between consciousness, world, and knowledge. We have already encountered this position as Cartesianism. The epistemological question this position confronts is how the relation between subject and object can be established. How can it be that we have an immanent perception of a table without the transcendent object being physically present in consciousness? In other words, how can the different substances of mind and matter “meet” in knowledge? According to the representative account, the table affects our sensory apparatus, causing a mental image to arise in our consciousness. According to this theory, “every perception implies two different entities, the extramental object and the intramental representation” (Zahavi, 17). The difficulty this theory has failed to solve is the extent in which the representation actually “meets” the object it seeks to represent. The theory does not bring us any closer to solving the epistemological difficulties relating to the question how a relation is possible between two separate entities (subject-object) that exist as mind and matter.

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<sup>3</sup> That is, consciousness does not appear through spatial perspectives. That means that being qua appearance, constitutes a region of being of itself. Phenomenology studies these meanings as present in consciousness.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

Husserl's notion of intentionality, seeks to come as a solution to the challenges which these positions give rise to. What Husserl basically seeks to show is that whenever I perceive this desk in front of me, it is *this* desk and not some mental image of this desk I intend to "reach" by a mental act. To quote MacIntyre on this:

When someone sees a tree, for example, the object of his perception is not (say) a sense datum but an actual tree, a physical object that others can also see and that exists independently of its being perceived. As Husserl conceives it, then, intentionality is not a relation to an extraordinary kind of "intentional object" but a relation – albeit a relation of a special sort – to ordinary entities of various kinds (MacIntyre, in Zahavi: 2003).

The term "intentional" in Husserl must, as can be drawn from this quotation, be taken in a larger sense than the one it has in expressions such as "having good intentions" or "having the intention to do this or that" (cf. TIH, 40; Sokolowski, 2000: 8). It is also different from the way in which the concept intentionality appears in the works of Brentano, Husserl's teacher in phenomenology. For Brentano intentionality amounted to *inner* perception. As De Boer reads Brentano's understanding of intentionality, it remained a concept referring to an immanent reality and close to the representationalist account of the relation between consciousness and world. In other words, Brentano made little progress since scholasticism. For example:

The subjective color is not an intentional presence of the real color, but the subjective product of our mind that comes into existence through contact with a reality of which we can say only that it has certain quantitative characteristics. (De Boer, 1989:56)

For Husserl, to say that consciousness is intentional is to say that consciousness is always consciousness *of something* (external). What does that mean? In a broad sense it means that what is present in consciousness is not merely a representation of a real thing or state of affairs which is outside consciousness as a substance resting in itself. The representation of a thing, Husserl argues, presupposes that there has been established a first "unmediated" relation to the object, a relation on the basis of which subsequent representations become possible. This first encounter is *presentational*: it gives us the real object. But intentional presence is something quite different from natural presence, the presence of the things as we encounter them in an everyday mode of existence. As Levinas writes:

Value or affective predicates therefore belong to the existence of the world, which is not an 'indifferent' medium of pure representations. The existence of a book, for instance, cannot be reduced to the simple fact of its being there, in front of us, as a set of physical properties. It is, rather, its practical and useful character which constitutes its existence; it is given to us in a manner quite different from a stone for example. (TIH, 45)

Whenever we intentionally relate to an object, we grasp an object on a different level than its mere existence on a material or physical level. We grasp it as having a value, a purpose, a meaning, etc. Normally, Husserl argues, we do not encounter objects as such. The intentional or phenomenological presence of an object, its presence qua appearance for consciousness, is something that needs to be uncovered first. We uncover that through a method Husserl – in his intermediate phase – developed in order to be able to study the world as it is intentionally or phenomenally present in consciousness (cf. Zahavi, 2003).

This method, known of as the reduction or the “bracketing of the world” (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 55 -56), is a method Husserl applied in order to access the world as it phenomenally appears to us, in consciousness. He intended to (temporarily) do away with the world as we experience it in day-to-day life as a world that merely exists. The natural world is not lost when the reduction is performed, but is suspended in order to gain a “phenomenological residuum”, which are “the subjective acts, the modes of appearance, etc.” (Husserl, in Zahavi: 46), of the world as we encounter it phenomenally. Or as Levinas describes it in his introduction to Husserl's phenomenology, the phenomenological *attitude* reveals that:

The external world exists, it is what it is, and to see it as being only a phenomenon is to clarify the sense of its existence; it is to show, after having looked at the life in which it is given, what its mode of occurring in life is. (TIH, 35)

Husserl calls the reduction a *transcendental* reduction. This means that the aim of the reduction is to arrive at the subject as the *condition* for the possibility of the appearance of something that could be called “world”. It is in that sense that it is possible for Husserl to think of a worldless subject, whereas the reverse is impossible. World needs the subject in order to come to existence. The reduction reveals the subject as the condition for the possibility of world. In other words, what the reduction shows is that the world does not merely “exist” but rather is something that “appears”. And how does it appear? In Levinas's reading of Husserl:

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What exists for us, what we consider as existing is not a reality hidden behind phenomena that appear as images or signs of this reality. The world of the phenomena itself makes up the being of our concrete life. (ibid., 24)

The “world” as is revealed to us through the reduction is not merely “existence”.<sup>4</sup> It is a *qualitative* existence, as Levinas continues, consisting of:

Objects of practical use and values. The qualities that make things important (*Bedeutsamkeitsprädikate*) or dear to us, that make us fear them or want them, etc. are intrinsic characteristics which must not be excluded from the constitution of the world and must not be attributed solely to the ‘subjective reaction’ of men that are in the world. (ibid., 44)

What we see here is that Husserl’s transcendental subject is linked to the world. The link is established through intentionality because this implies that consciousness is always *about* the world. The world however is not merely the “natural” world but rather the world as it appears phenomenally and transcendently as a world of meanings.<sup>5</sup>

An object is transcendent for Husserl insofar as it *cannot* be reduced to my experience of the object, and yet this mode of experiencing is the only access there is to the object. Objects have only a certain significance, a phenomenological existence *for us*. It is in this sense that Husserl can be seen as an idealist, but one of a specific kind. An idealist for whom “reality is not a brute fact” (Zahavi, 2003:69) but:

A system of validity and meaning that needs subjectivity, that is, experiential and conceptual perspectives if it is to manifest and articulate itself. (ibid.)

The world needs the subject in order to become a field of meanings. Phenomenology studies these meanings and we gain access to these meanings *through* the phenomenological reduction.<sup>6</sup> But we remain in an egological circle here. We

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, as Husserl has written, “the very existence of the intentional object is phenomenologically irrelevant, since the intrinsic nature of the act is supposed to remain the same regardless of whether or not the object exists” (Husserl, in Zahavi:2003: 40).

<sup>5</sup> The world as it appears is the world. As Heidegger would say; it is phenomenologically absurd to say of the phenomenon that it stands in the way of something more fundamental that it merely represents (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 56).

<sup>6</sup> Phenomenology is in that sense, as originally envisioned by Husserl, a merely descriptive science that seeks to study the meanings that we find within consciousness.

have gained contact with the world (present in intentional consciousness) but we remain within the sphere of the Self. The world of meanings that is uncovered through the transcendental reduction is in need of an account as to where these meanings are derived from. If they are derived from the Self, phenomenology has made little progress since Descartes. Moreover, a world of meanings *for us* constitutes a challenge for a philosophical discipline that – especially in Husserl's intermediate phase – seeks to develop itself into a *rigorous* science. In order to arrive at the *objectivity* that underlies all proper science, Husserl needs to escape from the egological circle the phenomenological reduction has led him in. He needs, in other words, *intersubjective validity* for the meanings that are uncovered after the transcendental reduction. I will now study in what way intersubjectivity became epistemologically necessary within Husserl's phenomenological project.

### 1.3. The Other in Husserl's later phenomenology

We have seen how phenomenology lapsed into a solipsism. This, we have seen, is the position according to which the phenomenal world reveals itself in the individual, isolated consciousness. The world of the phenomena is a world of meanings *for us*. Furthermore, there is contact with the world – through intentionality – but this world is a world consisting of things and states of affairs. Others are not included in this phenomenal world. That is because others are not there *for me*; they exist independent and separated from me. Others are in the world as meaning-giving beings that are like the Self and can therefore not appear as a correlate of *my* intentionality. We have already seen in part II how the relation with the Other is established in a *sui generis* mode of intentionality, which Husserl referred to as empathy. We have also seen what the function of the Other is within Husserl's overall philosophical undertaking. We have however not seen, in detail, to what extent it became *necessary* for Husserl to include the Other and through that correct the flaws of what is called – and I have discussed in the previous section – his “methodological solipsism” (Zahavi, 2003: 109) into which Husserl is led after his transcendental reduction. With his inclusion of the Other Husserl made what has come to be known as an “intersubjective transformation of transcendental philosophy” (ibid.). What is the structure of this transformation?

The transcendental reduction reduces phenomenology to a study of merely subjective appearances. How do we escape from that, how do we enter into the world of objectivity? According to Husserl, this is possible the moment we succeed

## Closing the Empathy Gap

in transforming merely subjective appearances into a truth for everyone, i.e. an intersubjectively founded objectivity (cf. Husserl, 1977:92). We escape from solipsism the moment we succeed in founding our appearances as belonging to an intersubjective world in which there is the possibility of subjective appearance, to become true for everyone. How do we make the move from subjectivity to intersubjectivity? This is a challenge because on a phenomenological level, everything – including the appearance of the other – becomes “reduced” to *my* perception.

In a way, Husserl argues, we experience the world from the start as an intersubjectively founded world. That is because the phenomenal world is never experienced as being merely private but rather as a public world which is there for everyone. The subject’s embeddedness in intersubjectivity is fundamental. As Husserl writes:

Transcendental intersubjectivity is the absolute and only self-sufficient ontological foundation (Seinsboden), out of which everything objective (the totality of objectively real entities, but also every objective ideal world) draws its sense and validity. (Husserl, in Zahavi: 2003:111)

The intersubjective world therefore is the condition for the possibility of objective knowledge. Why is that the case and how do we discover intersubjectivity? Generally speaking, we discover the “need” for intersubjectivity when we learn “how little the single subject can manage in its own” (ibid.). The transcendental reduction is one such moment we learn this, because we then discover with clarity that the phenomenal world as uncovered through the reduction is not *my* world. We have a phenomenological residu of meaning that we have not derived from ourselves. We will discover that the meanings the phenomena have are meanings that are handed over to us through tradition, others, etc. As Husserl writes:

What I generate from out of myself (primally instituting) is mine. But I am a ‘child of the times’; I am a member of a we-community in the broadest sense – a community that has its tradition and that, for its part, is connected in a novel manner with the generative subjects, the closest and the most distant ancestors. And these have ‘influenced’ me: I am what I am as an heir. (ibid.,138)

Phenomenological reduction reveals a world of meanings. They appear, at first sight, to be meanings that I have projected on the world. Upon closer inspection, it will show that this is actually an inadequate account of what subjectivity amounts

to. What we are, the meanings and the world present in consciousness, is what it is through others. The “pure I”, the monad, does not exist and the reduction reveals that to us. But how does the Other turn into a *condition* for the possibility of objectivity? The basic thesis of Husserl is that whenever it is possible for any object to be experienced by another, it is impossible to speak of the object as being merely *my* intentional correlate. But that is only the case when it is impossible to (also) reduce the other to being a correlate of *my* intentionality. If that were the case, we would still lack an external point of verification. What we need to do first is uncover the intentional relation with other subjects.

As we saw in my discussion of the concept “empathy”, it is indeed possible to construe the Other as a special being in the sense that it can never become the result of an intentional initiative on the side of the subject. The Other as being *for itself* is a being with “genuine” transcendence. As Husserl writes:

Here we have the only transcendence that is genuinely worthy of its name, and everything else that is also called transcendent, such as the objective world, rests upon the transcendence of foreign subjectivity (Husserl in, Zahavi, 2003: 115).

In Husserl’s account, therefore, the transcendence of the external world is *mediated* to us through the Other. That is to say: the world as being more than just an intentional correlate of the Self is a possibility because the “genuine” transcendence of the Other precedes it.

How does this relation come about? How do we come to view the other as the transcendent being that conditions all other relations with the world? First of all, there is a primal experience of the other and this experience forever changes our other experiences.<sup>7</sup> We do not need to experience others as transcendent beings on a daily basis. The primal experience – the relation with parents, brothers, sisters, etc. – functions as stable, background experiences that forever condition our other relations. In everyday life, however, the relation with the Other does in fact serve an epistemological purpose. Within Husserl’s framework, an experience without another has only *signitive* value, whereas an experience accompanied by

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the mirror-stage in Lacan’s approach to psychoanalysis. The mirror-stage is the phase in the development of identity when one starts to recognize one’s self as an independent being, a self-conscious being. This appears at the moment we look in the mirror and recognize the being reflected in the mirror as our own. This is the primal experience of selfhood.

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the experience of an other has *intuitive* significance: we have evidence that our experience holds *objective* validity.<sup>8</sup>

An experience gains objective value whenever we come to realize that the experience is something that can be shared by others. That is, for Husserl the categories of “transcendence, objectivity and reality are constituted intersubjectively” (Zahavi, 2003: 118). The same holds for the categories “immanence, subjectivity and appearance” (ibid.). Our subjectivity is also something that is ultimately acquired through our relation with the Other. This comes about whenever we experience that not only the Other appears as an alter ego for us, but also that we appear as an alter ego for the Other. As Husserl writes:

The origin of personality is found in empathy and in the further social acts that grow out of it. For personality, it is not enough that the subject becomes aware of itself as the center of its acts; rather, personality is constituted only as the subject enters into social relations with others. (Husserl, in Zahavi, 2015: 81)

As this quotation indicates, self-consciousness alone does not constitute personality and selfhood. For this a relation with a foreign consciousness is needed, because it is then that we gain a perspective on our Self. It is through this perspective that we can develop into personalities.

We have seen that Husserl introduces intersubjectivity as the necessary means leading to the possible existence of an objective world. We have also seen that the Other functions as the mediator leading to the possibility of self awareness. It is once we realize that we can appear as a *being for the other*, that we learn something about ourselves. This is a first step leading to a construction of personhood. Now that we have seen why it was important for Husserl – but also for Descartes – to introduce a foreign consciousness within their respective philosophical project, let us now see in what way this line of reasoning is present in Heidegger. This is important because it foreshadows the way in which the Other is present in Heidegger-inspired philosophies and ethics of technology.

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<sup>8</sup> See Borgmann’s account of levels of value attached to differing levels of information. I discussed this account in part III.

## 2 The place of the Other in Heidegger's early existential analytic

### 2.1. Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world and the position of others

In this section I will show what the role is of the Other in Heidegger's early phenomenology. For that reason, I will discuss "who" the Self (Dasein) is according to Heidegger's account. This discussion therefore entails a discussion of what Heidegger calls an "existential". These are the ways in which Dasein is, which will reveal what the role of the Other and otherness is. What are existentials? These are the typical ways in which we are *in* the world. In Heidegger's own wording:

The average everydayness of Dasein can thus be determined as entangled-disclosed, thrown-projecting being-in-the-world, which is concerned with its own most potentiality in its being together with 'the world' and in being-with with others. (BT, 176)

Being in the world is different from the way a stone is in the world. Humans are in the world as beings that are *involved* in a process of world-making. Being "in" in the Heideggerian sense, never means to be "spatially" and "temporarily" in some place. Dasein is not like an object, a thing, which does not have the character of being-in, for Heidegger. An object (animals included) are not in the world in the existential meaning Heidegger attaches to this term. For Heidegger it means living a life of action, engagement, involvement and the co-creation of world. To phrase it otherwise, as Dasein we "inhabit" (Dreyfus, 44) the world, we make it a place that befits our humanity and related capacities.<sup>9</sup> The typical ways in which Dasein is in the world, are what Heidegger calls the existentials of Care, Concern,

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<sup>9</sup> In his commentary on *Being and Time*, Dreyfus provides an illuminating description of the special Heideggerian notion of being-in: "in English we also distinguish two senses of 'in' : a spatial sense ('in the box') and an existential sense ('in the army, 'in love'). The first use expresses inclusion, the second conveys involvement." (Dreyfus, 1991:43). It is the second use of "in" which Heidegger is referring to with regard to Dasein's being-in-the-world.

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and Solicitude.<sup>10</sup> In Heidegger's analysis, we have Care for ourselves, Concern for things, and Solicitude for others. These are the ways in which we typically and normally are. Our relation with others, however, is not completely covered with the existential Solicitude. In fact, Heidegger discerns two other relations with others. These are the relations of "Falling" and "Empathy". We have already seen that the latter concept is not worked out by Heidegger. What I will do, therefore, is discuss the relation with others as an existential which consists of three – so to say – sub-existentials, which are: Solicitude, Falling, and Empathy. Empathy however I will not discuss separately for I have already covered this in part II.

### 2.2. The first existential: concern/taking-care

In his existential analysis, Heidegger seeks to uncover the everyday background practices that guide and underlie our (theoretical) understanding of the world. His analysis is meant to be – according to phenomenology's intention – a descriptive or ontological analysis. His analysis is not a normative assessment of the ways in which we are in the world. He merely uncovers the ways in which we are the world, as this is a way of being that is normally concealed. For Heidegger, we are intentional world-directed and meaning-constituting beings. We are however not intentional in the Husserlian sense of the word. For Heidegger, this notion – although we have seen that contact with the world is the heart of this notion – is still too much caught up in the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Heidegger also analyses the human being (Dasein) as an intentional being, but intentionality for Heidegger is not a property of consciousness, it is the encompassing structure of how Dasein is. Every act of Dasein is an intentional act. As Heidegger writes in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

Intentionality belongs to the existence of Dasein ... To exist, then, means, among other things, to be as relating to oneself by comporting with beings. It belongs to the nature of Dasein to exist in such a way that it is always already with other beings. (BPP, 157)

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<sup>10</sup> As beings that have the ability to "cope" with their environment. Coping is, as Dreyfus has translated Heidegger's account of Dasein's *being-in-the-world* (Dreyfus, 2014), skillfully handling and going around in our environment without prior reflection. The skillful copier does not reflect first and then acts, but rather the other way around.

Human beings are intentionally directed to the beings we encounter in the world.<sup>11</sup> This is not a theoretical directedness based on “perceptual cognition” (BT, 92). The most natural way for Dasein to relate to its world is through “the kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use” (ibid.). For Heidegger, this pragmatic “dealing” with the beings we encounter in the world is the most fundamental human-world relation, which conditions all other ways of relating to and understanding the world. What does the pragmatic relation of handling and concern mean?

First of all, Heidegger writes, the beings closest to us are not mere “things” that are “objectively present”.<sup>12</sup> The beings closest to us are what he calls “equipment”, “tools” (Zeuge), things that have in Heidegger’s analysis the character of being-in-order-to. What is equipment? Basically, everything that we encounter in the enviroining world and which we recognize as having some specific purpose that is recognized by Dasein. A recognition, however, we will see that in the next section, that is ultimately socially embedded and mediated: our knowledge of handling a tool is a kind of knowledge that we derive from the social context in which we are. Meaning is not (only) present *in* the tool but is a “know-how” that is handed over to us from our social context.<sup>13</sup>

Equipment is everything that we encounter in the world as having the mode of a being that is in-order-to. We relate to it in the mode of *ready-to-hand* (Zuhanden). In contrast to the theoretical mode, which reveals beings in their being *present-at-hand* (Vorhanden or present as objects). The typical way in which the world is disclosed, thus is pragmatic. This can be made clearer with the example of Heidegger’s famous hammer. With this example, Heidegger makes apparent the way in which things are not just objectively present, but primordially part of the kind of practices and meaning that constitute his phenomenological account of world:

Hammering does not just have a knowledge of the useful character of the hammer; rather, it has appropriated this utensil in the most adequate way

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<sup>11</sup> These beings are all that is “objectively present” in the world, such as: other Dasein, stones, trees, books, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Objectively-present are things according to the theoretical attitude. Then they appear as things without context, without meaning, and without a proper place in our constitution. The pragmatic attitude reveals things in their being as ‘ready-to-hand’.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the notion of technological intentionality which I discussed in part I, in my discussion of TMT. In this notion an account of the social embedding of the meaning of tools is absent.

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possible (...) the less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more we take hold of it and use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as a useful thing. The act of hammering itself discovers the specific ‘handiness’ of the hammer. (BT, 99)

We know how to use the *tools* that we encounter, and this mode of knowledge is the first and fundamental way through which we make the world and our being in it. Tools or equipment are what Heidegger calls the “nearest” (BPP, 163) beings we encounter in the world and which give rise to “the worldhood of the world” (ibid.). The world is not a collection of independent and unrelated beings, but a meaningful whole which it is because of the tool-like structure of the beings in the world. As Heidegger makes it concrete: “each individual piece of equipment is by its own nature *equipment-for-* for traveling, for writing, for flying” (BPP, 163).

Tools by themselves belong to bigger structures, they can never be encountered in isolation, “the different modes of in-order-to such as serviceability, helpfulness, usability, handiness, constitute a totality of useful things” (BT, 68). In the *Basic Problems*, Heidegger refers to this as the “contexture” (BPP, 162) or “webs of significance” (Inwood, 2000:35) that are constituted by things that *essentially* exist as referential structures: their existence is an in-order-to. It is in this way that the leather in the craftsman’s workshop belongs to the bigger structure of the workshop, which is there in-order-to make possible the fabrication and maintenance of shoes. The leather does not exist in and for itself, it arises out of what Heidegger calls a “thing-contexture” (ein Ding-zusammenhang). The shoes themselves, for which the workshop is, have the structure of in-order-to. Shoes are there “in order to be worn” (BT, 100). This pragmatic structure is characteristic of all beings, whether or not they are actual tools:

The forest is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the river is a water power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails. (BT, 71)

Tools have a purpose and we recognize this purpose. But how do we come to know the purpose of the tools? According to Heidegger, we come to know it when we are actually *using* the tool. We can learn how to use tools by studying manuals or textbooks, but this would not offer us the firsthand knowledge we acquire through the actual usage of the tool. But how do we know how to use a tool, more specifically: how do we know how to use the tool in a *normal* way? As was made visible, we know this because the knowledge of normal usability is handed over to

us through tradition and through the shared social practices we are part of. It is through these practices that we are endowed with an *a priori* sense of the normal way in which we should deal with tools. Tradition teaches us that a chair is not something we normally stand on, but a tool on which we normally sit. Tools and their meanings are socially embedded. This embedding also becomes visible in the way tools refer to other subjects. Tools are not private but refer to others and the public world in which these tools are present:

The 'description' of the surrounding world closest to us, for example, the work-world of the handworker, showed that together with the useful things found in work, others are 'also encountered' for whom the 'work' is to be done. In the kind of being of these things at hand, that is, in their relevance, there lies an essential reference to possible wearers for whom they should be 'made to measure'. (ibid., 115)

When we use tools, we tend to forget about the way a tool is, as a being that is (also) objectively present. When we use a tool, say the hammer, the hammer itself becomes *transparent*. We "forget" the hammer until it breaks down and the hammer becomes (again) objectively present. When the hammer has broken down, our attention is shifted from normal usage to the specifics of the hammer itself: we start wondering how we can repair it or how we can complete the task with a different tool. The user of a tool also becomes transparent. Once the user is sufficiently skillful, once he has mastered the usage of the tool, he becomes unified with the tool: the distinction between the object hammer and the subject craftsman has disappeared.

What Heidegger is referring to in this context can be compared to what is known as "the state of flow": "you are so involved in what you are doing you aren't thinking of yourself as separate from the immediate activity ... You don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing" (Dreyfus, 1991: 66). Or in Heidegger's own wording: "Dasein (...) is nothing but (...) concerned absorption in the world" (ibid.). In the mode of Concern – which is our everyday way of being in the world - the subject-object distinction is gone. Subject and object have become immersed in one another. This brings me to a final theme in this discussion of the Heideggerian notion of Concern as existential of Dasein.

According to Heidegger, we are "what we are doing" and because of that "Dasein has a world" (BT, 86). Through our interaction with tools, we create a world *for us*. But we also acquire a Self through our interactions with tools. We become what

## Closing the Empathy Gap

we are doing, our selfhood in that sense is acquired through an alien source that is not present in Dasein itself, but comes from the outside and shapes Dasein into a certain kind of being. To be in our everyday mode of concern for the things in the world, is, in Heidegger's terminology, to be *in-authentic*. We will see in the next section that we are in-authentic in the sense that we generally understand ourselves as belonging to an anonymous mass (das Man, the They). But that our normal way of being in-authentic is also something that becomes visible through our relation with things. In the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger writes that what we encounter first are things, "and we see ourselves reflected to it (the self, CZ) from things" (BPP, 159). How do we see ourselves in relation to the things we encounter in the world? Heidegger gives the following example:

The craftsmen in his workshop, given over to his tools, materials, works to be produced, in short to what with which he concerns himself. Here it is quite clear, isn't it, that the shoemaker is not the shoe, not the hammer, not the leather and not the thread, not the awl, and not the nail. How could he understand *himself*, starting out from them? Certainly the shoemaker is not the shoe, and nevertheless he understands *himself* from his things, *himself*, his own self. (ibid., 160)

The craftsman has become identical to his surrounding, he understands himself *from* his occupation in the world. In that sense the craftsman is in-authentic. To be in-authentic is in Heidegger not a negative condition. It is not necessarily something we have to get rid of, although it is Heidegger's aim to show that Dasein's existential project is to become free for its inner utmost possibilities. But normally, in our everyday life, we are in-authentic, and it is a positive condition. It defines us in *who* we are and Heidegger's descriptive phenomenology has uncovered this otherwise concealed way of being in the world:

While we exist in the everyday, we understand ourselves in an everyday way, as we can formulate it terminologically, *not authentically* in the strict sense of the word, not from the most extreme possibilities of own existence, but inauthentically as we are not our own, as we have lost our self in things and human beings while we exist in the everyday (...) Being lost, however, does not have a negative depreciative significance but means something positive belonging to Dasein itself. (BPP, 160).

Dasein is a being that defines itself from sources that are external to it. In this section we have seen that this is the external source of "concern" in which things

and tools have a central position. In the next section I will discuss the relation with the Other as an external source of Dasein's identity. This source is the other or others in the meaning of an anonymous mass: the They.

### 2.3. The second existential: the relation with other Dasein

#### 2.3.1. Solitude

In part II, I discussed Heidegger's position within the phenomenological tradition on the matter of intersubjectivity. It became clear that for Heidegger empathy is not how we normally relate to others. Others are normally not objectively present as "thing-persons" (BT, 117) or as "minds about which we have beliefs" (Dreyfus, 1991: 150). In my discussion of the existential "falling", we will come to see that for Heidegger there actually is no distinction between self and others. We rather conform to a *one-self*, a mass with whom we, according to Heidegger, tend to identify ourselves. But the relation of falling is not the *only* way we relate to others. In fact, according to Heidegger, the normal way we relate to others is that of *solicitude*. This is a way of caring-for-the-other – or the absence of it – which comes naturally to us because we are normally together with others. The absence of others is a deficient mode – comparable to the breakdown of tools – which reveals the other as somehow objectively present. Normally, however, we go along with others like we go along with tools, the other becomes *transparent* in our dealing with the other. As Heidegger writes:

Knowing oneself (...) operates primarily in accordance with the kind of being that is closest to us – being-in-the-world as being-with; and it does so in acquaintance with that which Dasein, along with others, comes across in its environmental circumspection and concerns itself with (...) Thus the other is primarily disclosed in concerned solicitude. (BT, 124)

What does that mean, disclosing the other in "concerned solicitude"? As we have seen, it is of the same structure as the way in which we disclose tools, by "using" them. But we cannot use other Dasein like we use tools. Other Dasein is disclosed in its own way and this is Solicitude. Solicitude has a negative and a positive mode. In the *negative* mode of solicitude, there is a tendency to ignore the other:

Being for-, against, and without-one-another, passing-one-another-by, not-mattering-to-one-another, are possible ways of concern/solicitude. (ibid., 118)

## Closing the Empathy Gap

The social institutions of “welfare work” are, according to Heidegger, the result of the indifference that characterizes the negative way in which we normally have solicitude for others (cf. BT, 118). It is because we normally fail to have authentic solicitude for others that institutions are needed to stand in for Dasein’s responsibility for the other. But there are also positive ways in which we can relate to others. In the most extreme version, we “take the other’s care away from him” (ibid., 118). We “leap in for him “ (ibid.) and – so to speak – take care of something the other himself needs to take care of. What we then have taken care of for the other becomes “available” (ibid.) for the other without burdens. What the other needs to do herself in order to develop her own capabilities is given to her in a *commodious* way.<sup>14</sup> This is negative insofar as it leads to domination; whenever we leap in for the other, “the other becomes dependent and dominated” (ibid., 119), even if not known to the other. In contrast with this form of solicitude, there is a form in which we do not step in for the other, but actually “help the other to become transparent to himself in his care and free for it” (ibid.). To help the other to become a Self, a being that is able to live independently from us and develop herself according to her own standards, is the more authentic way of relating to the other. We let the other be (or become) and do not reduce the other to some sort of “couch potato”.<sup>15</sup>

Between the extremes as sketched above, there are many mixed variants of having solicitude for others and each of these modes is constitutive for how we are in the world as beings that are entangled with other Dasein, even if we are not consciously aware of it. We have seen how we are related to others in the mode of “taking care”. There is however another mode of relating to others which Heidegger calls “falling”. I will discuss that mode in the following paragraph.

### 2.3.2. Falling: the positive and negative function of the They

In the first part we have seen the empathic and transcendental-ethical approaches to intersubjectivity. These approaches depart from a separation between human beings, which is in need of empathy as a “bridge” which again unites human beings. Heidegger has a different starting point. We are not separated from each other but rather united or intertwined with others:

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<sup>14</sup> This notion is taken from Albert Borgmann (Borgmann, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## The place of the Other in phenomenological contact theory

By 'others' we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too. (...) This 'with' is something of the character of Dasein; the 'too' means a sameness of being as circumspectively concerned being-in-the-world. (BT, 118)

We are part of others, we belong to a mass, the They. The They is first, it is the They who gives rise to the existence of a common world. A world that is common because it is through others that we engage in shared practices and it is with others that we share a language with which we make the world intelligible. As Heidegger writes in the *History of the Concept of Time* (Heidegger, 1985):

The They as that which forms everyday being-with-one-another (...) constitutes what we call *the public* in the strict sense of the word. It implies that the world is always already primarily given as the common world. (...) This is how philosophers imagine these things when they ask about the constitution of the intersubjective world. We say instead that the first thing that is given is the common world – the They. (HCT, 246)

The They is a positive constitution of Dasein, it is part of who we are. Positive in the sense that the They define who we are. Language is an example of this according to Heidegger, as language “expresses an average intelligibility” (BT, 212). Language conditions who we are. We are beings that “fall in to public norms” (ibid.). The condition of “falling” has a negative connotation in the sense that falling into the They gives rise to conformism and leveling. Our being as part of the They erases our individuality because we understand who we are starting from a foreign source.<sup>16</sup> But there is more to the They. It also *enables* average intelligibility. As Dreyfus writes:

In this sense, even equipment that only a single person can use, like prescription glasses and false teeth, are defined by the one [Dreyfus's translation of the they, CZ]. One uses glasses to help failing vision, etc. This use of 'one' does not mean that glasses are designed for failing vision, although that is also true. It tells us how glasses are normally or appropriately used. (Dreyfus, 152)

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<sup>16</sup> As Dreyfus shows in his interpretation of *Being and Time* (Dreyfus, 1991), in this analysis Heidegger is influenced by Kierkegaard's attack on the Public in *The Present Age* (Kierkegaard, 2010).

## Closing the Empathy Gap

But although the world becomes intelligible through others and the shared normal practices we engage in, the intelligibility handed over to us by the They conceals a “genuine” understanding. Since we are intrinsically interwoven with the mass, every form of understanding gets covered up in a *pseudo-understanding*:

Distantiality, averageness, and leveling down, as ways of beings for the ‘they’, constitute what we know as ‘publicness’ (...) By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone. (BT, 165)

We understand ourselves in our everyday attitude with a vocabulary and through modes of being that are derived from the They. In relation to others, there is a sense of immersion and absorption; we dissolve into the They and thereby lose our *individuality*:

In utilizing public transportation, in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the next. This being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of being of ‘the others’ in such a way that others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. (BT, 123)

Others define who we are, how we enjoy, have fun, read, see, and judge literature (cf. BT, 123). We have already seen that this absorption has a positive side to it, insofar as it is through it that the world appears as a meaningful whole. In a more negative interpretation, it is also because of others that Dasein “is not self, the others haven taken from him his being” (ibid., 169).

And yet, the condition of falling does not, as Heidegger explicitly states, “express any negative value judgment” (ibid., 169). We are not “utterly lost” (ibid.) in this kind of being. On the contrary, it “precisely is a distinctive kind of being in the world” (ibid.). The falling prey is not a “fall from a purer and higher primordial condition” (ibid.). According to Heidegger this condition is impossible to conceive because we have no experience of such a condition; there has never been a world in which we were not together with others and not under the influence of them.

In part II we have already seen that Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein as a social being marks his distinction from the empathic and transcendental-ethical approach to intersubjectivity. That is however not to say that empathy is altogether irrelevant for Heidegger. On the contrary, as he writes in *Being and Time*, a “special hermeneutics” is needed to uncover the ways in which it is possible to relate

*authentically* to others through empathy (cf. BT, 122). It is thus in empathy that a “solution” is to be found for the in-authenticity of our everyday relation with others:

How the various possibilities of being of Dasein themselves mislead and obstruct being-with-one-another and its self-knowledge, so that a genuine ‘understanding’ is suppressed and Dasein takes its refuge in surrogates; this positive existential condition presupposes a correct understanding of the stranger for its possibility. (ibid.,)

This authentic empathic relation however is not further worked out by Heidegger. There are however interpretations (Agosta, 2014) which attempt to relate Heidegger’s remarks on the possibility of authentic empathy back to his analysis of (authentic) Solicitude. The relation with the other in which we do not “leap in” for the other but, so to say, *help* the other to become an authentic Dasein. This is a theme I will not explore further within the scope of this research.

### 2.4. The third existential: (self) Care

I have discussed the existentials of Concern and Solicitude. These existentials define who Dasein is in its everydayness. These existentials are all part of a formal Care-structure which define Dasein in who it is. But Dasein is a special being according to Heidegger, because for Dasein his own being is an issue (cf. BT, 406). We are not in the world like stones, trees, and animals are. We need to *construct* our being. Our being is a project we need to work on. We have not yet seen how Dasein “takes care of” of its own being, as the existentials I have discussed so far define Dasein primarily in what it is not (authentically). But there is in Dasein a possibility to be a Self, to be authentic and grasp the being for which it is caring, as “mine” (*Jemeines*).

That our relations to the world are always accompanied by an “I” seems to be “indubitable” (ibid., 115), Heidegger writes. But that does not mean that the I is easily grasped. We have seen that Descartes attempts to grasp the “I” through a process of systematic doubt in which we are gradually cut loose from our relations to the world in order to arrive at what we “actually” are: a thing that thinks. In a way, Heidegger follows a similar path as he writes that an “I” can only be discovered once “everything is disregarded, everything ‘given’ – not only a ‘world’ that is, but even the being of other ‘I’s” (ibid.). As we will see, there is in Heidegger’s analysis a route that leads to this I as an “objectively-present” being. This being becomes visible in the phenomenon of anxiety (Angst):

## Closing the Empathy Gap

The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can Dasein-with of others. Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself (...) in terms of 'the world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. (ibid., 187)

Anxiety therefore functions analogous to the breaking down of tools which reveal them as "objectively present" (cf. Dreyfus, 1991: 176) beings. Anxiety makes our Self objectively present for us, as a being that has in it the potential of nothingness, of a future death which renders all our engagements in the world ultimately pointless. But Heidegger has made progress since Descartes. Our relations with the world actually do constitute us in who we are. Who we are is to be understood from what we do and whom we relate to. These relations constitute Dasein in who it is. That Heidegger qualified these relations as inauthentic does according to him not mean that they are "bad". On the contrary, they reveal what we are on an everyday basis and this level of being. And being a Self, was a level that remained hidden in the Cartesian analysis of the "I".

But Heidegger is in search of a Self that relates authentically to its own Being, and therefore he is in need of a possibility which discloses in Dasein itself, a possibility to be authentic and, for that matter, source of itself. This possibility is not to be found in the world but rather in "Dasein itself" (BT, 182). What does it mean for us to be authentic selves?

What is characteristic of the essentiality of Dasein, is that it is a "who". Who is this "who"? A "who is that what remains identical in the flux of experiences and behaviors and has a relation to this diversity" (ibid., 15). But this who in its everydayness is understood from "its absorption in 'the world' and the They (...) in which Dasein flees from itself as an authentic possibility" (ibid., 178). How then do we get an authentic grip on our Being? For Heidegger, we experience that we exist for ourselves in the experience of *anxiety*. The experience of anxiety discloses: "the factum that I am; I am namely in the sense of the naked being-in-the-world" (ibid.).

Naked here means being stripped from our relations to the world, the relations thus of Concern and Solitude. The phenomenon of anxiety renders these relations *insignificant* and – so to say – drives Dasein back to its very essence: that its *existence* essentially is a relation with itself, with its own possibilities. What we then get is Dasein as "solus ipse" (BT 182). Anxiety renders Dasein individualized and reduced to its "own" possibilities and amounts to what Heidegger refers to as an

“existential solipsism” (ibid.).<sup>17</sup> Anxiety is that mood in which relations to the world are revealed to us in their insignificance. What we have left then is nothing but indeed our “naked” being-in-the-world, confronted with its existential obligation that it *has to be*:

Thus anxiety takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the ‘world’ and the public way of being interpreted. It throws Dasein back upon that for which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Anxiety individuates Dasein to its ownmost being-in-the-world. (BT, 182).

The phenomenon of anxiety discloses to Dasein that it is essentially a *being-possible*, a being whose essentiality resides in potentialities. Is there an escape out of this circle? Is there “a moment” in our Being that our possibilities come to an end, that we become what and who we essentially are? In Heidegger’s analysis there is indeed a possible “wholeness” of our Being and this wholeness is disclosed to us in the phenomenon of death. In our relation to our own death, the being of Dasein becomes visible to us as being essentially Care. Care is:

Being towards something (...) as being towards something, it (Dasein), projects towards *what it is not yet*. (GA 20, 425 – 426, in Heeffer: 170).

It is in the mode of Anxiety that we come face to face with our future and possible not-being, the possibility of our existence being reduced to a “nullity”. Because of this, Dasein “individualizes” and comes to realize itself that its utmost possibilities are to be found in its “own”, in a being that is freed from others and taken out of the context of Concern, the context that “protects” (BT, 337) it from facing its own possibilities.

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<sup>17</sup> Heidegger explicitly distances his position from traditional (Cartesian) solipsism because Heideggerian solipsism brings Dasein back to its original condition as being for whom its *own* Being is an issue. This is something we tend to forget, as Heidegger attempts to show.



## 3 The Other in Heidegger's later phenomenology

### 3.1. The later Heidegger: the turn to posthumanism

In this section, I intend to show in what way Heidegger in his later writings transformed from a post-humanist into an anti-humanist. A form of antihumanism that can be linked to and gives rise to solipsism insofar as in both positions the other is absent, thus confining the human being to a sphere of "ownness". With ownness, I mean "not derived from the other". That is to say, not derived from a concrete other that we encounter in our everyday life. It is important to note this distinction because we will come to see that the later Heidegger's subject has in fact a relation with otherness. That is, with Being. But Being lacks concreteness and an account of a relation with it, and how that relation constitutes meaning remains lacking. Heidegger developed his form of humanism – that we soon will recognize as a post-humanism, preparing room for an antihumanism – in his *Letter Concerning Humanism* (Heidegger, 1949). The insights in this essay are, as I will show, applied in a radicalized way in his later essay, the *Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger, 1954).

Heidegger's Letter on humanism is a reaction to Sartre's essay, *L'existentialisme est un Humanisme* (Sartre, 1946).<sup>18</sup> In the Letter Heidegger addresses three questions which were presented to him by Jean Beaufret. The first question Beaufret confronts Heidegger with is how it is possible for a philosophy that rejects rationalism (like Heidegger's) to avoid irrationalism. The second question is how philosophy can preserve its adventurous character, and third, how it could be possible to give meaning again – after the second World War – to the word "humanism". It is this question that Heidegger mainly addresses throughout his Letter.

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<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Sartre seeks to show that existentialism is a humanism in the sense that it seeks to become by transcending itself. It "is" nothing in itself, as the classical humanistic positions sought to show. (Cf. Sartre, 1965: 61). It remains humanistic in the sense that its object is still the human being. What this being is and how it becomes, is however analyzed from a perspective that deviates sharply from the traditional humanistic stance.

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What is Heidegger's aim with his *Letter* and his particular own account of what humanism is? Heidegger aim is to restore the dignity of mankind. Where to find it in a world that has just witnessed a catastrophic war? For Heidegger, we need to redefine what it means to be a human being. Traditionally, the human being was defined as a "rational animal". For Heidegger that is not enough. Reason and rationality are among the causes of the wars that had just confronted the world. We need to dig deeper in order to find out what marks the dignity of the human being. We must grant, Heidegger writes, the human its *own* proper place. The human is not merely an animal in the possession of the capacity to reason. There is rather an ontological difference, an "abyss" that separates the human from the animal realm. What is that difference? Traditionally, the man of humanism was the man that could be differentiated from the animal realm because it had the capacity of speech. It could reason and that marked the difference with the animal species with whom it was compared because of their likeness (as embodied beings). This is the position that gave rise to humanism in which the human being took the center stage in the universe.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger argues that we should overcome this position. According to him, we should show that the human being could be defined on a level that grants him a proper and perhaps even better place in the universe. Humanity is not be found in the human being's rationality. Not if we use the concept "rationality" as an adjective to distinguish between human beings and (other) animals. The dignity of the human being, according to Heidegger, is to be found in his role as the "shepherd of being". The human being is not master of the universe because of his rationality. His proper place is, so to say, to give birth to Being. Being unfolds itself in mankind. What does Heidegger mean with Being and how and why does it unfold itself in human beings?

In the context of the *Letter on Humanism*, Being means something like the growth and becoming of mankind through the tradition of art, literature, poetry, philosophy, etc. In this tradition the human being is nurtured, not because it

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<sup>19</sup> That is also Sloterdijks interpretation of humanism in his reaction to Heidegger's *Letter*. In the *Rules for the Human Zoo* (Sloterdijk, 1999) radicalizes Heidegger's critique concerning traditional humanism. As Heidegger had already pointed to and technology makes even more clear, we are not just rational animals, that can be tamed, formed and shaped by such media. Our technologized world has different media, and the task of an ethics of technology could be to control, assess, and challenge these media.

is a rational animal in the sense that it is able to justify its actions by providing reasons for it. That is not the proper “function” of language. Language, Heidegger enigmatically writes, is “the dwelling of Being” (LOH, 33). The human being as a being in the possession of language is a being that can relate to its history and project itself towards the future in which Being reveals itself. That is because Being “announces” itself through language. For this it is needed that we rethink what language actually is. According to Heidegger, it is not just not a means for communication, something we use in our everyday life to communicate with others and relate to “the public”. Language does not have the function of making average intelligibility possible. This was the function of it in *Being and Time*:

What is said in *Being and Time*, sections 27 and 35, about ‘the they’ in no way means to furnish an incidental contribution to sociology. (...) rather, what is said there contains a reference, thought in terms of the question of the truth of being, to the primordial belonging of the word to being. This relation remains concealed amidst the dominance of subjectivity that presents itself as the public realm (LOH, 241).

Language connects us to others. But a more fundamental analysis uncovers that language binds us to a bigger project: the arrival of Being. It is for that reason that Heidegger argues in the Letter that we should do away with sociality and the Self as sources of our subjectivity. We should instead search for our authentic destiny in “the nearness of Being” (ibid.). In order to achieve that, the human being must learn to “recognize the seductions of the public realms as well as the impotence of the private” (ibid.). What the human being must do, is turn away from the human realm and “let himself be claimed by Being” (ibid.). Only then we can return to a “proper” humanism, a proper humanism which is achieved once the human being returns to its essence. But what is the essence of humanity?

For Marx, according to Heidegger, the humanity of man is found in society. Once the society is able to feed its hungry and clothe the naked, human being reacquires its essence. For Christianity, humanity is to be found in our relation to God; once the Christian learns to listen to the voice of God we will become children of God again. Within the Roman-Greco culture, the humanitas of man was to be found in our relation to culture and cultivation. For Heidegger the essence of mankind is to be found in its possibility to provide the space in which Being unfolds and announces itself.

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The Heideggerian human being has been granted a more humble (less humanistic) place in the universe. A place different from the one it occupied in *Being and Time*. There, we have seen, it is within our Self that we will discover what we essentially are. Being is something that is a potentiality of the human being.

In the Letter, Heidegger reverses this account. There it is not the human but Being itself which is in the process of becoming. It is the task of the human being to “help” Being to become. Why is the human being no longer the center of the universe? As Sloterdijk interprets Heidegger, this is because Heidegger sought to do away with “the anthropocentric violence” (Sloterdijk, 1999) present in the “-isms” that occupied a central place in the violence of World War II: fascism, communism, and Americanism. How to develop an ethics again in a world dominated by violence that developed out of an anthropocentric ethics? According to Heidegger, this could be done only once the human had been removed from the center of the universe and been granted a more humble place: to be the shepherd of something that is not only older but also in possession of “more future”. Being is more than the human being and once we realize that, we will come to understand what this requires of us in the realm of an ethics.

### 3.2. Heidegger’s Question Concerning Technology

We have seen how Heidegger attempted to “rescue” ethics by removing the human from the center of the universe in order to make the human subject to Being. The human subject should draw the guidelines for its actions from Being. This was needed, Heidegger maintained, because of the horrors the anthropocentric “isms” had led to. In his *Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger radicalizes these posthumanistic insights. The position of the human is no longer just “humble”, the human is removed from the center stage altogether and is replaced by Technology. Technology, according to the later Heidegger, is the dominating power, which is characteristic of the modern age of science. This is a radical breach with the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, in which the dominating power was not Technology but the They. It is a radicalization of his position in the Letter, insofar as Heidegger in the Question shows that who we are is completely patterned and dominated by Technology, which forms a “rule” that we cannot escape from by means of some aid that we can derive from a humanistic source.

Technology comes with a dominant pattern and perspective on the world. However, it appears that it is primarily *nature* that becomes dominated by the rule

of Technology. This domination has a specific form. It is through Technology that we are forced to view nature as merely a *standing-reserve*, a stock-pile of resources. The rule of Technology conceals all other possible ways of relating to nature. How does the rule of Technology come about?

We have seen that, in the early Heidegger of *Being and Time*, humans are fundamentally intertwined with technology. We use the hammer but in the processes of using the hammer both the hammer and the user become transparent: they form a unity, a bond that breaks the moment something in one of the relata “breaks down”. But this union with technology is embedded in a social context: we know that a hammer is in-order-to hammer, because we have learned to understand the hammer as such. The world of technology and sociality are co-constitutively intertwined, the technology and its normal and appropriate use get its form and shape within a social context of evolving social practices. In the later Heidegger, Technology is cut lose from its social context and viewed as a power in itself which forces us to relate to the world and others in a technology-driven and dominating way. Technology is not just an instrument in order to achieve a certain end, nor is it subordinated to the human world. According to these two extreme positions:

One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: technology is a human activity. (...) The current concept of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology. (T, 8)

This instrumental-anthropological view is “correct” (ibid.), writes Heidegger, but it is not “true” (ibid.). It is actually “partially true” (Ihde, 2001: 278). Heidegger derives this distinction from the line he has already drawn in *Being and Time*, the line between the *ontic* and the *ontological*. On an ontic level, technology might appear as an ensemble of technologies in themselves, like cars, hammers, televisions, and so on. Ontologically speaking, however, these “things” are present in what the early Heidegger referred to as a thing-contexture.<sup>20</sup> Through the ontological lens, technologies are not merely individual instances of concrete technologies, but they are “a mode of truth or a field within which things and activities might

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<sup>20</sup> Ontology is for Heidegger the study of the meaning of beings, their place within a referential and meaningful whole; not the study of beings in isolation as “objectively present” beings. The latter would be the subject matter of the research done within the natural sciences.

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appear as they do” (ibid. 279). In that sense it is not just correct but actually true if we understand Technology as:

A mode of *aletheuin* (revealing, disclosing). It (Technology) reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. (T, 16)

We have seen that tools reveal a world. It might be the world of artisans, engineers, or the world of code-book using lawyers. In the early Heideggerian analysis, every world is somehow tool-driven and disclosed through tools. But tools “in themselves” are nothing. Not only are they part of a referential whole of other tools. More important still is that they have a meaning that is socially embedded. And sociality, we have seen, actually precedes the meaning of individual tools.

How does that go for the technologies Heidegger discusses in his essay? First of all, Heidegger no longer refers to the more innocent tools of the craftsman in *Being and Time*. Heidegger discusses the powerplant in the Rhine river, an airplane on an airstrip, and the tourist-industry. He is therefore on the one hand talking about modern science driven technology and on the other hand – as has become apparent in the case of the tourist-industry – not talking about concrete technologies but about an *attitude*, which he refers to as Enframing (*das Ge-stell*).<sup>21</sup> What then, does modern-technology or more generally, a modern “world view” reveal? The world as standing-reserve, as a stockpile of commodities that can be utilized in order to complete some kind of life-project:

Enframing is the gathering together which belongs to that setting-upon which challenges man and puts him in a position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of enframing. (T, 283)

Technologies or tools have always had the characteristic of “revealing” but the danger or pervasiveness of *modern-science* driven technologies is that:

All revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve. (ibid., 308)

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<sup>21</sup> In the next chapter we will see that this attitude comes close to something Albert Borgmann refers to as “commodification”, although Borgmann problematized this attitude for different reasons – i.e. not in terms of a loss of Being but in terms of a loss in the quality of life (excellence and grace). But commodification, it seems, is a concept that accurately captures what Heidegger has in mind with his concept Enframing.

The ultimate danger is that we start to understand ourselves as being merely standing-reserves (information) and – with *Being and Time* in mind – forget our existentiality, our relationship with our *own* Being, which, as we will see shortly, ultimately becomes the relation with Being itself. This is not to say that Technology is “demonic” (T, 29). Technology rather operates in an ambiguous way but “we are delivered over to it, in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral” (ibid.). If we would do that, and lose Technology out of our control, then these dangers might indeed occur. But if we start to take Technology for what it is – i.e. as a specific filter that makes the world visible in a very specific sense – then it becomes possible to regain a free and independent relation towards Technology again. A relation Heidegger refers to as “releasement”:

We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside (...) as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher (the clearing). I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses ‘yes’ and at the same time ‘no’, by an old word, *releasement towards things*. (Heidegger, in Dreyfus, 2004: 58)

This releasement is acquired concretely when art is given a new center in our lives. Art shares with technology that it reveals being but instead of reducing being to standing-reserve, as modern technology does, art opens up new ways of “saying being”. The salvation therefore comes from what Levinas would later call “the neutre of being” and therein ultimately resides Heideggerian antihumanism, as we will come to see shortly.

### 3.3. The turn to antihumanism in Heidegger’s Question Concerning Technology

In the next part, we will see that Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology* is mostly read as an overly romantic and unwarranted critique of modern Technology. I read it differently. I read it as an essay in which Heidegger expresses an antihumanism. A position that was already prepared for in *Being and Time* but culminates in his appreciation of modern Technology. This antihumanism becomes visible in what Technology actually does according to Heidegger, and in the potential for reform.

In *the Question*, there are four ways in which Heideggerian antihumanism becomes visible. First, it is typical of Technology that it leads us to view ourselves as a stockpile, whereas it is not typical of Technology that we start to see *others* as stockpiles. Second, Heidegger’s analysis shows on the one hand that humans and

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other beings are interchangeable: for Heidegger, the reduction of the Rhine to a stockpile and the reduction of human beings to stockpiles in the concentration camps are on the same level. The human being does not have a privileged position in the world. On the other hand and third, the reduction of “nature” to a stockpile is more problematic for Heidegger than the potential reduction of other human beings to stockpiles. It is not the human being but nature that has a privileged position for Heidegger.<sup>22</sup> Fourth, humans are not granted a place within a potential reform or “counter” movement: the problem started “outside” the human realm, within Technology and a reform program therefore must also come from the outside. This outside is Heidegger’s notion Being, an abstract de-humanized Being.

To begin with the first indication of Heideggerian antihumanism: Technology affects human beings but it primarily affects individuals in their individuality. The challenge is an existential challenge, and with that Heidegger remains within his original quest for authenticity. For example, a forester “is today positioned by the lumber industry” (T, 20). Whether he knows it or not, he is in his own way a piece of inventory in “the cellulose stock” (ibid.) delivered to newspapers and magazines. These in turn set public opinion to swallow what is printed, so that a set of commodified opinions becomes available on demand. Similarly, radio and its employees belong to the standing reserve of the public sphere. Everything in the public sphere is ordered “for anyone and everyone without distinction” (ibid.). And yet:

Precisely because man is challenged more originally than are the energies of nature, i.e., into the process of ordering, he never is transformed into mere standing-reserve. Since man drives technology forward, he takes part in ordering as a way of revealing. (ibid., 18)

Human beings as individuals are *ordered for* by Technology. A Technology-driven *ordering-for* of other individuals is possible but not what worries Heidegger in particular:

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<sup>22</sup> This was also seen by Levinas in the latter’s essay *Heidegger, Gagarin and Us* (Levinas, 1973). In this essay Levinas argues that we should see nature as a resource that enables us to dwell, eat, and live. This is an attempt to demystify Heidegger’s portrayal of nature as a primordial engaging presence.

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Is the human being, more original than it is the case with nature, part of the standing-reserve? The current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a clinic gives evidence for this. (ibid.,17)

This idle talk is both true and untrue. It is possible to reduce other human beings to stockpiles but also impossible insofar as other human beings are on the active side of Technology's reductionist power. We are part of the problem. Therefore, it is not the reduction of human other beings that worries Heidegger in particular. As he writes in the *Bremen Lectures* (Heidegger, 2012):

Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs. (ibid.)

As it can be concluded from this quotation, for Heidegger there is no qualitative and moral distinction between a human being reduced to a resource and agriculture. For Heidegger, the modern farmer and the Nazi-leadership belong to a similar development. This is not an occasional side remark. It follows, I believe, from a failure on Heidegger's part to grasp what is existentially and morally special about other subjects, the Other, and otherness. As I showed in part I, the reduction of the Other to the Self – the mediation of the Other – constitutes a sui generis ethical challenge. This in the sense that this reduction deprives the Self from the exteriority that it needs in order to test, verify and challenge its private concepts of what is good. That this has escaped Heidegger constitutes the second indication that the later Heidegger has turned to an antihumanism that has pervaded his evaluation of modern Technology.

There is a third indication of this antihumanism. Not only is it that the stockpiling of other humans for Heidegger is on an equal footing with nature, there are even indications that the stockpiling of nature does in fact raise greater concerns for Heidegger. As he writes in the *Question Concerning Technology*:

That [modern Technology-driven, CZ] revealing concerns nature, above all, as the chief storehouse of the standing energy reserve. (T, 21)

This has also drawn the attention of Levinas. In an essay, *Heidegger, Gagarin and Us* (Levinas, 1973), Levinas criticizes Heidegger for his admiration and mystification of nature. Where Heidegger's relation to nature amounts to a new form of paganism,

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Levinas argues that technology indeed should demystify nature and present it at as a storehouse of resources which are there to the disposal of mankind:

Food, water and shelter, three things the human being cannot live without and which the one human being offers to the Other. That is what the earth is for. The human being is master of the earth in order to serve mankind. We need to stay master over the mysteries of the earth. (HGU, 68)

Nature is for Levinas not a mystic place but actually more like a “storehouse”, an ensemble of raw materials that, through technological intervention, become goods with which we can potentially feed the hungry and clothe the naked. It appears to me that this is a rather simplistic interpretation of our relation to nature and its resources. A position that, in the light of the man-made catastrophes we confront today, is untenable. After all we need to have some degree of respect for the earth if we wish to maintain our abilities to feed the world in the long run. But if Levinas’s position is an extreme form of humanism, the humanism-of-the-Other as he terms it, Heidegger’s position is an extreme form of antihumanism. The human being in Heidegger’s analysis is placed on a different and arguably lower footing than nature, which is Heidegger’s chief concern. This is the third indication of Heideggerian antihumanism. The fourth indication is to be found in his suggestions for a reform or a different attitude towards Technology. We need this different attitude, but we cannot acquire it by way of human activity:

Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. (T,33)

Why not? Because we ourselves belong to *das Ge-Stell*. We are on the active side as the beings that are ordered-for by Technology to enframe nature and the world around us. We are *in* the technological loop and in order to be saved, we need something from outside the loop. What then should we do, what can we hope for? What we should do is find what Heidegger refers to as a “released” relation to Technology. A relation in which we say “yes” and at the same time “no” to Technology. We should not submit ourselves completely. It remains however unclear how we are able to achieve such an attitude, as we are in the meantime subjected to Technology in the sense that, together with it, we form *das Ge-stell*.

In other words, Heidegger’s human being remains enclosed in a circle, a deadlock which she is subjected to by Technology. There is no convincing account as to how we will acquire our released attitude. Heidegger’s being lacks a gateway

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out of itself, an external point of verification that could released her. In that sense, Heidegger's antihumanism leads to a form of solipsism. This solipsism is a deadlock Heidegger is led in because from the start – beginning with *Being and Time* – he failed to grasp the significance of otherness, transcendence, and the potential location of this: the other human being. Had Heidegger from the start granted a significant position to otherness, he could have searched for a solution within that realm, for that could function as the external source, needed to escape from chains of a dominating power structure. As we will come to see in the next part, positions that are derived from Heidegger remain to a large extent within this circle.



## 4 The stages in Heidegger's appreciation of the Other and otherness

In the previous two chapters we have seen a development in Heidegger's position regarding the Other and otherness. We saw that others do have a place in Heidegger's phenomenology but not as the locus of otherness and the gateway to selfhood. On the contrary, for Heidegger, selfhood is ultimately to be found *in* the Self. But others did have a function for the early Heidegger. Meaning, it became clear, is not something that the self could only derive from itself or from the tools surrounding it. Meaning was something that was constructed socially. Would this have remained the case, and would this have become a central notion in the later Heidegger and approaches that are inspired by it, then it would have been possible to use Heidegger as a source in the closing of the empathy gap.

We saw, however, a different development. Others were gradually removed from the stage and even the Self lost its significance. With that, the potential location of otherness in the world was also lost. It could be argued that otherness re-appeared in the form of Being. This Being, however, lacks concreteness and it is difficult to see how this account could be used in an attempt to close the empathy gap. For this, we need concrete others and a concrete account of the potential location of otherness in the world.

Why is it important that this development was disclosed? The positions which I will discuss in the next part are to a large extent Heidegger-inspired. Especially the early and intermediate Heidegger function as a source of inspiration for these approaches. Paradoxically, insofar as they show themselves to be inspired by Heidegger, they have done so without accounting for the role that others still occupied in the early Heidegger.<sup>23</sup> They take from Heidegger his focus on the (authentic) self and pragmatic relation with the world and ignore the role others played. From my perspective, this is a missed opportunity because the further inclusion of the Other in their projects could have made them (more) useful in an attempt to close the empathy gap.

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<sup>23</sup> This with the exception of Borgmann's analysis. In this technology *and* sociality (Focal things and Practices, cf. Borgmann, 1984) work together to balance the rule of the Device Paradigm (cf. *ibid.*).

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Furthermore, I showed that Heidegger develops towards antihumanism. This position is congruent with *Being and Time*. This is because, although others have a (positive) role to play in the constitution of the self and its life-projects, existence ultimately revolves around the recovering of an authentic Self. The removal of others from a position in the world is therefore something that was already prepared for in Heidegger's appreciation of others and their relation to the Self. It is therefore no surprise that Heidegger-influenced philosophies had little trouble in denying others and otherness a place in their projects. In the table below I have summarized Heidegger's development regarding others and otherness. This development already points to the difficulty of using Heidegger-inspired philosophies in my attempt to close the empathy gap. This would imply an appreciation of otherness and its link to concrete humanity.

Stage	Meaning generator	Counter position
<i>Early Heidegger (Being and Time)</i>	Humanistic: -the They (others), tools (in-authentic); -Dasein/the self (authentic).	Husserl: meaning resides/ is produced in intentional consciousness Cartesianism: meaning resides/is produced in non- intentional consciousness
<i>Intermediate Heidegger (Letter on Humanism)</i>	Posthumanistic because meaning is produced by a non-human and abstract entity. This entity is Being. This meaning, however, is still in need of the human being to be made concrete and put into practice.	Positions for which meaning is produced in: -Sociality (the public realm); The self (the private realm).
<i>Later Heidegger (The Question Concerning Technology)</i>	Anti-humanistic because meaning is produced by a concrete non- human entity: Technology. The human is subjected to Technology. The solution is to be found <i>outside</i> the human realm.	Positions in which humans have a place as producers of meaning.

Table 4: Heidegger's development towards antihumanism



## Part V

# Post-Heideggerian philosophy of technology and the empathy gap

In this part I will explore various approaches within postphenomenological and post-Heideggerian philosophy of technology. The central question is: “are post-Heideggerian ethical and philosophical approaches to human-technology relations able to bridge the empathy gap”? In the closing of part III the minimal requirements for such an approach were set.

Minimally, this entails that an approach includes an account of exteriority and its value, offers an analysis of the structure of this relation, and discloses the dams and levies that might obstruct a successful relation with it. An account that is successful in closing the empathy gap offers, in other words, a relation between human and world that has the structure of a dialogue. A dialogue, we have seen, is a confrontation between beings that to some degree are *for themselves* that in the course of the confrontation construct a meaning that has some measure of objectivity; it is intersubjectively grounded. This is a criterion we can work with in order to determine to what extent the approaches that will be discussed in the course of this part are successful in closing the empathy gap.

The positions which I will discuss in this part are Heidegger-inspired. From the previous part, we learned that this implies a focus on authenticity, the Self, and its pragmatic tool-guided relation to the world. The Other and otherness do not have a significant position in this account of the human-world relation. Although the positions in this part remain to a large extent Heideggerian, they have also added components to Heidegger’s analyzes. These components are needed in the construction of empathy ethics.

In chapter 1 I will discuss Albert Borgmann’s philosophy of technology, with a specific focus on his work in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Borgmann, 1984) and his later *Real American Ethics* (Borgmann, 2006). This approach is Heideggerian because like the latter, Borgmann argues that things have a central place in the way we are in the world. But Borgmann has moved

beyond Heidegger – or arguably returned to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* – by showing that the significance of things becomes visible only in a social context. His call for a reform of technology, therefore, advocates the role of “Focal things and Practices” in his concept of the Good Life. This move is a necessary step to take if we are to account for the empathy gap. Because it moves in the direction of a dialogue-like human world relation. This becomes visible in the contrast he draws between *commodified* and *engaging practices*.

In chapter 2 I will discuss Hubert Dreyfus’s philosophy of technology. I will present Dreyfus’s position as a case-study on the subject of “online education”, discussed in the essays *the Danger of education on the Internet* (Dreyfus, 2003) and *the Internet* (Dreyfus, 2001). Like Borgmann, Dreyfus demonstrates his allegiance to Heideggerian phenomenology. For Dreyfus, like it was for Heidegger, things have a central role in our being as “world-disclosers”. But he has moved beyond Heidegger in adding the component of “embodiment” and connected the notion of “risk” to it. Again, an account which includes “risk” moves into the direction of dialogue-like human-world relation. Because risk points to a relation that is a confrontation between beings that are to some degree *for themselves*.

In chapter 3, I will discuss Technological Mediation Theory (TMT) and the attempts that have been made to construct an ethics of technology, departing from basic insights which are derived from TMT. Both positions have found inspiration in the (early) Heidegger. I discuss TMT and posthumanistic ethics of technology, because these positions have made an attempt to offer a constructive analysis of human-technology relations and an ethics in function of that. After the elements “focal things and practises” and “embodiment and risk”, an ethics of technology is the third and final building-block that can be derived from post-Heideggerian philosophy of technology and can be used in the construction of empathy ethics, because this perspective reveals the role of technology in the relation between Self and world. In order to be able to work with this account, it is necessary to include an assessment of the role of technology in connecting to exteriority. It will become clear that this is done in a rather minimal way.



# 1 Technology, reality and sociality

## 1.1. Devices and things: Borgmann's trouble with technology

Borgmann's trouble with technology is concerned with the difference between "things" and "devices". More specifically, between the level of engagement offered through interaction with either of these. This contrast is central to Borgmann's seminal work, *the Character of Technology and Contemporary life* (Borgmann, 1984). A thing, in Borgmann's approach, is:

Inseparable from its context, namely, its world, and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely engagement. The experience of a thing is always and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing's world. (Borgmann, 1984: 41)

A thing offers engagement, and thereby, as Borgmann writes, "necessarily provides more than one commodity" (ibid.). Why? A thing does not offer commodities, ready-made products that can be enjoyed instantly. A thing offers the opportunity to do labor, to make efforts in order to acquire something we desire. It is in this sense that things live up to the requirements set by Borgmann's concept of the Good Life. According to this principle, derived from Aristotle, a Good Life is good because in living it, we enjoy realized capabilities, and we enjoy them better whenever the process is realized or has been more complex (cf. Borgmann, 1984: 213). We enjoy something more whenever we have put more effort in acquiring it. That is the basic idea and Borgmann argues that things are better in affording these efforts than devices are. Things provide complex webs of engagement, and by taking up these engagements we train ourselves and live a Good Life in the course of it. A good example of a thing in Borgmann's sense of it, is the stove:

A stove used to furnish more than mere warmth [the commodity, CZ]. It was a *focus*, a place that gathered the work and leisure of a family and gave the house a center. Its coldness marked the morning, and the spreading of its warmth the beginning of the day. It assigned to the different family members tasks that defined their place in the household. (ibid., 42)

What we see here is a whole range of practices that are afforded for by things. And although these are only first indications of the kind of world provided for by a thing, the argument Borgmann seeks to put forth becomes visible: it is through

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a thing that a world of engagements, enabling the Good Life, is constituted. What a device does is different. It does according to Borgmann not engage us in a way that places the highest demands on our skills. By contrast:

A device such as a central heating plant procures mere warmth and disburdens us of all other elements. These are taken over by the machinery of the device. The machinery makes no demands on our skill, strength, or attention, and it is the less demanding the less it makes its presence felt. (ibid.)

This analysis of the difference between things and devices is distinctly Heideggerian in tone and is inspired on what could be called “the middle stage” in Heidegger’s analysis of Technology, worked out in the short essay *the Thing* (Heidegger, 1950). A thing, Heidegger argues in this essay, cannot be assessed in terms of its being “objectively present”. A thing is not present as an object that can be studied and theorized about. A thing gives entry to a *world*. Compared to *Being and Time*, Heidegger has made a move and makes things – and not the They – central in the unfolding of world. A thing, as Heidegger famously argues, “things”. A thing should, in that sense be understood from what it “gathers”, it must be understood from the kind of world it affords. What a thing gathers in Heidegger’s analysis is “the fourfold”. Heidegger’s thing organizes around it a world, in which the “members” of the fourfold become present, and visible through the thing. The members of the fourfold are the sky, the earth, the divinities, and the mortals. In *the Thing* Heidegger gives an example of how these entities are engaged and made present around a thing:

The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream, its arches ‘ready for the sky’s weather and its fickle nature,’ escorting ‘the lingering and hastening ways’ of mortals as they go about their business, but always ‘before the divinities’, and in a way that can allow us to ‘think of, and visibly give thanks for, their presence.’ (ibid., 152–153)

The world takes its shapes around a Thing. This is the starting point of Borgmann’s concept of things and where he draws a contrast with a device. Because what a device offers is a commodity, rather than the opportunity to create a world of engagements around it. As Borgmann argues, “goods that are available to us enrich our lives and, if they are made technologically available, they do so without posing burdens on us” (Borgmann, 1984: 41). When a good is made technologically available, it has been rendered present as a commodity, which is present as

something that is “instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe, and easy” (ibid.). The warmth provided by the central heating is a good example of this. The central heating provides warmth like the hearth does. But the central heating provides warmth in the form of a commodity. We just flip on the switch, and we have warmth available for us without having to attend to the source of the warmth any longer. This is the difference between what a device does, and what a thing does.

This becomes visible in the way a device operates. It is, in contrast with a thing, present in the *background* of our lifeworld. Devices, Borgmann writes, have “a tendency to become concealed or to shrink” (ibid. 42). What the device *is for* becomes the commodity it provides. It does not draw our attention to the thing itself and the mastery of the skills needed to properly handle and attend to it.

What is the challenge of commodification? This might seem counter-intuitive. How can it be that the more technology procures for us in terms of commodities, the worse it gets? One might be tempted to argue that the more goods are made available as commodities, the better it is. Moreover, as Borgmann argues, in providing commodities and making less demands on us, technology fulfills its original promise. According to this promise, we would be freed from the domination by nature, through the steady advance of science and technology. In the wording of Descartes:

This would not only be desirable in bringing about the invention of an infinity of devices to enable us to enjoy the fruits of agriculture and all the wealth of the earth without labor, but even more so in conserving health, the principle good and the basis of all other goods in this life. (Descartes, in Borgmann, 1984: 36)

In Borgmann’s analysis there is no doubt that technology has offered mankind much in terms of the commodification of otherwise difficult to procure goods and services. The Aristotelian principle offers the criterion for a further assessment which should according to Borgmann be done in a case-by-case assessment.<sup>1</sup> Such an assessment reveals, for example, that devices in the context of social relations

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<sup>1</sup> The principle according to Borgmann is: “other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity” (Borgmann, 1984: 213)

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are sometimes good and sometimes not. Some commodification, according to Borgmann, of the social relation is good. Commodification in this context is an instance of *moral* commodification. Social relations “can be burdensome” (ibid.) and a relief of this burden might sometimes be a good thing. Borgmann draws the line where “moral commodification has alleviated misery and provided for the fundamental of life” (ibid.). When commodification contributes to this, it is good, otherwise it is “ethically debilitating and objectionable” (ibid.). That also goes for the liberation from others provided by technologies. As long as technologies do not leave us “isolated, passive, and enervated” (ibid.) they are good, because they provide substance for the Good Life. So while it might be *pleasurable* to be relieved, by means of technology, from certain social burdens and be more in control of the other, this does not make it *good*, assessed from the perspective of engagement. The good relation with another is, as we will see in the next section, a relation that commences within what Borgmann calls “focal things and practices”.

### 1.2. The potential<sup>2</sup> for reform: focal things and focal practices

Borgmann’s analysis works towards a balanced perspective. In this perspective we have, amidst our device-driven culture, the places and contexts that could provide some balance to the commodification of our lifeworlds. It would also allow us to enjoy these commodities better, as they are acquired in balance with other and still engaging relations in our lifeworld. The balance should come from what he calls “focal things and practices” (cf. Borgmann, 196). These practices would center our lives and thereby balance (other) elements of our lives which live from the enjoyment of commodities.

Borgmann gives some concrete examples of these focal things and practices. Running is such a practice, compared to driving a car. What running provides is:

What I am doing now, driving, requires no effort, and little or no skill or discipline. I am a divided person; my achievement lies in the past, my enjoyment in the present. But in the runner, effort and joy are one; the split between means and ends, labor and leisure is healed. (Borgmann, 1984: 202)

Running points to a possible “wholeness” (ibid.) because in this practice mind and body work together and are engaged to the maxim of their potential. Mind and body do no longer appear as separate entities but work together in a joint effort to endure. The practice of running is not an exercise to procure health. Running is not for

something, other than a reunion between mind and spirit, body and surrounding. The perspective Borgmann opens is that there are practices which, because of the effort invested in them, bring us in contact with a larger context. These are focal practices in the sense that they engage us, both body and mind, and place us in a larger context. As we have already seen, these practices are proper to a concept of the Good Life that runs according to the principle that a life worthy of living is a life rich with engaging practices, which demand the most of us. Like running, dining is a focal practice. This because:

It gathers the scattered family around the table. And on the table it gathers the most delectable things nature has brought forth. But it also recollects and presents a tradition, the immemorial experiences of the race in identifying and cultivating edible plants, in domesticating and butchering animals; it brings into focus closer relations of national or regional customs, and more intimate traditions still of family recipes and dishes. (ibid., 204)

In this example the interplay is visible between things and practices. The practice of dining requires a well ordered table that is placed in a dining-room in such a way that it actually attracts the attention it is entitled to as the focal point of a practice. With the table, without the tool-guided preparation of the dinner, there would be no focal practice and vice versa.

Commodification might be in the best interest of mankind. A case-by-case study of technologies is therefore necessary in order to analyze the particular ways and degrees in which the technologies that occupy us in our daily lives indeed disengage. Our lives are not only structured by the rules according to which we live or ought to live, our lives are also much patterned by “the tangible setting of the rules” (ibid., 209). Focal things and practices therefore balance one another:

Practically a focal practice comes into being through resoluteness, either an explicit resolution where one vows regularly to engage in a focal activity from this day on or in more implicit resolve that is nurtured by a focal thing in favorable circumstances and matures into a settled custom. (ibid.)

Focal things and practices engage us, and the more they engage us, the better they are in providing the substance for a life that strives after happiness. This happiness is acquired through self-development and engagement. The more complex an engagement is, the more it demands from our capacities, the more we become what we are.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

### 1.3. Closing the empathy gap with Borgmann?

An ethics that is able to close the empathy gap is an ethics that offers an account of exteriority and its relevance, reveals what (technologies) might effectively block a successful relation with it, and what is needed to overcome this. At first sight, Borgmann's analysis offers little that we could work with in an attempt to close the gap. His analysis of technology and its role in the Good Life remains distinctly Heideggerian in tone. The focus is on regaining a version of authentic selfhood. Arguably, his notion of "focal things and practices" made him move beyond Heidegger. In a reform of technology and our relation to it, we should again have a proper place for sociality. In Borgmann's analysis this becomes visible in the role designated for *practices*. These are explicitly social practices. A proper relation with technology includes sociality.

In an attempt to close the empathy gap, the inclusion of sociality seems to be a necessary step. After all, the empathy gap points to the situation in which social relations do not function properly because something (a mediation) effectively causes a failure in our connection to exteriority, as established through engagement in the social relation. As we saw, the social relation offers the prototypical structure of a relation that successfully connects to exteriority.

This, however, is not the most important building block that can be gained from Borgmann's perspective. What is more important is that his account of "focal things and practices" points in the direction of a relation that has the structure of a dialogue, which is the basic structure, from the perspective of empathy ethics, that connects the Self to exteriority. How does that come about?

A relation with devices offers commodities, which are goods that can be consumed without or with less burdens and efforts for the Self. Whether or not Borgmann is accurate in his analysis of devices, what he does point to is that a relation in which the Self confronts something without *resistance* is a relation in which nothing is added to the Self. The lack of resistance that is characteristic of a commodity adds nothing new to the construction of selfhood. For that it is necessary that the Self finds itself in a dialogical relation with something that opposes it to some extent. The more resistance, the more efforts the Self needs to undertake. It is through these efforts that new experiences and new information are added to the Self.

From the perspective of empathy ethics, that is the basic structure of what Borgmann attempts to make visible. It is in that specific sense that his account can

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be seen as a forerunner of an account like empathy ethics, which places the relation between Self and exteriority at its central. In other words, what can be gained from Borgmann is that his account points to the need for the Self to be in a dialogical relation with its world, in which the world can “teach” the Self something. In a commodified world, there is no teaching because there is nothing that actually opposes the Self. Every step away from a confrontation, is a step away from learning and, for that matter, a step away from the construction of selfhood.



## 2 Technology, education and risk

### 2.1. The educational value of dis-embodiment for (self) knowledge

What is the role of the body and embodiment in an educational process? Is it important that this process takes place in a real life setting, where student and teacher are present before one another “in the flesh”? These questions are addressed by Dreyfus in his analysis of the role of technologies in education processes (cf. Dreyfus, 2001; Dreyfus, 2016).

As he concludes, it depends on what the acquisition of skills is about and what the skills are one seeks to acquire. For example, everyone would agree that it is impossible to learn driving a car by reading a textbook or even through a simulator. Driving is about responding to a real life context with real dangers where one has learned to relate oneself to small details, signs, and other drivers. The expert driver knows how to apply theoretical knowledge in this situated setting. And the more skillful he is, the less he is consciously aware of what he is doing. The expert is immersed in his surrounding, in which both he and his surrounding have become transparent (cf. Dreyfus, 2016). As Dreyfus has it: “only emotional, involved and embodied persons can become skilled” (Dreyfus, 2001: 54).

In this account, our access to the world is patterned by the body. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, we do not have a body, we *are* a body. It is through our embodied presence in the world that we are constantly trying to adapt our relation to the world in order gain an “optimal perspective” (ibid.) on the world. This optimal perspective is gained through a process of training in which we come to know how we can optimally position ourselves in space and relate to its affordances. There are however also contexts in which the body does in fact impede the educational process.

One can think of the practical side to it. If an educational setting requires embodied presence, there are limitations to who and how many people can enjoy education. This limitation, according to some, is overcome with the Internet and the distance-learning this allows for (cf. Dreyfus, 2003: 581). The internet democratizes knowledge by disconnecting it from space and the need for embodied presence on the location and *in* the situation. This idea works best if we also shift our perspective on what education actually is. If education is indeed about “practical wisdom” (Dreyfus, 2001: 52) and the knowledge of how to cope with

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one's real environment, any form of internet-afforded education can be seen as a lesser form of education. But if education is about information-processing, there is no reason to limit education to a real life and situated setting.

This account of education implies knowing how to apply the right method in order to structure and digest all this information and become learned in the process. As Dreyfus quotes Lewis J. Perelman – a (then) influential writer on the educational implications of the emergent internet:

With knowledge doubling every year or so, “expertise” now has a shelf life measured in days; everyone must be both learner and teacher; and the sheer challenge of learning can be managed only through a globe-girdling network that links all minds and all knowledge. (Perelman, quoted in Dreyfus, 2003: 578)

According to this concept, knowledge is in reach of everyone who is trained in applying the proper method for the processing of information. Knowledge is not acquired in a way that is restricted to an embodied context. It requires the application of an abstract procedure and this could be learned independent from any real-life setting.

There is yet another way in which embodiment can be seen as an impediment in an educational process. Embodiment can be associated with stability and substantiality. That we *are* a body can in that sense be seen as a limitation, an impediment that we should overcome. Modern technologies, such as the internet, could be of help in the process of liberating us from our embodied constitution. This was already sensed by Heidegger, as Dreyfus reads him (Cf. Dreyfus, 2003).

As we saw, Heidegger argued that Technology is a mode of Enframing. Through this mode, every being becomes a resource, a *standing-reserve*. As Dreyfus interprets this, it is through Technology that we become some kind of *information*. Something that lacks the stability and fixed identity of an embodied object, but is rather something that can be molded easily into every direction desired for. As information, things are not “in themselves” as substances, but are rather resources that are *for something* else. Technology thus appears to be a *post-modern* power. As Dreyfus writes:

Thanks to Nietzsche, Heidegger could sense that, when everything becomes standing reserve or resources, people and things will no longer be understood as having essences or identities or, for people, the goal of satisfying arbitrary desires. (Dreyfus, 2003: 215).

This effect of technology has become most apparent in online technology, more specifically in the internet, which according to Dreyfus is the primary source of flux and fluidity in our times. Why is that? Because of the amount of information, and the pace in which it changes and develops itself. Moreover, the internet is not limited to time and space, thus offering endless opportunity's to discover new and different sources of knowledge and inspiration. As Dreyfus writes:

What is being stored and accessed [online, CZ] is no longer a fixed body of objects with fixed identities and contents. Moreover, the user seeking the information is not a subject who desires a more complete and reliable model of the world, but a protean being ready to be opened up to ever new horizons. (ibid.)

Once we are relieved from our embodied identity, it will become possible to enter the world with newly discovered identities with which we can identify ourselves completely. This is the educational value of dis-embodiment technologies. This was also seen by Sherry Turkle in her book, *Life on the Screen* (Turkle, 1995).

According to Turkle we advance (self) knowledge online because we are no longer limited to our embodied constitution and corresponding limitations. On the internet we are free from this and enabled to explore what we are beyond our biological constitution. As Turkle writes, life online is like an "identity workshop (...)" where we can cycle through many selves" (cf. Turkle, 1995: 178-179). We can leave our body and our fixed identity behind. The difference between the online flux and the offline fixation is experienced by Turkle's interviewees. As they relate their experiences:

I didn't exactly lie to him about anything specific, but I feel very different online. I am a lot more outgoing, less inhibited. I would say I feel more like myself. But that's a contradiction. I feel more like I wish I was. I am just hoping that face-to-face I can find a way to spend some time being the online me. (ibid.)

Online we gain freedom and release from an identity that we have not acquired by choice but which is there due to our embodied, socio-historic being in the world. Technologies could release us from the weight of this identity. That is what we gain, or, as another one of Turkle's interviewees relates his experience as a member of an online gaming community:

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You can be whoever you want to be. You can completely redefine yourself if you want. You can be the opposite sex. You can be more talkative you can be less talkative. Whatever. You can just be whoever you want, really, whoever you have the capacity to be. (...) They (other participants in the game) don't look at your body and make assumptions. They don't hear your accent and make assumptions. All they see is your words. (ibid., 184)

If identity is something modern, the state of flux experienced online is post-modern. Technologies could in that sense be seen as technologies of the post-modern Self. A Self that does not understand itself as a substantiality, a being that is determined by its embodiment and historical context. Online, one's identity is in a state of *becoming*.

Becoming, however, implies that one is somebody and ready to adapt to new situations and information. The becoming of somebody implies that a state of flux is conditioned by engagements that require a real life setting. That is the case because in this setting there is an element of risk present. This will be shown in the next section.

### 2.2. The missing element: the risk of responsibility

The test for an educational process, as Dreyfus understands it, is whether it is successful in integrating an element of risk. Risk is needed for one to start to learn in a process of anticipating to and learning from failures. This is best facilitated in a context where outcomes are directly confronted and actually matter because there is something at stake. The context thus where one needs to take responsibility or can be held accountable for one's actions and decisions. Dreyfus basically argues that this is the way in which one advances most optimally on a learning curve. The more an environment disengages one from the consequences of actions and choices, the less it will add to a process of education.

For this argument, Dreyfus finds inspiration in Kierkegaard's essay *the Present Age* (Kierkegaard, 2010). In this essay, Kierkegaard's criticism is directed at the role of the Press in his age. As Kierkegaard understands it, the Press had a role to play in the lack of commitment and the rise in curiosity and reflection he found present in his time. According to him, this was the case because with the Press and its massive distribution of context-independent information, the distinction between the important and trivial would be leveled out. Normally this distinction can be made on the basis of a direct relation with the context in which the information

arises. One can tell from one's own experience whether something is relevant or not. When information is cut loose from its context, and starts to float freely, this connection is no longer present. It is in that sense that the Press would give rise to the Public, the anonymous mass of mere spectators, consumers of information who have no responsibility for the information produced, and also do not have the responsibility to act upon the information.

This responsibility is absent because of the medium. This installs a distance between the producer of information, the recipient and the information itself which leads to a diminished responsibility. This in turn is detrimental to a learning process, taken as a process in which one acts in accordance with responsibilities.

According to the Kierkegaard, there are three possible ways of existence, which connect to the stance one has towards information. The first way of being is what Kierkegaard calls the *aesthetic* sphere. In this sphere, one takes in information out of curiosity but does nothing more than merely enjoying the act of doing that. Information, surfing on the internet for example, has become an end in itself. The aesthetic kind of person, according to Kierkegaard, is a person who fails to commit himself. His engagements are conditional, they can be revoked at any time. He is post-modern in that sense (cf. Dreyfus, 2003: 580). His engagements, motivated out of enjoyment, are pleasurable precisely because there are no risks involved. The aesthetic person is attracted to this pleasure because it gives him comfort and little risk. Insofar as one can be a mere spectator in the Press or on the Internet, media actively support this risk-free aesthetic level of existence. One produces information without responsibilities and one takes it in without responsibilities. That is why a mere aesthetic process has little educational value.

The second way of being is called *ethical*. In the ethical sphere, one has a stable identity and commits oneself to some involved action. It is an action that cannot be easily abandoned. Ethical existence is full commitment. The aesthetic lacks "seriousness" (Kierkegaard, 1989: 100), whereas the ethical person is dedicated. Connected to information, the ethical-user does not merely use or process information. He or she is actively involved in an embodied, engaging context. For example, in the context of education, one does not only know about procedures but is also involved in the actual outcomes of these procedures (cf. Dreyfus, 2003: 580). One knows how to apply rules, learns from their effects and adjusts their procedure if necessary. The ethical is about commitment and engagement. The challenge, however, is that *we* are the authors of our actions. As Kierkegaard has

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it “the good is for the fact that I will it” (Kierkegaard, 524). If we can will whatever we want, there is an endless proliferation of choices. We can revoke what we have done before and choose whatever we want to do next, because *we* have initiated an action in the first place. For that reason, ethical involvements have limited extra educational value. For the most optimal condition, a third leap needs to be made.

The third and final way of being is the *religious* sphere. In this sphere, actions are not the result of a will or choice, but are the result of something that completely overtakes us. Religious engagements are unconditional because they are not the result of our choices. In that sense, whenever they are felt, they cannot be revoked and for that reason, they stop the proliferation of choices. They take our whole being and lead one to commit oneself unreservedly to some cause or action. The risk is that these engagements might fail. The cause might be so important, after all, or our lover might abandon us. And yet, as Kierkegaard argues, if we are to avoid nihilism and despair and be serious about self-development, we should go for religious-like engagements. If this is the optimal way of being, the way in which we confront the most risks, how successful are online environments in providing and affording this?

The test for the internet is to what extent it is able to simulate “risk”. As Dreyfus argues, the internet – and here we can add social media technologies – do well in simulation but they ultimately fail because the embodied context of the interaction is not there. Embodiment – the “real” – is the most optimal condition for risk. Why is that the case? For example, in ancient (political) conversation, “the individual was personally present and had to submit at once to applause or disapproval for his discussion” (Kierkegaard, 2010: 33). In an embodied, real-life setting, there is the risk attached to confrontation with the impact of one’s position. Direct confrontation is experienced as a risk: one is held responsible and accountable for one’s words. In an embodied educational setting, this process is present in a likewise manner.

In the context of education the risk is an interactional risk: both teacher and student can be asked questions that they don’t know how to respond to. This introduces the possibility of failure and stimulates the willingness to learn and study in order to manage or avoid the interactional risk. Does this necessarily require a physical and real presence? According to Dreyfus this is the case, because it is through this presence that there is an immediate demand to react, pay attention to the reaction, and adjust one’s response to the effects that are immediately

noticed. There is also the interactional risk with fellow students, a risk that is uniquely experienced in the tangible setting of the classroom where students teach each other “how to learn” (ibid.). Linked to any context and place is also a specific “mood”, which has its value in coloring our experience of a given situation. If these are indications of a specific value of education in a tangible setting, education through the internet needs to substitute the values of “interactive, personalized and live education” (ibid. 66).

For Dreyfus online education fails to live up to this objective. It appears that, in online settings, it is impossible to adopt the “optimal perspective” (cf. (Merleau-Ponty, in Dreyfus, 2001: 63) so crucial in embodied, tangible conditions. So it appears difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher to adapt to his audience in online settings. In real life, the teacher can adapt to his audience, based on the reactions he receives, indicating the approval, disapproval, understanding, etc.

Since technologies, insofar as they can liberate us from specific burdens, can have important educational values, it is needed to have a balanced perspective. Because, although Dreyfus is critical of Turkle, they also share the view that technology’s liberating potential is only actualized against a stable background of (embodied) practices.

They [virtual spaces, CZ] are spaces for learning about the lived meaning of a cultural simulation. Will it be a separate world where people get lost in the surfaces or we will learn to see how the real and the virtual can be made permeable, each having the potential for enriching and expanding the other. (ibid., 268)

In an ideal world, the technologies that liberate us – from physical misery, fixed identities, etc. – are balanced by practices that remain rooted in an embodied, real and physical context.

### 2.3. Closing the empathy gap with Dreyfus?

We have seen that, in the context of an education process, we will benefit from technology once we find some balancing practice. Liberation can be acted upon in a positive way, once there is a background of rooted practices. That is the central point that was made in the course of this chapter. This position is congruent with the position we encountered in the previous chapter, in which this background was made concrete with reference to “focal things and practices”. In the course of this chapter, we saw that these stabilizing practices need to include an element of

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“risk”. This in turn requires an embodied, situated context because in this context there is direct confrontation with the outcomes of one’s action. The effects of risk are directly experienced and this adds to any educational process. First, because the presence of risk requires *dedication*. Second, because it is through the interaction with a risk in place that we advance on a learning curve. Risks could be seen as invitations to fine-tune responses to one’s environment. This is made visible in the notion *skillful coping*.

What Dreyfus seems to offer us, as a stepping stone towards the closure of the empathy gap, is mainly the following. Again we see that Dreyfus’s analysis points in the direction of a relation that has the structure of a dialogue. This is made visible in the notion “risk”. It is through interactions with risks that we advance on a learning curve. This can be reconceptualized as a dialogical structure. It is through risks that the Self is placed in a dialogical relation with what it is not, and which can only be taken after effort and the willingness to cope with the risk in place. Thus with Dreyfus’s analysis we can make a stronger case for dialogue-like relations with the world.

### 3 Technology, mediation and ethics

#### 3.1. Postphenomenology and Technological Mediation Theory (TMT)

I have referred to postphenomenology at several occasions. In this section I will discuss what it is. Methodologically, postphenomenology, seeks to blend “empirical and philosophical work” (Verbeek & Rosenberger, 2015:10). Empirically, it starts with an assessment of concrete technologies and seeks to apply a philosophical analysis to these concrete technologies. Philosophically, it seeks to understand “the various ways in which technologies help to shape relations between human beings and world” (ibid.). It is “post” a *classical* phenomenological assessment of technology (cf. Achterhuis, 2001).

The classical position, linked to the later Heidegger, assesses the “historical and transcendental conditions that made modern technology possible” (ibid.3). That means it does not pay attention to the actual changes that are caused by concrete technologies. For example, Don Ihde criticizes Heidegger’s lack of systematic assessment of concrete technologies in different contexts (cf. Ihde, 1993). Instead of analyzing what new dimensions of reality are opened up by new technologies, Heidegger takes Technology to be some force *in itself*, that in fact has nothing to do with concrete technologies. What has been called the “empirical turn” in the philosophy of technology fills in this blank (Achterhuis, 2001:6). It does not take technology to be a monolithic power in itself, rather it turns to an assessment of concrete instances of technologies and the impact these instances have on aspects of society. In that sense, positions that come after the empirical turn aspire for a constructive analysis of technology that would *guide* it rather than *denounce* it.

Postphenomenology, as one philosophy of technology that has made the empirical turn, has moved beyond the later Heidegger but returned to elements of the early Heidegger, in the sense that it follows Heidegger’s analysis of the role of things is in the disclosing of world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ihde’s analysis is also Heideggerian in his claim that science is embedded and owes its progress to technology. Praxis thus is first and theory is second. To simplify it with a claim made by Ihde: “new instrumentation gives new perceptions” (Ihde, 56). I will not elaborate on this Heideggerian aspect of Ihde’s philosophy of technology.

## Closing the Empathy Gap

A source of inspiration for Ihde's analysis is Heidegger's classic example of the "hammer". As Ihde writes, it is "in the hammer that potentially lies a fruitful entry into a philosophy of technology" (Ihde, 1993: 34). The basic notion is that it is through our engagement with tools that we disclose a world. A world that is not revealed theoretically for a consciousness as it was for Husserl, but rather *pragmatically* through our everyday preoccupation in the world. First comes praxis, and based on this praxis theories can take shape. As Heidegger, quoted by Ihde, writes:

Our concerned absorption in whatever work-world lies closest to us, has the function of discovering; and it is essential to this function that depending upon the way in which we are absorbed, those entities within-the-world which are brought along in the work and with it (...) remain discoverable in varying degrees of explicitness and with a varying circumspective penetration. (Heidegger, in Ihde, 1990: 34)

Heidegger's hammer is the classic example of an intentionality Heidegger referred to as in-order-to. That is how we know things normally and through our handling of these things, a world comes to be disclosed. It is in that sense that our being-in-the-world is guided by what Ihde calls "instrumental intentionality". With this notion Ihde means that our relation to the world is a relation that is patterned in a way proper to the technology via which we relate to the world. As we have already seen, there is much in Heidegger's *Being and Time* which justifies a reading which highlights the role played by "tools" in the disclosing of world. But there is an ambiguity here.<sup>3</sup> Compare the following quotations from *Being and Time*:

Dasein initially finds 'itself' in what it does, needs, expects, has charge of, in the things at hand which it initially *takes care of* in the surrounding world. (BT, 116)

This "taking care of" the world is patterned for by the technologies via which we so to say enter the world. And others are also encountered "at work", as beings that have created a world around them through their tool-use. But how do we know

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<sup>3</sup> Ihde indeed mentions that "there is no thing-in-itself" (Ihde, 69). A thing is only something within a referential whole, a use-context in which it is decided what a thing is for. There is however no reference to the contextual embedding of technology, when he discussed the four relations of technological mediation he discerns.

how to use tools? As Heidegger argues – and this pleads in favor of “instrumental intentionality” :

The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more we take hold of it and use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as a useful thing. (BT, 69)

What the thing *is for* would, according to this quotation, be a characteristic that is present *in* the thing or, more correctly perhaps, in the “referential whole” the thing is part of. Where does this purpose derive its meaning from? How do we know what the thing *is for* in an appropriate way?

As we have already seen, according to Dreyfus, we grasp the most appropriate way of using the hammer, as a thing- for-hammering, through a normality handed over to us by others. That would be the positive function of the They as that what constitutes the referential whole, we refer to as “normality”. The kind of normality according to which “in the West *one* (Dreyfus’s translation of *das Man*, the They CZ) eats with a knife and fork; in the Far East *one* eats with chopsticks” (Dreyfus, 1991: 152). If we schematize this position the addition of sociality to technology could be translated as follows:

I < > (technology – sociality) > world

We will see that Ihde does not add sociality in his analysis of human-technology-world relations. Whether or not Ihde is still Heideggerian in this representation of Heidegger’s analysis of the role of tools played in human-world relations is not what is particularly worrying. Relevant in the scope of this investigation is what happens when the social embedding of technologies is no longer taken to be relevant

First of all, when sociality is not included, it becomes difficult to evaluate *how* technologies mediate human-world relations. How technologies do so is largely decided in the use-context of the technology.

Second and, within the scope of my thesis, more relevant, excluding sociality from human-technology relations deprives us of an external measure which allows us to evaluate human-technology relations. In that sense, TMT remains mediationalist in its Cartesian fashion. This can be shown through the way in which the concept of “intentionality” is understood in postphenomenology (cf. Verbeek, 2005: 108 – 110).

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In part I and II, we saw that once we continue with “intentionality”, we end up with a world that is reduced to a world as it appears *for us*. As we saw in part IV, this was not what Husserlian phenomenology was ultimately after. A world *for us* does not point to a relation but merely to a reduction: we remain caught up in the self-loop. The phenomenological project, after all, was designed to be a “rigorous science” which could indeed place the subject *in the world* rather than in a world *for us*. For that reason, the (later) Husserl came to develop his theory of empathy and intersubjectivity (cf. Zahavi, 2003: 109). In this project the Other becomes the “being in itself” which because of that is able to ground the phenomenological project which would otherwise remain a mere solipsism (cf. *ibid.*). The relation between subject and world, which has overcome the danger of solipsism, translates as “subjectivity-intersubjectivity-world” (*ibid.*, 76).

The postphenomenological representation of human-technology-world relations, remains *solipstic*, measured from the Husserl-inspired phenomenological perspective which I pursued in the course of this investigation. This is problematic insofar as it is necessary for a post-humanist ethics of technology that some external measure is present that allows us to evaluate and assess technology. This calls for an additional account of human-technology-world relations that points to the need for dialogue-like relations between Self and world. Only then is there a successful escape from solipsism.

### 3.2. Postphenomenology and mediation theory

Within postphenomenology, five possible human technology relations are discovered. All of these relations follow the structure according to which it is *through* a technology that the world and our presence in it becomes constituted. Technologies are therefore construed as *mediators* between us and world. As postphenomenology grants, there might be other mediators between us and the world, but the predominant one is technology.

The first four relations between humans, technology, and world are derived from Ihde’s *Technology and the Lifeworld* (Ihde, 1990). The four relations all depart from the basic assumption that the world is always somehow through a technology present for us. The typical structure of this account is as follows:

Human – Technology – World

Departing from this structure, the first relation Ihde identifies is that of *embodiment*. We already encountered this relation in Heidegger's hammer as the typical example of how a an embodied tool leads to the disclosing of world. The embodiment relation has the following structure:

$$(I\text{-Technology}) > \text{World}$$

The classic example of this relation of embodiment is the pair of glasses (cf. Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). When we wear glasses, it is through the glasses that the world is present for us. As Ihde writes "my glasses become part of the way I ordinarily experience my surroundings; they withdraw and are barely noticed, if at all" (Ihde, 1990: 73). The world is not something that is experienced directly but always through the glasses. The typical effect of this is that technical mediation has the structure of *amplification* and *reduction*. Through a telescope we can see the moon in greater detail, but the telescope also removes the moon from its context, thereby reducing some parts of our perception of the moon.

The second human-technology-world relation is the *hermeneutical* relation. In this relation we also encounter the world through a technology, but this encounter has a specific hermeneutic or *interpretative* structure. This relation can be represented as follows:

$$I > (\text{Technology} - \text{World})$$

The classic example of such a relation is the thermometer. It is through the thermometer that we read what temperature it is. Again it is through technology that we have access to a specific interpretation of the world. In this case that interpretation is measured in terms of degrees and – depending on the kind of technology – made visible in numbers.

The third relation is the *alterity* relation. That is the relation with technology in which the technology has become a "quasi other". As Ihde writes, the term "alterity" is taken from Levinas's philosophy (cf. Ihde, 99). Examples are ATMs, or even more significantly, Weizenbaum's ELIZA. Schematically, this relation reads as follows:

$$I > \text{Technology} - (- \text{World})$$

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This account of alterity seems to point to a difference in degree of otherness. There is the strong form of alterity present in human beings, and weaker forms in other beings such as animals and technologies. Non-human beings are quasi-other in the sense that we might experience toys from our childhood as having a life of their own (cf. Ihde, 1991: 100). The degree in which a being has this life and is for that reason able to offer a degree of *resistance* is what determines its degree of otherness. The category “resistance” will be used in part VI as an element of empathy ethics and thus as one of the building-blocks that can be derived from postphenomenology.

The fourth relation is the *background* relation. Ihde has not clarified this relation schematically. But the examples he gives make clear what this relation is:

In the mundane context of the home, lighting, heating, and cooling systems, and the plethora of semiautomatic appliances are good examples. (Ihde, 1990: 108)

These technologies are present in the background of our lives and condition life. By conditioning and sustaining our life in the background, they actively give shape to the way we experience world and our presence in it.

Recent research and inventions have called for the addition of a class of other relations that can be called “cyborg relations” (Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015: 20)

(I/Technology) > world

Technologies that move from extension to *fusion* and from a background relation to being *ambient* and an *environment* (ibid.) belong in this category.

The exposition above intends to show what the project of TMT is. It seeks to expand the phenomenological notion of intentionality beyond its Husserlian form. This is done through an analysis that reveals in what way technologies, like intentionality, connect subject and object, human and world. It is in that sense that technologies have the structure of the intentional human-world relation, as was uncovered in Husserlian phenomenology. As I already pointed out, it is precisely at this point that the position I hold in this investigation could add to the work done in the context of TMT, by pointing out how technological mediation indeed becomes a mediationalism insofar as it remains closely connected to a phenomenology of

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intentionality. The empirical consequences of this position are made visible in the empathy gap.



## 4 Postphenomenology, mediation theory and ethics

### 4.1. From mediation-theory to an ethics of technology

We have seen that mediation theory has shown that technologies structure or “mediate” our relation to world and that from this insight, case-by-case empirical-philosophical research is needed to show what technology does with us and the way the world is present for us. This is a *descriptive* analysis. In his book, *Moralizing technology: understanding and designing the morality of things* (Verbeek, 2011), Verbeek argues that the time is ripe to augment this descriptive analyzes with a more normative assessment of our relation with things. This is a specific application of the insights that are drawn from mediation-theory, which already points in the direction of a more hybrid account of the human. As Verbeek notes: “virtually all human perceptions and actions are mediated by technological devices, ranging from eyeglasses and television sets to cellphones” (Verbeek, 2011: 15). Devices like this “mediate moral decisions and shape moral subjects” (ibid.).

In order to clarify this point, it is helpful to discuss Verbeek’s example of the “obstetric ultrasound” (cf. Verbeek, 2011: 23-27). This example demonstrates in what way technologies mediate morality and why that, according to Verbeek, necessitates a new (posthumanistic) approach to ethics. The technology of obstetric ultrasound makes the unborn child in the womb of the mother visible. The ultrasound scans, at least in the Netherlands, are offered two times during pregnancy. The first time is at 12 weeks and is aimed at measuring the age of the fetus, but also on calculating the risk that the unborn child suffers from the Down syndrome. The scan offers options to measure this risk. At the twentieth week, a second scan is offered which enables for a more detailed examination of possible defects in the unborn child. This information could be used in determining whether or not to have an abortion.<sup>4</sup> Abortion is allowed up until the twentieth week of pregnancy. How does this technology of obstetric ultrasound constitute a relation between the couple and the child and in what sense is this relation an ethical relation?

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<sup>4</sup> It has been established that the test effectively leads to an increase in abortions (cf. TNO, *Preventie en Zorg*, 2009).

## Closing the Empathy Gap

To begin with, the technology used to “measure” the unborn child does it in such a manner that the child appears almost the same size of a real infant. By doing that, the technology detaches the unborn child from its mother and as Sandelowski, quoted by Verbeek, puts it “depicts the fetus as if it were floating free in space” (Verbeek, 2011: 24). The technology thereby removes the fetus from its environment and transforms it into a person, which is a transition afforded by the technology in place.

Second, the technology shows us the fetus as a patient, not neutrally, but as a person with “abnormalities” (ibid., 25). In the second test, it is not only possible to detect Down syndrome, but the probability of other defects is also determined. The technology therefore “transform[s] pregnancy into a medical condition that needs to be monitored and that requires professional health care” (ibid.). A new field of choices originates in what the technology makes visible, choices that would not have been there without the technology of obstetric ultrasound. The technology installs new norms, new normalities: not taking the test counts as irresponsible behavior.

Third, the technology installs a different relation between mother and child. Before the technology, the mother had a sort of privileged and special access to the child. Through the technology, the child is put out in the open and becomes as much of a subject of medical care as it is the child of the mother or couple. Fathers, previously perhaps reduced to the role of mere spectators, are now actively involved in the process of having a child and the choices that need to be made in order to make that happen. What is most important, however, as Verbeek argues, is that the relation between the parents and the fetus has changed dramatically. As Verbeek notes, the technology might encourage abortion because of the probability that some defect is present which might cause a health condition later in life. On the other hand it might discourage abortion because the unborn child has almost literally received “a face”. The point by now is clear. The technology of obstetric ultrasound “radically changes the experience of being pregnant” (ibid., 27) and it does so in a way that could be called ethical: the technology patterns choices, expands the field of choices, brings us closer or perhaps even further away from “the other” present in the womb.

## 4.2. From humanistic ethics towards a posthumanistic ethics of technology

### 4.2.1. Humanistic ethics

An ethics which seeks to include technology attempts to overcome humanistic ethics. Within a humanistic ethics, the human subject is made central and independent from its material surrounding and biological constitution. An exemplary example of humanistic ethics is Kantian ethics, and that is why I will discuss Kant's account of ethics. In Kantian ethics, materiality and biology are not ignored or overseen, but morality is placed in a different and higher faculty of the human being: its reason.

The philosophical challenge that Kant needs to tackle, however, is how freedom is possible in a world that is governed by the Newtonian laws of causality. And yet this freedom exists as the condition in which morality becomes possible. People recognize it and have, as Kant argues, "awe and respect" (Kant, in Ulemann, 2010:91) for people that abide to the laws of freedom. That is, to the laws that we *ourselves* have chosen to guide ourselves. Freedom is not easy, as Kant would say. It is "the strangest thing" (ibid.,1). It is strange to think of an entity that exists in the world like other beings and that is in the meantime not subjected to the laws of nature like other beings. A being that acts upon self-given laws, issues our moral respect. As Kant writes:

The majesty of the law (like the law on Sinai) instills awe (not dread, which repels; and also not fascination, which invites familiarity); and this awe rouses the respect of the subject towards his master, except that in this case, since the master lies in us, it rouses a *feeling of the sublimity* of our own vocation that enraptures us more than any beauty. (ibid., 91)

Why do we have moral respect for beings that follow laws that they discover in their selves – i.e. autonomous beings? To begin with, Kant needs freedom in order to determine who is to blame for his actions, and who is not. Freedom and responsibility are connected. Obviously, we can only blame someone for an action he or she has committed freely and willingly. As Kant argues, the state of nature is neither good nor bad. It is the order of *causality* and whatever happens in nature, happens as a product of causality. This is neutral from an ethical perspective. The state of nature is brought about by other causes than the will of a rational being (ibid., 95). A free and autonomous being, by contrast, is in fact a source of itself and for that reason issues "awe and respect". There are many (eight to be precise,

## Closing the Empathy Gap

cf. Uleman, 150) reasons why it is better to be a cause of ourselves, rather than to be subjected to some alien cause.

Let me note two reasons why to be free is good according to Kant, which seem to me to stand in the starkest contrast with what a posthumanistic ethics of technology attempts to achieve.

First there is “the elevation above nature”. As Kant writes:

[acting upon a free will, CZ] can be nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world), what connects him with an order of things that only the understanding can think and that at the same time has under it the whole sensible world and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time. (ibid., 150)

What becomes clear from this quotation is that Kant does not so much ignore reality, but only argues that it is morally preferable to elevate ourselves above it. That seems to me to be a much different line of reasoning than a one in which it Kant had seemingly “forgotten” that we are in the world. Kant has not, but he argues that we have “a duty to raise our self from the crude state of nature” (ibid.). With “nature” Kant is talking about reality insofar as it is subject to the blind (amoral) laws of nature. With “nature”, Kant does not explicitly refer to technology, but that does not change the structure of the Kantian argument. What Kant intends to do is formulate an ethics that will hold independent of *context* and situations.

Kant formulates an imperative, an ought, a “how it should be” state of affairs.

Another reason why Kant argues that freedom is good, is the argument from “power and agency” (ibid., 151). This argument makes clear again that Kant is not ignoring reality. As Kant writes:

The pure moral motive must be brought to bear on the soul ... because it teaches the human being to feel his own dignity – gives his mind power, unexpected even by himself, to tear himself away from all sensible attachments so far as they want to rule over him and to find a rich compensation for the sacrifice he makes in the independence of his rational nature and the greatness of soul to which he sees that he is called. (ibid.)

Now what Kant seeks to achieve is much clearer. Kant is not ignoring something, he seeks to show that ethics exists on a different level, it does not conform to the laws and regulations of what could be called “the natural”. Kant reasons from what

he believes to be a central value that morality should strive after, “the dignity of a rational being, who obeys no law other than what which he himself at the same time gives” (ibid., 140). For Kant the ultimate aim of morality is the promotion of the wellbeing of the community of rational beings, of those beings that are “an end in themselves”. Morality therefore strives for the promotion of human dignity in ourselves – the dignity that we acquire by acting upon laws that we have chosen freely and rationally – and others that we recognize as doing the same.

We should elevate ourselves from nature, we should do so by adopting principles upon which we act, and we should pick the principles upon we act freely and rationally. That is what Kantian autonomy in its most basic sense is. But how could we be free in a world that runs according to the laws of nature? To “will” something, in Kant’s sense, is to have the freedom to determine ourselves by way of laws and corresponding action principles (maxims). But how can we will that? A detailed reconstruction of Kant’s practical reason, because that’s where the answer lies, stretches well beyond the scope of this subparagraph. We just need a few remarks to make clear what the concept of freedom is that post-humanism opposes.

Freedom, for Kant, is a so called “transcendental idea”. According to Ulemann, this is an idea “reason is pressed to posit, and it is justified in positing, because rational reflection and argumentation show it to be a necessary condition of something else that is given and undeniable” (ibid., 65). Kant argues therefore that we need to postulate the existence of freedom because reasons and argumentation show that it is the condition for “responsibility or imputation” (ibid., 66). Kant is radical in this postulate, as he shows with an example of a man who is threatened with immediate execution unless he gives some false testimony. Kant writes that the man and anyone putting himself in the man’s place “must admit without hesitation that he *could* choose to tell the truth” (ibid., 67). This is Kant’s account of *negative* freedom: we are free insofar as we are not under the coercion of external influences. In a way, we are always free in this sense, or at least this freedom needs to be postulated. In the second sense, we must do something with our freedom. That is, we must act upon freely chosen laws that we adopt as our own guiding principles. This ability is the Kantian notion of autonomy, in which we can find Kant’s notion of *positive* freedom.

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Freedom, in Kant's account of it, does not exist. That is, it does exist, as nature does, as things "that exist under laws" (ibid.,79). Freedom needs to be postulated as the source and, as we have seen, the ultimate end of moral action.

A posthumanistic ethics does not so much argue that freedom does not exist. It argues in favor of what could be called a more realistic perspective. According to this perspective, freedom is not a precondition for ethics, but rather something we acquire throughout our interactions with the world. In the next paragraph I will discuss this perspective.

### 4.2.2. (Foucauldian) posthumanistic ethics

A discussion of posthumanistic ethics can be done drawing on Heidegger, through a reading of his *Letter on Humanism* (Heidegger, 1954) and subsequent discussions and radical applications of this post-humanism in for example Sloterdijk's *Rules for the Human Zoo* (Sloterdijk, 1999). Although not necessarily entirely different in terms of foundations, it suits the overall scope of this paragraph best if I discuss Foucauldian posthumanism, because the account of posthumanistic ethics of technology, which I will discuss in the next paragraph, is to a large extent based on Foucault.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is an examination of the way in which the human subject is disciplined or *produced* by the structures and institutions that surround it. Foucault discusses the cases of schools, the military, the clinic, and also "the Panopticon". The panopticon is particularly interesting because it is one of the rare occasions in Foucault's work that (hard) technology is mentioned and discussed explicitly. What Foucault's analysis shows is that some naivety is present in Enlightenment. On the level of ideas, the Enlightenment proclaimed human beings to be free, but it failed to account for their "operativity": the human being as it is, entangled in its everyday life in the power structures that surround it. Our embodiment is relevant, as Foucault writes:

(...) out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready all the times, turning silently into the automatisms of habit. (Foucault, 1975:135)

The institutions that surround us – hospitals, schools, the military – are monitoring and surveilling the subject, thereby "governing" and "fashioning" it into some

particular form of subjectivity. This forming of the individual is according to Foucault something that we neither need nor can walk away from. We cannot walk away from these powers because they are there and they have always been there. We need not walk away from them because power, for Foucault, is not something negative that can be assessed in (negative) terms such as “exclusion”, “repression”, “masking”, etc. (ibid., 194). On the contrary, power is something constructive and productive: “(...) power produces. (...) The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (ibid.).

The archetypical and architectural “incarnation” of these power structures is Bentham’s panopticon. As Foucault writes:

It [the panopticon, CZ] is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. (ibid., 592)

According to Foucault, the panopticon is the prototype for the power relation that exists on an “operative” level, where power over people is exerted via the *material* organization of our lifeworld together with procedures. The panopticon is an efficient instrument of control. It reduces those executing power while increasing the number of those on whom the power is exercised. This material organization of power has moral implications:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (ibid.)

The sentence “he becomes the principle of his own subjection” is a central one. It shows that power relations can function such that “the power relation is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint (...) but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency” (ibid.). Power relations that might seem external are internalized by the individual that finds himself caught up in the surrounding power relations.

From his inquiries Foucault draws the conclusion that our moral subjectivity is not to be understood independently from our interactions with the world. Moral

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subjectivity is actually “fabricated” by a “whole technique of bodies and forces” (ibid. 596), the bodies and forces of which the Panopticon is the emblematic structure. At this point it is important to note that Foucault introduces a notion of moral subjectivity that runs counter to the modern and Kantian concept of it.

That is a major step away from Kant’s transcendental approach to human moral subjectivity and a major step towards an ethics that accounts for the role of technology in the shaping of our moral subjectivity. This is a theme that Foucault works out in his later works, of which I will shortly discuss the relevant themes in the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1984). This work is among the later works of Foucault in which he had made a “turn to the subject”. As he writes about this turn:

It appears that I now had to undertake a third shift, in order to analyze what is termed ‘the subject’. It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject. (Foucault, 1992: 6)

This turn is relevant because, as we have seen, Foucault’s earlier work could well be seen as a vehement critique on modern concepts of ethics like those of Kant, which depart from the free and autonomous subject, about which Foucault has written:

While jurists or philosophers were seeking in the past a primal model for the construction or reconstruction of the social body, the soldiers and with them the technicians of discipline were elaborating procedures for the individual and collective coercion of bodies. (Foucault, 1975: 169)

Foucault has shown that the embodied subject is as much under influence of materiality and procedures as it is under influence by ideas. These structures *produce* the subject. How is it possible to construct an ethics based on this insight? For that we need to return to classical ethics, which is not concerned with the law and our ability to abide by the law, but rather an ethics that is concerned with “the arts of existence” (Foucault, 1984: 10). That is to say, an ethics which focuses not so much on moral codes but on moral practices through which we put moral codes into practice (ibid., 29). The ancient focus on the individual’s practical knowledge as means towards the “governing and fashioning” of oneself is an ethics that Foucault deemed to be compatible with early insights on moral subjectivation. As he writes:

All moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply ‘self-awareness’ but self-formation as an ‘ethical subject. (ibid., 28)

Moral subjectivity therefore is not something that we *possess* but something that needs to be acquired. We acquire it through the skillful interaction with our (material) environment. Here we can already see why this form of ethics becomes relevant for an ethics of technology that seeks to account for the influence of technologies on our autonomy (cf. Dorrestijn, 2012).

Our efforts to become moral subjects, that is to relate successfully and excellently to our environment, are called by Foucault “technologies of the self” (cf. Foucault, 1984). These technologies are the practical instruments by which we shape ourselves in order to become some kind of subject. Examples of these technologies in ancient ethics, as discussed by Foucault, are: meditation, diet, and consultation with a mentor. With the notion of “ethical technologies”, Foucault turns back to classical ethics, in which morality was not the result of an abstract process of reasoning through we could abide to laws. Rather, ethics as our ability to abide to moral codes required effort and practice.

The process of moral subjectivation according to Foucault involves four levels (cf. Foucault, 1984). The first one is what Foucault calls “the ethical substance” (ibid.). This is the part of the moral subject that needs to be shaped through moral practices. This could be our *will* as it is the case for Christian moral practices; it could be the control of *desires* and every part of us that needs to be shaped morally.

The second is “the mode of subjectivation”. Moral practices could be directed to the way in which we abide to moral codes. The focus here is on *how* we are subjected; on what makes us abide to some moral code. This could be, for example, divine commandment or the authority of the bible.

The third aspect of moral subjectivation is “ethical elaboration”. This aspect focuses on the “moral technologies” we apply in becoming a moral subject. We can adopt different technologies as possible aids in becoming a moral subject. We can, for example, learn moral codes by heart, or we can adopt ascetic principles and simply quit some behavior we have found to be morally wrong.

Finally, a moral practice could be conducted because of what we can achieve by it. It is possible to act morally because we believe that we achieve something, like eternal life in the case of Christians. The final aspect of the subjectivation scheme therefore is “the telos” of a moral practice.

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Our practices aimed at becoming a moral subject are all guided by the question what moral subject we want to become. Why do we need this categorization? As Foucault writes:

Self-formation as an 'ethical subject' (is) a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice (ethical substance), defines his position relative to the precept he will follow (mode of subjectivation), and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal (telos). And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself (ethical elaboration). (Foucault, 1992: 28)

The scheme offered by Foucault could be seen as a description of the various aspects that are part of any process of moral subjectivation. I will now discuss in what way Foucault's insights are used within the philosophy of technology.

### 4.2.3. Posthumanistic ethics of technology

We have seen the example of obstetric ultrasound and the theoretical frameworks of humanistic and posthumanistic ethics. I will now outline the theoretical framework of a posthumanistic ethics of technology (cf. Verbeek, 2011; Dorrestijn, 2012). A posthumanistic ethics of technology accounts for the way in which technologies (help to) give shape to our morality. Morality in its traditional humanistic (Kantian, cf. Uleman, 2010) fashion was the activity of the autonomous subject. Foucault has however paved the way for an understanding of the moral subject as a relational entity that gets its shape through interaction with its tangible environment – i.e. not in ignorance or denial of that environment. I will focus on the way in which a posthumanistic ethics of technology makes this insight fruitful for an ethics of technology. In my discussion of obstetric ultrasound technology, I have already shown in what way technologies themselves are morally charged in the sense that they can be seen as mediators of morality. I will now focus on the way in which the moral subject is shaped throughout its relation with technology.

An ethics which seeks to make Foucault relevant for the ethics of technology seeks to apply Foucault's fourfold to our relation with technology. This fourfold, we have seen, is Foucault's analysis of the way in which a subject is constituted throughout its relation with surrounding power relations.

The first is the *ethical substance*. The ethical substance in our technologized world is according to Verbeek our technologically mediated subjectivity. An ethics of self-care should therefore focus on the way in which we can develop “an engaged relation to technological mediations” (Verbeek, 2011:83). This is a relation with technology in which the relation becomes a conscious activity in which we “actively contribute” (ibid.) to the way in which we are shaped by technology.

The second is the *mode of subjectivation*. This is the way in which technology shapes us. In our technologized culture, it takes many forms. There are technologies – such as speed-bumps – which seek to actively *influence* our moral behavior. The effect of other technologies is much more concealed. An example of the latter is obstetric ultrasound technology. The way in which technologies influences our moral subjectivity comes in different degrees. Technologies might *force* us to behave in a certain morally desirable way, or they can *persuade* us, or *seduce* us in the way commercials are designed to seduce us into buying goods.

Thirdly, *self-practices* in our relation with technology consist of different ways in which we consciously let technologies mediate our morality. These practices can be described as “techniques of using technology” (ibid.,84). We can use technologies in a deliberate way in order to let technology shape us in a way we deem desirable. But the design of technologies also counts as a self-practice. A deliberate design of an artifact helps us to become the moral subjects we want to become.

The final stage in Foucault’s analysis of moral subjectivation is the teleological question: what subjects do we want to become? For Foucault the answer to this was to become a “free subject”. The object of morality is freedom. This is a question that we need to ask ourselves, starting from our interwoven relation with technology. According to Verbeek, for this answer we can still make use of the “old” ethical theories such as deontology and consequentialism. It is also possible to use freedom as the telos of our relation with technology.

For Foucault, morality is about achieving a state of being that “can be described as complete self-enjoyment or complete sovereignty over oneself” (Foucault, 1984:33). When morality does not presuppose an autonomous moral subject, but is actually something that can be achieved in the conscious interaction with the power-relations which surround us, an ethical framework is found that is compatible with the inescapable (technologically) mediated mode of being in the world. This because technology is like a powerstructure. The question remains, however, what

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kind of moral subject (cf. Verbeek, 2011) we want to become and what version of the Good Life we want to live, as this is a matter on which technologies themselves stay silent.

According to the ethics of technology I have outlined in this sub-paragraph, the question of the Good Life is a question that should accompany us throughout our interaction with technology (cf. Verbeek, 2011: 164). We should not deliver ourselves over to technologies mediating influence. On the contrary, we should ask ourselves in any mediated situation “what a good way of living with such technology could be” (ibid., 157).

Is it possible and desirable that we ask this question from a situation *outside* our relation with technologies? Unlike TMT, the position of this investigation (i.e. the position of empathy ethics ) maintains that this is possible. Not every relation with the world is a technologically mediated relation and not every relation *should* be one. Insofar as the empathy gap points to the way in which technologies reduce what is other to the Self, it is clear that not every relation with the world should be one that is technologically mediated. It should be one that allows us to expand beyond the Self and connect to exterior being. A relation which affords this relation optimally is one that could lead the Self outside itself in order to acquire an external perspective that makes it possible to evaluate the relations it has with the world. The structure of the relation that successfully connects to exteriority will be further discussed in the final part.

### 4.2.4. Levinasian posthumanistic ethics

An ethics that seeks to expand beyond humanism needs to connect the Self with what it is not. Would that not be the case, it would remain within the boundaries of a humanism. In the previous paragraph we encountered a posthumanistic position which, paradoxically, returns to the Self in order to escape from the Self of humanism, for example those of Kant and Descartes. In this paragraph an alternative position will be discussed which breaks with humanism in order to connect with the Other. Thus with something the Self is not and cannot become. Because this position has this structure it offers itself as a more convincing alternative to humanism. In order to show this, I will discuss Levinas’s essay bundle, the *Humanism of the Other*, (Levinas, 1972; 2006, HO) in which he positions himself with regards to the traditions of humanistic and posthumanistic

ethics. This is relevant because it shows that although humanistic ethics is in need of reform, it is not necessary to accomplish this reform by doing away with humanism altogether. Rather, in doing away with traditional humanism, we should start to reveal structures and ways in which the Self is brought into a connection with exteriority. The aim is therefore to uncover relations that have the structure of a dialogue. Only once that has been achieved can there be a relation that expands beyond traditional humanism.

Levinas's ethics starts off with a deep mistrust for any ethics that puts human subject at its center. That is to say, his philosophy is directed against humanism. Humanism according to Levinas is:

In a wide sense, humanism signified the recognition of an invariable essence named 'Man', the affirmation of this central place in the economy of the Real and of his value which engendered all values. This created respect for the person, both in itself and in the Other, which made it necessary to safeguard his freedom; a blossoming of human nature, of intelligence in Science, creativity in Art, and pleasure in daily life. (DF, 277)

Humanism thus is an approach which puts the subject at its center and takes it to be its moral obligation to safeguard this subject against any external intrusions on the one hand, and to promote its flourishing on the other hand.<sup>5</sup> We have seen that Kantian ethics is such an approach because it is an ethics that, as Levinas understands it, places the "dignity of man" (HO, 5) in the free subject. Levinas mistrusts this subject as a possible and sound foundation for an ethics in a post-war era. On the contrary, it is precisely this account of the moral subject that has led us into wars:

The unburied dead of wars and death camps accredit the idea of a death with no future, making tragicomic the care for one's self and illusory the pretensions of the *rational animal* to a privileged place in the cosmos, capable of dominating and integrating the totality of being in a consciousness of self. (HO,45)

If morality is something that can be identified with man's capacities to do and choose what is right, the question becomes, as Levinas already wrote in TI,

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<sup>5</sup> In order to contribute to the flourishing of man, we use the medium of books (*belles-lettres* Levinas calls them). Note the semblance with Sloterdijk's portrayal of humanism.

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“whether we are not duped by morality” (TI, 7). Is morality, the potential of the good in being, still possible in a world that has seen and still experiences war? Not in its traditional fashion. The crisis of humanism, Levinas writes in his essay *Antihumanism and education* (Levinas, 1976; 1990), begins with the “inhuman events of recent history” (DF, 282). These events are, according to Levinas:

The 1914 War, the Russian revolution refuting itself into Stalinism, fascism, Hitlerism, the 1939- 1945 War, atomic bombings, genocide and uninterrupted war. On another level, a science that wants to embrace the world and threatens it with disintegration – a science that calculates the real without always thinking it, as if it were created on its own in the human brain, without man, who is reduced purely and simply to the fields in which the operations of numbers unfold. (DF, 281)

Is there room for a humanism in this world? Yes, would be Levinas’s response, but we have to search for a new foundation. We should search for an ethics that somehow locates the starting point of ethics *outside* the subject because an ethics that places the the human subject at its center has, according to Levinas, in it “the seeds of war” (TI:22). Why is that the case? Why is there a risk of war in an ethics and philosophy that makes the subject its center? That is because, according to Levinas, a human subject that takes itself to be a “free” subject is a *joyeuse force qui va*.<sup>6</sup> Unhindered by the Other, by a being “according to itself”, the subject will seek to persist in his being no matter what the costs are. A being that has the aim of persistence in its being – the *Darwinist* subject – is an *a-moral* being, a being that has not encountered the Other as the external force *par excellence* that comes to “hinder” the subject in the free exercise of its will and power. For Levinas, the Other is the one who elevates the human above its natural Darwinistic condition. Humanistic ethics, as the ethics that places the free subject at its center, is because of that an unsolid foundation for an ethics.

But what about a posthumanistic ethics, which – as we have seen – brings the human (moral) subject within a relation to external (material) power relations? Is

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<sup>6</sup> In his essay-bundle *Difficult Freedom* (Levinas, 1976/1997) Levinas writes: “the Face of the Other puts into question the happy spontaneity of the self, this *joyous force which moves*” (DF, 293). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes: “to approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a ‘moving force’, this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder” (TI, 303).

that a good alternative for Levinas? The answer is no. Why not? Because Levinas is – despite the failures of humanism – still in search of the highest dignity of man, which according to him is found in our uniqueness that is experienced in the face of the Other. The Other is the unique one. As Levinas understands it, posthumanistic accounts of the human being fail to grasp this unicity as either of them subjects the unique human being to an alien force.

In one of his attacks on posthumanism – here referred to as *structuralism* – Levinas writes “contemporary thought (structuralism, CZ) thus moves in a world of being without human traces” (GCM, 7).<sup>7</sup> Why is that the case and what is the alternative? Because a structuralist or posthumanistic anthropology subjects the human being to an anonymity. This anonymity becomes – we have seen that – in Heidegger’s version of posthumanism the arrival of Being. The arrival thus of the culture of language and art which contains in it the guidelines – the ethics – for human moral action. The human being, the individual, is subjected to this and is granted by Heidegger the place of being its sheppard. The human being in its uniqueness has been lost here according to Levinas. Why? Because the human being in its uniqueness has been subordinated to an external power relation. For Levinas, however, the challenge of a post-war ethics is to *rethink* the dignity of mankind, not to abandon it. As he writes:

So there is no need to deny humanism as long as we recognize it there where it receives its least deceiving mode, never in the zones of the interiority of power and law, order, culture, heroic magnificence. (HO,67)

Where then should we find it, according to Levinas? For him we find it in the Goodness that the one man is willing to hand over to the Other. This is a humanism insofar as it is “the defence of man” (HO, 68). More correctly, it is a “defence of the man other than me” (ibid., 69). Insofar as his ethics is this defense, it is a humanism. It is this defense, that according to Levinas, presides over “what in our day is called the critique of humanism” (ibid.). Levinas’s humanism is a humanistic ethics insofar as it places the human at its center. But it differs from

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<sup>7</sup> Levinas here refers to structuralism as conceived by Ferdinand de Saussure. In his approach, de Saussure made the individual speech-act (*la parole*) subject to the systematic structure of language (*la langue*). Meaning is not produced by the individual but rather by the structure or the system. In part I we already came across Levinas’s language-theory as refutation of the structural approach. Meaning does not reside in the system but is rather *produced* in the face-to-face conversation.

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traditional humanism in the sense that it places “the Other” at its center, and not the Self. It is in this sense that Levinas’s ethics can be categorized as a “humanism of the Other”.

### 4.2.5. Closing the empathy gap with TMT and posthumanistic ethics?

We encountered a perspective which sought to show that technologies connect the Self to its world as *mediators*. Technologies connect subject and world like intentionality does. Technologies therefore have the structure of intentionality. Is this an account that could help us close the empathy gap? In order to close the gap, an ethics needs to be developed that offers an account of exteriority, its value and what is required of a structure that is successful in connecting to it.

Insofar as TMT remains attached to a phenomenology of intentionality and the kind of world we get through an intentional relation, it will be difficult to proceed with it on the path of an attempt to close the empathy gap. Intentionality and technological intentionality connect to a world that is experienced as a world *for us*. There is no account of otherness present in this analysis and neither is it revealed in what sense otherness could be needed in order to expand beyond the world as it appears *for us*. The technologically mediated relation does not have the structure of a dialogue. Rather, it has the structure of a monologue.

For a dialogue, it is necessary that there is a being outside the Self a being that is, like the Self, a *for itself*. It is only with a being that has this structure that there can be a relation that allows the Self to escape from itself. TMT, as a Heidegger-inspired phenomenology, is precisely in denial of this being *for itself*. It maintains that there exists only a mediated being *for us*. This is the fundamental blind spot and that is why a closure of the empathy gap cannot be completed without an additional approach, which will be further worked out in this part.

However, there are some important building blocks that can be drawn from TMT and the way in which it has made visible that technology has a moral side to it.

First, it reveals how technologies could cause an empathy gap. The relation with exteriority is something that is transformed through technological mediations. Connected to this insight, it becomes clear that technology is in need of an ethics. Technologies matter, morally speaking, and this insight is uncovered by TMT.

Second, TMT like empathy ethics aspires to connect the Self with world. It therefore aspires towards a dialogue-like relation, although it has not made the necessary leap to do so, which is accounting for exteriority and what is, could be,

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and what successful connection with it would consist of. Third, we can draw from TMT a criterion that measures otherness *in* technologies, namely a degree of resistance. A being that has resistance shows a degree of otherness.

## Part VI

### Closing the empathy gap

In this part I will answer the following question: “what is empathy ethics and how can it overcome the empathy gap”? Previously in this thesis, the diagnosis was presented. It became visible that an empathy gap occurs whenever successful contact with exteriority fails to be made. It was shown that this is the result of mediationalism. Mediationalism, as I understand it, comes down to a reduction of exteriority to the Self. According to the extreme version of this position, there is no exteriority. There is only Self (*solus ipse*). I showed, in contrast with common positions, that phenomenology and its concept of intentionality belongs to the same position because it is through intentionality that “the world” becomes *our* world. For intentional consciousness, there is only world *for us*. This scheme reappears in the notion of technological intentionality. According to this notion, it is through a technology that the world is transformed into something *for us*. That this is not a mere play with words was made visible with the phenomenon of the empathy gap. It was shown that some technologies, in social relations, in fact reduce what is Other to the Self. This leads to the condition that was referred to as a technologically mediated solipsism.

I will propose a way out of solipsism through an ethics that places a successful connection with exteriority at its center. Since this exteriority is situated *in* the social relation, it will primarily be an ethics *for* this relation. For that reason it is called empathy ethics. This part is divided in six chapters.

In chapter 1, the problem that needs to be addressed is restated. It will become clear that an ethics that seeks to close the empathy gap needs to be successful in linking the Self with exteriority. Chapter 2 prepares room for empathy ethics. This is done in two steps.

First, I will discuss what building blocks could be derived from a post-Heideggerian philosophy of technology. Second, I will show in what way they fall short of addressing the matter of exteriority.

What this exteriority actually “is” will be the theme for discussion in chapter 3. In this chapter a notion of exteriority is presented that builds on preparatory work that has been done in part II and part IV. Furthermore, it will be discussed what its foundations are and to what extent these are necessarily humanistic.

Chapter 4 will discuss why the Self is in need of exteriority. Again, this builds on the exposition put forth in part II and part IV. What could be called the “functions” of exteriority will be explained. It appears that these functions have an existential, epistemological, and ethical side to them.

Chapter 5 will gather the elements of an ethics that is successful in connecting the Self with exteriority. These elements could be called empathic, insofar as their purpose is to bring the Self into a relation with what is primarily exterior to it.

Chapter 6 will work out what empathy ethics is. As will be made clear, this account is a starting point. It offers some insights into the orientation of empathy ethics and the practices it could consist of.



# 1 Restating the problem: (technological) mediation, technologies and contact with exteriority

In a recent book, David J. Gunkel analyses what he calls the “machine question” (Gunkel, 2017). The question is a variant on a long standing debate regarding the scope of the moral community. Is it limited to human beings? Should animals also be included and what criteria should determine the outcome of these questions? The moral status of animals is dubbed the “animal question” (Regan, 1999: xi). Currently there is a widespread agreement that animals should be included in the moral community (Gunkel, 2017:4). Gunkel expands the debate towards “machines”, like ‘computers, robots, AI’s” (cf. Gunkel, 2017: 210). Like there was an “animal question”, nowadays we have the “machine question”. Should machines be included in the moral community? Why should we do that and how should we do that? These are elements of the “machine question”.

Levinas’s perspective allows Gunkel to think about the machine-other in a different way (cf. Gunkel, 175). What does “thinking otherwise” (ibid.) mean and why is it needed? According to Gunkel, it is typical of moral philosophy to make exclusive decisions about “who is and who is not a legitimate moral agent and/or patient” (ibid.,159). The challenge that any position that makes an attempt to settle this question faces is twofold. When something or somebody is *excluded* from the moral community, the focus is on “difference” with regards to members of the moral community, instead of similarities.

When something or somebody is *included* in the moral community, the focus is on “likeness” with members of the existing moral community (ibid., 162). Both cases lead to forms of injustice, either with regards to the existing members (they are reduced to sameness) or with regard to the new members (they are viewed as different, as other).

In order to escape from this, we need to “think otherwise” (ibid., 163). The rules of the ethical game need to be changed. According to Gunkel, Levinas’s ethics offers a

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method to think otherwise about ethics and the matter of inclusion and exclusion. This because it reorients the foundations of ethics, it changes its categories and through that allows for the “thinking otherwise” which an answer to “the machine question” needs.

First, Levinas’s ethics changes the position we need to occupy before the Other. The Other, as Levinas understands it, is not some epistemological problem that needs to be settled. Rather, the Other becomes the *condition* for ethics. Second, Levinasian ethics expands beyond a traditional perspective, according to which the moral community is divided into a class of patients and a class of agents. For Levinas the Self is not an “agent”. It becomes something through “an uncontrolled and incomprehensible exposure to the Face of the Other” (ibid., 177). Before the arrival of the Other the Self is not already something. It *becomes* in the face of the Other. The Other is also not just a patient, a recipient of actions initiated by the agent. The Other is active. It “confronts, calls upon, and interrupts self-involvement” (ibid.).

Third, according to Gunkel, Levinas changes the moral game by showing that the Other is not just another person. That is not the reason that we have moral obligations towards the Other. It is because the Other is different (cf. Gunkel, 178). Levinasian philosophy, therefore, does not make prior commitments or decisions about who or what will be considered a legitimate moral subject. For Levinas, it seems, anything that faces the I and calls it *ipseity* into question would be Other and would constitute the site of ethics (cf. Gunkel, 179).

Gunkel’s perspective is relevant for this investigation. It applies a Levinas-inspired conception of otherness and ethics, although it differs from the line of reasoning that has been pursued in the course of this investigation. This difference allows me to rephrase this line of reasoning.

The central thesis in this investigation has been to investigate technologies as mediators. Not as beings that are *in themselves* and, for that reason, could have a degree of otherness. The latter perspective could be relevant, for example in order to assess whether technologies themselves could have a role in the closing of the empathy gap. The primary aim of this investigation, however, has been to analyze the role of technologies in bringing about an empathy gap, because technologies have a role in mediating social relations.

Empathy, as we saw, is the “intentionality” that leads the Self into what she is not, the Other. Empathy is what connects the Self to exteriority. For that reason, it has been assessed to what extent technologies could connect the subject to exteriority and what the difficulties are that we face in the course of it.

First, it has been shown that the empathy gap is the situation in which the subject *fails to make contact with something – a state of affairs – he/she is not*. The empathy gap in that sense is the condition that in philosophical terms can be referred to as a solipsism. Solipsism, as has been argued in part I, is the condition one is led in through mediation. Mediation and its links to solipsism have an empirical as well as philosophical-theoretical side to it. First the empirical element. It has been shown that there are technological mediations which, although connecting us to the world, effectively affirm selfhood in the specific sense of *sameness* (cf. Ricoeur, 1992). That is a form of selfhood which lacks openness to what it is not (yet) but rather reduces otherness to what it (already) is. In part I and part III, I provided some empirical evidence in support of this position. What I showed is that some technologies function as *screens* which disconnect us from the Other *as* otherness because the confrontational character of the encounter with her is levelled out. Furthermore, it was shown that some technologies might function as *filters* which reduce “the world” to a world that increasingly conforms to our already existing standards and preferences. What could be called “the world” increasingly becomes “my world”. Personalized Google search results are an example of this. Finally, I pointed to *informationalization* as leading to a measure of control on the side of the subject, because information fails to have a “commanding presence”. Information is, to paraphrase Dreyfus, something that can be molded easily in any desired direction. The degree of resistance offered by information is weaker, compared to a being that has reference to itself only and for that reason has “commanding presence”.

These effects of technology and their potentially challenging results can only be sensed by an approach which has an account of exteriority and its specific value in the first place. This is the theoretical side to what I referred to as the “the challenge of mediation”. Because what I showed is that any philosophy of technology that has found its primary inspiration in Heideggerian philosophy fails to have this account. In this philosophy, the focus is primarily on “authenticity”, selfhood, and ultimately self-care. Otherness and its particular value remain unaccounted for. This is particularly visible in TMT, which has, in addition to the troubles any

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Heidegger-inspired philosophy confronts, the problematic concept of “technological intentionality”.

As I showed in part I and part V, this concept is problematic insofar as it fuses Husserlian intentionality with what technology does as mediator between Self and world. This is troubling because the exposition of the phenomenon of empathy revealed that intentionality should not be seen as a solution to Cartesian subject-object dualism. Rather, intentionality as understood by Husserl designates a new field of exploration, namely the ways in which contact with something outside the Self (the world) can be established. Intentionality, as denoting the interwoven character of subject and world, designates the starting point of new field of exploration. It is not the end to a longstanding struggle to settle Cartesian-style dualistic positions. Why not?

As I made visible, mediation or mediationalism is the position according to which knowledge is the inner depiction of outer reality (cf. Dreyfus & Taylor, 10). Husserlian phenomenology, in which the concept of “intentionality” has a central position, belongs to the same strand of philosophy. That is to say, intentionality and intentional consciousness remain a representationalism in its Cartesian fashion. As Ricoeur, commenting on Levinas, has it:

[Levinas] is concerned to the extent that phenomenology and its major theme of intentionality belong to a philosophy of *representation* (...) to represent something to oneself is to assimilate it to oneself, to include it in oneself, and hence deny its otherness. (Ricoeur, 1992: 332)

Any approach which reduces otherness to sameness is in that sense mediationalist. I have shown that this goes for TMT. For example, it denies the existence of “things in themselves” (Verbeek, 2005: 113). There are for TMT, following Heidegger’s account of how things are, there are only beings *for us*. When this is the starting point of the analysis, it is clear in what sense TMT is indeed a mediationalism. What is the problem with mediationalism or – as it could be called - *technological mediationalism*?

As I discussed in part II, exteriority has a “function” in ethics, epistemology, and existentiality. When there is only Self – the mediationalist position – there enters a kind of dualism that is associated with Cartesianism. Following Dreyfus and Taylor in their critique of mediationalism (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015), there are two lines of arguments that can be brought against such dualism. The first is that Cartesianism is monological. Knowledge, according to this position, is always

*individual* knowledge, the individual remains the isolated center in which external input is processed into knowledge. The second line of critique is what has occupied them the most and which has led them into (Heideggerian) phenomenology as a solution to mediationalism, namely that the world is not mere neutrality.

Any theory that seeks to overcome mediation makes an attempt to establish “genuine” contact with the world. It seeks to step away from the boundaries of the Self in order to connect the Self to an external reality. An attempt to establish this relation could be called a contact theory. According to Dreyfus and Taylor, in such a contact theory:

The contact (...) is not achieved on the level of Ideas, but is rather something primordial, something we never escape. It is the contact of living, active beings, whose life form involves acting in and on a world which also acts on them. (ibid, 18)

The question then arises when *successful* contact is made. What are the conditions for successful contact? In order to overcome mediationalism and humanism, it is necessary that we make contact with a reality *outside* the subject. Why is that needed? Because mediationalist and humanistic accounts of the human-world relation render the world a product of a disengaged Self that projects meanings on the world. This position is ultimately untenable for it has no account of the epistemological and ethical significance of *experience*. Furthermore, it remains to a *monological* account of the human-world relation. There is in this account no “being in itself” that can put itself in a dialogical position with the Self in order to “call it into question”. A monological position, therefore, to use a phrase from Levinas, is *dogmatic* (cf. TI, 43).

In order to successfully escape from mediationalism, we need to bring the Self in a relation with what is exterior to it. An account, like Heidegger’s, which revolves around a notion of experience, does not bring the Self in a relation with exteriority. Because what is disclosed in experience is disclosed in relation to the Self. There is in this account only being *for us*. A successful escape from mediationalism has an account in which there is and remains being *for itself*. It is has been the thesis of this research that the Other is the prototype of a being that is *for itself*. And the relation with the Other is the prototype of a relation that allows to escape from mediationalism. It is a relation that gives way to a dialogical process of meaning-construction. And only a relation that functions *like* a dialogue is able to bring the Self in relation with exteriority.



## 2 Preparing for empathy ethics

The previous chapter offered an exposition of the empathy gap and the role of technological mediation in bringing about this gap. In this chapter I will discuss the building blocks we have and that are needed to close the empathy gap. These building blocks are derived from my exposition of post-Heideggerian philosophy of technology in the previous part. Furthermore, I will discuss what we still lack and in what way we can proceed with Levinasian ethics in order to fill in the missing links and construct an empathy ethics. This is an ethics which closes the empathy gap and in function of that, puts the relation between subject and exteriority at its center.

In the previous part we encountered three elements which are required of an ethics that is able to close the empathy gap. As I will show, either of these elements also implies that decisive steps beyond Heidegger are made.

In Borgmann's account we saw a strong case in favor of "things" as foci around which Borgmann's specific interpretation of the Good Life gets its shape. His reform program, contra the device-paradigm, provides what he calls "focal things and practices". It is through these foci that we can provide balance to a life that, according to him, would otherwise be characterized by mere triviality. As we saw, these practices offer engagement. That is, they point to a more dialogical relation between the Self and its environment. Commodities, as we saw from Borgmann's perspective, offer less engagement, are more easily grasped, and require a weaker degree of effort in handling them. They lack the kind of resistance that is central to dialogue-like relations with the world. This points to what empathy ethics attempts to make visible, namely that a relation that connects the Self with exteriority is a relation that has the structure of a dialogue. In this relation, the Self relates to something that offers a degree of resistance. The social relation offers the prototypical structure of such a relation.

Insofar as it can be made visible that Borgmann's reform program points in the direction of dialogue-like relations, it is an account which paves the way for empathy ethics. In Dreyfus's account we encountered another building block which again points in the direction of the need for a dialogue-like relation between Self and world. A relation thus that connects to exteriority. As we could draw

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from my exposition in part III, embodiment and the empathy gap have a close connection. Reality, to use a much debated concept, provides the prototypical structure for empathy-generating experiences. The more an experience is detached from “reality”, the less optimal its role will be in the construction of empathy, and vice versa. I provided examples of video-games and empathy-apps to further substantiate this position. Closely connected to reality, as Dreyfus has shown, is the notion of “risk”. Degrees of reality can be assessed by degrees of risk that are afforded for. The more real an environment is, the more risks it provides. A relation with risks has the structure of a dialogue. This is important, as Dreyfus has shown, in an educational process. We learn from coping with situations that actually matter in the sense that there are outcomes which can be experienced in terms of pleasure, pain, happiness, etc. If the construction of empathy is an educational process, which I have demonstrated, the addition of risks is optimal for improving our empathic skills.

The position of TMT and posthumanistic ethics offers the final building block. As the empathy gap points out, our relations with technology are in need of an ethics as a “know-how” to deal with what happens in the structure of human-technology relations. We have seen that, based on insights from TMT, a posthumanistic ethics is constructed which puts a notion of Foucault-inspired self-care at its center. This is the care one needs in order to get oneself in the right shape to confront technology’s influence on our moral subjectivity. Furthermore, TMT has offered a measure that allows us to assess the degree of otherness present in technologies. This measure is the degree of resistance present in the technology.

Although these building-blocks are an important and necessary step towards empathy ethics, they are not sufficient. What we need most is an account of exteriority and what a relation with it requires qua ethical attitude. Phrased from the perspective of Levinas, we need an ethics as care-for-the-other. It could also be called an *ethics-for-exteriority*. This ethics articulates the relevance of exteriority, it discloses the forces that endanger a relation with it and it constructs an ethics in function of that.

This is the Husserlian route to otherness, insofar as in this position the empathic and ethical positions regarding the intersubjective relation converge in the concept of empathy ethics. The aim of this ethics is to prepare a certain

*receptivity* in the Self towards the “critique” that emanates from the Other. This is not present in Levinas, as is also sensed by Ricoeur:

If interiority were indeed determined solely by the desire for retreat and closure, how could it ever hear a word addressed to it, which would seem so foreign to it that this word would be as nothing for an isolated existence?  
(Ricoeur, 1992:339)

The Other, as Ricoeur attempts to show, needs to resonate *in* the Self to the extent that one starts to take *Oneself as Another* (ibid.). The Self, therefore, needs to have a reflexive structure – conscience according to Ricoeur – which actively responds to the Other’s vocation. The development of this structure is what could be an element of empathy-ethics, as an ethics-for-exteriority. Indeed, we seem to be far away from Levinas. For example, in an interview Levinas admits to the following position:

Q: this attention to the Other, can it be taught?

E.L.: in my view it is awakened in the Face of the Other. (RTB, 236)

This seems to imply that no ethics is needed that could teach us how to relate to the Other. And yet, Levinas has not written with the pretention of having created a complete ethics. He has pointed to its possible foundation in the social relation and, for that matter, in exteriority. If one seeks to proceed with Levinas, one cannot avoid the responsibility of having to construct an ethics that can do little more but to draw its inspiration from Levinas. Levinas has not presented more than foundations. The building needs to be constructed by the one using Levinas. That is what empathy ethics is. As an ethics it does the following:

- It articulates the relevance of exteriority, especially in the context of human-technology relations. The need for this is apparent with the emergence of the empathy gap. The empathy gap shows how technologies effectively block a successful connection with exteriority;
- It reveals the structure that is successful in connecting to exteriority, namely that of a dialogue. The prototypical structure for a dialogue is the social relation, because in the social relation beings that exist *for themselves* encounter one another. Whenever there is an encounter with (another) being *for itself*, there is contact with exteriority;

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- It proposes ways to develop the receptive structure in the Self that is needed to place the Self in a proper relation with exteriority. This implies the need to introduce a certain notion of self-care;
- It points in the direction of an ethics that articulates and promotes the structure that connects to exteriority. In the course of that, it articulates practices that are successful in connecting to exteriority amidst a technologically mediated context.

### 3 Technological and humanistic exteriority

This chapter explores what exteriority is and in what way it is or is not necessarily anthropocentric. I begin with analyzing the concept of exteriority and then I will assess to what extent it is possible to extend this notion beyond its current, primarily anthropocentric foundation.

In Levinas's analysis, the Other is associated with exteriority. In fact, the Other *is* exteriority. Levinas reaches this conclusion following an account which depicts the Self as *interiority*. The way in which the Self is in the world, as "thinker and possessor" (TI, 33), integrates what is other in the Self. The world is only relatively exterior, only so long as the Self permits it to have exteriority. Exterior is that which, except when taken by force, *cannot* be integrated in the Self through acts of reflection and acts that turn something into a possession. Because although the world might seem "foreign and hostile" (ibid., 37), the Self finds itself at home in the world (ibid.) and everything that seems foreign ultimately falls under the powers of the Self (ibid., 38). What kind of subject is the subject of this interiority? Levinas calls it the "egoism of enjoyment" (ibid.). With that, Levinas means that the Self before the Other is concerned with its own wellbeing alone. In that sense, the Self is the Darwinistic subject before the arrival of the Other, completely entangled in a private struggle to maintain itself. It is in that sense a *pre-moral* being. Once the Other arrives, the Self is no longer able to focus only on itself. It needs to account for the Other or ignore the Other, but in both positions the Other has dramatically changed the self-relation. Interiority is connected with the Self and its relations with the world. What, by contrast, is exteriority and how does it link to the Other?

The Other, we have seen, is a being "according to itself". It is in that sense a being like the Self that has world *for itself*. The Other, Edith Stein writes in her *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein, 1989), makes the world "as it appears for her" (cf. Stein, 64). It is in this specific sense that the Other is other and for that matter *exteriority*. Exterior because, what the Other is and how the world appears *for her*, is a perspective that can never be taken up by the Self. Exteriority in that sense is characterized by *active resistance*. That what is exterior has, in the concept given to it

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in the course of this chapter, the unique characteristic of that what “can sovereignly say no to me” (TI, 199). Why is that the case?

For Husserl, this is the case because the Other has a different position in space. The Other, as an embodied being like the Self, has a different perspective on the world. She holds a different place in the world and because of that, her perspective is also different. As Stein relates this account:

The other’s physical body as a mere physical body is spatial like other things.  
(...) When I interpret it as a sensing, living body and empathically project  
myself in it, I obtain a new image. (Stein, 69)

The Other is a being with a perspective of her own. A perspective that is linked to her embodied being in the world, which makes her have a view and perspective that can never be completely grasped by the Self.

We saw that, for Levinas, embodiment grants otherness, insofar as it is through embodiment that one has experiences which are non-transitive: nobody can have *my* experience of eating an apple or drinking a glass of wine. With our being embodied in the world comes separation, difference, and otherness between Self and Other. A separation that is connected to the way in which both the Self and the Other have a perspective of their own. Or as Zahavi has it:

The reason why the other is characterized by a certain dimension of transcendence, the reason why the other is an other, is precisely because he or she is also an experiential self, with his or her own irreplaceable first-person perspective. (Zahavi, 2014: 189)

This first-person perspective can further extend to every way in which the Other is in the world. Every other experience of the Other grants her an internal temporal life with a past, future, and experience of the present. The Other is, to paraphrase Bergson, “duration” (Bergson, 2017). Our unique experience of our own past determines how we experience the present and the future. In that sense any experience is an individualized experience. Even our own experiences can never be repeated. Like temporality grants us selfhood, it grants the Other exteriority and otherness. It is possible to link this to Kant’s distinction between reflective acts of knowledge and sensuous perception (cf. Mensch, 2015: 29). In order to grasp temporal relations, we cannot rely on outer perception. We cannot *see* the Other’s memory. External access does not give us the experience the Other has. We see expressions, behavior, etc. But we cannot enter the Other’s self, as the

intersection of past, present, and future. If we were able to do that, the distinction between Self and Other would have dissolved. The intention with which we grasp the Other can therefore never be a complete and *fulfilled* intention. We saw already that this does not count as a failed form of intentionality. Rather, it is a different form of intentionality which Husserl named empathy and Levinas refers to as *non-intentionality* or “ethics”.

There has been considerable debate regarding the question whether or not the notion of otherness and exteriority necessarily has a humanistic foundation. Can animals or artifacts also have otherness? If it is matter of perspective or depends on a decision, then it is a matter of time before we start to grant technologies like robots and advanced AIs a certain measure of otherness (cf. Gunkel, 2017). According to this perspective, granting otherness to beings is a matter of allowing them access to the moral community. And like we gradually started to admit more members to the moral community based on their autonomy, so we will come to grant technologies a certain measure of otherness, thus allowing them to enter the moral community based on that.

The exposition in this chapter and the course of this investigation reveals a more hesitant approach. Otherness is not something a being has, it is what a being *is*. In that sense, this exposition takes sides with Don Ihde’s position, which grants technologies a *quasi*-otherness (cf. Ihde, 1990: 99). It is “quasi” other in the sense that the otherness of technologies is stronger than mere objectness and weaker than the otherness found in humans and animals (cf. *ibid.* 100). The determinant is the extent in which a being has a “life of its own” (*ibid.*). Thus a horse which acts contra its domestication is *disobedient* whereas a malfunctioning car is merely *broken*. What this points to is a difference in the strength with which a being is able to say “no”. The more a being has a life of its own, a future of its own, projects of its own, etc., the more this being is able to say “no”. The Other is the prototype of this being because the Other is the *free being* over which the Self never has complete control. The Other is marked by what Levinas calls “unforseeableness” (TI, 199).

This was also noted by Stein, who argues that otherness is not present in the same manner in for example plants and animals (cf. Stein, 78), but also things that don’t have this particular sense of otherness. The kind of *generative* otherness that could add to our knowledge, change our perspectives, or generally the otherness that allows the Self to escape beyond “the world as it appears to me” (Stein, 64).

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For this a being needs to have a world *for itself*, or at least a degree of it. The degree in which a being has a world *for itself* measures the difference between stronger and weaker forms of otherness.

A strong form of otherness is generative. It adds to our perspectives because it has a perspective of itself. A strong form of otherness has a world *for itself* and draws experiences and perspectives from this world with which it can oppose, confront, and criticize the Self. The Other is the prototype of a being with a strong form of otherness. A relation with such a being is dialectic instead of maieutic. A weaker form of otherness is merely able to say “no”, like a malfunctioning car is able to say “no”. However, it does not reveal its own perspective. And because it does not do that, it does not change the Self. It merely retrieves in the Self what was already there. In that sense, the relation with a being with a weaker form of otherness is a maieutic relation. Beings that do not possess strong otherness are still able to “perform” the functions of exteriority that are worked out in the next chapter. They can do that, however, because and to the extent that the Self also has strong dialectic relations in which new and different knowledge is actively generated and not merely retrieved, as it is in maieutic relations.

## 4 The functions of exteriority

Following the phenomenological line of reasoning that has been pursued in the course of this investigation, three “functions” of exteriority can be discerned. They can be categorized as the *epistemological* and *existential* functions of exteriority, the accounts that are most closely linked to Husserl’s (and Stein’s) position regarding the intersubjective relation. And, third, there is the *ethical* function, which is connected to Levinasian ethics. I will first discuss Husserl’s position and then proceed to Levinas.

The *existential* function of exteriority refers to the construction of selfhood, which is enabled through the relation with exteriority. What is “sleeping” (Stein, 1989: 116) in us is developed when we confront what she calls “related natures” (ibid.). Beings that are like us, but are also different because they themselves are in possession of world. The confrontation with the Other confronts us with “what we are not, what we are more or less than others” (ibid.). This confrontation is an important aid in the construction of selfhood. We mirror ourselves in what we are not and through this mirroring we gain information from an external source, which is subsequently used in the further development of the Self. The construction takes place because of the *dialogical* character of this relation. We relate to a *for itself* which allows for what Levinas calls a *non-maieutic* but rather confrontational construction of meaning and – in this case – selfhood. What we receive as new perspectives on our Self is not discovered in ourselves, but come from the Other.

In a similar manner, the phenomenon of shame contributes to the development of Self. In shame, as we saw in part II, we experience ourselves as object of the Other’s perception. We are ashamed of how we appear for-the-other, even if the Other is not actually there, as it is in Sartre’s example of the imagined spectator in the scene of the voyeur (cf. Sartre, 2003: 312). In this case, it is also otherness which teaches us something about ourselves.

In these two accounts, it is through a relation with something we are not that we gain a crucial perspective on ourselves. But there is also a difference. In the case of Stein, the Other appears more as a mirror, as something that is and remains Other. In the example of shame, it is as if the Other has somehow “slipped” into the Self. This in the meaning Ricoeur has in mind in the phenomenon in which

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*oneself is or has become another*. Otherness in that sense is, as Ricoeur calls it, a “sedimented” (Ricoeur, 1992: 353) structure in the Self. A structure that derives its experience from concrete others and subsequently starts to build upon every other new experience. This account is promising if we seek to somehow allow for exteriority in experiences that do not involve concrete, real-time others. This will be further explored in chapter 6.

The *epistemological* function of exteriority refers to its role in the construction of objectivity. The basic argument that Husserl brings forth is the following. When we realize that an object can be experienced by somebody else, we then realize that there is a difference between the thing itself and the way it appears *for us* (cf. Zahavi: 2003: 118). However, this is only achieved when the Other has been accounted for as a not-Self, an exteriority, in the first place. Would the Other not be transcendent, it could not provide us access to the objective world. It would also be a being *for me*, like the world is. A world that is only *for me* is the solipsistic world which the later Husserl sought to escape from.

When it has been established that the Other is *for itself* and not *for me*, we have a being that experiences the world as the Self does, without being included in the experience of the Self. For that reason, the world cannot only be the correlate of the Self, because it also experienced by Others. The experience of the Other and of the Self could be brought in confrontation with one another and, the moment this happens, the objectivity of the world becomes constructed in an intersubjective interplay. This is the epistemological function of exteriority.

Finally, there is the *ethical function* of exteriority. As was noted in part II, this connects closely to the functions of exteriority that have been delineated above. The ethical function of the Other occurs in Levinas’s account in two ways. First, the Other is the one who offers a way out of self-enclosurement. In that sense, Levinas’s account of the relation with the Other is best understood in confrontation with Socrates’s *maieutics* (cf. Ricoeur, 337). Unlike this form of teaching, the Other does not awaken knowledge *as* reminiscence. The Other does in fact have a perspective and body of knowledge of herself. This perspective, as Levinas envisions it, is brought into discourse, which then becomes a *struggle* between independent beings that attempt to settle for some common ground. It is in reaching this common ground that the Self escapes from self-enclosurement. The struggle in discourse is ethics, insofar as it is the moment that a perspective comes into view which

contrasts with that of the Self. This different perspective “calls into question” the Self. For example, because the perspective from the Other, let the Self make to see herself as the Other does from her external perspective. This is the critical function of ethics, its opposition to what Levinas calls the “dogmatism” (TI, 43) of an enclosed Self.

As Ricoeur has remarked, in order to have this effect, the Other as exteriority needs to become interior, to a certain extent. Exteriority is not permanent in that sense. The moment the Other awakens a critical conscience, the voice of the Other has become my *own*. Otherness in this account has become a structure in the Self as a growing body of sedimented earlier encounters with the Other. This seems to be a fruitful step beyond Levinas’s account of exteriority, insofar as it allows us to disconnect exteriority from concrete Others, which need to be experienced most optimally in a continuous way, at every corner of the road, so to say. This is not needed once it has been accounted for a receptive structure that is part of the Self.

The second element of Levinasian ethics is its material side, its element of *Goodness*. Goodness relates to exteriority in the sense that it is in Goodness that we affirm a reality beyond the Self. We affirm that there are beings “like us” which have a right to a Good Life according to their standards, and goodness affirms this right. It is in that specific sense a way out of the Self. This has no function that relates back to the Self, as the critical element of ethics does. In fact, Goodness, in this sense, is a “forgetting of the Self”. It is the moment that the Self leaves its preoccupation with care-for-itself. How we should envision these relations in a technologized context will be discussed in the next chapter.



## 5 Contact with exteriority in a technologized context

In the previous chapters we have examined what exteriority is. This chapter will discuss what a successful relation with it – i.e. a relation in which exteriority is “reached” – implies. The crucial element here is the mediator between Self and exteriority. Because, as the empathy gap points out, some mediators connect us to it and others do not. We remain effectively in the Self and exteriority is not reached. This is the challenge of mediationalism, the challenge that was discussed in the opening chapter of this part. In the course of this chapter, I will do two things. First, I will make an attempt to explicate what is required of the *structure* that is successful in connecting the Self to exteriority. This structure consists of the elements Self, Other, and the medium between the two. This structure is derived from the expositions in the previous chapters and from part II, in which the empathic relation was discussed. Second, I will discuss what this entails for our relations with and through technologies.

As could be drawn from the exposition in the previous chapters, a successful relation with exteriority requires something of the Self, the Other, and the medium between the two. On the side of the Self, as Ricoeur has pointed out, there needs to be some sort of *receptive* structure. Furthermore, this structure can be viewed as passive in opposition to intentionality (cf. Ricoeur, 1992: 318). Intentionality, and here we can include technological intentionality, transforms what it is directed at. Receptivity, by contrast, has a certain measure of respect for exteriority. However, receptivity also entails that exteriority somehow resonates in the Self. Ricoeur refers to this as “conscience” (ibid. 347). Conscience in this sense is “the dialectic between selfhood and otherness” (ibid. 341). The Other in this position is not identical with the Self, but is present in the Self as a vocation, a critical voice. This is the first requirement. The Self needs to have a receptive structure which could be called a *conscience*.

Second, there is something required of the Other. What needs to be present “in” the Other is the structure of *active resistance*. The less active the resistance on the side of the Other, the less strong its form of exteriority will be. It is not that,

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as in Levinas's account, only the being who is able to say "no" is the Other. There are, as Ihde was right in pointing out, degrees in which beings express this active resistance. This enables one to extend the class of others beyond its confinement to the concrete Other. The second requirement thus is a degree of *active resistance*.

Third, there is something required of the medium that establishes contact with exteriority. In fact, this has been the central thesis that has been laid out in the course of this investigation. Because it appeared that technology, in the context of social relations, might have the effect of failing to establish contact with the exteriority it seeks to reach. The medium is a crucial element in establishing this contact. In his analysis, Levinas points to three media that connect us to exteriority: Desire, goodness, and conversation (cf. TI, 39). What seems to connect these three means is their *dialectic* structure. In any of these means, there is a confrontation with something exterior, a not-self which is *not destroyed* by the medium. Rather, any of these mediums require the exteriority at which they are directed. They affirm it in its exteriority.

Desire, as Levinas understands it, is Desire for something that does not satisfy the Desire. It does not originate from a lack, a need that needs to be satisfied (cf. TI, 34). Likewise, goodness is directed at not-Self. It is, as Levinas has it, the movement in which the Self leaves preoccupation with its own wellbeing behind and moves towards the Other. Goodness thus can be seen as affirming the "right to be" of what is not-Self. Finally, conversation also implies exteriority. More strongly, it requires this exteriority in order to have something that offers a confrontation, an external point of verification that allows the Self to expand beyond itself and provide some intersubjectively founded principle for its being in the world.

A medium that connects to exteriority needs to afford dialogue and a dialectic process of meaning-construction through it. This is the third element. The media that connect the Self to exteriority, need to afford dialogue. Levinas gave the examples of "conversation" and "goodness" as media that enable to make that connection. The analyses in this section enables us to expand beyond these examples. We have a measure that allows us to test whether or not some medium affords connection to exteriority. This test is the *form* of the dialogue. If a medium does in fact afford this form to a certain extent, then it could pass for a medium that is successful in connecting to exteriority. How do the aforementioned elements of the basic structure that connects to exteriority relate to our relations with and through technology?

The empathy gap points to a situation in which the aforementioned structure does not function properly. The Self lacks receptivity because it aspires to control the situation it is in. The Other has a weak form of resistance because it is experienced as a product of the Self, rather than as a being that expresses a fundamental form of ownness. And the medium does not afford dialogue. Rather, it affords something that has *the structure of a monologue*. For example, the case of the “filter bubble”, which was discussed in part III, revealed how a technology has the effect of re-affirming the Self in its already existing ideas and preferences. It does not connect to a reality as a *for itself* which actively resists integration. In that sense, the medium fails to facilitate a process of dialectic meaning-construction. It rather functions *maieutically* in the sense that it retrieves in the Self what was already in there. This is a position which this investigation strongly opposes, for it neglects what can be gained through relations with exteriority.

Once this relevance has been granted, it appears to be necessary to develop an ethics that gets us in a *proper* relation with technology. In this context, proper means that it is a relation in which one has learned to cope with technology in ways that actively support the maintenance of a relation with exteriority. This starts with acknowledging the value of exteriority and the potential influences that might endanger a relation with it. From there, it would take a form of *wisdom* to know how and when to relate to technology. That means the Self needs to develop a form of self-care in which this wisdom is developed through the development of and engagement in practices that have that purpose.

At this point, what has been laid out in the course of this part converges with insights that are derived from a posthumanistic ethics of technology. At this intersection, some remarks should be made regarding the subject matter, scope, and concrete application of an ethics for exteriority, which at this point culminates in what is the more practical element of empathy ethics. I will work out some suggestions for that in the next chapter.



## 6 Empathy ethics and the closing of the empathy gap

In the previous chapter, I delineated three basic elements for a successful relation for reaching exteriority. When that is done, the empathy gap is closed and this research has delivered its promise to offer a diagnosis (what is the empathy gap?) and a cure: what we can do in order to close it. The diagnosis was offered in part I, and this chapter investigates a possible cure. It does so by uniting the elements for successful contact with exteriority in an ethics. This is empathy ethics in its pragmatic application as a set of principles, practices, and points of orientation that help connect with exteriority in the course of (technologically) mediated relations.

In the previous chapter, we encountered the elements that are needed to connect to exteriority and – in the course of that connection – close the empathy gap. These elements are receptivity (the Self), active resistance (the Other), and dialogue (the relation between the two). As I envision it, these elements provide a point of orientation in the field of self-care, design, and politics. How could that come about?

The first is the domain of *self-care*. With self-care, I have in mind the form of Foucauldian self-care that we encountered in the previous part. This amounts to a form of self-construction, or *self-shaping* in order for one to become a being that “knows how” to deal with its environment. It is an ethics of self-governance and not one, as its Kantian counterpart, of obedience to some imperative. What self-care could mean in the context of the empathy gap can be made concrete.

First, it has a specific goal or *telos*. It is a self-care directed at developing a conscience, or the receptivity towards exteriority. In order to achieve conscience, some “substance” in the Self needs to be shaped. This is conscience as an openness for exteriority. Thirdly, this could be achieved through some practices. For example it could be possible to *articulate* the relevance of exteriority, and to pay attention to its incarnation in others, but also, in degrees, in non-human others. This articulation takes place in the private sphere and more “political” environments such as the press and politics. Also, it could imply practicing what Turkle called “empathic arts” (RC, 2015). It is, for example, about learning how to engage in *dialogical* conversations. These lessons could be learned in schools and private conditions.

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Finally it could amount to learning how to recognize specific opportunities but also risks that come with a technologically mediated environment. This could amount to a form of *media-wisdom* in learning to recognize these specific positive and negative affordances of technological environments.

In a *design-context* the elements that enable contact with exteriority could be applied in at least two ways. First they could be used as points of orientation in the design of space (cf. Turkle, 2015). As Turkle calls for a *design-for-conversation*, it could be noted that the underlying structure is one in which the design is *for exteriority*. Second, they could be used as points for orientation in the design of artifacts themselves. They could be used as *maxims* or *values* that provide a frame of reference in the design of technologies. This is done, implicitly, by Sarah Konrath, the researcher who has uncovered the empathy gap (Konrath, et.al. 2011). In her work since then, she has set out to develop an empathy app, a technology that teaches empathic skills through recognition of facial expressions, emotions, etc. The degrees in which such a technology is successful could be measured according to the elements that were set for successful contact with exteriority. For example the following questions could be asked:

- What is the degree of *receptivity* towards exteriority, already present in the one who engages with the technology?
- What is the degree of *resistance* the technology has, could have, and/or should have?
- To what extent can the interaction with the technology be qualified as *dialogical*?

The third domain in which empathy ethics could take a strong position is the *political domain*. Politics, as I showed in part I, could be seen as the domain that covers the relations between more than two people. That should not be taken in a literal sense. It does point to relations that exceed normal social interactions. Political relations are relations that are mediated by state and private institutions. What could the role of empathy ethics be in this domain?

It appears, first, that empathy ethics in this domain could contribute by setting the agenda for discussions in institutions regarding the specific role of exteriority in this institution and what this requires qua attitudes towards implementation and usage of technologies. Second, once having set an agenda, empathy ethics

could have concrete implications with regard to the way in which the institution functions, both concerning its relation with technology and its internal relations. Again, the elements of successful contact with exteriority could be used in order to assess what could be an optimal way of using technologies in the context of institutions. For example, the elements could be used to guide debates about the introduction of new technologies and assess what role they should occupy within the institution itself and the projects it executes. This could be done in the following way:

- What does exteriority mean in the context of the institution and is there a degree of receptivity towards it? Exteriority in this context could, for example, mean the degree of openness and mutual understanding between colleagues.
- In what sense does the institution deal with Others? What degree of resistance is needed in that context?
- In what sense is the institution in need of dialogues and what are dialogues in the context of what the organization seeks to accomplish?

What has been discussed in this chapter has by no means the intention of being complete. Empathy ethics has been proposed as a suitable candidate to first diagnose and then close the empathy gap. Empathy ethics is a starting point. Its orientation can be used to place exteriority on the agenda of the philosophy of technology and link it with current-day technological developments. Further research is needed in order to spell out what the future of exteriority is and in what degree it could be designed in technologies. Furthermore, empathy ethics needs to keep its pace with technological developments. Empathy ethics is for that reason not finished. It is a starting point.



# Conclusions

The central question that this investigation set out to answer in this research was the following:

RQ: How do technologically mediated social relations bring about an empathy gap and how can an empathy ethics overcome this empathy gap?

I have answered this question in six parts, all of which addressed an element of this question. The subquestions I addressed are the following:

- SQ part I: what is the empathy gap?
- SQ part II: what is empathy?
- SQ part III: what is the relation between empathy and technology?
- SQ part IV: what is the position of the Other in phenomenological contact theory?
- SQ part V: are post-Heideggerian ethical and philosophical approaches to human-technology relations able to bridge the empathy gap ?
- SQ part VI: what is empathy ethics and how can it overcome the empathy gap?

In the following I will formulate the answers to these questions.

## 1. SQ part I: what is the empathy gap?

There are two answers to this question. From an empirical perspective, the empathy gap is an increased difficulty to imagine a situation *from* the Other's perspective and, because of that, a decrease in our abilities to develop the self-reflection that is ultimately needed to start paying (moral) attention to the Other. In other words, the empathy gap is *a failure in successful imagination* that is caused by the technological mediation of social relations. I referred to this condition as a "technologically mediated solipsism". From a philosophical-ethical perspective, derived from Levinas's concept of ethics, the empathy gap is *an ethics gap*. That is the case because according to this concept, a social relation that functions properly is an ethical relation. Such a relation is at the very least:

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- Directed at otherness, for which it implies separation between Self and Other;
- Unmediated in the sense of *not mediated through the Self*;
- The trigger for self-reflection and self-criticism;
- Constructed through the means of conversation and goodness.

A social relation that does not support its ethical function is a mediated relation. This effectively means that contact with exteriority is not made in a successful way because it is either through the Self – i.e. phenomenological, Cartesian, and humanistic mediation – or through technological mediation that we fail to make contact with a reality exterior to the Self. That is problematic because we need, from my ethical perspective, this external reality to verify (“call into question”) the reality of the Self. The reality of the Self was also referred to as an “economic” reality.

In part I, I showed that social media technologies – i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc. – mediate the social relation to the extent that another human being is transformed from a being “according to itself” into a being that is “according to me”. The reverse is also to true: because some “information” about the Other is filtered out, the Self can remain itself, unchallenged by the Other. The Other that is transformed through the technological filter fails to be the ethical source *outside* the subject that is able to “call into question” the subject and its ways of being. This failure is an ethical failure from the ethical perspective that I introduced in part I. The empathy gap can therefore be articulated as an ethics gap. What do we gain from that insight? First of all it allows me to connect a new and not yet addressed ethical challenge to the ways in which technology mediates our relation with the world. Second, after having addressed what it is, it becomes possible to develop ways to overcome this challenge by developing practices that allow for a closure of the gap.

## 2. SQ part II: what is empathy?

This research is an inquiry into empathy and failures in empathy. For that reason, I sought to understand what empathy actually is. In order to formulate an answer to this question, I inquired into the way empathy has been conceptualized throughout the phenomenological tradition. The insight I gained from this investigation is that empathy is actually one specific attempt to articulate the kind of intentional relation that is peculiar to subject-subject relations. It became visible that, within

the phenomenological tradition, there are three ways to articulate and analyze the particularities of this relation:

- *The Husserlian, empathic approach.* This approach underscores the intentional structure of the intersubjective relation and articulates its value in an epistemological way: it is through empathy that we avoid the trap of solipsism and make contact with exterior being.
- *The Heideggerian, ontological approach.* According to this position, there is no difference between Self and Other like the empathic approach sought to show. By contrast, there is an ontological intertwinement between Self and Other that actually gives rise to our main existential challenge: becoming an authentic Self that lives from sources it finds inside itself.
- *The Levinasian, transcendental approach.* This position draws on the Husserlian stance on the matter of intersubjectivity but seeks to articulate the value of the transcendental character of otherness in primarily ethical language: it is because the Other is an Other – i.e. a world according to itself – that we are able to verify, test, and challenge private concepts of the Good Life.

In the remainder of this part, I discussed some empirical perspectives regarding empathy, with a focus on perspectives that offered an explicit analysis of the empathy gap. It became apparent that these perspectives share, to a large extent, the view of the empathic-ethical approach in the phenomenological tradition. For that reason I concluded that it is possible to come up with a concept of empathy ethics in which empathy as understood in the phenomenological-empirical tradition that I studied can be merged with ethics as understood of by Levinas. This fusion offers the concept “empathy ethics”. What makes this concept relevant throughout the current investigation is that it refers to a *sui generis* ethical position, that it offers a critique of (technological) mediation, is in favor of the Other and otherness, and can be brought in confrontation with both Heidegger and post-Heideggerian positions.

### 3. SQ part III: what is the relation between empathy, the empathy gap and technology?

In this part I studied the relation between empathy and technology. I did that through a postphenomenological perspective, according to which any technological mediation has the structure of amplification and reduction. The technologically mediated “background” triggers were analyzed as the effects of informationalization, screening, and filtering. Although there is a correlation, these triggers produce effects that are not necessarily identical. The correlation is that it is through these causes that there is a weaker form of a dialogue-like relations between Self and world. The effects are:

- *Informationalization*: there are two sides to informationalization. First, information is how we confront others. There is an ontological side to it: what we are and how we are in technologically mediated environments is informational. We do not confront others as “commanding presences” but rather *as* information. Second, informationalization is a perspective: ICTs invite us to informationalize everything we encounter, even outside ICT-mediated environments.
- *Screening*: the effect through which the presence of the screen or interface leaves out an embodied context and, with that, some of the ethical potential that is part of embodied interactions. There is a weaker degree of confrontation than with a being experienced as a being “according to itself”. Screening is one of the technology-afforded ways in which the establishment of a relation with something outside the Self is not successful.
- *Filtering*: the effect that algorithm-driven technologies tailor a world around us that conforms to our standards, pre-existing beliefs, and body of knowledge. Filtering is a technology-embedded cause of failure to connect with external reality. It is through the technology that we remain in a monologue-like relation with the world.

These triggers produce effects that have a negative impact on empathy as a structure that connects the Self, in a dialogical relation, with something the Self is not. I also pointed to positive correlates between empathy and technology. I provided a case study of the link between photography, video games, and empathy. From these expositions it could be drawn that although technologies might have a

positive effect on empathy, a close connection to reality needs to remain in place, because reality offers the prototypical environment for a relation that has some degree of a dialogue. This offers a crucial point of verification for any relation between Self and world. The degree in which this relation affords dialogue is the degree in which this relation connects the Self to exteriority.

#### **4. SQ part IV: what is the position of the Other in phenomenological contact theory?**

In this part I elaborated on the distinction that I prepared in part II, namely the distinction between Husserl's and Heidegger's approach to intersubjectivity. This distinction becomes visible in their perspectives with regard to the place and value of otherness. I chose to discuss the positions of Husserl and Heidegger because, with them, I have two foundational approaches in the phenomenological tradition. Husserl's position has yielded great influence on Levinas's account of phenomenology, and the former's position regarding intersubjectivity has paved the way for Levinas's ethical account of social relations. Heidegger, in turn, has been influential in the philosophy of technology, especially in the positions I discussed in part V.

In part IV I showed the two separate paths of the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger:

- Husserl acknowledges that his phenomenological project necessarily leads to solipsism. In order to escape from that, he starts to search for a "foreign consciousness" that can provide the Self with the kind of secure and objective knowledge that the Self cannot arrive at on its own. This foreign source is the Other and Husserl needs the Other in order to grant his phenomenological project intersubjective validity.
- The starting point of Heidegger's analysis is not solipsism but rather togetherness and immersion. His project is to designate ways in which the Self can free itself from others and find in the Self an authentic source from which it can start to construct its identity. In his later project, both the Self and the Other are removed from the stage. Meaning is then provided by Being, which grants the Self the concepts and rules according to which it can engage in its life projects.

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In my discussion I followed the abovementioned developments in both of these projects. I then concluded that a project that evolves around the Self from the start and finally ends as an antihumanism is not a fruitful starting point for an ethics that seeks to close the empathy gap by introducing the Other in its ethical project. Husserl's line of reasoning, however, provides a good entry into this attempt.

### 5. SQ part V: are post-Heideggerian ethical and philosophical approaches to human-technology relations able to bridge the empathy gap?

In this part I discussed three post-Heideggerian positions in the philosophy of technology. I termed them post-Heideggerian because they have moved beyond Heidegger but remained Heideggerian in the sense that, in none of these approaches to ethics and the philosophy of technology, the other has its proper place. I discussed these positions because they offered the stepping stones towards an empathy ethics. These building blocks are the following:

- *Technology, reality, and sociality*: we came across a perspective according to which it is not only technology but rather the ensemble of humans and technology that produces world and with that, meaning. Furthermore, we came across an account of meaning as “commanding presence”. Both elements have a role to play in the closure of the empathy gap, because it points in the direction of the basic structure of empathy ethics, which is the structure of a dialogue.
- *Embodiment and risk*: we came across the notion of the value of risk, and the way in which this linked to both a tangible context and a learning process. It became clear that risk has more significance in a tangible context and has a particular relevance in an educational process. Again, this points in the direction of the underlying structure which empathy ethics has sought to uncover.
- *Ethics and technology*: we came across the notion of ethics in relation with technology. This account made the Foucauldian concept of self-care relevant, which it deems to be the appropriate way of dealing with technology seen as a power structure that yields a significant impact on our moral subjectivity.

These perspectives provided some of the building blocks I needed in order to construct my account of empathy ethics as an ethics that is capable of bridging

the empathy gap. The one important building block that remained missing, however, was the Other, seen as an important condition in a dialectic notion of the construction of meaning, ethics, and moral subjectivity. Thus a complementary account is needed that articulates the relevance of exteriority, investigates its place in a technologized context, and proposes concrete practices that establish a successful relation with it.

## 6. SQ part VI: what is empathy ethics and how can it overcome the empathy gap?

In this part I connected the positions in the prior parts in order to come up with an ethical position that could close the empathy gap. Central to this position is its focus on exteriority. An empathy ethics, as I formulated it, is an ethics-for-exteriority. I started by restating the challenge the empathy gap gives rise to. This challenge is that technological mediations of social relations *reduce the Self to interiority*. The Self fails to have a relation with exteriority. This relation, I showed, has a dialogical structure. This means that in such a relation, the Self relates to another *for itself*. In such a relation, a dialectical process of meaning-construction is optimally afforded.

I showed in what way the Other is a *for itself* as a being that *is* its own world and has for that reason a perspective of itself. It is in contrast with this perspective that the Self starts to develop itself. Furthermore, I investigated to what extent the *for itself* structure is necessarily anthropocentric. It became clear that this is not the case, as long as a being does demonstrate a degree of resistance.

My discussions in this part pointed to a structure that could be successful in connecting to exteriority. The structure includes the Self, the Other, and the “mediator” between the two. In order for these elements to be successfully related, they need to have a specific form. Successful here means that the elements cannot be reduced to one another. This form provides the frame of reference and orientation for an ethics that somehow re-introduces exteriority in the context of human-technology relations.

The form of the Self needs to have a receptive structure. The Other needs to be present *in* the Self in the form of a conscience. This implies and requires the proper functioning of the two other elements. Namely, the Other needs to show some degree of *resistance*. Would that not be the case, there would still not be an exteriority with whom the Self could connect in order to escape from itself. This

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leads to the third element, the “mediator” between Self and Other, which needs to afford *dialogue*. A dialogue in this sense is the “conversation” between independent beings (two *for itselfs*) as envisioned by Levinas. It is through this dialogue that a meaning becomes *constructed* and is thus not derived from the Self. When that comes about, a successful relation with exteriority is established.

The structure as discussed above is the kind of structure that could be used as point of verification in an ethics that accounts for both exteriority and technologically mediated solipsism as conceived of in this investigation.

### **7. How do technologically mediated social relations bring about an empathy gap and how can an empathy ethics overcome this empathy gap?**

The answer to my research question can now be given in a comprehensive way. There are three main elements I will address:

- The empathy gap is a failure to make successful contact with a reality that is exterior to the Self. This failure is both caused and enhanced through the effects of the technological mediation of social relations.
- Technological mediation *affords* this failure insofar as they screen out the relevant embodied context of the other, give way to conversations that remain in fact monologues, and reduce the Other as “commanding presence” to a presence as information. Technology *embeds* this failure insofar as technology leads to a world that becomes increasingly tailored around the Self.
- Empathy ethics overcomes the empathy gap because:
  - It reveals the structure of a relation that connects the Self to exteriority;
  - It makes clear what the form of the elements in the structure needs to be;
  - It points out possible practices that make sure the structure functions in the way it is intended, as a structure that connects to exteriority. This practices function like a dialogue.

## Summary

This research investigates a phenomenon that is referred to as “the empathy gap” (Konrath, et.al, 2011). The empathy gap is the situation in which there is diminished ability in Perspective Taking (PT) and Emotional Concern (EC), caused by technology. The central objective of this investigation has been to understand what the empathy gap is, how technology could have caused it, and what we need in order to close it.

From the perspective of this investigation, the empathy gap is a failure to establish successful contact with exteriority. As such it constitutes a *sui generis* ethical challenge, because, from the proposed perspective, the Self needs exteriority in order to let itself be “called into question”. This is the definition of ethics as employed over the course of this investigation and it is derived from and inspired by Levinas’s account of ethics.

What is this exteriority and what is a successful relation with it? Leaning on the phenomenological discussion of the phenomenon of empathy and Levinas’s account of ethics, I have made visible that the strongest version of exteriority is to be found in the Other, because the Other, like the Self, is in the possession of a world. That means that the Other is a being with a life. She enjoys, she has a past, future, and present. She has a perspective of her own and a certain account of what constitutes the Good Life for her. In other words, she is a being that lives *for herself*.

In a successful relation with the Other, we gain something *from* the Other and use that in order to let ourselves be “called into question”. We should let the Other be herself and gain from her the insights, ideas, and perspectives that could inform and enrich our own perspectives. This relation is non-mediationalist.

I have shown that a mediationalist relation is a relation in which we reduce what is other to ourselves. In a mediationalist relation, there is only being *for us*. All being becomes relative being. When there is only being *for us*, we fail to have a relation that is able to spark (self) criticism. A relation that is able to bring about (self) criticism is a relation that has the basic structure of a dialogue. Because, as I envisioned it, two different worlds confront one another in a dialogue, and in the course of this confrontation they attempt to reach for some common ground that was not there prior to the dialogue. A successful relation with exteriority therefore is a dialogical relation.

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In what way could technologies endanger the dialogical relation? First of all, I have shown that dialogical relations come in degrees. The prototypical structure for the dialogical relation is the social relation, but there are derived and “weaker” forms of dialogical relations. These might be the relations we have with and through technologies.

Second, I have pointed out ways in which technologies might weaken the dialogical relation, for example through the effects which I called filtering, screening, and informationalization. In any of these situations, the dialogical relation is weakened because the optimal situation, in which there is a confrontation between two beings *for themselves*, is not reached.

How do we reach this optimal situation? In the final part, I made an attempt to reveal the basic structure of a relation that is successful in connecting the Self to exteriority. In a basic sense, this structure consists of the elements Self, Other, and the “mediator” between the two. It appeared that these elements need to have a specific structure. The Self needs to possess some degree of *receptivity* towards otherness. This is developed through the other elements. The Other needs to show a degree of *resistance*, it needs to be able to say “no” in some degree. The “mediator” needs to have the structure of a *dialogue*. It needs to be a medium that affords confrontation between competing worlds. As I concluded, this structure could function as a point of verification in self-care ethics, politics, and ethics of design. Furthermore, concrete practices could be developed in these domains that would allow the elements in the *structure-for-exteriority* to function properly, thus connecting the Self to exteriority.

## About the author

Cees Zweistra (1986) studied both law and philosophy at Utrecht University. He obtained a master's degree in corporate law (2010) and a master's degree in philosophy (2012). In his philosophical master thesis, he discussed the subject of self-formation in the philosophy of Heidegger, Levinas, and Kierkegaard. This theme reappears in this doctoral thesis.

After his graduation in law, he started to work as self-employed lawyer, mainly in the field of construction (law). During a year-round overland trip through Europe, Asia, and Russia in 2013, he decided to start working on a doctoral thesis. Again, the philosophical background for this thesis is set in the context of (existential) phenomenology. He started working on this thesis in April 2014 at the TU-Delft and completed it in April 2019. In the fall of this year, it will be published as a book under the title *Closing the Empathy Gap: Technology, Ethics, and the Other*. He published various articles on the subject in newspapers and magazines.

Together with his wife, he owns and runs a philosophy institute called Centre Erasme. The main activity of the institute is organizing philosophical summer- and winter schools in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.



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## Simon Stevin (1548-1620)

‘Wonder en is gheen Wonder

This series in the philosophy and ethics of technology is named after the Dutch / Flemish natural philosopher, scientist and engineer Simon Stevin. He was an extraordinary versatile person. He published, among other things, on arithmetic, accounting, geometry, mechanics, hydrostatics, astronomy, theory of measurement, civil engineering, the theory of music, and civil citizenship. He wrote the very first treatise on logic in Dutch, which he considered to be a superior language for scientific purposes. The relation between theory and practice is a main topic in his work. In addition to his theoretical publications, he held a large number of patents, and was actively involved as an engineer in the building of windmills, harbours, and fortifications for the Dutch prince Maurits. He is famous for having constructed large sailing carriages.

Little is known about his personal life. He was probably born in 1548 in Bruges (Flanders) and went to Leiden in 1581, where he took up his studies at the university two years later. His work was published between 1581 and 1617. He was an early defender of the Copernican worldview, which did not make him popular in religious circles. He died in 1620, but the exact date and the place of his burial are unknown. Philosophically he was a pragmatic rationalist for whom every phenomenon, however mysterious, ultimately had a scientific explanation. Hence his dictum ‘Wonder is no Wonder’, which he used on the cover of several of his own books.

