I. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Life and Horizon

James Mensch
(Charles University, Prague)

Abstract:

In this article, I expand Husserl's concept of horizon by relating it to the experiential horizons of non-human animals. Using Darwin's description of the "web of complex relations" that binds different species together, I show how the human horizon connects to the horizons of other sentient creatures. The result is an enlargement of Husserl's "horizon of horizons" beyond the human totality of experiences. I conclude by showing how this expanded notion of horizon allows us to address the problematic aspects of Husserl's original notion of horizon.

Introduction

The concept of horizon has a certain paradoxical, aporetic quality. On the one hand the term signifies a limit, a border. The word comes from the Greek, ὁρίζων (*horízōn*), which is taken from ὅρος (*óros*), signifying a boundary. Thus, we can speak of the horizon as the border between the earth and the sky. This border is the limit of what we can see. As we advance, it recedes before us. It appears as a border that can never be crossed. It is, paradoxically, a one-sided border—a border that we can never, as from some sort of aerial view, see from both sides. In this, it shares the aporetic quality that death exhibits. Death also exhibits itself as a border, a threshold that we cannot cross. This threshold is constantly present to us. Living, we approach it, but we cannot, as long as we are alive, cross it. As Derrida writes, "Indeed, concerning the threshold of death, we are engaged here toward a certain possibility of the impossible."[1] Death is the ultimate expression of the "I cannot."

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutroit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 11.

Like the horizon, it remains a one-sided border.

What does this comparison say about the idea of horizon? Is it a coincidence, or does it point to something essential in its conception? Certain things suggest an essential connection as, for example, the fact that only living beings can die. Death, in other words, is only possible in the context of life. It is in terms of this context that death assumes its quality of a border. There is also the fact that living beings are embodied and, as such, are capable of motility. Because of this, they are open to experiencing the ongoing advance of the horizon and, with this, its quality of being a one-sided border. That the notion of such a border occurs in the context of life points to the tie between life and horizon. In what follows, I will examine this relationship. My thesis will be that the horizonality of experiences is structured by life. Such horizonality is not just a structure of the "life-world," the world of lived experiences that, according to Husserl, we enter once we bracket the claims of science. Horizonality, I will argue, is an ontological principle, one that informs the living world as such. It is a principle determinative of the factual course of experience of sentient beings.

Horizon and Facticity

In phenomenology, the concept of horizon signifies a series of experiences that have been connected and, in their connections, determine the further experiences which can join this series. Thus, in the appearing of a spatio-temporal object, the experiences which we have grasped form the actually experienced portion of a larger horizon. This horizon is composed of the experiences which can connect with the perspectival views we have already experienced. If they fit in with them, they join with our previous experiences so as to more closely determine the object's sense. If they don't, then they make us correct our interpretation of this sense. This sense is not just visual. The horizon that determines it includes our experiences of the object's tactile, auditory, and other sensuous qualities. It also includes the experience we have of its relations to other objects, for example, when we use it as a tool. An object's horizon is, in fact, not just "internal," i.e., directed to the specification of its particular features; it is also "external." Husserl writes regarding the latter,

> The individual—relative to consciousness—is nothing for itself; perception of a thing is its perception in a *perceptual field*.

> And just as the individual thing has a sense in perception only through an open horizon of "possible perceptions,"... so once again the thing has a horizon: an "external horizon" in relation to the "internal"; it has this precisely as a thing of a *field of things*; and this finally points to the totality, "the world as a perceptual world."[2]

The experiences forming this external horizon relate the sense of the object to the senses of the objects composing its surrounding world. My perceptual field includes them. When I move from one object to another, the series of my experiences makes the second object occupy the foreground of my visual field. By virtue of such external horizons, an object acquires its sense as an individual member of the objects of the world. It appears as a numerical (or countable) singular, i.e., as one of many different objects. It also becomes classifiable. Objects with similar senses have the same general internal horizons. Their relations to other objects as given by their external horizons are also similar. Burning matches, for example, all shed light and warmth on their environment.

The most general sense of objects is that they are objects of the world. This signifies that we experience them as part of our unfolding experience of the world. Husserl writes regarding this: "Things, objects...are 'given'...but in principle only in such a way that we are conscious of them as things or objects *within the world-horizon.* Each one is something, something of the world of which we are constantly conscious as a horizon."[3] This world-horizon is the totality of the internal and external horizons through which we grasp objects and their relations. Its correlate is the world considered as the totality of objects. Each worldly object is a one-among-many, but the world, taken as a whole, is simply one. It is not a numerical, but rather a *unique* singular. In Husserl's words, "the world does not exist like an entity, an object, but exists in a singularity for which the plural is senseless."[4] This means that there is a "fundamental distinction in the way in which we are conscious

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[2] Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, ed. W. Biemel (Den Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 165. All translations from the German in this essay are my own.

[3] Ibid., 145.

[4] Ibid., 146.

of the world and the way in which we are conscious of the thing."[5] We are "constantly consciousness" of the world "as a horizon." We can only think of the world as the unending totality of the unfolding experience that, in its connections, allows us to posit individual objects.

Left unresolved in this view of horizon is the existence of the connections that allow us to posit objects and, ultimately, the world as the totality of objects. For Husserl, such connections are simply a fact. He writes:

> The factual (*das Factische*) is the course of consciousness. This holds for every case, whether or not this consciousness be sufficient for the constitution of an exact nature, i.e., our nature, and whether or not it be, as well, one which requires this…Prior, then, to transcendental phenomenology, it is, therefore, a fact that the course of consciousness is so structured that within it a nature as a "rational" unity can constitute itself.[6]

Implicit in calling the course of consciousness a fact is the idea of its contingency. Facts could be otherwise and so could be the experience that allows us to posit the world. As Husserl puts this point: "The existence of the world is a correlate of certain multiplicities of experience marked out by certain essential formations. But it is *not* a matter of insight that actual experience could proceed *only* in such forms of connections. This cannot be inferred purely from the essence of perception *per se.*"[7] The essence of perception, which designates the possibility of perceptual synthesis, is actualized when experiences occur in a certain order—for example, the order of perspectival givenness, where one side of an object gives way to another as we move around it. In the absence of this order, the synthesis that yields the perceptual presence of a three-dimensional object cannot occur. This factual dependence thus opens up the possibility that experience could proceed in a way that makes positing impossible. Thus, when Husserl asks, "Must there always exist an

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/1924), Erste Teil, Kritische Ideengeschichte*, ed. R. Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 393.

[7] Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, ed. R. Schuhmann (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 103.

ego and a physical nature? Cannot consciousness collapse in a tumult of formations?". His answer is affirmative.[8] For him, "the being (the actual existence) of nature is an open pretension on every level."[9] It depends on the factual course of experience.[10]

What is responsible for this factual course? Husserl writes: "Because

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[8] Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24), Erster Teil,* 393. Husserl remarks, "a complete dissolution of the world in a tumult of experiences is equivalent to a dissolution of the ego" (Ms. K IV 2, p. 14). I am grateful to the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium for permission to quote from the unpublished manuscripts.

[9] Husserl, Ms. K III 2, Oct. 10, 1935, p. 10. Iso Kern writes with regard to Husserl's stress on facticity, "In his interpretation of the facticity of world-constitution or of the 'ego of transcendental apperception,' Husserl was aware that he was in a fundamental opposition to German idealism." For the latter, as represented by Kant, the ego is prior to and determinative of the factual. For Husserl, the reverse is the case. Regarding the resultant contingency of both the ego and its world, Kern expresses this opposition as follows: "Insofar as Husserl teaches that world-constitution or, as the case may be, the ego who possesses the world (the 'ego of transcendental apperception') does not, itself, have a basis in a transcendental subjectivity which would make this constitution necessary and permit the positing of the ego itself as necessarily possessing the world—or, better, insofar as world-constitution does not have a basis in a transcendental subjectivity which could guarantee the genesis and continuance of this constitution so that there would not continually exist for transcendental subjectivity the possibility of the dissolution of the cosmos and the 'ego of transcendental apperception'—there results for Husserl a concept of transcendental idealism which is basically different from those of German idealism" (*Husserl und Kant* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964], 297-98).

[10] Thus, for Husserl, "Facts are, in principle, incapable of being derived from essential laws; such laws, in the manner of ideal norms, only specify facts with regard to possibility" (Ms. F I 14, p. 49, June 1911). They specify, in other words, the possibilities of what would obtain, *if* certain factual conditions were, indeed, given. They do not, however, prescribe the obtaining of such factual conditions. In Husserl's words, "These laws...cannot pronounce with regard to an actuality—i.e., whether or not there exists an actuality which corresponds to them. Essential laws possess a meaning for the real if something real (an individual being) can be given which falls under the essences, the ideas" (Ms. D 13 XXI, p. 26, 1907-09).

the rationality that facticity actualizes is not such as the essence demands, in all this there lies a wonderful *teleology*."[11] In other words, because the essence cannot demand that perception give us an actual, "rational" world, the necessity must lie in such a world taken as a goal or *telos* inherent in constitution. Husserl embraces this solution in the *Crisis* and the unpublished manuscripts associated with it. He writes that "each transcendental ego has something innate. Within itself, it innately bears the teleological ground of its streaming, constituting, transcendental life."[12] This ground, which is also a goal, determines the factual course of its consciousness and, hence, its "constituting, transcendental life." As "immanent" within subjects, "as the form of their individual being, as the form of all the forms in which subjectivity exists," this ground determines both "the universal being of transcendental subjectivity" and the world that such subjectivity posits.[13] Given this, "teleology can be exhibited as that which ultimately makes possible and thereby actualizes all being in its totality."[14] For Husserl, then the teleological directedness of consciousness towards the constitution of a stable world is the reason why neither the subject nor its world collapses into a "tumult of formations."

In what sense is this position phenomenological? If we take phenomenology as a descriptive science of the actually existing formations of consciousness, then its descriptions, like such formations, presuppose the factual course of consciousness. In attempting to account for such a factual course, we thus go beyond such phenomenology. What we face, Husserl writes, is "the problematic of the irrationality of the transcendental fact, which appears in the constitution of the factual world and factual mental life." The attempt to solve it involves "metaphysics in a new sense."[15]

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[11] Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, ed. R. Schuhmann (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 125.

[12] Husserl, Ms. E III 9, p. 11.

[13] Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), 1973, 378.

[14] Ibid., 380.

[15] Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24)*, 188. That this metaphysics also has a theological sense is indicated by Husserl's asking: "Can one say, in this situation, that this teleology with its primal facticity has its basis in God" (*Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, p. 385). God, here, is understood as the logos or principle of rationality. See ibid., p. 610.

Life and Horizon

We need not embrace such metaphysics to solve this problematic. The factual course of consciousness can also be taken as determined by nature, taken in a Darwinian sense. Doing so, we broaden the concept of horizon. We extend it to all sentient life. For Darwin, nature is determined by natural selection. Comparing its results with those of domestic breeding, Darwin writes,

> Nature, if I may be allowed to personify the natural preservation or survival of the fittest, cares nothing for appearances, except insofar as they are useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good: Nature only for that of the being which she tends.[16]

This notion of the "being which she tends" and its benefit becomes highly ambiguous once we bear "in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life."[17] For Darwin, each organic being is enmeshed in "the web of complex relations" that binds different species together. This web, he writes, is such "that the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential and yet often hidden manner, to that of all the other organic beings with which it comes into competition for food or residence or from which it has to escape or on which it preys."[18] In Darwin's view, the individual features that make up a living being's structure, from the shape of its legs to the type of eyes it has, are actually a set of indices. Each points to the specific features of the environment in which it functions, and which, for the purposes of survival, its evolutionary history has internalized as part of its structure.[19] This holds not just for nature's shaping the physical features of organisms, but also for its action on their sensate, conscious lives. An animal's senses are determined by its need to function in a given envi-

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[16] Charles Darwin, "The Origin of the Species," in *The Origin of the Species and the Descent of Man* (New York: Random House, 1967), 65.
[17] Ibid., 63.
[18] Ibid, 62.
[19] See ibid.

ronment. The interrelation of this environment with those of species composing it extends in a horizonal manner to the whole of life. Understood in these terms, then, the "being" that nature tends can be understood as life itself understood as a web of relations. This becomes the shifting *telos* determining individual lives.

If we accept Darwin's position, there is a horizonality built into life. Ontologically, that is, in terms of each species' being, this horizon is expressed by the interrelation of the life forms and their environment. The horizon of each species includes both the physical environment in which it functions, as well the other species that function in this. Thus, the individual's ontological horizon includes those whom it feeds upon and those who prey upon it. It also includes those who compete with it for food or mates, as well as those, if it is a social species, with whom it must cooperate if it is to survive. Each of the members of the species with whom it comes into relation has its own horizon, one that extends beyond the original species' horizon. Ultimately, this horizonality extends to the web of life itself. In this web, each species directly shapes the species that form its environment. Mediately, it shapes all the others. Such shaping also includes its physical environment. Thus, the oxygen we breathe is present through the chemical actions of plants; the carbon dioxide that plants require is provided through animal respiration. Similar assertions can be made of the quality of the soil, and so on.

Given that an animal's senses are determined by its need to function in a given environment, we can say that its *phenomenological* horizon is founded on the ontological one of animate and inanimate entities. As determined by the latter, each of its senses has its own horizon. The horizon of a bat's sense of hearing, for example, is determined by the darkness of the sky and the insects it feeds on at night. It is also determined by its ability to fly, to issue high pitched sounds, and to locate insects through the echoes it receives. Its auditory horizon, as it hunts on the wing, unfolds according to these factors. The same can be said of its other senses. They are all determined by the web of life (and the nonliving material that is part of this). Similar assertions hold for the other animals in this web. Each has its own perceptual horizons. Such horizons are also tied to its bodily structure as determined by its environment. They, too, are linked to the organisms with whom they compete or cooperate, pursue or fall prey to. The totality of such linked horizons forms, we can say, the horizon of experiential horizons. The human ho-

rizon is just a part of this. Husserl's world horizon is also part of a greater whole insofar as it consists of experiences available to human subjects. Viewed in the context of life, Husserl's ultimate horizon thus cannot be taken as the phenomenological expression of the world as a totality—the uniquely singular world. The totality of experiences that define such a world exceeds the human.

With this, we can return to the question of the factual course of our experiences. The defining factor, here, must be the web of life. As Nietzsche expresses this insight: "we have senses for only a selection of perceptions—those with which we have to concern ourselves in order to preserve ourselves."[20] The same holds for the other animals. In each case, the factual course of its perceptions is determined in their order and their kind by its functioning in its environment. Its particular senses determine the *kind* of perceptions it has. Its bodily motility determines their *order*. Thus, out of the multitude of information its animate and inanimate environment offers, it attends only to those that match its needs.[21] If it did not, it would not survive: the processes of natural selection would result in its extinction. The teleology inherent in this is directed to life as whole, life as affirming itself in its changing parts. The goal of such teleology is, in Darwin's terms, simply "the "being" that "Nature" tends." It is ultimately life itself, understood in terms of the web of relations that binds it together.

Motion and Horizon

Implicit in the assertion that our bodily motion determines the order of our perceptions is the fact that motion is what actualizes our perceptual horizon. As we move, our experience unfolds horizonally. Motion, then, is at the basis of the appearing of our world. It is also, according to the Czech phenomenologist, Jan Patočka, at the basis of its existence. In asserting the primacy of motion, Patočka thus gives us a basis for understanding the relation between the phenomenological and ontological horizons that Darwin joins together. In announcing his inten-

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[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 275.

[21] Since biologists ascribe senses and motility to plants, the same assertions hold with regard to them. Their horizons are linked to those of the animal world.

tions, Patočka writes that his goal is "a philosophy of a distinctive kind, one that takes movement as its basic concept and principle." "What is distinctive about our attempt," he adds, "is our interpretation of movement; we understand it independently of the dichotomy between subject and object."[22] Its independence comes from the fact that motion is not itself an entity, but rather the *realization* of entities—be they embodied subjects or objects. As Patočka expresses this: "Movement is what makes a being what it is. It unifies and maintains cohesion; it synthesizes the determinations of the being. The persistence and the determinations of substance, and so on, are movements."[23] His point is that movement is the very *existence* of what exists. It is its actuality or being in act. This insight can be put in terms of the etymological sense of the term "existence," which is that of standing out—*ex* and *istimi* in the Greek. Things stand out, that is, ex-ist, by affecting their environment, such affection occurring through their motion. On the most basic level, living beings do this through engaging in metabolism, i.e., by exchanging material with what surrounds them. Inanimate objects do this through such motions as the vibration of atoms, the movement of electrons, the flux of subatomic particles, and so on. Without such motions, entities could not distinguish themselves from their environments; they could not affect them. Environmentally, then, without movement, they are indistinguishable from non-entities. If we accept this, then we can also say with Patočka, "movement is...what founds the identity between being and appearing. Being is being manifest."[24] This follows because

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[22] Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1998), 153.

[23] Patočka, "La conception aristotélicienne du mouvement: signification philosophique et recherches historiques," in *Le monde naturel et le mouvement de l'existence humaine*, ed. and trans. Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 136. At issue, then, is "the problem of movement ontologically conceived, the problem of movement that is not a simple relation, the result of a constitution, but rather the very movement that constitutes the being of entities, which itself exists through movement and becoming, not simply exteriorly and relatively, but in terms of everything that they are" (ibid.). Such a conception, it should be emphasized, is not Aristotelian. Aristotle conceived of motion as the motion of some underlying substrate.

[24] Ibid.

the movement that makes something stand out or exist also makes it present to its environment. It appears in affecting it, and it affects it through its motion.

Whether or not Patočka's conception can apply to existence as a whole, it finds a ready application to the Darwinian conception of life. This is because "the web of complex relations" that characterize life is not static, but continually evolves. This evolution is the result of what can be called the motion of evolution. Such motion actualizes the species. In doing so, it results in the ways in which the individuals composing them presently affect each other and, hence, in the ways in which they "stand out" or exist for one another. In endowing them with senses and bodily motility, it also actualizes their perceptual horizons and, hence, the appearing for each of its world. With this, we have the actualization of the world-horizon in the extended sense of including all their interrelated experiential horizons.

When we apply Patočka's conception to life, two conclusions thus follow. The first is that the web of life is itself actualized as motion. Each of the individuals composing it has been shaped by the motion of evolution. Such motion is a primary example of Patočka's dictum that, ontologically understood, motion "no longer presupposes constituted being but rather constitutes it."[25] For Patočka, this dictum holds generally. In living beings, such constituting motion consists of such things as an animal's metabolic processes, the flow of blood in its veins, the movements of respiration, of digestion, in short, all the organic movements that characterize its being alive. It also includes its bodily motility, which includes the motility of its senses, such as its focusing its eyes, sniffing the air, responding to echoes and so on. All these things, and more, are, in Patočka's words, "movements tied to the fundamental functions of organisms." In humans, he adds, movement includes "language, the movement that, by its composition and decomposition, seizes upon or lets escape the real relations between things and their qualifications." Given our capacity for imitation, our movement also includes the motions of "artistic mimesis," for example, those of singing, dancing, drawing, etc.[26] All these

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[25] Patočka, "Nachwort," in *Die natürliche Welt als philosophisches Problem, Phänomenologische Schriften I*, ed. Klaus Nellen und Jiří Němec, trans. Eliška und Ralph Melville (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 242.

[26] Patočka, *Aristote, ses devanciers, ses successeurs*, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2011), 128.

movements, and many others besides, go into making a person *be* what he or she is. The second conclusion is that this actualization is one with the appearing that occurs through the associated horizons. It is responsible for the bat's perceptual world, as it hunts on the wing. It also results in the world that humans encounter.

The One-Sided Border

With this, we have the reason why both life and experience are confronted by borders that they can never cross. The border of what we do experience (its horizon) always advances before us. We can never catch up with it. The same holds with regard to our death, which, as long as we are alive, is always ahead of us. Both follow from the fact that the ongoing quality of our experiential horizon is tied to the motion that is essential to life. When the motion that actualizes our life and its associated horizon of experience ceases—when, on the basic level, metabolism stops—we lose the basis for both being and appearing. Given this, we can never cross the boundary of the horizon. The horizon must always advance since its stasis is one with the end of our existence. The actual, underlying one-sided border is, thus, implicit in motion itself understood as the ground of both being and appearing.

Derrida's paradox of the "possibility of the impossible," i.e., of the one-sided border, thus, points beyond itself to Patočka's reformulation of phenomenology. It also indicates the biological basis of both the factual course of consciousness and the horizons that this course actualizes. In this, it shows us our interconnectedness—in both a phenomenological and ontological sense—with the rest of nature. To interpret this in a Darwinian sense may, to some, appear as a questionable "naturalization" of phenomenology. Such naturalization, however, may also be taken as sign of and an obligation to the natural world that sustains us.