Between “Homeworld” and “Alienworld”: Waldenfels on Interculturality

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Abstract:
The problematic of culture, with focus on the intercultural relationship, is investigated in the framework of Waldenfels’ phenomenological thinking. Beginning with Husserl’s discourse of experiencing-the-other (Fremderfahrung) and relationship between “homeworld” (Heimwelt) and “alienworld” (Fremdwelt), he denounces the ego-centric position of Husserl and proposes to make clear the original meaning of “the other” (das Fremde). The intertwining relationship between self and other, the “homeworld” and the “alienworld,” which is advocated by Waldenfels, will be made clear in my paper. The distorted form of such intertwining relationship through possessing the other (Aneignung) as well as the consequence of this distortion is also going to be explored.

1. Introduction

The tension of globalization and localization is increasingly obvious in our age. We see on the one hand the European countries are more willing than ever to converge into one cross-country organization, but at the same time and on the same continent we witness the separation of ethnic and cultural groups in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is marching toward its climax. In respect of economics the expansion of international company is vividly present, whereas the protest against globalization is also everywhere to hear. So far as the culture is concerned, the triumph of universalism is always hand in hand accompanied by contextualism and relativism. If you allow me to focus on the current situation in my homeland, we see obviously the controversy about the ethnical and cultural problems is on its height. “Are you Chinese or Taiwanese? To which do you identify yourself?” The meaning of such questions is beyond the academic interest since it touches the serious concern of the ordinary people and has great impact on politics. It is undoubtedly worth taking up these questions with deepest reflections. Wherein is my ethnic and cultural identity?
Do I have to choose between alternatives or the answer can be multiple? How should I treat the difference between me and the other as well as my group and other groups? Does ethnic and cultural authenticity have the prime authority beyond all questions? Can the idea of self-centered nationalism provide us with the best solution to the problem?

These questions are not unknown in phenomenology if we see how Husserl has taken it up by introducing notions such as “homeworld” (Heimwelt), “alienworld” (Fremdwelt) and “the one world” (die eine Welt).¹ In the present essay I propose to deal with such cultural problematic in the framework of the phenomenological thinking of the contemporary phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels. Based on the Husserlian concepts of homeworld and alienworld, Waldenfels depicts the intercultural phenomena as the intertwining relationship between cultural groups. I proceed to explore his cultural discourse by bringing up first his analysis of “the other” (das Fremde) and then his conceiving of the interculturality as the intertwining relationship between homeworld, and alienworld. The distorted form of such a relationship through “possessing the other” (Aneignung) and the consequence of this distortion will be explicated as well.

2. The analysis of the other

When we consider the problem of the other, the self is inevitably involved. Generally speaking, the other is viewed as that which is excluded from the realm of the self. In the broad sense, the self is characterized by the belongingness (Zugehörigkeit), intimacy (Vertrautheit), and availability (Verfügbarkeit). In concrete, it denotes my body, my clothes, my bed, department, friends, kids, generation, homeland, vocation etc. The problem now is, how is the contrast of self and other to be understood? Is it like the shell and core? Or is it like the fore and the rear, the front and the back? Waldenfels uses the Husserlian discourse of experiencing-the-other (Fremderfahrung) to discuss this problem.

According to Waldenfels, what is essential in the discourse of Husserl’s question about the other is not “what is the other,” or “how can I get access to the other,” instead he asks about the way the other presents itself. That is to say, in Husserl’s

¹ Authors such as Klaus Held, Anthony Steinbock together with Waldenfels have interpreted these Husserlian concepts from their own perspectives. See my paper “Lifeworld, Cultural Difference and the Idea of Grounding.” (to be published by David Carr and Chan-Fai Cheung, Space, Time and Culture, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.)
mind there is no such kind of independent other that exists objectively no matter if he is experienced by me or not. He insists that the other is determined by the way how he is accessed (die Fremdheit ist durch die Art ihrer Zugänglichkeit bestimmt). (Waldenfels, 1989: 48) Besides, the other presents itself only through the paradoxical manner: “the verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible.” (CM, 144[114]) Waldenfels points out that the Husserlian discourse of the other is based on the postulates of intersubjectively mutual effect (intersubjektive Wechselwirkung), mutual understanding (Verständigung), the given basis of commonness (das vorgegebene Boden der Gemeinsamkeit), and most crucially, the contrast of the self and the other. (Waldenfels, 1997: 24) The distinction of the self and the other is so to speak self-evident.

The paradoxical form of the other, “the verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible” is interpreted by Waldenfels as lively absence (leibhaftige Abwesenheit), which is quite inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the other, as the latter understands the other as the elsewhere itself instead of as staying in elsewhere. (Das Fremde ist nicht einfach anderswo, se ist das Anderswo, und zwar eine “originäre Form des Anderswo”)(Waldenfels, 1997: 26; see also Merleau-Ponty, 1986, 320) The other cannot be defined solely in the negative way; it is namely not just “what remains to be known.” The other is closely related to the present by way of withdrawal (Entzug), just like memory, which is no longer in presence, it retains nevertheless its impact on the present. Waldenfels says:

“The experiencing-the-other does not mean that there exists something inaccessible in contrast to something accessible. We see clearly from the Husserlian definition of the other that the moment someone escapes from us, it presents itself.” (Waldenfels, 1997 : 29)

An adequate understanding of the other does not necessarily presuppose the pure “my own sphere (Eigenheitssphäre). Because we not only encounter the other on the other persons, we encounter it in us as well. There exists namely the otherness in ourselves and in our cultures, which has to do with the intersubjective otherness (intersubjektive Fremdheit) and intercultural otherness (interkulturelle Fremdheit) respectively. The otherness in us lies not in the dark corners, it is instead vividly present. Waldenfels uses the following examples to show clearly this fact: my birth being given and my name being given. These two happenings seem to stay in the far past, the past that never comes back again, however, they are present almost at every moment of my life. How comes if my life were never given, how comes if I had not a name. I came to the
world through my birth and being known through my name. But the beginning of my life and my being known through name-giving is never part of my memory, “of myself,” “of my consciousness in the strict sense.” I am myself, but this self is never clear to me like crystal. Waldenfels refers to the experience of looking one’s own past photo, he wonders, can I recognize myself as myself? Is he not someone foreign to me, with whom I can hardly identify myself? (Waldenfels, 1997:30)

It follows that the other does not exist somewhere beforehand, it just originates in “drawing the line.” The other is thus always relative. When we draw a line, we have to stand on one of the sides of the line, just like when we tell the difference between genders, it is impossible for us not to stand on either male side or female. That is, we can never assume the third gender to distinguish the genders. The same holds that we are never able to stand outside any culture to compare cultures. (Waldenfels, 1997: 19-21) Our involvements are unavoidable each time when we make any kind of distinction. The other never comes by itself; there is never “the other in itself” that waits for me to get in touch with. The other is other only when we draw the line between self and the other, and I always have to assume a side to stand on.

Waldenfels treats the other on the one hand as relational, such as the right and the left. Since there is never a right side in itself, there is never an other in itself, either. The other is always established through a kind of order, just like the right or the left has no meaning without relating to some standpoint. The other is never localized somewhere, it is instead the result of the establishment of a certain kind of order. An order, once established, will determine what belong to it and what not; anything that does not belong to this order is excluded as outside, as other. Yet on the other hand Waldenfels apparently lays upon the other a more fundamental significance, it is in itself the origin of the order establishing. The other is that which we respond to, and to establish the order can be seen to be one way of responding. The latter in return decide what is inside and what is outside, that is, it thus contributes to the commonly understood meaning of the other, which is in contrast to the self. The other, thus understood, can be described as the other of the second order, which is otherwise from the “primordial other.”

As we have already seen above that the other is treated as the second self, to which the term “alter ego” refers. But the “primordial other” is never the second self. It is what pushes us to speak and to take action. It is also the original force to distinguish the other from the self. In short, it cannot be viewed as belonging to any order at all. That which inspires the establishment of order is not to be put into that order in
reverse. And the other never allows itself to be put into the saying about the other. We make mistakes sometimes when we think, “the saying about the totality is in itself the saying by totality.” (Waldenfels, 1993: 62) But regrettably the significance of the other has not been fully recognized and has been treated now and then as the second self, it is inscribed in a certain order and its significance is just omitted. The reason of its oblivion is that the other is not easy to recognize, as long as we do not pay enough attention. The other presents itself only in the form of calling, to that Waldenfels explains:

“The other is not something determinate, it is what awaits the response – and nothing more.” (Waldenfels, 1997: 180)

The other is that which is calling for response, even the avoiding attitude is a kind of response, and the self is defined in this context accordingly as “responding to the calling.” Even though easily omitted, the other is everywhere to detect, because “the other penetrates all our experiences.” (Waldenfels, 1997: 180)

The other may be also confused with the third (das Dritte). The so-called third person presents itself usually in the form of anonym judge. The “neutral” third person claims also their validity of judgment in terms of “truth,” “law,” “consciousness,” or “intentional meaning.” As long as the other, with whom I am communicating, claims his intentions to be universally valid, then it is highly probable that he is assuming the role of the third person. The consequence would be that the “I” and the “other” may replace each other by way of exchange of perspectives. As long as people do that, the dialogue between them will transform very quickly to the monologue, and the consequence is that the “otherness” evades and gives place to the “commonness.”

One may agree that there is always the third that is involved in the I-other relationship. But it dose not mean that the third stands in this relation from the very beginning. It has its origin instead in a certain discourse; it comes from a certain corner rather than nowhere. Correspondingly, that “universalization” also originates from somewhere. It is the result of some kind of discourse. Waldenfels says emphatically that the modern European used to assume “the standpoint of universality” (Gesichtspunkt des Universalien), but they blindly turn it to “the universal standpoint” (universaler Gesichtspunkt). This latter standpoint leads to the “pressure of universalization” (Universalisierungszwang), which pushes the self and the other under its compulsion. The so-called universal value of human right and justice is the result of a kind of order, and it has a certain kind of injustice as its inevitable
by-product. (Waldenfels, 1997: 125)

The other is completely different from the third, and as we have already seen that it presents itself only in the form of calling (Anspruch). For Waldenfels the calling of the other is as essential as the chasing happiness in Aristotle, the self-preservation in Spinoza, the categorical imperative in Kant and the absolute freedom in Sartre. (Waldenfels, 1997: 121) We have so to speak no other choice in front of the other, we cannot but respond to its calling. It is so primordial that we do not have any other premises when we respond to it.

That which inspires our speaking and action cannot be put in the speaking and action in return. It shows itself only in an indirect way. The attraction of alien culture and other gender is also similar, people can only respond to this attraction by being involved or escaping from it. No way may we talk about it, make it as a theme of our speech. Waldenfels deems it as the play of the truth (Spiel der Wahrheit), which cannot be put in the framework of duality of truth/falseness or good/evil. The equalizing of the self and the other is very much like the equalizing of now and past, life and death. The other namely never allows of any dissolving in any frame of order.

3. The intertwining relationship between cultures and the distortion of this relationship

In dealing with homeworld and alienworld Husserl points out that the homeworld denotes the normal lifeworld of “my fellow people.” It is characterized by cognitional and behavioral norms shared by people who belong to this group. These norms are developed throughout generations, so that for Husserl the alienworld is different from the homeworld because they have no common ancestors. Besides, since the long traditions shape specific cultural characteristics for each culture, we may conclude that there is cultural difference between homeworld and alienworld. Husserl believes that such difference in cultures can be overcome by “the one world” (die eine Welt), which is seen to be the common basis for all homeworlds.

Waldenfels points out that Husserl’s discourse about the homeworld and alienworld is ambiguous, he stresses on the one hand the obvious distinction of homeworld and alienworld, but on the other hand he brings up “the one world” to abolish this differentiation. In the eyes of Waldenfels the consequence of this ambiguity is the oblivion of the otherness of the alienworld. Waldenfels suggests that the relationship may be reinterpreted as intertwining (Verschränkung). He denies the existence of any
independent culture, he denies also the egocentric way of treating the other cultures. From his point of view this is exactly the way Husserl treats the relationship of the European culture and other cultures. (Waldenfels, 1997: 150)

Contrary to Husserl, the other is the key notion for Waldenfels in his discourse about homeworld and alienworld. As indicated above, traditionally the other is treated as the non-self, other than self or that which does not belong to self, it refers to an unclear domain contrasting to the clear domain of “I.” And this unclear domain is that which waits to be recognized, overcome or even conquered. (Waldenfels, 1997: 59-60)

In the modern Europe, beginning with Descartes, the subject is upheld to the center of philosophical discourse. In respect of ethnic problems the nationalism is put in the central place. In addition, the Eurocentricism is also obvious in dealing with the relationship between European culture and other cultures. Under such circumstances the distinction between self and other, homeworld and alienworld is taken for granted. I am purely I and the other is purely the other. However the relationship between the other and I is never symmetrical. The asymmetry results from the fact that people always look at the other or other cultures from their own point of view. The other is consequently depreciated as the non-self. It is merely treated in the negative sense.

We have seen above that according to Waldenfels the other is spread all over our experiences, the experiencing-the-other in terms of Husserl is nothing but one of the examples. The relationship between homeworld and alienworld can be seen to be another typical example. The way Waldenfels criticizes the Husserlian discourse of experiencing-the-other is also obviously demonstrated in his critical attitude on the latter’s discourse of intercultural relationship. He contends that in myself it is full of otherness, the self is not penetratingly clear at all. We see above that the giving of my name, with which I identify myself, is proceeded without my participation. Such inner otherness indicates that between the self and the other there is the intersection, which makes the interaction between me and the other possible. (Waldenfels, 1997: 156)

The way Waldenfels interprets interculturality is similar to his way of interpreting intersubjectivity. The otherness in homeworld and alienworld co-constitutes the between-worlds (Zwischenwelten), which contributes to the intertwining relationship between different worlds. The between-worlds constitute also the basis of the mutual understanding between cultures.

On the basis of calling and response (Anspruch-Antwort), Waldenfels indicates a paradox in the intercultural relation: the characteristics of every culture has to be grateful for its response to the other, no matter whether this other stems from inside or
outside. Waldenfels says:

“The response involves the listening to the voice of the other, but it is not obedience, because our response is creative rather than just repeated.” (Waldenfels, 1993: 64)

“That which we respond to and have to respond to is not under our control, and it is not out of our free invention…. Any pure own culture (reine Eigenkultur) were a culture that does not respond any more, it repeats only the answer that it already has or just the variations.” (Waldenfels, 1993: 63-64)

Generally speaking, people used to undermine the cultural difference between the self and the other (my own group and the other group) by way of “possessing the other” (Aneignung) or “giving up to the other” (Enteignung). The consequence is the sacrifice of other cultures. According to Waldenfels the meaning of „inter“ in the intertwining relationship of homeworld and alienworld should never be sacrificed by any „arrogant single culture“ (angemäßte Monokultur), nor should it be sacrificed by the contrary move. The Aneignung in the strict sense is sorts of sticking to the borderline between cultures, whereas as the Enteignung means to say the abolishing of the borderline. They both want to escape from what Waldenfels calls the dizzy “borderline-play” (Grenzspiel).

Such borderline-play is the true origin of the intersubjectivity and interculturality. It helps bringing about the discursive models and norms (diskursive Mustern und Normen) that enables the communication and interaction between cultures to be possible. (Waldenfels, 1990: 68) The original understanding of language can be taken as an example in this context. Waldenfels contends that the mutual understanding between cultures through language is made possible from the outlet because it is based on the phonological symbolism, which is encountered from culture to culture. For example, “mal” indicates “being grand,” whereas “mil” indicates “being tiny.” Without such kind of original understanding of language we can hardly explain how people from totally different cultures can begin to understand each other and why children always find their access to the language of the adults as well as why the normal persons can communicate with the psychotic patients. (Waldenfels, 1990: 69)

So far as the debate of cultural relativism and universalism is concerned, Waldenfels points out that they both have something in common, that is, they compare their own cultures with those of the other. Waldenfels emphasizes that no significant comparison
between cultures and life forms is possible, as long as we take our own standpoints for granted. The asymmetrical attitude is almost unavoidable each time we make comparison, just because we can hardly stand outside our own cultural basis. The Husserlian discourse about intercultural relationship may provide us with a typical example.

How does homeworld and alienworld relate to each other for Husserl? On the one hand he acknowledges the basic difference between them, it is therefore not unimaginable for people to encounter shock and amazement from the other groups. However, Husserl on the other hand introduces the “fundamental ground” (fundamentale Grundschicht) to undermine this difference as well as the shock and amazement.

The Husserlian notion of the one world is the result of the expanding of the homeworld. Such self-centered idea neglects the intertwining phenomena between cultures and cross over the between-worlds. Husserl’s discourse is based on the assumption that the other is nothing but secondary to me, and the communication between self and other presumes the priority of self over the other, and moreover this priority is strengthened by the commonness proposed by me. The idea of “one world” understood as the first ground and the last horizon fits perfectly to fulfill this role of commonness.

Waldenfels is opposed to Husserl in this point when he thinks that Husserl displays typically what Waldenfels calls the attitude of Aneignung. The possessing of the other, as Waldenfels describes it, means the use the rationality as instrument to conquer and possess the other. In Waldenfels’ understanding, it is the European alone that have ever assumed this attitude towards the other cultures. It is not only based on the ethnocentrism, which is also usually visible among many cultures, but also based on the logocentrism, the focal point of which is the reason. Inherent the reason is the potential to equalize everything and advocate the common aspect. That nothing remains unfamiliar is to be the consequence. Although the European encounter the others and deal with the others but they seldom let the others express themselves.²

² The American political scientist Fred Dallmayr once depicts as follows the way the European dealt with the American Indian after Columbus “discovered” the new continent: “the Spanish authors speak well of the Indians, but with very few exceptions they do not speak to the Indians.”(1996:7) and "According to Todorov, the Spanish-Indian confrontation was a failed encounter from the start, because it was predicated on two alternative strategies: either complete assimilation or complete rejection and subjugation. These two alternatives, he muses, are not confined to the Spanish conquest but are prototype of the behavior of "every colonist in his relation to the colonized" down to our own days."(Dallmayr, 1996:6)
This is the typical position that the modern European used to hold. As long as we understand the attitude of *Aneignung* adequately, we will have no surprise why the modern European is so enthusiastic about colonizing the other ethnic and cultural groups. They considered themselves to be the representatives of the universal reason, and it is their vocation to conquer the “foreign” land ("fremdes" Land), no matter how it is fulfilled through the military power or the civilized method. (Waldenfels, 1990: 63)

The Husserlian discourse about the intercultural relationship reveals that he sticks to the bias of the western tradition. For him, Europe is not just a geographical name; it is the embodiment of rationality. The “ideal lifestyle and mode of being” (Hua, XI: 320) is completely revealed on this continent. This is a kind of Eurocentrism, which encompasses ethnocentrism and logocentrism. (Waldenfels, 1997:49) Waldenfels interprets this Eurocentrism also as “philosophical Eurocentrism,” which begets the miracle that “starts from the self, goes through the other and ends in totality.” (Waldenfels, 1993: 61) The modern European made use of the reason as instrument to conquer and possess the other. The meaning of the other has never been taken up as a serious topic in this Eurocentric way of thinking.

According to Husserl, the European inherit the spirit of the ancient Greece, they make the world as their home and in reverse they consider their home to be the world. Any non-European who wants to do as the European do, just have to learn from the European. The European culture has assumed a cross-cultural and cross-ethnic attitude and become the guard of the “common world” (Gemeinwelt). (Hua VI: 320, 336) All the other cultures can find a place in the hierarchy or system of orders created by the Europeans. Compared to the European culture, these cultures are more or less irrational and it should surprise no one if we witness the collapse of a certain culture because it contains too many irrational factors. (Waldenfels, 1993: 61)

Frankly speaking, the so-called “common world” is nothing but the expansion of the “my own world” (Eigenwelt). The frame of this world is although extended, it remains nevertheless within its own horizon. The misery of this way of thinking is that the European consider their own culture as the culture of cultures and never allows the place for deviations. (Waldenfels, 1993: 61-62) By contrast, the “between-worlds,” as Waldenfels conceives of it, is completely different, because it retains the basic characteristics of “my own world” and “the other world.” The interculturality should never be dismissed by any single culture, especially from the angel of any homeworld. The notion of lifeworld is also reinterpreted in this context.
by Waldenfels as the intertwining area of homeworld and alienworld, instead of being the horizon of a certain homeworld. (Waldenfels, 1997: 41)

4. Concluding remarks

Husserl once says very clearly that “There is something unique here that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example.” (Hua VI, 320[275]) This statement reveals apparently the eurocentric attitude of Husserl and it expresses also quite clearly what Waldenfels calls *Aneignung*. That the modern European executed the colonization and imperialism in the last centuries in the name of reason is a historical fact that no one can deny. Today the European may regret very much about what their ancestors have done to the globe, especially the disappearance of many “primitive cultures.” The European have changed the world, and this change is handed down to us in the contemporary century, with all the good aspects as well as the bad. And this past is not yet over, since we are till witnessing the responses to this past history by war, by terrorism and whatsoever. The non-European and non-Western have to ask themselves such a question: what next then? Should that remorse about the vanishing of their original culture continue to affect their attitude toward the west and even themselves? Should they learn from west the imperial attitude towards the other cultures/countries? The solution lies in, I believe, their attitude toward the other and this attitude has to be considered reflectively and seriously. Let me return to the questions about globalization and localization mentioned in the introduction, we might wonder, are they necessarily in conflict with other? So is the question about my homeland: is to be a Taiwanese and a Chinese necessarily self-contradictory? Based on the idea of interculturality proposed by Waldenfels we might find out better alternative solutions than we used to have.
References:


