



Husserl's Intersubjectivity Meets Thomistic Notions: A Path to Better Interreligious Dialogues

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Abstract

This paper seeks to prove that Thomistic Realism and notions of real beings can supplement Husserlian intersubjectivity to address its lapses so that it can improve interreligious dialogues. Interreligious dialogues are encounters between persons of different faiths. Throughout history, interreligious encounters have been challenged because of some problems with how an individual perceives reality and other persons. In these times when numerous faiths exist worldwide, interreligious dialogue is not an option anymore but a necessity. At first, one may say that Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity is sufficient to address these challenges. Intersubjectivity is the exchange of thoughts and feelings between two 'subjects.' Being grounded in phenomenology and the transcendental Ego, Husserl's intersubjectivity addresses interreligious dialogues' challenges. However, one could see some gaps in Husserl's intersubjectivity, such as the possibility of solipsism, a skeptical philosophy, and the overfocus on rationality. Thomistic realism supplements intersubjectivity by addressing its solipsistic and skeptical tendencies, while the Thomistic notion of real beings refocuses intersubjectivity to the real "being" of man. By addressing these problems in Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity, the challenges to interreligious dialogues, regarding the concept of reality, person, and personal interaction, are countered; hence, improving interreligious dialogues.

Keywords: Interreligious Dialogues, Realism, Thomism, Real Beings, Husserl, Intersubjectivity, Phenomenology

Introduction

The harmonious coexistence of different faiths has been historically challenged, often leading to the perception that such coexistence is unattainable. Instances like the Crusades (1096–1291), a series of religious wars initiated by the Latin Church in the medieval period, where Christians, Muslims, and Jews clashed over religious and territorial dominance, exemplify these struggles. Similarly, World War II (1939–1945) was marked by the Holocaust, which led to the genocide of approximately six million Jews. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, have fueled Islamophobia, further highlighting the ongoing tension between different religious communities. More recently, ongoing conflicts such as the Israel–Palestine crisis, with violent escalations in Gaza and the West Bank, reflect continued struggles over territory, identity, and religious differences, exacerbating interreligious tensions.

Despite these challenges, interreligious dialogue has emerged as a crucial means of fostering understanding and peace among diverse religious groups. Since the inception of the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, numerous efforts have been made to encourage dialogue between faiths, such as the National Muslim-Christian Initiative launched in 2008. These dialogues aim to promote mutual respect and understanding, helping individuals from different faiths find common ground while deepening their understanding of their own beliefs.

However, achieving genuine interreligious dialogue remains difficult, particularly when certain individuals resist engaging with those of different faiths, leading to the potential for prejudice and misunderstanding. This issue can be addressed by employing the philosophical method of phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl, which emphasizes the examination of experiences as they are, free from preconceived judgments. Yet, while Husserl's phenomenology, particularly his concept of intersubjectivity, offers valuable insights for interreligious dialogues, it is not without its criticisms. Critics argue that Husserl's approach risks solipsism, where

the other is perceived as merely an extension of the self, rather than as a distinct and autonomous being.

To counter these limitations, this paper proposes supplementing Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity with Thomistic Realism and the Thomistic notion of real beings, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas. Thomistic Realism offers a more grounded approach to understanding reality beyond the self, facilitating a more authentic recognition of the other. Additionally, the Thomistic concept of real beings, though rooted in metaphysics, has contemporary relevance and can enhance our understanding of the self and others within interreligious dialogues.

This paper acknowledges that interreligious dialogues may not be the sole solution to global conflict, but they could pave the way to a meaningful philosophical contribution to peacebuilding. While philosophical dialogue does not directly intervene in political conflict, it offers a lens through which mutual understanding can be deepened. Philosophy in this paper is believed to possibly be an overarching principle of religions or groups in the society where conflicts occur.¹ This is the reason why the focus in this paper would be philosophical, with the view of making more concrete, practical ideas grounded in real-world concerns. This simply means that interreligious dialogue, in this context, is viewed as both a spiritual and intellectual endeavor that supports peace and justice. Furthermore, while the emphasis lies in the Catholic philosophical tradition, the paper invites engagement across faiths.

Therefore, this paper argues that integrating Thomistic Realism with Husserlian intersubjectivity can address the latter's shortcomings and lead to more effective interreligious dialogues. By bridging these philosophical traditions, the research aims to demonstrate the continued relevance of Aquinas's thought in contemporary interreligious contexts and its potential to foster deeper understanding and cooperation among different religious communities. Though this study is grounded in Christian philosophical tradition, particularly Thomism, it seeks universal philosophical

¹ Philosophy, also, affects the mindset of each person in every age may it directly or indirectly. This could be reinforced with Juichiro Tanabe's philosophy of the conditioned mind. See: Juichiro Tanabe, "A Holistic Peace: Buddhism and Liberal Peace," in *Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. Oliver P. Richmond and Gëzim Visoka (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 131–161.

principles such as truth, goodness, and being—values that transcend any single religious tradition and can serve as points of convergence in interfaith dialogue.² To arrive at such a generalization, it is just to discuss every term involved, starting with Husserl's *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*.

Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity

In Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, the concept of intersubjectivity plays a crucial role in bridging individual consciousness with shared experience. Intersubjectivity, broadly defined as the exchange of thoughts and feelings between individuals, is pivotal for Husserl's philosophical approach. His seminal work, *Cartesian Meditations*, explores how phenomenology and intersubjectivity intertwine, emphasizing that phenomenology is not merely a quest for scientific objectivity but also a path to understanding shared human experiences.³

Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity is rooted in his concept of transcendental subjectivity, which preserves the autonomy of the ego while enabling a "we-relationship" with others. This relationship is facilitated through the act of consciousness, which connects individuals with the world around them, yet allows them to maintain their own perceptions and thoughts. Consciousness plays a vital part in phenomenology through its intentional structures—*noetic* (the process of thinking) and *noematic* (the object of thought)—that shape the meaning of intersubjectivity.⁴ Alongside consciousness, there is intentionality, which would remind one that understanding another's experience involves more than acknowledging their mental states; it also requires an engagement with their physical presence.⁵

Except for the aforementioned concepts, central to Husserl's phenomenology is the process of reductions, which involves bracketing personal presuppositions to achieve a more universal view

² Though these values might not be explicit in this paper, it must be noted that Thomistic metaphysics, these things are given.

³ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §13, 30.

⁴ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), "Husserl, Edmund," 483.

⁵ Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 72. See also: Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures*, Summer Semester (1977).

of reality. The *epoche*, or *epoché* reduction, enables individuals to set aside biases and approach others with an open perspective. Through eidetic reduction, the essential features of reality are distilled, allowing for a purer engagement in intersubjective dialogue. It must be noted, however, that these reductions happen within the consciousness of the person. If this is the case, to consider consciousness, intentionality, and the reductions may not suffice to achieve an authentic intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity is not only about consciousness but also about the body's role in interacting with others in a shared world. To achieve authenticity in intersubjectivity, according to Husserl, the role of the transcendental ego is necessary. The transcendental ego is integral in recognizing and engaging with other egos in a shared environment, leading to a "community of egos."⁶ This communal aspect is crucial for understanding intersubjectivity, as it allows for the fusion of horizons, where different perspectives converge to form a more comprehensive understanding of reality.

Another thing that would bridge consciousness to authentic intersubjectivity is empathy. It is defined as the ability to project oneself into another's lifeworld. This "placing oneself in another's shoes" fosters deeper understanding and genuine dialogue. However, it is crucial to balance empathy with maintaining one's own perspective, ensuring that dialogues do not merely become intellectual exchanges but also lead to practical, authentic interactions.

Thomistic Realism

After a brief explanation of Husserl's intersubjectivity and the necessary concepts hinged to it, it is just to have a glimpse of the Thomistic concepts involved in this paper as well. Within the broad scope of realism,⁷ Thomistic Realism—aligned closely with the

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 255.

⁷ Realism, in contrast to idealism—which posits that objects exist only insofar as they are perceived—asserts that objects have an existence independent of their perception. Idealism encapsulates the notion "esse est percipi" (to be is to be perceived), suggesting that the existence of objects is contingent upon their being known. Realism, on the other hand, posits that the external world exists independently of the mind, and its relationship to the perceiving subject is external.

philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas—offers a nuanced understanding of how the external world interacts with the mind. Thomistic Realism emphasizes that the external world is presented directly to consciousness rather than through mere images or representations. According to this view, extramental reality is perceived as it exists in itself, "out there" in nature. This is reflected in Aquinas's writings, particularly in his *Summa Theologica*, where he argues that reality is directly apprehended through sensory experience. In Thomistic Realism, extramental reality is encountered through direct sensory perception, rather than being confined to mental constructs.⁸

Thomistic Realism can be further categorized into rigid and critical forms. Rigid perceptionists hold that both primary qualities (such as extension and shape) and secondary qualities (such as color and sound) exist objectively and independently of perception. Critical perceptionists, however, argue that while primary qualities exist independently, secondary qualities are subjective and depend on the perceiver. Aquinas's view aligns with this critical perspective, recognizing that while sensory experiences are subjective, they do not negate the objective reality of primary qualities. This balance reflects Aquinas's belief in an external reality that exists independently of, but is perceived through, subjective experience.⁹ It is for this reason that the view of critical perceptionists is used in this paper alongside the Thomistic notion of real beings.

Thomistic Notion of Real Beings

In Thomistic philosophy, "real beings" refer to entities that possess or can potentially possess existence independently of human cognition.¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between actual beings—entities that exist presently—and possible beings—entities that could

This perspective maintains that reality is not merely a construct of subjective thought but exists objectively beyond mental representation. See: Celestine Bittle, *Reality and the Mind* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1936), 363.

⁸ Celestine Bittle, *The Domain of Being* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1939), 22. See also: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), I, q. 4, art. 2.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* trans. By Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1948), II, q. 10, art. 6.

¹⁰ Celestine Bittle, *The Domain of Being* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1939), 22.

exist but do not at the moment. Real beings extend beyond the material realm to include spiritual entities, which, though real, are not perceptible by human senses.¹¹ However, the term real beings is used in this paper with limitations to the creatural beings that continue to reach the perfection of their being. Hence, establishing that real beings are dynamic acts, self-communicative, and have receptivity.

Created beings, unlike God, are mixtures of act and potency. They do not possess their complete being all at once but have received a degree of perfection or act and are capable of further development. This dynamic nature is inherent in Thomistic metaphysics, aligning with Aristotle's notion of the soul, where even the lowest forms of life exhibit self-development. Higher beings, with rational souls, show more complex forms of self-development. This dynamic quality of real beings allows for continuous change and perfection, reflecting their inherent growth potential. This desire for perfection, however, will not be possible without the aid of other real beings.¹²

To achieve this self-development, real beings exhibit self-communication through their operations, reflecting their capacity to effect change and impart perfection to themselves and others. For instance, plants grow, animals move according to instincts, and humans make deliberate choices that enhance both their own and others' perfection. Symbiotic relationships in nature, however, such as those between mushrooms and trees, illustrate how beings can contribute to each other's well-being as they are also trying to perfect themselves. This notion of self-communication highlights the interconnectedness of real beings and their mutual influence on each other's perfection. This influence, however, will not be possible without receptivity.

Receptive potency refers to a being's capacity to receive and be perfected by others. This characteristic underscores the relational nature of real beings, as they continually seek to acquire and impart perfection. Thomistic thought posits that no being achieves ultimate perfection in isolation; rather, beings rely on their interactions with

¹¹ Among these, God is considered the most real, or the *ens realissimum*, embodying pure and absolute actuality. Created beings, by contrast, are composites of potency and act, possessing a degree of actuality but remaining susceptible to change and further perfection. See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentes* I, ch. 16, trans. by Anton C. Pegis (Garden City: Image Books, 1955), 100.

¹² *Quidquid movetur ab alio movetur*; whatever changes is changed by another. See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 2, art. 3.

others to reach their full potential.¹³ This relational aspect of receptivity is crucial for understanding the dynamic nature of existence within the Thomistic tradition.

Identification of Gaps in Husserl's Intersubjectivity

Before applying both philosophical traditions to interreligious dialogues, it is necessary to determine the gaps in Husserl's *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* to establish the reason why there is a necessity to incorporate some Thomistic themes in his notion. Indeed, it offers profound insights into understanding consciousness and mutual recognition, but inherent weaknesses in his framework can significantly impact its effectiveness in improving interreligious dialogues.

One of the primary criticisms of Husserl's approach is its potential to lead to solipsistic tendencies.¹⁴ Husserl's focus on the transcendental Ego, which he posits as central to the constitution of reality, can inadvertently reduce the external world and other minds to mere constructs of one's own consciousness.

By prioritizing the introspective constitution of reality, Husserl's framework may confine dialogues to subjective projections rather than engaging with others as independent, real entities. This limitation poses a challenge to achieving authentic and reciprocal understanding.

Another significant gap in Husserl's *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* involves the issue of skepticism regarding the nature of reality and the existence of others. Husserl's method of bracketing, which involves reducing external realities to subjective experiences, can cast doubt on whether the external world and other individuals genuinely exist beyond one's consciousness. If the existence of the other and their experiences are merely a construct of the Ego, it becomes challenging to establish a common ground for dialogue. This limitation affects the depth and authenticity of conversations.

It is also noteworthy that Husserl's framework is heavily grounded in rationality and logical analysis, which, while valuable for

¹³ It is noteworthy, however, that no matter how much a being communicates itself to others and desire to improve the being of others, the effect is still dependent on the being receives it. *Quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver).

¹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 100.

philosophical discourse, may overlook the emotional and spiritual dimensions. The emphasis on rationality can limit the scope of engagement, reducing the richness of human interactions to intellectual exchanges alone.

Interreligious dialogues often involve emotional and spiritual aspects that are not fully captured by a purely rational approach. Husserl's framework, by prioritizing logical structures, may neglect the importance of compassion and the broader human experience necessary for meaningful dialogue. This overfocus on rationality can constrain the ability to connect with others on a more profound and holistic level, which is essential for fostering understanding and respect across different belief systems.

Integration of Thomistic Realism in Husserlian Phenomenology

In the previous discussion, one can see that Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity has a framework that may encounter several limitations. This is addressed through Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings, which offer improvements by focusing on the concepts of reality, human nature, and personal interaction.

Husserl's approach emphasizes the subjective experience of the ego, relying on processes like bracketing to understand reality. This methodology, however, faces criticism from Jacques Maritain, who argues that it risks solipsism. According to Maritain, if transcendental phenomenology constructs reality solely through the ego, it undermines the confirmation of an external world, potentially reducing it to mere subjective construction.¹⁵

Thomistic Realism counters this issue by upholding foundational truths that must be acknowledged in phenomenological investigation. Thomistic principles affirm essential truths such as the existence of the self, the principle of contradiction, and the reliability of reason. These truths support the existence of an objective external world that cannot be dismissed or reduced away. Thomistic Realism posits that primary qualities of external realities are objective and should not be subject to reduction, while secondary qualities, being subjective, can be bracketed. This approach helps to preserve the

¹⁵ Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 100.

commitment to an objective reality, addressing the solipsistic tendencies of Husserl's framework.

In Husserl's phenomenology, the individual is understood as a transcendental ego—a thinking subject engaged in intersubjectivity. This view, however, has a solipsistic potential and a limited focus on the intellectual aspect of human nature.

The Thomistic Notion of Real Beings offers a more comprehensive view by emphasizing the body-soul composite of human nature. According to Thomistic thought, the body is integral to human existence and relational capacity, not merely a vessel for intellectual activity. This perspective enriches the Husserlian concept of the transcendental ego by incorporating the embodied and volitional dimensions of human nature. The Thomistic Notion of Real Beings acknowledges that humans are not only intellectual beings but also seek goodness and perfection through their relationships.

Additionally, Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings highlight that human interactions involve not only the pursuit of truth but also the pursuit of goodness. Unlike Husserl's emphasis on intellectual processes, Thomistic thought recognizes the importance of volition and moral values. This broader understanding facilitates a richer account of personal interaction, emphasizing the relational and moral aspects of human engagement.

Lastly, Husserl's concept of intersubjectivity includes empathy, which involves projecting oneself into another's lifeworld. However, Stein's notion of empathy must be taken note of as well, as she says that empathy is not merely a projection into another's lifeworld but involves recognizing the other's unique subjectivity. Empathy includes a kind of 'primordial presence,' an encounter that respects both self and other.¹⁶ This adds depth to Husserl's account by grounding intersubjectivity in both experiential awareness and moral responsibility. Taking these into consideration, while this approach aims to bridge individual perspectives, it remains limited by its reliance on subjective experience and the challenge of fully grasping the other.

Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings provide a rectification by emphasizing the role of love and the good in personal interactions. In Thomistic thought, love is an active willing of the good

¹⁶ Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989), 63.

for others, not merely a cognitive or emotional response. This notion of love transcends Husserl's concept of empathy, involving a genuine commitment to the well-being of others. Integrating this concept into phenomenology ensures that interactions are grounded in an appreciation of the other's inherent dignity and value, rather than reducing them to mere reflections of oneself. By this, there would be an emphasis on a relational engagement that recognizes the real existence and worth of others. This approach also aligns with the Thomistic view that personal interactions should aim for mutual perfection and moral development.

The integration of Thomistic Realism into Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity addresses key gaps by reinforcing the objectivity of reality, enriching the understanding of human nature, and deepening the concept of personal interaction. Thomistic principles amend the solipsistic tendencies of Husserl's framework, emphasizing the importance of an objective external world, the embodied nature of human existence, and the role of love in personal relationships. This integration results in a more robust and comprehensive framework for understanding intersubjectivity.

Implications for Interreligious Dialogue

By supplementing Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity with Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings, a compelling approach to enhancing interreligious dialogues. Husserl's focus on subjective experience and empathy can benefit greatly from Thomistic Realism's grounding in objective reality. This combination addresses key challenges related to perceptions of reality and the value of others, leading to more effective and respectful dialogues.

Husserl's phenomenology emphasizes understanding the world through individual subjective experiences. While this approach provides valuable insights into personal perspectives, it can also lead to discrepancies when engaging in interreligious dialogues. Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings supplement this by asserting the existence of an objective reality beyond individual viewpoints. By establishing this shared reality, participants have a common ground to build upon, fostering clearer and more productive discussions. This objective foundation helps bridge gaps between differing perspectives,

creating a stable basis for exploring and understanding each other's beliefs.

In addition to providing a common reality, Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings enhance mutual respect within dialogues. By recognizing the intrinsic value and goodness of each person, as emphasized by Thomistic thought, participants are encouraged to view one another with greater appreciation. This perspective fosters a respectful and considerate environment where each participant's views are valued and heard. The recognition of the inherent worth of others promotes empathetic and respectful interactions, essential for meaningful dialogue.

Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings also broadens the scope of dialogue by introducing a more comprehensive view of human nature. While Husserl's phenomenology primarily focuses on intellectual aspects, Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings encompass intellectual, moral, and relational dimensions of human existence. This holistic approach allows dialogues to address not only intellectual differences but also ethical and relational aspects. By engaging with these broader dimensions, participants can explore deeper values and goals, leading to more enriching and comprehensive discussions.

Moreover, integrating Thomistic notions of love with Husserl's empathy enhances the quality of interactions. Thomistic love involves actively willing the good for others, which complements the empathetic understanding promoted by Husserl. This integration ensures that dialogues go beyond mere understanding to include genuine care and support for each participant's spiritual and moral growth. By fostering compassionate engagement, this approach encourages more meaningful and supportive exchanges.

In practical terms, establishing common ground is crucial for effective interreligious dialogue. Participants should begin by acknowledging shared objective realities and fundamental truths, which provide a stable foundation for exploring differences. This shared reality helps to create a coherent basis for discussion and facilitates meaningful exchanges. Additionally, fostering respectful engagement by emphasizing the intrinsic worth of each person ensures that all perspectives are valued and considered. This respectful environment supports more constructive interactions.

Encouraging holistic dialogue involves applying Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings' broader view of human nature to address not only intellectual differences but also moral and relational aspects. This approach enables deeper engagement with each other's values and goals, enriching the dialogue. Lastly, integrating Thomistic love with Husserl's empathy promotes compassionate interaction. This combination encourages participants to actively support each other's spiritual and moral growth, leading to more meaningful and supportive dialogue.

In conclusion, the integration of Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings with Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity offers a robust framework for improving interreligious dialogues. By establishing shared objective realities, enhancing mutual respect, expanding the scope of dialogue, and integrating love and empathy, this philosophical combination addresses key challenges and fosters more meaningful, respectful, and constructive exchanges. This approach not only improves understanding among participants but also encourages deeper and more compassionate engagement.

Possible Applications

To further demonstrate the practical relevance of integrating Thomistic Realism with Husserlian Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity, it is helpful to consider a concrete or hypothetical case of interreligious dialogue. For example, consider a dialogue between a Catholic priest and a Muslim imam discussing the notion of divine justice. A common obstacle in such conversations is the epistemological disparity: while the Catholic interlocutor may appeal to natural law and metaphysical realism, the Muslim representative may invoke revelatory tradition rooted in prophetic authority.

Under a strictly Husserlian framework, the dialogue would attempt to suspend all theological presuppositions to find a common experiential ground. Yet, this bracketing can lead to a sterile neutrality, reducing the meaningfulness of their deeply held metaphysical commitments. Here, Thomistic Realism offers a corrective by affirming that certain fundamental truths—such as the existence of being, the intelligibility of reality, and the moral order—can be known and shared across traditions without being reduced to subjectivism.

Furthermore, applying the Thomistic notion of the human person as a “substance-in-relation” reorients the dialogue from abstract egos to concrete persons seeking mutual flourishing. By acknowledging the other's rational and volitional nature, the dialogue becomes not just a space of intellectual encounter, but also of moral and spiritual communion. For instance, instead of merely “understanding” the imam’s concept of justice, the priest can recognize the imam’s perspective as a participation in the common good, thus establishing a shared ethical framework grounded in being.

The integration of Husserl’s *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* with Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real could also be practically transformative for individuals and communities navigating religious tensions or armed conflict, even outside formal dialogue sessions. As long as at the heart of both traditions is the affirmation of the human person as a subject and as a real being, capable of both knowing and loving. In practical terms, this means encouraging ordinary individuals to begin conversations by recognizing the intrinsic dignity and subjectivity of others, especially those considered “outsiders” or even “enemies.”

Grounding dialogue in shared humanity enables mutual recognition and mitigates prejudice. Drawing from Edith Stein’s development of Husserlian empathy, people can learn that empathy is not merely emotional resonance, but a responsible engagement with another’s experience, calling them to act in solidarity. Furthermore, Husserl’s method of “bracketing” judgments can be applied in interfaith or interethnic dialogues by helping participants suspend biases and assumptions, enabling a clearer, more objective understanding of the other.

Thomistic Realism then reaffirms that these others are not mental constructs, but real beings worthy of engagement and love. Dialogue, in this light, becomes less about debate and more about mutual perfection, where each party shares its own goodness and grows toward the good together. Finally, this integrated approach frames every act of peacebuilding—listening, forgiving, or reaching out—as a form of self-transcendence and moral conversion. Seen through this lens, the path to peace is not just political or social but also spiritual and ethical, one that begins within and radiates outward to transform communities.

In this way, the Thomistic-Husserlian integration not only clarifies misunderstandings about the nature of reality and the human subject but also provides practical norms for more fruitful and transformative interreligious engagements.

Conclusion

Integrating Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings with Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity offers a compelling framework for enhancing interreligious dialogues. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology allows participants to bracket their personal biases and engage with reality more objectively. This approach facilitates a shared understanding by focusing on common experiences and perceptions, which helps address pluralism and differing faith perspectives.

However, Husserlian phenomenology has limitations. The concept of the transcendental ego, while useful for understanding the other as another self, remains self-centered and lacks a concrete external framework. Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings address this by affirming an objective reality beyond individual perceptions. It provides a necessary counterbalance to phenomenological reductions, ensuring a more comprehensive and grounded dialogue. By recognizing fundamental truths and the reliability of reason, Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings allow for a more substantial exchange of ideas and help overcome the solipsistic tendencies of phenomenology.

In practice, combining Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings with Husserl's phenomenology can improve interreligious dialogues. Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings establish a shared foundation of fundamental truths, making discussions more meaningful and less subjective. This approach helps participants engage with each other's beliefs on common ground rather than through isolated interpretations.

Moreover, Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings expand on the transcendental ego by emphasizing a holistic view of the person, including their moral and volitive dimensions. This broader perspective fosters a deeper, more empathetic engagement with the other, recognizing them not just as a cognitive mirror but as a person with intrinsic worth and potential for mutual growth.

While empathy in Husserl's phenomenology is valuable for understanding different perspectives, it must be complemented by Thomistic notions of love. Love transcends mere cognitive understanding and involves a genuine commitment to the other's well-being and perfection. This integration encourages participants to build deeper relationships and engage in more meaningful dialogues, aligning with the goal of interreligious discussions: transcending individual differences and fostering a connection with the Divine.

In summary, supplementing Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity with Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings enhances interreligious dialogues by addressing the limitations of each approach. Husserl's phenomenology provides a method for overcoming personal biases, while Thomistic Realism and the Notion of Real Beings offer a grounded understanding of reality and the self. This integration facilitates a richer dialogue, promoting mutual growth and a deeper relationship with the Divine. By rectifying the solipsistic tendencies of phenomenology and incorporating the notion of love, this approach not only improves understanding but also strengthens the fundamental purpose of interreligious dialogue.

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