Self-identification, Intersubjectivity, and the Background of Intentionality

A Reply to Anita Pacholik-Żuromska

Christian Beyer

Two suggestions by Pacholik-Żuromska, concerning the background of "I"-references and the intersubjective dimension of intentionality, respectively, are taken up and related to Husserl's theory of intentionality. Moreover, a number of misunderstandings of my view are corrected, Searle's "regress argument" for the Background Hypothesis is criticized, and a distinction between two functions of the background of intentionality is drawn in order to clarify my view.

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1 Introduction

Pacholik-Żuromska takes issue with both my proposal to tone down Searle's Background Hypothesis in terms of the distinction between producers and mere consumers and my claim that part of the background of intentionality is itself intentional (albeit in a derived sense). In her introduction she kindly raises the question "who has made the mistake—the speaker (producer, author) or the hearer (consumer, reader)," provided that "the interpreter of the article [...] was to misunderstand the article" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, pp. 2–6). I answer that in case of doubt it is the author of the target article, of course, who has made the mistake. As the formulation of her question shows, Pacholik-Żuromska has indeed misunderstood a central distinction, i.e., that between producer and mere consumer. However, before I take the opportunity to correct this and other misunderstandings, I would like to comment on

two ideas and suggestions by Pacholik-Żuromska that I find interesting and well worth pursuing further.

2 The background of self-identification

The first suggestion concerns our ability to "grasp the literal meaning of the indexical 'I'." (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 4) Pacholik-Żuromska contends that this may require, on the part of both speaker and hearer, "a capacity to identify themselves as subjects of a certain state, which is a capacity belonging to the unintentional background." (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 4) I agree that (1) the same sort of capacity is in play with both speaker and hearer, and that (2) this capacity belongs to the background. I reject the claim, though, that this capacity is non-intentional. Let me explain.

Ad (1): In *The Thought* Gottlob Frege contends that only the speaker herself can grasp the proposition expressed by the sentence "I have been wounded," as used in a soliloquy, and that the hearer therefore has to grasp a different proposition, provided by the utterance context, in order to understand a corresponding sentential utterance, such as the proposition expressed by "She who is speaking to you at this moment has been wounded" (Frege 1956, p. 298). This flies in the face of the Husserlian conception of linguistic communication from which I start out in my article, which requires that the hearer ascribes the right meaning-bestowing act to the speaker in a case of successful communication; which means, in the case at hand, that he ascribes to the speaker what Pacholik-Żuromska aptly calls a self-identification (rather than an act of speaking to the hearer, as Frege has it). In fact, this is precisely the way Husserl himself describes what happens in the case of the correct interpretation of "I"-utterances:

> Es ist klar: Wer 'ich' sagt, nennt sich nicht nur selbst, sondern er ist sich dieser Selbstnennung auch als solcher bewußt, und dieses Bewußtsein gehört wesentlich mit zum Bedeutungskonstituierenden des Wor-

tes 'ich'. Das aktuelle Sich-selbst-Meinen fungiert […] so, daß darin sein Gegenstand als Gegenstand eines Selbstmeinens gemeint […] ist. […] Der Hörende versteht es, sofern es ihm Anzeige für dieses ganze Bewußtseinsgebilde ist, also der Redende für ihn als jemand dasteht, der sich selbst, und zwar als 'ich' nennt, d.i. sich als Gegenstand seiner als Selbsterfassung erkannten Selbsterfassung nennt.[1] (Husserl 1984, p. 813)

Thus, if the speaker asserts "I have been wounded," she presents herself as someone who refers to herself *as* referring to herself (or as meaning herself/having herself in mind/thinking of herself), in order to state about herself that she has been wounded; and the hearer understands this assertion if he takes the speaker to refer to herself as referring to herself and to assert about herself that she has been wounded. I regard this metarepresentational view of the meaning-bestowing acts underlying the assertive use of "I"-sentences as quite plausible. After all, if someone claims, say, "I have a broken leg," then she *eo ipso* knows that she *refers to herself* by "I;" she could instantly add: "I am speaking of *myself*." (Contrast this to a case in which a speaker unknowingly looks at herself in a mirror and exclaims "She has a broken leg." See Beyer 2006, pp. 33 ff.) Incidentally, this view fits in well with a dispositionalist higher-order judgment theory of consciousness, which implies that (thanks to an underlying, "pre-reflective" structure of inner time-consciousness) "I"-awareness disposes its subject to judge that she herself is thinking of herself (see Beyer 2006, pp. 33 ff.).[2] If a mental disposition such as this is actualized (which is not re-

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1 The English translation is as follows: "Clearly, if someone says 'I', he does not only refer to himself, but he is also aware of this referring to himself as such, and this awareness builds an essential part of what constitutes the meaning of the word 'I'. The current act of meaning oneself is functioning […] in such a way that in the course of it its [intentional] object is […] being meant *as* the object of an act of meaning oneself. […] The hearer understands it, if he takes it as an indication for the whole structure of consciousness just described, that is to say, if the speaker is regarded by him as someone who refers to himself precisely as 'I', i.e., as someone who refers to himself as the object of his recognition of himself recognized as a recognition of himself." (My translation.)

quired for self-identification), then the resulting ("reflective") "I"-judgment is based upon, and epistemically motivated by, a ("pre-predicative") act of referring to oneself *as* referring to oneself.

Ad (2): In order for the hearer to ascribe such a meaning-bestowing act of self-identification to the speaker, he does not, of course, have to actualize his own capacity for self-identification, in the sense of actually thinking of himself as thinking of himself. But in the absence of this *capacity* he would be unable to ascribe such an act to the speaker, at least if we follow Husserl and Edith Stein and conceive of third-person act ascriptions as based on empathy, where the ascriber mentally simulates the cognitive situation of the target person (see Beyer 2006, ch. 3). So I agree with Pacholik-Żuromska that an element of the background (notably, the capacity for self-identification) is required for the ability to understand "I"-utterances. However, I deny that this capacity is completely non-intentional. It is precisely a mental disposition that is actualized (if it gets actualized) in *intentional* consciousness, namely in pre-predicative acts of referring to oneself *as* oneself—acts which may, but need not, give rise to corresponding "self-reflective" higher-order judgments.

3 The intersubjective dimension of intentionality

Another interesting suggestion made by Pacholik-Żuromska concerns the relationship between intentionality and intersubjectivity. She claims that "[i]ntentionality is a relation between minds and the world" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 5), thus subscribing to an externalist conception of intentionality (which I share), and goes on to characterize it as "a social phenomenon, developed and practiced through interactions with other minds" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 5). Pacholik-Żuromska refers to Tomasello, Rakoczy, and Davidson in this connection, but (her ascription to Husserl of the thesis that

subjects can "live a solitary life" notwithstanding, which I regard as a misreading; this collection, p. 8) she could also have referred to Husserl here. In the second volume of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (*Ideas II*), Husserl presents a detailed analysis of the intersubjective, reciprocal constitution of intentional objects that belong to a "communicative environment" and are thus immediately perceivable as valuable heating material, for example:

> Kohle z.B. sehe ich als Heizmaterial; ich erkenne es und erkenne es als dienlich und dienend zum Heizen, als dazu geeignet und dazu bestimmt Wärme zu erzeugen. […] Ich kann [den brennbaren Gegenstand] als Brennmaterial benutzen, […] er ist mir wert mit Beziehung darauf, daß ich Erwärmung eines Raumes und dadurch angenehme Wärmeempfindungen für mich und andere erzeugen kann. […] [A]uch andere fassen ihn so auf, und er erhält einen intersubjektiven Nutzwert, ist im sozialen Verbande geschätzt und schätzenswert als so Dienliches, als den Menschen Nützliches usw. So wird er nun unmittelbar 'angesehen' […].[3] (Husserl 1952, p. 187)

Notice that near the end of this passage from § 50 of *Ideas II* Husserl observes how intersubjective agreement in the form of reciprocally shared emotional valuings, and accordingly motivated evaluations (evaluative judgments), add a social dimension to the constitution of the environment. In this way, the personal environment of an individual subject acquires the significance of a social environment equipped with

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2 This may also fit in with the Brentanian conception of consciousness that Pacholik-Żuromska alludes to in section 4.

3 The English translation is as follows: "I see coal as heating material; I recognize it and recognize it as useful and as used for heating, as appropriate for and as destined to produce warmth. […] I can use [a combustible object] as fuel; it has value for me as a possible source of heat. That is, it has value for me with respect to the fact that with it I can produce the heating of a room and thereby pleasant sensations of warmth for myself and others. […] Others also apprehend it in the same way, and it acquires an intersubjective use-value and in a social context is appreciated and is valuable as serving such and such a purpose, as useful to man, etc. That is how it is first 'looked upon' in its immediacy." (Husserl 1989, pp. 196f.)

common objects possessing intersubjectively shared values—in the case at hand: shared use-values, to be perceived immediately (e.g., as a piece of heating material). In the following section, §51, entitled "The person in personal associations," Husserl generalizes these observations. He claims that the social environment is relative to persons who are able to "communicate" with one another, i.e., to "determine one another" by performing actions with the intention of motivating the other to display "certain personal modes of behavior" on his grasping that very communicative intention (Husserl 1989, p. 202). If an attempted piece of communication such as this, also called a "social act" (Husserl 1989, p. 204), is successful, then certain "relations of mutual understanding (Beziehungen des Einverständnisses)" are formed (Husserl 1989, p. 202):

> [A]uf die Rede folgt Antwort, auf die theoretische, wertende, praktische Zumutung, die der Eine dem Anderen macht, folgt die gleichsam antwortende Rückwendung, die Zustimmung (das Einverstanden) oder Ablehnung (das Nicht-einverstanden), ev. ein Gegenvorschlag usw. In diesen Beziehungen des Einverständnisses ist […] eine einheitliche Beziehung derselben zur gemeinsamen Umwelt hergestellt.[4] (Husserl 1952, pp. 192-193)

A few lines later, Husserl even claims that relations of mutual understanding help determine the common surrounding *world* for a group of persons; the world as constituted this way is called a "communicative environment." On his view, the world of experience is partly structured by the outcomes of communicative acts. If it is structured this way, then there will be meaningful environmental "stimuli," or solicitations (to use a more recent terminology), which motivate a given subject to display personal behaviour that consists in his reacting upon such environmental stimuli;

where the notion of motivation is to be understood as follows:

> [W]ie komme ich darauf, was hat mich dazu gebracht? Daß man so fragen kann, charakterisiert alle Motivation überhaupt.[5] (Husserl 1952, p. 222)

I regard this Husserlian conception of the structures underlying our being-in-the-world as highly plausible. So Pacholik-Żuromska kicks at an open door when she stresses the importance of (what is nowadays called) embedded cognition and dynamic mind-world interaction for an adequate conception of intentionality.[6]

4 Some corrections and clarifications

Finally, some corrections. I begin with two misunderstandings that I find easily comprehensible.

First, my use of the term "producer" may be misleading, as it differs from the ordinary use of the term. Not every producer of an utterance, in the ordinary sense, is a producer in the technical sense that Evans and I associate with the term. To take up the example that Evans gives in the long quotation cited at the beginning of section 5 of my article, if someone uses the name "Livingston" today to refer to (say) an 18th century politician, then she will be a mere consumer of that name, because she could not "have been introduced to the [name-using] practice via [her] acquaintance with" Livingston, to put it in Evans' terms (1982, pp. 376–393). This holds true even if she is the *speaker* of an utterance in which the name "Livingston" is used this way. I do not think that the producer/consumer distinction leads to a problematic

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4 The English translation is as follows: "[S]peaking elicits response; the theoretical, valuing, or practical appeal, addressed by one to the other, elicits, as it were, a response coming back, assent (agreement) or refusal (disagreement) and perhaps a counterproposal, etc. In these relations of mutual understanding, there is produced […] a unitary relation of [persons] to a common surrounding world." (Husserl 1989, pp. 203-204)

5 The English translation is as follows: "How did I hit upon that, what brought me to it? That questions like these can be raised characterizes all motivation in general." (Husserl 1989, p. 234; in part my translation)

6 Pacholik-Żuromska also refers to Davidson's notion of triangulation in this connection. For a Husserl- and Føllesdal-inspired critique of Davidson's recourse to causal concepts in this context, see Beyer 2006, pp. 88–99. In the last paragraph of section 4 she draws a distinction between diachronic externalism— a position she ascribes to Davidson—, synchronic and social externalism, claiming that the latter "creates trouble for Beyer" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 8). In the light of both the foregoing considerations and her misreading of my view on Searle's Background Hypothesis (see section 4), I regard this claim as false.

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two-tier society of linguistic insiders and outsiders, as Pacholik-Żuromska seems to believe. It merely reflects the way proper names and other expressions acquire a particular usage, as a matter of fact. Actually, Pacholik-Żuromska herself draws upon a very similar distinction (but see footnote 16 in the target article, Beyer this collection) when she talks about experts. Of course, in principle anyone may become an expert regarding the application of any term—although it is difficult, to say the least, to become a producer regarding a proper name whose bearer has passed away a long time ago (see above). If this latter remark is correct (as I think it is), then it is not the case that in general "everyone can verify or falsify judgments of others," as Pacholik-Żuromska (this collection, p. 6) wants to claim following Peacocke. In some cases (such as the case of proper names whose bearers have passed away) some people—the mere consumers—are in an epistemically underprivileged position.

Since Pacholik-Żuromska mistakenly equates what I call producers with speakers and mere consumers with hearers, she misreads my proposal to tone down Searle's Background Hypothesis in such a way that only the producers with regard to a given set of sentences need "background know-how regarding the application of those sentences" (as I put it in section 5 in the target article, Beyer this collection), and her relevant arguments are besides the point—even if they contain interesting ideas (see sections 1 and 2 above). I do not claim that the Background Hypothesis "should be restricted only to the speaker," as Pacholik-Żuromska (this collection, p. 1) puts it in her abstract. I contend that it should be restricted to the producers.

This brings me to a second misunderstanding that also concerns my view on the Background Hypothesis. In some places (like the last paragraph of section 4 in the target article; Beyer this collection) I carelessly put my view in such a way that it invites the following interpretation, which Pacholik-Żuromska takes for granted: only the producers need any background know-how. However, this is, again, a misreading, as becomes clear when one looks at

more careful formulations of my view, such as the one quoted in the preceding paragraph or the following formulations from section 5: "Meaning-intentions […] do not generally require a non-intentional background *relative to which their (truth-conditional) content and satisfaction conditions are determined;*" (Beyer this collection, p. 15; emphasis added) "the applicability of the Background Hypothesis […] needs to be restricted, *as far as the part of the background (co-)determining truth-conditional content is concerned, to what I have called the producers.*" (Beyer this collection, p. 17; emphasis added) What Pacholik-Żuromska does not notice, and what I should have made clearer, is that I distinguish between two different functions of the background:

- On the one hand, some of its elements (such as personal acquaintance with a name-bearer, or with a practice like opening a can) help to determine a particular truth-condition for a sentence-use and its underlying meaning-bestowing act—here I claim that only the producers need a corresponding background.
- On the other hand, the existence of what Searle calls the Network is an enabling condition for intentional consciousness.

Regarding the latter, I argue near the end of my article that it is misleading to characterize the part of the Network that constitutes "the set of anticipations determining" (Beyer this collection, p. 16) what Husserl refers to as the "intentional horizon" of a conscious intentional state as completely non-intentional, because they are mental dispositions to form occurrent higher-order beliefs. In order to save Husserl's notion of intentional yet unconscious horizon anticipations, which I regard as an indispensable contribution to the theory of intentionality, I propose that we (re)formulate Searle's background conception in such a way that "the background may indeed contain intentional elements, albeit in a derived sense" (Beyer this collection, p. 17), notably in the sense of mental dispositions to form higher-order beliefs. The only argument I find in Pacholik-Żuromska's commentary that may at

first sight be taken to speak against the admission of such intentional background-elements is the regress argument she refers to in section 4 of her commentary. She points out that the Background Hypothesis is supposed to avoid a regress of assumptions such as the one I describe in section 3 in the target article (under the heading "Background assumptions") in order to motivate Searle's radical contextualism. But, quite apart from the fact that I do not claim that *all* elements of the background are intentional in the relevant sense, I find Searle's corresponding argument for the Background Hypothesis confused. He claims that "[t]he actual content is insufficient to determine the conditions of satisfaction," and that "[e]ven if you spell out all the contents of the mind as a set of conscious rules, thoughts, beliefs, etc., you still need a set of Background capacities for their interpretation." (Searle 1992, pp. 189–190) To repeat a point I make in section 5 of my article, this is an absurd view (cf. Beyer 1997, p. 346). Neither intentional content ("actual content") nor respective meaning can be interpreted (or "applied") at all—only (utterances of) linguistic *expressions*, including *formulations* of rules, can be interpreted, and the result of this interpretation will be (the ascription of) a meaning-bestowing act which displays an intentional content that uniquely determines the conditions of satisfaction.

Here are some further corrections and clarifications.

I do not take the case of indexicals like "I," "here" and "now" to show that "literal truth-conditional meaning" can be grasped even in the absence of "the correct background." Unlike "sentences without established use" (as Pacholik-Żuromska aptly calls them; this collection, pp. 2–3), these examples have no bearing on the truth of the version of the Background Hypothesis for which I argue. They can be captured by any standard semantics that distinguishes between general meaning-function (character) and respective meaning (content).

I do not give any example in which "the speaker utters a sentence that the hearer re-

peats, while referring to another object" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 3) than the one the speaker refers to. In the example about the yellow apple and the red ball in the box, the speaker refers to the apple in order to (wrongly) state that it is red, and the hearer may figure this out by applying a suitably modified version of Williamson's principle of knowledge maximization (rather than Davidson's principle of truth maximization). Nor do I claim that any "false judgment in certain circumstances can count as knowledgeable." (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 3) Rather, the unmodified version of Williamson's principle is not applicable in the case at hand.

Furthermore, epistemic contextualism does not only (often) purport to answer sceptical challenges to *justified-true-belief* accounts of knowledge, but also to other accounts such as reliabilist theories of knowledge that make recourse to the notion of the ability to exclude relevant alternatives. I do not distinguish between "literal truth-conditional meaning" and "contextual respective meaning," as Pacholik-Żuromska claims in section 3. In the case of indexicals, literal meaning is not to be confused with linguistic meaning in the sense of general meaning-function (character). The relevant distinction is that between literal and figurative meaning; unlike "meaning as usage," figurative (or non-literal) meaning is a case of (what is expressed by) implicature.

It is misleading to assert that "according to Searle, propositional attitudes are not intentional states" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 4). It is true, however, that (like Husserl) Searle does not conceive of them "as a relation of being directed […] towards a judgment in a logical sense" (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 4), i.e., towards a proposition. Propositional contents are to be distinguished from the satisfaction conditions they determine (which Husserl refers to as states of affairs).

I do not claim that "if the hearer does not recognize an intention accompanying an utterance, she does not fail to grasp the literal truth-conditional meaning." (Pacholik-Żuromska this collection, p. 4) Grasping that mean-

ing requires, on the part of the hearer, to ascribe the intention to express a meaning-bestowing act to the speaker.

I distinguish (following Borg) between knowing a sentence's truth-condition, on the one hand, and being able to decide whether this truth-condition is satisfied, on the other. Mere consumers *do* know the truth-condition of a sentence when they understand it, but they are unable to decide (in an epistemically responsible way) whether it is met. *Pace* Pacholik-Żuromska, this does not mean that they "have to believe everything they [hear]." (this collection, p. 5) Nothing in the notion of a mere consumer implies that he must regard a given speaker as infallible (and sincere), even if this speaker is in fact a producer; and nothing in the notion of a producer implies that producers are infallible (and always truthful). Nor does this mean that producers grasp truth-conditional content more "fully" than mere consumers (see footnote 16 of my target article; Beyer this collection).

On my conception of a producer, there can be no producer who is "a false expert." It is possible, though, on my view, to be a producer without being a scientific expert on whatever it is that constitutes the extension, reference, or truth-condition of the relevant expression (again, see footnote 16 of my target article; Beyer this collection).

Pacholik-Żuromska raises an excellent question when she asks what, on my view, "would be an indicator of the proper usage of a sentence." (this collection, p. 6) However, it does not speak against a particular approach to meaning that this problem arises in its framework. It arises in any framework.

Husserl took over the idea of intentionality from Brentano, but he does not share Brentano's view that consciousness is always intentional. According to Husserl, there is also non-intentional consciousness, such as pain. Without intentionality, there would be no stream of consciousness, and hence no consciousness. But not every single element of the stream of consciousness is itself intentional. As usual, I find myself in agreement with Husserl here.

5 Conclusion

Despite some serious misunderstandings, for which I am prepared to take responsibility at least in part, Pacholik-Żuromska presents some promising ideas. In particular, she highlights the significance of the background of self-identification and the intersubjective dimension of intentionality. In addition, her commentary has helped me to see the need to explicitly distinguish between two functions of the background: its reference-determining role on the one hand, and its enabling role in connection with the functioning of the intentional horizon on the other.

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