



An Extra-Qualitative Alternative to the Qualitative Interpretation of Absolute Individuation

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Abstract

Husserl's thesis of absolute individuation consists of two ideas: (1) unlike experiences and mundane entities, which are individuated via spatiotemporal position, the subject has its own principle of individuation and (2) even for non-subjects, the ultimate principle of individuation is their relationship with the subject. Absolute individuation is sometimes qualitatively interpreted (even by Husserl): owing to habituation, a subject's personal character cannot be reinstated elsewhere. I argue against the qualitative interpretation for two reasons. The first is its inconsistency with Husserl's account of the individuation of non-subjects. Maximally specific universals cannot individuate a non-subject because they can be multiply instantiated, at least in different phantasies. If multiple instantiation is also possible for personal characters, then this poses a problem for the qualitative interpretation. The second reason is that the qualitative interpretation cannot explain the subjective contribution to the individuation of non-subjects. I consequently propose an extra-qualitative interpretation: The relevant subject should be defined as one-off *sic et simpliciter*. It has no other determinations than one-offness and is, thus, pre-spatiotemporal. This can explain what individuates instances of maximally specific spatiotemporal universals, thereby addressing (2) above. It also highlights the need to recognize the respective contributions made by multiple notions of the subject. Husserl's context-dependent distinction between constitutive determinations and principia individuationis may shed light on the qualitative/non-qualitative difference in contemporary metaphysics. The hierarchical model of individuation can also illuminate the debate around possible worlds and haecceitism.

Keywords Absolute Individuation · Subject · Non-qualitative Property · Spatiotemporal Position · Thisness

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1 Introduction

To date, the discussion of individuation in Husserl's writings has focused on non-subjects—how entities in the actual and phantasy worlds individualize via their spatiotemporal positions, how experiences individualize via phenomenological time (Bernet, 2004; Lohmar, 2020), and whether spatiotemporal individuation contradicts the status of *individual* as a formal ontological category (Lobo, 2008). Less attention has been paid to the individuation of subjects, although this has been addressed by Husserl and some later scholars (e.g., Santis, 2023; Hart, 2009; Shang, 2022; Summa, 2013). A crucial text for the individuation of subjects can be found in *Ideas II*.¹ In this article, I first present what I shall call “Husserl's thesis of absolute individuation.” I then consider different interpretive possibilities.²

1.1 Husserl's Thesis of Absolute Individuation

Husserl contrasts subjects with non-subjects in terms of historicity. A subject “has a history” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 60). In contrast, “entities in the physical world” are “history-less (*geschichtslos*) realities” insofar as they can “return to identically the same general state” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 21). Husserl introduces the framework of individuation to philosophically explore this distinction.

As demonstrated in Sect. 3, Husserl endorses an *extra-qualitative* theory of the individuation of non-subjects: not only do physical entities individualize via physical spatiotemporal positions, but experiences are individuated by experiential spatiotemporal positions. “Extra-qualitative” means that even a maximally specific universal (e.g., a specific redness) can be multiply instantiated by different individuals. Hence, the maximally specific universal—which I shall call “quality” (a term more precisely characterized in Sect. 2)—does not individuate a particular non-subject.

Is this also true of the subject, considering its alleged “historicity”? Husserl argues for a distinction between “individuality in the spiritual (*geistig*) sense” and “natural individuality” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 230; see also Husserl, 1952, p. 298). He also proposes the notion of absolute individuation, arguing that “the environment of the self obtains its individuation via its relationship with the self, who has an experience of the environment and exchanges experience with other individuals” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 231; see also Husserl, 1952, p. 301). One can delineate Husserl's proposal into three ideas:

1. *The subject has a different principle of individuation* from non-subjects. It does not individualize via position in the world or even experiential position. To refer to the subject's principle of individuation, Husserl coins the term “absolute individuation.”
2. This principle of individuation applies first and foremost to the subject that is not in the world (the pure self) and then, derivatively, to the subject in the world (the personal self).

¹ I am mainly going to cite the new version of *Ideas II*, edited by Dirk Fonfara (Husserl, forthcoming).

² I shall use “individualize” intransitively to describe how these instances become individual via the principia individuationis. I shall use “individuate” transitively to refer to how the principia individuationis render the instances of a universal individual.

3. Husserl defends the strong thesis that all non-subjects individualize only in relation to subjects. In other words, *the ultimate principle of individuation is not spatiotemporal position but rather the subject itself in a certain sense or a non-subject's relationship to it.*

The individuation of non-subjects—such as the world vis-à-vis a subject—is “secondary,” “while the original, the absolute individuation lies in the self” (Husserl, 1952, p. 301). Husserl developed this thesis around 1905: “[T]he continuity of time and space is not the complete individuator (*das voll Individualisierende*). Rather, [that individuator is] the self-individuality (*Ichindividualität*)” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 3). Accordingly, the subject, or something's relationship to it, is a more fundamental principium individuationis than temporality and spatiality.³

1.2 The Qualitative and the Extra-Qualitative Interpretation

The problem is how to interpret absolute individuation. Regarding the idea that the subject “has something absolutely individual in itself” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 231), one interpretation of “in itself” suggests that the individuation of the subject defies the distinction between differentiation and individuation (Sect. 3): each subject individualizes via its distinctive quality rather than some extra-qualitative factor. Here, “in itself” contrasts with “extra-qualitatively.” I shall call this the *qualitative interpretation* of absolute individuation.

Another interpretation takes *the subject itself in a certain sense* and relationships to this subject as constituting an *extra-qualitative principle of individuation*. Here, the subject individuates not only its own qualities but also those of all non-subjects. On this interpretation, “in itself” contrasts with what is “not the subject.” In other words, the subject is not individuated via spatiotemporal positions that are non-identical to it.

Husserl endorses the first interpretation (as I shall show in Sect. 3). Following him, most interpreters of Husserlian absolute individuation endorse the qualitative interpretation. Daniele de Santis (2023), for instance, talks about “the ego's ontological concreteness” or its “intrinsic individuation”: For an ego, “there is [a] coincidence between the universal of the lowest level and its individuality” (p. 62).⁴

Fortunately, I have at least one Husserlian on my side. Hart (2009) explicitly promotes the extra-qualitative interpretation. He argues that rather than being individuated “*per accidens*” (p. 273), “I myself am ‘individuated’ per se, by myself, in the sense that there is an ‘individuation’ without reference to anything beyond myself” (Hart, 2009, p. 273). In other words, the subject “is not individuated by any quality,” by being in space and time,” “by reason or causality,” or “by way of even a prior contrast with Others” (p. 296). One should not conceive of the subject's most basic

³ This seems at odds with Michela Summa's view that the temporal stream of consciousness is “the ultimate source of individuation” (2013, p. 112) from which the subject derives its individuality. This is despite some textual evidence for her reading (Summa, 2013, p. 128).

⁴ There might well be subtle questions about whether Husserl derives the absolute individuation of the entire ego from the one-offness of particular experiences or the other way around (Santis, 2023, p. 69). I am, nonetheless, questioning the qualitative interpretation's philosophical robustness in general given Husserl's extra-qualitative stance on the individuation of non-subjects.

individuality “in sortal terms” (p. 326) because the qualitative account “does not exhaust or even have an inkling of the more basic sense of ‘who one is’” (p. 96). For Hart, if there is anything one-off in the subject, it is this qualityless or “propertyless” individuality (p. 288). The subject in this sense is “the ultimate principle of individuation” (p. 281). I largely endorse these statements but I take exception to Hart’s identification of the pure self as the persistent pole of consciousness with the subject of absolute individuation (pp. 104, 309). This is precisely for a reason he mentions: the notion of “subject” has “levels of originalness or centrality” (p. 137) such that we should avoid rushing to assimilate its different senses (see Sect. 7.4).

I would not quarrel with the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation if all it took to be a Husserlian was repeating what Husserl said. However, if a Husserlian must examine the validity of Husserl’s arguments and overcome inconsistencies between different parts of his system, then I have serious objections to this interpretation.

1.3 Plan

In Sect. 2, I shall clarify the notion of “quality” on which the distinction between qualitative and extra-qualitative interpretations depends. In so doing, I introduce Husserl’s distinction between “constitutive determinations” and “principia individuationis” as a more fitting terminology. The former can be interpreted as referring to a universal instantiated by a particular entity and the latter as referring to the particulars individuating instances of this universal: x is qualitative and y is extra-qualitative if y is a particular that individuates an instance of x . There is a hierarchy of individuation on this account. The qualitative/extra-qualitative distinction is context-dependent—it depends on the role an entity plays in the instantiation–individuation relation.

In Sect. 3, I shall present Husserl’s theory of extra-qualitative individuation. This presentation is based on the distinction between constitutive determinations and principia individuationis: the individuation of an instance of a maximally specific universal is extra-qualitative if and only if this maximally specific universal alone does not suffice to individuate its instance.

In Sect. 4, I outline Husserl’s argument for the qualitative interpretation. He claims that personal traits cannot be multiply instantiated because of habituation. Thus, a maximally specific personal trait alone suffices to individuate its instance.

In Sect. 5, I argue against the qualitative interpretation from two perspectives. First, the possibility of qualitative duplicates in phantasy also applies to personal character. Second, the qualitative interpretation cannot account for a subjective contribution to the individuation of non-subjects.

In Sect. 6, I discuss what motivates Husserl to opt for the qualitative interpretation. He has a well-justified motivation: give the individuation of subjects its due rather than reduce it to the individuation of non-subjects. The problem is that this motivation is mixed with several others in a way that fallaciously leads Husserl to the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation. One can even acknowledge the validity of other motivations without endorsing the qualitative interpretation. The extra-qualitative individuation of subjects can also capture the uniqueness of subject individuation just as well, if not better.

In Sect. 7, I reconstruct my preferred extra-qualitative interpretation: the relevant subject in absolute individuation should be defined as “one-off *sic et simpliciter*.” Its only determination is one-offness and it is prior to spatiality, temporality, and any personal trait. This definition avoids the Husserlian qualitative interpretation’s inconsistency. It also explains how subjects contribute to the individuation of non-subjects. The subject in this sense challenges the dichotomy of the transcendental and the psychological subject because the subject of absolute individuation makes a contribution to the being of particular entities in general.

This account is relevant not only for an exegesis of Husserl’s view. More importantly, it has implications for some contemporary debates in analytic metaphysics, specifically those related to the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction, haecceitism, possible worlds, and bare particulars.⁵

It is important to note upfront that Husserl was always experimenting with different theoretical options. It is thus unwise to label one view as the genuine, orthodox view and discard other interpretive possibilities. Each theoretical option might have captured some important state of affairs but missed others. It is more fruitful to let Husserl’s different insights collide with each other to catalyze a philosophically sound and inspiring proposal, a proposal that overcomes the weaknesses of each theoretical option while retaining its merit.

2 Constitutive Determinations Versus Principia Individuationis

The opposition between qualitative and extra-qualitative individuation depends on a distinction between “constitutive determinations” and “*principia individuationis*” from one of Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts, dated 1917 (1910–1920, A III 13, 48a). Constitutive determinations—which Husserl also calls the “conceptual essence” (*begriffliches Wesen*)—are “ultratemporal” (*überweltlich*) and “ultraspatial” (*über-räumlich*) (A III 13, 48a). Any of them “can appear in a totally identical manner in arbitrarily many instances” (*sich in beliebig vielen Exemplaren völlig gleich vorfinden kann*) (A III 13, 49a). Such determinations are, however, subject to an important taxonomy, one that ranges from “the constitutive spatial and temporal species” to “the contents that are extended along this extension” (A III 13, 49a). An instance of the former is the “this-determination” (*Dies-Bestimmung*) of spatiotemporal position (e.g., spatiotemporal position here and now). An instance of the latter is “the quale,” such as the redness that “individualizes indirectly” (i.e., in virtue of the individuation of spatiotemporal positions) (A III 13, 49a).

Because one can investigate spatiotemporal positions in geometry, they must have corresponding universals (which are still universals rather than individual entities): “Every spatial point has an essence, and the [geometrical] relations [between different points] are grounded in [this] essence” (Husserl, 2012, p. 199). Here, it is important to make two distinctions.

The first distinction is between the genus “spatiotemporal position” and the maximally specific spatiotemporal universal. Consider two particular spatial positions O

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing these debates to my attention.

and A in the same spatial continuum. Husserl asks, “[W]hat is differentiated” when one moves from O to A? (Husserl, 2012, p. 200). He then answers as follows: “[T]he essence [of O],” which “transits continuously into the other [essence of] A” (Husserl, 2012, p. 200). Hence, in a particular spatial continuum—such as the space of the actual world—“a certain essence [instantiated by the particular spatial position] O” is instantiated “only once.” Thus, the entire spatial continuum is an instance of “a system of essence, but not ‘general’ essence” (Husserl, 2012, p. 200). In other words, each spatiotemporal position in a particular spatiotemporal continuum is *not just* an instance of the “general” universal (i.e., the *genus* “spatiotemporal position”) but also an instance of a distinct maximally spatiotemporal universal.⁶ The relation between a maximally specific spatiotemporal universal and the genus “spatiotemporal position” resembles the relation between, for instance, the maximally specific redness and the genus “color.”⁷

The second distinction is between a maximally specific spatiotemporal universal and its instances. Husserl uses “the lowest species” (A III 13, 49a) or “the lowest specific difference of the generic conceptual essence (*Gattungsbegriffswesen*) duration” to refer to the maximally specific temporal universal. He then uses “the ultimately determined temporal duration” (*die letztbestimmte Zeitdauer*) to refer to its instance (A III 13, 52b). The lowest spatiotemporal specification still belongs to constitutive determinations because it “can be arbitrarily duplicated” (*vervielfältigen*) (A III 13, 52b). But, for Husserl, if each spatiotemporal position in a particular spatiotemporal continuum instantiates a different maximally specific spatiotemporal universal, then this duplication is impossible *within* one spatiotemporal continuum. Instead, it is possible only *across* different spatiotemporal continua.

One can imagine numerically distinct phantasy worlds. According to Husserl, the spatiotemporal continua of these worlds are isolated from one another (*zusammenhangslos*) (Husserl, 1980, pp. 145–146). But, such spatiotemporal continua might be exact duplicates of one another such that they instantiate the same maximally specific spatiotemporal universal. “Possible worlds” in “phantasy variation” can repeatedly instantiate the same “spatial form,” which does not further differentiate. In other words, possible worlds instantiate the same lowest spatial universal (Husserl, 1910–1926). This echoes Byron Simmons’ (2020, 2021) claim that actuality is non-qualitative because the actual world and mere possible worlds might have qualitatively indiscernible, but numerically distinct, instances. In my case, these qualitatively indiscernible individuals are instances of the same maximally specific spatiotemporal universal. In this context, this maximally specific spatiotemporal uni-

⁶ “General” can highlight either (a) the characteristic of a species in contrast with a maximally specific universal or (b) any universal (including the maximally specific universal) in contrast with its instances. Hence why I do not define “qualitative properties” in terms of “generality” (as Adams, 1979 and Rosenkrantz, 1993 have done).

⁷ Here, the maximally specific spatiotemporal universal should be taken as “B-theoretic” (i.e., it lacks the A-theoretical structure of here/there and past/present/future). I agree that A-theoretical structures are important in their own right (*vis-à-vis* spatial orientation and becoming). However, I do not think that they are further individuating than the B-theoretical spatiotemporal positions. The subject *qua* one-off *simpliciter* grounds both the individuation of the spatiotemporal positions and the A-theoretical structures. I am pursuing only the former thesis here (see Liu, 2024b).

versal is a constitutive determination. Hence, the individuation of an instance of the lowest spatiotemporal species—“this determination” (i.e., an individual spatiotemporal position)—is “no longer specific” (A III 13, 49a).

We should, however, not conflate the instantiation of maximally specific spatiotemporal universals with the transition from the genus “spatiotemporal position” to its subspecies. Here, some might be puzzled by the double status of spatiotemporal positions. On the one hand, Husserl thinks that they are the particulars individuating instances of a “*quale*” in a narrow sense. On the other hand, he also takes the universals of spatiotemporal positions to be constitutive determinations or “qualities” in a broad sense. Are spatiotemporal positions qualitative or extra-qualitative?

The distinction between constitutive determinations and principia individuationis is context-dependent. Consider a red apple. If one is discussing which particulars individuate this instance of the universal “redness,” then the universal is the constitutive determination and the spatiotemporal positions play the principia individuationis role. However, if one asks whether the particular spatiotemporal positions the apple occupies are also individuated by some other particulars, then the spatiotemporal positions’ universals are the constitutive determinations in this context. The other particulars that individuate the instances of those universals are, then, the principia individuationis.

For this reason, there is a hierarchy of individuation. Qualities in a narrower sense (e.g., redness and causal properties) individualize indirectly in virtue of the individuation of spatiotemporal universals. Depending on the context, one can characterize spatiotemporal positions as qualitative or extra-qualitative, but this should not lead to confusion. On my interpretation, “constitutive determinations” (qualities in the broad sense) and “principia individuationis” are *roles* in an instantiation–individuation relation: x is qualitative and y is an extra-qualitative principium individuationis if y is a particular that individuates the instance of x .⁸ The context-dependence here means only that “qualitative/non-qualitative” cannot be absolutely attributed to entities (i.e., attributed regardless of the instantiation–individuation relation the entities stand in). It also does not entail the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction’s language dependence because this distinction tracks back to an ontological relation (instantiation–individuation) rather than a linguistic fact (Simmons, 2020). It also does not imply that this distinction is a cluster notion because the attribution of a qualitative/non-qualitative property is strictly constrained by an entity’s role in the instantiation–individuation relation (Cowling, 2015).⁹

If “quality” is limited to the narrow sense, then the term “qualitative interpretation” is not sufficiently precise to capture the strategy of explaining individuation in terms of maximally specific constitutive determinations. That said, Husserl has a specific use for the term “constitution.” To avoid confusion, I shall retain the term

⁸ Sam Cowling (2021) has noticed the connection between the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction and the instantiation–individuation relation.

⁹ By delineating constitutive determination and principia individuationis, I am not providing an ambitious account of all the (alleged) qualitative/non-qualitative properties discussed in Cowling (2015), Hoffman-Kolss (2019), and Simmons (2021).

“qualitative interpretation” and use it in a broad sense to cover the accounts mentioned in 1.2.

Some might wonder what serves as the principium individuationis of instances of the lowest spatiotemporal universals. This is prescient of my argument in Sect. 7: the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* individuates instances of these universals. This extra-qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation can explain the subjective contribution to the individuation of non-subjects. The qualitative interpretation is, in contrast, incapable of such an explanation.

3 Husserl’s Extra-Qualitative Theory of Individuation

In the manuscript A III 13, Husserl explicitly endorses the extra-qualitative interpretation of individuation: “[T]he specific” (i.e., the constitutive determination) “does not turn an object into the individual this” because “the lowest species [...] could still be actualized in unlimitedly many particular cases” (A III 13, 52a). In other words, principia individuationis are extra-qualitative, insofar as qualitative duplicates are possible. The maximally specific universal alone does not suffice to individuate its instances; further particulars (the principia individuationis) are needed for their individuation.¹⁰

The possibility of qualitative duplicates comes from Husserl’s distinction between individuation and differentiation (*Differenzierung*). Differentiation might mean the movement from the genus “color” to the species “red” and finally to a maximally specific shade (*niederste Differenz*, literally “lowest difference”) of redness. But even the lowest species is a universal whose instance “individualizes in the manner of simple ‘repetition’” (Husserl, 2012, p. 123). The same universal can have qualitatively identical, yet individually distinct, instances via the principle of individuation. This is “something wholly different” from differentiation (Husserl, 2012, p. 123; see also p. 91). In this sense, Husserl considers individuation to be synonymous with instantiation (Husserl, 1910–1920, A III 13, 17a). Subsuming the principle of individuation under the category of the lowest species risks conflating differentiation with individuation.

One may resort to qualitative individuation in practical life, such as when one considers something to be the same physical entity because it stands in the same causal relations with other entities (Sect. 6). However, Husserl warns that “regarding the nexus (*Zusammenhang*) as well as those connected individuals in it, we must also distinguish between constitutive, or specific, content and its individuality, or what individuates the specific” (A III 13, 17a). In other words, relational (e.g., causal or social) properties still belong to the category of constitutive determination. According to the extra-qualitative theory of individuation, they are not the principia individuationis.

¹⁰ Some consider the possibility of qualitative duplicates to be an argument against the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (see Hawley, 2009 for an overview). Della Rocca (2005) argues that the possibility of coinciding but numerically distinct entities is a consequence of qualitative duplicates (Black, 1952). I agree with Robin Jeshion’s (2006) conclusion that co-located spatial regions in Della Rocca’s argument are conceptually incoherent. Unlike Jeshion, however, I argue that subject is a more primitive principle of individuation than spatiotemporal positions (cf. Section 7).

Originally, Husserl applies the extra-qualitative theory of individuation to non-subjects. Examples include (a) an entity in the actual world, (b) an entity in a phantasy world, and (c) an experience in the stream of consciousness (whether this view is also an appropriate account of the individuation of the subject is a matter I shall return to in Sects. 4–6). I now discuss these three examples in turn.

3.1 Example A

For an entity in the actual world, “the individuality of a thing lies in its here and now” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 230). Accordingly, “several things with totally indiscernible (*gleich*) properties and causal states” can occur at different times and locations (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 231). For instance, the same redness can be twice instantiated in Europe and Asia at the same time or in the same place in 400 BCE and 1900 CE. Hence, if one is discussing an instance of a maximally specific quality in the narrow sense (such as redness) (Sect. 2), then it is not this quality itself but the particular spatiotemporal positions of the actual world that individuate instances of this quality.

Even if repeated instantiation is unlikely in the actual world, it remains conceivable across different phantasy worlds: the redness of Harry Potter’s robe can, in principle, be the same as the redness of James Bond’s blood. Two instances can be qualitatively the same while numerically different. Again, if one is discussing what individuates instances of a maximally specific quality in the narrow sense across different phantasy worlds, then it is not this quality itself but the particular spatiotemporal positions of the phantasy worlds that are responsible for this individuation (Husserl, 2004, p. 315). Entities in different phantasy worlds and the actual world might overlap in their constitutive determinations—whether a quality in the narrow sense or the maximally specific spatiotemporal universal (Sect. 2)—but they are still numerically distinct (Husserl, 2004, p. 360).

3.2 Example B

At least two clarifications are necessary for the possibility of qualitative duplicates across different phantasy worlds. First, Husserl does not deny the concrete existence of phantasy entities because he does not constrain existence to existence in the actual world. Rather, entities in phantasy worlds exist in the mode of “as-if” at phantasized spatiotemporal positions (Husserl, 1980, pp. 559–565). Husserl is not an ersatzist (Adams, 1981) but a concretist regarding phantasy worlds. He thus considers the question of qualitative duplicates across phantasy worlds to be a genuine question.

Second, it is important to distinguish between two modes of phantasy, which Husserl calls “*Umphantasieren*” and “sheer, free phantasy” (*bloße, reine Phantasie*) (Husserl, 1980, p. 561). Suppose that it was raining last night. One can imagine alternatives to this fact, such as that it was not raining last night but the night before. This is “*Umphantasieren*,” which means “thinking otherwise” (*anders denken*) (Husserl, 1980). Here, the imagined alternatives are conceived of as “attached” to a given world. In contrast, one can “freely” imagine the world of James Bond and the world of Harry Porter without connecting them to each other. They have a “lack of nexus” or are isolated from one another (*zusammenhangslos*) (Husserl, 1980, pp. 145–146).

Of course, it is possible to additionally imagine (*hinzuphantasieren*) a connection between these isolated worlds (e.g., merging the two worlds into one world where James and Harry both live in London). Nonetheless, “separated phantasies have no necessary nexus a priori” (Husserl, 1980, p. 358).

As discussed in Sect. 2, every particular spatiotemporal position in the actual world instantiates a different maximally specific spatiotemporal universal. Hence, in the *Umphantasieren* mode, one can reduplicate instances of the quality in the narrow sense (such as redness) but not instances of the maximally specific spatiotemporal universal. In contrast, the latter qualitative duplicate is possible across different freely imagined phantasy worlds: Two worlds might have numerically distinct but qualitatively indiscernible, spatiotemporal structures. These structures multiply instantiate the same maximally specific spatiotemporal universal.

Husserl can, then, accept the possibility of numerically distinct but qualitatively indiscernible possible worlds if they are imagined in the free phantasy mode. This might be impossible in the *Umphantasieren* mode because what one thinks is otherwise the instantiated quality in the narrow sense.¹¹ One can, then, reformulate Husserl’s argument for the extra-qualitative theory of individuation as follows: as long as it is possible to imagine an individual’s qualitative duplicates across different phantasy worlds in the free phantasy mode, the individual’s principium individuationis will be extra-qualitative. This will be important in the argument against the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation (Sect. 5).

3.3 Example C

Besides entities in the actual or phantasy worlds, Husserl also thinks that experiences individualize via spatiotemporal, but not physical, positions. Phenomenological time is a principle of individuation for experiences (Husserl, 2004, Text No. 16–17). Moreover, “even if [an experience] lacks a genuine [experiential] space as the form of temporal coexistence, it does not lack the form of [experiential] coexistence in general, however difficult it is to describe this form” (Husserl, 2006, p. 388). In other words, “a unified exterior-to-one-another (*Außereinander*) belongs to every [experiential] temporal point” (Husserl 2006, p. 63). This exterior-to-one-another constitutes a space-like principium individuationis for experiences.¹²

How is the extra-qualitative individuation related to haecceity (thisness) and haecceitism? I diverge from the traditional definition of “thisness” (as the property of being an individual x or being identical to x) (Adams, 1979, 1981; Dickemper, 2015).

¹¹ The distinction between *Umphantasieren* and free phantasy roughly resembles the much-discussed difference between Kripke’s (1980) and Lewis’ (1986) conceptions of possible worlds. Kripke construes possible worlds as “ways the world might have been” or “states” of the actual world (1980, p. 18). These ways are stipulated as alternatives and thus attached to the actual world from the outstart. Lewis maintains that different possible worlds are spatiotemporally and causally isolated (1986, § 1.6). I said “roughly,” because Lewis actually construes possible worlds in a mixed mode of *Umphantasieren* and free phantasy. Although Lewis sometimes allows for the possibility of qualitatively indiscernible worlds (1986, pp. 84, 157) and even invokes this possibility to argue against the ersatzist view on possible worlds (p. 87), he rejects elsewhere the non-qualitative differences between possible worlds (p. 224). Cf. Fara (2009) and Cowling (2012) for this tension in Lewis.

¹² See Dainton (2017) for a similar position.

On my account, “thisness” is interpreted as “one-offness”: An entity is numerically distinct from another entity instantiating the same maximally specific universal in virtue of its one-offness. This entity is “one-off” because repeated instantiations of the same universal do not entail a re-identification of its instances.¹³ In other words, “thisness” is contrastively construed as “non-thatness,” where “that” is another instance of the same maximally specific universal. This interpretation of thisness notably differs from the traditional definition in two ways.

3.4 First Way

In accordance with the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction’s context-dependence (Sect. 2), one-offness is a hierarchical notion. A red table is numerically distinct from another instance of the universal “red table” in virtue of the thisness of the spatiotemporal positions it occupies. But, on my account, such spatiotemporal positions are also numerically distinct from instances of the same maximally specific spatiotemporal universal in other phantasy worlds. Spatiotemporal positions have thisness thanks to their relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* (see Sect. 7). There is, then, a hierarchy of thisness: entities at level zero are one-off in the primitive sense, level-one entities derive their one-offness from their relationship with level-zero entities, level-two entities derive their one-offness from their relationship with level-one entities, and so on. In contrast, the traditional definition of haecceity (as “being *x*” or “being identical to *x*”) does not imply a hierarchical structure.

Rosenkrantz (1993, p. 100) has accused the account of individuation via spatiotemporal positions of circularity given that spatiotemporal positions cannot individuate themselves. He argues that any entity is individuated by an alternative principle—its haecceity (Rosenkrantz, 1993, p. 106). I agree with Rosenkrantz’s diagnosis but disagree with his solution. On my hierarchical account of individuation, the relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* individuates spatiotemporal positions (Sect. 7). This breaks the circularity. Note that thisness in my account is, however, not an alternative principle of individuation for all entities. Indeed, the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* has no other principles of individuation than one-offness. But this does not mean that spatiotemporal positions play no role in the individuation of other entities. An apple derives its thisness from the thisness of its principles of individuation. Thus, an apple’s thisness is not an *additional* principle of individuation. It is, instead, a *consequence* of the apple’s hierarchical individuation via the spatiotemporal position, which is further individuated by a relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter*.

3.5 Second Way

The interpretation of “thisness” as one-offness leaves sufficient room for qualitative contributions to an entity’s identity. My extra-qualitative account of individuation does not “downplay qualitative properties” by claiming that any entity’s identity does not require “any of its qualities at all” (Della Rocca, 2005, pp. 484–485). If thisness

¹³ See Sect. 7.1 for Husserl’s use of “one-off.”

was construed traditionally and was a non-qualitative property, then non-qualitative properties alone would suffice to settle any questions about an entity's identity. And constitutive determinations would, anyway, contribute nothing to the numerical identity. This is a consequence I wish to avoid. I sympathize with Peter Geach when he (a) denies the "unqualified identity" (1972, p. 241) of persistent and composite entities and (b) argues that the "identity [of such entities] is unintelligible apart from a [qualitative] criterion of identity" (1980, p. 206). For an entity to be identical to a tree, there must be a certain qualitative pattern over the spatiotemporal positions it occupies. If the entity undergoes a change exceeding this qualitative pattern (e.g., when it burns to ash), then the identity relation no longer holds.¹⁴ Hence, constitutive determinations contribute to the numerical identity of some entities. But this contribution again relies on the extra-qualitative principia individuationis: the essential qualitative pattern for the identity of persistent and composite entities is always a pattern *over* spatiotemporal positions.¹⁵ For this reason, a relative identity thesis is fully compatible with my position, where constitutive determinations *alone* never suffice to individuate an entity. This is why I am speaking about an *extra*-qualitative, rather than *non*-qualitative, theory of individuation.¹⁶

It follows that I endorse a certain form of haecceitism if all that matters to haecceitism is the acknowledgment of thisness (as one-offness) and qualitatively indiscernible but numerically distinct possible worlds.¹⁷ However, this does not apply if haecceitism includes the claim that thisness is a principle of individuation other than spatiotemporal positions and that it alone suffices to individuate all entities.

4 The Habituation Argument for the Qualitative Interpretation

Given Husserl's extra-qualitative account of individuation for non-subjects, one might wonder how he could uphold the qualitative interpretation of the absolute individuation of the subject. Husserl suggests that the individuation of personal characters defies the distinction between differentiation and instantiation. In Hua XXXV, he writes that "the ego cannot be repeated as a chain of purely possible coexisting and absolutely identical egos" (2002, p. 262). And, even if particular elements of personal characters could be repeated, "the total complex" of these personal traits "is not repeatable" (2002, p. 262). Consequently, "the most specific concrete universal [of the ego] individuates itself" (2002, p. 262). Husserl likewise claims in Hua XIV that

¹⁴ Non-qualitative properties could appear as "empirically undetectable" (Dasgupta, 2009) if one tends to track an entity by using the qualitative criterion of identity (e.g., tracking a criminal with his DNA). But it does not follow that non-qualitative properties should be jettisoned because empirical detectability is not the only thing that matters in ontology.

¹⁵ The qualities in these two sentences are construed in the narrow sense. Say that we admit trans-world identity as an analog of diachronic and synchronic identity. We can then take the qualitative pattern over different possible worlds imposed by the maximally specific spatiotemporal universal to be part of the qualitative criterion of identity, which the relative identity thesis requires.

¹⁶ See Morganti (2011, p. 188) on the distinction between moderate and extreme haecceitism.

¹⁷ This is "haecceitism*" in Fara (2009) or "World Haecceitism" in Russell (2015). See Skow (2008) for a discussion of the difference between "traditional" and Lewisian haecceitism.

an individual subject's personal character "cannot be identical with" that of another, meaning that "many selves" of personal character's same lowest species are impossible (1973b, pp. 22–23).

The version of *Ideas II* edited by Edith Stein also seems to suggest this reading (Shang, 2022). The new version contains similar claims. Husserl contrasts how subjects and non-subjects are individuated as follows: each physical entity has its "whatness," which "is itself a universal," such that every physical entity "is an instance of a universal" (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 230). The universal that a physical entity instantiates is "arbitrarily repeatable," while personal character is "one-off" (*einmalig*): "[T]wo spirits can never be totally identical, nor can the same spirit ever return again to the same general state" (Husserl, forthcoming, pp. 258–259; see also p. 231). Most of the above quotations suggest that Husserl takes the relevant subject in the thesis of absolute individuation to be distinct from the stream of consciousness. Instead, a subject "behaves" (*verhalten*) through the stream of consciousness (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 484). Particular experiences are the subject's manners of behaving (*Verhaltensweisen*) (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 585), and these are manners through which the personal character manifests itself (*sich bekunden*) (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 472).

Notably, Husserl is worried about the risk of the self becoming "an empty pole," and instead proposes that the self is the "carrier of its habituality, and in this habituality lies the fact that the self has its individual history" (Husserl, 1952, p. 300). He seems to argue for the absolute individuation of the subject from the fact that each subject has a qualitatively unique personal character owing to habituation. Every experience is sedimented in personal traits such that each subject has its own "style" (*ichlicher stil*) (Husserl, 2006, p. 386). For this reason, Husserl claims as follows:

Every self, purely taken as self, as living in its conscious life and purely living therein, has its individuality, [...] such that total indiscernibility (*völlige Gleichheit*) is already necessarily excluded. The absolute uniqueness lies in the content (*Gehalt*) of each self, despite the universal form, the universal essence, via which the self is precisely a self. (Husserl, 2006, p. 386)

Here, Husserl suggests that the individuation of the subject lies in its "content," which is contrasted with form in two ways: (1) "physical individuality has spatiotemporal extension as the inner form of its individual being" and (2) in this form, an instance of "the individual content that belongs to physical individuality" individualizes (Husserl, 2006, p. 387). "Content" here is a universal, while "form" is the extra-qualitative principle of individuation. This should, however, not be confused with another sense of "form" (in the block quotation above), which refers to the genus "self" whose lowest species are personal characters. Because of habituation, Husserl thinks that the lowest species to which a subject belongs suffices to individuate it without an extra-qualitative principle of individuation.

5 Arguments Against the Qualitative Interpretation

Husserl maintains that at least “for natural objects, it is clear” that individuation is extra-qualitative “because every individual object as [a] possible object can be arbitrarily ‘repeated,’ each has arbitrarily many duplicates (*seinesgleichen*) in the realm of imaginable possibility (*phantasierbare Möglichkeit*)” (A III 13, 17b). In other words, “for every individual object, I can conceive another and yet another which is like it in every respect but yet distinct” (A III 13, 17b). Husserl’s argument here can be summarized as follows: an individual entity cannot individualize via its constitutive determinations because it is conceivable that another individual entity with completely indiscernible constitutive determinations exists in phantasy. The question is whether this argument also applies to the subject.

In some texts, Husserl suggests that it does not. He argues that, because of habituation, “total indiscernibility” regarding personal traits “is already necessarily excluded” such that “the absolute uniqueness lies in the content of each self” (Husserl, 2006, p. 386). We can also express the argument as follows:

- (1) Because personal character results from habituation, its qualitatively indiscernible instantiation in two individual subjects is impossible.
- (2) Therefore, the subject need not individualize via something other than the lowest-level species of personal character.

There is, however, an ambiguity in Premise 1: it could refer to the impossibility of multiple instantiation either *in phantasy* or *in actuality*. Notably, only the impossibility in phantasy suffices to rule out applying extra-qualitative individuation to the subject because the inference is based on an imagined possibility. But if one interprets Premise 1 as asserting the impossibility of multiple instantiation in phantasy, then it cannot obtain adequate support from habituation.

Consider a subject whose childhood experiences have led them to develop a melancholy character. One could imagine another subject undergoing qualitatively the same childhood experiences and developing a qualitatively indiscernible melancholy character owing to habituation. Even if habituation might preclude identical instantiations in actuality, it does not rule out the possibility in phantasy. To paraphrase Hart, personal characters are what the subject *has* (2009, p. 276). Different subjects can possess qualitatively indiscernible properties, and thinking that this exhausts what the subject *is* involves incurring the problem of “ontological clones” (p. 167).

Stanteler (1935) has propounded an argument against the qualitative interpretation of subjective individuality, one that is directed at the argument that “the total complex” of the personal traits “is not repeatable” (Husserl, 2002, p. 262). For Stanteler, “[i]ndividuality does not simply mean uniqueness (*Einzigartigkeit*), but also essentially one-off-ness (*Einmaligkeit*), unrepeatability” (1935, p. 582). One can only “find an essential trait of individuality” in the fact that “it is and can be, in opposition to all universal determinations, given only once” (Stanteler, 1935, p. 582). Hence, there can be “two, three, ten individuals, who all have identical qualitative determinations” (p. 583). They have identical complexes of personal traits such that “purely qualitative determinations can never alone and completely constitute (*ausmachen*)

individuality, and for this reason, they cannot by themselves guarantee the clarification of individuality” (Stanteler, 1935, p. 583). Thus, even personal character can be repeatedly instantiated, at least in phantasy. The individuation of the subject requires an extra-qualitative principium individuationis.

De Santis has argued that the imagined repetition of some experiential moment “always produces an irreducible difference” (2023, p. 114). His example is perfect mastery of a foreign language. Imagining this requires imagining “an individual ego with a different individual history” (Santis, 2023, p. 114). To take this as an argument for the qualitative interpretation would be to confuse two senses of free variation. This is a good example if one is exploring the species or genus—such as the eidos “linguistic capacity”—rather than the lowest universal that applies to the subject. One modifies both the principia individuationis *and the constitutive determinations* because a genus covers instances of many different lowest species (mastery of English, Italian, and so on). This also suits de Santis’ purpose of showing how one could perform eidetic intuition even if, as claimed by de Santis, the lowest universal that applies to the subject coincided with the subject’s individuality. That said, *free variation can also mean that one only modifies the principia individuationis*. De Santis’ example does not belong to this category because it varies linguistic capacity, which is a constitutive determination. It is more appropriate to imagine another subject whose linguistic capacity and (more generally) its personal history are precisely indiscernible from mine, even if this subject might not live in the same world. Only free variation in the *latter* sense is the counterpart of the arbitrary repetition in phantasy which Husserl invokes in his argument for the extra-qualitative individuation of non-subjects (see Sect. 4).

Proponents of the qualitative interpretation might attempt to save Premise 1 by arguing that Husserl is referring only to cases that occur in actuality. But this reply is no less problematic. Even in actuality, amnesia could counteract habituation’s effect. A melancholy subject rendered optimistic by a personal success could lose the memory of this experience in a car accident and become melancholy again. Even in actuality, habituation is insufficient to exclude the possibility of personal traits being repeatedly instantiated. However, if one insists that complete amnesia regarding any given experience is impossible in actuality, then the same may also apply to the individuation of non-subjects. A clock hand returns to its original position periodically, but a repetition of every detail is highly unlikely. The clock hand wears out owing to friction, for instance. Recall that Husserl wants to distinguish between the individuation of subjects and non-subjects (Sect. 1.1). However, a qualitative interpretation fleshed out along these lines suggests that there is no essential difference between them when it comes to the possibility of repeated instantiation; they only differ in degree.

One might avoid this argument from amnesia by further revising Husserl’s claim (Sect. 4): the entire stream of consciousness, rather than personal character, has no qualitative duplicates.¹⁸ But this revision cannot succeed either. Habituation does not support a proponent of this revision’s strong claim that qualitative duplicates of a

¹⁸ Husserl might have considered this option: “[F]or the immanent [...], its lowest difference is individual from the outstart and no more specific. [...] An experience in general has no concrete (repeatable) essence.

given stream of consciousness are unimaginable. One can imagine two subjects with qualitatively indiscernible childhood experiences because they have qualitatively indiscernible parents, teachers, and so on. If the proponent of this revision makes the weaker claim that such a multiple instantiation is unlikely in actuality, then the problem from the above paragraph resurfaces: a repeated instantiation in every detail is also unlikely for non-subjects.

This is the first argument against interpreting absolute individuation qualitatively. If one endorses Husserl's extra-qualitative individuation of non-subjects, then one should reject the argument from habituation for the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation. This argument is inconsistent with the extra-qualitative individuation of non-subjects.

The second argument lies in the fact that “the environment of the self obtains its individuation via the relationship with the self” (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 231). For Husserl, the absolute individuation of the subject should be the ultimate principle of individuation, which then explains the individuation of both the subject and non-subjects. However, the qualitative interpretation fails to address this idea. Suppose that a subject has a distinctive personal trait owing to habituation. Husserl argues that objects in that subject's environment individualize via their spatiotemporal positions. Still, absolute individuation implies that these objects' spatiotemporal positions are insufficient for the individuation of non-subjects, and thereby require a contribution from the subject. How can personal character, which is a constitutive determination of the subject, contribute to the extra-qualitative individuation of non-subjects? One might reply that non-subjects appear differently to different subjects depending on the latter's personal traits (e.g., color blindness). Redness does not have the same quality for all subjects. But this still addresses only the constitutive determinations of non-subjects. Such constitutive determinations cannot be non-subjects' principia individuationis if their individuation must be extra-qualitative. The qualitative interpretation has no answer to the question of how spatiotemporal positions themselves could individualize via the qualitative individuation of the subject.

6 Husserl's Mixed Motivations for the Qualitative Interpretation

What motivates Husserl to propose a qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation if this interpretation is seemingly so problematic and inconsistent with his own ideas? Manuscript A VI 19, which is dated “start of January 1919,” is telling here. I argue that one can give them their due without endorsing the qualitative interpretation. In so doing, I shall discuss three of Husserl's pertinent motivations.

6.1 First Motivation

Extra-qualitative individuation is a philosophical thesis; it does not necessarily coincide with our daily practice. According to Hart, the “necessary involvement with oth-

Its immanent temporal position alone individuates and does not individuate a repeatable. Namely, the lowest difference is itself individual” (Husserl, 2004, 80a).

ers and intersubjective meanings immerses the unique ipseity [of the subject] in the realm of what is universal and repeatable”; this is “the phenomenon of [subjective] style” (2009). In this sense, one speaks of “forms of individuation by reason of their insertion in nature, society, and culture” (Hart, 2009, p. ix). For the qualitative individuation of non-subjects in praxis, Husserl offers an account in terms of the causal nexus (*Zusammenhang*): whereby individuation in our practical life is not performed simply via spatiotemporal positions. It is, instead, performed via constitutive determinations, such as causal determinations.

Here, we can observe Husserl’s first motivation for the qualitative interpretation. He argues that a physical entity is “purely determined via its external relations” (1910s, A VI 19, 6a). Relations to other entities exhaust that entity’s lowest specific constitutive determinations, which include nothing non-relational.¹⁹ Personal character is, in contrast, “not determined from outside” (A VI 19, 4a). “The person has an absolute eigen-essence; the thing does not have absolute eigen-essence” (A VI 19, 6b). This means that “the subject also stands in relation to other objects. But it is not to be determined ‘from outside,’ simply via the nexus, regardless of this eigen-essence” (A VI 19, 6b).

Husserl is claiming that *the subject’s relations to other entities cannot exhaust its constitutive properties* (in contrast to the case of physical entities). I shall leave open the question of whether this thesis is correct. Nonetheless, the individuation in this context is more connected to our practical life than to the philosophical thesis of extra-qualitative individuation. The issue of individuation in the latter sense is different from the question of whether the subject’s constitutive determinations are all relational. The (non-)relationality of personal traits or physical properties addresses only a subject’s constitutive determinations. It has no implications for the principia individuationis because all constitutive determinations individualize via the latter. Even if subjects’ constitutive properties are truly not exhausted by relations, it does not follow that the subject individualizes via these constitutive determinations.

6.2 Second Motivation

Husserl’s second motivation concerns *how a genus differentiates from the lowest species*. He argues that the lowest species of physical universals “can be constructed a priori from the given universal form” (i.e., the genus), while “from the form” or genus “*person*, the particular content of any actual personal properties (such as material [*sachhaltig*] ones) cannot be derived or indirectly indicated” (A VI 19, 6b). In the case of physical universals, Husserl maintains that it is possible to derive the lowest species from the genus through mathematical operations, but this does not apply to personal characters. It is clear that Husserl is addressing only differentiation in this passage. As before, I shall not examine the correctness of his claim. Nonetheless, as long as this differentiation is different from individuation, the distinction regarding differentiation has no implications for the individuation of the subject.

¹⁹ Panpsychists might take this as an argument for their position. Cf. Pelczar (2022) for a critical review.

6.3 Third Motivation

Connected to the second motivation is another: “[N]ature is calculable: physical nature is mathematical, psychophysical nature is mathematical-intuitive [...]. Spirit (*Geist*) is not calculable, but only comprehensible afterwards” (A VI 14, 14a). Here, Husserl is arguing against the temptation to calculate which personal traits an individual would have as a result of family, friends, past experiences, and the like. Either one is conscious of a personal character through one’s own experience or one grasps the personality of another via empathy. Calculation cannot provide proper knowledge of personal character. This motivation does not require endorsing the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation. We can fully reject the mathematical calculation of personal traits while still arguing that the individuation of the subject requires extra-qualitative principia individuationis.

6.4 The Well-Justified Motivation

Underlying the above discussions is another well-justified motivation: one should “give the uniqueness of psychological individuality its due” (A VI 14, 9a). But is the qualitative interpretation the only way to do so? I suggest that the extra-qualitative interpretation can do even greater justice to subjective individuality (Sect. 7).

6.5 The Mixture of Motivations

Husserl’s qualitative individuation arises from a mixture of the above three motivations. The following passage is telling in this regard:

[A]ll peculiarit[ies] (*Eigenheit*) of the natural individual [are] universal peculiarities, and the universal does not individuate. Any peculiarity an individual has is still the same, whether for all individuals of that nature in general, or for individuals of a closed class. Only position in the nexus individuates; that is, from the nexus and the states of those external individuals standing in the nexus, I can calculate the states of each individual observed in relation to them as the universal determinations of the lowest species that must individually appear at its position.

But the idea of personality and a personal nexus is such that although an essential component (*Wesensbestand*) in the lowest [species], [an instance of] which becomes individuated only via its position, belongs to each person, the person also has individuality in the sense of essential components that do not just become individuated via position in the nexus; the person has a per se, which is not calculable but [is] essentially only experienced and according to the inner experience—it is known as this unique individual, the states [are] comprehensible as its character properties, and then the individual becomes recognizable in advance for the future of its existence (*Dasein*) within the boundaries of the predications of past experience. Now, there is also [an] essential universal of personal individuality and an empirical typology of the individuals. But that

does not change anything regarding the per se of each particular single individual. Nothing in the following changes this state of affairs either: that each individual comes to the communicative nexus, to the motivation[al] dependence on other subjects [...] still, each personal individual is precisely this particular self-person, who has its individuation in itself and not as determinable from the nexus. (A VI 14, 10a–b)

Husserl begins these two paragraphs with the constitutive determinations or “peculiarities” of entities in the natural world. Constitutive determinations cannot play the role of principia individuationis because they are “the same” for multiple instances of the lowest species. Husserl nonetheless blends two other factors with the idea of extra-qualitative individuation.

First, he has *not distinguished between the spatiotemporal and the causal nexus*. True, one sometimes uses causal properties to track an individual in daily life, but it does not follow that spatiotemporal positions and positions in a causal nexus are equivalent. Different events can coexist or succeed each other without being causally related. Causal properties also count as constitutive properties, which can be instantiated by multiple individuals in phantasy. Hence, one can endorse the extra-qualitative individuation of instances of physical universals without thinking that causal properties play any role therein.

Second, Husserl connects extra-qualitative individuation with the *calculability of constitutive determinations*. This is also unnecessary for the extra-qualitative individuation thesis. As Husserl highlights at the start of the manuscript, an inference from the instantiation of certain physical universals at one spatiotemporal position to the instantiation of others at other locations is only an “ideal comprehension” (*ideale Auffassung*) (A VI 19, 3a). In reality, it lacks “a sufficient analysis of the circumstance” under which one makes predictions (A VI 19, 3a). We can fully acknowledge the extra-qualitative individuation of physical universals’ instances while maintaining that it is impossible to predict natural processes in exact mathematical terms.

The mixture of different motivations is clearer in the above quotation’s second paragraph. Indeed, Husserl is *not completely hostile to the extra-qualitative interpretation* of absolute individuation. He accepts that the “essential component in the lowest [species]”—which can be interpreted as personal character’s lowest universal—individuates an instance via a certain form of “position.” As an analog of spatiotemporal position, this form can, in turn, be considered extra-qualitative. I say “can be considered” because the talk of “form” also accommodates qualitative interpretations. At the end of the second paragraph, Husserl also references the “communicative nexus” that each subject stands in. This is an analog of the causal nexus among physical entities. Position in such a communicative nexus is a constitutive determination, and individuation in terms of such positions is, therefore, qualitative. I engage with the problem of how to interpret individuation as extra-qualitative in the next section.

Husserl quickly turns to the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation. Here, the mixture of motivations is obvious. Initially, he contrasts the subject’s “per se” with the fact that a physical entity’s constitutive determinations can be exhausted by their relations to other entities. For Husserl, a physical entity’s constitutive deter-

minations are thus nothing more than its position in the causal nexus. This is the first motivation presented above. I leave open the correctness of Husserl's claim that relations cannot exhaust personal character's lowest species. The status of this claim does not affect my thesis that bearers of personal traits must also individualize extra-qualitatively. The dispute concerns only two kinds of constitutive determinations—physical properties and personal traits—and whether they are exhausted by relations. However, the dispute over constitutive determinations' relationality has no consequence for the individuation of their instances. The former question applies *within* the realm of constitutive determinations' universals, while the latter goes *beyond* that realm.

I suspect that Husserl is confusing *two* senses of “external” or “extra” here. On the one hand, spatiotemporal positions are extra-qualitative in the sense that they are not constitutive determinations. On the other hand, Husserl claims that all constitutive properties of physical entities relate those entities to something external to themselves. This second sense of “external” indicates a distinction *internal to* the realm of constitutive determinations and is quite different from the first. The identification of the extra-qualitativeness of principia individuationis with the relationality of certain constitutive determinations connects Husserl's well-justified motivation of giving subjective individuality its due with the mixture of other motivations.

Husserl's first motivation is now mixed with the second and third: personal character is not calculable in the sense that differentiation from the genus to the lowest species is not a mathematical operation, and one cannot mathematically infer the instantiation of a personal character from the instantiation of other universals. That said, these incalculabilities do not entail the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation. Differentiation is a procedure within the realm of constitutive determinations and should be explicitly distinguished from individuation. Analogously, one can deny the possibility of mathematically inferring the instantiation of one physical universal from the instantiation of others while fully endorsing the extra-qualitative individuation of physical entities. Rejecting such inferences for personal characters has no implications in the debate between qualitative and extra-qualitative interpretations of absolute individuation.

A well-justified component of Husserl's mixture of motivations is the desire to give subjective individuality's uniqueness its due. Unfortunately, this motivation is blended with other considerations: relational properties cannot exhaust personal character, differentiation from the genus of personal character to its lowest species is not a mathematical deduction, and it is impossible to mathematically infer the instantiation of a personal character from the instantiation of other universals. However, subjective individuality's uniqueness does not by itself entail the qualitative interpretation. Extra-qualitative individuation can better account for subjective individuality. As stated, the mixture of other motivations drives Husserl to the qualitative interpretation. But we can fully acknowledge the validity of the other motivations without endorsing the qualitative interpretation if we make a clear distinction between the relationality of certain constitutive determinations and the extra-qualitativeness of principia individuationis.

7 The Subject *qua* One-Off *sic et simpliciter*

In Sects. 5 and 6, I argued that the qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation is neither consistent with Husserl's extra-qualitative account of the individuation of non-subjects nor can it explain that individuation's subjective contribution. Husserl's well-justified motivation is unfortunately mixed with several others, and he confuses the relationality of certain constitutive determinations with the extra-qualitativeness of their principia individuationis.

Demonstrating my extra-qualitative interpretation's advantage thus requires explaining at least four things:

1. Whether it interprets the topical texts as plausibly as the qualitative interpretation (7.1).
2. Why it is consistent with Husserl's other ideas about individuation (7.2).
3. What it says about how the subject contributes to the individuation of non-subjects (7.3).
4. Whether it does justice to subjective individuality's uniqueness (7.4).

7.1 The Extra-Qualitative Interpretation's Plausibility

Recall Husserl's proposal that the subject's principia individuationis are not spatiotemporal positions. Instead, "the pure self already has absolute individuation, as the self of each cogitation, who has something absolutely individual in itself" (Husserl, forthcoming, p. 231). The question is how to interpret this "in itself." The qualitative interpretation suggests that "in itself" means constitutive determinations (i.e., personal characters) in contrast to extra-qualitative principia individuationis. For the extra-qualitative interpretation, "in itself" means that the subject itself *is* an extra-qualitative principium individuationis. It does not individualize in virtue of something else. I am thus defining the relevant notion of the subject in absolute individuation as follows:

The subject in absolute individuation is one-off *sic et simpliciter*.

Here, "one-off" addresses the subject's individuality because constitutive determinations can be instantiated by multiple individuals. In other words, constitutive determinations can be repeated, while individuality means "unrepeatable one-offness" (*unwiederholbare Einmaligkeit*) (A III 13, 26a, 54a). It follows that the one-offness is extra-qualitative. "Sic et simpliciter," in turn, addresses the absoluteness of absolute individuation. This notion of the subject has no determinations other than one-offness; it is pre-temporal and pre-spatial.

The qualitative interpretation conversely explains one-offness as the impossibility of constitutive determinations being instantiated by two individuals (even in phantasy). It contrasts the absoluteness of absolute individuation with the extra-qualitativeness of principia individuationis.

Both interpretations are possible if we do not consider other factors. This means that the extra-qualitative interpretation of the text where Husserl proposes the notion

of absolute individuation is at least as plausible as the qualitative interpretation. However, as noted, the qualitative interpretation suffers from several flaws. If the extra-qualitative interpretation does better in those respects, then we would have reason to prefer it.

Before pursuing such an argument, I should address a concern. Some might wonder whether the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* is synonymous with a “bare particular” in contemporary metaphysics. In Sect. 3, I explained thisness in terms of one-offness (what distinguishes one instance of a maximally specific universal from another instance of the same universal). I also suggested that the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* enjoys a primitive thisness. Indeed, some authors (e.g., Park, 1990) have noticed the similarity between thisness and a bare particular: they are both individuator and, to a certain extent, non-qualitative (bare).²⁰ However, they are not synonymous given that a bare particular is traditionally taken to be a *substratum* rather than any non-qualitative particular (Park, 1990; Connolly, 2015).

The first difference between the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* and a substratum is their respective explanandum. The paradigm explanandum for substratum theories is a (composite and diachronic) entity (e.g., an apple) that remains united despite its various qualitative properties. It is also numerically distinct from its qualitative duplicate. Substratum theories explain this invariant unity and individuality in terms of a postulated invariant: the substratum that is left after subtracting the qualitative properties (Perović, 2017). The subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* thesis is, in contrast, motivated by the fact that maximally specific spatiotemporal universals can have numerically distinct instances across phantasy worlds, even if these universals cannot individuate themselves.

This difference in explananda leads to an important distinction: the substratum “bears” the qualitative properties but this “bearing” relation does not hold between the subject *sic et simpliciter* and an entity it individuates. As explicated in Sect. 7.3 and 7.4, we can follow Woosuk Park in saying that “my experience is mine because it is individuated by the relationship with me” and “our world is actual because it individualizes relative to us,” but the subject is not a bearer of what it individuates (1990, p. 394). “My” or “our” implies an indexical relation rather than “bearing.” The subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* is neither a constituent of the spatiotemporal position it individuates nor identical with it. This contrasts with the substratum, which is either constitutive of or identical to what it individuates (Connolly, 2015).²¹

As argued in Sect. 3, the hierarchical individuation via spatiotemporal positions and the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter*²² also leave room for a qualitative contribution to the identity of persistent and composite entities. An apple’s criterion of identity is a qualitative pattern over the extra-qualitative principles of individuation.

²⁰ Proponents of bare particulars disagree over how bare they should be (Perović, 2017).

²¹ James P. Moreland might deny the difference between thisness and substratum by saying that he does “not think that [substrata] serve any [...] other roles” than individuator (1998, p. 254). But if Moreland takes this seriously, then he should give up the talk of substratum, since the substratum that does not unite anything is a metaphor that adds no explanatory force (Rydén, 2013, p. 460).

²² Substratum theorists might also allow hierarchical individuation. Such a hierarchy will, however, differ from mine as long as these theorists deny the role of spatiotemporal positions in individuation (Moreland, 1998, p. 254).

Neither the qualitative properties nor the extra-qualitative principles of individuation alone suffice to determine an apple's identity. It is, instead, determined by them both. In contrast, a substratum exhausts the identity of a persistent and composite entity and excludes qualitative properties from playing any role therein unless substratum theorists require substrata to be essentially tied to certain qualitative properties (Morganti, 2011, p. 189). But this reduced bareness of the substratum would render substratum-talk explanatorily redundant: the substratum of an apple is supposed to explain the apple's identity, but the very apple explains the tie between the relevant substratum and the qualitative properties it bears (Davis, 2013, p. 405).

If substratum theorists go to the other extreme of a “truly bare” substratum, then the last resort seems to be identifying substrata with spatiotemporal regions (as Morganti, 2011 and Sider, 2006 have argued). But, then, substratum theories will be absorbed by, rather than serve as rival alternatives to, my account: substrata will be spatiotemporal positions individuating instances of qualities in the narrow sense. However, substrata themselves are still qualitative in the broad sense insofar as they are individuated by the relationship with the subject *sic et simpliciter* (Sects. 2 and 3).

In sum, the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* is not a substratum even if it is “bare” (non-qualitative) and “particular.” This might explain why Hart insists that the subject is not “a bare particular bereft of an ‘essence’ and ‘essential meaning,’ even though it is propertyless” (2009, p. 288). The subject's essence is precisely oneness and nothing else (being a substratum, etc.).

7.2 Consistency with Husserl's Other Ideas About Individuation

The first problem with the qualitative interpretation is its inconsistency with Husserl's view about the extra-qualitative individuation of non-subjects. As argued in Sect. 3, different individuals can indiscernibly instantiate constitutive determinations (at least in phantasy), thereby demonstrating that the principia individuationis should be extra-qualitative. Husserl's argument against the application of this thesis to personal character is unsuccessful (cf. Sections 4 and 5). My extra-qualitative interpretation is, in contrast, consistent with this idea.

Husserl admits the possibility of principia individuationis other than temporal positions: “[T]he temporal form, as a universal ‘form’ of all individuals,” does not mean “that it is the only such form” (A III 13, 17a). “Form” indicates that the principia individuationis are extra-qualitative if one takes constitutive determinations as “matter.” Nonetheless, Husserl has not specified what the other extra-qualitative principia individuationis are. He seems to suggest that spatial position is the only possible extra-qualitative principium individuationis other than temporality (A III 13, 18b). It is this suggestion that I must reject. Faithfulness to the idea of absolute individuation dictates that this principium individuationis should be prior to temporality and spatiality. Time and space presuppose the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* rather than the other way around.

Husserl seems to allow the possibility of the extra-qualitative interpretation by saying that personal character in its lowest species also “becomes individuated via position” (A VI 19, 10a). And “position” (like “form”) indicates extra-qualitativeness if constitutive determinations stand in the relevant position. This expression favors

an extra-qualitative reading, although Husserl might have ascribed a qualitative reading to “position” in that context (viz. position in the communicative nexus) (A VI 19, 10b).

Husserl’s claim that the subject’s essence cannot be repeatedly instantiated thus obtains a new meaning: rather than meaning that “there is [a] coincidence between the universal of the lowest level and its individuality” (Santis, 2023, p. 62), it means that there is a coincidence between the subject’s individuality and its “essence” (or sole determination or one-offness) (Hart, 2009, p. 274).

To conclude, my extra-qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation is more consistent with Husserl’s extra-qualitative account of the individuation of non-subjects, although whether there is direct textual support for this reading remains an open question. In this respect, my extra-qualitative interpretation has an advantage over the qualitative interpretation. The next step is to show how the extra-qualitative interpretation can explain subjective contributions to the individuation of non-subjects.

7.3 The Subject as the Ultimate Principle of Individuation

In Sect. 5, I showed how the qualitative interpretation fails to explain the subject as the ultimate principle of individuation. If the subject individualized qualitatively via its constitutive determinations, then there would be no indication of how a non-subject’s relationship with that subject could contribute to its extra-qualitative individuation.

My extra-qualitative interpretation offers such an explanation. Why is the space-time continuum not yet the ultimate principle of individuation? The answer lies in the double senses of “spatiotemporal position.” As extra-qualitative principles of individuation, spatiotemporal positions seem to be “excluded from essence” (Husserl, 2012, p. 85). This is because all universals applicable to non-subjects must instantiate themselves via spatiotemporal positions. However, geometry investigates universals that apply to spatiotemporal positions and even their lowest species (Husserl, 2012, p. 200). This is why Husserl must distinguish between “the lowest species of spatiotemporal extension” and “the finally determined temporal duration” (A III 13, 49a, 52b; Husserl, 2012, p. 199). The latter instantiates the former, which still counts as a constitutive determination.

So what individuates instances of spatiotemporal positions’ “lowest species?” According to Husserl, even these lowest species “can be arbitrarily duplicated” (e.g., in different phantasy worlds) (A III 13, 52b), meaning that their principia individuationis cannot be qualitative. In contrast, the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* can play this principia individuationis role. It satisfies the extra-qualitativeness condition because its only determination is one-offness. The subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* contains no constitutive determinations, not even spatiotemporal structure. It also provides arbitrarily repeated instances of spatiotemporal universals with individuality. Consider the lowest species *S* of a spatial position, which has its instance s_0 in the actual world and instances $s_1, s_2 \dots s_n$ in different phantasy worlds. On my extra-qualitative interpretation, instances s_i differ from one another because they are related to different subjects *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter*, which we can respectively call “the actual subject” and “the imagined subjects.” Two instances of the same maximally specific spatial universal are numerically distinct, because they oppose different sub-

jects *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter*. The instances of spatiotemporal position's repeatable lowest species derive their individuality or one-offness from that of the subject.

This notion of the subject is not esoteric. In fact, Lewis (1986) argues that the actual world is actual because it is our world, while possible worlds are merely possible because they are not ours (pp. 92–95, 99, 129–131). Thus, actuality and mere possibility are indexical—indexed to the subject. For a world that can be intersubjectively identified, the pertinent subject can be called “us.” Instances of mundane spatiotemporal positions, in turn, individualize via their relationships to “us.” For experiential spatiotemporal positions—as in the case of phenomenological time (Husserl, 2004, Text No. 16 and 17) and the experiential analog of space (Husserl, 2006, pp. 63, 388)—the subject is in the singular form. So, the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* or the entity's relationship with this subject is the ultimate principle of individuation. This is the principle via which instances of both spatiotemporal position's lowest species and further constitutive determinations individualize.

There is a caveat here: we should avoid using the traditional model of form and matter to describe the subject in this sense (despite the frequency of such language in Husserl's writings [cf. Section 7.2]). “Form”—as in “spatiotemporal form”—implies extra-qualitativeness, and the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* therefore has similarity to a form. Yet, if a form brings structure and order to matter, then this notion of the subject is not a form because it is pre-spatiotemporal. It is the spatiotemporal position and further constitutive determinations that structure the subject in this sense. In this respect, the subject is matter-like.²³

Anton Friedrich Koch proposes a similar idea when he asks after “the principle of individuation of spatiotemporal regions” (2002, p. 181). His answer is the subject: what differentiates my spatiotemporal surroundings from my doppelgänger's qualitatively indiscernible surroundings is the fact that one is mine and the other is his (Koch, 2002, p. 184). Nonetheless, there are at least four important differences between Koch's position and mine.

First, it is unclear whether Koch is claiming that all spatiotemporal regions within one world or those across different possible worlds are qualitatively indiscernible. Husserl would reject the former claim because he thinks that different spatiotemporal regions in one world instantiate different maximally specific spatiotemporal universals (Sect. 2).

Second, Koch seems to conflate the ontological *fact* of individuation and the subjective *act* of individuating.²⁴ For me, it is a fact that the relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* individuates spatiotemporal positions. The relationship is not (as Koch claims) something created or “posited” (*setzen*) by the subject and imposed on the world, where the distinction between qualitatively indiscernible spatiotemporal positions does not yet exist (Koch, 2002, pp. 183–185). I agree with Koch that the subject for the individuation of spatiotemporal positions is not “non-

²³ In the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, matter is taken to be what possesses one-offness (Stanteler, 1935).

²⁴ Koch (forthcoming) distinguishes between “epistemic individuation” and “ontic individuation” (p. 6). Still, he assumes that they always go hand in hand but a Husserlian would take the distinction between ontology and sense-making seriously.

participatory” (*unbeteiligt*) (Koch, 2002, p. 195). Husserl’s characterization of transcendental subjectivity as “beyond the world” (i.e., what makes sense of the world but is not a part of it) can be taken as a paradigm for such a non-participatory subject (Sect. 7.4). But there are different ways or gestures of subjective participation in the being of worldly entities. To contribute to the individuation of spatiotemporal positions, the subject does not have to be an agent that introduces its creations into the world (as Koch assumes). It can make this contribution as a mere observer.

Third, Koch maintains that the intentional relation of perception is the same as the relation of spatiotemporal positions to the subject responsible for their individuation. I have argued elsewhere that intentionality is a unique type of relation because it can have non-existent relata (Liu, 2024a). To use De Santis’ phrasing, “[i]ntentionality” is not an ontological concept, but a ‘transcendental’ one: it has nothing to do with ‘being’ but rather with ‘sense’” (2023, p. 200). Thus, the subject for intentionality is Husserlian transcendental subjectivity, which does not participate in the being of the world (Sect. 7.4). Although intentionality and the individuating relation to the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* might coincide, they are not synonymous.

Fourth, Koch construes the subject-relative individuation of spatiotemporal positions in terms of the subject’s localization here and now (2002, p. 184).²⁵ There are, however, two problems with this strategy: (1) although the present might be the most salient temporal component, it is dubious to say that the subject is solely localized in the present while the past or future contributes nothing to the subject and (2) if one assumes that the subject for the individuation of spatiotemporal positions is spatiotemporally localized, then one’s account is circular.²⁶

Spatiotemporal positions individuate red instances. This is a non-circular account because spatiotemporal positions contain no information about redness. If spatiotemporal positions were by definition red, then the question of how red instances individualize would be unmotivated. Likewise, the individuation of spatiotemporal positions via a relationship with the subject is non-circular if the subject is pre-spatiotemporal (as is the case in my account). In contrast, if the relevant subject is by definition spatiotemporally localized, then the question of the individuation of spatiotemporal positions will be settled from the get-go, and it would be redundant to invoke the subject to answer it.

Hofweber (2015) has argued that if what Koch (2006, 2010, manuscript) calls “indexical” or “perspectival” properties (here-ness and there-ness) are relational to the subject, then they cannot ground the numerical identity and difference between entities in the world because an entity in the world would then have different indexical properties relative to different subjects (Hofweber, 2015, p. 485). This objection does not threaten my account for two reasons.

First, I am not claiming that the relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* is the *sole* ground of numerical identity and difference. Rather, there is

²⁵ It is unclear whether Lewis would consider the subject to which the actual world is indexed to be spatiotemporally located in the actual world. He contends that “‘actual’ applies to my world and my worldmates; that is, to the world that I am part of and to other parts of the world” (1986, p. 94). But he also insists that “which world is ours” is an “*egocentric* fact about *me*, not at all a fact about the world” (p. 130, original emphasis).

²⁶ See Rosenkrantz (1993, pp. 93–105) for a systematic critique of circular individuation.

a hierarchy of individuation: spatiotemporal positions individuate instances of pertinent qualities in the narrow sense, and the relationship with the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* individuates instances of the maximally specific spatiotemporal universals in different worlds.²⁷ Hofweber's objection bites only if the subject *alone* grounds all the numerical differences. But on my account, the subject is the *ultimate* ground of individuality, which requires further principles of individuation and even qualitative contributions (Sect. 3).

Second, Hofweber assumes that subjects for the individuation of *worldly* entities are singular subjects (such as “you” or “me”). This is not true of my account. As outlined in Sect. 7.3, the actual world in Lewis (1986) is actual. And this is not because it is only *my* or *your* world, but because it is *our* world. In contrast, an experience is actual because it is experienced by *me*. Hence, the subject to which the actual world is indexed (“everyone of us”) differs from the subject to which the actual experience is indexed (“me”). The fact that Plato and Aristotle are different subjects does not double the actual world's property of being actual. Instead, the subject for the world's actuality is someone that every dweller in the actual world can identify with.²⁸

The problems with Koch's account are strongly related to different senses of the subject. These are transcendental subjectivity that goes “beyond the world,” the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* that participates in the individuation of all particulars in general, and the psychological subject that is localized in a specific spatiotemporal region of the world. Hofweber's critique also highlights the need to distinguish between the indexical “me” and “us.” These different senses of the subject might coincide, but they should not be treated as synonymous. How they are related to one another is, nonetheless, a legitimate question. I now provide a sketch of these issues, but more extensive discussions go beyond the scope of this article.

7.4 Doing Justice to Subjective Individuality

The final question is whether the extra-qualitative interpretation does justice to subjective individuality's uniqueness. My answer is that it does, and indeed does so better than the qualitative interpretation. If subjective individuality consisted solely in the unlikelihood of a multiple instantiation of certain constitutive determinations, then this individuality would not be essentially different from that of a physical entity. For instance, certain radioactive particles in an organism can be tracked by their emission of rays. These particles are considered identical across time and space as long as they have the same constitutive determinations of radioactivity. Tracking a person's identity by DNA or personal character is not essentially different.

If Husserl wants to argue for the subject's uniqueness or one-offness, then the qualitative interpretation does not do a good job here. But on the extra-qualitative interpretation, one-offness is *distinctive* and *definitive* of the subject. This one-offness is

²⁷ We must distinguish between (a) *inter-world* indexicality (the indexicality of actual spatiotemporal positions to the subject in contrast with mere possibilities) and (b) the *intra-world* indexicality of (A-theoretical) structures like here/there and past/present/now. I am pursuing only the former indexicality here, although I argue for the latter elsewhere (see Liu, 2024b).

²⁸ This is why my account does not suffer from solipsism—the built-in perspective for the being of the actual world is my, rather than our, perspective (Hofweber, 2015, p. 486).

noncontingent, while a personal character's unrepeatability depends on the condition that nothing like amnesia counteracts anyone's habituation. The subject's one-offness is also nonderivative: non-subjects derive their non-repetitiveness or individuality from that of the subject. If so, then the extra-qualitative interpretation can do better justice to subjective individuality's uniqueness than the qualitative interpretation can. That said, three objections might arise here.

7.4.1 First Objection

The subject, thus understood, is “fragmented” in the sense that it is not an identical pole that persists throughout time.²⁹ I admit that this is true. But the notion of a diachronically identical subject is not the only legitimate option, even for Husserl. For instance, “every act has *its* separate self, so to speak as *its separate act-pole*” (Husserl, 1996, p. 90, original emphasis). These separate selves are united into a persistent self by “the identity synthesis of the self” (Husserl, 1968, p. 480). Put differently, the persistent subject is grounded in the fragmented subject. These are not in conflict but rather address different strata of the subject. One-offness *sic et simpliciter* is the bottom layer, while notions of the persistent self and the qualitative subject are more sophisticated structures built on it.³⁰

This is the central difference between my view and Hart's. Hart identifies the subject of absolute individuation with the persistent pole of consciousness (2009, p. 308). I have two main reasons for disagreeing. The first is given by Hart himself: “[W]ho I am” has different senses, which are “not absolutely coincident” (p. 96). Hence, *one should have a liberal and even pluralistic attitude toward the notion of a subject rather than hasten to identify its different senses*. The second relates to Hart's seeming inability to readily explain how the subject can be the ultimate principle of individuation. Indeed, Hart seems to suggest that temporality and the subject are two parallel principia individuationis (p. 320). However, on my account, the subject is *pre*-spatiotemporal rather than *ultra*-spatiotemporal. Time and space are *further* structures that the subject individuates rather than something it *transcends* (p. 309). Spatiotemporal positions derive their status as principia individuationis from the subject. This explanation of the subject's ultimateness as principium individuationis is what Hart's account cannot offer.

7.4.2 Second Objection

A complaint arises from Husserl's concern with the emptiness of the notion of the subject (Husserl, 1952, pp. 299–300; Shang, 2022). One-offness *sic et simpliciter* might appear to be an extreme case of such emptiness because it contains no determinations beyond one-offness. Note that I am *not* against a qualitative characterization of the subject with personal traits. I insist only that such a characterization does not exhaust the subject's individuality and cannot adequately explain the thesis of absolute individuation. I am ready to embrace rich, complex, and qualitative struc-

²⁹ See Crowell (2021) and Loidolt (2021) for further distinctions in the context of personal identity.

³⁰ Baxter (2018) has put forward a similar idea of “self-differing.”

tures *upon* the extra-qualitative subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter*. This renders my account compatible with the notion of a concrete subject having abundant personal characteristics (*unless* one attempts to interpret absolute individuation solely via these qualitative aspects). Note also that the notion of the subject is a thick one. There is no reason to assume one sense of “subject” as the only correct one. As long as they serve different purposes, qualitative and extra-qualitative accounts of the subject can peacefully coexist.

7.4.3 Third Objection

There might also be a complaint related to the established dichotomy of the subject. On the one hand, there is transcendental subjectivity, which is “ultramundane (*überweltlich*) as world-constituting” (Husserl, 1968, p. 345); it is not a part of the world as a “mundane member” (*Weltmitglied*) (Husserl, 2002, pp. 111, 344). Instead, it is “the subjectivity for the world, in whose functioning the world obtains meaning” or “in whose unknown achievement this world obtains meaning for us” (Husserl, 1994, pp. 337, 498). Transcendental subjectivity can be said to make an “ultraontological contribution to the world” insofar as it participates only in the sense-obtaining of mundane entities and not their being.

On the other hand, there is the psychological subject (e.g., a human or other animal), which is “intramundane” (*innerweltlich*)—a part of the world (Husserl, 1968, p. 345). This subject makes an “ontic” contribution to the world because it contributes only to the being of a limited range of mundane entities. The psychological subject is, however, not an entity alongside the transcendental subject. It is, instead, the result of the latter’s self-objectification (Husserl, 1968, p. 294).

The subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* seems to violate this dichotomy because it is neither ultramundane nor intramundane. Arguably, it makes an “ontological contribution,” or is even “intermundane,” because it “selects” the actual world from among possible worlds. *Intentionality* is, thus, *not* the relationship with the subject that individuates non-subjects. As De Santis writes, “[i]ntentionality’ is not an ontological concept, but a ‘transcendental’ one: it has nothing to do with ‘being’ but rather with ‘sense’” (2023, p. 200). Intentionality is responsible only for the object obtaining sense. It makes only an “ultraontological” contribution, leaving open the object’s existence. This is because there can be intentional objects whose existence is impossible (e.g., a tree that is both entirely red and entirely non-red) (Liu, 2024a). But an object’s relationship with the subject of absolute individuation makes an ontological contribution.

Is this bad news? Not at all. As Textor (2018) suggests, the notion of “self” or “subject” is a “thick” one, covering multiple more basic subject notions. We should not assume that one or two notions of “subject” are sufficient to exhaust all of its senses. The conflict between the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* and the established dichotomy in Husserl’s view does not point to a flaw in the former. Rather, it signals that the notion of “subject” deserves a subtler differentiation, one that aligns with various notions’ respective contributions. Different notions of “subject” may non-accidentally *coincide* in one individual, but they are not *synonymous*. Although the notion of subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* does not *contain* the difference

between “me” and “us” (cf. Section 7.3), it might *borrow* this difference from other subject notions owing to the coincidence.³¹

The extra-qualitative interpretation of absolute individuation suggests that Husserl’s notion of the subject implicitly goes beyond his well-known dichotomy. Far from threatening Husserl’s characterization of the subject, the extra-qualitative interpretation actually renews it. It is also necessary to explain why and how the ultra-mundane transcendental subject must objectify itself as an intramundane entity. The intermundane subject could serve as a link between these two.

8 Conclusion

I have presented Husserl’s notion of absolute individuation and its different interpretations. Absolute individuation means that the subject has its own manner of individuation and all non-subjects ultimately individualize via their relationships to it. The qualitative interpretation construes absolute individuation as the impossibility of repeated personal character instantiations. To argue against this interpretation, I introduced Husserl’s distinction between constitutive determinations and principia individuationis. I also set out his extra-qualitative account of the individuation of non-subjects.

The qualitative interpretation faces two difficulties. First, it is inconsistent with Husserl’s extra-qualitative stance toward the individuation of non-subjects. The argument from habituation does not support the idea that personal characters cannot be repeatedly instantiated in phantasy. Second, it cannot explain the subjective contribution to the individuation of non-subjects.

Husserl is rightly motivated to do justice to the uniqueness of subjective individuality. But this motivation is mixed with others. And, in the process, he confuses the extra-qualitativeness of principia individuationis with the relationality of certain constitutive determinations, which leads him to the qualitative interpretation.

The interpretation I have offered is extra-qualitative. Here, the subject is defined as one-off *sic et simpliciter*. It has no determinations other than one-offness and is, consequently, pre-spatiotemporal. This interpretation fits Husserl’s topical texts as plausibly as the qualitative interpretation. More importantly, it can solve problems facing the qualitative interpretation. It is more consistent with Husserl’s extra-qualitative account of the individuation of non-subjects, and explains why the subject in this sense is the ultimate principle of individuation. The extra-qualitative interpretation accommodates subjective individuality’s uniqueness better than the qualitative interpretation. The tension between the resulting notion of the subject and Husserl’s established dichotomy of the subject implies no inconsistency. Instead, it demands a more subtle differentiation of the notion of the subject, one that accords with the different notions’ respective contributions.

³¹ Some might use the death of the subject as an argument against the possibility that the subject makes an ontological contribution to the being of all mundane entities. On my view, death means only that the coincidence of subjects in different senses breaks down. Whether one type of subject could survive the death of another is a topic for another discussion.

To end, Husserl's thesis of absolute individuation might benefit contemporary metaphysics in, at least, three ways. First, the context-dependent distinction between constitutive determinations and individuation's extra-qualitative principles might illuminate the debate around qualitative/extra-qualitative properties (Sect. 2). Second, the interpretation of thisness in terms of one-offness could shed light on important issues related to possible worlds and haecceitism (Sect. 3). Third, the hierarchical extra-qualitative individuation that ultimately relies on the subject *qua* one-off *sic et simpliciter* is a possible alternative to both bundle theories and substratum theories (Sect. 7).

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