

# Adorno reader and critic of Husserl\*: the reformulation of dialectics from the critique of phenomenology

Adorno leitor e crítico de Husserl: a reformulação  
da dialética a partir da crítica da fenomenologia

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## ABSTRACT

To understand Adorno's relationship with phenomenology, or rather, the Adorno-Husserl relationship, it is important to distinguish two inseparable moments: (I) the critique of phenomenology operated from the dialectic, and (II) the recognition of the legitimacy of a phenomenological moment against Hegelian idealism. From a conceptual point of view; it is, therefore, a matter of deconstructing the primacy of the former, which characterizes the phenomenological concept of the latter, and then denouncing the idealist claim of a totalization of all mediations in a thought system. The coexistence of these two requirements in the same method could have been reduced, if not to a contradiction, at least to an aporia. The settling of accounts with Husserlian idealism becomes, therefore, *prima facie* an important reading key for understanding Adorno's philosophy. Even more so when it comes to the negative form that his dialectic will take. These are the questions that the present paper intends to discuss.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology. Dialectic. Critique. Theodor W. Adorno. Edmund Husserl.

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## RESUMO

Para compreendermos a relação de Adorno com a fenomenologia, ou melhor, a relação Adorno-Husserl, é importante distinguir dois momentos indissociáveis: (I) a crítica da fenomenologia operada a partir da dialética, e (II) o reconhecimento da legitimidade de um momento contra o idealismo hegeliano. Do ponto de vista conceitual, trata-se, portanto, de desconstruir a primazia do imediato, que caracteriza o conceito fenomenológico do dado, para depois denunciar a pretensão idealista de uma totalização de todas as mediações em um sistema de pensamento. A coexistência desses dois requisitos no mesmo método poderia ter sido reduzida, se não a uma contradição, ao menos a uma aporia. O acerto de contas com o idealismo husserliano torna-se, portanto, *prima facie*, uma importante chave de leitura para a compreensão da filosofia de Adorno. Ainda mais quando se trata da forma negativa que sua dialética assumirá. Essas são as questões que este artigo pretende discutir.

**Palavras-chave:** Fenomenologia. Dialética. Crítica. Theodor W. Adorno. Edmundo Husserl.

“Adorno remained convinced that Husserl more than any of his contemporaries had correctly articulated the issues and dilemmas which philosophy presently confronted”.  
Susan Buck-Morss

“[...] what according to Adorno turns Husserl into a privileged object of the immanent critique of idealism is that in him manifests itself with all clarity, the crisis of the same idealism, i.e., a perception of its antinomic character, the perception that has a social and historical origin”.

José A. Zamora

## Introduction

Adorno's position presented before the authors he addresses is, by no means, arbitrary. Considering an external look at the author's work, his concern is not to demonstrate, possible errors or untruths contained therein. If that were so, the first and most basic of dialectical procedures would be violated: “the immanent critique” (*immanente Kritik*) (ADORNO, 1970, p. 14). For example, the requirement that the immanent critique imposes on those who now read this text is not to slightly invalidate it from a probable (and certain) incongruity between the positions exposed here with others, that also proposed to investigate the object in question. A philosophy that simply started from some unquestioned principles to question others would be “a philosophy of mere perspectives” (*bloße Standpunktphilosophie*) (ADORNO, 1974, p. 21).

Therefore, it is not a matter of criticizing a thought from another point of view: criticizing the relapse of idealism into a formalism from the perspective of materialist philosophy, which makes any dialogue impossible while confronting two distinct logics of thought. Such criticism responds much more to a rhetorical game than a demand for philosophical seriousness. Immanent critique, on the contrary, is true philosophical criticism insofar as it respects a fundamental hermeneutical principle, which is to understand a work from the deep logic of its composition, the objectives that this work proposes to do, the internal mediation between each of the justifications present, and to situate any critical perspective from the internal

inadequacy, in the work studied, between its compositional logic and the results that this work tends to achieve (i.e., to see if it satisfied such purposes).

This critical strategy holds for the analysis of philosophical texts no less than for the exercises in musicology, where Adorno follows the basic interpretative principle (later formulated in *Aesthetic Theory*) that unresolved "antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form" (GORDON, 2016, p. 61).

"Immanent critique means the absence of an external criterion to the object to judge it" (FLECK, 2015, p. 148), or even something external to thinking and philosophizing: it is "the very essence of thinking" (WELLMER, 2003, p. 27). Fundamentally, this is the function of the critique in the Adornian philosophical project is to carry out the necessary dissociation between dialectics and idealism or between dialectics and positivity. Ultimately, it becomes an internal requirement of philosophy itself when this rigorous logic of disintegration is taken to its ultimate consequences. In phenomenology, i.e., in a rigorous project of the immanent disintegration of idealism, this critique begins to gain strength. For Gordon (2016, p. 62), "the immanent critique of Husserlian phenomenology involves a far-reaching critique of the self-contradiction in idealist epistemology".

In his 1960 – 1961 course entitled *Ontologie und Dialektik*, a form of prolegomena to *Negative Dialektik*, Adorno set out to argue that the dialectical method should not be understood as the contradictory opposite of phenomenology. On the contrary, "the transition to dialectic consists precisely in the ontology self-reflection. To better rephrase this idea in more Hegelian terms, dialectic is mediated in itself precisely through ontology" (ADORNO, 2002, p. 12-13). If dialectics can only be constituted from an immanent critique of its opposite, it cannot emerge unscathed from this movement. Then how does the deviation through phenomenology, which persists as a minor key in Adorno's text, translate into the methodical reformulation undertaken in the *Negative Dialektik*?

The semantic ambiguity of Adorno's prose makes it difficult to unequivocally explain the link with phenomenology in his writings. This difficulty was redoubled by the evolution of his theoretical positions between the first texts of the late 1920s and the *Negative Dialektik*, published in 1966. To understand Adorno's relationship with phenomenology, or rather, the Adorno-Husserl relationship, it is important to distinguish two inseparable moments: (I) the critique of phenomenology operated from the dialectic, and (II), the recognition of the legitimacy of a phenomenological moment in the face of Hegelian idealism. From a conceptual point of view, it is first a matter of deconstructing the primacy of the immediate, which characterizes the phenomenological concept of the given and denouncing; in a second moment, the idealist claims of totalizing all mediations in a system of thought. The coexistence of these two requirements in the same method could have been reduced, if not to a contradiction, at least to an aporia. This is the main object of the present paper.

## 1 Metacritique of Husserlian theory

According to Pettazzi (1977; 1979), the dissertation, a moment in the transcendental phase of Adorno's thought, is an extremely important text for understanding the origins of his materialist dialectic. The hypothesis of this work – which can be considered, along with some of his essays on music theory, one of his first systematic academic works – is that Husserlian phenomenology contains from the beginning transcendental-realist's elements that involve

irreducible contradictions, despite its idealist-transcendental passage. It is important to point out that this text highlights Adorno's constant dialogue with Husserlian phenomenology – a dialogue that begins with this work and is resumed during the years 34-37 (Oxford Manuscript – *Zur Philosophie Husserls*) and that culminates with the publication of these two moments in the text *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*. In the latter, as Silva points out in his presentation to the Brazilian edition, “about the marginal annotations in Husserl's works [...] there is no other book in Adorno's library to which the author has had access that has so many notes, marks, and readings of comments” (SILVA, 2015, p. 14).

The contact with phenomenology, therefore, was by no means arbitrary. “Adorno remained convinced that, more than any of his contemporaries, Husserl had correctly articulated the issues and dilemmas which philosophy presently confronted” (BUCK-MORSS, 1977, p. 10). Thus, on one hand, Adorno aimed to argue that Husserl's attempt to resolve the aporias of idealism, and on the other hand, “what according to Adorno turns Husserl into a privileged object of the immanent critique of idealism is that in him manifests itself with all clarity, the crisis of the same idealism, that is, a perception of its antinomic character, the perception that has a social and historical origin” (ZAMORA, 2009, p. 52), and that, therefore, should be corrected and overcome. Concerning specifically the dissertation, it is important to note that the critical component of his reading of Husserl is not expressed in an evident way, as he remains attached to the theoretical positions of his academic mentor: Hans Cornelius (1863-1947).

Different from what happened with the interpreters of the first phenomenological school, who saw in “going to the things themselves” (*zu den Sachen selbst*) a proposal for a return to brute things or ontic objects, and not a return to the things that are in question, i.e., a return to the representations proper to the idea aimed at (noema), which within the scope of dissertation and intentionally determined by, what Adorno questions in Husserl, is precisely the fact that he did not take this step. By establishing through phenomenological reduction a consciousness as a “sphere of being of absolute origins” (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 103), within the scope of *Ideen I*, as the basis for all knowledge that claims to be clear and rigorous, and while opposing consciousness from the beginning with a transcendent world, which in fact could only be legitimated in its reference to consciousness but whose existence would not be constituted by the connection of consciousness, “in the main Husserl's theoretical-cognitive work, however, reveals a fundamental contradiction [...] the placement of a transcendent world [...] contradicts the assumption of consciousness as a “sphere of being with absolute origins”” (ADORNO, 1973, p. 14, 17).

### ***Addendum: Husserl, the Ideen I, and the New Science***

The task that Husserl proposes since the *Ideen I* is to fix the method, the object, and the groups of themes and problems pertinent to an “essentially new science” (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 3), i.e., to pure phenomenology, while the “first of all philosophies (*ersten aller Philosophien*)” and “the indispensable precondition for any metaphysics and another sort of philosophy” (Husserl, 2014, p. 3). The ultimate problem pertinent to it is epistemological, that of the conditions of the objective validity of knowledge claims, that is,

[...] finally upon the question of what consciousness' “pretension” of actually “referring” to something objective, of being “on target”, in reality says [and] how objective relations of “validity” and “invalidity” may be clarified phenomenologically in terms of noesis and noema. The net effect is that we stand before enormous problems of reason (HUSSERL, 2006, p. 286).

For Adorno, "one must examine, however, whether Husserl carries out his epistemological analyzes within the framework of a phenomenology oriented purely to consciousness as the foundation of the legitimacy of knowledge" (ADORNO, 1973, p. 13). The fundamental contradiction is only realized through the answer to this problem.

As *Ideen I* finds, according to Husserl, a "pure or transcendental phenomenology will be established, not as a science of facts, but instead as a science of essences (as an 'eidetic' science)" (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 5); the method for this path is that of phenomenological reduction (*phänomenologischen Reduktion*). It is known that already in *Méditations métaphysiques*, dated 1641, defending the belief that there could be a deceiving genius that confused him about everything he saw and felt, Descartes introduced doubt as a method to investigate which conditions could make valid, clear, and rigorously distinct, the existence of things. This procedure was only possible through a process of abstraction that the creator of analytic geometry knew very well, added to the underlying logical-mathematical style, which would later make him overcome it and arrive at a fixed point with a function analogous to that of Archimedes. In his words, "Archimedes, to remove the terrestrial globe from its place and transport it to another, asked for nothing but a fixed and secure point. Thus, I will have the right to conceive high hopes, if I have the happiness of finding only one thing that is certain and indubitable" (DESCARTES, 1992, p. 19).

The procedure that will lead the French philosopher to clear and distinct certainty is meticulously traced to "the beginning that nothing outside its sequence of stages could disturb it" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 19). Even if doubt leads me to contest the movement that configures external objects and, thus, the reality that is external to me, I cannot doubt the sphere that propels doubt, namely the cogito. If I think, I exist as a thinking substance, i.e., I cannot question the existence of thought, that will result in a leap to the absurd. There is no room for the bad temper to penetrate because such a realization does not depend on the external world, only on a conscience that is immanent per se. There is no room for doubt regarding the existence of thinking: thought is a movement of doubt in itself. "Hence the fanatical intolerance of the method and its total arbitrariness, against any arbitrariness as deviation. Its subjectivity sets up the law of objectivity. The lordship of spirit believes only itself to be without bounds" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 21).

The *cogito* has the function of showing its existence in dependence only on its thought: *se dubito, cogito; cogito ergo sum*. This new orientation, *regulae ad directionem ingenii*, based on clarity and distinction, became, from the construction of the method as a procedure, the basis on which both common sense and science should be guided. The method is a process of purifying the impurities in the thought-thing relationship. "That is their value, one of the thoughts which have not yet veiled the unholy to which they give witness" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 21). Thought asserts itself as the sui generis causation of self-certainty, whereas with self-certainty (of thought) the objective validity of the existence of the thinking being is intuited (and, in a way, surrounding objectivity). Thus, the primacy and separation of the *res cogitans* from the *res extensa* is established, in other words, the "mathematical habits of thought as the only kind which are binding" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 19).

A confessed heir of Cartesian philosophy, the search for rigorous evidence did not depart from the "absolutist Husserl" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 24). The proposal of a transcendental attitude, as a hyperpolarization of Cartesian doubt of an "absolute doubt joins of itself in the parade through the goal of the method, which is once again to be produced out of method itself" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 20). By applying the reduction, the judgments proper to the natural attitude, that is, that attitude in which we address ourselves to the things that in each case are given to

us, are suspended. With this suspension, Husserl intends to distance himself and overcome Cartesian solipsism, because, according to him, we are aware of a spatiotemporally infinite world that "is continuously 'on hand' for me, and I am myself a member of it. This world is not thereby there for me as a mere world of things (*Sachenwelt*); instead, with the same immediacy, it is there as a world of values, a world of goods, a practical world" (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 49-50); the cogito is left with the correlation between the experience of consciousness (*cogitatio*) and the perceived object (*cogitatum*).

Husserl starts from the natural image of the world. The fact that we are now in front of a hypothetical computer (or even any object), for example, touching it without further reflection on its value, makes us a man of natural life (*Menschen des natürlichen Lebens*) in front of a world that is mine because it is simply there for me at my disposal. Regardless of whether I occupy myself with it,

I am conscious of it, and that means above all that I immediately find it intuitively, I experience [*erfahre*] it. Through seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, in the various manners of sensory perception, corporeal things in some sort of spatial distribution are simply there for me; in the literal or figurative sense of the word they are "on hand," whether or not I am particularly attentive to them and engage with them, observing, thinking, feeling, willing (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 48).

If in Cartesian philosophy, reality external to consciousness is contested from a natural distrust of what the senses can offer that is experientially valid, in Husserl's philosophy, this does not happen. In another place, I even stated (a position that I now confirm) that by radicalizing the Cartesian cogito, Husserl sees in the idea of the intentionality of consciousness a way of avoiding confusion between the thinking thing and the thought bis that is, between the *ego* and the *res cogitans*. The *cogito ergo sum* gives way to the *ego-cogito-cogitatum*.

In this sense, intentionality is the fundamental mark of consciousness (*noesis*), since consciousness is all the time turned outside of itself, that is, towards the object (*noema*). However, the intentionality of consciousness will no longer be analyzed as a concept of psychic intentionality – as Franz Brentano (1838-1917) did in his *Deskriptive Psychologie* (1982) – but from its transcendental aspect. In other words, for Husserl, consciousness is only consciousness, being conscious of something. There can be no consciousness without background representations. What he means by this is that consciousness, contrary to what Descartes thought, is always intentional, because, unreflectively, I find at my disposal an actuality as being there, and I accept it as such, or rather, as "the attitude that consists in spontaneously considering as existing – without any effort and, in this case, without any awareness of performing the smallest act – every object that concerns us, which for us makes sense to live innocently" (SALANSKIS, 2006, p. 43-44). Each perception corresponds, in a clear sense or not, to the character of the being-there on which, by essence, an existential judgment (*ist... da*) can be predicted.

Despite this judgment, the object and the surrounding world in general, as background intuitions (*Hintergrundanschauungen*), are already somehow contained in the original experience, with the character of the available (*vorhanden*), even if they are not thematized, they remain in a thoughtless, not predictive.

In genuinely perceiving something in the sense of becoming aware of it, I am turned to the object, for example, the paper; I apprehend it as this entity here and now. The apprehending is a "taking out from," [since] everything perceived has a background that is part of the experience [*einen Erfahrungshintergrund*]. Around the paper lie books, pens, inkwells, and



so forth; they are also “perceived” in a certain way; they are perceptually there, in the “field of intuition,” but while I am turned to the paper, they dispense with any such turn to them and apprehension of them, even in a secondary way. They appeared and yet were not taken up, posited for themselves. Each perception of a thing thus has a halo of *background intuitions* (or instances of background-seeing, in case one already makes the process of “being turned-toward an object” a part of the intuiting), and that, too, is an “experience of consciousness” or, more succinctly, “consciousness” and, to be sure, “of” everything that lies in fact in the objective “background” that is also seen (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 61).

In this sense, the natural attitude refers to our consideration of things as outside of the interiority that perceives them, composing a world as existing in itself, independent of interiority itself. Being still conditioned to a natural orientation, the subject addresses the objectives envisaged in its natural determinations, free from any reference to the subjective as a datum of the real world, i.e., as an effective datum. This means to say that the targeting subject addresses the target object, capturing it, therefore, with some provisional certainties that place it as effective in an individualized way. For this reason, Husserl considers life in the natural attitude to be a naive life. It is as if life enunciated a certainty about everything at all times. Faced with this naivete, he suggests the possibility, as Salanskis rightly points out, that he can engage us “from the moment it is [suggested]: *suspend* the permanent implicit enunciation of *the this exists* [...] But Husserl believes that everything is passed as if we were enunciating *it exists*; he then asks us to *explicitly erase the implicit it in life*” (SALANSKIS, 2006, p. 44). Here is what Husserl called: reduction (*Reduktion*).

Reduction acquires crucial methodological importance in the scope of phenomenology. There are several modes of reduction (eidetic reduction, intersubjective reduction, transcendental reduction, etc.). Two of them, in my view, are highlighted in *Ideen I*, namely: i) the eidetic reduction, which corresponds to the suspension of belief in the existence of reality to examine the essence of the phenomena captured by consciousness and the ii) transcendental reduction, which corresponds to the suspension of the existence of the psychophysical subject who performs this act, aiming to access the transcendental consciousness that is at the foundation of the various experiences, i.e., the *pure ego*.

Notwithstanding the various modes of reduction, fundamentally the method of phenomenological reduction, in Husserl, is applied to reach a level free of presuppositions. The existence of this world that I see (*here before me*) and everything that is in it (the red pen that is placed on the table, the preaching I now make of it, etc.), are placed in parentheses. Such a procedure, that of putting the experiences of the natural attitude in parentheses (*Einklammerung*), Husserl called phenomenological *ἐποχή*. Now, Adorno will say, “Husserl wonders, what remains after a radical execution of the *epoché*?” (ADORNO, 1973, p. 20): “that of gaining a new region of being, one that has not previously been circumscribed in its distinctiveness and that, like every authentic region, is a region of the individual being” (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 57).

The Husserlian concept of philosophy responded, in its way, to the Aristotelian ideal of a *próte philosophía* (*πρώτη φιλοσοφία*). “Since this cannot be represented as other than methodical”, Husserl intended to outline, in general terms, the “method, the regulated ‘way’” (ADORNO, 1970, p. 19), from which it would be possible to achieve a rigorous, first and universal knowledge. In this knowledge would be sustained, then, the set of concrete knowledge, which would have their common and original point of reference. This first philosophy, of which a program could only be elaborated in the first instance, would have to be able to resolve the most complete theoretical questions and make possible, from a practical point of view, a life governed by rational norms. This methodical knowledge, in the words of Adorno, “the *τέλος* of cognition

which, as methodical, is protected from aberration, autarchic and takes itself to be unconditioned, is pure logical (*die rein logische Identität*)" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 20).

Given this scenario, it is possible to say that Husserlian phenomenology expands the traditional conception of the cogito, adding a new element to it based on the premise that every state of consciousness assumes something (*cogitatum*) and, simultaneously, carries it within itself. Thus, in this broad sense, the act of consciousness, understood as lived, brings within itself the subject-object relationship, expressed by the structure *ego cogito cogitatum* (I think what is thought), unlike the traditional expression *ego cogito* (I think). In Husserl's own words:

That an experience is the consciousness of something, for example, that fiction is a fiction of a specific centaur but also that a perception is perception of its "actual" object, a judgment is judgment of its state of affairs, and so forth—that has no bearing on the experience as a factum in the world, specifically in the factual, psychological connection. Instead it has a bearing on the pure essence, i.e., the essence apprehended in focusing on the idea [Ideation] as a pure idea. The essence of experience itself entails not only that it is consciousness, but also of what it is the consciousness, whether it be determinate or indeterminate. So, too, the essence of the consciousness not currently actualized dictates the kinds of actualized *cogitationes* into which it is to be converted through the modification discussed above, what we designate as "turning the focus of attention to what was previously not attended to" (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 63).

Thus, we understand that what was lived is everything that is found in consciousness in its particular property of being conscious of something, in any of its modes (perceiving, imagining, remembering, etc.), and in any of its moments (current, present or unactual, potential). "One time the experience is so to speak 'explicit' consciousness of something that is, for it, objective; another time it is implicit, merely potential" (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 61). Therefore, in the intentional experience, i.e., when the consciousness is focused on a certain object, apprehending it attentively, we cannot neglect that this experience is surrounded by a halo of unfactual experiences, by a co-intuited background formed by so many other experiences possible.

Regarding the intentional experience, Husserl clarifies that affirming its actuality means that through it the subject is directed towards the intentional object, that which is apprehended by consciousness as having been detached from an infinite of possibilities of objects that are, consequently, always for consciousness and, in a broad sense, always for the pure self. Thus,

If an intentional experience is currently actual, i.e., implemented in the manner of the cogito, the subject in that experience "is directed" at the intentional object. Inherent in the cogito itself and immanent to it is a "focus on" the object, a focus that, on the other hand, springs forth from the "ego" that thus can never be missing. (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 64).

From the impossibility of the ego being absent, it follows that it is the being of all acts of consciousness. In Husserlian terms: *Das Prinzip aller Prinzipien* (*The principle of all principles*). The thesis of the natural attitude underlies the idea that intuition and intuited are not linked in their essence. That is why it is justified in a model of investigation restricted to presuppositions, that is,

Not the physical thing, as is self-evident, this being utterly transcendent-transcendent over against the entire "world of appearance". Yet as much as this world is "merely subjective," it, too, does not belong, in terms of all its individual things and occurrences, to the real [*reel*] constitution of perception; over against the latter, it is "transcendent" (HUSSERL, 2014, p. 71).



This means that a perception such as, for example, the experience of a tree, although it refers to the tree object, it is still an experience of the subject. The objectivity of the tree is not referred to, but how the subject intuits the tree with experience. The question is inevitable: how to guarantee the bilaterality of the experiences, instead of a mere unilaterality? This leads to the corollary that everything that is not me becomes merely a phenomenon (which, consequently, leads to methodical solipsism). As much as the departure from the natural attitude tries to recover the evidence of logical laws, of the *a priori* determination of experience by reason, through a sphere understood as original, a thesis like this must be questioned.

It is precisely on these assumptions that Adorno justifies his critique of Husserl. When analyzing phenomenology from within, i.e., from a dialectical perspective, it is forced to affirm, against its will, its falsity, which is a non-truth transformed into a critical truth: into a concept. Dialectics confronts phenomenology from the point of view of the existence of a real contradiction in its foundations (at the level of the concept) and does not assume it, better to say, as a mere abstract universal. This is how phenomenology becomes one that will mobilize the concepts of dialectics: "phenomenology turned critical-dialectical" (SILVA, 2015, p. 55). The dialectical approach allows the implicit assumptions of phenomenology to be revealed as antinomies while affirming their character as totalizing principles (logical absolutism, in other words). This leads us to fix some points before any consecutive analysis: 1) the radical difference between the phenomenological method and the dialectical method and, consequently, 2) how Adorno will assume both in his negative immanent critique.

In phenomenology, the primacy of the method acquires a completely new meaning, alien to previous philosophies: that of a cognitive process rooted in a social process of domination, tending towards the totalization of meaning. The establishment of the ontological primacy of method goes hand in hand with the constitution of the capitalist form of the command. In other words, according to Adorno, phenomenology provides capitalist domination with its scientific justification, giving it a systematic method and ontological dignity. Husserl's philosophy only translates the property relations fixed by alienation into concepts, because in his rigorous and aseptic approach, he draws extremely rigid boundaries between ideas, which he considers to be real properties, and the objects in question.

The world is constructed by phenomenology following a pattern of appropriation: ideas must be available to the method since they must serve as the undoubted basis of being. *Próte philosophía* determines the truth of its propositions from presuppositions that have always been implicit in it, it is closed to its identity, incapable of opening itself to difference and otherness. The principle that supports phenomenology is that of security at all costs, nothing should disturb the stability and coherence of ideas. In this way, Husserlian phenomenology not only becomes an epistemology that does not "know", but also becomes a conceptual apparatus that covers up and reproduces capitalist relations of domination. The social process is, in a way, redeemed by phenomenology and confirmed as it is, without the possibility of modification.

## 2 Logical absolutism as *Próte Philosophía*

Husserl intends to distance himself from Brentanian psychologism and its derivations through a phenomenological project based on the idea of a *prote philosophia*, or even first science, guided by the search for the so-called sphere of being of absolute origins (*Seins-sphäre des absoluter Ursprünge*), therefore, sphere of ideal objectivities. In the course of this process, of developing a theory of knowledge grounded in objective, safe, and universal knowledge, he, as

an experienced mathematician, converts logic into one of his main instruments. In the Logical Investigations, the denunciation of the contradictions in which psychologism fell when reducing the objectivities of knowledge to purely psychic phenomena is explicit. Husserl says:

How plausible do the ready suggestions of psychologistic reflection sound? Logical laws are laws for validations, proofs, what are validations but peculiar human trains of thought, in which, in normal circumstances, the finally emergent judgements seem endowed with a necessarily consequential character. This character is itself a mental one, a peculiar mode of mindedness and no more. And, obviously, none of these mental phenomena is isolated, but is a single thread in the tangled web of mental phenomena, of mental disposition and organic process, called human life. How could anything beyond empirical generalities result in such circumstances? Where has psychology yielded more? We reply: Psychology certainly does not yield more, and cannot, for this reason, yield the apodictically evident, and so metempirical and absolutely exact laws which form the core of all logic (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 48).

In other words, the theory is forced within Husserlian phenomenology to present itself (and justify itself) as pure logic, that is, Husserl builds a model of thought in which logic assumes absolute primacy. Its truths are independent of the factual or even of a probable psychological reduction. For Miller,

Moreover, the specific concepts of phenomenological reduction, evidence (Evidenz), and eidetic intuition all appear to represent aspects of an epistemological account based on immediately intuited cognitive givens and designed to counter relativist conceptions of truth and knowledge. Indeed, even a cursory glance at the themes, rhetoric, and aims of Husserl's work suggests a consistent, if not uniform, concern with overcoming both intellectual and cultural crisis by delineating the proper domain, method, and goals of the philosophical enterprise. The result of these converging factors has been to promote Husserl as a philosopher for whom the project of foundationalism and the viability and sustainability of epistemology are highly relevant and deeply intertwined problems (MILLER, 2009, p. 101).

*Metakritik's* objective is precisely to analyze the intrinsic difficulties of this absolute primacy of pure logic (within the scope of Husserlian phenomenology), and above all, what it brings within it. What Husserl wanted to demonstrate, I quote Adorno, "was that a safe scientific method, trained under the surveillance of mathematics, could not be satisfied with the psychological method and must seek another justification. For him, the foundation of logic was hypothetical, speculative and, in a way, also metaphysical" (ADORNO, 2010, p. 87).

In this sense, "Husserl presented forcibly and with much authority the antinomies into which logical psychologism falls. But the unmediated opposing position of absolutism involves itself in no less harmful antinomies" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 80). This is because, in seeking to distance itself from relativism, granting logical entities a reality beyond thought, the paradox is indeed evident: consciousness is opposed to logic.

Consciousness would know logic not as something that merely appears to consciousness to be accepted as heteronomous, but rather as true only if logic itself were the knowledge of consciousness [...] Logic is not being, but rather a process (*Prozeß*) which cannot be reduced purely to either a 'subjectivity' or an 'objectivity' pole. The consequence of the self-critique of logic is the dialectic (ADORNO, 1970, p. 80-81).

The excerpt above is quite enlightening. Adorno sees in Husserlian phenomenology a claim to find rigorous knowledge through logical absolutism that, at the same time, can only be

conceived through consciousness. There is in Husserl a consequent tendency towards formalism or even a mere tautology based on the split between logic and history. This is shown, to a large extent, in the hegemony granted to mathematics. Due to its analytical character and the purity of its method, the model of its philosophy, "at all stages is mathematics [...] The analytic character of mathematics protects it from any intrusion by unforeseen experience. Thus unconditioned certainty and security match its a priority" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 61). Mathematical certainty, given its positivity and precisely because it contains such a character in itself, is converted into an ideal model to measure the criteria of security, clarity, and distinction for knowledge. In Husserlian's *Zahlenmetaphysik* (metaphysics of numbers), the alliance between mathematical science and philosophy is already present since the Platonic designation of ideas as numbers are reproduced.

By establishing the primacy and purity of logic and mathematics, eliminating the incommensurable experience through formal inventories that in no way refer to concrete objects, the antinomies are, perhaps, irreducible: i.e., on the one hand, the integrating and systematic principle of the theory of knowledge; ii., on the other hand, "Unconscious objecthood returns as the false consciousness of pure forms. It produces a naive realism of logic" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 62). In other words, says Adorno, "logical absolutism is from the beginning absolute idealism" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 74), or even a "hypertrophied idealism" (ADORNO, 1966, p. 167). In a lapidary paragraph Demmerling precisely places Adorno's critique of Husserl, parallel to the critique of idealism: as a critique of the philosophy of the subject.

Adorno's critique of idealism must be understood as a critique of the philosophy of the subject. The materialist correctness of idealism exceeds the fundamental assumptions of the philosophy of consciousness. Analogously to the materialist critique of idealism, Adorno exercises an 'anthropological' critique of Husserl's phenomenological principle. This is another step towards a materialist transformation of classical philosophy. Materialism is validated [*abgesichert*] in a critical-cognitive way (DEMMLERLING, 1994, p. 143).

Thus, as the absolute primacy of the subject, the phenomenological construct, justified in purely logical-formal categories, aimed to eliminate any trace of difference in favor of identity. Logic is, without a doubt, its most important instrument of abstraction. Because by it "the subject saves itself from falling into the amorphous, the inconstant, and the ambiguous. For it stamps itself on experience, it is the identity of the survivor as form" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 87). Because it is based on an idea of objective truth that succumbs to the moment of reflexive participation of the subject, logical absolutism faithfully represents the subjugation that the scientific ideal submits to reason and that, in the end, leads to its paralysis and atrophy. In considering the laws of logic independent of experience, Husserl conceives them as valid in themselves. The subject recognizes logical truth as an original datum, another distinct from the result of his work, and, finally, "Thoughts must suspend themselves so that the privilege of self-sustaining absoluteness may be maintained for spirit alienated as logical automatism in which thought does not recognize itself" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 65).

In wanting to overcome neo-Kantian idealism as well, Husserl is forced to place the foundation of logic in an ideal scope, i.e., in consciousness, to ensure its immutable and permanent character. Categorical intuition, (as Adorno had already stated in his previous works) represented the Husserlian desire to maintain the independence of logical truths from any factual content and, at the same time, to understand them as graspable by consciousness in an intuitive way, to break with the fetishization of concepts. That is why, *Metakritik*, defines it as "the paradoxical apex of his thought. It is the indifference into which the positivistic motif of

instability and the rationalistic one of being-in-itself of ideal states-of affairs should be sublated.” (ADORNO, 1970, p. 204).

Undoubtedly, in Adorno's opinion, the theory of pure logic ends up reproducing the same totalitarian and absolutist will of the idealist philosophy against which it had been constituted. Hence its failure. For the objectivity and ideality of logical propositions are presupposed as given and evident, when rationality independent of their formation process is attributed to them. In trying to overcome relativism and save the objectivity of truth, Husserl opposes the priority of the *datum* to the fetishism of the concept. But the result of the operation is different from what was intended since the pure determination of logic has as its equivalent the fetishism of both the object and the subject: 1) on the one hand, when it converts the immediate given into a hypostasis and presents it as independent from the existing, Husserl falls back into the naive form of realism from which he intended to emerge; 2), but on the other hand, by wanting the data to be intuitively graspable by consciousness, he ends up repeating the same idealistic categories of immanence.

Therefore, Adorno defines the motor of phenomenological thought as “the will to establish existence rejected by a *ratio* within the horizon of the autonomous *ratio* itself” (ADORNO, 1970, p. 194). Even though Husserl proposes the reduction to objective immanence as a solution to the idealist aporia, he only recognizes things and legitimizes them as they are referred to the subject. He reproduces, therefore, the categories from which he sought to stand out and, finally, admits the idealist concept of *par excellence*: transcendental subjectivity (*eidós ego*). In other words, the idea of conscience is a principle from which it is possible to capture the totality of existing things, reducing and disintegrating what does not fit.

Transcendental subjectivity, however, is the origin and title deed of the very concept fetishes that the unbiased, accepting view of the ‘things themselves’ is supposed to undo. It defines the same idealism against which the historical tendency of the attempt to break out was turned. Hegel's definition of the dialectical movement of thought as a circle proves ironically true in Husserl. Phenomenology revokes itself. (ADORNO, 1970, p. 197).

Ratifying the position already expressed above, Husserl's logical absolutism repeats the totalitarian will to unify the real through a first abstract already present in idealist philosophy. Because the goal he sets and the method he uses are incompatible, his project fails. Here Adorno sees the true idealist component of phenomenology, not in the reduction of reality to the immanence of consciousness, but in its constant claim to identity, i.e., in the reduction to an absolute principle from which he wishes to explain the totality of the real. Therefore, Husserl becomes the most significant representative of the philosophy of identity, the scientific form of the philosophy of origin.

Whenever such an identity is affirmed, viz. a monistic principle of world explanation, which by its sheer form promotes the primacy of a spirit which dictates that principle, then philosophy is idealistic. Even where, as such a principle, being is dealt out against consciousness, the priority of spirit becomes evident in the claim to the totality of the principle, which comprehends everything. What does not arise in spirit is inconclusive (*unabschlussbar*) and escapes the principle itself (ADORNO, 1970, p. 186).

Although it observes a positive moment in the Husserlian concept of the original experience, when it is understood as a stronghold of liberation or a focus of resistance amid the total reification of the real, its hypostasis is dangerous. Adorno intends to demonstrate how every theory of knowledge becomes *próte philosophía* when the hypostasis of an original

principle occurs, from which it is intended to illuminate the real and, against which, everything else is secondary, derived, and, therefore, worthless. At different times throughout his work, he will insist on showing the disastrous role that the concepts of origin, foundation, or principle play, both in theory and in praxis.

In *Philosophische Terminologie: zur Einleitung*, the following passage is punctual: “philosophical truth is oriented towards what I once called ‘the superstition of first things’; what genetically and logically comes first must therefore possess the maximum dignity, the maximum truth” (ADORNO, 1976, p. 113). Claiming the totality is not only seeking identification with the whole but, above all, dissolving any external element that could lead to possible contamination. Therefore, the search for original concepts or principles is equated with the priority of identity thinking. And the philosophical aspiration to reach an immediate beginning is understood as a “mask” that hides a forced oblivion related to domination, as it represents the priority of the first and the unconditioned against the derivative and the secondary, or, as will be pointed out in the *Negative Dialektik*, the validity “autochthon against the newcomer, the settler against the migrant” (ADORNO, 1966, p. 156). The *ens concretissimus* of the theory of knowledge, the immediate given understood as the last firm substrate, is for Adorno nothing but the result of abstractions, impossible to present as something pure and independent of the categorical work. Therefore, “what the tradition took to be first, viz. sensation, Kant’s ‘material’, becomes last for him, a *τέλος* cited by the progress of knowledge, the ultimate ‘fulfillment’ (*Erfüllung*) of intentions” (ADORNO, 1970, p. 153).

### 3 The revised dialectic

More than simply denouncing the methodological insufficiency of phenomenology through its dogmatic recourse to immediacy, Adorno sought to do justice to the legitimacy of the impulse that animates this model of thought. Already in the 1931 conference, *Die Aktualität der Philosophie*, the growing influence of phenomenology under the Weimar Republic was interpreted as the symptom of a crisis of idealism, or rather, of its fundamental principle according to which “the autonomous *ratio* – thesis of every idealist system – it should be able to develop, starting from itself, the concept of reality and all reality” (ADORNO, 1973, p. 326). This definition must be understood in the context of a flourishing neo-Kantianism, describing the constitution of objectivity by a priori forms inscribed in the subject. Its radicalism, however, recalls Fichte’s project to deduce the content from the nature of the *transcendental self*, going beyond the boundary of criticism.

Despite his initial admiration for the vast theoretical project of the first Lukács, outlined in his *Die Theorie des Romans*, then unfolded in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, Adorno gradually freed himself from this tutelage through his criticism of the idealism that supported his philosophy, of which the study of phenomenology constitutes an essential moment. This rupture is already outlined in the two essays on Husserl written in the late 1930s, where the *Ausbruch* motif is stated, by which Adorno designates the rupture of idealism undertaken by phenomenology. Even if the observation is that the Husserlian enterprise results in a failure, as far as this desire to explode idealism remains fulfilled from the point of view of the immanence of consciousness and, therefore, of an idealist conceptuality, the critique of Adorno is in no way a disqualification of this original design. In a letter to Alfred Sohn-Rethel, dated November 17, 1936, written at the same time as these two essays, he evoked his theoretical enterprise in the same terms he used to define the critical task of phenomenology. In his terms: “I now believe



with certainty what I had long assumed from my attempt. We will concretely succeed in exploding idealism, not through the 'abstract' antithesis of practice (as Marx still did), but through the very antinomic nature of idealism" (ADORNO; SOHN-RETHEL, 1991, p. 32).

Far from unilaterally rejecting the Husserlian project, dedicating it to being just an ideological expression of a reified consciousness, Adorno, therefore, insists on the legitimacy of a primary impulse that animates this movement. It was while preparing *Negative Dialektik*, in his course of January 12, 1961, that he came to designate this moment of truth in phenomenology as an antidote to modern subjectivism, completed by German idealism. Following this hypothesis, it would therefore be possible to interpret the resource of *going to the things themselves* from an ontological need, resisting the idealist ambition of reducing all reality to the result of the activity of a transcendental subject. The force of attraction exerted by phenomenology on its contemporaries can only be understood on the condition of rediscovering the desire for otherness that is expressed through it against the solipsistic fantasy of idealism.

When Adorno recalls in this course the hypothesis of his 1931 lecture, according to which the insistence of this necessity in phenomenology would be the symptom of a crisis of idealism in the face of the non-rationality of the contemporary social world – against the Hegelian identification of effectiveness with the concept – he wants to both take it up and deepen it. Such a need would find its origin in a primitive repression of the otherness of the object, which would have followed the crisis of subjectivity triggered by the Copernican revolution. Against the risk of weakening the subject, implied by the heliocentrism that decentralizes the point of view of the observer, philosophy has seized this motive precisely to reaffirm the primacy of the transcendental subject around which the objective world gravitates.

The challenge of this critical return to the history of philosophy, which goes beyond the simple socio-historical analysis of the contemporary crisis of idealism, must be understood as an implicit response to Lukács. In the chapter of his essay on reification, entitled *Die Antinomien des bürgerlichen Denkens*, he retraces the heroic story of a Copernican revolution, inaugurating a new positive task for philosophy: no longer holding on to the idea that the world would be "something that has arisen something (or e.g., has been created by God) independently of the knowing subject, and prefers to conceive of it instead as its product" (LUKÁCS, 1923, p. 118). Instead of denouncing the arrogance of the transcendental subject of the German idealists, Lukács promises the realization of this still abstract idea in the conscious praxis of the proletariat, posited as the principle of historical becoming. Against this interpretation that only transposes the Fichtian concept of pure activity (*Tathandlung*) into the concrete act of production, Adorno puts into play a phenomenological moment that restores the non-identity between the subject and the world.

Instead, it expresses the fact that the conceptualized world, however much also through the fault of the subject, is not its own but hostile to it. This is almost imperceptibly attested to by the apperception [*Wesensschau*] of the Husserlian doctrine. It amounts to the complete alienation of essence from the consciousness which grasps it. It recalls, albeit in the fetishized form of an utterly absolute ideal sphere, that even the concepts to which their essentialities are unthinkingly equated are not only the products of syntheses and abstractions: they represent equally, too, a moment in the many, which calls up the concepts, which according to idealistic doctrine are merely posited (ADORNO, 1966, p. 167).

The pure separation of subject and object is only a moment of the normative presupposition of their fundamental unity. This point will become clearer if we remember the horizon against which reification is criticized: the idealist project of reducing objectivity to the productive activity of the subject, to be conducted by the practice of the proletariat. We understand, therefore, that



criticism cannot be limited to the denunciation of reification. Centering theory on her, who is a figure of consciousness, makes critical theory acceptable to an idealist point of view, to the dominant consciousness and the collective unconscious. Faced with the critique of phenomenological immediacy, unfolded from the point of view of the totalizing dialectic of reification, a legitimate ontological need arises, which translates into a critique of Lukács. The alternation of the two points of view then forms what we could call the antinomy of mediation and immediacy in *Negative Dialektik*. "The purpose of a metacritique, then, is to bring this normative commitment to light, in part because one can then demonstrate its entanglement in a host of social conditions that would remain otherwise obscured (hence linking the practice of metacritique to the Marxian practice of ideology critique)" (GORDON, 2016, p. 62).

Against the hypostasis given by phenomenology, it is a matter of restoring the mediations that constitute all experiences. Against the idealist assumption of reducing all objectivity to the subject's constituent activity, it is a matter of evoking the rights of a moment of immediacy. In a chapter of the introduction entitled *Dialektik und das Feste*, Adorno is very clear on this point:

Not every experience which appears to be primary is to be denied point-blank. If the experience of consciousness wholly lacked what Kierkegaard defended as naivete, then thinking would do that which is expected of it by what is established, would go astray in itself, and would become quite naïve. Even termini such as Ur-experience, compromised through phenomenology and neo-ontology, designate something true, while they haughtily damage it. If they did not spontaneously create resistance against the façade, heedless of their dependencies, then thought and activity would only be dim copies. What in the object goes beyond the determinations laid upon it by thinking, returns firstly to the subject as something immediate; where the subject feels itself to be quite certain of itself, in the primary experience, it is once again least of all a subject. That which is most subjective of all, the immediately given, eludes its grasp (ADORNO, 1966, p. 47-48).

Adorno, therefore, does not criticize phenomenology for resorting to the notion of immediacy, but for its fixation on an unshakable principle, its hypostasis. Properly understood as a moment and not as a foundation, the experience of immediacy can therefore serve as an antidote to a totalizing dialectic. Where phenomenology has succumbed to the substantialization of the immediate, it remains, therefore, to show that the ontological need that nourishes it can be realized in a reformulation of dialectics. The project of an authentic materialist dialectic is motivated by the irreducibility of the object of experience to the simple product of the concept. Now, it is precisely the repression of this primacy of the object inaugurated by philosophical modernity, carried out by subjective idealism, which nourishes the ontological need expressed in phenomenology. Far from denying it all its rights, Adorno seeks, on the contrary, to give it space within the very heart of the dialectic, to free it from its idealistic attachments. By denouncing the phenomenological primacy of the given, he manages with the same gesture to overturn the brute materialism of the Third International. And, unlike Lukács's Marxism, a simple return to German idealism does not seem to him to be a salvation against dogmatism. On the contrary, his ambivalent reading of phenomenology takes seriously the new task of exiting idealism, from which the new dialectic – the method of Marxism – carries the stigmas.

## Concluding remarks

The resource of going to the very things that phenomenology intends to oppose to the fetishism of concepts constitutes the product of conceptual work. It is a mixture of history and

nature: The 'absolutely other', which should arise within the phenomenological *ἐποχή*, is, under the heel of the *ἐποχή*, nothing other than the reified performance of the subject radically alienated from its origin (ADORNO, 1970, p. 167). In this way, the supposed objectivism of logic turns out to be mere subjectivism. The idealist element that contradicts the original program of phenomenology resides, according to Adorno, in forgetting the irreducible relationship between subject and object. By remaining in the separation between the empirical subject and the necessary object,

Husserl sees only the rigid alternative between the empirical, contingent subject – and the necessary ideal law purified of all facticity. This is not to say, however, that truth arises in neither of those. Rather it is a constellation of moments which cannot be reckoned a 'residuum' of either the subjective or of the objective side (ADORNO, 1970, p. 79).

The forgetting of the moment of mediation in knowledge, which causes its conversion into a *próte philosophía*, ends up reproducing the same fetishization that it wanted to overcome. Here, a thesis that will be central to the materialist construction of adornian philosophy is repeated: the understanding of objectification as a form of forgetting. Husserl eliminates the component of subjective mediation in logic, but also the objective moment, the indissoluble question of thought. And, therefore, his philosophy has just become a thought absolutized by its claim to be absolute objectivity. Here, for Adorno, lies the dialectical moment that is in the anti-dialectical will of Husserlian philosophy and by which phenomenology ends up revoking itself: "the self-critical movement of critical philosophy imposes its relapse into a pre-critical movement: the assumption of a transcendence dogmatic as much as that of thought in the face of experience" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 171).

The theory of knowledge becomes, even if unintentionally, a theory-driven by a dialectical urge since its attempt to base logical absolutism on idealism coincides with it in its instruments. The dogmatic transcendence of consciousness about the experience that the idealist system had advocated is now opposed to an immanent as well as a dogmatic transcendence. Therefore, although the phenomenological program aimed to eliminate the tyranny of reified psychology and to show as an alternative the need to go to the things themselves, Adorno sees in her a "subject in disguise", a sign of the objectification she wanted to avoid.

Ironically, Husserl fulfills the Hegelian figure of the circular and dialectical movement of thought, realized as the paradoxical attempt at a theory free from theory. For, when reflecting on the foundations of knowledge, at the same time, he would like to go beyond the subjective moment of criticism and surrender to the original *datum*, thus repeating positivist dogmatic realism. And, in doing so, he inevitably fits into the idealist concept of pure thought: "the path to freedom from anthropomorphism, which first philosophy enters under the standard of demythologization, leads to the apotheosis of *ἄυθροπος* as a second mythology [...] Dread of psychology leads philosophy in quest of the residuum to sacrifice everything for which it exists" (ADORNO, 1970, p. 24).

Given this, *Metakritik* insists on dismantling the fallacy of the theory of knowledge as a *próte philosophía*. Therefore, the alternative to Husserl's phenomenological reduction, the correction of his idealism, will be a materialist interpretation of dialectics capable of becoming aware of the necessarily mediated character of real and philosophical experience, according to Zamora,

What, according to Adorno, makes Husserl a privileged object of the immanent critique of idealism is that in him the crisis of idealism is manifested, i.e., a perception of its antinomic

character, a perception that has a social and historical origin. But in his intention to leave this framework of idealism, Husserl remains linked to idealist assumptions, so that the antinomies of idealism are intensified and the impossibility of idealism to overcome itself becomes manifest (ZAMORA, 2009, p. 49-50; 52).

The settling of accounts with Husserlian idealism becomes, therefore, *prima facie* an important reading key for understanding Adorno's philosophy. Even more so when it comes to the negative form that his dialectic will take. Defending the possibility and, therefore, the actuality of philosophy requires, not only the abandonment of a model of thought understood as a justifier of what is, *per se*, effective but the re-semanticization of the question about the appropriate forms for the new orientation of doing. philosophical. What follows from this agreement, or rather what is hidden between the lines, is his desire to understand the crisis of idealism not only as a crisis of *ratio* but mainly the consequences of this crisis for theory and praxis.

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