



ADORNO CONTRA TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM: A CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL'S NOTION OF OBJECTIVITY

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The work intends to reconstruct Theodor Adorno's critique of Edmund Husserl's transcendental idealism. The intended goal of Husserl's phenomenology was to continue the Cartesian project of attaining certitude, and in the process, dismantle the alleged arbitrary division between subject and object. Despite sharing the latter's goal of effecting a radical turn against traditional epistemology, Adorno, however, criticizes Husserl's idealist position. The latter's position asserts that objectivity is laden not only within the object, but is also reliant within the internal structures of consciousness, and its relation with the object. By virtue of the a priori, and transcendent nature of the Husserlian eidos, Adorno asserts that this idealism merely posits an abstract "philosophical First" that reveals nothing concrete about the object itself. Consequently, instead of taking a revolutionary approach, as Husserl would have it, it instead becomes an affirmation of the totalitarian nature of the classical notion of subjectivity. The paper will demonstrate how the abstract and dominating nature of Husserl's philosophy fashions objectivity as its necessary instrument. Objectivity for Husserl only occurs once the transcendental subject exhausts the horizons of meaning of an object thereby implying the necessity of the subject's participation in the creation of meaning for an object. Following this, I will demonstrate Adorno's critique of objectivity in the backdrop of his confrontation of the crisis of philosophy, vis-à-vis his own proposed materialist dialectic method.

Keywords: Epistemology, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Transcendental Phenomenology

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I. INTRODUCTION

The work aims to navigate the intricacies of Theodor Adorno's engagements with Edmund Husserl's epistemology. The title is worded as such in order to avoid the wholesale equation of Adorno's critiques of transcendental idealism to Husserl's philosophy alone; other notable versions of transcendental idealism that Adorno engaged in his works are those of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.¹ Adorno's antagonism to idealism is rooted from his notion that the tradition supports the ascendancy of the subject over the object and thus bears the roots of domination.² The work does not, therefore, endeavor to provide a wholesale rejection of Husserl's philosophy, but rather, it endeavors to gauge his epistemic claims to objectivity based on its own metric using the process of immanent critique and, in particular, reevaluate the notion based on its own standards.

In the first discussion, I will elaborate the framework of Husserl's method, through the intellectual tradition by which his method and its content finds its roots; specifically, Husserl will be discussed on the backdrop of his Cartesian and Kantian influences. This will be followed by a discussion of the movement from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude, through the moments of phenomenological reduction. This will lay down the sufficient groundwork for the discussion of objectivity; a concept that finds itself in the center Adorno's critiques.³ According to Husserl, the epistemic means of phenomenology differs from traditional philosophy in so far as

phenomenology relies on intuition instead of abstraction, and thus, is primarily pre-theoretical by nature. From the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude, the subject sheds its learned prejudices and recovers its vision of the things-themselves; eidetic intuition allows the subject to immediately see the object's essence. This immediate vision allows the subject access to objectivity in so far as it opens the horizons for the subject to interpret the object in the way that the subject means to, or following the language of Husserl, seeing the object as meant.⁴ This is objective in so far as the transcendental subject's description is always oriented towards determining the object itself because, being transcendental, it concerns itself with the object in its essentiality. The participation of the subject in the establishment of objectivity is essential because absent the subject, the object will only be objective in so far as it conforms with the given laws and interpretations in the natural world. Absolute objectivity only occurs when the horizon for meaning has been exhausted and the object becomes the object as meant by the subject.

To follow is a section that expounds on Adorno's position against Husserl's transcendental idealism, in the context of his redemption of materialism. The discussion will begin with Adorno's disposition against idealism, and afterwards, by his critique of epistemology. His position is similar to Husserl insofar as Adorno also endeavored to dismantle the oppositional, identitarian categories enclosing subject-object relations but does so through the process of immanent critique. To further contrast this with Husserl, Adorno's approach does not put forth any transcendental suppositions, but rather assesses Husserl's position with the goal that it

¹ See Theodor Adorno, *The Negative Dialectics* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2014], esp. "Three Studies on Hegel", Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trans. Willis Domingo [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013], and Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001].

² Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 24.

³ Critiques here pertain to the multiple works Adorno's engagements with phenomenology published as monographs and essays.

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977], 37.





sets for itself, namely, to assess the quality of the “philosophical First” which Husserl claims to arrive at through the process of phenomenology. To conclude this section, I will elaborate on the significance of this epistemic critique to Adorno’s “redemption of materialism” through demonstrating his materialist revision of subject-object relations.

As a form of conclusion, the work will present a summary of the divergences between Husserl’s and Adorno’s revision of subject object relations and concretize the two critical imports of this work. First, to shed further light on Adorno’s Husserl studies through piecing together his consistent fragments on the thinker, and second, to reevaluate these criticisms on the grounds of the clarity and interpretations brought about by re-engaging Husserl’s primary works on phenomenology.

This work does not claim that objectivity is the only point of contention that Adorno had with Husserl’s philosophy. It is merely one of the multiple levels of engagement that Adorno undertook during the early years of his intellectual career, alongside his critique of the pre-given, and self-originary nature of Husserl’s categorical intuition.⁵

II. IMMEDIACY AND OBJECTIVITY AS ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF HUSSERL’S TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

The concern which I wish to address in this initial section is that of the role of objectivity in Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. In the foregoing, I will discuss objectivity in the foreground of the phenomenological method to which it finds its significance, and demonstrate

that the concept is integral in so far as it becomes the *telos* to which the logic of Husserl’s method drives at.

Edmund Husserl’s primary intent was to transform philosophy into a rigorous science through ascertaining a method towards certitude. Cartesian in spirit, his method seeks to establish a new science whose chief concern was the description a realm of essences, or dimension that discloses things-themselves.⁶ Unlike the objective sciences of the world, the science of subjectivity focuses on the transcendental subject as the theme of its inquiry, and concerns itself with the objective subjectivity of man and the world.⁷ Husserl himself would later on consider his phenomenology as a “radical development of Cartesian motifs” that establishes philosophy as a “science grounded on an absolute foundation.”⁸ He also situates his position as a continuation of the idealist tradition similar to Immanuel Kant’s in so far as he posits certain transcendental presupposition that knowing is contingent on “necessary and universal structures underlying experience.”⁹ He considers the project as phenomenology, and argued that these essences were accessible through experience because their actualization was contingent only through the subject’s experience of them.

The fundamental presuppositions that characterize Husserl’s phenomenology are first, the *a priori* latency of particular essences (or ideas) within objects and, second, that these are accessible within the realm of transcendental subjectivity. According to Husserl, the realm of transcendental subjectivity is a realm of experience absolutely independent from

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, vol. 1, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), xxxiv.

⁷ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 30.

⁸ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 1.

⁹ John Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy* [Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007], 100.

⁵ Adorno, “Husserl and the Problem of Idealism,” 12.



empirical reality and from which we can ascertain the essences objects.¹⁰ Unlike the early moderns up to Kant, as postulated by Drummord, Husserl's ideas didn't refer to mental objects or states; for him, essence or idea refers to "an ontological category that refers to the necessary and universal."¹¹ In other words, it refers to the *a priori* structures that determine what the thing fundamentally is. The undertaking which philosophy put upon itself is "[exhibiting] the task of knowing [such essences] within the framework of phenomenological reduction"¹² through establishing an Archimedean point of certitude in the transcendental ego.¹³ The transcendental ego becomes the Archimedean point insofar as it becomes a standpoint that does not bear the weight of facts and values in the objective world and therefore is not subject to its biases, allowing it to have eidetic intuition. To put simply, the realm of essences becomes immediately apparent to a mind that has gained the capacity to see objects in their essentiality. To gain this eidetic intuition however, Husserl necessitates a movement from what he calls the natural attitude to the transcendental ego's phenomenological standpoint through transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Here he first necessitates the abstentive moment of the phenomenological reduction; the *epoche*. Drummord explains *epoche* as reverting the transcendental ego's attention towards the "constituting acts of consciousness with their objects simply as given."¹⁴ This moment necessitates us to bracket (or parenthesize) all our experiences and biases gleaned from the natural standpoint and reject its "primordial embeddedness", or our habitually normalized

understanding of the natural world.¹⁵ This is the only way to transcend what appears as immanently real; through the process of bracketing, we accept that the empirical world exists, yet, in the pursuit of eidetic reality, its existence ceases to matter to us.¹⁶ Soffer, against various claims contesting Husserl's Cartesian departure point,¹⁷ builds on Husserl's claim and articulated that unlike Descartes' universal doubt and its intent to "reject or reconstruct positivistic science," Husserl's phenomenological *epoche* merely instead suspends or abstains its judgment of an object to allow the ego to become a "ground of meaning."¹⁸ Whereas Descartes doubt was geared toward questioning the whether external objects existed, Husserl's *epoche* was instead concerned with the content of external objects.¹⁹ *Epoche* as a form of abstention, for Soffer, becomes then an exercise of freedom from the primordial givenness of existent objects normalized by the natural attitude.²⁰ Husserl emphasizes the necessity of such an operation to gain this freedom by highlighting the converse: without it, we cannot be able to access to pure consciousness, and the phenomenological region along with it. Absent the *epoche*, our eyes merely concentrate on the natural world, and the positive sciences along with it, as the centers of experience.²¹ After the bracketing, the transcendental consciousness is able to access what Husserl calls immanent transcendency, where the "reduced world *shows* itself" and where the consciousness recognizes that it exists alongside the external world with non-Egos.²² This implies that he does not outright reject

¹⁰ Husserl, *Ideas*, xxxiv.

¹¹ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl's Philosophy*, 68.

¹² Edmund Husserl, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology: From the Lectures, Winter Semester 1910-1911*, trans. Ingo Farin and James Hart [Dordrecht: Springer, 2006], 6.

¹³ Soffer, "Husserl's Neo-Cartesianism," 142; Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 69.

¹⁴ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 68.

¹⁵ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 147.

¹⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 13.

¹⁷ For a brief overview of existing debates on Husserl's Neo-Cartesianism, see Soffer, "Husserl's Neo-Cartesianism."

¹⁸ Soffer, "Husserl's Neo-Cartesianism", 142-3.

¹⁹ This is primarily evident in his work; in the *Ideas*, he devotes lengthy discussions to the question of the constitutions of pure consciousness, and the relationship between the *noema* and *noesis* in the realm of transcendental subjectivity. [See Husserl, *Ideas*, vol. 1, esp. chaps. 2-3.]

²⁰ Soffer, "Husserl's Neo-Cartesianism," 148.

²¹ Husserl, *Ideas*, § 33.

²² Husserl, *Ideas*, 106. Emphasis mine.



immanence, but instead posits the necessity of encountering immanence in the pursuit of transcendence. Herein transcendence can be understood in the classical sense; transcendence is taken to mean “going beyond one’s self,” and for Husserl specifically, this going beyond one’s self bears epistemic significance, insofar as the essences of things can only be grasped by looking beyond how it projects itself in the realm of the natural standpoint and looking within its immanence.²³

After bracketing, what remain are pure consciousness and the objects of the natural world.²⁴ Since *epoche* does not reject the existence of the world but retains it, the process merely opens up the field of transcendental experience, which Husserl characterizes as “an infinite realm of being of a new kind.”²⁵ To further understand the peculiar nature of consciousness and objects in the phenomenological standpoint, it is first necessary to make a couple of terminological clarifications. Husserl distinguishes consciousness belonging to the natural standpoint and pure consciousness. For him, consciousness in the natural standpoint concerns itself with the existence-positing of objects, while the pure consciousness overlooks such an existential concern and instead focuses on “uncovering itself in its full concreteness” through exhausting itself in horizons of meanings which it uncovers in transcendental experience.²⁶ Objects, on the other hand, understood in a general sense, are things that stand against the subject with which the subject directs its acts.²⁷ In a transcendental phenomenological sense, it represents a pole of identity that has yet to be actualized.²⁸ These can be understood as real objects and ideal

objects: the former, the primary concern of the consciousness in the natural standpoint, while the latter, belongs to the domain of the transcendental subjectivity and thus becomes the object of transcendental inquiry and description. Ideal objects, then, are irreal and transcendent, meaning that they exist beyond the realm of the natural world. These relate to one another because of the intentional character intrinsic in consciousness: consciousness is never just consciousness—as Descartes’ floating cogito would have—but it always exists along with its correlate, its object. Such awareness comes to the subject only when he has undergone reflection. In a fundamental sense, reflection is a moment within phenomenological reduction that denotes the shift of the consciousness’ focus to itself and its acts, in turn, also focusing on the objects which these acts constitute.²⁹ It shifts our focus from understanding the subject and object as isolated poles, to understanding it as correlates of one another.

The shift in the structure of knowledge necessitated Husserl to introduce a nomenclature to denote such relationships. He introduced the concepts of *noesis* and *noema* in order to highlight the transcendental consciousness’ novel approach to knowledge. *Noesis* is a technical term that denotes the intentional apprehension of the object of experience more specifically referring the subjective aspect of the subject-object correlation.³⁰ Husserl notes that every intentional experience is in itself noetic, insofar as it carries within it various meanings.³¹ *Noema*, on the other hand, denotes the objective pole of the correlation and refers to the object as intended, or the object as meant.³² The *noema* denotes the object as the recipient of the subject’s intentional acts, and as bearing the subject’s

²³ Damian Bryers, *Intentionality and Transcendence: Closure and Openness in Husserl’s Phenomenology* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002], 6.

²⁴ Husserl, *Ideas*, § 33.

²⁵ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 36, 27.

²⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 31, 34, 38.

²⁷ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 148.

²⁸ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 45-46.

²⁹ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 179.

³⁰ Drummord, *A Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 146.

³¹ Husserl, *Ideas*, §88.

³² Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 146.





given significance. Intentional analysis, as a means of fashioning this significance, endeavors to bare possibilities implicit within actualities of consciousness.³³

The noematic structure of knowledge concretizes the object relies on the subject in order for it to be clarified. On the onset, the object is not a finished datum, in so far as it is just a mere field of possibilities of meaning, and is thus open to interpretation.³⁴ For such meanings to be actualized, the subject needs to undertake the task exploring the horizons made manifest by its experience of the object. Every experience bears within it an inner and outer horizon, which contribute to our making sense of the object both noetically and noematically. Horizons are given in experience, but not thematized. With reference to the task of fashioning intentional content towards the object, inner horizons refer to objects in the mind identical with objects in the external world to which we direct our intentionality and which contribute to the way we make sense of the object as a whole.³⁵ Outer horizons, on the other hand, are where these objectivities find their place.³⁶

Understanding the subject's participation in the realization of the object already hints at how Husserl understands objectivity, and consequently, knowing itself. Knowledge is no longer the correspondence of ideas within the mind with reality, as what most moderns would advocate, before and after Husserl. Husserl's paradigmatic contribution to the theory of knowledge was that objectivity, instead of the understanding of the pure object independently of the subject, arose from and for subjectivity.³⁷ Objectivity is the subject's intention-fulfillment

within the horizons accessed through transcendental experience. This knowing is considered as objectivity and not subjectivity, as Damien claims, because despite the fact that the object is "found *within* the knowing," the object, and the possibility of knowing the object, also exceeds the knowing.³⁸ In Husserl's epistemology, objectivity can therefore be distinguished from object-being, or the object itself. Objectivity has the quality of transcendence and pertains to the subject's making sense of the object. Sense, in this instance, refers to "the presentation of matter in a determinate manner in experience."³⁹ As a concept, objectivity finds itself in the nexus of Husserl's transcendental idealism, because it precisely represents the culmination of that form of idealism. This is in so far as his theory of intentionality demonstrates that transcendental subjectivity is the necessary condition by which we can experience this objectivity.

III. ADORNO ON THE NECESSITY OF A RADICAL REEVALUATION OF IDEALISM AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Theodor Adorno's critiques of transcendental idealism can only be sufficiently understood if we look at the broader picture as to where these critiques find their place in his body of work.⁴⁰ The significance of his metacritique of epistemology, in particular, can be realized only if one has a working knowledge of his lifelong attempt of redeeming materialism.⁴¹ Jarvis notes that Adorno's critiques are, all-together, part of a

³³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 46.

³⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 45.

³⁵ Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 97.

³⁶ Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 97.

³⁷ Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 119.

³⁸ Damian, *Intentionality and Transcendence: Closure and Openness in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 6.

³⁹ Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 189.

⁴⁰ By sufficient, I would qualify this as a functional understanding of Adorno's work in relation to his overall project. The inexhaustible nature of his literature cannot be surmised through an understanding of a mere part, nor can such a part account for the whole of his intellectual endeavor.

⁴¹ Jarvis notes that through out Adorno's intellectual career, his criticisms of philosophical tradition were aimed at "formulating a philosophical materialism." [Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 148.]





larger project that sought to redeem materialism from its unconscious dogmatism. Previous attempts at materialist thought have fallen into the same trap that idealism; instead of actively understanding the 'givens', materialism passively takes these as they are and fails to question the possibility of materialist thought.⁴²

Philosophy has thematized the triumph of subjectivity, and is currently facing what Adorno and Horkheimer consider a "crisis." In employing the adjectival form of theme, I recognize and consciously employ a Husserlian connotation. By theme, I mean it has become the focus of philosophical endeavors.⁴³ In his inaugural lecture to the University of Frankfurt, Adorno opined that... "[the] Fullness of the real, as a totality, does not let itself be subsumed under the idea of being which might allocate meaning to it". He opines that in order to do philosophy, we must first rid ourselves of the grandeur idea that thought can encompass reality in its fullness, and calls for a reevaluation of how we practice philosophy.⁴⁴ To escape from this illusion of totality, he necessitates first, the reevaluation of philosophy and the emancipation from idealism, followed by the development of ideas from reality itself. One of the areas, which he wants to begin with in this project, is the idealist epistemology unquestioningly accepted as part of tradition.

Husserl became the occasion of Adorno's critique of epistemology because of the strong resurgence of tradition within his phenomenology. Despite presenting a seemingly radical approach to the theory of knowing through introducing the noetic-noematic structures of knowledge, Adorno was sought to identify and enumerate why the project precisely embodies the classical

idealism that it sought to emancipate itself from. Among the things Adorno takes note of is the peculiar and problematic nature of Husserl's 'anti-idealist idealism'. In one of his essays he notes: "[Husserl] rebels against idealist thinking while attempting to break through the walls of idealism with purely idealist instruments, namely, by an exclusive analysis of the structure of thought and consciousness."⁴⁵ Husserl was flagrantly convinced that his *prima philosophia* was certain and grounded, hence Adorno's claim of his denouncement of idealism. However, this philosophical first is grounded on idealist presuppositions in instances where Husserl claims the existence of pure and simple essences. Through making his phenomenology scientific, Adorno affirmed that Husserl was able to remove traces of speculation from idealism itself. By virtue of it operating on autonomous reason, however, it does not burst that idealism open but rather embodies it.⁴⁶ For Adorno, the object, in its barest form, is non-identical in character. By non-identical, we mean that the object does not conform to the rigid laws of the logic of contradiction in so far as it contains antagonistic qualities within itself. The object presents itself dialectically, and should thus be understood by the subject as such: through the dialectical process, the contradictions become explicit, and not non-existent.⁴⁷ Husserl does the opposite, and relies on immediacy and reduction, as he makes explicit through out his lengthy corpus on phenomenology. To recall, Husserl necessitates the moments of reduction to first, suspend the biases from the natural world, and second, to reorient the consciousness to its acts and consequently, the objects of these acts.⁴⁸ These processes, according to Adorno, are problematic because they are blatant refusals to engage complexity.⁴⁹

⁴² *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁴³ Drummord *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 201.

⁴⁴ Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos* 1997, no. 3 (1997): 120-121.

⁴⁵ Theodor Adorno, "Husserl and the Problem of Idealism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 37, no. 1 (1940): 17.

⁴⁶ Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," 122.

⁴⁷ Theodor Adorno. "A Metacritique of Epistemology." *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978-1979): 78.

⁴⁸ Drummord, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl*, 68, 179.

⁴⁹ Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 20, 22.



Despite recognizing the limitations of the subject in terms of knowing the object in Husserl's phenomenology, Adorno's position alleging its totalitarian nature is unyielding. Adding to the peculiar nature of Husserl's phenomenology is its transcendental idealist nature, which attempts to "ground objectivity in fundamental structures of subjectivity", while, at the same time abandons all empirical content from the world; a turn which was most evident in the corpus of the *Logical Investigations* and the preface of his *Ideas*.⁵⁰ In effect, he reduces all concepts, or ideas to engage Husserl's language, of objects to the subject.⁵¹ This is most evident in his notion of objectivity. As intention-fulfillment of the subject, the metric by which objectivity measures itself is that of the subject's own creation. Furthermore, because the transcendental subject and its object are mere residuum of *epoche*, they are left to grapple for "truth" in "leftover and dregs," aggravating the already questionable notion.⁵² Without the empirical world to serve as material for to mediate the concept's interaction with the world, the subject is left free to construct the object based on his own understanding. Objectivity, therefore, says nothing about the object itself, but instead expresses the how the same subject understands the object within his stream of experiences.⁵³ More alarming for Adorno aside from the affirmation of this false objectivity is the constant acceptance of it. One of the essential characteristics of Husserl's essences is that they are eternal and unchanging, meaning the essences of things are fixed. For the reason that they do not disclose anything about the real object, those essences merely serve to reify objects; masquerading as the objects themselves. This becomes problematic, for Adorno, particularly because it reaffirms

the idealism he seeks to dismantle; that ideas are more real than objects themselves. This, he opined, was the perpetuation of the dominating tendency of thought.

Against this, Adorno describes what he considers as the proper ideal relationship between the subject and the object. After confronting the idealist tendencies laden in thought, he argues that redemption from this wrong state of things can be attained through returning to the proper subject-object relations, that is, for the subject to realize that it stands on equal footing with the object. He contends that the division between the subject and the object is both true and false: its truth lies in the fact that the subject exists in a separate cognitive realm from the object while its falsity lies in the fact that the objective realm continuously partakes in the formation of the human consciousness.⁵⁴ Human knowledge becomes objective because our understanding of the world relies on our experiences. To put simply, the subject and object share a mediating relationship because both rely on each other for mutual affirmation.⁵⁵ He counters the notion of constitutive subjectivity through a demonstration of the object's leverage in the subject-object relations. Adorno views that the subject is, in truth, more reliant to the object in as much as its status as the subject could only be affirmed if it is able to refer, or in Husserl's language if its consciousness is able to intend something.

As for the object, it could still exist in the absence of the subject. Its meaning is inherent, and its interaction with the subject only serves to make that meaning apparent. Furthermore, the subject relies on the object to understand his socio-historical condition. Adorno's position, however,

⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," *Telos*, no. 60 (1984), 112.

⁵¹ Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 22.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 23.

⁵⁴ Cf. Adorno, "Subject and Object," *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 498-499.

⁵⁵ O'Connor clarifies mediation as the "interdetermining structure of experience". In contrast to identity, mediations "are understood as operating interdependently in the production of knowledge." [O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic*, 13.]



is not purely objective. He criticizes this position as well, claiming that the purely objective view of reality depersonalizes knowledge and proceeds by arguing that this reductionism results into unreflective practical sciences.⁵⁶ Despite his criticism of the radical poles of subjectivity and objectivity, Adorno still find value in confronting these positions. For him, the problem lies in the ideologization of either standpoint.⁵⁷ His critique is targeted towards society's fetishism and perpetuation of the myth of subjectivity. This veneration reifies the subject and fetishizes the Spirit, perpetuating the unequal power relations in the subject-object relationship.⁵⁸

Evidently, despite sharing the position that subjects and objects are not completely opposite poles, independent of each other, Adorno contrasts himself from Husserl on some fundamental points. First is his materialism; unlike Husserl, Adorno understands and builds concepts or ideas of objects based on their socio-historical condition. The dialectic mediation, unlike reduction, is a form of engagement to empirical reality, implying that instead of separating himself from the world in favor of a transcendental realm, Adorno suggests a continuous engagement of material reality. Corollary to this, his notion of concepts are not fixed, eternal, or unchanging. For Adorno, concepts can and must be continuously subjected to reevaluation otherwise they would become reified and empty, prompting the crisis of philosophy and its hubris once more.

Conclusively, in the backdrop of Adorno's materialism, we can see that Husserl's scientific formulation merely serves as an instrument to perpetuate a problematic philosophical tradition. With its crux in objectivity, his theory

of knowledge merely affirms the subject's dominance over the object, while, at the same time, failing to disclose any truth about the object itself.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite Husserl's scientific approach to philosophy, Adorno, under the frame of materialism, found it problematic. As the latter sought to emancipate philosophy from its own idealistic entanglement, his materialist method necessitated him to do away with Husserl's system. This was done not through positing his own antinomies, but through Adorno's engagement with Husserl on his own terms. Adorno reevaluated the certitude that Husserl allegedly arrived at through transcendental phenomenology. Both approach transcendence through immanence, with their own methodological caveats. Husserl's philosophy puts primacy on possibilities, and treats objectivity as the exhaustion of these possibilities. Such an approach gives free reign for the subject to use the world as an instrument of its own self-determination, which thinkers, like Horkheimer and Adorno, find problematic because this is where totalitarianism finds its roots.

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", *Telos* 31 (Spring 1977), 121.

⁵⁷ Adorno, "A Metacritique of Epistemology", 96.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*



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