

## **Phenomenology and the Social Sciences: a story with no beginning**

**Carlos Belvedere\***

### **SUMMARY**

The relation between phenomenology and social sciences has gone through various stages. In phenomenological philosophy, its outstanding landmarks can be found in: a) the counterpoint that Husserl posited for the different sciences and his mounting interest in social sciences, b) the reinforcement of this line of thought by his followers -Schutz and Merleau-Ponty, for example-, and c) the radicalization of "non-intentional phenomenology" produced by Levinas and Henry. In the ambit of social sciences, Schutz has been acknowledged to have been first in trying to establish the connection between both disciplines by broaching the phenomenology of the natural attitude understood as phenomenological psychology, thus freeing social sciences from the rule of philosophy because. From this perspective, they do not stem from it but from the life-world, a space that can be accessed by the methodology of social research, however restrictedly because it ends subdued to methodological deliberations. As a result, the relation between phenomenology and ontology remains unaccounted for. In this work we therefore outline a four-step program aimed at awaking social phenomenology from its dogmatic slumber.

The subject we have chosen has already become a classic. Countless books, papers, and courses of study have come under this title (and its many variants and versions) throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Among the most memorable ones, we could mention *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as "Phenomenology and the social sciences" by Alfred Schutz. Husserl himself established the first links of a chain that connects both fields of knowledge, instating what would later take root as a significant tradition both to phenomenology and social sciences. Hence, let us begin by tracing the sequential versions of this issue, because I agree with Merleau-Ponty that philosophy should not be separated from the history of philosophy.

### **The philosophical foundation of the social sciences**

In a general way, Husserl never lost sight of the counterpoint between science and his philosophy. From his initial training as a mathematician to his last works, his phenomenology was nurtured by it. Likewise, he engaged in a dialogue with positive sciences, arguing about what positivism really means.

Regarding social sciences in particular, Husserl developed a mounting interest in them. Among the many landmarks of this dialogue, let us remember his meeting with Schutz when the latter presented him the manuscript of his first book, entitled *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*<sup>1</sup>. It would also be unwise to disregard the importance of historical and social issues in *Krisis...* and the significance for the social sciences of "The origin of geometry" – duly underscored by Schutz -. We could also

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\* Carlos Belvedere holds a degree in Sociology by the University of Buenos Aires. Associate Professor of Sociological Theory at the School of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires.

1 On the meeting between Schutz and Husserl, see Helmut R. Wagner. *Alfred Schütz. An intellectual biography*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 45-48.

mention his famous letter to Lucien Lévy-Brühl, where he praises the latter's *La mythologie primitive*<sup>2</sup>, in which (according to Merleau-Ponty) Husserl concedes that it is not pointless that facts should stir the imagination as if imagination itself did not enable us to represent the possibilities of existence of the different cultures; as if the eidetics of history did not exempt us from historical research.

Then, Husserl's phenomenology found a valid interlocutor in the social sciences, one whose relevance increased as his work matured. It is on this foundational dialogue that some of his adherents have established what might be the canonic version of the history of the connection between them. I am basically referring to Schutz's and Merleau-Ponty's generation, which has unearthed the issue and done much to encourage debate on it. It is in a second instance that the relation between phenomenology and social sciences appears to be indeclinable, by resorting to an authoritative quote – invoking Husserl – establishing the foundation of social sciences in phenomenology, preventing it from waiving specificity or autonomy.

In this respect, and following Husserl, it is often argued that phenomenology ends where science begins, which provides science with its fundamentals, contributing to the clarification of the essence of their respective objects of study. From this standpoint, the primary relation between phenomenology and social sciences is foundation.

Husserlian orthodoxy tends to reach this far, since this second moment already involves some heterodoxy. The main disagreement usually hinges on the kind of foundation provided by phenomenology and on the realm where it operates. To put it more specifically, the phenomenology inclined to engage in a dialogue with the social sciences have been refractory to the program proposed by transcendental phenomenology, even though it has based its posits on Husserl's within this line of thought.

More particularly, both Merleau-Ponty and Schutz question the possibility of transcendental reduction. The former maintains that complete reduction is impossible: we cannot sever our bonds with the world; at most, we can stretch them. Consequently, the only way is descriptive phenomenology. Therefore, the grounding that Husserl sought in the transcendental realm, was found by Merleau-Ponty in the description of perceptual faith and the natural attitude.

Schutz also attempts to found social sciences in the description of the natural attitude, a stance to which he is driven by a most emphatic rejection of transcendental phenomenology. He argues that rather than in transcendental phenomenology, empirical social sciences find their true foundation in the constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude. Moreover, he declares that even if Husserl carried out some of his analysis in a phenomenologically reduced realm, this does not preclude their validity for the realm of the natural attitude, since Husserl himself established that the analysis carried out in the former realm are also valid for the latter. Hence, according to Schutz, it is not necessary to seek the foundation of social sciences in the transcendental realm but in the life-world. Furthermore, if the life-world had to (and could) be reduced, it would no longer be in a position to serve as the grounding of all knowledge.

Hence, this second moment in a long-standing problem shares three common features: establishing the possibility and fruitfulness of a connection between phenomenology and social sciences, presenting it as a relation in which social sciences find their foundation in phenomenology, and arguing with Husserl as a quote of authority, however, rejecting the transcendental nature of phenomenology.

### **Non-intentional phenomenology and its criticism of the social sciences**

There is still a third moment in which philosophy keeps an interest in the relation between phenomenology and social sciences. I am speaking of more recent developments and, mainly, of what has been called “non-intentional phenomenology”. This calls for reference to the works by Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Henry, although we cannot disregard the fact that their works and those of their predecessors are articulated by Martin Heidegger, through whom phenomenology started to take a critical stance of social sciences. While it is actually true that his ideas have given

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl. “Carta a Lucien Lévy-Brühl”, in *Sociológica. Revista argentina de ciencias sociales*, # 2/3, 1979, pp. 26-32.

significant impulse to a reflection about history and the interpretative arts (for example, the impact of *Sein und Zeit* cannot be ignored), it is also true that his criticism of research and University as an institution were the prelude of a critical approach that I believe to have been the source of the third moment in the relation between phenomenology and social sciences.

However, this is not the only difference between this and the previous moment of the connection between phenomenology and social sciences, since non-intentional phenomenology inverts the constitutive assessments of the consensus that preceded it. Thus, by questioning the primacy of intentionality and, therefore, circumscribing the possibility of access to phenomenology to an area previous to all exteriority and objectivity, its connection with social sciences, perceived as lost in the realm of the latter, becomes not only futile but also impossible. Hence, social sciences cannot be instituted, because the implicit continuity with them - as advocated by Husserl - is no longer admissible. Finally, a quote of authority to Husserl is also hopeless, since he, following his conception of intentional consciousness, was first in losing his way into exteriority and objectivity. Along these lines, Levinas conceives social sciences as deaf to exteriority – that is to say, as refractory to ethics, which is the first philosophy: the one that Greek ontology thought of as metaphysics, as an access to the being as such -. He will produce similar notions about human sciences, those that, in his view, approach man as a presence, and that their formal expression simplifies cultural meanings – as if having occurred in exteriority – because to these sciences there is nothing more suspicious than an I that listens to and touches itself, and there is nothing more horrid than the confusion of cultural meanings broached by a subjectivity from the inside<sup>3</sup> so that even man may be seen as apparent<sup>4</sup>.

It could also be said that this philosophy does not admit a phenomenological foundation for the social sciences, since in principle they are refractory to subjectivity and remain in the sphere of the Neuter. In Levinas, we find a diatribe against sociologists, philologists, and historians, who destroy the word and the I by identifying it with the outside. This is how the relation of foundation established by Husserl and renewed by Merleau-Ponty and Schutz was lost. This is also why Levinas said that philosophy exceeds anthropology, the discipline that had aroused the late Husserl, and had also infected Merleau-Ponty.

Still, he will wage an all-out war against historiography, because he thinks that it consummates totalization, since the chronological order of history as organized by historians outlines the web of the being itself, for the time of universal history remains the ontological background where particular existents lose, narrate or, at least, sum up their essence. In this context, Levinas undertakes a defense of subjectivity against the totalization of history as the being's ultimate purpose, and calls historiographic time into question inasmuch as it understands interiority as the not-being where everything is possible, and as the inessential anything is possible<sup>5</sup> typical of insanity.

The protection of subjectivity's invisibility plays here a significant role, since it constitutes one of the elements that articulates the attitude of non-intentional phenomenology toward the social sciences. From this standpoint, subjectivity is irreducible to history because the latter's very nature consists in translating all apologia into visible arguments. Thus, Levinas counters subjectivity's invisibility to the visibility of history's totality, and establishes a separation between them in terms of a moral experience in which inner life is no longer guided by the evidence provided by history and goes beyond its judgment<sup>6</sup>.

Henry also thinks of subjectivity and community as essentially invisible. Neither the Other nor the community appear to us in the light of the Greek phenomenon. Expressed in phenomenological terms, they do not appear as transcendent but immanent. This means that the Other is not apprehended through perception, that he does not appear facing the intentional structure of consciousness, and that he does not appear in the light projected by its ecstatic horizon both in exteriority and in objectivity.

Along these lines, objectivity entails the individual's subjection – in the case of modern technics, for instance – not only in a theoretical but also in a political sense. In fact, objectivism implies death both to life at large and to the individual, as the essentially pathetic community cannot be exhibited in

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3 *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Paris, Kluwer Academic, 1987, p. 74.

4 *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

5 *Loc. cit.*

6 *Op. cit.*, pp. 272-276.

objectivity or, for that very same reason, offer itself to representation. Henry's criticism points out that the very little that Western philosophy has been able to say about the members of the community was blindly taken from the structure of the world, which modern metaphysics has transformed into the structure of representation. Nevertheless, relationships among between the living in the community are out of the world and of its representation because the community is an a priori. Hence, the community is the face-to-face relation outside the world, which is unconsciously fulfilled in the non-mediation of life, insofar as it is pure affect. As in life the primitive experience of the members of the community in relation to others is previous to the world, it escapes all thought<sup>7</sup>; and since life is the essence of the community, and it affects itself immediately, without the distance proper of Difference, apart from the world and from representation, every community is invisible<sup>8</sup>. It should be noted that this notion of community leaves no space for access from the direction of social sciences, which are regarded as subjected to the sphere of representation. Following this line of reasoning, the social sciences tend to think of subjectivity and the community in terms of exteriority, so that they could be claimed to sustain the kind of objectivism which, as well as losing the individual, also loses its particular way of giving itself what it shares with the community: namely, life.

### **A brief history of a frustrated dialogue**

What has been said so far in one way or other, shows that a reference to social sciences has been present throughout the history of phenomenological philosophy. This concern could already be seen in Husserl, first emerging in his attempt at making phenomenology a strict science and a superior form of positivism, then persisting in his eagerness to lay the foundations for science, finishing where they begin, and expressed in his last work as a dialogue in which eidetics and history might articulate smoothly.

Some of his immediate followers picked up this spirit, attempting a more direct, sustained dialogue with the social sciences. We find the spirit of Husserl's project both in Merleau-Ponty and Schutz, though subjected to respectful yet severe criticism. Whereas they upkeep the attempt to lay the foundations of the social sciences while respecting their autonomy, they more or less vehemently reject (depending on the case) the project laid by transcendental phenomenology. Having taken this step, "to lay the foundations" gets a different meaning from the meaning Husserl gave it: having questioned the *epoché*, this groundwork is transferred to the life-world. This leads them to descriptive phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and to phenomenological psychology or phenomenology of the natural attitude (Schutz).

Regardless of these critiques and redefinitions, up to this point phenomenology trusts that a dialogue with the social sciences is not only possible but also fruitful. This positive view starts to change with the advent of Heidegger, who –besides enriching reflections on history and on interpretation issues – calls the social sciences into question in terms of their metaphysical interpretation of the being -. This attitude becomes even more radicalized in the field of non-intentional phenomenology, where the criticism leveled at the social sciences converges with a criticism of phenomenology. What is debatable here is not the transcendental nature of phenomenology but the concept of intentional consciousness, which, once it has been exceeded (either toward transcendence or toward immanence, depending on each case) the intersubjective link is placed outside the intentional field. Thus the eidetic variation, in terms of which Husserl's project intended to lay the foundations for science, proves hopeless for the purpose. Far from liberating the social sciences from the tutelage of intentional phenomenology, this outcome turns them into accomplices to its relapse into objectivity and exteriority, where the intersubjective link and the community are irreparably lost.

Consequently, looking at the overall map of the relation between phenomenology and the social sciences, we should conclude that this is a history of frustration; one that started with a perhaps naive confidence in the possibility of some articulation while it ended by confirming its lack of feasibility. Thus, the persistent concern of philosophy to formulate a connection between phenomenology and social sciences is dropped amid feelings of resignation.

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

## **The phenomenological perspective in the social sciences**

This very road has been walked in the opposite direction, starting at social sciences towards phenomenological philosophy. Schutz is an unavoidable reference here, not only because of his dual status as a philosopher and a scientist, but also because he spread phenomenology in academic spheres related to social research.

Here, besides a transposition between disciplines, we should turn our attention to a territorial shift. Up to now, following the axis of the philosophical dialogue with social sciences, we have focused mostly on French phenomenology, which has been especially mindful of the issue. Now, if we wish to tackle the connection from the side of social sciences, we need to turn to the American Academia, the forum that has more thoroughly discussed the connection between phenomenology and social sciences, and the place where social phenomenology has yielded its best fruits, above all after European intellectuals in exile, like Schutz and his most outstanding disciples, settled down in the United States. Let us see then how the social sciences have discussed the possibility and relevance of phenomenology to their own issues.

## **Schutz and the naturalization of phenomenology**

In the early 40s, Schutz became aware that, in the best of cases, phenomenology was unknown to American social scientists, while in the worst of cases it was regarded as an esoteric cult marked by a language that ordinary people found cryptic and incomprehensible. This is why his first publications in English were devoted to introducing and disseminating Husserl's phenomenology among an audience that was not familiar with it. Additionally, Schutz targeted readers of the social sciences. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons why the phenomenology that prevailed in America is characterized by its proximity to Husserlian stances and by a proclivity to dialogue with the social sciences. Let us then revisit some of the main features of this aspect of social phenomenology so as to find out in what way the social sciences conceived of their relation with phenomenology.

We are facing another promising beginning for a "marriage" between phenomenology and the social sciences. While it is true that, as regards transcendental phenomenology, Schutz is pessimistic, for he finds it impossible, not to say superfluous and inexpressible, once reduction has been refuted, he focuses on the phenomenology of the natural attitude, positing phenomenological psychology as possible and auspicious.

This stance opens new possibilities for the social sciences, not only because it amounts to their emancipation from philosophy (because rather than in philosophy, they now find their grounding in the life-world, lived by ordinary men and shared in common) but also because the realm that Schutz considered as "paramount reality" is not only accessible to the philosophical methods but also the methods of social research.

Obviously, this can be viewed as a misrepresentation by orthodox phenomenology, not only because it rejects transcendental phenomenology but also because Schutz, as a phenomenologist, evidences a rather lenient assessment of positive sciences, one that borders on naturalist and objectivist positions which Husserl criticized so harshly. Moreover, Schutz appears to champion realism and psychologism in his advocacy for the natural attitude and common sense. In this context, we find that the peak reached by the autonomy and dignity of social sciences in the history of the problematic articulation that we have been describing is also the peak of its detachment from the phenomenological considerations that prevailed in those times.

Schutz has often been criticized for this. That phenomenology may be phenomenological psychology is not something that many would accept gladly. To quote a few of the objections that were raised, we may remember Ronald Cox's criticism, according to which Schutz was doing metaphysics rather than phenomenology, since phenomenology neither denies nor affirms "the stance of ontological realism, nor any other ontological theory of the world, for it operates entirely within the scope of

phenomenological *epoché*”<sup>9</sup>. Instead, Schutz posits a real, transcendent nature, reifying the noema in assuming that it is a real thing in the world rather than the correlate to a noesis. Along these lines, he states a metaphysical not a phenomenological thesis, since he “assumes an existence independent of that noesis”<sup>10</sup>. Thus, he leads his social ontology to a point where phenomenology becomes impossible.

Helmut Wagner also illustrates this, although he presents it as a deliberate project and not as mere oversight, as he maintains that Schutz was increasingly convinced of the need to abandon the theoretical framework of phenomenology in order to develop philosophical anthropology as an ontology of the life-world<sup>11</sup>. Among other adherents and scholars devoted to the study of Schutz’s works, Lester Embree, Daniel Cefaï, and Chung-Chi Yu have upheld similar positions.

The above shows that both Schutz’s critics and some of his followers maintain that, to a certain extent, his importance to the social sciences is related to his detachment from phenomenological philosophy. Thus, the promising beginning of a dialogue between phenomenology and social sciences suggested by Schutz’s works turns out to be heterodox for his successors.

### **Tiryakian and a phenomenological reading of Durkheim**

While it cannot be denied that Schutz’s thought proved pioneering for the social sciences, it should be acknowledged that it was not the only attempt at an articulation with phenomenology. Edward Tiryakian has also sought a connection between sociological tradition and phenomenological philosophy. For reasons that will be understood further on, we are here interested in revisiting his views of Durkheim’s legacy.

According to Tiryakian, apart from the fact that Durkheim’s positivism might bring about a confrontation with phenomenology, if one ponders the connotations resulting from considering social facts as things, one may notice a deep affinity with Husserl, who intended to return to the things themselves. Both share a methodology in which ingenuity is in abeyance, and the biases pertaining to the natural attitude have been set aside. It is in this sense, then, that Tiryakian speaks of Durkheim’s implicitly phenomenological approach<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, there are limitations to this analogy. In fact, Tiryakian’s thesis has been contested from orthodox Husserlian stances. By way of example, we may remember the reply issued by James Heap and Phillip Roth, according to whom Tiryakian uses “the concepts of phenomenology ‘metaphorically’”<sup>13</sup> (basically as regards the intentionality of consciousness, reduction, the notion of phenomenon, and essence), which leads to “a distortion, if not perversion, of both phenomenology and sociology”<sup>14</sup>.

On the basis of such arguments, Heap and Roth establish that, as the realm of sociology lies in the empirical world while Husserlian phenomenology deals with an eidetic, parallel science prior to empiricism, there might be an essential sociology providing it a groundwork. This means that everything goes back to square one: the place where, starting from Husserl’s posits, phenomenological philosophy proposed to lay the foundations for the social sciences.

Furthermore, Heap and Roth agree with Schutz that Husserl knew little of the concrete problems facing the social sciences, but they object that the eidetic science that he developed is no sociological eidetics inasmuch as it does not attempt to capture the essence of social phenomena. Once again, an articulation between the social sciences appears to be desirable but problematic. To put it in a nutshell, this is yet another failure to bring them together.

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9 Ronald R. Cox. *Schutz’s theory of relevance: A phenomenological critique*. The Hague / Boston / London, Martinus Nijhoff, 1978, p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Wagner. “Toward an anthropology of the life-world: A. Schutz’s quest for the ontological justification of the phenomenological undertaking”, cited in Horacio Banega. *La sociología comprensiva de Alfred Schütz como una sociología pragmático-fenomenológica. Un intento de reconstrucción teórica*. Buenos Aires, Flacso, 2002, mimeo (Master’s thesis), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Edward A. Tiryakian. “Existential Phenomenology and the Sociological Tradition”, in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 30, No. 5. (Oct., 1965), pp. 674-688.

<sup>13</sup> “On phenomenological sociology”, in: *American Sociological Review*, vol. 38, June 1973, p. 355.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 359.

Thus, the displacement of social phenomenology from intentionality to the natural attitude is not actually attributable to Tiryakian but to Schutz, who does not bring it about as a result of poor conceptual accuracy or of metaphorical use, but derives it from a programmed detachment from transcendental phenomenology. Hence, in calling Tiryakian's ideas into question, Heap and Roth are actually arguing with Schutz.

### **Social phenomenology into question**

At this point, the divide lies in deciding whether phenomenology should be transcendental phenomenology or phenomenological psychology. In other words, it is about ascertaining whether Schutz was right in calling Husserl's notions into question. This is a heated issue, for just like Heap and Roth stand away from Schutz, there are those who, like Yu, continue to advocate his stance<sup>15</sup>. As far as this is concerned – i.e., which is less phenomenology itself than its connection with social sciences – the problem hinges on the fact of whether it is possible to develop a truly phenomenological perspective in the realm of the social sciences. Two kinds of answers come to mind. The first states that phenomenology provides the foundation for the social sciences, and maintains that its outcomes are compatible with, but not identifiable to, those of phenomenology. Following this line of thought, there might be an eidetic science correlative to every empirical science, and the former should be understood as the groundwork for the latter. We have already seen that this is the notion that Merleau-Ponty sustains on the basis of Husserl's developments. A variant of this same stance is held by Thomas Luckmann, who states that Schutz has provided a methodological basis for Max Weber's and George Herbert Mead's scientific programs, operating a phenomenological description of the universal structures of the life-world and thus constituting a proto-sociological matrix, which, however, should not be mistaken for sociology<sup>16</sup>. The second answer comes from Schutz. As I have already pointed out, he accepts the existence of a genuinely phenomenological social science on condition that phenomenology be redefined, bringing it back from a transcendentalist conception and redirecting it to a position anchored in the life-world and understood as a description of the natural attitude.

### **The lost object of social phenomenology**

So far, the epicenter of these disquisitions has lain on the methodological scope of phenomenology. To a large extent, the debate on whether it should be transcendentalist or naturalist revolves on procedural issues. The dominance exercised by methodological problems leads to a complex, difficult articulation with ontology.

### **Methodology and ontology**

At this point, Jean-Luc Marion's remarks are worth considering<sup>17</sup>. He remarks that givenness always starts from the operation that prompts it, the reduction. That means that there is no givenness without reduction, and no reduction that does not end up at givenness. Consequently, we could say that: "so much reduction, so much givenness".

To some extent, this assessment of method in phenomenological philosophy is also valid for one sector of the social sciences for, as we have seen, Luckmann, Heap and Roth among others invoke methodological issues to found their stance on the possibility of social phenomenology. Nevertheless, both Schutz and Tiryakian prefer to pose the problem in a different domain, where the nature of the object bestowed on social phenomenology is more important than the methodological matter. Within

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<sup>15</sup> "On Schutz's Way of Doing Phenomenology: The Phenomenological Psychology of Husserl as a Clue", in *Second Meeting of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations*, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, August 15-20, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Luckmann. "Phänomenologie und Soziologie", cited in Horacio Banega. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Luc Marion. *Réduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1989.

this framework, maybe Schutz's words gain a deeper meaning when he focuses the discussion about social sciences on the specific features of their object rather than on those of their methods (*Verstehen*, etc.) or paradigms (such as the distinctions between cultural sciences and natural sciences). We can then speak of two paradigms of social phenomenology: a methodological one and an ontological one. Which is to be adhered to?

Here, Heidegger's phenomenology shows us a point of articulation and equilibrium that may prove illuminating. He pointed out that, whereas phenomenology is originally related to a methodological conception, it expresses the beginning of all scientific knowledge insofar as it intends to return to the things themselves<sup>18</sup>. To us, and in the context of our current quest, this means that the method refers us to the object, just as the object is given us by the method. Understood this way, the phenomenological motto "to the things themselves!" means: to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself<sup>19</sup>.

This is no minor matter, because it leads us to the issue of how the social is given.

Phenomenology has not felt at ease about this matter, since it has only skirted it without succeeding in confronting it effectively. For example, Merleau-Ponty also lets go of the social, after identifying it and characterizing it in a promising way as something that is, above all, my situation. This sharp remark does not make much of a contribution, for it flees, very much after Heidegger, toward the being-in-the-world (just like Schutz's ontology of the life-world, that was also to get lost along the same path), foregoing a first intention that seemed happily inclined to think of the social as such. In that sense, one might speak of a persistent difficulty in objectifying what is, essentially, objectivity, even when it is an objectivity that involves me as a subject. In other words, phenomenology might be incapable of dealing with that particular type of objectivity represented by the social.

Despite its hesitations, phenomenology has provided some indirect albeit worthy approaches. Its contributions to the clarification of the ways in which the social is recognized by us, and of how far such contributions leave us from their elucidation should therefore be assessed.

A phenomenological approach to the social should account for its primary condition; i.e., for the intersubjective link. Regarding this issue, and regardless of the difficulties identified by Husserl's disciples about his stances and those which he himself acknowledged, we cannot but admit that we are confronted by an unavoidable problem. Sociality is supported on intersubjectivity, where it finds its first stratum. According to Schutz, intersubjectivity is one of its structures; more precisely, it is the intimate and most familiar of them all: the face-to-face relationship. Well then, besides the fact that the social is irreducible to this connection, it cannot be translated to it because it consists mostly of anonymity. Consequently, face-to-face relationship is the most atypical and enclosed of all relationships pertaining to the social world. Needless to say, for that very reason it can only contribute to its elucidation in a most indirect, abstruse manner.

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that even Schutz's posits on this issue prove indecisive and hence lacking, since the intersubjective dimension of the life-world is not to be regarded as the first stratum in the social sphere but as its grounds. This implies that it is not the social itself. That is to say that, no matter how basal a phenomenology of the intersubjective link may be at the initial stages toward the path leading to a genuine phenomenology of the social, it may elucidate only its conditions of possibility but not its quiddity. Therefore, its essential features and ways giving itself are left unthought of.

In view of such mishaps, one may feel inclined to think that not-intentional phenomenology provides a breath of fresh air, insofar as it calls into question the loss of subjectivity in the world's exteriority. However, the pointed criticisms addressed by Levinas and Henry to the ways in which this occurs cannot be easily extrapolated into the social. On the one hand, Levinas's sociality remains outside the totality and, consequently, outside the social, as can be seen from the idiosyncratic use of the term "society", which does not reflect either what common sense or social sciences understand as such. What it does reflect is "a relation without relation" in which "the terms absolve themselves from the relation". On the other hand, Henry's phenomenology also locates itself on this side of the

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger. *Ser y tiempo*. Editorial Universitaria, Santiago de Chile, 1997, pp. 27 and 51. I do not intend to oppose this stance to Marion's as if they were antagonistic; on the present occasion, I simply prefer Heidegger's explanation about the intricate relation between method and object in the realm of phenomenology.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 57.



world and, therefore, from the social; however, it can be credited with an original posit about how its foundation is given to us: in the form of the community of the living. We might admit that finding the fundament of the intersubjective link in the community constitutes a step forward in the direction of a radical conception of the social; however, just as we do not accept that Levinas's sociality is the social *per se*, neither could we connect Henry's community in a continuum with the said sphere.

### **Durkheim's forgotten legacy**

When it comes to Durkheim's thought, phenomenology has symptomatically expressed the same uneasiness it feels about the social. Here we can identify two prevailing attitudes: one upheld by French phenomenology, inclined to frequently quote Durkheim but without grasping his sociological legacy, and that of the social sciences, better acquainted with the Durkheimian social, but inured to something they unjustifiably interpret as idealistic, irrational metaphysics. In this dual game of recurrences and misunderstandings, Durkheim's phenomenological legacy is at once perceived and unappreciated.

Within French phenomenological philosophy, Durkheim's presence is strongly felt in Merleau-Ponty's thought. Two of his writings in *Éloge de la Philosophie* condense Durkheim's significance, making clear his centrality in this manner of thinking about the social and also its inability of retaining the evidence offered by him. Both pieces of writing also express flights from the social: one runs away toward history, while the other escapes in the direction of culture.

Let us focus on the first writing – “Le philosophe et la sociologie” –, since it is the one directly aimed at sociology. The beginning of this text is a superb example of Durkheim's way to grasp the social in as striking a way as is his sudden abandonment of the issue. After voicing his rejection of the “separation regime” between philosophy and sociology, Merleau-Ponty adopts the Durkheimian language by pointing out (following his reading of Husserl) that, in terms of the social, what matters is to know how something can simultaneously be “an object” to be known without prejudice and a “meaning” which such societies as we know them give but one occasion to appear<sup>20</sup>. It is amazing that he seeks for the answer in the field of history rather than in the realm of the social. Further on, his query leads him to describe the way in which the transcendental descends into history. After invoking the already mentioned letter that Husserl addressed to Lévy-Brühl, he redirects his quest once more to the field of history, only this time he seeks for its anthropological rather than for its social substratum.

The reference to anthropology leads to the second writing mentioned above, entitled “De Mauss a Claude Lévi-Strauss”. Symptomatically and to our amazement, we find here an explicit reference to Durkheim. The text targeting sociology ends by speaking about anthropology, whereas the text about anthropology is much more openly driven toward sociology. In it the author recalls the motto that social facts must be considered as things as well as Durkheim's notions of collective representations, collective consciousness, and elementary forms of social life. The purpose of this is to work his way back to Lévy-Brühl and his concept of primitive mentality, and to Mauss's notion of gift. By this shift, he abandons his concern about the social as such (a concern that is limited to one page), moving on to considerations on culture and its bonds to nature.

In the realm of the social sciences, phenomenology has also let go of Durkheim's phenomenological legacy. Along these lines, their stronger familiarity with the social in Durkheim's sense (as compared to what happened in the case of phenomenological philosophy) did not suffice to establish a profound comprehension of the potential it offered for the advancement of a genuine social phenomenology or of its intrinsic meaning. On this subject, Schutz represents a paradigmatic case, because he best shows a duality between familiarity with and aversion to Durkheim's thought.

A lapidary Schutz maintains that there is no such thing as “a collective soul” or “a collective consciousness” in a Durkheimian sense, because social relations are always interindividual. Please note the rash equation between collective soul and collective consciousness. Seen thus, the notion of collective consciousness would be but a metaphysical remainder. Thus, Schutz's critique unknowingly joins the positivist persecution of metaphysics, reaching the paradoxical outcome that he appears to be more of a positivist than Durkheim himself.

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<sup>20</sup> *Éloge de la philosophie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 104.

To what extent can this be understood as strict phenomenology? I think that it does not go very far, as it shows that Schutz is close to empiricist stances that might be deemed as atypical in phenomenology, not to mention a costly concession or, in plain language, desertion from phenomenology. In other words, in Schutz, Durkheim's detachment is not a consequence of his devotion to phenomenology, but of his distancing from it.

Still, Schutz does not completely lose Durkheim's legacy, as not all of his references to him are critical. However, it is regrettable that Schutz only took into account the sociological aspects of Durkheim's theory – those that were the most obvious to social sciences – without exploring it and reflecting on it as a phenomenological approach considering things themselves thoroughly would require; on the other hand, he praises Durkheim's attention to the manifestations of primitive cultures and of the concepts of anomie<sup>21</sup> and norm.

In this context, while Schutz's criticism of Durkheim was more positivist than phenomenological, his defense lies nearer Husserl's legacy, which becomes evident in his resignification of the social as such. In this regard, he approaches "social things", stating that these can be understood only by reducing them to the human activity that has created them. Here he introduces the subject of reduction. Unfortunately, he does not expound on it. Moreover, the whole of Schutz's defense of Durkheim is questionable, for what would norms and anomie mean unless they were referred to the notion of collective consciousness? That is, how can Schutz broach social things in a Durkheimian manner when he has rejected the notion of collective consciousness because he finds it speculative and metaphysical? Thus, however valuable his statement that the social imposes itself upon individuals, and that when such imposition undergoes a crisis great evils arise, I believe that Schutz's argument is based on an unjustified leap, somehow comparable to the one he takes in defense of Husserl.

Schutz intends to defend the outcomes of transcendental phenomenology and contest transcendental reduction. We may agree that this is possible in the realm of the natural attitude (where Schutz grounds his phenomenology) but the natural attitude takes for granted a number of issues that it is unable to found and that, in Schutz's phenomenology, remain a dogmatic remainder. This becomes evident from his nearly naive, speculative use of notions such as the transcendental, the aprioristic, and the pure. Thus, the attempt at trying to recover the outcomes of transcendental phenomenology while contesting its procedures gives rise to a number of uncertainties and flaws in his phenomenology. We might say the same about his defense of Durkheim for, as we have seen, Schutz intends to validate the notions of norm and anomie while contesting their fundamentals, which is none other than the notion of collective consciousness. Then, we might well say about Schutz what he states about Durkheim concerning the tension between individual consciousness and collective consciousness: namely, that he clearly identified the dilemma but did not succeed in solving it.

### **Toward a provisional balance in the relation between phenomenology and the social sciences**

This is then the present state of affairs in the relation between phenomenology and social sciences: the attempt of phenomenological philosophy to lay the foundations for social sciences ended in radical criticism, and any possibility of dialogue between them was severed. In turn, the attempt to found a phenomenological perspective within the social sciences led to the relinquishment of phenomenological orthodoxy and offset up a further separation between phenomenology and social sciences. Thus, whichever way we look at it, social phenomenology has remained a matter of debate. Moreover, we have seen it swamped in a circularity that could hardly be called virtuous and that, by subjecting the possibility of a phenomenological perspective within the social sciences to a matter of method that had been neither resolved nor agreed on in the framework of phenomenological philosophy, conjured any further discussion before it had the chance to start. As a consequence, the phenomenological status of its object remained unthought of. This is a serious problem for, as Durkheim anticipated, the possibility of sociology largely depends on its being able to establish the existence of its own, specific object. In this context, and paraphrasing Kant, I wonder

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<sup>21</sup> "War is the archetype of that social structure which Durkheim calls the state of 'anomie'" (Schutz, Alfred. *Collected Papers: II. Studies in social theory, op. cit.*, p. 117).

how to awake phenomenology from its dogmatic slumber. With a provisional character, and by way of conclusion, I shall suggest a four-item program.

1. In the first place, it is necessary *to do away with the utopia of founding*, because phenomenological philosophy attempted to lay the foundations for social sciences by imposing on their objects such conditions that prevent an approach to the social as such, insofar as it confines the tasks of empirical research to regional ontologies, disregarding the fact that the social is essentially totality. Along these lines, further research should examine whether Durkheim's conception of the social as a totality, albeit dogmatic and speculative, is actually accurate. Should it prove so, the social would be inapprehensible if it were divided into objects and regions without realizing its holistic nature from the very beginning. Besides, if the way in which this particular object is given to us is not one of pure objectivity –as Merleau-Ponty noticed, though precariously so- but that of my circumstances, in which I am involved; if my circumstances cannot be objectified like essences can when subjected to eidetic variations to be later on filled by experience, and if the subject is part of the situation rather than facing it, the social, understood thus, could not be posit as an object. Therefore, its essence would not be accessible to eidetic variation and, consequently, there would be no point in making a distinction between eidetic sociology and empiricist sociology if what we are striving to grasp is the social as such.

2. The impossibility of establishing a bond between phenomenology and the social sciences complying with the expectations of Husserl's phenomenology should not hurl us into skepticism. In other words, *we should not think that a bond between phenomenological philosophy and the social sciences is impossible*. At any rate, we should attempt an articulation between them in a different domain than that where the discussion I have summarized here became swamped. We should abandon the idea of exteriority and interiority and, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out, focus on the situation, where both are likely to permeate each other. Here we could also agree with the criticism leveled by not-intentional phenomenology at the primacy of the panoramic and the ambit of representation, since the social as such is neither full representation nor is fully given in what is visible. Still, we should not consent to its withdrawal into the privileges of interiority or its relentless transcendentalism, for both these features deny the essential characteristics of the social, thereby losing the object of the social sciences in their most radical dimension, leaving them no more than "plots" (punning Henry's terminology) for exploration.

3. The peculiarities of the social as such call for a refutation of the *primacy of method*. This is supported by the fact that, both in phenomenological philosophy and the phenomenological perspective in social sciences, a certain current of opinion has insisted on solving the issue of the nature of its objects through methodological disquisitions. However, we should consider the possibility that perhaps the objective nature of the social may not be generated by a method or enjoy complete autonomy. *Mutatis mutandi*, we could extrapolate here the complex articulation between reduction and donation that I described through Marion, as well as recognizing the initial value of an average understanding for phenomenological philosophy and of common sense to social phenomenology, since both disclose to us something without which phenomenology would become impossible and that is given us prior to any methodological operation. Hence a philosopher such as Merleau-Ponty, inclined to engage in dialogue with the social sciences, refuted the possibility of strict compliance with the methodological operation of reduction.

4. In turn, calling into question the foundational nature of method leads us to *call into question the supposedly intuitive and immediate nature of the social as an object* as a safeguard for the above posit, since methodological restriction could easily be mistaken for something like naive intuitionism. This is why it is necessary to make explicit that recognition through an average understanding and wild meaning as nurturing factors of phenomenology should not suggest that the essence of the social as such will be given unveiled to direct intuition. Since the social is a situation in which the I is involved, it will not be offered to direct perception as a totality. This has precisely been the obstacle in phenomenology, which has searched for the social in a way and a sphere where it would not be able to find it.

Thus, we will have to find an access to the social other than eidetic variation, for the contestation to phenomenological philosophy's foundational utopia regarding the social sciences and the notion that what is strictly phenomenological is rooted in method forces us to redefine the connection between phenomenology and social sciences so as to deter the pretention that pure eidectics will give us the essence of the social. This is why I questioned the purely intuitive nature of the social as an object,

and I insist upon it at this point. It is not a matter of formal intuition into which experience would only stuff with fulfilling matter. That the social is a fact and that its reality has the properties of the thing depends on that: that which Durkheim intuited but we still need to found.

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