

## Alfred Schutz as a critic of social ontological Robinsonades

Revisiting his objections to Husserl's 5th Cartesian meditation

### *Alfred Schutz como um crítico de robinsonadas social-ontológicas*

*Revisitando suas objeções à 5ª meditação cartesiana de Husserl*

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**Abstract:** Alfred Schutz tends to be falsely considered as an illustrious representative of social ontological individualism. In this paper, I seek to correct this flawed interpretation of his work by means of a revisitation of his criticism of what I – taking up a Marxian term – call the “robinsonades” intrinsic to Husserl’s *5th Cartesian Meditation*. It is my contention that the systematic reconstruction of this classical criticism makes it possible to lay bare Schutz’s actual ontological account, namely: social ontological *intersubjectivism*.

**Keywords:** Alfred Schutz. Phenomenology. Social ontology. Intersubjectivity. Transcendental phenomenology.

**Resumo:** Alfred Schutz tende a ser equivocadamente considerado como um ilustre representante do individualismo ontológico social. Neste artigo, busco corrigir esta interpretação deturpada da sua obra por meio de uma revisão de sua crítica ao que eu chamo de “Robinsonadas” – tomando emprestado um termo marxiano – intrínsecas à 5ª Meditação Cartesiana de Husserl. Meu argumento é que a reconstrução sistemática desta crítica clássica permite esclarecer a verdadeira preocupação ontológica de Schutz, a saber: o *intersubjetivismo* ontológico social.

**Palavras-chave:** Alfred Schutz. Fenomenologia. Ontologia social. Intersubjetividade. Fenomenologia transcendental.

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## Introduction: a Marxian overture for a paper on Schutz?<sup>1</sup>

In a famous passage from his *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx (1973, p. 84; 1961, p. 615) claims: “The human being is in the most literal sense a *zōon politikon*, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society”. This ontologically and philosophical-anthropologically connoted statement emerges within the context of Marx’s (1973, p. 83; 1961, p. 615) critical confrontation with what he calls the “robinsonades” [*Robinsonaden*] of 18th-century English political economy. Alluding to Defoe’s classical novel *Robinson Crusoe*, Marx (1973, p. 84; 1961, p. 615) uses the term “robinsonades” to refer to those theories that attempt to explain the origins and workings of socio-historical phenomena – especially, of the economic reality of capitalism – by tracing them back to the actions of “isolated individual[s] outside society”, which, in turn, are conceived as specimens of a pre-social, universal human nature.

According to the author of *Das Kapital*, far from being the “point of departure” [*Ausgangspunkt*] of history, the isolated, laborious, and rational *homo oeconomicus* of which Smith and Ricardo speak is nothing but a socio-historical “result” [*Resultat*] that these authors hypostasize and project into an alleged originary past (Marx, 1973, p. 84; 1961, p. 615). For Marx (1973, p. 84; 1961, p. 615), indeed, this kind of individual can only arise as such within the frame of “civil society” [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*]; that is, within the society of free market and free contract which emerges in the 18th century as a product of the dissolution and collapse of the communitarian way of life characteristic of feudalism.

It might seem odd to start a paper on Schutz’s objections to Husserl’s *5th Cartesian Meditation* with a digression on Marx’s criticism of robinsonades, and this for two reasons. First, because Schutz is by no means a Marxist – as a matter of fact, his main social-scientific inspiration comes from who is usually considered as “Marx’s sociological antipode”: Max Weber (Rosa, 2013, p. 14). And second – and most importantly for the aims of the present paper –, because the Vienesse phenomenologist tends to be considered as an illustrious representative of social ontological “individualism” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 68; 1996, p. 176); *i.e.*, of an account that has much more in common with Smith’s and Ricardo’s than with Marx’s, insofar as it claims that the isolated and decontextualized individual is the fundamental constituent element of social reality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Emma Caterinicchio for her contributions as English proofreader.

<sup>2</sup> In line with Schatzki (2017), I use here the term “social ontology” to refer to the theoretical study of the “nature” and “basic features” of social reality.

As against this flawed interpretation of Schutz's thought endorsed nowadays by prominent authors such as Theodore Schatzki (2002, p. 68; 1996, p. 175-176), in the present paper I want to defend the following two closely related claims.

*First*, that the fact that Schutz – as a Weberian interpretive sociologist and a phenomenologist – endorses *methodological* individualism<sup>3</sup> does not turn him into a *social ontological* individualist. Rather, he defends an *intersubjectivist* social ontology; that is, an account according to which the primal constituent of sociality is not isolated individuality, but *intersubjectivity*.

And *second*, that Schutz's critical confrontation with what I would like to call the "robinsonades" intrinsic to the Husserlian *5th Cartesian Meditation* plays a crucial role in the development and shaping of his intersubjectivist social ontology. In this sense, at least to some extent, Schutz's criticism of the Husserlian account of transcendental intersubjectivity can be said to be structurally analogous to Marx's criticism of 18th-century political economy.

In order to support these two claims, I will systematically revisit some of Schutz's main objections to Husserl's *5th Cartesian Meditation*.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, I will proceed in three steps: (1) First, I will reconstruct the main traits of what, in my view, Schutz sees as *Husserl's most grandiose robinsonade*, namely, his posing and solution of the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity; (2) second, I will analyze what I call Schutz's *Immanent* objections to the Husserlian account; and (3) finally, I will focus on the Schutzian *fundamental* criticisms of it.

Before I begin, a word about the limits and scope of this study. It is not my aim here to assess the validity and pertinence of Schutz's objections to the Husserlian account of transcendental intersubjectivity – a number of contemporary Husserl scholars, such as Dan Zahavi (2003, p. 111; 1996, p. 17) and Shinji Hamauzu (2010, p. 58), among others, defend the founder of phenomenology from Schutz's alleged "misinterpretations". In this paper, rather, I will deliberately take *at face value* Schutz's criticisms of *what he interprets as* the shortcomings of Husserl's *5th Cartesian Meditations*, since,

<sup>3</sup> I understand here methodological individualism as the procedural decision of focusing social research on the behavior, action, or experience of *individuals*. In my view, endorsing *methodological* individualism does not necessarily entail advocating for *ontological* individualism. It is crucial to bear this in mind in order to properly understand Schutz's thought.

<sup>4</sup> Here I will mainly focus on the objections that the late Schutz (2009, p. 227; 1970, p. 51) raises against Husserl in the 1957 article "*Das Problem der Intersubjektivität bei Husserl*". I will also refer, however, to criticisms contained in other Schutzian papers.

in my view, they tell us much more about Schutz's own social ontological account than about Husserl's philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Husserl's most grandiose robinsonade: the posing and solution of the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation***

#### ***Husserl's idealist robinsonade: the posing of the problem***

As said above, it is my contention that, to some extent, Schutz reads Husserl's posing and solution of the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity as a *robinsonade* in Marxian terms. To be sure, Husserl's *philosophical* robinsonade is quite different from Smith's and Ricardo's *economic-theoretical* one and Hobbes' and Locke's *political-theoretical* one – so-called contractualism–; but nevertheless it still possesses the main features of this kind of radical individualistic accounts of sociality: it refers back social phenomena – *intersubjectivity* – to the actions – the *intentional performances* – of an isolated “Robinson” – the *transcendental ego*.

Arguably, in Schutz's view, Husserl's *philosophical* robinsonade is *much more radical* than the ones of contractualism and classical political economy. In effect, these accounts assign some importance to interpersonal interaction when it comes to explaining social phenomena – think of the social relationships established in the market and in contracts. By contrast, in Husserl's *5th Cartesian Meditation* as seen by Schutz, it is the isolated, pre-social *transcendental ego* in pure solitude that constitutes – or, in the late Schutz's reading, *creates* – the alter ego(s) *ex nihilo* by *his own means*. From this perspective, the Husserlian *transcendental Robinson* seems to be even more isolated than Smith's and Ricardo's individual; so isolated as an almighty God is from his creation (Wagner, 1983, p. 311).<sup>6</sup>

Although Schutz (1962, p. 144) takes up a number of Husserl's *particular* phenomenological analyses in order to provide a philosophical foundation for the interpretive social sciences, he is very critical of the Husserlian philosophical *program*. Just like other famous Husserl exegetes of the 20th century (Löwith, 1967, p. 49; Ricoeur, 1975), the Vienesse thinker (Schutz, 1962, p. 102; 2009, p. 228-229; 1970, p. 53, 55) seems to identify Husserl's theoretical project with the idealistic, solipsistic, and Cartesian theses defended in programmatic texts

<sup>5</sup> For an exhaustive account of Husserl's treatment of intersubjectivity that tries to counteract criticisms like the one by Schutz, see especially Zahavi (1996; 2003, p. 109).

<sup>6</sup> I am slyly referring here to Schutz's claim that Husserl conceives transcendental constitution as the “creation [*Kreation*] of the World by an Ego-turned-into-God” (Wagner, 1983, p. 311).

such as *Ideen I* (2009), the *Nachwort to Ideen I* (2009), and the first three *Cartesianische Meditationen* (Husserl, 1995, p. 3-90).

In the mentioned programmatic writings, Husserl stresses that the “external” world is not a pure objective reality existing out-there with total independence from my consciousness of it. Rather, he repeatedly says, it is nothing but an “intentional meaning-formation” [*intentionales Sinngebilde*] constituted in and by my transcendental subjectivity, this understood as “the primal site of every meaning-bestowing and verification of being” [*Urstätte aller Sinngebung und Seinsbewahrung*] (Husserl, 2009, p. 139, 153). On this account, thus, my transcendental ego has an *absolute* status, insofar as it exists “in itself and for itself [...] ‘before’ every worldly being”, whereas the “real world” is *relative* with respect to it (Husserl, 2009, p. 146, 153; Schutz, 2009, p. 228-229).

Husserl himself (1995, p. 154; 1960, p. 148) notices the “appearance of a solipsism” which emerges from his transcendental-phenomenological idealism. Indeed, if every transcendence is an intentional meaning-formation constituted in and by my transcendental consciousness, then this must also apply for the subjectivity of the Other. Following this train of thought, there could only exist *one* transcendental consciousness: *mine*; for the Other *qua noema* – i.e. *qua constituted meaning* – can never be a *constituting* subjectivity.

It is in this way that Husserl’s *most grandiose robinsonade*, to put it in Marxian terms, arises within his transcendental phenomenology, namely: the so-called *problem of transcendental intersubjectivity*. In broad outline, Schutz (1981, p. 137) understands this *idealist robinsonade* as the problem as to how the – transcendental – Other is constituted within the consciousness of the “*solitary*” [*einsam*] transcendental subject. “How is it possible to derive [*ableiten*] the existence of Others and, in further consequence, the intersubjectivity of the world from the internationalities of my conscious life and its constitutive performances?” (Schutz, 2009, p. 72).

Rather than running away from the ghost of solipsism, says Schutz (2009, p. 229; 1970, p. 54), Husserl tries to throw light on this “painfully puzzling question”. According to the Viennese thinker, Husserl’s most thorough attempt of dealing with this issue is to be found in the *5th Cartesian Meditation*. In this canonical text, the founder of phenomenology takes a series of theoretical steps to solve the posed *aporia*. The next section of the present paper will be devoted to systematically analyze the first two of them.

### *The first step of Husserl’s robinsonade: the “second epoché”*

For Husserl (1995, p. 95; 1960, p. 92), in order to show how I, as a *solitary transcendental Robinson*, constitute another subjectivity *by my own*

means, it is first necessary to clearly demarcate what is *purely* mine within the reduced egological sphere. In other terms, it is required to *purify* or *clean* my transcendental ego from every element that directly or indirectly refers to alien [*fremd*] subjectivities. With the aim of delimiting “what-is-properly-mine as the not-alien” [*das mir-eigene als das nicht-fremde*] (Schutz, 2009, p.232), Husserl (1995, p.95, 97; 1960, p.93, 95) performs a *second epoché* within the already transcendentially reduced egological sphere, namely, the so-called “primordial reduction” [*primordiale Reduktion*] or “reduction to my transcendental sphere of peculiar ownness” [*Reduktion auf meine transzendente Eigensphäre*].

As is well known, the *first* Husserlian *epoché* implies a “radical modification” of the quotidian attitude towards the world – the so-called “natural attitude”–, insofar as it puts into brackets the general thesis of the natural attitude; that is, the assumption that “external” reality exists out-there with total independence from the cognitive and interpretative operations of subjectivity (Husserl, 2009, p.141). After having neutralized this dogmatic prejudice, claims Husserl (2009, p.141), the meditating phenomenologist is able to discover and analyze the way in which the world constitutes itself in and by the intentional operations of transcendental consciousness.

Arguably, the *second* reduction works in a similar way than the first one does, but is more limited in scope. It is, in Husserl’s words, a “thematic *epoché*” [*thematischer Epoché*] (Husserl, 1995, p.95; 1960, p.93). What is thematically neutralized here is a *fragment* of the thesis of the natural attitude, namely, what Schutz (1981, p.137-138) calls the “general thesis of the alter ego” [*Generalthesis des alter ego*]; *i.e.*, the quotidian belief in the *objective* existence of other subjects possessing a consciousness similar to mine.

The aim of the second reduction is also analogous to the purpose of the first one. It seeks to free the phenomenological view from ill-founded prejudices about the – alleged – *objective* nature of the Other, and this in order to analyze the way in which it constitutes itself *qua* meaning-formation in *my* solitary transcendental consciousness. More precisely put, the primordial reduction is a “peculiar abstractive sense-exclusion” that suspends the “*constitutional accomplishments*” [*konstitutive Leistungen*] that “*immediately* or *mediately*” refer to alien subjectivities (Husserl, 1995, p.95, 100; 1960, p.93, 98. Translation modified). What is suspended within the already reduced egological sphere is, thus, not merely the meaning “alter ego”, but also the meaning “*objective world*”. (In order for the world to manifest itself as *really* objective, it has to appear as a “world *for everyone*”, *i.e.* *both* for me and for the alter egos).

According to Husserl (1995, p. 95, 111; 1960, p. 93, 108), what remains after performing this second *epoché* is my isolated “monad” [*Monade*] in all its concretion, that is, my “sphere of peculiar ownness” [*Eigenheitssphäre*]. To this “primordial sphere” – and this is crucial for properly understanding Husserl’s second step towards transcendental intersubjectivity – not only belongs my stream of *cogitationes*, but also an “immanent transcendence” or “primordial world” *only accessible to me*, namely: “nature reduced to what is included in my ownness” [*eigenheitlich reduzierte Natur*] (Husserl, 1995, p. 108-109; 1960, p. 104). This solipsistic natural world is, so to say, an originary and basic stratum of the *objective* natural world, that is, of the world “for everyone” (Schutz, 2009, p. 232; 1970, p. 57).

### ***The second step of Husserl’s Robinsonade: the analysis of the presentation of the alien consciousness within the primordial sphere***

The second step of Husserl’s idealist Robinsonade consists in the analysis of “the constitution of the Other’s I within the primordial sphere” (Schutz, 2009, p. 235; 1970, p. 61). This constitutive process takes place by means of so-called “improper empathy” [*uneigentliche Einfühlung*], a passive modality of experience of the Other in which the alien body appresents the conscious life of the alter ego (Walton, 2007, p. 410).

In order to properly understand this second step, it is crucial to note that in spite of the suspension of the meaning “alter ego”, the body of the Other *still not constituted as such* can appear within my primordial world. It appears, however, not *as* the “Other’s body”, but rather *as* a “physical object” like any other (Schutz, 2009, p. 233; 1970, p. 57). Having this in mind, one can interpret the Husserlian primordial reduction as a *thought experiment* that allows the meditating phenomenologist to reenact an *originary state* in which the transcendental Robinson, *still* in solitude, *still* purified from every intersubjective, alien element, bestows *for the very first time* the meaning “Other’s body” to a peculiar physical object that enters into its primordial world.

Before conducting this thought experiment, Husserl (1995, p. 99; 1960, p. 97) describes what is left in my primordial natural world after the second *epoché*: the experience of a “physical body” [*Körper*] that stands out, namely, my “lived body” [*Leib*]. Its peculiarity, he says, is twofold: first, I ascribe “*fields of sensation*” [*Empfindungsfelder*] to it – “a field of tactual sensations, a field of warmth and coldness, and so forth” (Husserl, 1995, p. 99; 1960, p. 97)–; and second, I am able to voluntarily govern it; that is, I can move some of its organs at will (Schutz, 2009, p. 36; 1970, p. 61).

Suppose now that the body of an alter ego *still not constituted as such* enters into my primordial perceptual field (Husserl, 1995, p. 113; 1960, p. 110). As a consequence of the effects of the second *epoché*, at this originary moment this body will not appear as the lived body or *Leib* of the Other, but rather as a mere physical body or *Körper* like any other (Schutz, 2009, p. 236; 1970, p. 61). According to Husserl (1995, p. 111; 1960, p. 110), the most primitive stage of the constitution of the Other takes place the moment I “interpret” this *Körper* as an “alien lived body” [*fremder Leib*], that is, as “Another’s body” (Schutz, 2009, p. 236; 1970, p. 62).

This interpretation, claims Husserl (1995, p. 111; 1960, p. 108), takes place as a consequence of an “appresentation” [*Appräsentation*]; *i.e.*, a passive synthesis of “analogical transference” [*analogisierende Übertragung*] by virtue of which I *unconsciously and athematically* – that is, without the need of performing an inference or act of thinking – transfer the meaning “*Leib*” from my own lived body to the alien physical body, and this because of the “similarity” [*Ähnlichkeit*] that exists between both of them. As a product of this passive meaning transference [*Sinnübertragung*], a “co-presentation” [*Mitgegenwärtigung*] automatically attaches itself to the actual “presentation” [*Gegenwärtigung*] of the appearing alien *Körper*, namely: the co-presentation of the alter ego’s consciousness (Schutz, 2009, p. 236; p. 1970, p. 62).

According to Husserl (1995, p. 114, 125; 1960, p. 111, 122), rather than being a mechanism that exclusively operates in empathy, appresentation is involved in “*each everyday experience*”. Indeed, we always “see” more than we actually *see*. Due to the perspectival character of our visual perception – which, in turn, follows from our corporeal anchorage in space –, we are never able to actually *see* the entirety of an object, but only sides of it. In the natural attitude, however, we “see” things in their wholeness. For instance, we “see” a house, although we only actually *see* its facade. According to Husserl (1995, p. 125; 1960, p. 122), this is possible because of an appresentative mechanism that passively *completes* our fragmentary perception. It is, in effect, by virtue of an appresentation that a “surplus” [*Überschuß*] of co-presence – the backside of the house – automatically associates itself to the “kernel” [*Kern*] of what is *actually* perceived – the facade.

Husserl’s analysis of appresentation is closely linked to his account of the typicality and habituality of everyday experience (Husserl, 1995, p. 114; 1960, p. 111; 1972, p. 398; Gros, 2017). For the founding father of phenomenology, appresentation is a passive meaning-transfer provoked by the similarity between something that actually presents itself and an empirical type stored away within the subjective habitualities. In this sense, it could be



argued that every perception entails the automatic subsumption of what we actually perceive under a sedimented empirical type; subsumption that, in turn, motivates the co-presentation of the non-visible sides of the object at stake.

More precisely, for Husserl (1995, p. 114; 1960, p. 111), every empirical type refers back to a “primal foundation” [Urstiftung]; that is, to a past experience “in which an object with a similar sense became constituted for the first time”. For instance, having understood for the first time the “final sense [Zwecksinn] of scissors”, a child is from that moment on able to see scissors as such “at the first glance” (Husserl, 1995, p. 114; 1960, p. 111).

Yet, in contrast to what occurs in a regular external perception, the empirical type at work in the appresentation of the Other’s mind – namely, the type of my own lived body – is not a typification that refers back to a primal foundation in the past. Rather, the experience of my Leib, understood as the “primarily institutive original” [urstiftendes Original], is “always livingly present”, “always going on in a livingly effective manner” (Husserl, 1995, p. 114; 1960, p. 112). As I shall show below, it is very important to have this in mind in order to properly understand both Husserl’s account of transcendental intersubjectivity and Schutz’s criticism of it.

### **On the conditions of impossibility of a Robinsonade (part I): Schutz’s immanent objections to Husserl’s account of transcendental intersubjectivity**

In what follows, I will systematically reconstruct Schutz’s *immanent* objections to the Husserlian *5th Cartesian Meditation*. I call these objections *immanent* because they remain *within* Husserl’s account; that is to say, because they do not put into question the philosophical pertinence of the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity, but rather limit themselves to criticizing the steps the founder of phenomenology takes to solve it.

#### ***Schutz on the impracticability and artificial character of the primordial reduction***

Schutz’s *immanent* objections to the Husserlian second *epoché* are manifold, and not all of them possess the same strictness and power (Schutz, 2009, p. 233-235; 1970, p. 68-70). In my view, the most well-crafted of these criticisms is the one directed to the *negative* definition of the sphere of ownness as “the not-alien” [*das Nicht-Fremde*] (Schutz, 2009, p. 232; 1970, p. 60-61).

For Schutz (1962, p. 166), by defining “what-is-mine” by means of the negation or exclusion of the alien, and not in pure positive terms, Husserl

secretly confesses the *impossibility* of conceiving a subjective sphere absolutely isolated from intersubjective elements. In effect, in Schutz's view, the *negative* nature of the second *epoché* shows that I can never get rid of the indelible trace of the Other within me, and this simply because what-is-mine does not exist *in-itself*, but rather only *in contraposition* to what is yours, his, or hers. To put it in his own words:

[I]t is hard to understand how the abstraction from all meaning referring to Others could be performed in the required radical manner in order to isolate my own peculiar sphere, since *it is exactly the non-reference to the Other which constitutes the line of demarcation of the sphere of what is peculiar to my own concrete transcendental ego*. Hence, *some* meaning related to Others must necessarily subsist in the very criterion of non-reference to Others (Schutz, 1962, p. 166. My emphasis).

In this Schutzian objection to Husserl one can hear the echoes of Jean-Paul Sartre's account of the question of the Other (Crossley, 1996, p. 9; Sartre, 1973, p. 237). Indeed, although Schutz (1962, p. 203) strongly criticizes Sartre's idea that *every* interpersonal relation necessarily entails the reification of the fellow-man, he seems to accept the *Hegelian* premise upon which the entire Sartrean approach to intersubjectivity is based; namely, that neither the ego nor the alter ego exist as *completely formed* individual subjectivities *before* the relationship between both, as most robinsonades claim (Sartre, 1973, p. 237). In this perspective, an intersubjective relation is not an *external* but an *internal* "connection between two terms, either of which constitutes itself by negating the other" (Schutz, 1962, p. 188).

In Schutz's criticism of the Husserlian primordial reduction, it is also possible to recognize the influence of another Hegel-inspired thinker, namely: G. H. Mead. For the author of *Mind, self, and society*, rather than being innate, mature – *i.e.* self-conscious – selfhood gradually takes shape in early childhood as a result of the relation between the child and his "significant others" – parents, teachers, elder siblings, etc. – (Mead, 1972, p. 186-187). In line with Mead, and also to some extent with Scheler (1973, p. 241; cf. Schutz, 1962, p. 171), Schutz (2009, p. 254; 2003, p. 330) considers that certain key features of fully-fledged subjectivity – such as reflectivity, cognitive-interpretative skills for defining situations, and communicative capacities – can only emerge through a long process of education and socialization. In this sense, for the Vienesse thinker, "[t]he possibility of reflection on the self, discovery of the ego [...] and the possibility of all communication [...]"

are founded on the primal experience of the we-relationship” (Schutz, 2009, p.254; 1970, p. 82).

In light of the above mentioned, it is easy to see why Schutz (2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 83) considers Husserl’s primordial reduction as an “*artificial*” [*künstlich*] procedure. Insofar as it *unnaturally* divorces the subject from his intersubjective environment, the second *epoché* is a Robinsonade that contradicts the inextricably social nature of human life. In this sense, claims Schutz, the primordial reduction ends up being exactly the opposite of what Husserl intends it to be: rather than a method for overcoming transcendental solipsism, it reveals itself as a way of exacerbate it *ad absurdum*.

Following this line of thought, Schutz argues that the Husserlian primordial sphere, understood as a field of exclusively private experience, is nothing but a chimera. Indeed, according to the Vienesse thinker, “a private experience that is not socialized from the beginning” is inconceivable (Schutz and Gurwitsch, 1989, p.177). On Schutz’s account, both self- and world-experience are *from the outset* pre-formed by a “*social a priori*” which is constituted not only by the internalized perspective of concrete Others, but also by a socially acquired, cultural “stock of knowledge” [*Wissensvorrat*] (Schutz and Luckmann, 2003, p.318). This stock of knowledge, claims Schutz (and Luckmann, 2003, p.318; Schutz, 1962, p. 13-14), is composed by a set of socioculturally validated, cognitive and practical “typifications” [*Typisierungen*] that allow the individual to – *typically* – define and come to terms with – *typical* – everyday situations (Gros, 2017).

Taking up a Husserlian concept in an idiosyncratic manner, Schutz (2009, p. 233; 1970, p. 79) characterizes this *social a priori* as a “preconstituted lower level of the alien” [*vorkonstituierte Unterstufe des Fremden*]. It is, as it were, an inextricable stratum of sociality and Otherness that *always-already* inhabits individual subjectivity in a secret manner, and this in spite of the factual absence of the alter ego. In Schutz’s view, no reductive procedure can ever erase this indelible trace of alterity within me: “the Other”, as Jean-Paul Sartre (1973, p. 237) concisely puts it, “penetrates me to the heart”.

### ***Schutz on the infeasibility of improper empathy***

Schutz (2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63) also puts into question the key premise upon which Husserl’s account of improper empathy is based, namely: the thesis of the “similarity” between the manner of givenness of my own body and the one of the Other. As above said, for Husserl, it is precisely this resemblance “that makes possible the apperceptive transfer of sense from the latter to the former” (Schutz, p. 237; 1970, p. 63). Yet, from a strict phenomenological perspective,

the Vienesse thinker asks himself: “to what extent is such similarity *given*?” (Schutz, 2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63. Translation modified. My emphasis.).

According to Schutz (2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63), a rigorous phenomenological analysis – *i.e.* an analysis that restricts itself to describing what is experientially given in the first-person-perspective – shows that the phenomenon of the Other’s physical body [*Körper*] is “as dissimilar as possible” to the manifestation of my own lived body [*Leib*]. For this very reason, he concludes, the latter “can never lead to an analogical apperception” of the former (Schutz, 2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63).

In this perspective, thus, insofar as Husserl claims that two markedly different phenomena are similar, he seems to contradict the *ethos* of phenomenological research that he himself promotes throughout all his work (Husserl, 2009, § 24). Arguing against Husserl, Schutz (2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63) emphasizes the discrepancies between (a) the manner of manifestation of *my* body – qua *Leib* – and (b) the mode of givenness of the Other’s body – qua *Körper*.

- (a) I live my own body *from within*, *i.e.*, in the first-person-perspective, and this through kinesthetic and somatic sensations of many kinds: I am aware of my current corporeal position in space and of my displacements through it; I feel pain, pleasure, fatigue, etc. “My living body”, claims Schutz (2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63), is always “present as inner perception of its boundaries and through the kinaesthetic experience of its functioning”.
- (b) The Other’s body, on the contrary, is not internally experienced by me, but rather perceived in the third-person-perspective (Schutz, 2009, p. 237; p. 1970, p. 63). I observe alter ego’s facial physiognomy, his gestures, and physical movements *from the outside*. In this sense, it is possible to say that I perceive his body in a more complete and exhaustive manner than I do mine. Although it is true that I can observe some aspects of my body, this perception remains always *partial* and *occasional* (2009, p. 237; 1970, p. 63).

It could be argued that with this objection to improper empathy, Schutz undermines Husserl’s solution to the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity. As stated above, the founder of phenomenology claims that the *solitary transcendental Robinson* is able to constitute the – transcendental – alter ego *by his own means*, that is to say, without the need of resorting to *socially* derived empirical types. On Husserl’s account, this is possible due to one of the peculiar features that distinguish improper empathy from regular external perception: the *permanent presence* of my lived body *qua* empirical type.

As mentioned, Husserl argues that every perception passively resorts to a typification in order to *make sense* of what is perceived. This typification, in turn, is nothing but a sedimentation of a “primal foundation” of meaning; that is, of a past experience in which I perceived a typically similar thing for the very first time. Yet, if improper empathy worked this way – *i.e.* if it referred back to a sedimented past experience of the “Other(s)” –, it would be impossible within my sphere of ownness, and this because, as said above, the second *epoché* suspends all meanings mediately and immediately referring to alien subjectivity. For Husserl, however, – and this is crucial for properly understanding his account –, I am able to constitute the meaning “alter-ego” within my primordial sphere *without the need of resorting to a prior experience of the Other(s)*. This is possible by virtue of the peculiarity of the typification that operates in improper empathy: my lived body.

Rather than being a sedimentation of past experiences, says Husserl (1995, p. 114; 1960, p. 112), my *Leib* is “always livingly present”, “always going on in a livingly effective manner”. That is, in order for me to interpret this body entering into my primordial nature as “the Other’s body”, I do not need to resort to a typification stored away in my stock of knowledge; rather, I immediately apprehend it as such because of its similarity to my “always livingly present” body.

Now, what happens with Husserl’s argumentation if one takes Schutz’s criticism of improper empathy seriously? If, as Schutz claims, the analogical meaning-transference between my body and the Other’s is not possible because of their extreme different manner of givenness, then the solitary transcendental Robinson is not able to constitute an alter ego by his own means. In other terms, if Schutz is right, then there is no empirical type left within my primordial sphere that allows for an immediate apprehension of the – alleged – Other’s Körper entering into my perceptual field as an “Other’s Leib”.

If Husserl’s autonomous path to the constitution of the Other is closed, thinks Schutz (2009, p. 238; 1970, p. 64), then the meaning “alter ego” must have an heteronomous genesis very much like the one of any regular perception; that is to say, it must refer back to prior experiences of the Other(s). It is in this sense that Schutz asks (2009, p. 239; 1970, p. 65) himself: “are we to see the solution [A.E.G: of this dilemma] in preserving my pre-experiences of the alien [*Vorerfahrungen von dem Fremden*] even within the primordial sphere that has been reduced to what is ‘properly’ of my ego?” If this were the case, concludes Schutz (2009, p. 239; 1970, p. 65), then the Husserlian second *epoché* “has not been carried out radically enough” or “perhaps it cannot be radically carried out at all”.

Following this line of thought, Schutz (2009, p. 240; 1970, p. 66) maintains, further, that the empirical type at play in Husserlian improper empathy – namely, “alter ego” or “Other” – is an artificial abstraction from the more concrete, *socioculturally* derived typifications actually operating in empirical, lifeworldly intersubjectivity: “man”, “woman”, “child”, “teenager”, “foreigner”, “old person”, “healthy”, “sick”, etc., “and all of this in all kinds of variations, depending on the culture to which the ‘Other’ and I belong” (2009, p. 240; 1970, p. 66). One can argue with Schutz (2009, p. 240; 1970, p. 66) that both these cultural typifications and the above mentioned prior experiences of Others belong to the inextricable *social a priori*, or pre-constituted lower level of the alien, which always-already inhabits individual subjectivity.

## **On the conditions of impossibility of a Robinsonade (part II): Schutz’s *fundamental* objections to Husserl’s account of transcendental intersubjectivity**

In the following, I will devote myself to systematically reconstruct Schutz’s *fundamental* objections to Husserl’s *5th Cartesian Meditation*. These objections go further and deeper than the above-analyzed *immanent* ones, insofar as they call into question the philosophical pertinence of the so-called problem of transcendental intersubjectivity. The posing of the problem itself, and not merely the steps Husserl takes to solve it, becomes now target of criticism.

### ***A digression on the late Schutz’s philosophical position***

It is my contention that in order to properly understand Schutz’s *fundamental* objections to the Husserlian account of intersubjectivity, it is necessary to read them in light of his more comprehensive criticism of what he considers the main tenets of Husserl’s phenomenological-transcendental idealism. As said above, in a similar vein to other famous Husserl exegetes of the 20th century (Löwith, 1967, p. 49; Ricoeur, 1975) – and, of course, in contrast to many contemporary Husserl scholars (Zahavi, 2003; Walton, 2015)–, Schutz (2009, p. 228-229; 1970, p. 53) seems to identify the philosophical project of the founder of phenomenology with the idealistic, solipsistic, and Cartesian theses defended by him in programmatic texts such as *Ideen I* (Husserl, 2009), the *Nachwort* (Husserl, 2009), and the first four *Cartesianische Meditationen* (Husserl, 1995).

Broadly speaking, the late Schutz (2009, p. 256; 1970, p. 83-84) understands Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology as a radical form of subjective, transcendental idealism that aims at establishing “an ontology on

the basis of the processes of subjective life”. Indeed, according to Schutz (2009, p. 271, p. 151), Husserl makes “an exuberant use” [*überschwenglicher Gebrauch*] of the idea of transcendental constitution [*Konstitution*] with speculative aims, insofar as he conceives of it as “the creation [*Kreation*] of the World by an Ego-turned-into-God” (Wagner, 1983, p. 311. My emphasis). On Schutz’s reading (2009, p. 271), thus, rather than seeing “constitution” as a mere meaning-bestowing or meaning-forming process, Husserl understands it as a sort of “production” [*Produktion*] of the lifeworld carried through *ex nihilo* by an almighty transcendental subjectivity.

More precisely, inspired by Eugen Fink (1976, p. 152), Schutz speaks of a “transformation of sense which the concept of constitution has undergone in the course of the development of phenomenology” (Schutz, 2009, p. 255; 1970, p. 83). The early Husserl, says Schutz (2009, p. 255; 1970, p. 83), understood phenomenological constitutional analysis in a more humble manner, namely, as an attempt to explicate and clarify the meaning-structure of the world by “tracing back all *cogitata* to intentional operations of the on-going conscious life”. “But unobtrusively, and almost unaware”, the Husserlian “idea of constitution has changed from clarification of the sense of being, into the foundation [*Begründung*] of the structure of being”; that is to say, “from interpretation [*Auslegung*] into creation [*Kreation*]” (Schutz, 2009, p. 255; 1970, p. 83. My emphasis).

Especially during the last years of his life, Schutz sharply distances himself from what he considers the metaphysical, solipsistic, intellectualist, and idealistic tenets of the Husserlian transcendental project, developing an own phenomenological-philosophical position. This position, he says, is his own a version of what Husserl himself (2009, p. 158) calls a “phenomenological psychology” [*phänomenologische Psychologie*] or a “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” [*konstitutive Phänomenologie der natürlichen Einstellung*] (Schutz, 1962, p. 132). More precisely, it is a social scientifically oriented phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt* with realistic, philosophical-anthropological, anti-metaphysical, pragmatic, and existential-philosophical features (Srubar, 2007, p. 173; Wagner, 1983, p. 239; Schutz, 1962, p. 208).

### ***Schutz’s objections to the speculative and solipsistic character of the idea of the transcendental constitution of the other***

Against the background of this overall interpretation of the Husserlian transcendental-phenomenological project, Schutz (2009, p. 279; 1970, p. 89) conceives the Husserlian treatment of the problem of Other as an attempt to

“constitute intersubjectivity in the sense of the *creation* [*Kreation*] of a universe of monads” within *my* pure transcendental consciousness. In effect, for the Viennese phenomenologist, Husserl’s aim in the *5th Cartesian Meditation* is to show how I, *qua* solitary transcendental Robinson, *create* or *produce* other – transcendental – subjectivities by means of my intentional performances (Schutz, 2009, p. 273).

On Schutz’s account, as I understand it, the idea of me *creating* or *producing* an alter ego within my isolated transcendental consciousness is so absurd that it does not even deserve philosophical consideration. In this sense, the Husserlian question as to how this *egological creation* of the social world takes place is nothing but a pseudo-problem, a vague speculation without any phenomenological foundation. Schutz’s (2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 81-82) skepticism about Husserl’s *speculative* approach to the issue of intersubjectivity is reflected in a series of sarcastic questions he poses towards the end of “*Das Problem der transzendentalen Intersubjektivität bei Husserl*”: “Are the Sumerians and the pygmies of the African bush, who are unknown to me, actually constituted in my meditating ego? Do I constitute Socrates or does he constitute me? Is not ‘to have in horizon’ something other than constitution?”

Arguing against Husserl from a social-scientifically, philosophical-anthropologically, and existential-philosophically informed perspective, Schutz (2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 82) claims that intersubjectivity is by no means a “problem of constitution which can be solved within the transcendental sphere”. It is, rather, *plainly and simply* an incontestable, and ultimately unexplainable, “*datum* [*Gegebenheit*] of the lifeworld”; that is to say, an ontological *factum imposed* upon us by our *conditio humana* (Schutz, 2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 82). As Schutz (2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 82) famously puts it: “As long as man is born of woman, intersubjectivity and the we-relationship will be the fundamental category [*Grundkategorie*] of human existence and of every philosophical anthropology”.

Much like our finitude and corporeality, thus, the social nature of human life cannot be neither philosophically justified nor founded, but merely accepted as what it is and *described* in terms of a phenomenological “ontology of the lifeworld” [*Ontologie der Lebenswelt*] (Schutz, 2009, p. 254; 1970, p. 82; Schutz and Gurwitsch, 1985, p. 332). In this sense, Schutz would agree with Marx (1973, p. 83): the human being is, essentially, a “*zōon politikon*”, “a gregarious animal”. From this perspective, by attempting to “found the existence of the Others on constitutive operations of the consciousness of the transcendental ego”, Husserl “made an ‘exuberant use’ – to put it in Kantian



terms – of the method of transcendental constitution” (Schutz, 2009, p. 275; 1970, p. 90).

Furthermore, according to Schutz (2009, p. 250; 1970, p. 77), Husserl fails to achieve the aim he sets himself in the *5th Cartesian Meditation*, namely, escaping from the trap of solipsism – this being understood as a philosophical position that postulates the existence of *only one* subjectivity in the emphatic sense of the term, namely, *my own* (Zahavi, 2003, p. 109). In line with Sartre (1978, p. 234), Schutz (1962, p. 194) thinks that in order to *really* overcome the pitfall of solipsism, Husserl has to show how *the* transcendental subject can constitute another *transcendental* – *i.e.* extramundane and world-constituting – ego by its own means. However, he only shows how the Other is constituted as an intentional object or *noema*.

In spite of the theoretical efforts made in the *5th Cartesian Meditation*, the Other suffers in Husserl’s philosophy the same fate as *every* transcendent being; namely, it is conceived of as a mere *creation* or *production of meaning* carried through within and by the “the primal site of every sense-bestowing”: *my* transcendental subjectivity (Husserl, 2009, p. 139). Following this line of thought, speaking of a plurality of transcendental subjects seems absurd. It is in this sense that Schutz (2009, p. 250; p. 1970, p. 77) asks himself: “Is it conceivable and meaningful to speak of a plurality of transcendental egos? Is not the concept of transcendental ego conceivable only in the singular? Can it also be ‘declined’ in the plural, or is it, as the Latin grammarians call it, a *singulare tantum*?”

## **Conclusion: Schutz’s social ontological intersubjectivism (versus Schatzki)**

The reconstruction of the Schutzian objections to the *5th Cartesian Meditation* carried out in this paper was not conceived as an end in itself, but rather as a means for laying bare Schutz’s social ontological position, namely: *neither ontological individualism nor ontological holism, but ontological intersubjectivism*. In this sense, the present paper must be read as an attempt to counteract flawed interpretations of his work like the one given by the prominent current social theorist Theodore Schatzki (2002, p. 68; 1996, p. 175-176). As said in the Introduction, for this author, Schutz is an illustrious representative of so-called ontological individualism (Schatzki, 2002, p. 68).

Generally speaking, social ontology can be defined as the theoretical study of the fundamental nature and basic characteristics of social reality, that is, of its essential—*i.e.* culturally and historically invariant – features (Schatzki, 2017). Put in a nutshell, it is an attempt to provide an answer to the

difficult question: “What is sociality?” As is well known, since Aristotle and Plato until our time, a myriad of different and contradictory answers to this question were given.

According to Theodore Schatzki (1996, p. 1), most modern social theories can be subsumed under either of what he calls the two fundamental “paths of social ontological conceptualization”, namely: “ontological holism” and “ontological individualism”. In broad outline, these social ontological “schools of thought” diverge from each other in their definition of the “fundamental ontological phenomena” or constituent element of social reality.

Ontological *holists* – such as Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, Althusser, Luhmann, etc. – claim, in different ways, that the fundamental constituent of sociality is the “social whole”; that is, a social totality – be it a state, a structure, a mode of production, a system, a society, etc. – which is “something more” than the individuals that compose it and determines their behavior and mental states (Schatzki, 2002, p. 92; 1996, p. 2). On the contrary, for Schatzki (p. 2002, p. 68; p. 1996, p. 6), ontological *individualists* – such as contractualists (Hobbes, Locke, etc.), classical political economists (Smith, Ricardo, etc.), Weber, Karl Popper, and von Hayek, among others – affirm that the pre-socially constituted “individual” is the fundamental ontological phenomenon of social reality. Arguably, ontological individualism as defined by Schatzki can be identified with what I, in line with Marx, call robinsonades, insofar as it claims that social reality is *nothing but* a product of the actions and interactions of isolated and culturally decontextualized individuals, which, in turn, are “psychologically integral independently of their participation in social institutions and practices” (Schatzki, 1996, p. 6).

As I mentioned, in Schatzki’s view (2002, p. 68; 1996, p. 175), Alfred Schutz belongs to this second social ontological school of thought. For Schatzki, in effect, Schutz’s (1962, p. 16; 1981, p. 227) phenomenological analysis of everyday interaction reduces social reality to the individual’s thematic “directness towards others”; that is, to conscious, other-directed behavior performed by *pre-socially* constituted and *decontextualized* individuals. By doing so, says Schatzki (1996, p. 175), Schutz overlooks that sociality is *much more* than thematic other-directness: “lives do not hang together merely through people encountering one another”. More precisely, on this reading, Schutz neglects the fact that individual life is *from the outset* pre-consciously and unthematically embedded in social “contexts” – “systems of action, worldviews, social practices, and fields of various sorts” – which are prior and more fundamental than any thematic experience of, or encounter with, an alter ego (Schatzki, 2002, p. 65).

In light of the Schutzian objections to what I call the robinsonades intrinsic to Husserl's 5th *Cartesian Meditation*, it is easy to see that Schatzki's reading of Schutz as a social ontological individualist is fundamentally flawed. Arguably, this defective reading is due to the fact that Schatzki conflates the Schutzian *methodological* individualism with a form of *ontological* individualism. Yet, Schutz's (1962, p. 43) Weber- and phenomenologically inspired *methodological* decision of focusing social research on subjective lived experience does not imply, at any rate, a fall into *social ontological robinsonades*.

In effect, as shown in the present paper, the Austrian author claims that not the isolated Robinson, but *intersubjectivity*, understood as an anthropological and ontological fundamental *datum* of human existence, is the primal phenomenon of social reality. The human subject is *always-already* pre-reflectively and athematically embedded in an intersubjective, sociocultural *milieu*. Far from being external to him, this *milieu* penetrates him to the heart; in fact, it is the very condition of possibility for the conformation of *mature, full-fledged* individual subjectivity. The everyday encounters between adult individuals that Schutz (cf. 1981, p. 27) describes in many of his writings are only viable against the background of this *social a priori*.

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