

Husserl's Critique of Lotze and Its Relation to McDowell and the "Myth of the Given"

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is twofold: I want to investigate (i) to what extent Husserl's critique of Lotze can provide a phenomenological contribution to the contemporary analytic debate on the Myth of the Given, and (ii) to what extent this critique can be related to McDowell's conceptualism. We will see that Husserl's phenomenological clarification of the acts of knowledge comes close to McDowell's conceptualism in some respects, but fundamentally moves away from it in some others. Specifically, we will see that McDowell's conceptualism would fail to follow Husserl's "master thought": the radical freedom of presuppositions in investigations concerning theory of knowledge. A side purpose of this paper is to show how the contemporary analytic debate resembles—both historically and systematically—one of the main problems that is at the origins of phenomenology: the critique of knowledge and the problem of the consciousness-world correlation. The paper is structured as follows: firstly, I briefly present the essential points of McDowell's conceptualism; then, I summarize Lotze's theory of knowledge from his last book of *Logic* from 1874; finally, I turn to Husserl's critique of Lotze in the *Unpublished Manuscript K I 59* and briefly indicate the possible points of contact that it may have with the contemporary analytic debate, especially with McDowell's conceptualist response to the Sellarsian critique of the Given.

Keywords: Husserl, Lotze, McDowell, Myth of the given, Non-conceptual content.

1. Introduction

Sellars' critique of the Given can be considered the original locus of what is now called the *Pittsburgh School* in contemporary analytic philosophy. One of the main problems that Sellars' essay presents—and thus helps to shape this "school" of thought—concerns the general aim of his critique. To speak with McDowell, the question is whether Sellars' main goal is, as Brandom interprets it, "to dismantle [traditional] empiricism" (Brandom 1997: 168) or whether it is, as McDowell suggests, "to rescue a non-traditional empiricism from the wreckage of traditional

empiricism”, showing us the way on how to be “good empiricists” (McDowell 2009: 221).

Following Crowell’s contextualization (Crowell 2009: 151), Brandom’s inferentialism is closer to Marburg neo-Kantianism, which understands experience as a mediated process, namely *via* systematic inferences in judgments generated in scientific theorizing, and McDowell is closer to Baden neo-Kantianism, insofar as he suggests not a dismantling of empiricism, but a way of attributing normativity to the content of experience. For McDowell, it is a matter of recovering a concept of experiential given which is not a mere natural happening external to what Sellars called the “logical space of reasons”, but, on the contrary, a given that can justify our thoughts about the world. This is how Sellars describes the logical space of reasons:

In characterizing an episode or state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says (Sellars 1991: 169).

To acknowledge experience as belonging to the logical space of reasons is, therefore, to acknowledge it as already belonging to a sphere of normativity (McDowell 1996: 8). This is achieved, in *Mind and World*,¹ when one understands the content of experience as carrier of “conceptual content”, because the “conceptual sphere”, which is composed of “rational relations”, is “at least part of what Wilfrid Sellars calls the ‘logical space of reasons’”² (McDowell 1996: 5).

This characterization of experience as carrier of conceptual content is crucial for the contemporary analytic debate on the contents of perception. To summarize something that will be developed below, McDowell intends not to dismiss the concept of perceptual givenness, but to rescue it from its mythical sense. Now, it is precisely this idea of ensuring a concept of givenness that is immune to the Myth of the Given that has been currently acting as a reading key in many phenomenological writings. As Gunther points out (Gunther 2003: 4), the distinction between the conceptual and the non-conceptual takes place within the genre of intentionality, and, in a well-known passage from *Ideas I*, Husserl states that “the title of the problem that embraces the whole phenomenology is called intentionality” (Husserl 1976: 337).³ We should not understand this, however, as the same debate with different approaches, one with the tools of Analytic Philosophy, another with those of Phenomenology. We believe that the phenomenological clarification of knowledge can help us disarm this debate, freeing phenomenology from the need to *answer* the question of the Myth of the Given. This disarmament can be seen from Husserl’s early critique of Hermann Lotze’s theory of

¹ It is well-known that after *Mind and World*, more precisely in the essay *Avoiding the Myth of the Given* (2008a), McDowell revises his conception due to Travis’ criticism and no longer understands perceptual content as conceptual content, although perceptual content should still be endowed with normativity so that it is not a mythical Given (McDowell 2008b: 258).

² This would already distance McDowell from the neo-Kantianism of the Baden School, according to Crowell’s analysis, since the simple “conceptualization” of experience would still be stuck to the subjectivity/world duality—which, in turn, remains stuck to traditional empiricism. Our analysis supports this statement, as we will see below. According to Crowell, Lask’s *panlogism* offers a better alternative for conferring normativity to the content of experience (Crowell 2009).

³ All translations into English are my responsibility.

knowledge, the latter coming surprisingly close to the Sellarsian-McDowellian framework of thought. What we intend to investigate in the following is to what extent Husserl's critique of Lotze can help us understand the contribution of phenomenology to the contemporary debate and to what extent this critique comes close to McDowell's conceptualism—which is, in a way, an attempt to overcome the Sellarsian critique of the Given—but moves away from it in essential points.

2. McDowell' Conceptualism

McDowell's philosophy revolves around a problem characteristic of modernity: that of the relation between mind and world. Unlike modern philosophers in general, however, McDowell thematizes this relation not in terms of a question to which a "constructive philosophy" should provide answers, but in terms of an anxiety that must be exorcised (McDowell 1996: xxiv). If modern philosophy intended to answer the question about "how is it possible for there to be thinking directed at how things are?", McDowell intends to show that this question only arises from a line of reasoning that, "if made explicit, would purport to reveal that the question's topic is actually not possible at all" (McDowell 1996: xiii). This would lead us, at once, to the dissolution of the "problem" of the mind-world relation and to the "cure" for the anxiety (McDowell 1996: xi).

The cure must begin by considering the plausibility of a "minimal empiricism", which is characterized as "the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all" (McDowell 1996: xii). Thus, to cure the anxiety, we must consider two theses:

- (i) thinking *as such* is always thinking *about the world*; and
- (ii) thinking is only thinking about the world if *sensible experience* does not hinder our contact with things, but, on the contrary, *makes it possible*.

If thinking is always thinking about the world *through* experience, then McDowell's challenge is to present a conception of experience which is consistent with this role of mediation. To do so, this experience cannot be the *id quo*, the *given* in the sense of a brute fact outside the space of reasons. Experience cannot enclose us in the mind: it must lead us into the world. To this end, McDowell needs a concept of given in the broad sense of a given *world*, and not a given of our allegedly sensible contents, or presentations, in the mind.

Minimal empiricism shows us that the problem of traditional empiricism harbors a "deeper anxiety", namely that concerning thinking *as such*:

It is true that modern philosophy is pervaded by apparent problems about *knowledge in particular*. But I think it is helpful to see those apparent problems as more or less inept expressions of a *deeper anxiety*—an inchoately felt threat that a *way of thinking* we find ourselves falling into leaves minds simply out of touch with the rest of reality, not just questionably capable of getting to know about it (McDowell 1996: p. xiii, emphasis added).

The refusal of this *way of thinking* that motivates the anxiety is possible, according to McDowell, if we better understand the *intentional structure* of thought. It is the

blindness to the structure of intentionality that leads us to the gnoseological imprisonment in the mind detached from the world.⁴

McDowell's starting point for presenting the structure of intentionality is Davidson's critique of the "dualism of total scheme (or language) and uninterpreted content" (Davidson 1984: 187, apud McDowell 1996: 3, footnote 1), which is renamed the "dualism of scheme and Given" (McDowell 1996: 4). According to McDowell, we are *tempted* to adopt this dualism in order to put a brake on our freedom. More precisely, it is about not regarding the freedom of our empirical thinking as absolute (McDowell 1996: 5) but recognizing an "external constraint on our freedom to deploy our empirical concepts" (McDowell 1996: 6). The main advantage of this dualism is presented to us in this exemplary passage:

The idea is that when we have exhausted all the available moves within the space of concepts, all the available moves from one conceptually organized item to another, there is still one more step we can take: namely, pointing to something that is simply received in experience (McDowell 1996: 6).

On the one hand, therefore, we have movements in the "space of concepts"; on the other, "non-conceptual impacts" external to the domain of thought. This is a compelling image at first glance, McDowell tells us, because it reminds us of the old Kantian *dictum* that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant 1998: B 76). We have no intellectual intuition, that is, we cannot produce empirical content by mere thinking. Rather, thinking must have a content that is "simply received in experience", and it is from this *given* content that thought can start its "conceptual movements".

This compelling image, however, must remain a temptation. According to McDowell, it is an untenable image. This becomes clear in a passage that should be quoted in full:

[...] the idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgment is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities (McDowell 1996: 7).

That is, if we are tempted to adopt the dualism because of its idea of a *Given* that would impose *limits* on our thinking, we now see that such a given is *absurd*. The Given, in this dualistic image, is *non-conceptual*, it is a brute impact outside of thought. To impose limits on thought, it should *relate to* the latter. How could something non-conceptual relate to something that is conceptual, if by "relation" we mean only *rational relations*, that is, "movements in the space of concepts"?⁵ This is, in McDowell's rationale, impossible.

⁴ For the same line of reasoning from a phenomenological perspective, see Wild 1940: 77.

⁵ This debate could be broadened to question whether only rational relations could impose limits on thought. My location and duration in space and time could impose limits, for instance. But this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, since we are dealing with McDowell's restriction to rational relations (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for noticing this point).

Now, if thought is characterized in terms of the logical space of reasons, then it is characterized in terms of *knowledge*, which could call into question the primacy of intentionality that we highlighted above. But McDowell himself disallows this reading:

though Sellars here speaks of knowledge in particular, that is just to stress one application of the thought that a normative context is necessary for the idea of being in touch with the world at all, *whether knowledgeableably or not* (McDowell 1996: xiv, emphasis added).

That is, the logical space of reasons encompasses *thinking as such* and knowledge *as a particular case of thinking* (namely, the case of true thinking). To think is to move in the space of “justifications” and the “ability to justify what one says”, and this is only possible through relations such as those of “implication” and “probabilification”, which take place through “potential exercises of conceptual capacities”. In other words: to think is to make logico-rational inferences; now, only that which is conceptual in nature can be part of a logico-rational inference; therefore, a brute impact external to the conceptual cannot cognitively affect thinking. This is how the idea of a non-conceptual Given is understood as a “Myth”: a non-conceptual empirical content can never play the role of a “tribunal” for thought, since it lacks the necessary elements to do so.

But thinking is thinking about the *world*. If we banish, along with the idea of non-conceptual content, the idea that the empirical Given can play any epistemic role, we risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater. According to McDowell, this is exactly what happens with both Davidson and Sellars. Davidson abandons any possibility of empiricism, as long as, according to his conception, “we cannot take experience to be epistemologically significant except by falling into the Myth of the Given” (McDowell 1996: xvii). Sellars, equally, “works at delineating a concept of impressions that is insulated from epistemology” (McDowell 1996: xvii). For both of them, therefore, the space of reason is exclusively the space of *thinking*, and what is left to experience is its causal and non-conceptual impact. In this way, experience is a mere *happening*, and has no place in the space of justifications. This conception is reflected in Davidson’s maxim that summarizes the position called *coherentism*: “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” (Davidson 2001: 310). In this conception, empirical content cannot act as a *limit* for thought, since it cannot act as *reason*. It only has the function of a “causal influence” (McDowell 1996: 14), which results, for McDowell, in a thought that is “frictionless spinning in a void” (McDowell 1996: 11). Sellars, too, restricts empirical content to the role of a mere causal influence. In *Science and Metaphysics*, when dealing with the Kantian concept of the “manifold of external sense”, Sellars stresses that only if this manifold is “mistakenly construed as belonging to the conceptual order” would it make sense to suppose that it literally becomes part of the “resulting intuitive representation”, and that “if it is, as I take it to be, non-conceptual, it can only guide ‘from without’ the unique conceptual activity” (Sellars 1967: 20).

But the idea of non-conceptual Given is unacceptable, McDowell insists. What can stop the “endless oscillation” (McDowell 1996: 9) between coherentism and the Myth of the Given is precisely the characterization of the content of experience as *conceptual* content:

When we trace the ground for an empirical judgment, the last step takes us to experiences. Experiences already have conceptual content, so this last step does not take us outside the space of concepts. But it takes us to something in which sensibility—receptivity—is operative (McDowell 1996: 10).

This passage deserves a careful reading. McDowell argues that the *ground* for an empirical judgment is *experience*, thus already breaking with the Davidsonian maxim that only one belief can justify another belief. This experience, however, is not *beyond the space of concepts*, because if it were, we would be facing the Myth of the Given, that is, we would be facing the idea that “the space of reasons [...] extends more widely than the conceptual sphere” (McDowell 1996: 7). Now, if the empirical judgment is based on experience, and if “to base” means “to move within the logical space of reasons” (which is the space of concepts), then the content of the experience must already be conceptual.

This conception may seem, at first glance, clearly mistaken. As rightly noted by De Gaynesford, many opponents of McDowell hastily conclude that conceptualism *identifies* beliefs and experiences, or their contents, making them indistinguishable (De Gaynesford 2004: 187, footnote 9). This is also the case for some of Husserl’s commentators, especially Hopp.⁶ This objection is not so unfounded, however. By defending a kind of *logical continuity* between thought and experience, McDowell calls into question the possibility of a cure for the anxiety which depends precisely on the correct explanation of how *thought* is always thought about the world *through experience*. Now, if thought is characterized as working in the “space of concepts”, and if experience, to serve as a mediation to the world, must already be conceptual, how can one not end up amalgamating experience in the realm of thought, thus making both indistinct?

Sufficient for McDowell is the basic Kantian notion of synthesis which states that “we cannot represent anything as combined in the object without having combined the thing ourselves beforehand” (Kant 1998: B 130). It is this notion that McDowell has in mind when he claims that “receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the cooperation [namely, the cooperation between receptivity and spontaneity]” (McDowell 1996: 9).

Now, if both receptivity and understanding are instances of the *same* synthesis, how do they differ? According to McDowell, only in the *way* this synthesis is actualized:

in judgment, there would be a free and responsible exercise of conceptual capacities; in ostensible seeing, they [the conceptual capacities] would be involuntarily put into operation under ostensible necessity from an ostensibly seen object (McDowell 2009: 31).

“Judgment” and “ostensible seeing” here correspond, respectively, to “spontaneity” and “receptivity”. The idea is relatively simple: it is not in our freedom to create the content of experience. This, however, does not eliminate the fact that “in experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One’s conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content’s being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter” (McDowell 1996: 10). The world is *a*

⁶ For example, “The main problem with this conception is that it cannot explain why and how experiences behave so differently from beliefs in justification and knowledge” (Hopp 2020: 190).

priori a world of possible experience. There is no need for a non-conceptual impact to ensure our contact with the world. Or, to speak with Davidson, it is not necessary to “get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happenings of which we are aware” (Davidson 1986: 312 apud McDowell 1996: 16).

3. Husserl's Critique of Lotze's Abyss between Thought and World

It is much mentioned Husserl's criticism of Lotze in the *Draft of a Preface to the Second Edition of the Logical Investigations*, from 1913. In this text, however—as well as in §65 of the Sixth Investigation—Husserl only notes the weaknesses of Lotze's theory of knowledge, but he does not develop an entire critique of it. The privileged place where we find this critique is in that chapter that Husserl promises in the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*: “In the next volume we will take the opportunity to critically discuss Lotze's theory of knowledge, especially his chapter on the real and formal signification of the logical” (Husserl 1975: 222, footnote 4). This chapter, as we know, was not included in the next volume. Its content, however, would most likely be based on the Manuscript preserved in the Husserl Archives under the signature K I 59, transcribed by R. Parpan in 1982, entitled “Lotze–Mikrokosmos”, which was probably written around the same time as the *Prolegomena*.⁷ This text shows us quite clearly the specificity of the *phenomenological* theory of knowledge as opposed to what we will call the *standard* theory of knowledge represented by Lotze. We will first introduce Lotze's theory and then analyse Husserl's critique. We will break the latter in two moments: a negative and a positive one.

Lotze's starting point, which is also the first and essential *principle* of both his Logic and his Theory of Knowledge, and which is evaluated by Husserl as *correct*, is the “identity of the objective independent of all thinking” (Ms. K I 59: 5a).⁸ Lotze correctly differentiates, according to Husserl, between *sensing* [*Empfinden*] and *presenting* [*Vorstellen*] as opposed to the thing *apt to be sensed* [*Empfindbar*] and the thing *apt to be presented* [*Vorstellbar*] (Ms. K I 59: 5a).⁹ When something sweet becomes salty, it is not the sweet that becomes salty, but my *sensation of sweet* that switches to the *sensation of salty*. Things are what they are, regardless of the changes they may undergo.

Having made this distinction between *sense* and *sensed*, the question arises as to whether what is sensed (that is, this sensation of red, of sweet, this specific sound, etc.) corresponds to the “sensed itself”, that is, to the red “itself”, to the sweet “itself”, to the “sound itself”. According to Lotze, this question should no longer be asked. In a passage that Husserl does not quote in the manuscript, Lotze states that

Even if these vibrations of external media appeared to differently constituted beings in the form of modes of sensation completely unknown to us, the colors and

⁷ The Manuscript is dated from 1895-1897. For an investigation of the dating of this manuscript, as well as a thorough analysis, both historical and systematic, of the relationship between Husserl and Lotze based on this and other manuscripts, see Varga 2013.

⁸ “von allem Denken unabhängige Identität des Objektiven”.

⁹ Note that it is precisely the *indistinction between the sense and sensed* (namely, between *sense* and *sense-data*) that characterizes the concept of *given* [*datum*] for Henry H. Price—a characterization that served as the source for the concept of Given attacked by Sellars, as Bordini (2012: 23, 32-33) shows us.

tones which we see and hear, once we have once sensed them, would constitute for us a secure treasure of knowledge with intrinsically valid and legally coherent content (Lotze 2010: 980, 982).

That is, even if there is a reality “in itself”, “behind” that which appears, and even if such a reality is completely distinct from the appearances, this in no way modifies the fact that appearances, insofar as we experience them, constitute a privileged domain for knowledge. This is the “starting point” of any theory of knowledge, and this starting point is endorsed by Husserl: the focusing on appearances and their legal connections in disregard from their possible external causes.

Then, however, another problem arises for Lotze, namely: how to think of, *e.g.*, a color when no one sees it? Or a sound that is heard by no one? Can we still say of such a color and sound that they both *exist* and have determinate predicates? Or would we say of them that they *are* nothing? Lotze’s solution involves a *decomposition* of the univocal concept of *being* and the development of a *theory of relations* [*Beziehungen*] consistent with this decomposition. If we ask of a sound that is not heard whether this sound *is* or *is not*, we can already reject the second option (that it is *not*) by the simple fact that *we posit* the sound and ask for its being or non-being. That is, “as long as we hold them in our thought to answer this question, every color and every tone is a determinate content different from others, a something rather than nothing” (Lotze 2010: 982). If we ask ourselves about a sound, this sound is already something. Nevertheless, the *status* of this “something” needs to be clarified—after all, this sound that is heard by no one and that is posited by thought cannot exist in the same way as the tree which I now see in front of me. Hence the need, according to Lotze, for “creating a technical expression [*Kunstausdruck*]” (Lotze 2010: 984) that is more satisfactory than the expression *positing* [*Setzung*], since the etymology of the concept of “positing” suggests that what is *posited* owes its *being* to the act of positing (Lotze 2010: 984). To this end, Lotze chooses the term *reality* [*Wirklichkeit*]. The *way* something is real, however, will vary according to the nature of that something. A sound that is heard is “more real” than a sound heard by no one, for example. This point is crucial: the *way in which something appears to consciousness determines the ‘reality’ of this something*. The ‘something’ heard is *different* on its *quid* from the ‘something’ not heard. In a passage quoted by Husserl in the Manuscript, Lotze summarizes his theory of relations that follows from his conception of reality. Within the universe of what can be said *real*, we have *modalizations*. This is how Lotze differentiates them and presents his theory:

The Thing → is
 The Event → happens
 The Relation [*Verhältnis*] → subsists
 The Proposition → is valid [*gilt*]¹⁰

According to Husserl, the creation of this terminology is understandable insofar as it shows that

we always think of reality as a relation [*Beziehung*], the *how* of which, however, is very different, depending on one of these different forms which it assumes, one of

¹⁰ See Lotze 2010: 984, 986.

which it must assume, and none of which is traceable to or contained in the other” (Ms. K I 59, 6a).¹¹

In short, the unheard sound, insofar as it is a content that we posit in thought, is a *proposition*, and therefore possesses *reality* in the mode of *validity*, not in the mode of *being*. In contrast to this unheard sound, the sound actually heard is an *event* that *happens* in consciousness. These are, therefore, *two different sounds*, both of a different *nature*—that is, different *realities* in the technical sense that Lotze assigns here. The result is that the introduction of the new terminology has an ontological counterpart, and ‘reality’ is now classified according to the *mode of its appearance* to consciousness.

Lotze’s next step is to present his theory of validity, which stems from his famous reinterpretation of Plato’s doctrine of the Ideas. This reinterpretation, as Husserl states, is Lotze’s attempt to armor the Platonic Ideas from their metaphysical hypostatization in some supersensible world. The Ideas are to be considered only as an outflow of their being-thought in the sense of validity (or meaning [*Bedeutung*]) (Ms. K I 59, 7a). Husserl approves Lotze’s theory of validity, and even stresses that he could quote it in full as his own conception (Ms. K I 59, 7a). Let us put here, then, the entire passage:

Plato wanted to teach nothing else than what we have gone through above: the validity of truths as such, apart from whether they are confirmed in some object of the external world, as its mode of being or not; the eternally self-identical meaning of ideas, which are always what they are, regardless of whether there are things that, by participating in them, make them appear in this external world, or whether there are minds [*Geister*] that, by thinking them, give them the reality of a mental event [*Seelenzustand*] (Lotze 2010: 988).

That to which *validity* is attributed (namely, propositions) is valid *eternally*, regardless of whether it *exists* (which befits things) or not. If something *is*, its *propositional content* can be isolated and considered valid. But the proposition can be valid even if something is not, that is, even if *nothing* instantiates it. The reality of the thing is distinct from the reality of the proposition. The former exists; the latter is valid. Let us remember that Lotze’s terminology arises in connection with the problem of the silent sound. Now, insofar as we posit the sound and ask whether it is or is not, we are *presenting it*: “their content, however, as far as we consider it separated from the presenting activity which we direct towards it and does not happen anymore, is not also as the things are, but they are still valid” (Ms. K I 59, 7a).¹² As a presentation, the sound-content is an *event* in consciousness and, therefore, its mode of reality is that of a *happening*. But we can *posit* this sound as a *content of consciousness*: as such, it is no longer a simple event that happens, but it does not become a *thing* that *exists*. Rather, it is now a *propositional content* that has *validity*. Now we can, on the basis of a mere presentation (in abstraction from the reality

¹¹ “wir unter Wirklichkeit immer eine Beziehung denken, deren Wie sich aber sehr verschieden gestaltet, je nach einer dieser verschiedenen Formen, die sie annimmt, deren eine sie annehmen muss, und deren keine auf die andere zurückführbar oder in ihr enthalten ist”.

¹² “ihr Inhalt aber, sofern wir ihn abgesondert betrachten von der vorstellenden Tätigkeit, die wir auf ihn richten, geschieht dann nicht mehr, aber er ist auch nicht so, wie die Dinge sind, sondern er gilt noch”.

of the thing, for instance), establish laws of relations between contents: for example, to say of a sound, even if we do not hear it, that it has, by definition, an intensity, a height, a timbre, etc.; or of a color that it always has a hue, a tone, that it is always accompanied by an extension, etc. All this we can affirm of the *reality* of the propositional contents, even disregarding their *existence*, that is, even without their *singularization by a thing*.

Having distinguished between the reality of an *existing thing* and the reality of a *valid propositional content*, Lotze presents us with a problem which, according to Husserl, should not follow from his premises: the problem of the mind-world abyss. Let us look at the passage in which Lotze formulates it:

the content of manifold perceptions and appearances must conform to general points of view and be treated according to general laws in such a way that our conclusions drawn in advance [*im voraus*] coincide with the progress of those appearances; but that this is so, that there are general truths which are not themselves like things, and which nevertheless govern the behavior of things, this is nevertheless an abyss of marvelousness for the mind that delves into it (Lotze 2010: 998, 1000).

That is, we were used to attribute *existence* to the contents of consciousness (the propositions) for one reason only: because there are general truths that are predicated on these propositions, and which *also* govern relations between *things*. Now, if we can also say of certain relations between *things* that they are true, then we are enticed to affirm of the propositional contents that they *exist* just as things do. But that *the relations between things in the world coincide to the relations between the propositional contents of consciousness* represents, for Lotze, a “marvelous abyss”. This is the so-called “problem of the real signification of the logical”: it is the problem of understanding how the validity of relations that govern the reality of the propositional contents of consciousness correspond to the relations of existence that govern the reality of things. Despite the “abyss” between them (a *categorical* abyss, since the thought is *valid* while the thing *exists*), they “coincide”, since we often observe that the “thing” corresponds to “thought”.

Husserl presents two paths to criticize Lotze’s problem, or so go our reconstruction of his critique. The first is a *negative one*: he refuses the terms in which the problem is posed and dissolves it into a pseudo-problem. The second is, let us say, *positive*: Husserl accepts the problem in Lotze’s own terms and shows that it leads to nonsense (apagogical argumentation, or *reductio ad absurdum*). Let us look at each of these paths.

3.1 The Negative Path of Husserl’s Critique of Lotze

Husserl is straightforward with respect to the Lotzean perplexity:

An abyss of marvelousness? I expose myself to the suspicion of being very unphilosophical when I freely confess that I cannot discover anything of this abyss and can only wonder about one thing: how Lotze, who seemed to be so completely on the right path, could stray from it so far and get himself hopelessly entangled in self-prepared difficulties (Ms. K I 59, 8a).¹³

¹³ “Ein Abgrund von Wunderbarkeit? Ich setze mich dem Verdachte aus, sehr unphilosophisch zu sein, wenn ich freimütig bekenne, dass ich von diesem Abgrund nichts entdecken

According to Husserl, it is the “technical expression” introduced by Lotze that is primarily responsible for leading him to the abyss. The root of the problem lies in the restriction of validity to propositions and being to things. This is a terminological distinction *created* by Lotze. One wonders, however, whether this terminology is in fact adequate, since we can very well state, according to Husserl, that either things, states of affairs, or occurrences *are, exist*, and that there is no need to restrict the concept of *being* to the *thing* only (Ms. K I 59, 8a). The concept of being must be opposed only to *mere thinking*, in the sense of *suppose something as allegedly existing*; hence, there is no inconsistency in saying that Bismarck, the Earth, that $2 \times 2 = 4$ etc. *exist*: i.e., “it is so, it is really, truly so, it is not a mere thought, it is not a false thought” (Ms. K I 59, 8a).¹⁴ Husserl recognizes that the *unity of the word* does not imply the *unity of its meaning*, and that therefore “Bismarck” *is* not in the same way as the proposition “ $2 \times 2 = 4$ ” *is*. For Husserl, *the equivocality of the meaning of the term ‘being’ does not imply the absolute heterogeneity of two modes of relation*. Lotze is led by the equivocality of the concept of being to distinguish heterogeneous *relations*: in the case in question here, the relation of *validity* governing *propositions* and the relation of *existence* governing *things*. Now, since these are two categorially distinct relations, it is inevitable that the question arises for Lotze as to how they *coincide*. If, however, as Husserl suggests, we accept as unproblematic the assertion that both propositions and things *exist*, and that the difference between their “mode of being” is not in the relation that governs them (*validity* versus *being*), but in the *subject matter*, that is, in the *content* of what we assert to exist, then the problem disappears. In Husserl’s words:

In any case, we could only give our approval to this speech, which is not inaccessible to misinterpretation, if it meant, contrary to the wording, that the sense of the “relation” here, as in all cases, is *only one* and that *the differences lay only in the asserted matter* (Ms K I 59, 9a, emphasis added).¹⁵

In sum, being as a *relation* has always the same meaning: both Bismarck and mathematical numbers *exist*, and there is no need for “creating a new technical expression” to differentiate their modes of being. However, Bismarck obviously *is* not just as numbers *are*. This difference, however, belongs to the *matter*, which is the *asserted content in judgments*: in one case, a thing in the world (a person, Bismarck); in the other, an ideality (a number). Husserl is, once again, straight to the point: “Being as such is here *everywhere the same*, it is being as true; only *that which is*, is different” (Ms K I 59, 9a, emphasis added).¹⁶

In short: the equivocality of the term “being” leads Lotze to the heterogeneity in the modes of reality, and this leads him to distinguish categorially incompatible

und mich nur über das eine verwundern kann, wie Lotze, der so ganz auf richtigem Wege schien, von ihm so weit abirren und sich in selbst bereitete Schwierigkeiten rettungslos verwickeln konnte”.

¹⁴“es ist so, ist wirklich, wahrhaft so, es ist nicht blosser Gedanke, es ist kein falscher Gedanke”.

¹⁵ “Jedenfalls könnten wir dieser, Missdeutungen nicht unzugänglichen Rede unsere Zustimmung nur geben, wenn sie, dem Wortlaut entgegen, meinte, dass der Sinn der “Beziehung” hier wie in allen Fällen *nur einer sei* und dass die *Unterschiede bloss in der bejahten Materie lägen*”.

¹⁶ “Das Sein als solches ist hier *überall dasselbe*, es ist wahrhaft-sein; nur *das, was ist*, ist verschieden”.

relations. It is this “abstract” distinction of Lotze that makes him marvel at the fact that two relations categorially separated by an “abyss” (namely, the *relation of validity* proper to propositional contents and the *relation of being* proper to things) often end up “agreeing” with each other. If, however, we follow Husserl and regard this categorial distinction as illegitimate and rescue the possibility of speaking of things, events, occurrences, and propositions as *existing*, although in a distinct way (this distinction concerning the *matter*), then the “wonderful abyss” shows itself to be a pure “Missverständnis”, and Lotze’s problem, an upside-down problem (Ms K I 59, 9a).

3.2 The Positive Path

“What should we be surprised about?” (Ms. K I 59, 9a).¹⁷ This is how Husserl begins to develop what we call here the “positive path” of disarming Lotze’s problem. In this path, it is no longer a question of refusing the terms in which the problem is posed, but of accepting them and extracting their consequences. If these consequences contradict the premises, there is nothing to marvel at.

The problem concerns the harmony between the course of thought and the course of the world, formulated by Lotze as follows: “that our conclusions drawn in advance [*im voraus*] coincide with the progress of those appearances” (Lotze 2010: 1000, emphasis added). Husserl stresses that what is here at issue is a *correct* inference, for “inferences often enough fail to correspond with experience” (Ms. K I 59, 9a),¹⁸ and this would certainly have caused Lotze no wonder. Lotze therefore starts from correct inferences and correct judgments about things and end up wondering about their agreement. A correct judgment is, by definition, one in which from the truth of the premises necessarily follows the truth of the conclusion. Now, whether the true judgment in question here is about real things, events, non-real things, numbers, extension of concepts—all this *does not concern* the definition of “correct inference”: “It is evident that what is correctly deduced from [...] truths is also true” (Ms. K I 59, 10a).¹⁹ What distinguishes these judgments, according to Husserl, is the *subject matter*, i.e., *the asserted-content*. If we judge about *real things* and carry out a correct inference, how then could the world contradict the thought? In other words, Lotze has at his disposal a correct judgment (that in which if the premise is true, the conclusion is necessarily true) about real things, and then marvels at how things can agree with what we inferred *im voraus*. Not agreeing would go against the definition of correct inference, or deductive reasoning. If we accept the standard definition of deductive reasoning (and Lotze accepts it) and carry out a correct valid inference about real things, then the thing will be just as we inferred. Given the terms with which Lotze puts the problem, to worry about the possibility that the course of the world contradicts the inferences of thought “is identical with the consideration that the truth once turns out to be false” (Ms. K I 59, 10a),²⁰ for we would be contradicting the logical principle of correct inference. If we start from things as premises and make correct judgments about them, it is evident that things will follow as we judge them. If

¹⁷ “Worüber sollen wir uns denn verwundern?”.

¹⁸ “Denn Folgerungen verfehlen oft genug die Übereinstimmung mit der Erfahrung”.

¹⁹ “Es ist evident, dass was aus [...] Wahrheiten richtig erschlossen ist, auch wahr ist”.

²⁰ “ist identisch mit der Betrachtung, es möchte das Wahre sich einmal als falsch herausstellen”.

they do not, it would be as if the concept of “correct judgment” suddenly changes its meaning.

Seen from this side, Lotze's concern does indeed sound absurd. But there is a position with respect to logic and logical principles that, in effect, allows skepticism with respect to this “agreement” between thought and thing. Such a position is what Husserl calls *subjectivism*. It is not a matter of refusing the definition of a correct judgment, but of refusing the possibility of making judgments *about things*. This is how the subjectivist sees the problem:

If, on the one hand, we accept things, events, worlds as existing in themselves, and on the other hand, we allow everything logical to be absorbed in the subjective activities of thought [...], this abyss of marvelousness opens up: here the things, there our thinking. How do both come together, how to explain the miracle of their harmony? (Ms. K I 59, 10a).²¹

That is, the logical laws would be mere *subjective laws of thinking*, and the world with its things and events would be “opposed” to them, would be “things in themselves”. In this scenario, we make a judgment and ask ourselves how a world in itself, to which the logical laws do not apply, can nevertheless agree with judgment.

In sum: *the problem of the abyss arises due to a metaphysical presupposition of a world existing “in itself” opposed to “consciousness”—the logical laws being exclusive patrimony of the latter only. This way, the transcendence of the thing is inaccessible, and we have access to thought only (and, therefore, to logical laws). These two points together form what Husserl calls “subjectivism”.*

According to Husserl, this conception is self-contradictory. If we assume subjectivism, nothing remains even from the “being of things”, and it would not even be possible to talk about the harmony between thinking and being (Ms. K I 59: 10a). This objection is better understood if we turn to the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*. There, Husserl defines *world* as “the entire objectual unity which corresponds to the ideal system of all factual truth and is inseparable from it” (Husserl 1975: 128). To reduce truth to the merely subjective and admit, nevertheless, a “world in itself”, is to contradict the concept of object, which is nothing but the correlate of truth. If the object is the correlate of truth, and if truth is subjective, then it is not possible to speak of a “world in itself”, but only of a “world for me”, a “subjective” world. The subjectivist premise, therefore, does not offer a consistent conception of a “world in itself”; therefore, if we assume it, nothing remains of the being of things, but only of being “for me”. The opposition between “thought” and “world” is thus impossible, or so would state the consistent subjectivism.

For the non-subjectivist, Lotze's abyss is not an abyss at all. Truth is not subjectively dissolved, that is, it is not the exclusive patrimony of “thought” detached from things. The reduction of logical truth to the domain of the subjective is, according to Husserl, unjustified. For the non-subjectivist point of view,

Truth is not subjective and the existence of the thing objective; truths and existing things are not heterogeneous entities incommensurable with each other; they belong

²¹ “einerseits Dinge, Ereignisse, Welten als an sich existierend annimmt, und auf der anderen Seite doch alles Logische in den subjektiven Denktätigkeiten aufgehen lässt, für den öffnet sich [...] dieser Abgrund von Wunderbarkeit: Hier die Dinge, dort unser Denken. Wie kommen beide zusammen, wie das Wunder ihrer Harmonie erklären?”

together and agree, as truth and true things, the one as objective as the other, and both correlative, that is, inseparably related to each other (Ms. K I 59: 10a).²²

The thing is a constituent of a state of affairs (Lotze's "propositions" or "truths"). There is, according to this conception, no "enigma" in the "harmony" between thought and world, since the world is simply, by definition, the correlate of thought—namely, the set of objects corresponding to factual truths.

4. Husserl, McDowell, and the Gap between Mind and World

In one of the most quoted passages from *Mind and World*, McDowell explains his conceptualist position as follows:

In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is that *things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment: it becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content (McDowell 1996: 26).

Further on, he continues: "there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case" (McDowell 1996: 27). Considering Husserl's critical reading of Lotze, the similarity between Husserl and McDowell is striking. Just like Husserl, McDowell admits as unproblematic the possibility of making judgments about *things*. Now, if one judges about things, and if one judges correctly, then what one judges *will be* as the thing is. Therefore, there is no "ontological gap" between judgments and things, thought and world. There would only be such a "gap" if one accepts what Husserl calls "subjectivism" and what McDowell calls "coherentism": the idea that thought only deals with thought, and that logical laws concern only the laws of thought. If one follows both Husserl and McDowell in considering the judgment about things as unproblematic, there is no abyss or gap. It is enough that the judgment is carried out correctly so that the "world" does not contradict the "thought".

It could be argued that Lotzean anxiety between thought and reality and McDowell's anxiety between mind and world are similar in many aspects, but different in some crucial ones. For example, one could raise the very pertinent rebuttal that McDowell's anxiety is between *perceptual experience* and *thought*, which is a kind of *deeper* anxiety if compared to Lotzean preoccupation with the relation between *thought* and *reality*. But if we look closer to McDowell's text, we see that the focus on perception is only *a way to illustrate that very same general abyss* stated by Lotze. See, for example, the following passage from *Mind and World*:

[...] the picture [we are opposing to] is that the conceptual realm does have an outside, which is populated by particular objects. Thought makes contact with objects, from its location within the conceptual realm, *by exploiting relations such as*

²² "Die Wahrheit ist nicht subjektiv und die Existenz des Dinges objektiv; Wahrheiten und dingliche Existenzen sind nicht heterogene, miteinander incommensurable Entitäten; sie gehören zusammen und stimmen zusammen, wie Wahrheit und wahre Sache, das Eine so objektiv wie das andere, und beide korrelativ, also untrennbar aufeinander bezogen".

perception, which are conceived as penetrating the outer boundary of the conceptual (McDowell 1996: 105, my emphasis).

In a nutshell: it is the non-conceptualist premise that requires one to account for the mind-world relation, for example by exploiting a theory of perception. McDowell's conceptualism, on the other hand, *does not need a theory of perception*. It shows, on the contrary, the *redundancy of such a theory*, since the conceptual is unbounded. If the conceptual is unbounded, it does not have an "outside", and the result is the non-existence of two poles that need to be related. This is why we were able to compare both kind of anxieties: the Lotzean one regarding the relation between *thought* and *reality*, and the McDowellian one regarding *thought* and *perceptual experience*. For McDowell, the one who must explain how perception deals with thought is the *non-conceptualist*; the conceptualist sees as unproblematic the relation between thought and reality, and if perception enters the scene is only to show that this (perception) is one of the possible relations between mind and world which turns out to be problematic if we do not accept the conceptual as unbounded. Therefore, the Lotzean abyss between thought and reality is of the same *type* as the abyss that McDowell refers to, that is, the Davidsonian coherentist abyss that separates perceptual experience from thought.

Now, McDowell does not draw a clear content/object distinction, as Husserl does. For Husserl, the referent of an act is the intentional object, which is distinct from both its real content and from its ideal content. For Husserl they are objectively and necessarily related, but they are not the same thing, as McDowell's premises imply. To sum up: for McDowell, the problem boils down to a general gap between mind and world which is dissolved because the "conceptual is unbounded". For Husserl, in turn, the analysis of the essence of perception does not state a logical continuity between the contents of mind and world (as in McDowell), but neither does it open any gap (as in Lotze). Perception, unlike mere thought, is the originary givenness of a thing. And just as it is nonsense to suppose that a problematic "gap" could open between a thing and a truth about it, so it's absurd to suppose that a thing could be radically different from how it presents itself as being in the kind of act which, by definition, is its self-manifestation.

This already points towards the main difference between Husserl and McDowell: namely, the one with respect to what justifies the conceptualist position and what motivates phenomenological analysis. The solution to the problem of transcendence, in McDowell, is offered in terms of the characterization of the content of experience as conceptual content and the rejection of both coherentism and the Myth of the Given. According to McDowell, if we offer an answer to the problem of transcendence by admitting reason-given relations as holding only within the space of concepts, then we fall prey to coherentism ("subjectivism", in Husserl's *parlance*); and if we assume a non-conceptual Given, we fall inescapably into the Myth of the Given. In both cases, the "abyss", or "gap", returns. The only way to close it is to understand the content of experience as conceptual content. Now, in the light of Husserl's phenomenological clarification of the acts of knowledge, McDowell's conceptualism would still fall prey to a *metaphysical presupposition*, namely that of the absolute opposition between consciousness (or mind) and world, which is denounced by Husserl as *ab initio* self-contradictory in his reading of Lotze. Coherentism and the Myth of the Given would not even be valid alternatives for Husserl. This way, even when McDowell states the "unboundedness of the conceptual" and calls the opposition between mind and world

not a *problem*, but an *anxiety*, there are still *unclear presuppositions* parasitizing his conception. All in all, despite the apparent proximities between McDowellian conceptualism and Husserl's non-subjectivism, conceptualism would still fail to follow Husserl's master thought: the principle of the radical freedom from presuppositions in investigations concerning theory of knowledge²³ and the phenomenological idea of the *a priori* correlation between consciousness and world.²⁴

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²³ See Husserl 1984: 24 ff.

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