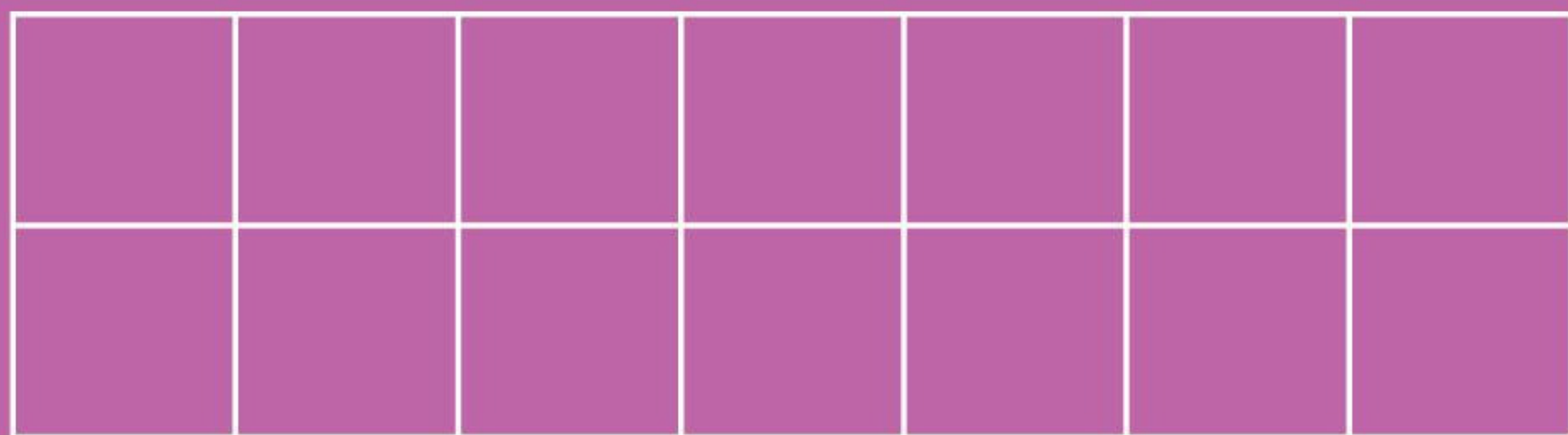
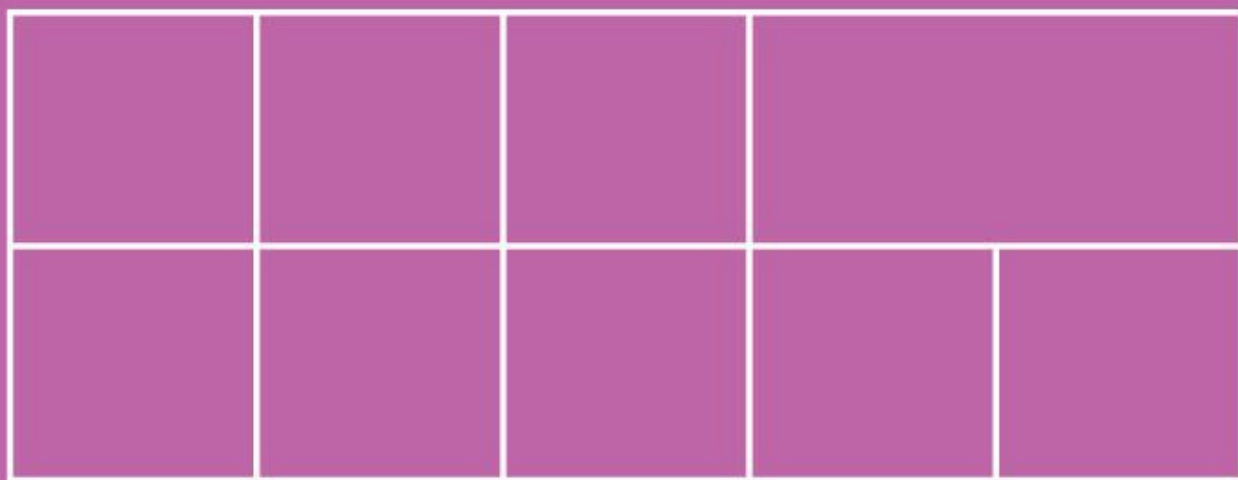


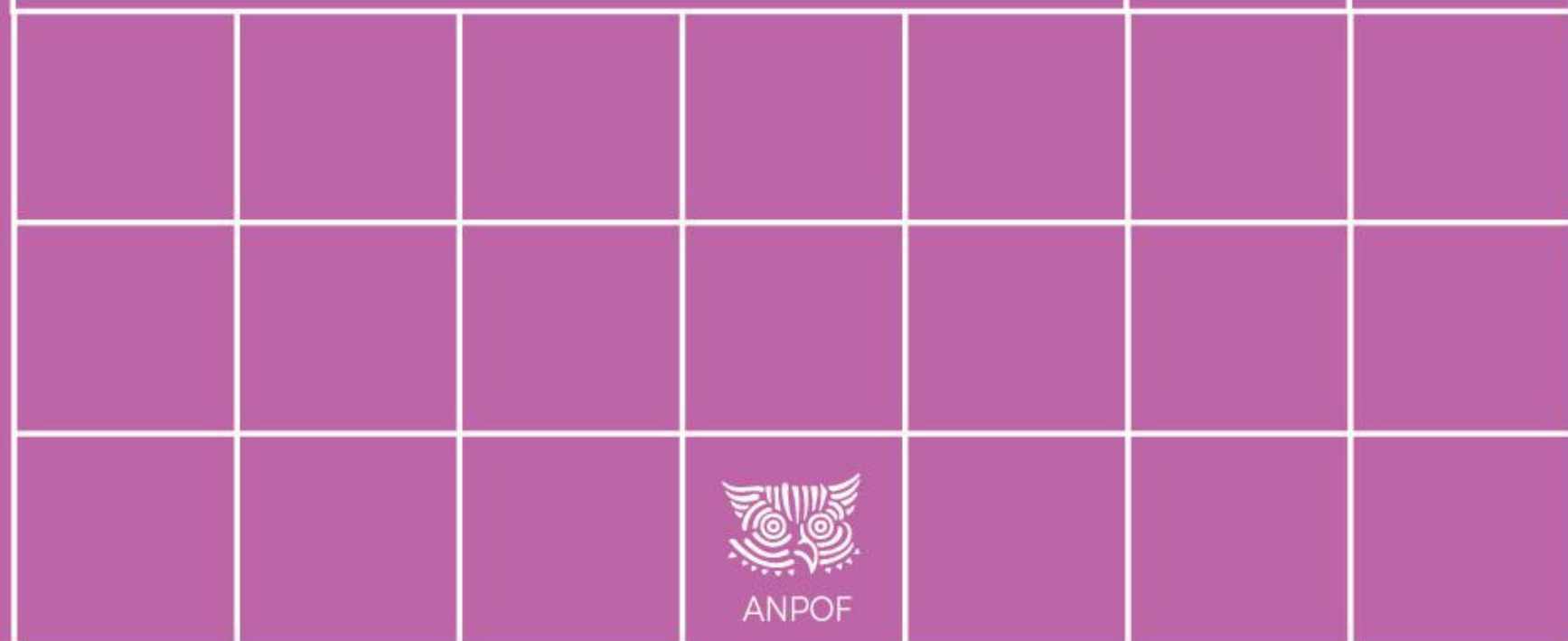
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Husserlian realism and transcendental idealism*

Nathalie Barbosa de La Cadena
(UFJF)

The aim of this investigation is to discuss the concept of realism and idealism applied to Husserlian phenomenology, distinguishing the ontological and the epistemological dimensions. Therefore, I propose questions that will help to mark this distinction. The answers will be given with reference to Husserl's texts and commentators.

In the ontological investigations, there are several possible questions, but I will focus on this: 'Is there a mind-independent world?'. On the epistemological investigation, among various questions, I propose two: 'who knows?' and 'what is the limit of knowledge?'. In this study, I will only answer the first question and discuss its relation to the ontological investigation. The second question about the limit of knowledge will be answered in another article.

The answer proposed to the first question, about the independence of the world, will be in favor of a realistic interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology. The answer to the second question, about the subject of knowledge, will be in favor of transcendental idealism.

The conclusion will be that those concepts are complementary and a broad view of Husserl's phenomenology can show that those concepts permeate all his work; they are integrated in various dimensions and necessary to the full comprehension of phenomenology.

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1. REALISM AND IDEALISM DEFINITIONS

The terms 'realism' and 'idealism' can be used with different meanings in different areas of philosophy. Ilkka Niiniluoto presents a few possibilities:

Ontological: Which entities are real? Is there a mind-independent world?

Semantical: Is truth an objective language-world relation?

Epistemological: Is knowledge about the world possible?

Axiological: Is truth one of the aims of enquiry?

Methodological: What are the best methods for pursuing knowledge?

Ethical: Do moral values exist in reality? (2004, p. 1)

These are a few questions that, depending on the answers, will classify the philosophical theory will be classified as realistic or idealistic. In this investigation, I will present only the ontological and the epistemological dimensions. In the ontological investigation, to the question 'Is there a mind-independent world?' there are two possible answers. First, the one that considers the existence of the world independent of the subject. This position will represent ontological realism; second, the one that considers the world as dependent of subjectivity, this position will represent ontological idealism.

In the epistemological dimension, there are several possible questions. Niiniluoto proposes the question 'Is Knowledge about the world possible?'. The answer can be negative or positive. In this case, the question follows: 'who knows?', in other words, 'where does knowledge takes place?'. The answer intends to define who this subject of knowledge is. Would she be active or passive in the process of knowledge? Does she comprehend and constitute reality or only operate on and associate data? Is her activity of synthesis passive or active?

2. ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION, IS THERE A MIND-INDEPENDENT WORLD?

Before this question, there are two possible answers, ontological realism or ontological idealism. In the first, the philosophical system makes

the assumption that the world, its objects, substances, relations, states and essences, this means, reality has its own independent existence. In the second one, the philosophical system makes the assumption that reality is somehow created by subjectivity, and its functioning depends on subjects.

Husserl clearly defends ontological realism. In *Cartesian Meditations*, he asserts:

Just as the reduced Ego is not a piece of the world, so conversely, neither the world nor any worldly Object is a piece of my Ego, to be found in my conscious life as a really inherent part of it, as a complex of data of sensation or a complex of acts. (Hua I/65)

It is evident from the passage above that statement is in favor of the independence of the world in relation to subjectivity. However, consciousness is responsible for giving sense and constituting essences; the transcendental ego does not create or regulate the world. The objects, substances, relations and essences, their order, relations and functioning, do not belong to subjectivity. The world is transcendent, independent. Still, in *Cartesian Meditations*, we can read:

I *experience* the world (including others) – and, according to its experiential sense, *not* as (so to speak) my *private* synthetic formation but as other than mine alone [*mir fremde*], as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone. (Hua I/123)

In *Ideas I*, Husserl confirms his positions in favor of ontological realism:

If I do that, as I can with complete freedom, then I am *not negating* this “world” as though I were a sophist; I am *not doubting its factual being* as though I were a skeptic; rather I am exercising the “phenomenological” *epoché* which also *completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being*. (Hua III/56)

Husserl, in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, insists:

There can be no stronger realism than this, if by this world nothing more is meant than: “I am certain of being a human being

who lives in this world, etc., and I doubt it not in the least.” But the great problem is precisely to understand what is here so “obvious”. (Hua VI/190-91)

In *Ideas III*, he declares:

That the world exists, that is given an existing universe in uninterrupted experience which is constantly fusing into universal concordance, is entirely beyond doubt. But it is quite another matter to understand this indubitability which sustains life and positive science and to clarify the ground of its legitimacy. (Hua V/153-54)

The assumption of the world as independent of subjectivity is not naive. Husserl admits the doubt, but at the same time presumes the realism as grounding of phenomenology, after all

The world is dubitable not in the sense that rational motives are present to be taken into consideration over against the tremendous force of harmonious experiences, but rather in the sense that a doubt is conceivable because, of essential necessity, the possibility of the non-being of the world is never excluded. (Hua III/87)

In the same sense, Karl Ameriks claims that “*things are never completely verified, they do not become immanent, and so their nonexistence remains logically possible*” (1977, p. 505). The possibility of doubting the existence of an independent world does not imply its negation, nor the opposite position, that the world depends on subjectivity.

Roman Ingarden, in *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, asserts

The controversy between realists and idealists concerning the existence of the real world is not about the question whether the real world, the material world in particular, exists in general (even Berkeley would protest energetically if somebody told him that he affirmed the non-existence of the material world), but about the mode of the world’s existence and what its existential relation is to acts of consciousness in which objects belonging to this world are cognized. (1975, p. 5)

Pedro Alves (2016, p. 149) asks: “Does this consists in, contradictorily, consider consciousness a condition of existence of the real world? Not at all. The real world is independent of consciousness.”

Dan Zahavi (2001, p. 14) also confirms:

Remaining true to his phenomenological point of departure, Husserl does not deny the actual existence of the world. The kind of idealistic thesis he wants to uphold does not consist in the claim that the transcendence of the world is *dissolved* in *psychic* immanence (3/355 [366]), nor does he deny that the world exists independently from human cognition. On the contrary, the task of transcendental idealism (or phenomenology) consists in *elucidating* mundane transcendence through a systematic disclosure of constituting intentionality (1/34).

Assuming the premise of an independent world is grounding to Husserl’s philosophical proposal, This premise guarantees knowledge, its sharing, and intersubjectivity. About knowledge, Husserl expresses in *Logical Investigations*, First Investigation, §11,

[...] what we assert in the judgment involves nothing subjective. My act of judging is a transient experience: it arises and passes away. But what my assertion asserts, the content *that the three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point*, neither arises nor passes away. It is an identity in the strict sense, one and the same geometrical truth. (Hua XIX/1, 49)

Husserl distinguishes the subjective dimension, the act of judging, from the objective dimension, the content of the act which in *Ideas I* will gain the definitive nomenclature, *noese* and *noema*. Knowledge is only possible because it is about an object independent from subjectivity which allows constant revisiting, bracketing, critical attitude and sharing.

In this sense, Husserl, in *First Philosophy*, second volume, *Theory of phenomenological reduction*, asserts “Here we have the only transcendence that is genuinely worthy of the name – and everything else that is still called transcendence, such as the objective world, rests on the transcendence of foreign subjectivity.” (Hua VIII, 495 n.2) There is a first transcendence, subjective, and a genuine transcendence, intersubjective, that grants the improvement of knowledge about the world and leads us beyond the per-

sonal sphere. For example, as a dilettante, looking at the photos from the Hubble telescope, I am touched by their immense beauty, but I cannot go much further. An astrophysicist will look to the pictures and identify galaxies, clusters of stars, nebulas, birth and death of stars, black holes, hot and cold zones and more. It is the same picture, absolutely independent of our will, just as the sky above our heads, but knowledge will allow the astrophysicist to see, judge and share what I cannot see, or even imagine.

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION, WHO KNOWS?

For Husserl, the subject of knowledge is the transcendental ego, the intentional consciousness. It is in the *kogito* where the evidence of internal and external experiences, the world and its objects, real, formal and ideal, takes place. However, it is not only a matter of where knowledge takes place, but who knows, in other words, who leads the process of knowledge?

Before the questions presented at the beginning of this article, ‘would the subject of knowledge be passive or active?’, ‘would she comprehend and constitute reality or operate and associate data?’, ‘is her activity of syntheses merely passive or also active?’, the answers to these questions would be in favor of transcendental idealism. Husserl’s transcendental idealism basically claims the primacy of intentional consciousness activity over external sensory perception in the process of cognition. The subject leads the process of knowledge, chooses its content and applies the phenomenological reduction to reach its essence. In this sense, Pedro Alves asserts “*the meaning of “idealism” is referred to the field and method of transcendental experience, only on this connection reaches its proper meaning*” (2016, p. 140). The existence of the objects does not depend on consciousness, the sense of the objects is evidenced by consciousness, but not created by it.

This primacy of intentional consciousness activity can be found in different moments of Husserl’s work. I will present only four of them: when he analyses the passive and active syntheses in *Lectures of Transcendental Logic*, when he presents the transcendental reduction in *Ideas I*, when he proposes the theory of meaning in *Lectures* and *Ideas*, and when he offers an explanation about intersubjectivity as transcendental intersubjectivity in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, Zweiter Teil*.

In *Lectures on Transcendental Logic – Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Husserl asserts “an object – an object as object – is only first there for the active ego.” And “Passivity is what is in itself first because all activity essentially presupposes a foundation of passivity as well as an objectlike formation that is already pre-constituted in it.” (Hua XXXI/3). The idea is that the experience is primarily given on the passive level of consciousness, as a background, the awareness of something in the obscurity of passivity. Then, the affection turn toward the being and its objectivity emerges; it is constituted within passivity as identical. This identity as an object can lead to a feeling, pleasurable or unpleasurable, agreeable or disagreeable. At this point there are two levels of consciousness of the object, a layer of consciousness of intentionality of the object as an object, and a novel layer of consciousness of intentionality of feeling. Thus, the “object is constituted in and through the objectivating that underlies the intentionality of feeling” (Hua XXXI/6). From then on consciousness assumes an active attitude, it can analyze the intentionality of the object as object, relating it to its foundation, and simultaneously objectivate a sense intertwined with higher objectivations, such as values, like work of art, economic goods and so forth; or it can analyze the intentionality of feeling that arises from the experience of the object relating it to an active feeling, that is “a new active objectivation that directs precisely the thematic gaze toward the “pleasurable” and identifies it and determines it as object.” (Hua XXXI/8) The path followed is presentation – feeling – will. And will is not a mere desire; “it belongs in the more general sphere of pure activity.” (Hua XXXI/10) “The strict and genuine concept of will, however, designates only a special mode of activity which spreads over all other regions of consciousness insofar as all activity ca occur in the forma of voluntary activity.” (Hua XXXI/10)

In transcendental reduction, the consciousness recognizes itself as active in the process of knowledge, comprehends itself as part of the world and, at the same time, as above it, since it is where the world evidences takes place. The transcendental ego, phenomenological residuum of the *epoché*, does not create the world or legislate over it, only evidences its essences (Hua III/322-323). Husserl explains:

consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion. It therefore remains as the “phenomenological residuum,” as a region of

being which is of essential necessity quite unique and which can indeed become the field of a science of a novel kind: phenomenology. The “phenomenological” *epoché* will deserve its name only by means of this insight; the fully conscious effecting of that *epoché* will prove itself to be the operation necessary to *make “pure” consciousness, and subsequently the whole phenomenological region, accessible to us.* (Hua III/59)

The consciousness that emerges from *epoché* is not passive, its job is not only to operate on or associate data, but to constitute the world, and it is most important that this qualified consciousness is aware of its position and role in the process of knowledge.

The role of language in the process of knowledge also confirms the idea of primacy of intentional consciousness activity. Language describes reality, its objects and relations, essences and states of affairs. It is an instrument of constitution of the world and evidenciation of essences, and all this takes place in the transcendental consciousness. It is not a mere operation of the mind naming the objects. Language makes it possible to comprehend the world, its essences and states. It helps to unveil them. Likewise the subject of knowledge is capable of experiencing, knowledge, constitution and description of empiric and eidetic reality through language. And through language the subject can share all this with other egos.

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl considers the meaning as dependent on the consciousness act, the act of meaning (Hua XIX/1, 102-108). After the discovery of the *epoché*, in *Lectures on the theory of meaning*, Husserl applies the separation between act of consciousness (phenological) and the content of the act of consciousness (phenomenological) to the theory of meaning and realizes that the meaning does not rely on the act, but on the content of the act of consciousness (Hua XXVI/26-28). In *Ideas I*, Husserl makes one more distinction, using the definitive terminology, *noese* and *noema*. He distinguishes two dimensions of the *noema*, objective insights and phenomenological insights (Hua III/180). It is important to differentiate that, in the reduced perception, we find the perceived as perceived which includes eidetic moments in themselves as this perception-*noema*. It is not only the perception of a material thing, plant or tree; it includes “*the sense of this perception, something belonging necessarily to its essence*” (Hua III/184). At the moment of perception, the

subject has the empirical intuition of a particular object, and also, at the same time, the intuition of its essence. Therefore, we have to distinguish between the sound awareness, particular dimension of the noema given by the empirical intuition, from the awareness of the meaning, the eidetic dimension of the noema given by the eidetic intuition. Meaning, then, wins a new definition. It is not limited by what we want to say, the noetic dimension. Meaning is an ideal unity given by the eidetic intuition, the intentional consciousness apprehension of the eidetic dimension of the noema. Thus, the eidetic dimension of the noema is constituted by transcendental consciousness using language as an instrument.

While reinforcing transcendental idealism, there is the phenomenological comprehension of intersubjectivity. Husserl's proposal is that intersubjectivity has to be understood as transcendental intersubjectivity. In other words, the world is constituted in the transcendental dimension and the relation between subjects contributes to this process of constitution of the world and its objects, real, formal and ideal. Husserl admits a primordial transcendence, subjective, and a genuine transcendence, intersubjective (Hua I/136, XIV/344, XIV/442). The experience of intersubjective transcendence is possible only through the experience of subjective transcendence (Hua XIII/347, XVII/248 [241]). However, Husserl considers that only through the experience of others are we led beyond our own private and subjective sphere, and reach the true intersubjective transcendence of the world. (Hua XIV/442). See the example given at the end of item 3.

The self and the others are surrounded by this common world, we live and share the same world and our knowledge about this world is improved collectively. All these processes of disclosure, description and sharing the world and its objects are only possible because they occur in the transcendental sphere. It is the intentional consciousness, together with the other intentional consciences in intense collaboration, that unveils the world, evidence its essences, gives sense and constitute them intersubjectively.

4. CONCLUSION

A realistic reading of Husserl may be controversial, but I have tried to demonstrate that it is perfectly compatible with his phenomenology.

From the ontological point of view, I believe that Husserl stands very clearly in the sense of affirming the world as independent of subjectivity. From the epistemological point of view, as far as the subject of knowledge is concerned, Husserl's position about the transcendental ego as the place of knowledge is evident. Intentional consciousness is active and leads the whole process of the constitution of the world and its objects, as well as the evidenciation of essences. Ontological realism and transcendental idealism are complementary. The subject of knowledge is inserted in the world and has the task of unveiling it. Such a work is only possible because the world is independent of subjectivity and at the same time shared by other subjectivities that constitute it collectively.

In this sense, Dan Zahavi (2008, p. 365), in *Internalism, externalism and transcendental idealism*, argues that Husserl is a transcendental idealist and can not be considered an ontological idealist. The concepts adopted are the concepts of Analytic Philosophy, internalism and externalism. Internalism occurs when beliefs and experiences are fully constituted by the subject's mind and can be divided into internalism of content when content is mind dependent, or internalism of place when the mind is the place for the disclosure of content. Externalism can also be divided into externalism of content when content is not a creation of the mind, and radical externalism that rejects the two forms of internalism, of content and of place.

Matching the term 'internalism of content' with 'epistemological idealism'; the term 'internalism of place' to 'transcendental idealism'; and 'externalism of content' to 'epistemological realism', without correspondence to 'radical externalism', we have that, according to Zahavi, Husserl is a transcendental idealist and cannot be considered an ontological idealist.

Husserl assumes the existence of a mind-independent world as a principle, presents the phenomenological method that intends to describe the essences of the intuited objects, and finally, the whole cognitive and constitution process of the world, objects and essences that occur in the transcendental consciousness.

As evidenced in the present investigation, the ontological and epistemological spheres are different, and the premises adopted by Husserl are clear, ontological realism and transcendental idealism, respectively. I conclude that there is no incompatibility in considering Husserl an onto-

logical realist and a transcendental idealist, in fact, these are fundamental for the understanding of Husserlian phenomenology.

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