

SURPLUS BEYOND THE SUBJECT: TRUTH IN ADORNO'S CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL AND HEIDEGGER

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Theodor Adorno's idea of truth derives in part from his critique of Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology. This essay examines three passages from Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie and Negative Dialektik in which Adorno appears intent on wresting a viable conception of propositional truth from Husserl's account of categorial intuition and Heidegger's conception of Being. While agreeing with some of Adorno's criticisms, I argue that he does not give an adequate account of how predication contributes to cognition. Consequently, he fails to offer the viable conception of propositional truth required for both his critique of Heidegger and his broader idea of truth.

L'idée adornienne de la vérité dérive en partie de sa critique de la phénoménologie husserlienne et de l'ontologie heideggérienne. Cet essai examine trois passages de Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie et Negative Dialektik où Adorno paraît vouloir tirer une conception viable de la vérité propositionnelle de l'explication de l'intuition catégoriale de Husserl et de la conception de l'Être d'Heidegger. Quoiqu'en accord avec certaines des critiques qu'avance Adorno, je maintiens qu'il néglige la manière dont la prédication contribue à la cognition. Par conséquent, sa conception de la vérité propositionnelle n'est pas viable étant donné sa propre critique d'Heidegger ainsi que son idée générale de la vérité.

The surplus beyond the subject...and the truth-moment in what is thing-like are extremes that touch in the idea of truth.
—Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Theodor Adorno's idea of truth is an intricate force field (*Kraftfeld*) where dialectical polarities intersect: polarities between the universal and the individual, the conceptual and the nonconceptual, the critical and the utopian. Perhaps the most prominent dialectical tension in Adorno's idea of truth—or at least the one most frequently commented on—lies in the mediation between subject and object.¹ Although Adorno's understanding of subject/object mediation stems primarily from his complex reworking of both Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel, this mediation is implicitly predicated upon his critique of Edmund Husserl's conception of categorial intuition. For Adorno, Husserl's account of categorial intuition in *Logical Investigations* not only demonstrates the irresolvable antinomies in Husserlian phenomenology but also paves the way for Martin Heidegger's flawed conception of Being. At the same time, Adorno's own comprehensive idea of truth—as evinced in the epigraph above—carries the imprint of this critique, as he tries to provide an immanently critical alternative to the accounts of truth in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*.²

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association for Adorno Studies at the Université de Montréal in 2016. I thank Iain Macdonald for the invitation to present it and the conference participants for their lively and constructive conversations. I also acknowledge with gratitude the instructive comments received from two anonymous referees for this journal.

¹ See, for example, the use of Adorno's essay "Subject-Object" to explicate his "atonal philosophy" in Martin Jay, *Adorno* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984), 56–81, and Brian O'Connor's focus on "the priority of the object" and "the role of subjectivity" when he discusses Adorno's epistemology in *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 45–98. Jürgen Habermas, of course, thinks that Adorno's alleged inability to break with "the modern philosophy of the subject" and with a "philosophy of consciousness" is a fundamental failure, one Habermas aims to correct by proposing a philosophy of communicative action. See especially Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, (tr.) T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 366–99. For a brief and helpful discussion of Habermas's critique of Adorno, see O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic*, 165–70.

² For an illuminating overview of Adorno's decades-long engagement with Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology prior to *Negative Dialectics*, see Chapter 2 ("Ontology and Phenomenology") in Peter Gordon, *Adorno*

In this paper I examine three passages where Adorno appears intent on wresting a viable conception of propositional truth from Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology. The first passage is a discussion of Husserl's categorial intuition from Chapter 4 of Adorno's book on Husserl, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*.³ The second and third passages are discussions of the relation between Adorno's own negative dialectics and Heideggerian ontology, drawn from the "On Categorial Intuition" and "Copula" sections in Part One of *Negative Dialektik*.⁴ After examining these passages, I consider the issues they raise for Adorno's own conception of propositional truth.

1. Categorial Intuition (*Kategoriale Anschauung*)

In *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, Adorno reads Husserl's account of categorial intuition in *Logical Investigations*, Volume 2 as an extension of the "logical absolutism" of the "Prolegomena to Pure Logic."⁵ According to Adorno, Husserl therein challenges the relativism in psychologizing accounts of propositional truth by insisting on the complete independence of "propositions in themselves." Adorno notes that Husserl's subsequent discussion of categorial intuition in the Sixth Investigation tries to secure the pure yet experienced facts to which pure propositions must correspond. Husserl says these

and Existence (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 37–83. I discuss Husserl's and Heidegger's conceptions of truth at greater length, as well as Adorno's relations to them, in Lambert Zuidervaat, *Truth in Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School: Critical Retrieval* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie: Studien über Husserl und die phänomenologischen Antinomien*, in *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 5* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 203–15, tr. by W. Domingo as *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique; Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 200–212. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as AE. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the German original, then to the English translation.

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 6* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), tr. by E. B. Ashton as *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as ND. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the German original, then to the English translation. I have also consulted the translation by Dennis Redmond (2001), available online at [<http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>].

⁵ "Prolegomena zur reinen Logik" from *Logische Untersuchungen, Vol. 1* can be found in Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana, Vol. 18* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

facts, which he calls “states of affairs” (*Sachverhalte*), are intentionally given in categorial intuition. Husserl’s discussion of categorial intuition thereby permits an apparent reconciliation between his “rationalist” tendency to insist on absolute “truths of reason” (*vérités de raison*) and his “positivist” tendency to insist on the givenness of facts. Yet the reconciliation is only apparent, Adorno says, and the paradoxes in Husserl’s account of categorial intuition hide a dialectic that unfolds over Husserl’s head. (AE, 204–205/201–202) Adorno’s goal is to demonstrate the paradoxes and uncover this dialectic.⁶

I, by contrast, read the discussion of categorial intuition in Chapter 6 of Investigation 6 from *Logical Investigations* as an attempt to fill a significant gap in Husserl’s accounts of intentional experience (Investigation 5), phenomenology of knowledge (Investigation 6), and truth (Chapter 5 of Investigation 6). Knowledge and truth require that the meaning intentions expressed in judgments and assertions be fulfilled in acts of intuition (either perception or imagination or both) whereby intuited objects are given for intentional experience. Yet whatever fulfills the meaning expressed using words such as “a,” “some,” “not,” and “or”—including the copula “is”—cannot be given to sensuous perception or imagination. Husserl’s categorial intuition is an attempt to account for the fulfillment of such “formal moments” in what he calls signitive acts.

For Husserl, then, the main issue in this context is not to secure the truth of propositions in themselves but rather to complete his phenomenological account of experience, knowledge, and truth. He thus postulates a supersensuous kind of intuition that can be just as fulfilling as sensuous perception and sensuous imagination are. This is what Husserl calls “categorial intuition,” and the matters given to categorial intuition are what he calls “states of affairs.” For example, if I express my act of perceptual judgment by asserting “this house is green,” and my assertion is correct, the “is” of my assertion is fulfilled by a categorial intuition to which “predicative being” (*prädikatives Sein*) is given as a state of affairs, just as the house and its colour are given to sensuous intuition—specifically to sensuous perception.⁷

⁶ Because Adorno’s criticism tends to conflate Husserl’s early conception of categorial intuition and later conception of eidetic intuition, arguably he fails to do justice to Husserl’s extensive and painstaking work on the latter.

⁷ Cf. “Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis” from *Logische Untersuchungen, Vol. 2*, found in Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana, Vol. 19* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 669–70, tr. by J. Findlay as *Logical Investigations, Vol. 2*, (ed.) D. Moran (London: Routledge, 1970, 2001), 279–80.

Adorno, however, finds this notion of “predicative being” highly problematic. It arises because Husserl’s phenomenology of knowledge wrongly assumes a thoroughgoing parallelism between signitive acts, such as judging and asserting, and their intuitive fulfillment. This assumption misleads Husserl into claiming that the formal moments in signitive acts must be intuitively fulfilled via categorial intuition.⁸ But Husserl’s claim is fundamentally mistaken, according to Adorno: even Husserl must realize that one cannot grasp such formal “moments of thought” as “copies [*Abbilder*] of a nonsensuous, transsubjective being, since there is no way to determine the nonsensuous moments other than indeed as moments of thought.” (AE, 206/203, trans. mod.) Despite Husserl’s own attack on a copy theory of knowledge, his “fundamental thesis of propositions in themselves” forces him to adopt a picture theory of categorial intuition, such that the formal moments in signitive acts copy and “correspond” to some “objective-ideal being” that is categorial-intuitively given. (AE, 207/204)

Here we have the core of Adorno’s Hegelian objections both to Husserl’s account of categorial intuition and to Heidegger’s understanding of Being (*Sein*): both of them turn the conceptual into the nonconceptual and the mediated into the unmediated. Yet Adorno’s objections also raise questions about his own idea of truth, for Adorno’s claim that the nonsensuous moments of thought can only be grasped as moments of thought fails to address two questions of concern for both Husserl and Heidegger. First, what do these nonsensuous moments include? Specifically, is what Husserl calls “predicative being” nothing more than what Adorno calls “a moment of thought”? Second, how are Adorno’s moments of thought fulfilled? Specifically, how do we account for the fact that predicating does real, cognitive work in our judging and asserting, such that the results of this process—judgments, assertions, and propositions—can be true? One does not need to subscribe to a “copy theory” of knowledge and truth in order to think such questions are legitimate.

2. Process of Judging (*Urteilstvollzug*)

Although Adorno does not pose these questions, he indirectly addresses them when he argues that so-called “categorial intuition” is

⁸ For purposes of focus, my summary ignores the fact that Adorno seems to restrict Husserl’s notion of intentionality to signitive acts, even though Husserl plainly regards intuitive and meaning-fulfilling acts as intentional.

simply part of the whole process of knowledge that amounts to “grounded judgment” (*begründetes Urteil*). (AE, 208/205) Adorno makes this argument by unpacking a purported ambiguity in Husserl’s claim that we immediately “become aware” (*Gewahrwerden*) of “states of affairs” in categorial intuition. Adorno suggests that the immediacy of our becoming aware of a state of affairs—which Husserl attributes to categorial intuition—is simply the immediacy of the process of judging something (*die Unmittelbarkeit des Urteilsvollzugs*); *i.e.*, judging something is the same thing as becoming aware of the state of affairs judged. We do not need a special “categorial intuition” in order to become aware of a “state of affairs”; we can simply pass judgment. After the process of judging is completed and we reflect on the truth or legitimacy of the completed judgment, we might become aware of a “state of affairs,” but this state of affairs would be the completed judgment and not some “predicative being.” Husserl’s account of categorial intuition confuses the synthesis completed in the process of judging with the evidence we can achieve in reflection upon the results of this process. (AE, 208–209/205–206, trans. mod.)

Despite the initial plausibility of Adorno’s argument, on closer inspection, we must wonder if Adorno is the one confused rather than Husserl. For in early Husserl’s account of knowledge and truth, the synthesis completed in conjunction with the act of judging always involves both a coincidence between signitive and intuitive acts and an objective identity between the object as signitively meant and the object as intuitively given.⁹ This multidimensional account of cognitive synthesis gives rise to Husserl’s account of categorial intuition. Adorno tries to undermine Husserl’s account by appealing to the “synthesis” that occurs in the “process of judgment” (*Urteilsvollzug*). Yet Adorno’s undefined notion of a “process of judging” is just as ambiguous as he claims Husserl’s notion of “becoming aware” (*Gewahrwerden*) to be. On the one hand, the process of judging can be the entire multidimensional cognitive process within which we form judgments and make assertions. Typically, such a process includes what Husserl calls intuitive acts, which go beyond signitive

⁹ I discuss this account at greater length in the essays “Propositional and Existential Truth in Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*,” *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 150–80, and “Synthetic Evidence and Objective Identity: The Contemporary Significance of Early Husserl’s Conception of Truth,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2016, doi: 10.1111/ejop.12192. Revised versions of these essays appear as Chapters 2 and 6, respectively, in Zuidervaat, *Truth in Husserl*, 19–45, 125–46.

acts such as judging and asserting. Hence the question arises of how, say, (signitive) judging and (intuitive) perceiving line up—of how they are synthesized—when we achieve knowledge. That, in part, is the question Husserl's notion of categorial intuition aims to answer. On the other hand, Adorno's term "process of judging" might, strictly speaking, refer only to a signitive act or practice within the cognitive process, and any "synthesis" achieved within this more delimited and one-dimensional signitive act would be inherently conceptual and non-intuitive.

Adorno appeals to the first, multidimensional sense of "process of judging" when he claims that judging something is the same thing as becoming aware of a state of affairs. If he were to analyze this process, or at least if he rendered Husserl's analysis accurately, Adorno would need to indicate that the so-called process of judging is not simply an act or practice of judging; it is also, in Husserl's terms, an act or practice of intuiting, as well as an aligning of these two qualitatively distinct acts or practices—judging and intuiting—within a cognitive synthesis. Adorno would also need to distinguish the object as signified, intuited, and synthetically known from what, in Husserl's terms, is a state of affairs. If Adorno did all of this, he could not so casually equate "becoming aware" (of a state of affairs) in Husserl's sense with "the original [signitive] intending of something judged, the process of judging as an act, the synthesis that simultaneously reaches and establishes [*trifft und schafft*] the state of affairs that is judged." (AE, 208/206, trans. mod.) And just as Adorno could no longer equate judging with knowing, neither could he so easily reduce the object about which one makes a judgment ("something judged") to a state of affairs ("the state of affairs that is judged").

Adorno appeals to the second, one-dimensional sense of "process of judging"—*i.e.*, judging as a qualitatively distinct act or practice, not as the synthetic process of knowing—when he claims that the result of our judging can become a "state of affairs" as we reflect on this result and try to establish whether the original judgment is true. For the result of our judging is indeed a signitive judgment or assertion, not a percept or image, and also not a synthetic cognition. Moreover, when we critically reflect on this result, we need to link it with other judgments, as Adorno rightly suggests: "[Reflection] relates the judged state of affairs to other states of affairs: its own result is a new categorization." (AE, 209/206, trans. mod.)

But while Adorno uses "state of affairs" to mean something like the propositional content of an accomplished judgment, this is not what Husserl means when he says we become aware of "states of affairs" in categorial intuition, any more than he means that we

become categorial-intuitively aware of the entire object about which the judgment is made. For Husserl, a “state of affairs” is neither the propositional content nor the entire object of a judgment. Although Adorno is right to worry about the “immediacy” that Husserl seems to attribute to becoming categorial-intuitively aware of “states of affairs,” his criticisms fundamentally misconstrue what Husserl has in mind. Husserl is not saying that categorial intuition renders our judgments infallible. Rather, without categorial intuition our judgments could not be fully fallible—*i.e.*, they would neither have a purchase nor fail to have a purchase on certain ways in which objects are predicatively available.

Indeed, Adorno’s insistence that neither the “process of judging” in the multidimensional sense nor the reflection on accomplished judgments can be “interpreted as categorial intuition” (AE, 209/206) is a red herring: Husserl never says that they *can* be interpreted as categorial intuition. Rather, Husserl claims that the formal elements in signitive acts and in their results must reach fulfillment via non-signitive acts, and this happens when categorial intuition gives us access to states of affairs *in Husserl’s sense*. Otherwise the synthesis of knowing would be incomplete at best, and there would be no way to account fully for our ability to achieve assertoric correctness and propositional accuracy within the larger process of knowledge. Or, to use a phrase familiar from Adorno’s own writings, if the object is to have “priority” in epistemology, then there must also be a priority of the object *in its predicative availability*.

3. Predicative Being (*Prädikatives Sein*)

Adorno, however, would be quite wary about any notion of predicative availability. It is too redolent of Husserl’s notion of “predicative being,” which Adorno regards as the camel’s nose that lifts the tent flap to Heidegger’s ontological house of Being, where the concept of “being” inflates into a metaphysical hyperreality. Husserl introduces the notion of predicative being in opposition to empiricists such as John Locke, who say we arrive at categories like being and non-being or unity and plurality by reflecting on certain mental acts such as judgments. Husserl, by contrast, insists in §44 of the Sixth Investigation that the true source of such categories lies in the objects of these acts, not in the acts themselves. So, for example, the concept of “being,” in the sense of the predicative being at the basis of saying “x

is y," can arise only if some state of affairs is given to us—and this, according to Husserl, occurs in categorial intuition.¹⁰

Quoting from this passage, Adorno accuses Husserl of equivocating between highly mediated, abstract "being" (*Sein*) and immediately intuitable "beings" (*Seiendes*)—an equivocation that, Adorno claims, contaminates all of existential philosophy. He further accuses Husserl of ignoring Hegel's insight into how the concept of being in its immediacy is simply part of the process of conceptual mediation in which it arises. As a consequence, Adorno charges, Husserl tries to move the concept of being beyond the reach of critical epistemological reflection (AE, 210–11/207–209)—an odd, if not inflammatory charge to make, given Husserl's efforts to wrest the concept of being from empiricist and neo-Kantian neglect and to return it to epistemological salience. Indeed, upon inspection of Part One from *Negative Dialectics* (especially "On Categorial Intuition," ND, 87–90/80–83, and "Copula," ND, 107–11/100–104), I suspect that Adorno's real target here is not Husserlian phenomenology but rather Heideggerian ontology, not the camel's nose but rather the entire house of Being.¹¹

In "On Categorial Intuition," Adorno describes categorial intuition as a reminder that some nonsubjective moment must correspond to synthetic and categorically constituted states of affairs. For example, the "synthesis of numbers" presupposed by a valid simple equation (e.g., $7 + 5 = 12$) would be impossible unless a relationship between the elements corresponded to this synthesis. Heidegger, however, isolates "the moment of state of affairs" from the synthetic moment and thereby reifies it. Adorno's alternative here is to approach "states of affairs" as sedimented products of a historical process that thought can reconstruct and release. Because the states of affairs are

¹⁰ Husserl, *Husserliana*, 19:667–70, *Logical Investigations*, 2:278–80.

¹¹ Although Adorno's primary target in *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* is Husserl's "Idealism," especially Husserl's failure to break decisively with neo-Kantian problematics, the book's introduction signals that the ultimate object of Adorno's criticisms is Heidegger's ontological appropriation of Husserlian phenomenology (which "speaks the jargon of authenticity"). According to Adorno, the "turn to ontology that Husserl hesitatingly began and quickly recanted" leads to a Heideggerian ontology that "acts as if it found itself in a glass house with impenetrable but transparent walls and espied the truth outside like an inaccessible fixed star.... The new ontology returns penitently to the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* [i.e., to the concept of being] and expires in the abstract identity with which the whole game began." (AE, 40–42/33–35, trans. mod.) Hence it is not surprising that *Negative Dialectics*, when it mounts a sustained critique of Heidegger's ontology, returns to themes in Adorno's earlier criticisms of Husserl's "Idealism."

constituted by the historical process to which they belong, they permit something like a direct intuiting of their “essence,” within the medium of what Adorno calls “exemplary thought” (*Medium exemplarischen Denkens*). Husserl and Heidegger, by contrast, regard such products as static self-presentations, Adorno argues, and they treat the concept of being as the supreme “allegedly pure self-presenting categorial state of affairs.” (ND, 89/81, trans. mod.)

Two things become clear from this section in *Negative Dialectics*. First, Adorno replaces Husserl’s “categorial intuition” with his own notion of “exemplary thought.” Exemplary thought brings together not only the universal and the particular but also the conceptual and the nonconceptual, and it does so without freeze-framing the historical character of its subject matter.¹² Second, and correlatively, Adorno’s notion of a “state of affairs” is much more fluid and open-ended than Husserl’s. For Adorno, the “moment of state of affairs” amounts to the historically mediated subject matter that cognition tries to grasp. For early Husserl, by contrast, states of affairs are formal elements in intuitively given objects, and such elements fulfill the formal moments in signitive acts such as judgments and assertions. Husserl might allow that historically mediated subject matter presents such formal elements, and that a cognitive grasp of historically mediated subject matter requires such formal elements to fulfill the formal moments in our judgments and assertions. But he would reject Adorno’s inflating of states of affairs into subject matter as such. Husserl also would resist Adorno’s tendency to equate signitive acts such as judging and asserting with cognition as a whole. Whereas Adorno considers Husserl’s “categorial intuition” too static and “positivist,” Husserl would regard Adorno’s “exemplary thinking” as too fluid and imprecise.

Heidegger, of course, would see both approaches as overly invested in a subject/object model of knowledge and truth. Adorno, however, claims that Heidegger, with his emphasis on Being, tries to usurp a standpoint beyond the difference between subject and object, and this attempt must fail: “Thought cannot seize any position where the separation of subject and object, which lies in every thought, in thinking itself, would immediately disappear.” (ND,

¹² Indeed, the phrase “medium of exemplary thought” points to Adorno’s emphasis on constructing constellations of concepts and fashioning dialectical models of thought, as alternatives to both deductive systems and inductive histories. See the insightful discussion of Adorno’s constellations and models in Martin Shuster, *Autonomy after Auschwitz: Adorno, German Idealism, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 172–74.

90/85, trans. mod.) In Adorno's interpretation, Heidegger reaches this impossible standpoint by inflating Husserl's notion of predicative being as a categorially intuitable state of affairs.

This is why *Negative Dialectics* devotes an entire section (ND, 107–11/100–104) to discussing the copula, the “is” in every existential judgment such as “this house is green.”¹³ Without once mentioning Husserl, the section essentially argues that the “is” in an existential judgment does not need to be intuitively fulfilled. So there is no need to posit “being”—whether predicative or otherwise—as a categorial-intuitively given state of affairs to fulfill it. Let me reconstruct Adorno's actual argument, which he directs not at Husserl's “predicative being” but at Heidegger's “cult of Being.”

According to Adorno, the copula plays two roles. On the one hand, it establishes a connection (*Zusammenhang*) between the judgment's grammatical subject and its predicate—between “this house” and “green,” for example, in the judgment “this house is green.” In this role, the predicative “is” suggests something ontic, something that actually exists or could actually exist. On the other hand, taken simply as a copula, as the logical connective required in all existential judgments, it points to the “universal categorial fact [*Sachverhalt*] of a synthesis.” (ND, 107/100, trans. mod.) No matter which specific existential judgment has been reached, to say something in the form of “*x* is *y*” is to claim that there is a logical connection between *x* and *y*. In this logical role, the copula does not represent something ontic.

Heidegger, Adorno claims, derives the ontological purity of “Being” from the copula's second, logical role. Then, based on the ontic suggestion in the copula's first role, Heidegger hypostasizes the “categorial achievement of synthesis as something given [*Gegebenheit*]” (ND, 107/100–101, trans. mod.), as a state of affairs. The net result is the supposed givenness of pure Being.

Now Adorno does not deny that a “state of affairs” corresponds to the predicative “is” or that this “is” has a meaning (*Bedeutung*), just as the grammatical subject and predicate do. Yet this state of affairs “is intentional, not ontic,” he says, and the copula only achieves meaning within the relation between grammatical subject and predicate. (ND, 107–108/101, trans. mod.)¹⁴ Because the copula does not

¹³ Here Adorno's term “existential judgment” (*Existentialurteil*) follows standard usage to designate a judgment in which something is claimed to exist or to exist in a certain way. It does not refer to Heidegger's notion of the ontological “existentials” (*Existenzialien*) that constitute *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world.

¹⁴ Parallel passages in Adorno's lectures on “Ontology and Dialectic” in 1960–1961 label this first meaning of the copula “synsemantic,” as distinct from

exist independently from this grammatical relation, what it means is not being in itself. Predication is not a third thing added to the subject and predicate; it is simply how they are connected.

In other words, Adorno claims that Heidegger tries to derive “Being” as an essence from the copula. By doing so, however, Heidegger conflates the two meanings of the copula, namely, its universal logical meaning as “the constant grammatical coinage” for any judgment’s synthesis—a meaning derived from the copula’s second, logical role—and the specific meaning that “is” achieves in each particular judgment (ND, 108/101, trans. mod.)—a type/token conflation, we could say. By eliding the difference between the copula as a universal logical category and the predicative “is” that carries import in each particular judgment, Heidegger “transforms the ontic achievement of the ‘is’ into something ontological, [into] an ontological mode of being [*eine Seinsweise von Sein*].” (ND, 108/102, trans. mod.)

What Heidegger recognizes but distorts, Adorno claims, is “the objective moment that conditions the synthesis in every predicative judgment,” a moment that nevertheless first crystallizes in that synthesis. (ND, 109/102, trans. mod.) Yet this objective moment, this “state of affairs in the judgment,” is not independent. The grammatical subject and predicate are not only mutually mediated but also irreducible one to the other, he says, as are the epistemological subject and object. Yet their mediation is not something in addition to what is mediated any more than their irreducibility is anything outside of these relations. To say that the “is” in an existential judgment is neither a subjective thought nor an objective entity is not to say it (or what it means) is something else: a third thing, or pure being. Every attempt simply to think the “is” necessarily “leads to the existent [*Seiendes*] here and concepts there. The constellation of moments cannot be turned into [*aufbringen*] a singular essence; it is inhabited by what itself is not essence.” (ND, 111/104, trans. mod.)

“autosemantic.” For this terminology, Adorno cites Oskar Kraus’s introduction to the first volume of Franz Brentano’s *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1924). The lectures contrast the “synsemantic” meaning of the copula with the copula’s “syntactic” function as a universal form of judgment. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik (1960/61)*, (ed.) Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 298–309.

4. Objectivity and Synthesis

Despite the vigor of Adorno's argument, there is something unsettled in it, almost as if he repeatedly hits a slippery patch and tries to skate around it. His phrases "objective moment that conditions the synthesis in every predicative judgment" and "state of affairs in the judgment" seem deliberately vague. What exactly does Adorno mean by "the objective moment"? How precisely can a state of affairs be *in* a judgment? Perhaps Adorno recognizes the slippery patch. Perhaps, too, that is why the "Copula" section devotes a long footnote to sorting out distinctions and intersections between (1) the grammatical subject/predicate relation and (2) the "epistemological-material" subject/object relation (ND, 109–10/103), and why he returns to this topic at the beginning of the next section, titled "No Transcendence of Being." (ND, 111–14/105–108)

The long footnote describes the grammatical "subject" as the basis of predication (*das zugrunde Gelegte, von dem etwas prädiziert wird*) and as a sort of "objectivity" vis-à-vis both "the act of judging [*Urteilsakt*]" and "what is judged in the synthesis of judgment [*Urteilssynthese*]." It is that on which thought gets deployed. Epistemologically, by contrast, the "subject" is the function of thought or the thinker-as-such. Nevertheless, the two distinct matters labeled "subject" are interrelated. Adorno describes this interrelationship using two terms: recall (*mahnen an*) and abstraction (*Abstraktion*). From one angle, the relation between the judged *Sachverhalt* (i.e., the grammatical subject or "what is judged as such") and the intra-judgmental synthesis (which both rests on and produces this *Sachverhalt*) recalls the epistemological, reciprocal, and "material" relation between object and subject. From a different angle, one can say the logical or intra-judgmental relation between synthesis and *Sachverhalt* is "an abstraction from the subject/object relation." Not even the purest logical judgment can dispense with a reminder of that material subject/object relation: it will always be a judgment *about something*, and this "something" is a reminder of the epistemological and material object, "the trace of what exists [*die Spur des Seienden*]." (ND, 109–10/103, trans. mod)

Similarly, when the subsequent section argues that "Being" is not transcendent to the epistemological subject and object but simply indicative of their mutual mediation and the "imbrication" (*Verflochtenheit*) of everything with everything else, Adorno grants Heidegger the point that the "is" in a judgment is not something ontic or objective (*keine Seiendes, keine Objektivität*). The reason for this, however, is not that the "is" indicates Being as a third. Rather, the "is"

indicates a synthesis and, in the absence of this synthesis, it would have “no substrate.” (ND, 111–12/105–106, trans. mod.)

If I understand him correctly, Adorno wishes to distinguish between the objectivity within a judgment and the objectivity that has epistemological priority. The first pertains to the grammatical subject upon which something is predicated. The second pertains to whatever we can know when we experience objects and make judgments about them. Correlatively, Adorno appears to distinguish between two types of synthesis: the intra-judgmental synthesis that unites grammatical subject and predicate, and the wider cognitive synthesis that occurs within our experience when we make judgments and assertions.¹⁵

Accordingly, “the objective moment that conditions the synthesis in every predicative judgment” is simply the grammatical subject. And, as the grammatical subject, it can be called the “state of affairs in the judgment.” Yet Adorno does not explain how the epistemological and material object informs or impinges on this “state of affairs in the judgment.” Nor does he explore at any satisfactory length how the synthesis we presumably achieve in cognition informs or impinges on “the synthesis in every predicative judgment.” By failing to address these issues in the passages we have considered, Adorno passes up an opportunity to explore not only how Husserl and Heidegger might have pitched the wrong (ontological) tent but also how the tent they pitched might hold valuable insights for an Adornian metacritique of epistemology.

5. Metacritique

Earlier I claimed that the critique of categorial intuition in Adorno’s *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* fails to address two questions of concern to both Husserl and Heidegger. First, is so-called “predicative being” nothing more than a “moment of thought”? Second, how does predicating do real cognitive work, such that judgments, assertions, and propositions can be true? The two sections we have reviewed in *Negative Dialektik*, while not ignoring these questions, do not provide satisfactory answers. To give a satisfactory answer to the first question, Adorno would need to explicate the relation between grammatical subject and material object. To give a satisfactory answer to the second question, he would need to account for the

¹⁵ This distinction in types of synthesis is not explicated in the passages under consideration, however.

relation between judgment-internal synthesis and cognitive synthesis. Let me discuss these two issues in turn.

5.1 Grammatical Subject and Practical Object

First, to explicate the relation between grammatical subject and material object, Adorno would need a more robust account of what I call “predicative availability.” Predicative availability is among the various ways in which everyday matters offer themselves for human practices. Let me call these matters “practical objects.” Among the differentiated ways in which practical objects can offer themselves is their offering themselves for linguistic practices, and among these linguistic practices are those of reference and predication. The grammatical subjects of sentences, judgments, and assertions are referring terms. They are the linguistic means by which we pick out whatever we wish to talk about. When we talk about practical objects, these objects let us refer to them in language.

Practical objects also allow us to make predications about them, to specify what they are or how they are in one respect or another. We can say “this house is green,” “the water is too cold,” or “the traffic is terrible today,” and what we refer to allows us to specify in language what or how it is with respect to colour or temperature or congestion. The predicative availability of practical objects is how, under linguistic reference, they allow themselves to be linguistically specified.

This account of predicative availability implies that the primary relation between grammatical subject and practical object is one of linguistic reference and referability. So too the primary relation between grammatical predicate and practical object is one of linguistic specification and specifiability. What Adorno describes as a sort of “objectivity” or “objective moment” within judgments pertains to the relation between the linguistic referring and predicating that we accomplish in our judgments, on the one hand, and the referability and predicability of the practical objects about which we make these judgments, on the other.

Adorno, however, would worry that my account of predicative availability tries to sneak in Husserlian “predicative being” through a Heideggerian back door. For the notion of “availability” derives from Heidegger’s concept of *Zuhandenheit* (“handiness”). Indeed, “predicative availability” echoes the account in *Sein und Zeit* of the “discov-

eredness" (*Entdecktheit*) of that which is judged or asserted.¹⁶ Accordingly, we must ask: does the notion of predicative availability assume that "being" must be given to us in nonpredicative ways (*e.g.*, via categorial intuition) in order to "fulfill" the "is" that connects referring and predicating terms in an assertion? Or, to raise a similar question in more Adornian language, must an *extra-judgmental Sachverhalt* impinge on the *intra-judgmental* synthesis in order for a judgment to be correct?

5.2 Predicative and Cognitive Syntheses

In a very loose sense, I want to answer yes to both questions. Yes, in a sense, "being" must be given in nonpredicative ways; and yes, in a sense, an "external" *Sachverhalt* must impinge on the predicative synthesis. Moreover, I think Adorno's reluctance to address the question of how predicating does real cognitive work points to a weakness in his account. He does not adequately explain the relation between cognitive synthesis and predicative or *intra-judgmental* synthesis. Nevertheless, I share Adorno's reservations about the Husserlian notion of predicative being. When we say "*x is y*," we do not need the *being* of the "is" to fulfill our predication or to help make our judgment correct. What we do need, for the most part, is for the "*is y*" identity asserted concerning *x* to be disclosed to us in more than predicative ways. The "is" is simply a linguistic device for asserting such identity—it is "intentional, not ontic," as Adorno says.

Yet the asserted identity is not simply linguistic; and the predicative use of "is" presupposes, for the most part, that the asserted identity goes beyond the linguistic referability and predicability of the practical object about which an assertion is made. This, in turn, requires the object's predicative availability to align properly with other ways in which the object is available. Such alignment is not an independent "being"; nonetheless, in each case it is how an object (potentially) *is* and not simply how it is *asserted to be*.

Accordingly, Adorno's denial that *being* corresponds to the predicative "is," while correct, should not lead us to think the meaning of the "is" simply resides in the relation between grammatical subject and predicate. The meaning of the "is" equally resides in an alignment, on the part of the object, between its availability for predication and its availability for some other practice(s)—an alignment that, elsewhere, I have labeled "predicative self-disclosure." Further,

¹⁶ See Chapter 3 ("Truth as Disclosure: Martin Heidegger") in Zuidervaat, *Truth in Husserl*, 50–73.

this more-than-predicative meaning can only be established within the multidimensional relationship between epistemological subject and epistemological object—a relationship in which logical and linguistic practices such as judging and asserting mesh with other practices, and in which the predicative availability of the practical object meshes with other ways in which the object is available.

In this sense, the relation between what is judged and intra-judgmental synthesis does not simply *recall* the epistemological subject/object relation, as Adorno suggests. Rather, it *belongs to* this relation, and it would be hard to imagine any such epistemological relation where predicative practices and predicative availability are completely absent. At the same time, however, both on the subject side and on the object side, there is always more to knowledge and truth than predication—more, too, than the propositional content of judgments and assertions.

In fact, I believe Adorno writes the following passage from the “Meditations on Metaphysics” in *Negative Dialectics* to provide insight into the scope of this “more”—an insight, I might add, that he shares with Husserl and Heidegger:

The surplus beyond the subject, however, which subjective metaphysical experience does not want to surrender, and the truth-moment in what is thing-like [*das Wahrheitsmoment am Dinghaften*] are extremes that touch in the idea of truth. For [truth] could not exist without the subject that wrestles free from illusion [*Schein*] any more than [it could exist] without that which is not the subject and in which truth has its prototype [*Urbild*]. (ND, 368/375, trans. mod.)

To get to this “more,” however—to acknowledge those sides of truth that cannot be reduced to the correctness of assertions and the accuracy of propositions—a philosophical idea of truth needs to include a viable conception of propositional truth.¹⁷ Despite Adorno’s attempts to wrest such a viable conception from Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology, his concerns about “being,” whether predicative (Husserl) or ontological (Heidegger),

¹⁷ I take up Adorno’s more comprehensive idea of truth, as articulated in the “Meditations on Metaphysics” at the close of *Negative Dialectics*, in “History and Transcendence in Adorno’s Idea of Truth,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, (ed.) A. Honneth, E. Hammer, and P. Gordon (New York: Routledge, forthcoming). There I explore how issues in Adorno’s account of propositional truth connect with the tension between history and transcendence in his more comprehensive idea of truth.

keep him from offering a satisfactory account of how practical objects lend themselves to predicative practices. Only such an account could demonstrate how propositional truth, too, requires the truth-in-things to touch “the subject that wrestles free from illusion.”

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