

*Five Decades of Phenomenology and Dialectics
Exploring Generativity, History, and the Essence of Labour*

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1. *Introduction: Toward The New Phenomenology*

Enzo Paci was one of the most influential phenomenologists of the last century. As a student of Antonio Banfi and a prominent member of the so-called “Scuola di Milano”¹, Paci’s work encompasses the history of philosophy, existentialism, relationalism, and phenomenology. His oeuvre remains highly relevant today due to the originality of his interpretations and the significance of the issues he addresses. Within the phenomenological context, Paci is credited with reinterpreting both published and unpublished texts by Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, through a critical and economic-political lens². To achieve this, Paci also drew upon Karl Marx’s works concerning the exploitation of labour within the capitalist regime and the consequent fetishisation of goods and people³.

1. The “Scuola di Milano” was an intellectual movement that flourished in Milan during the 1930s and 1960s of the twentieth century. It encompasses all students of the philosophers Antonio Banfi and Piero Martinetti (see F. Papi, *Vita e filosofia. La scuola di Milano: Banfi, Cantoni, Paci, Preti, Guerini e Associati*, Milano 1990). This movement is historically distinguished by the successful fusion achieved by its interpreters of French existentialism, German phenomenology, critical theory, pragmatism, and Anglo-Saxon and American logical empiricism. Enzo Paci, in particular, along with his student Giovanni Piana, is universally recognised for the original interpretation he provided of Husserl’s phenomenology in light of his Marxist readings. This essay is dedicated to the most salient features of his interpretations in this regard.

2. This approach is primarily attributed to Banfi; however, Paci has successfully expanded it to include Husserl’s reflections in *The Crisis* and the unpublished texts concerning the analysis of temporality and intersubjectivity, mainly from groups C and K, which are currently preserved in Leuven, Belgium. Due to spatial constraints, this study will address only a limited number of issues that I believe can be linked to these aspects.

3. A distinctive aspect of Paci’s reading connects the exploitation of labour, as described by Marx, to the potential instrumentalisation of scientific practice that arises from neglecting

This paper focuses particularly on the arguments presented in one of his final books, titled *Phenomenology and Dialectics*. This book, which compiles transcripts of lectures given in the USA and Canada in 1970, holds significant importance. Given the brevity and programmatic nature of these readings, I contend that *Phenomenology and Dialectics* possesses the unique merit of serving as a manifesto of Paci's thought⁴. Here, his theses are articulated clearly and without delay or preamble, which contrasts with the norm in texts originally intended for publication⁵. The impression one gets is that Paci actively engages in dialogue with his students, endeavouring to convey a message along with a sense of the "legacy" and "responsibility" that naturally accompany being a phenomenologist. Perhaps the greatest lesson to glean from reading Paci's works is the ethical and tangible implication he aims to convey through his "new" phenomenology⁶. According to him, phenomenology, as an exercise in thought and particularly in action, primarily seeks to liberate individuals from the ignorance and resulting oppression they suffer as victims. For Paci, phenomenology serves as a tool for protecting meaning from potential distortions, as Husserl previously indicates in *The Crisis* from a more theoretical perspective. Indeed, the mission of Paci's "engaged" phenomenology, and of being phenomenologists, demands constant attention and tireless commitment from all social groups involved⁷. Furthermore, Paci's new phenomenology embodies the historical significance of achieving a «new humanism»⁸, one that can genuinely liberate everyone from intellectual and practical "slavery". Women and men are, in fact, born into a world that seems hostile at first glance.

its intuitive origins, a central theme in *The Crisis* by Husserl. Only by recovering true class consciousness, along with the original intuitiveness that transcendental intersubjectivity can justifiably aspire to, can we restore a sense of good practice that does not harm disadvantaged classes and leads to exploitation.

4. It is perhaps also, and more sadly, a spiritual testament, given that Paci would pass away only a few years later.

5. I am indeed unsure whether the texts from these conferences were actually intended for publication as well, but the reading is so smooth and the comprehension so immediate that one might assume otherwise.

6. Cfr. L. Semeraro, *L'etica come radice. La filosofia di Enzo Paci*, Capone, Lecce 1993.

7. This undoubtedly emphasises another aspect of Paci's originality as a genuine pioneer of phenomenological critical thinking. I will strive to explain why in the following text.

8. E. Paci, *Relazioni e significati*, vol. III, *Critica e dialettica*, Lampugnani Nigri, Milano 1966, p. 329; see also C. Sini, *Enzo Paci. Il filosofo e la vita*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2015, and A. Vigorelli, *L'esistenzialismo positivo di Enzo Paci. Una biografia intellettuale*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1987.

According to Paci, we find ourselves in a *Lebenswelt* primarily driven by «economic need», as is «the structure of labour that produces»⁹ what encompasses us all. Phenomenologically, for Paci, we are born into a state of material “passivity” that necessitates eventual “work” for the reconquest of what we naturally take for granted (but which is not). Conversely, humanity, in its larval form, must awaken and carve its own path to liberation. From this perspective, material production intersects with “scientific practice”, that is, the human meaning underlying all idealization and which must be programmatically recovered. Here, Paci reconnects with Husserl by rediscovering the «productive» and «historical intersubjectivity»¹⁰ that bestows meaning and value upon all our possible endeavours. But what “value” are we discussing here? Let’s explore how Paci elucidates this in *The New Phenomenology*.

2. Exploring Lebenswelt: New Practices and New Interdependencies

In *The New Phenomenology*, the existentialist inspiration behind Paci’s phenomenological reflection is immediately apparent¹¹. Rejecting the so-called error of “misplaced concreteness”¹², Paci cautions against viewing the Husserlian life-world or *Lebenswelt*¹³ as a “substantial” and mere onto-

9. E. Paci, *Fenomenologia e dialettica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1974, p. 12.

10. Ivi, p. 16.

11. Paci presents a positive interpretation of Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism. Rather than surrendering to the checkmate of human existence’s meaning, Paci firmly believes in its reactive power, bolstered by the tools provided to him this time by Marxist ethics and humanism.

12. This subject holds particular significance for Alfred North Whitehead, who serves as a crucial reference for Paci (and for all members of the “Scuola di Milano”) alongside the phenomenological literature. The “misplaced concreteness” argument examines the potential fallacy of reification and posits that the essence of a thing is not primarily located in the object itself, but instead in the “processes” that lead to its creation and eventual disappearance within spacetime.

13. This encapsulates one of the central themes of Husserl’s *The Crisis*. The contentious discovery or rediscovery of *Lebenswelt* marks the beginning of a new phenomenological research path, for Husserl, one that is fundamentally rooted in the awareness of the abstraction and emptiness of meaning produced by modern scientific practice, initiated by Galileo. From Paci’s perspective, beginning from the *Lebenswelt* as a critical problem and horizon of meaning also signifies, in Marxist terms, an attempt to rectify the distortions engendered by capitalist superstructures and the exploitation of primary, historical and transcendental intersubjectivity. What emerges from this, as we are about to read, is a genuinely original interpretation of this phenomenological and critical hybrid.

logical principle. Indeed, Paci's *Lebenswelt* precedes substance, or being, and the ontology that mistakenly seeks to describe it. Instead, it coincides with the «totality of all the subject's operations»¹⁴ and encompasses all concrete and actual activities traced back to our actions as human beings with bodies and interconnected histories. Here, the *Lebenswelt* functions as a principle of action and foundational "operability", guiding our work and potentially transformative activities across all domains of our extensive deeds. As a fundamental and dynamic element – one might better say primitive "force" – the *Lebenswelt* also includes the various «different regions», in Husserlian terms, «founding the different sciences», which contribute to the continuous creation of the so-called «*phenomenological encyclopaedia*[']s]»¹⁵ possible scientific outcomes.

In Husserl's reinterpretation and Paci's new phenomenology, there is a particular focus on «operating as foundation»¹⁶, which pertains to the dimension of activity that counters the former material «passivity» to which humanity is primarily subjugated¹⁷. Underpinning the world of interrelationships described by Paci is a «positive and creative» praxis, situating each of us, as an «operating subject»¹⁸, in space and time – a necessary condition for actually fulfilling this specific form of social and economic phenomenological "redemption", as we are about to explore. As anticipated, the natural or primitive condition – also influenced by economic and social factors and significant capitalist exploitation – necessitates a prompt response from the subjects, that is, an active "reaction". For Paci, the human being is not born into an idyllic reality; her role is not solely conservative but also reactionary and ultimately "disruptive". In this, I believe, lies the existentialist root and trigger of Paci's cultural and philosophical heritage.

Underlying the working condition that is the *Lebenswelt* is, in fact, a dimension of «negativity as lack, a need to be fulfilled»¹⁹, a thirst for knowledge that is also, however, a more tangible thirst for social justice and equitable treatment. Nevertheless, this could only be achieved over time,

14. Ivi, p. 20.

15. *Ibidem*; see ivi, p. 30.

16. Ivi, pp. 21-22.

17. *Ibidem*. It is difficult to clarify what the meaning of such passivity signifies in these few lines, as its interpretation appears to diverge significantly from that which Husserl offers for this lemma. Here, passivity seems to encompass everything that precedes it, and likely everything that follows, a poor – and indolent – use of reason.

18. *Ibidem*.

19. Ivi, p. 23.

and the outcome of such satisfaction is always provisional, as the phenomenological principle of *teleology* rightly demands²⁰. The human being is thus continuously invited, by the other human beings she eventually encounters in the *Lebenswelt*, to engage in a «work that produces an œuvre»²¹, which is knowledge, phenomenologically, but which is also «consumption» and «production»²², here highlighting the deeply practical and perhaps even “craftish” significance of every conceivable intellectual construction. For Paci, it is precisely from the continuity of these primitive and derivative operations that new relationships can emerge between individuals and, with them, a sense of new values and subsequent responsibilities to enhance our living conditions, even for those yet to come.

3. *Intersocialism and Its Historical Responsibilities*

Indeed, in Paci’s present work, we can also find an ecologist and even anti-colonialist invitation. Indeed, as Paci writes, the work to which we are called is reflected in a «transformative action» that transmutes «ourselves», no doubt, but also «our environment» and, finally, «our planet» as well²³. But what name does this task specifically take in his words? How is it realised – and eventually and “generatively” derealised – within history and its irreversible course? Let us find out. Paci here defines this emancipatory process as “intersocialism”. For him, «intersocialism» represents a historical reality that

depends on the continuous relationship between individuals, starting from a first couple, or *Paarung*, which gives rise to constituent groups. These groups, although they are separate entities, have the potential to form a new society and establish entirely new relations between subjects and objects, as well as between *Paarungen* of subjects, [...] of nuclei that possess self-governing capacity.²⁴

20. In the Husserl lexicon, teleology signifies the continuous horizon of enhancement that underpins the work of phenomenologically informed scientists in defining the idealities that constitute their respective disciplines. It is a practice without a predetermined endpoint, viewing the ongoing nature of the process itself as an indicator of scientific accuracy and historical correctness.

21. The Italian texts actually reads: «lavoro che produce un’opera» (*ibidem*).

22. *Ibidem*.

23. *Ibidem*.

24. *Ibidem*.

The intersocialism that Paci envisions represents a coherent exercise of an unsettling and intrinsic revolutionary social force. The latter embodies the existential basis for the various possibilities of the *Lebenswelt*. It stands as a «continuous creative activity»²⁵ capable of overcoming the obstacles previously posed by material and economic passivity. Furthermore, intersocialism seems to be realised only through collective action, a coherent sense of association, and phenomenological primitive pairing or “communality”²⁶, which forms the very foundation of any viable counter-activity.

Indeed, this exercise would neither be possible nor evidently necessary if its life-world did not include an element counter to its complete and auspicious realisation; that is, an implicit “negativity” legitimising its dialectical exercise from below. Paci clarifies this as follows: at the core of this dynamic is, in fact, a «dialectic between active work», supported by the community of interpreters mentioned here, and «passive matter»²⁷; in this context, it refers to a conflict between the dominated and the dominant class. Throughout this course, when the dominated class temporarily gains the upper hand in this confrontation, it can transform passive matter into the material or productive “fuel” necessary for the continuation of this ever-creative action or reaction.

However, prior to all this, it is essential to note that such a dialectic is possible due to the simultaneous presence of at least two classes with conflicting interests, whether the latter is aware or unaware of this detrimental situation. As Paci writes, within the domain, there exists at least one particle of anti-domain or «*antidominio*»²⁸ that enables the constant triggering of the so-called «revolutionary praxis»²⁹ at play here. This exercise, which is both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, is invariably entrusted to those «nuclei» or cells of intersubjective and cooperative resistance established, as Paci concludes, «from the primary and original intersubjectivity»³⁰ from

25. *Ibidem*.

26. In the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl clarifies that such commonality is primarily possible because transcendental subjectivity recognizes in primitive otherness another self, perceived as its reflection, as alter-ego. In this politically charged context, as interpreted by Paci, we can define this other as a colleague or even a “comrade”: a historical figure to whom class consciousness assigns a role and a clearly defined identity based on shared interests and a common “enemy”.

27. Ivi, p. 24.

28. *Ibidem*.

29. Ivi, p. 43.

30. Ivi, p. 24.

which every action actually springs, within the life-world, which is fundamentally composed of action and passion.

4. *For a Phenomenology of Resistance: Toward the “world constituent”*

In this sense, it is important to emphasize the almost “belligerent” motivation that intimately animates the potential intersubjective constitution arising within the roots of the *Lebenswelt*. This constitution, properly known as “intersocialism”, represents for Paci the internal production that tends to «break the shell surrounding the product of labor»³¹. Indeed, as Marx also pointed out, the critical power of materialism must liberate the actual relations governing the real production of labour, or idealities in this context, and prevent the emergence of unnecessary and harmful ideological constructions or abusive superstructures. The risk involves the potential fetishization of commodities and human subjects, and thus, of the intellectual and material “labour” that typically ennobles them.

Fetishization, as a disguise of the true “value” of products and the temporal labour invested by workers in creating them, is precisely the most harmful outcome of the capitalist system in which we live- a system that Paci even labels as “imperialism”. Such a conflicting force aims to keep us ignorant and divided to reduce the risk of being overpowered. As Paci writes, capitalism represents a «historical period of accumulation that denies intersubjectivity and free operation»³². The latter, on the contrary, takes the «form of time and space, which is shaped and structured by consumption and production»³³. To overcome this opposing force, Paci emphasizes the necessity of «struggles of domination» carried out by intersubjective nuclei that «will converge in the world constituent»³⁴, i.e., a real yet still imagined political body aimed at countering this form of injustice.

The term “world constituent” here politically symbolizes the deepest potential for a physical and institutional «future encounter» that embodies the «common goal of various constituent processes»³⁵ that all social partners can achieve. It represents the «living *telos*» of humanity, specifically

31. Ivi, p. 25.

32. *Ibidem*.

33. *Ibidem*.

34. *Ibidem*. Elsewhere, Paci also refers to «world intersubjectivity» (ivi, p. 32), the ideal and teleological culmination of this liberating process.

35. Ivi, p. 25.

one that acts «within the established domains»³⁶, breaking down or rupturing the superstructures that claim to exist without the support of a constituent intersubjectivity, meaning a product that fails to acknowledge the actual value of the producer. The latter may even see herself reduced to a commodity, i.e., as equal to the very products she actively produces. The constitution or establishment of such a body is important in order to dismantle, from principle, the «idolatry»³⁷ advocated by the dominant classes to the detriment of the dominated classes.

The latter, as Paci suggests, would not only seek to dominate the previously mentioned commodities – people and goods – but also the «truth»³⁸ or expertise that specifically contributes to their successful production. For this reason, science and its practice must rediscover their liberating function and protect themselves in the struggle arising from their potential instrumentalization. From this perspective, Paci, here recalling the lexicon of *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*³⁹, speaks of the struggle for the «presentification» of truth data; that is, the temporally conceived preservation and defence against that «which transforms the subject into objectivity, but also against all that forgets the original foundation of man»⁴⁰, here emphasizing a clear theme from *The Crisis*.

5. *Generative Eros Between Penia and Poros. As a Conclusion*

The realization of this guardianship – or rather, the tools that enable it – unfolds over time, thereby contributing to the progressive awareness of the historical continuity and «dialectic»⁴¹ of this subaltern dynamic.

36. *Ibidem*.

37. *Ibidem*.

38. *Ibidem*.

39. This text compiles a collection of transcriptions of notes written by Husserl during the first two decades of the last century. Here, it is crucial to recognise the process through which Husserl legitimises “retention”. Retention, understood as a passive yet still somehow active conservation of an intuition that has just passed, does not equate to memory, which represents more an act of recollecting what has gone by. To “retain” something as still alive – that is, as still influential in present perception – means, in a certain sense, to care for it, preserving it from oblivion (which conversely represents the necessary condition for the act of recalling to occur). In this context, Paci seems to be appealing to this idea of conservation effort as the primary task of each member of this ever-expanding class, aligned with the regulatory notion of *telos* guiding all possible scientific and practical commitment.

40. Ivi, p. 26.

41. *Ibidem*.

However, the truth this process captures fundamentally eludes us. Truth, in fact, lies more in the soundness of its practices and their constant exercise than in their results, which needs to constantly be repeatedly and renewed by more and more interpreters, as Husserl makes explicit in *The Origin of Geometry*⁴². This is why phenomenology, in Paci's work, assumes the guise of an ongoing struggle to attain truth and its constant safeguarding against possible falsifications, given the lack of constitutive emptiness on which intentionality and *Lebenswelt* rest and to which it always risks returning, as existentialists' positions formerly stated⁴³. Thus, Paci's phenomenology seems to coincide with the need to unite and reunite «in the present totality» all the «proletarian»⁴⁴ parties who take special responsibility for this happening.

Only if we act united and aware of this community of purpose can we actually change things or seriously try. For Paci, truth, justice or fairness among different stakeholders is not so much an empty wish or a noble intent but the coherent expression of a proper "need" we actually feel from the inside, inasmuch we intuitively sense hunger, as Paci states. Indeed, the latter reflects as much the need for «bread», and thus food, in the broadest sense, as it does for «value and truth»⁴⁵. Here, «truth exists as a demand for necessary satisfaction and filling», as the «*telos* present in every life that has meaning and value» properly triggers the revolutionary activity we are fervently seeking⁴⁶. Each of us can participate both synchronically, that is, in the present time, and diachronically, thus in time and its flow in

42. This text, spanning just over twenty pages, serves as the third appendix to paragraph § 9a of *The Crisis*. It has profoundly resonated throughout the history of philosophy of the last century. Initially published by Fink, it later became the focus of a university course led by Merleau-Ponty and a significant introductory work by Derrida (and, in a sense, by Stiegler). *The Origin of Geometry* is essential in this context as it elucidates the technical and existential roots upon which science, as a phenomenological discipline, is founded and disseminated over time. Here, Husserl addresses the theme of intersubjectivity and the technological instrument of writing, which is necessary for meaning to be faithfully established and conveyed to a potentially infinite plurality of interpreters. In this light, its significance in this context becomes clear. Good science and sound scientific practice, in general, cannot be confined to a limited area of space-time and limited contributors. Conversely, as an instrument in the fight against injustice and thus a means of promoting epistemic, but also social and economic redemption, phenomenology must extend indefinitely and operate, respecting its canons, wherever there is need.

43. Cfr. F. Paci, *Vita e filosofia*, cit., p. 218.

44. E. Paci, *Fenomenologia e dialettica*, cit., p. 51.

45. Ivi, p. 27.

46. *Ibidem*.

this initiative, fully aware that we feel the same call and share the same responsibility, or «solidarity»⁴⁷ towards other potential *Paruungen*. Paci's insightful analyses conclude here. I believe the proposed interventions exemplify a successful integration of genetic and generative phenomenology with critical theory. They undoubtedly embody elements of potential development and originality, representing a wholly legitimate deepening of Husserlian theory and a consistent hybridisation of Marxist capital theory within the conceptualisation of *Lebenswelt*. What may be lacking in this collection is the argumentative rigour evident in other essays, particularly *Function of the Sciences and Meaning for Man*⁴⁸ and *Ideas for a Phenomenological Encyclopedia*⁴⁹, but this is certainly justifiable given the nature of the lectures. What Paci did not have the opportunity to elaborate on, and which he briefly outlines here, pertains to the progressive expansion of the idea of intersocialism and its world union in a full-fledged constituent assembly. This represents a previously unpublished design of political philosophy, one that certainly deserves to be studied by scholars of Paci and phenomenology in general in the future.

47. Ivi, p. 44.

48. E. Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo*, il Saggiatore, Milano 1963.

49. E. Paci, *Idee per una enciclopedia fenomenologica*, Bompiani, Milano 1973.

Abstract

Nel 1970, Enzo Paci tenne una serie di conferenze a Buffalo e a Brock, in Canada, successivamente raccolte nel volume *Fenomenologia e dialettica*. La seconda conferenza, *La nuova fenomenologia*, metteva in luce l'importanza del contributo husserliano ed esplorava la possibilità di rivitalizzare la fenomenologia attraverso una prospettiva marxista. Secondo Paci, al centro del concetto husserliano di *mondo-della-vita* vi è la nozione di *praxis* e l'insieme delle azioni che permettono ai corpi, tramite le loro interazioni, di perseguire scopi determinati. La *Lebenswelt* comprende infatti anche le possibilità di trasformazione sociale, che Paci designa con il termine *intersocialismo*. Per lui, l'intersocialismo dipende dalle relazioni costanti tra gli individui, a partire da un legame originario – la *Paarung*, o coppia. Da questi nuclei fondativi si sviluppano progressivamente gruppi costitutivi sempre più complessi, dotati di nuove capacità emergenti. Pur facendo parte di un insieme più ampio, questi gruppi possiedono anche la capacità di dar vita a una nuova società e di instaurare relazioni del tutto inedite tra soggetti, collettivi e nuclei capaci di autogoverno. A cinquantun anni dalla pubblicazione di *Fenomenologia e dialettica*, questo intervento si propone di far luce su alcuni aspetti fondamentali dell'interpretazione politica che Paci ha offerto di Husserl e della sua eredità filosofica.

In 1970, Enzo Paci delivered a series of lectures in Buffalo and Brock, Canada, which were later compiled into the volume Phenomenology and Dialectics. The second lecture, The New Phenomenology, emphasised the significance of Husserl's contributions and explored the potential to revitalise phenomenology through a Marxist lens. According to Paci, central to Husserl's concept of the life-world is the notion of praxis and the actions that enable bodies, through their interactions, to pursue specific endeavours... Indeed, Lebenswelt also encompasses societal opportunities for change, which Paci refers to as intersocialism. For him, intersocialism depends on the ongoing relationships between individuals, represented by an initial pair or Paarung. From these foundational connections, increasingly complex constituent groups emerge with new and supervenient capabilities. While these groups are parts of a larger whole, they also possess the capacity to create a new society and forge entirely new relationships among subjects, groups, and nuclei capable of self-governance. Fifty-one years after the publication of Phenomenology and Dialectics, this talk aims to illuminate key aspects of Paci's political interpretation concerning Husserl and his philosophical legacy.