

Carnap and Husserl in Debate: A Perspective from Florence

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a particular Florentine perspective through which the contemporary debate on the relationship between Rudolf Carnap's philosophy and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology can be approached. The Florentine perspective combines transformative attitude and explicative method in philosophy. More specifically, the paper highlights the distinguishing features according to which Paolo Parrini's position on the relationship between Carnap's and Husserl's philosophies can be identified within Carnap scholarship. For this purpose, a phenomenology free of ontological-metaphysical presuppositions is elaborated by establishing its necessary conditions in revisiting material a priori statements. The paper reinterprets material a priori statements as those of neutral monism's ideal umbrella theory and proposes Machian anti-metaphysics as a third way between the philosophies of Carnap and Husserl.

1. Carnap and Husserl in Debate: A Perspective from Florence

When dealing with the debate concerning the relationship between the philosophy of Rudolf Carnap and that of Edmund Husserl, one encounters a three-fold panorama of literature. On a general level, there has been a more than 40-year philosophical and historiographical reconsideration of logical empiricism¹. On a specific level, since the 1990s, we have witnessed the deepening exploration of the relationship between the philosophy of Husserl and that of Carnap². Finally, starting with the production of recent works aimed at high-

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¹ For the *status quo* of contributions that elucidate the theoretical and historical-philosophical relations between phenomenology and logical empiricism, consult Parrini (2012).

² In this regard, Mayer (1991) and Haddock (2008) are usually cited as a pioneering paper and monograph (see Parrini, 2012). See also Friedman (1999), Sarkar (2003), Moulines (1985), and Mormann (1991). Curiously, even though I will not elaborate on this, the last two cited con-

lighting the composite nature of *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (*Aufbau*) – i.e., Awoday & Klein (2004), Damböck (2016), and Damböck & Wolters (2021) – a string of studies has focused on the relationship between Husserl’s phenomenology and Carnap’s 1928 project.

Parrini’s contributions intersect with at least two of the three guidelines above. Although devoted to the general theme of phenomenology and logical empiricism, generous sections of Parrini (2012, 2023) focus on Husserl and Carnap as eminent representatives and initiators of the philosophical movements they belong to. Nowadays, these contributions provide sufficient material to outline a *perspective from Florence*, or *Florentine perspective*, in honour of Parrini’s academic origin and life, on the debates between Carnap’s and Husserl’s scholarship. Before outlining its main characteristics, I would like to point out which aspects of these debates the Florentine perspective does not intend to pursue. In particular, it does not intend to touch upon the issue of Carnap’s alleged plagiarism in *Aufbau* to the detriment of Husserlian phenomenology³. This issue has produced a heated discussion and lies on a stage I don’t wish to enter. Nor does the Florentine perspective want to present itself as a comparative study, tending to converge towards statements about how phenomenological the *Aufbau* is or is not, or how neo-positivist phenomenology is or is not. Although interesting theoretical and historical-philosophical considerations come to the fore when justifying such assertions, one can slip into the oversimplifications of composite theoretical frameworks when drawing sharp conclusions.⁴

Two main characteristics distance the Florentine perspective from other approaches to the debate. The first emerges from adopting a transformative, creative, and integrative approach. This is highlighted by Parrini (2012, pp. 81-82, 109-110), with particular reference to Giulio Preti’s philosophical tradition. This approach aims to elaborate a new philosophy that emends the theoretical difficulties of phenomenology and logical empiricism that occur

tributions come from authors who have worked on the semantic view of scientific theories and on the distinction between their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic views (see also Winther, 2021).

³ In taking this distancing, I echo Parrini (2023).

⁴ Parrini (2012) already issued a warning on this point. For the complexity of the philosophical frameworks in question, see e.g. Author & Mormann (2022).

when one encounters them individually⁵. The second characteristic, developed by Parrini (2022), concerns an explicative method. Through it, one lets his or her philosophical inquiry become permeated by the drive to clarify conflicting or confused conceptual data and to identify their conditions of perspicuity or intelligibility (Grosholz, 2007), motivating such data “from below” via the search for middle terms, or third ways⁶.

In the present paper’s research perspective, I take Parrini’s (2023) position on Rudolf Carnap’s philosophy in relation to Husserl’s phenomenology as a conceptual datum to be made more perspicuous. For this purpose, I will divide the paper into three main sections. In the first, I shed light on the distinguishing features of Parrini’s position on Carnap’s philosophy in relation to phenomenology and the contemporary landscape of Carnap scholarship. In the second, I hypothesize that to find a middle term between Carnap’s and Husserl’s philosophies, an idea of phenomenology free of ontological-metaphysical presuppositions has to be given substance. Toward this goal, I use Parrini’s (2006) four questions on material *a priori* statements as blueprints and highlight his criticism of *quid iuris* and materiality. The third section appeals to Mach’s anti-metaphysics to flesh out the idea of phenomenology that is “sterilised” of ontological-metaphysical presuppositions, thereby showing how the former can serve as a middle term between Carnap’s and Husserl’s philosophies. Finally, ways of pacifying the 2006 criticisms are outlined. In its conclusion, the paper recapitulates the contents, terms, and open problems of the Florentine perspective on the debate between the two philosophies.

2. Phenomenology, Neutrality, and Conceptual Engineering

Parrini’s position on Carnap’s philosophy and Husserl’s phenomenology differs within Carnapian scholarship. In order to show it, I took my cue from Parrini (2023) and proceeded *per genus et differentiam*.

⁵ See, for example, the questions raised by Kaufman (1940) concerning the presuppositional nature of the raw data of experience, or the primacy of logical analysis (cf. Parrini 2012, fn.91). With regard to issues more closely related to phenomenology, one can see the criticism, hinted at below, regarding Husserl’s (1966/1991) use of “x-sign” or “data of x”-like terms.

⁶ From this point of view, I believe that the method of explication elaborated by Parrini (2022) has much to do with the concepts of analysis and synthesis advanced in Domszy & Dickson (2010, p.13 *passim*).

The essay *La neutralità ontologica: con Carnap oltre Carnap* [Ontological Neutrality: With Carnap Beyond Carnap], published in Parrini (2002), places the author within the context of Carnap scholarship. The significance of this essay depends not only on the fact that it draws on significant theses, such as Creath's (1985). It also relies on the fact that the author envisages a general philosophical view of Carnap's thought while taking the specific issues of instrumentalism and scientific realism as starting points. In this sense, Parrini (2002) intersects with the trend highlighted by Gabriel (2004). In the introduction to the volume *Carnap Brought Home: The View from Jena*, Gabriel points out that from the early 1990s onwards, scholars began to realize that Carnap had much more to offer than individual contributions to specific fields of research and that one could introduce an overall view of them (Gabriel, 2004, p.3).

Parrini's (2023) position on the relationship between Carnap's philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology can be characterized by employing two elements. Regarding the first, Parrini maintains an interpretation of Carnap's philosophy based on the ideas of conceptual engineering, the systematic elaboration of concepts, and language planning. As the following quote shows, this element traces a *fil rouge* from Carnap's rational reconstruction in 1928 to its explication in 1950:

A partire dall'idea di "ricostruzione razionale" alla base dell'*Aufbau*, e passando attraverso quella di "esplicazione" [...], [...] [Carnap] ha instancabilmente lavorato a un modello di filosofia come "ingegneria concettuale" e "pianificazione del linguaggio" il cui fine è l'elaborazione di "intelaiature linguistiche" di riferimento da valutare e da adottare tenendo conto dei problemi in esame. (Parrini, 2023, p.110)

[Starting from the idea of "rational reconstruction" at the basis of the *Aufbau*, and passing through that of "explication," [...] [Carnap] has tirelessly worked on a model of philosophy as "conceptual engineering" and "language planning" whose aim is the elaboration of reference "linguistic frameworks" to be evaluated and adopted according to the problems at issue.]

Regarding the second element, Parrini does not spare himself in emphasizing the profound influence that Husserl's phenomenology may have had on Carnap's philosophy. He instead tends to balance, in favor of phenomenology, the conventionalist and neo-Kantian interpretations of the *Aufbau* fostered by the

“Friedman-Richardson thesis” (Parrini, 2012, pp. 88–89)⁷. In Parrini’s view, as can be clearly seen in the following quote, the notions of *epochè*, or bracketing strategy, and phenomenological neutrality play an essential role in the shaping of Carnap’s conception of philosophy as conceptual engineering:

. . . è pure un dato di fatto che il rapporto con Husserl gioca nell’*Aufbau* un ruolo fondamentale esplicitamente dichiarato. Vorrei quindi mettere in luce come la nozione di *epoché*, o “sospensione,” o “messa fuori circuito” (*Enthaltung*) abbia contato per Carnap non solo per quanto riguarda la *Realismusfrage*, ma anche per dare l’avvio a quel percorso che, partendo dal progetto di ricostruzione razionale (*rationale Nachkonstruktion*) perseguito proprio nell’*Aufbau* (1928), lo ha condotto a concepire la filosofia come un’attività esplicativa consistente in una sorta di ingegneria concettuale (*conceptual engineering*) e di pianificazione linguistica (*language planning*). (Parrini, 2023, p. 104)

[. . . it is a matter of fact that the relationship with Husserl plays an explicitly declared fundamental role in the *Aufbau*. I would therefore like to highlight how the notion of *epoché*, or “suspension,” or “putting out of circuit” (*Enthaltung*) counted for Carnap not only with regard to the *Realismusfrage*, but also in initiating that path which, starting from the project of rational reconstruction (*rationale Nachkonstruktion*) pursued in *Aufbau* (1928), led him to conceive philosophy as an explanatory activity consisting in a kind of conceptual engineering [...] and language planning [...].

Within Carnap scholarship, Carus’ position (2007, 2016) overlaps with Parrini’s (2023) in both highlighted elements. At the same time, they differ in a rather sharp change of sign.

Considering explication as a philosophical attitude of a newly Enlightenment spirit (Carus 2007), there is no doubt that Carus leans towards an engineering interpretation of Carnap’s philosophy. After all, Parrini himself (2023, pp. 104, 110) points out the affinity between his position and that of Carus (2007). Despite this convergence, the program of sterilizing philosophical-scientific discourse of ontological-metaphysical presuppositions (Parrini, 2023, p. 113) presents different signs in the two interpreters. Carus (2016) interprets this program as a way of discrediting or dissolving such presupposi-

⁷ In this regard, see the emphasis on “internal tension” that Parrini (2012, p. 88) emphasises in Ryckman (2007). The same balance can perhaps be pursued with respect to the sensist and phenomenalist interpretations which dominated in the past (Cf. Parrini, 2012, pp.88–89).

tions⁸. Parrini (2022) tends instead to provide a Herbartian reading of the program, interpreting it not so much as the discrediting or dissolution of issues containing ontological-metaphysical presuppositions as an attempt to transform, rectify, and integrate them⁹ (see in particular para. 3.1).

Similarly, the significance of *epochè* and phenomenological neutrality for developing rational reconstruction and explication is ordinary to both interpretations (cf. Parrini, 2023, p. 104 and Carus 2016, pp. 152-153 *passim*). Nevertheless, therein, the presence of phenomenology assumes different signs. In the case of Carus (2016), though recognizing the influence of phenomenology in the use of the bracketing strategy, it is by expunging the phenomenological idea of knowledge as a subjective process from the epistemology that the engineering view of philosophy begins (p. 157)¹⁰. In Parrini's case, as can be seen in the following quote, it is instead precisely the processual aspect through which phenomenology looks at knowledge that triggers Carnap's innovative philosophy as a systematic elaboration of concepts:

Qui conta solo sottolineare, concludendo, che nella genesi di un'operazione tanto innovativa ha avuto un posto non secondario la possibilità di guardare al processo conoscitivo in termini husserliano-fenomenologici, sospendendo quei presupposti ontologico-metafisici che ne ostruivano una piena e più soddisfacente comprensione. (Parrini, 2023, p. 114).

[Here, it is only essential to emphasize, in conclusion, that in the genesis of such an innovative operation, the possibility of looking at the cognitive process in Husserlian-phenomenological terms, suspending those ontological-metaphysical assumptions that obstructed a complete and more satisfactory understanding played no secondary role.]

Parrini's and Carus' positions feature similar elements, although with a sign change. The differentiation of the former in Carnapian scholarship can thus be considered as shown. In the following paragraphs, I aim to indicate a specific

⁸ Carus' discussion here is specifically focused on certain conceptions of subjective consciousness that presuppose what the author refers to as "naturalistic predicament" (Carus, 2016, pp. 145-146).

⁹ Within this framework, Parrini (2020, 2023) nevertheless sees in Carnap's philosophy, in contrast to Varzi (2019), "not a new metaphysics, but a new way of conceiving philosophy with respect to metaphysics" (Parrini, 2023, p.114).

¹⁰ In this passage, Carus (2016, p. 157) refers ironically, but I think also significantly, to Dummett (1996).

middle term by which Parrini's position combines Carnap's philosophy with Husserl's phenomenology.

3. Phenomenological *Beziehungbeschreibung*

The quoted passage reveals a dual interpretation of phenomenology: one with ontological-metaphysical presuppositions and another free of them. I believe the first refers to Husserlian phenomenology. The second is probably one of Parrini's original insights. Generally, one may conjecture that this second version serves as a middle term between Carnap's and Husserl's philosophies. Putting this conjecture into action, I will carry out three steps that open and close on the issue of the epistemological *status* of material *a priori* statements. The first step, accomplished in the present paragraph, highlights the need for an appropriate regimentation of phenomenological language. The second and third steps, pursued in the following paragraph, interpret the idea of sterilized phenomenology along the lines of Parrini's (2017) Machian studies. It is, therefore, shown how such an interpretation can serve as a middle term between Carnap's and Husserl's philosophies and how it can pave the way for pacifying the *vis polemica* on material *a priori* that one can find in the four questions raised by Parrini (2006).

Considering material *a priori* statements as one of the pillars of Husserlian phenomenology, I assume their reconsideration constitutes a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for revising phenomenology itself. A sterilized phenomenology may, therefore, forge its way by addressing Parrini's (2006) four questions. I extrapolate two *foci* of criticism from them. The first urges phenomenologists to clarify the reasons why statements such as "there is no colour without extension" or "there is no pitch (or timbre) without duration"¹¹ should be considered as "material," *i.e.*, as concerning the content of knowledge, and not as "formal," *i.e.*, concerning its structure¹². The second urges phenomenologists to give reasons for the purported validity of material *a priori*, which is grounded on the evidence based on immediate experience, as well as on the subject and the particular and accidental forms of his cognitive faculties. Parrini thus urges phenomenologists to ask themselves in a Kantian

¹¹ Cf. Parrini (2006, pp. 15-16).

¹² For the generalization, as a theoretical *minimum*, of Kantian terminology on matter and form from alethic theory, see Parrini (1994, 2006).

way the question of *quid iuris* in order to justify the purported epistemic invulnerability of material *a priori* statements. The last paragraph will shape the first criticism as an open problem. I will now move on to deal with the second at length.

The criticism of the subjectivity, until proven otherwise, of material *a priori* statements could be addressed by bestowing a specific epistemological configuration on the pure subject, presumably not affected by the accidentality of the empirical one's cognitive faculties. However, the distinction between empirical and pure subjects, which is dear to Husserl's phenomenology, seems to find no place in Parrini (2006). The absence of such a distinction is particularly evident in paragraph four, where the author, *qua advocatus diaboli*, argues that, given the falsification of the hypothesis of the arbitrariness of the coordination between the rational and empirical elements of the cognitive process¹³, material *a priori* statements, insofar as they concern the actual structure of representational givenness and of what we can represent beyond truth or falsity or reality or unreality, might enjoy a different destiny from that of their Kantian analogs (p.37). Parrini rebuts characterizing the subjectivity until proven otherwise of material *a priori* statements as a *quid facti*¹⁴, without bestowing particular epistemological relevance on the phenomenological distinction between the empirical and pure subject. Attributing a specific epistemological configuration to the pure subject would lead phenomenology to encounter at least two difficulties. The first is weakening the claim of neutrality concerning the classical categories of idealism and realism in the theory of knowledge. The second, developed below, concerns the problem of dealing with a multi-layered constitutive subjectivity without relying on an appropriate regimentation of language.

The usefulness of a form of linguistic regimentation in constitution theory is evident not only to the Carnap of the *Aufbau* (paras. 75 ff.) but also, for example, to Husserl's writings on the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness (Husserl, 1966/1991). There, Husserl assumes a distinction analogous to that between the empirical and pure subject, namely the one between empirical time, pre-empirical time, and the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness (para. 34). Furthermore, he advances the need for a par-

¹³ The reference is to Reichenbach's terminology, to which Parrini (1994, 2006) refers and appeals.

¹⁴ See also Parrini (2006, p. 32) in this regard.

allel linguistic distinction, arguing that the quality of pre-empirical time and that of the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness are equivocally called *qualities* and could be more appropriately called *data of qualities* or *quality-signs*. *Mutatis mutandis*, pre-empirical time, and the absolute flow of consciousness are equivocally called *time*. We should instead more appropriately call them “temporal signs” or “temporal data” (para. 1). Although the author acknowledges such regimentation as being convenient, he does not stick to it consistently throughout the text. Just to give an example, the “data of sensation,” such as “blue,” “red,” etc., referred to in paragraph 40, are introduced without respecting previously-embraced linguistic regimentations¹⁵. These are only apparently technicalities and, in my view, are not devoid of consequences. Although I cannot wholly unravel the topic here, I tend to argue¹⁶ that the skepticism of retention (cf. Husserl, 1966/1991, part B, group II, no. 51) surfaces in the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness through slippages or vicious circles (*Aufbau*, para. 75), between the A-properties¹⁷ of empirical time and the A-properties of pre-empirical time, which one might circumvent via an appropriate regimentation of language.

Broadly speaking, a linguistic turn, declinable as formal or structural, lies beyond the horizon of Husserlian phenomenology and presents itself as double-shaped in the same Carnapian philosophy. On the one hand, one has the version underscored by Carus (2016, pp. 150-151 *passim*), according to which the dissolution of questions related to the phenomenological notion of subjective consciousness leads to an exclusively structural *Konstitutionstheorie*. On the other, one has the version that appears in Carnap (1923/2022), where the idea of relational description (*Beziehungsbeschreibung*), or structural description via formalized language, does not seem to serve the purpose of dismissing the phenomenological subjective consciousness, with its eventual ontological-metaphysical presuppositions¹⁸. Instead, as the following quotes illustrate, it seems to serve the purpose of finding appropriate tools for its de-

¹⁵ In Husserl (1966/1991) one can find various passages that allow one to delve into these terminological choices. See, for example, paragraphs 1, 14, 16, and Appendix VI.

¹⁶ I have written about this at greater length in Author (2014).

¹⁷ The reference is obviously to McTaggart’s terminology, which is widely used in the philosophy of time (Orilia, 2012)

¹⁸ Cf. Carus (2016, pp. 146, 150-151, 153-155).

scription, guaranteeing the reference to various kinds of immanent object domains, not the least of which is phenomenological:

. . . the relational description [*Beziehungsbeschreibung*] has the advantage that it does not overstep the given domain of objects. The elements of the set to be described are, indeed, not analyzed into components (Ct), whose set is generally not included in the given one. The relational description is, as it were, an “*immanent approach*” [*immanente Gebietsbehandlung*]. On the other hand, the relational description has the drawback of being ponderous in the approach to the individual elements themselves. One cannot, indeed, make a statement about an element without reference to other elements, which are again characterized only through reference to other elements, and so forth. (Carnap, 1923/2022, p. 256)

The subsequent discussion is intuitively based on a concrete example. The example is taken from the domain of the phenomenology of sense impression. During other researches, the investigation of this domain precisely suggested the development of the quasi-analytical method. (Carnap, 1923/2022, p. 260)

This second version of the linguistic turn meets Parrini’s (2023) tendency to move towards transformative, rectifying, or integrative anti-metaphysics. However, the achievement of a linguistic, or formal-structural, turn in phenomenology can only originate with revising the whole Husserlian framework.

4. Reconsidering Mach’s Antimetaphysics

Using the four questions on material *a priori* as blueprints, one points out the need for a mainly linguistic, or formal, turn in phenomenology. As can be seen at the end of the previous paragraph, this need leads to the identification of a transformative, rectifying, and integrative version of anti-metaphysics not only in Parrini (2022), but also in the preparatory manuscripts of Carnap’s *Aufbau*. Alongside this, the focus on neutral monism represents a common tendency between the manuscripts of the young Carnap (1922, 1923/2022; see Mormann, 2016) and Parrini (2017, 2020). Therefore, the second step towards identifying a sterilized phenomenology should draw attention to the Machian strand that Parrini’s reflection undertakes in the last 10–15 years of his philosophical work.

Though emphasizing the anti-absolutism of Mach’s anti-metaphysics, unaffected by the crisis of the verification principle (Parrini, 1995/1998, xiv, pp. 20–21), the presence of Mach in the author’s work prior to that phase ten-

dentially refers to his phenomenalist received view. Parrini closely followed the profound reconsiderations within Mach scholarship since the early 2000s (Banks 2003, 2014). The view of Mach flattened on phenomenism is revised, and his idea of anti-metaphysics is enriched. Anti-metaphysics ceases to be a harmful philosophical endeavor characterized only by forms of anti-absolutism and aversion to speculative thought regarding empirically unverifiable statements. It rather embodies the positive commitment to cleansing scientific discourse of subjective interpolations, *i.e.*, from properties belonging not to the world but to the subject who claims to know it. Various aspects of Mach's contributions enshrined in the history of science can undoubtedly be read along these lines. Take, for instance, those in the field of psychophysiology, where the mismatch between Mach's position and that of Fechner or Herbart arises by unmasking the presence of perceived properties smuggled into our view of physical matter (Banks, 2003, chapters 1, 3, 6).

The motives of neutral monism and anti-metaphysics in the young Carnap and the late Parrini thus bring to the fore the reconsideration of Mach's anti-metaphysics. Accordingly, the third step towards the characterisation of sterilised phenomenology proposes Machian anti-metaphysics as a middle term between Husserl's and Carnap's philosophies. To ascertain that Machian anti-metaphysics fulfils this role, I have identified affinities between the former and the latter, respectively.

As for the comparison between Husserl's phenomenology and Mach's anti-metaphysics, a point of convergence is certainly represented by anti-dogmatism. In both cases, the idea of something existing beyond any connections with possible experience is taken as absurd or superfluous (Lanfredini 2006, para. 6; Banks, 2003, chapter 1).

As for the affinity between Carnap's philosophy and Mach's anti-metaphysics, there are two lines of convergence. The first concerns a philosophical method based on the systematic elaboration of concepts. It involves the aim to purify our system of knowledge of metaphysical incrustations through a method based on the study of philosophical-scientific discourse. Such a method, which I would describe as "lay" concerning the notion of intuitive evidence, takes the form of Mach's historical-critical method (see e.g., Banks, 2014, pp. 28-29) and Carnap's conceptual engineering and language planning. The second line of affinity between Carnap's philosophy and Mach's anti-metaphysics concerns its interest in the unity of the sciences. The idea is to use the historical-critical method as well as Carnap's method, from rational

reconstruction to explication, to purify the philosophical-scientific discourse of metaphysical, hypostatising, subjective, or cultural aspects and arrive at a unified view of scientific knowledge (Banks, 2014, chapter 1; for the presence of this line throughout Carnap's intellectual career, see for example Mormann, 2012). In recent Mach scholarship, one refers to this view as an "*umbrella theory*," where the efforts of both phenomenological physics and neutral element theory converge (Banks, 2014; Parrini, 2017, p. 35).

Showing affinities with both Carnapian and Husserlian philosophy, Machian anti-metaphysics may serve as the middle term that motivates and makes perspicuous the differentiation of Parrini's position (2023) within Carnap scholarship. Based on the previously advanced conjectures, if Machian anti-metaphysics reshapes the notion of material *a priori*, then it can give substance to the idea of sterilized phenomenology. Such reshaping may be obtained by transforming material *a priori* statements into the general statements of the umbrella theory, which presents itself as an ontic theory¹⁹ based on the Machian notions of *element-and-function*, or *powerful qualities* (Banks, 2014). The fruitfulness of this transformation can be assessed by measuring the capacity of the reshaped material *a priori* statements to overcome the *foci of vis polemica* offered by Parrini (2006). In principle, the general statements of the umbrella theory might be capable of overcoming the charge of subjectivity until proven otherwise. They constitute the ideal outcome of constant historical-critical practice²⁰, which cleanses the philosophical-scientific discourse of subjective interpolations. The issue of materiality finally emerges as an open problem. Its solution can, however, be envisaged by considering that the statements of the umbrella theory refer to aspects that tend to be structural – though not “formal” – but material in the sense of materiality related to the general principles of a physical theory of matter. The overcoming of the two *foci* requires reconsidering matter from an empirical-biological perspective rather than merely an epistemological one (Del Sordo & Lanfredini, 2023).

¹⁹ The literature tends to speak of “element-and-function ontology” (Banks, 2014). However, Parrini (2014, 2017) expresses reservations about the appropriateness of using the word “ontology” in this context and prefers to speak of ontic theory. I follow him in this choice.

²⁰ Given that it does not amount to established principles, I believe that the historical-critical method can be seen as a kind of philosophical practice.

5. Conclusions

I divide the conclusions of this paper into three parts: content, open problems, and methodological virtues. Regarding content, this paper gives substance to Florence's perspective on the philosophies of Husserl and Carnap. Machian anti-metaphysics is therein presented as a possible re-signification of Husserlian phenomenology, as well as a synthetic element that motivates a particular union and integration between Carnap's and Husserl's philosophies. Regarding open problems, the revisitation of material *a priori* and Parrini's (2006) four questions were considered as necessary conditions and *blueprints*, respectively – for identifying a phenomenology free of ontological-metaphysical presuppositions. As outlined in the last paragraph, the transformation of the material *a priori* statements paves the way toward reassessing their capacity to overcome skeptical stances, e.g., those raised by various exponents, supporters, and interpreters of logical empiricism. Their complete reassessment requires unpacking the concept of matter, the epistemological version of which may need to be integrated or complemented. In conclusion, the explicative method and the transformative approach arise as virtuous methodological traits. First, they allow the outlining of results and open problems within the extent and limits of the questions that were initially raised. Finally, the combination of explication and transformation sheds light on significant opaque aspects in philosophical thought, where a heritage of instinctive principles is evoked and activated (Parrini 2017, pp. 21, 25, echoing Mach, 1883/1960, para. 1.2, see also para. 1.6), and shows up as highly performative in philosophical schools, traditions, and thought.

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