

Retrieving Phenomenology: Introduction to the Special Theme

Phenomenology ordinarily signifies the investigation (*logos*) of that which appears (*phainomenon*). It is frequently understood, outside of phenomenology as a philosophical movement, to be experiential description from the first person perspective. Critics of phenomenology, including contemporary critics as diverse as Daniel Dennett and John Searle, as well as speculative realism and object oriented ontology, construe it as being intrinsically subjective, idealistic, and trapped in the first-person point of view (Dennett 2003, 19–30; Searle 2008, 107–36; Sparrow 2014; Zahavi 289–309).

Phenomenology, as inaugurated as a philosophical task and style by Edmund Husserl and transformed through myriad variations in subsequent figures inside and outside of the disciple of professional academic philosophy, has never meant only description from the first-person perspective. Husserl formulated phenomenology as a descriptive and analytic method that investigates the conditions and structures of the first-person perspective and those of the interpersonal second-person and impersonal third-person. Instead of reaching an isolated abstract ego, or engaging in psychological self-introspection, Husserl's descriptions and analysis of experience from the first-person perspective disclose through the reductions—which Husserl acknowledges are incomplete and in need of being repeatedly enacted—the very belonging and relationality of all experience and consciousness in the phenomenon of intentionality in all of its passivity and orientation toward the object.

Husserl defined phenomenology in the *Logical Investigations* as an attempt to return to the things themselves (*Zu den Sachen selbst*). In *Ideas*, Husserl clarified that this task means: “returning from talk and opinions to the things themselves, questioning them as they are themselves given, and setting aside all prejudices alien to them” (Husserl 2014, 35). It is this undertaking that led him to the phenomenology of transcendental subjectivity, which concerns the conditions and constitution of meaningfulness. It does and cannot ignore nor exclude alterity, facticity, or passivity, as more careful assessments of Husserl's published and previously unpublished works and the phenomenological tradition have established (Depraz 1998; Raffoul 2008).

Immanuel Kant claimed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the transcendental idealist is the genuine empirical realist (Kant 1996, A370). Husserl's meaning-holism, one of multiple anti-Cartesian themes unfolded in his

phenomenological reconstruction of Descartes' *Meditations* in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl 1977), would not allow him to accept the dualism in Kant's critical philosophy. Husserl's conception of "transcendental idealism"—a label that has produced much misunderstanding of his thought even among his own students—addresses how sense and meaning are possible for subjects *qua* subjects who are conscious *of* objects. In the classic formulation of intentionality as consciousness being the "consciousness of something," the "of" is the relational term. It signifies that experience is directed toward and informed by things and the world without appealing to realism in the sense of a metaphysical or mystical postulation of an unexperienced and uninterpreted, or non-constituted and non-mediated, reality (i.e., of the *de re* divided from the *de dicto*):

Consciousness describes how the world becomes manifest: The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical. They belong together essentially; and as belonging together essentially, they are also concretely one, one in the only absolute concretion: transcendental subjectivity. (Husserl 1977, 84)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty noted how phenomenology is not a philosophy of essences detached from their existence and facticity: "But phenomenology is also a philosophy which places essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of humans and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, vii). Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the only philosophy that places subjectivity back into the body and the world. By thematizing the relational and reversible between subject and object, evident in touching/being touched, phenomenological inquiry does so without either naively trusting or losing sight of the first-person perspective and its roles in knowing and acting.

Phenomenology after, and in a significant sense already with, Husserl has been anti-phenomenological (in the ordinary sense of the word we began with above) to the extent that it has radically questioned the naiveté, prejudices, and self-certainty of subjectivity and the first-person perspective. It has challenged the everyday privileging of the subject's point of view in the natural attitude, the life-world, the everydayness of being-there, or the self-certainty of the ego oblivious to the other. Phenomenological interpretation is not the imposition of subjectivity or the first person perspective onto things that its critics fear; it is a way for the first person perspective to open itself to the encounter with its world, others, and itself.

The phenomenological orientation toward what stands outside the subject is

evident throughout the history of phenomenology. Phenomenology, Martin Heidegger noted, is attentiveness to the self-appearing of things: “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself [sich von ihm selbst her zeigt]” (Heidegger 2010, 30). Heidegger would in his later thought—which moves from the methodological priority of the question of human *Dasein* (being-there) as that being that poses the question of being in *Being and Time*, to that of the question of *Sein* (being) as the orienting point of his thinking—question the paradigm of transcendental subjectivity for the sake of encountering things in the letting releasement (*Gelassenheit*) that releases and liberates the subject as much as the thing (Nelson 2016).

Emmanuel Levinas, an exemplary instance of an anti-phenomenological phenomenologist, would problematize the priority of the subject, and the individualistic language of self-constitution, for the sake of the encounter with, or more precisely exposure to, the other that is prior to and in a significant way constitutes the sense of self and world. It is in this sense that ethics precedes the ontological and transcendental philosophizing of being and the subject in Heidegger and Husserl.

Early or “classical” phenomenologies begin with the experiential encounter with phenomena in order to analyze the structures of consciousness and transcendental subjectivity (Husserl), organic existence (Scheler), pre-reflective and reflective existence (Sartre), ways of being-there (Heidegger), forms of living as an embodied being and as reversible flesh (Merleau-Ponty), and the asymmetrical and non-identical relations of the other with the self (Levinas). Phenomenology has consequently never been restricted to a specific content or doctrine, as every aspect—and in particular his transcendental understanding of phenomenology—of Husserl’s project has been questioned, rejected, and reinterpreted, in the variations—hermeneutical, ontological, existential, life-philosophical, deconstructive, and naturalized, among others—of phenomenology for over the past hundred years.

The underlying tendency of these philosophers, to speak summarily, is to articulate an alternative to the self-absorbed naiveté of subjective understanding without falling into the illusions of an objectivism that presupposes the first and second person perspectives that it suppresses. Phenomenology is accordingly both a historical phenomenon to be revisited and an experiential encounter with appearances, and, as later phenomenology has shown, non-appearances (such as the invisible and inapparent) that can renew and transform our conception and practice of phenomenology.

Husserl conceived of phenomenology as a way to revitalize universal (that is, for him, Western) philosophy by returning to the phenomena to be thought, and to renew European culture in the Kaizo articles (published in Japan in 1923–24), and *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An*

Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy (1935) (Husserl 1989; Husserl 1970). These works concerned with crisis and renewal encompass Husserl's most powerful ethically-oriented concerns and remain relevant to our conflict-ridden age, shaped by struggles between universalism and particularism.

There is, nonetheless, a questionable dimension of universalism and cosmopolitanism that has historically privileged the West and has been employed to subjugate and marginalize others. That is, there is an overinflated conception of Europe and the occident, which Husserl interpreted as the only culture that is genuinely universal and infinite. The priority of the occidental, and philosophy construed as a unique attribute of the West, problematically resonates in Heidegger, Levinas, and other figures shaped by the phenomenological movement.

Notable exceptions to the tendency to define philosophy as intrinsically European include Merleau-Ponty (Park 2009). Merleau-Ponty noted that: “[philosophy’s] center is everywhere, its circumference nowhere” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 128). Philosophy cannot be bounded to Greek origins, to the occidental history of metaphysics and onto-theology, to a European homeland, or Western modernity.

Hence, at the same time that it has Eurocentric propensities, phenomenology has been and continues to be—through its emphasis on elucidating experience and responding to the phenomena—a significant bridge between Western and non-Western forms of thought. It is not accidental that phenomenology was enthusiastically adopted and transformed in East Asia and throughout the globe, nor that it also encouraged and informed Western research into non-Western sources.

Phenomenological interpretation has itself proved to be “reversible” and not confined to its occidental origins. Despite its troubling and question-worthy Eurocentric moments, which I consider in detail elsewhere (Nelson 2017), phenomenology has stimulated and continues to inspire—as some of the contributions in this issue indicate—philosophical dialogues across diverse perspectives and traditions in order to engage with that which is to be encountered, such as, for instance, the reality of death or the source of ethical responsibility.

2

The contributions gathered in this special issue of *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* engage in both of the previously mentioned tasks. They retrieve issues related to the phenomenological transmission, and promote encountering for ourselves phenomena from health, sickness, and pain, to being and belonging

with human and animal others, to the facticity of death and the conditions of ethical obligation.

Such phenomenological encounters and exposures indicate the embodied life and vulnerability of the subjects of experience and the conditionality of the self. The first-person perspective can neither dictate, much less exclude, the facticity of existing: that is, the intrusions of the conditions and structures of the world in their basic bodily, affective, intersubjective, and environmentally situated ways of being.

In the first two contributions, Welsh Talia and Saulius Geniusas examine the phenomenology of illness and pain.

Welsh Talia demonstrates in “Many Healths: Nietzsche and Phenomenologies of Illness” how implicit conceptions of health have shaped phenomenological discourses that construe health in terms of normal functioning. In contrast to the idea of an underlying normative function that is found in a range of phenomenological analyses of illness (namely, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Svenaeus), Talia articulates an alternative and more nuanced approach to the complexity and multiplicity of health and illness informed by a careful account of Nietzsche’s interpretation of health as a plurality of states that are interlinked with intensity, suffering, and illness.

In “Max Scheler’s Phenomenology of Pain,” Saulius Geniusas revisits Scheler’s phenomenological analysis of pain in relation to its historical context and traces its implications for contemporary pain research. Geniusas considers how pain is a necessarily ambiguous and complex condition for Scheler that incorporates intentional and non-intentional feeling-states. Pain is accordingly not merely a subjective state; it involves a mediation and sedimentation of affective, cognitive, sensory, and causal elements that allow pain to be phenomenologically distinguished from other conditions such as illness and suffering.

In the third and fourth essays, Frank Schalow and François Raffoul explore issues concerning the very character of phenomenological inquiry in the context of Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant, as mediated by Dilthey, and Heidegger’s thinking of a “phenomenology of the Inapparent” in relation to Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

Frank Schalow’s “A Diltheyan Loop? The Methodological Side of Heidegger’s Kant-Interpretation” traces the methodological development of Heidegger’s reinterpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that ontologically resituates Kant’s epistemological concerns. Schalow establishes the significance of Diltheyan interpretive strategies for Heidegger’s approach to the First Critique, carefully demonstrating how Heidegger’s phenomenological rereading involves a “Diltheyan loop” in which the pre-discursive, pre-predicative, and pre-theoretical fore-structures of self-understanding orient the discursive, predicative, and

theoretical knowledge that is the explicit concern of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Heidegger's reliance on Diltheyian hermeneutical strategies allows him to resituate the epistemic possibility of synthetic a priori judgments in Kant in the context of the ontological possibility of understanding being.

François Raffoul explores, in "The Invisible and the Secret: Of a Phenomenology of the Inapparent," Heidegger's conception of phenomenology as a "phenomenology of the inapparent." In contrast with the standard account that identifies phenomenology with the appearance of a presence, Raffoul provocatively traces how phenomenology cannot escape or evade that which does not appear and make itself manifest. The unappearing is not an accidental residue of phenomenological interpretation, but is, for Heidegger, its most proper sense. Drawing on their deconstructive critiques of the philosophy of presence and their discussions of the invisible, Raffoul illuminates the ethical ramifications of non-presence in the writings of Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida.

In the fifth and sixth papers, Jin Xiping and Ke Xiaogang turn our attention to the ethical and political dimensions of Heidegger's thinking in the 1930's. While the former contribution is concerned with the ethical-political deficits and failures of Heidegger's thinking of the human being, the latter develops the critical character of Heidegger's thinking of being in its confrontation with modern science and rationality.

In "Heidegger's Conception of Being-with (*Mitsein*) and His Simple Designation of Social and Political Reality in the *Black Notebooks*," Jin Xiping analyzes Heidegger's account of social-political reality in the recently published *Black Notebooks* in light of his earlier philosophy of life and his account of being-with (*Mitsein*) in *Being and Time*. Jin argues that Heidegger's failure to develop a richer understanding of *Mitsein*—which would include relations of love, friendship, and solidarity—points toward the destitution of Heidegger's phenomenology of the "life of the we." The ethical inattentiveness of Heidegger's thinking to basic human relations in the 1920's allows us to philosophically situate the social-political failures of the 1930's. The striking absence of love in Heidegger is critiqued from the phenomenology of love that is more attentively articulated in Scheler, Edith Stein, and Ludwig Binswanger.

Ke Xiaogang's "Reason and *Besinnung*: Heidegger's Reflections on Science in *Contributions to Philosophy*" examines the critical significance of Heidegger's thinking about modern science and rationality in the 1930's, focusing in particular on science as a philosophical question in the *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*. Ke argues that being-historical reflection (*seinsgeschichtliche Besinnung*) is not merely a negative much less an irrationalist critique of modern rationality; it offers a strategy for ontologically grounding reason with respect to being and its history through "mindful deliberation" (*Besinnung*). Heidegger's strategy of *Besinnung* in the

Contributions is consequently for Ke both a social-political critique of modern science and a mindful consideration of alternative possibilities for the sciences and reason.

In the seventh and eighth articles, Megan Altman and Tara Kennedy continue the examination of the ethical dimensions and implications of Heidegger's works, focusing on questions of human and animal others.

In "Heidegger on the Struggle for Belongingness and Being at Home," Megan Altman analyzes Heidegger's confrontation with modern liberal individualism and its self-undermining ideals and considers possibilities for a hermeneutic phenomenological ethics of belonging and sharing through a careful reading of Heidegger on belonging with, ethos, and dwelling from *Being and Time* to the *Letter on Humanism*. Altman elucidates how the phenomena of belonging to and sharing are constitutive moments of human life that have been undermined under modern individualistic discourses and regimes that reproduce alienation and estrangement, conformism and thoughtlessness. Heidegger's thinking does not offer a systematic ethics or resolution to this situation; it does indicate a break with the dominant individualistic paradigm as well as sources for mindfully and thoughtfully encountering this condition and plight.

Tara Kennedy articulates in "The Ethics of Treating Animals as Resources: A Post-Heideggerian Approach" the perfectionist normative implications of Heidegger's later phenomenological thinking and examines how they can enrich possibilities for meaningful human relations with animals. Kennedy clarifies how Heidegger confronted tendencies of enframing (*Gestell*) other beings as standing reserve (*Bestand*) and how Heidegger's analysis can be employed to interpret current agricultural practices that instrumentally reduce animals to mere resources and ontologically and ontically injure them. Possibilities of transforming how we dwell in relation to animals and other beings, in addition to our very needs as consumers, are indicated in Heidegger's later descriptions of meditative dwelling with beings in which beings are irreducibly meaningful beyond their reductive enframing in standing reserve.

The concluding two articles by David Chai and Sai Hang Kwok expand the scope of phenomenology beyond its classical boundaries by, respectively, considering Heidegger's thinking of death and Levinas's thinking of the other in relation to two key Chinese philosophical sources: the Daoism of Zhuangzi 莊子 and the Confucianism of the *Zhong Yong* 中庸, traditionally translated as the "Doctrine of the Mean."

David Chai, in his "On Pillowing One's Skull: Zhuangzi and Heidegger on Death," explores how death operates in *Being and Time* as an anxious anticipation of possibility in which one can potentially become free for one's death in being-towards-death. Focusing on Zhuangzi's conversation with a roadside skull, Chai elucidates how death can likewise be interpreted as a

possibility in the text associated with the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi. However, death reveals the entanglements of life, and the complicity of life with death, rather than indicating possibilities of authenticity and individuation. Chai accordingly maintains that Heidegger and Zhuangzi interpret death in positive ways for divergent reasons: whereas the fear, distress, and anxiety of anticipated death motivates the authentic embrace of human finitude in Heidegger, death is neither to be feared nor anticipated as an end or conclusion in Zhuangzi.

Sai Hang Kwok's "*Tianming* and the Other: Rethinking the Source of Responsibility in the *Zhong Yong* and Emmanuel Levinas," confronts dominant interpretations of the *Zhong Yong*, a paradigmatic source of the Confucian tradition, with Levinas's ethics of the other. In dialogue with Levinas's conception of passivity and responsibility, Kwok demonstrates through a careful and nuanced analysis of "heavenly-command" (*tianming* 天命) in the *Zhong Yong* how the source of responsibility does not consist of a bare ability or power to be moral, but instead in a passive ethical situation that calls upon an active ethical response. Ethical responsibility is passive in Levinas in the sense that it is commanded prior to my initiative or choice through being exposed to the other, encountering temporality as diachrony, and the aporetic situation of ethically responding. In the *Zhong Yong*, moral life is developed through its passivity and can only be achieved in "sincerity" (*cheng* 誠) by sincerely responding to the command of ethical responsibility.

3

Phenomenology, from its very beginnings, has been repeatedly declared to be dead, finished, and done with by its critics. Its continuing activities might indicate that it is a zombie. But Zhuangzi's discussions of death—that there is no end, only incessant transformation—may point to an alternative possibility. By following and retrieving the phenomena, the phenomenologist can transform along with them. This special issue has made perhaps a small step in this direction.

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