

Dan Zahavi, ed.

The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology.

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Philosophers disposed to thinking of phenomenology as a quaint historical antiquity would be well-advised to read the *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, edited by Dan Zahavi. With a small caveat to follow, the book certainly realises Zahavi's expressed aim of providing a "representative sample of what is currently happening in phenomenology, and make it clear to philosophers from other traditions that phenomenology, far from being a tradition of the past, is quite alive and in a position to make valuable contributions to contemporary thought" (4).

Of course, it is always possible to quibble regarding the "representative sample" claim for any such volume, and I think it is fair to say that this book actually has particular strengths that simultaneously preclude it being a wholly representative sample of the best of the field. One reason for this is that it is deliberately not a historically focused book, eschewing scholarly chapters on famous phenomenological names, as well as prolonged or detailed exposition for its own sake (3). Moreover, many of the essays also have what might be described as a problem-centred approach. This has its own benefits for those of us working within the field, and it also makes possible some quite detailed and compelling engagements with analytic philosophy.

Indeed, to qualify slightly my opening sentence of this review, I think that any *analytic* philosopher prone to dismissing phenomenology as dead and buried – for example as a research program with no agreed method and no agreed results, as Daniel Dennett once declared – is especially well advised to read this book, since the majority of essays in this collection make a sustained and convincing effort to put the lie to such characterisations, and to show the enduring relevance of phenomenology to contemporary analytic philosophy. Issues explored in detail include methodological matters pertaining to the relationship between transcendental philosophy and naturalism, as well as debates concerning direct realism in perception, conceptual and non-conceptual content, to name but a few.

As such, it might be maintained that this *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology* performatively shows that it is not phenomenology but the distinction between analytic and continental that is a quaint historical curiosity, and indeed one that that we should all be happy has passed into history. However, I do not think it is entirely a coincidence that this book, broad and pluralist as it is in one sense, nonetheless reinstitutes a slightly differently configured 'divide' in another, since it is much less aimed at convincing other parts of contemporary continental philosophy – e.g. psychoanalysts, deconstructivists, Deleuzians, Badiouians, Speculative Realists, etc. – that phenomenology is alive and kicking.

While Zahavi in his introduction briefly raises the recent reinventions and critical engagements with phenomenology by philosophers such as Derrida, Marion, Henry, Levinas, and others, these philosophers and the ideas stemming from them are not discussed much in this volume (admittedly, Henry, Ricoeur, and others are treated more at length in the final sections of the book on “Sociality, Time and History”). Of course, no book can do everything, and despite some of my above cautionary remarks, I think that Zahavi is right to maintain that some of the most important contemporary phenomenological philosophers are included here.

It would be exceedingly boring for me to offer short summaries of the 28 chapters in this *Handbook*, but in what follows I will endeavour to give some indication of the book’s structure and contents through considering many of the seven parts into which it sub-divides. This is a partial sample of the book, reflective of my own interests.

Subjectivity and Nature. One of the central themes of Part 1 of the book is the fate of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology’s relation to naturalism. Most readers of this review will not need me to tell them that two of the foremost writers on this issue, including collaboratively, have been Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi himself. Their collaborative writings (e.g., *The Phenomenological Mind* and the authors’ subsequent responses to the reviews it has received) have often evinced what appear to be quite significant differences in their conceptions of phenomenology and the prospects for any naturalising of it.

Zahavi’s introduction in this *Handbook* frames the transcendental dimension that he thinks is essential to phenomenology, a dimension without which, he suggests, one risks giving the game away to empirical science or other forms of philosophy. However, Gallagher’s essay in this volume, “On the Possibility of Naturalizing Phenomenology”, is significantly less committal on the question of transcendental phenomenology. Gallagher denies that either transcendental phenomenology or empirical investigation might be said to be more basic (73). He instead deploys a double strategy: Gallagher seeks to characterize canonical phenomenologists of the likes of Merleau-Ponty as having been engaged in philosophical projects that were not, strictly speaking, pure transcendental phenomenology, and he also outlines how phenomenology today can interact with contemporary empirical science without being reduced to it. Gallagher hence advocates something more like a phenomenological psychology, which he again takes Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy to support implicitly, while also offering a meta-philosophical justification for a view that might be called dialectical phenomenology, which argues for phenomenology to exist in a relationship of something akin to mutual constraint with the relevant empirical sciences.

Merleau-Ponty has become an interesting philosopher in these debates. Some proclaim him a cognitive scientist and naturalist philosopher before his time (albeit a non-reductive one); others argue that he is a traditional transcendental philosopher (albeit with the turn to the lived body rather than consciousness) who is pretty much anti-science and anti-naturalism, as Tom Baldwin argues in a recent article in the journal of the *Royal Institute of Philosophy* (2013). Both sides of the debate can produce textual evidence to

back up their views, perhaps especially from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. One problem for Gallagher's reception of Merleau-Ponty's work, however, is that notwithstanding Merleau-Ponty's continued engagement with science in his *Nature* lectures, and in *The Visible and the Invisible*, it would be difficult to say that his "indirect ontology", the work of the mature Merleau-Ponty, goes in the sort of direction one might expect for a proto-cognitive scientist. Interestingly, this important book is scarcely cited in this *Handbook* at all.

Steven Crowell by and large seems to endorse Zahavi's conception of transcendental phenomenology in his contribution to this volume, "Transcendental Phenomenology and the Seductions of Naturalism: Subjectivity, Consciousness and Meaning". Certainly for Crowell, phenomenology involves pure transcendental considerations and has an autonomy in relation to empirical and other theoretical matters, even if Crowell recognises that some of the later phenomenologists contest the extent to which consciousness can be the focus (26). Of course, in one sense any turn to the body (even if lived body) makes a pure conception of transcendental phenomenology more difficult to sustain, and that is why in much of his work Husserl resisted such a move. Crowell, however, criticises Husserl for refusing to grant the embodied person transcendental status, suggesting that Husserl's reasons for resisting this step betrayed his own naturalistic assumptions (26). On this account, then, the founder of phenomenology as a rigorous science could not (always) quite practice what he preached. As far as this goes, I agree with Crowell's analyses.

Crowell, however, thinks we might still issue a corrective and attain to a methodologically pure form of transcendental phenomenology. As Crowell puts it, "The epoché expresses transcendental phenomenology's commitment to the analytic autonomy of first-person experience", which "precludes me from appealing in my analysis to any third-person explanatory theories of the experience in question (for instance, causal-genetic ones) since any such theory necessarily posits the existence of both explanans and explanandum" (28). On my view, the transcendental and descriptive dimensions of a phenomenological inquiry should indeed aim not to appeal to third-person explanatory categories, although I am rather more sanguine than Crowell about whether this presuppositionless bracketing can be achieved. Moreover, when it comes to justifying phenomenology in relation to other ways of doing philosophy and others forms of explanation, I think that at this meta-level, inferential thinking is again not simply inevitable but also desirable.

At other times, however, Crowell seems to invoke what I have called a more dialectical understanding of phenomenology in the above discussion of Gallagher's work. In an intriguing section entitled "Towards a Transcendental Naturalism" Crowell says, "the 'nature' that belongs to the phenomenologically pre-given world is relative to culture in just the way that 'nature' as the object of natural science is relative to theory" (43). Here there seems to be an admission of encroachment, something like what Derrida might call "a principle of contamination". If 'phenomenological nature', for want of a better word, is relative to culture, as Crowell concedes, can the theoretical really be bracketed away, *tout court*? Does the theoretical not permeate the cultural? If so, perhaps

we need to be vigilant about this, to embrace a more pluralist conception of phenomenology that does not have an autonomous or secure domain. It may indeed be true that the lived body, the person, being-in-the-world (these seem to be synonyms for Crowell) do not show up if we are labouring under a certain externalist conception of 'nature' (44), and that they depend upon an attitudinal shift to access them, but that does not show that such analyses are ipso facto autonomous. Crowell demands that we strictly separate phenomenological from causal accounts, methodologically speaking, but if our transcendental conditions are temporally and historically based as Heidegger would concede (or relative to culture in Crowell's terms), can science really be kept in principle apart, or do certain possibilities and ways of thinking become part of our life-world in such a way that the epoché is a useful tool, even an indispensable tool for certain philosophical purposes, rather than a presuppositionless and autonomous attitude?

Intentionality, Perception, and Embodiment. The first two essays of Part Two dovetail nicely, with John Drummond's "Intentionality without Representationalism" and David Woodruff Smith's "Perception, Context, and Direct Realism" both defending in their different ways phenomenological-inspired accounts of direct perception and arguing against representationalist and inferentialist accounts of our access to perceptual objects (as does Overgaard later in the volume in relation to our perception of other people). While some related views have enjoyed a revival in analytic philosophy in recent times, it is certainly still not in the mainstream, and these phenomenologically-inspired works promise to help revivify that debate.

In that respect, however, a lot hinges on modal factors like the use of necessity in phenomenological and non-phenomenological debates. Phenomenologists like Drummond, for example, tend to find the modal argument for indirect perception unconvincing – e.g., that it is logically possible to have exactly the same experience with a veridical object present and when it is not present in a hallucination. They are likely to join Merleau-Ponty and say that such does not appear to be experientially the case; reports from patients, at least, seem to suggest that the veridical and the hallucinatory are not entirely indistinguishable for them, even if there is uncertainty and ambiguity. Pressed on whether it is *logically* possible that one may have exactly the same experience with a given veridical object as cause and also without any such object as cause, they are likely to defer to Husserl and suggest that this conception of logical possibility is merely an abstract and idle formal possibility, rather than an eidetic possibility about which we might have a concrete intuition.

Komarine Romdenh-Romluc's essay, "Thought in Action", focuses on Hubert Dreyfus's appropriations of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, building on but also criticising Dreyfus's emphasis on smooth coping. On her view, Dreyfus gives thought next to no role in expert and skilled behavior. This is alleged to be wrong on its own terms (empirically and phenomenologically), and wrong if it is meant to be a reading of Merleau-Ponty. In regard to all of her discussion complicating this picture of "mindless coping", I think she is right, although I worry that Dreyfus's position is presented in a rather simplified and deterministic form here. On Romdenh-Romluc's presentation of Dreyfus, it is hard to think why one would ever do philosophy at all. But, of course, part

of Dreyfus's point is that things are inevitably "unready-to-hand", "conspicuous", to employ some Heideggerian parlance, so smooth coping is never unproblematically attained in terms of bodily intentionality. There is a level of bodily intentionality that seeks such an equilibrium but it is, as Merleau-Ponty says, always imminent and never realised. That is the case without even getting to the personal dreams and hopes for the future that each of us may have, nor indeed the omnipresence of our past, whether in biographical memories, sedimented habits, etc. In general, though, it is impossible to quarrel with her contention that even skilled sportsman do need to use thought to guide their action. However amateurish and unsophisticated they may appear when subsequently interrogated about their deployment of those skills, there is a "reckoning with the possible" that sometimes involves extricating oneself from absorbed coping and which is pretty much indispensable to success and expertise in all such fields, especially given a variable playing field and conditions, as well as variable opponents.

In "Sex, Gender and Embodiment" Sara Heinämaa offers a detailed account of the uses of phenomenology in regard to the lived body and the way in which it can mobilise a critique of the pervasive sex-gender distinction as basically stemming from an uncritical reliance upon the natural attitude. For her, "the body itself is fundamentally a pre-scientific object that is co-given to us in action and communication and is not something that we make, fabricate, or invent" (217). I think her analyses are insightful in this respect, but again the strict separation between the body as lived and the body as object (e.g., the body as known by science, interpellated by culture, etc.), is perhaps a little more permeable than her analyses suggest.

Ethics, Politics and Sociability. I was fortunate enough to be part of a packed SPEP crowd when the double-billing of Zahavi and Bernard Waldenfels presented the talks that have subsequently appeared in this volume. Zahavi's paper, in particular, is a model of clarity and acumen, convincingly showing why phenomenological accounts of shame have certain advantages over other contemporary treatments. Waldenfels's chapter, "Responsive Ethics", is likewise impressive, but for me the highlight of this section is Søren Overgaard's chapter "Other People", which nicely teases apart the epistemic and descriptive problems of other minds. Overgaard cautions phenomenologists against over-extending themselves in regard to their rejections of inferentialist accounts of social cognition (468); he nonetheless makes some important points regarding why we should call something perceptual rather than inferential. For Overgaard, what we call inferences are standardly able to be revised and/or blocked, and this should also be true (albeit more difficult) for those inferences that are said to have become subconscious or habituated over a period of time (467). This can be done through training and the acquisition of new habits, and sometimes even through reasoning and having something brought to one's conscious attention. To pick a deliberately contentious example: perhaps the policeman who sees an indigenous Australian or an African-American and makes the snap judgment that that person is dangerous, then draws a weapon and fires, is using subconscious and habituated inferences rather than mere perception. Even though it occurs instantaneously and without any explicit racist thoughts intruding into a person's consciousness, we might maintain that what are being processed here are fast-tracked inferences, and those inferences may be based on previous

experiences and associations (with social and historical causes, like poverty and marginalisation, as well, possibly, as latent racism). But these sorts of inferences, Overgaard plausibly maintains, are revisable under pressure, and with training, etc., in a way that perceptions of some core emotional expressions, in particular, do not seem to be. Someone simply looks angry *tout court*, even if we judge later or after the event that this was feigned. We might compare this to the perception of the well-known Müller-Lyer illusion. Our judgment that the lines in such an illusion are equal when we check with a ruler, or are told this by a teacher or psychologist, does not change the way they look to us. Overgaard's claim (borrowing the terms from Zenon Pylyshyn) is that if there is cognitive impenetrability of this sort in the perception of core emotional expressions like anger, as there seems to be, then we should be inclined to call it perception rather than inference (467).

Klaus Held makes some interesting remarks concerning the relationship between phenomenology and the political world in his paper, "Towards a Phenomenology of the Political World". He situates phenomenology within a Greek tradition of opposing episteme to doxa. As Socrates famously discovered, any epistemological critique aimed at those within doxa (or within the natural attitude) is liable to being received as otherworldly and potentially dangerous. As Klaus frames this relationship: "the right by which philosophy could claim a superiority to doxa would have to remain inconceivable for them. This means that episteme's frontal assault on doxa, carried out by Heraclitus, can never lead the many toward opening themselves for the one world. Episteme's unmediated confrontation with the natural attitude makes an unsolvable riddle out of how the human beings that live within this attitude would ever bring themselves to turn away from it" (450–451). Klaus hence touches on the gap that separates philosophy and politics, and something of this order appears to be what Deleuze and Guattari were getting at when they suggested that "the question of desire's involvement in its own involuntary servitude is the fundamental problem of political philosophy". Reflections on rational self-interest, for example, and even rational argument per se, will not suffice for the overcoming of illusions and for social and political transformation.

One response is to reinstitute a stark contrast between episteme and doxa, as Badiou has arguably done. Held's conclusion is rather less radical. He says we must presume/posit some middle or mediator. He follows Hannah Arendt and affirms the role of judgment in this regard, as being both partly doxastic and partly oriented to episteme. There are some questions about this solution, this recourse to the "common sense use of our faculty of judgment" (459). Is this phenomenology as urdoxa, or higher doxa, as Deleuze says, while his own philosophy counsels us to be done with judgment? Perhaps there is a less problematic middle way to take, that is via the body, and an operative intentionality that precedes explicit opinions, beliefs, and the like and is basic to our perceptual faith, as paradoxical and teething as it is. In this respect I cannot help but wonder whether some of Merleau-Ponty's political writings in *Humanism and Terror* and *Adventures of the Dialectic* may have more to offer on these questions than this revisiting of Arendt, but such a suspicion cannot be justified here.

Time and History. Time has been fundamental to phenomenology since Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and it was central to Husserl's early work too, perhaps most notably in his account of the phenomenology of internal time consciousness which was subsequently adjusted and refashioned by Heidegger. The essays by David Carr, Gunter Figal, and Nicholas de Warren in this part of the book do justice to this rich heritage.

Carr's "Experience and History" reflects on the manner in which we have an experience of history that is not reducible to representation and memory. Nicholas de Warren's essay, "The Forgiveness of Time and Consciousness", is likewise impressive, revolving around the mutual dependence of forgiveness and time: forgiveness requires time and time sustains forgiveness (503), even if forgiving and forgetting are not the same thing.

I have touched on just a selection of the 28 essays in this *Handbook*. There are also impressive essays by David Cerbone, Charles Siewert, Renaud Barbaras, Ed Casey, Rudolf Bernet, Donn Welton, and Anthony Steinbock, to mention just a few of the prominent phenomenologists in the collection whose work I have not addressed. Certainly the volume as a whole is ample evidence that phenomenology perdures, being on a philosophical and methodological trajectory that has seen out the 20th century and is alive and kicking in the 21st, something that cannot be said for many of its ostensible philosophical competitors during the twentieth century. That perdurance might be equally taken to suggest that it is genuinely *contemporary*, as the title of this book interestingly proclaims; or that it is in some sense universal and timeless (philosophy, properly understood, always already was phenomenology); or even that it is *passé* but preserved institutionally in contemporary academia. Whatever one's assessment concerning this, what really matters is what those who inherit the name phenomenology do with it in the future. While only time will tell in that respect, this *Handbook* justifies some optimism about both what the future holds for phenomenology, and what phenomenology promises to contribute to the future of philosophy.

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