

Husserl Studies, Forthcoming.

**Zahavi, Dan (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-19-959490-0, 619 pp. US-\$ 150 (hardbound); €123 (hardbound).**

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This volume is the first in its kind to provide such a comprehensive survey of contemporary research in phenomenology. The editor has assembled an impressive cast of authoritative contributors to produce what will undoubtedly become a much-used, stimulating, and invaluable reference book in the field of philosophical phenomenology. The contributions themselves are on the whole of a uniformly high standard and (with some understandable exceptions, notably regarding applied phenomenology) cover the whole spectrum of phenomenological research. The book is divided into seven parts. The five chapters in Part I, “Subjectivity and Nature,” present some competing visions of what phenomenology is and what it is not, with special focus on its relationship to naturalism. The second and largest part of the book, “Intentionality, Perception, and Embodiment,” includes phenomenological contributions to the philosophy of mind and the theory of perception — concentrating on the intentionality of perceptual experience and bodily intentionality. Part III, “Self and Consciousness,” deals with the increasingly debated issues of the self and self-consciousness. Part IV, “Language, Thinking, and Knowledge,” covers epistemology and the philosophy of logic and language. The three chapters forming Part V, “Ethics, Politics, and Sociality,” explore new avenues for research in ethics and politics by clarifying some basic

concepts and issues: ethical “responsivity,” the “political world,” epistemological intersubjectivity. Part VI is dedicated to “Time and History.” Here, in my estimation, David Carr’s study provides a perfect illustration of how phenomenology can contribute to philosophy in general by elucidating the experiential sources of philosophical doctrines. Part VII, “Art and Religion,” includes three thought-provoking studies devoted to religious experience and the image in art.

The chapters contained in this volume could hardly be more diverse. What is strikingly apparent is the great variety of approaches and issues addressed, which may seem to contradict Zahavi’s optimistic diagnosis in the opening pages. Although highly heterogeneous, says Zahavi, post-Husserlian phenomenology still represents a unitary tradition and research program since its representatives, to a large extent, “continue the work of the founder” (p. 4). In contrast, the overall picture that emerges from the book suggests that contemporary phenomenology is torn apart by opposing tendencies reflecting different ideas about what phenomenology is or should be: some chapters tend to emphasize the “transcendental” or “eidetic” dimension of phenomenology, while others aim to integrate empirical findings, sometimes on a naturalistic basis; some see themselves in the first instance as heirs of the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, while others prefer to take a looser and more direct approach. These tendencies are all well represented, and it is a major merit of this volume that it gives equal weight to all of them.

Limited space makes it impossible to mention, let alone discuss, each of the 28 articles contained in this *Handbook*. I will confine my comments to a few of them that struck me as particularly interesting.

The transcendental line of thought clearly underlies the two opening essays by David Cerbone and Steven Crowell. The first one, “Phenomenological Method: Reflection, Introspection, and Skepticism,” is aimed at showing that the widespread skepticism about

phenomenology stems mainly from a misunderstanding of phenomenology as an introspection-based descriptive psychology. What is needed is to hark back to the later Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and to define phenomenology as a non-empirical discipline interested in "essences." Phenomenology thus conceived, Cerbone claims, might not only provide a convincing alternative to naturalism, but also help to clarify or solve some central issues of naturalism — for example, to circumvent the seeming impossibility of explaining the possibility of science scientifically (p. 21).

Crowell's essay ("Transcendental Phenomenology and the Seductions of Naturalism: Subjectivity, Consciousness, and Meaning") is an attempt to solve the so-called "paradox of subjectivity" as it arises in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Roughly, the paradox is that the "person" — the subject "as it appears within the human sciences" (p. 26) — must somehow be part of the world it "constitutes," that is, be both constituting and constituted, self-constituting. Since this is impossible, Husserl claims, the person must be different from the constituting or transcendental ego. In Crowell's view, the paradox has its roots in a background "naturalistic assumption" to the effect that the person instantiates the natural kind "human being." Crowell's aim is to dispel the paradox of subjectivity by rejecting this assumption: "The paradox of subjectivity (...) is only apparent, since the subjectivity that constitutes the world is not *in* the world at all: it is, as Heidegger will say, being-in-the-world" (p. 44).

At the opposite side of the spectrum lies Shaun Gallagher's essay, "On the Possibility of Naturalizing Phenomenology." Gallagher's aim is to clarify how phenomenological data can be integrated in a non-reductionist way into the general framework of cognitive science. Phenomenology is certainly not "naturalizable" in the reductive sense, but there may be some benefit to redefining both phenomenology and naturalism in such a way that they can cooperate with each other "in a process of mutual enlightenment" (p. 89). Nothing new thus

far. What is new and noteworthy here, however, is the cogent and well-argued discussion of the nature and possibility of such cooperation, in dialogue with some transcendentalist critics like Leonard Lawlor. On the one hand, Gallagher persuasively shows that Husserl's phenomenology is consistent with scientific naturalism broadly conceived. On the other hand, he offers concrete examples of how the phenomenological and neuroscientific levels of description can constrain and guide each other.

It is quite plausible to say — as did Brentano and Stumpf, for example — that the scientific investigation of the mind must somehow be guided by phenomenological description, to the extent that the latter furnishes explananda for the former. Likewise, the phenomenologist's choice of focusing on one specific phenomenon over others can arguably be dictated by the needs of the cognitive sciences. It remains unclear, however, why such a mutual constraint should lead one to “redefine naturalism” as Gallagher claims. If Husserl and many of his followers are right in characterizing phenomenological description as metaphysically neutral (Hua XIX/1, 1984, p. 24 ff.), then there is a sense in which phenomenology is consistent even with reductionist naturalism — namely that metaphysical questions are just not the sort of questions that phenomenology is designed to answer.

In opposition to both transcendental and naturalistic-minded phenomenologists, Charles Siewert (“Respecting Appearances: A Phenomenological Approach to Consciousness”) proposes a more neutral and manageable definition of phenomenology as “a sustained and unified effort to clarify our understanding of philosophically or theoretically relevant distinctions, with recourse to an underived and critical use of first-person reflection” (p. 50). Phenomenology, as he conceives it, ties up with a non-representational account of phenomenal consciousness (p. 57, 67). “Experiencing an experience,” he argues, is to be construed intransitively on the model of “dancing a dance.” The idea is not new (compare, e.g., Thomasson 2000, Thomas 2003, Zahavi 2004, etc.), but Siewert offers some fresh and

valuable insights in terms of a “coincidence” between one’s experience and one’s experiencing it. Most interestingly, he also emphasizes the need for a phenomenological approach to sensory intentionality and argues for a phenomenological, non-representational variant of the so-called phenomenal intentionality thesis (pp. 60–61). Finally, the essay provides many subtle and potentially useful distinctions — for instance, the distinction between coincident and “objectual sensing,” between “recognitional” and non-“recognitional” appearances, and between “essential” and “derivative” phenomenality.

A similar non-representational line of argument underlies Dorothée Legrand’s chapter on self-consciousness (“Self-consciousness and World-consciousness”). Legrand agrees with Zahavi and Henry that, since the subject is “what the object is not,” self-consciousness must be irreducible to object-consciousness, that is, non-intentional. On the other hand, however, her view is that self-consciousness constitutively involves object-consciousness insofar as the subject can experience herself only by experiencing the objects she is not. Self-consciousness is not “reflective,” in the sense that the subject is in no way its object; and it is not “reflexive,” in the sense that being conscious of oneself requires being intentionally directed upon the world.

A significant portion of the volume is devoted to the phenomenology of intentionality. David W. Smith and John Drummond make significant contributions to the still quite alive debate between internalist and externalist readings of Husserl. Drummond’s “Intentionality without Representationalism” offers an updated version of his phenomenological externalism, which he calls “presentationalism.” Drummond convincingly argues that representational theories of intentionality fail both to fully address the problems that underlie and motivate them (conception-dependence and existence-independence) and to accommodate the common-sense understanding of intentionality as an unmediated relation to the world. Although his arguments are not decisive — does ordinary intuition really say that the

intentional sense belongs to the object rather than to our experience of it (p. 123)? —, Drummond’s careful discussion of the problem of intentionality has the merit of drawing on recent work to reformulate the debate in a way that is both clearer and more precise. His analysis of illusion and hallucination in Sections 1 and 2 is one of the most concise and straightforward introductions to the topic available.

David W. Smith’s tone in his chapter, “Perception, Context, and Direct Realism,” is more conciliatory. He rejects both (strict) internalism and (strict) externalism as partial and biased, on behalf of his indexical-content model of perceptual intentionality. His general idea is that “the satisfaction of an indexical content in an experience involves both internal and external elements in perception” (p. 149) — that is, the intentional content as well as the context of experience. This leads him to advocate a Husserl-inspired direct realism in the theory of perception without abandoning the idea that perceptual intentionality is also determined by the intrinsic content of experience, namely by “phenomenal appearances.”

Walter Hopp’s brilliant chapter on “The (Many) Foundations of Knowledge” is, perhaps regrettably, the only contribution in the volume centrally concerned with epistemological issues. Its purpose is to provide “a phenomenologically-based account of immediate justification” (p. 327), that is, of the fact that sometimes *facts* are evidence for (the content of) our beliefs. Following Husserl, Hopp assumes that some beliefs are “basic” in the sense that they are non-inferentially justified, and he describes non-inferential justification in terms of perceptual fulfillment. He makes three claims. First, the evidential justifier of, say, the belief that the door is open must be the “object of consciousness” at which the belief is intentionally aimed. Secondly, it is not the corresponding mental fact: it is not the fact that I see the door open, but the fact that the door is open that serves as evidence for my belief that the door is open. Likewise, my belief that I am in pain is justified by the fact that I am in pain, not by the fact that I know that I am in pain. Thirdly, the evidential justifier is internal. This last claim

corresponds to what Hopp terms “reasons internalism.” Most of the chapter is dedicated to explicating these views and defending them against criticisms.

Zahavi’s chapter, “Self, Consciousness, and Shame,” is a scrupulous and insightful analysis of the phenomenon of shame. Zahavi takes up the issue of what role others play in shame: Is shame intrinsically social? Does it affect, say, the socially constructed component of the self, or has it more to do with personal ideals and failures regardless of the others’ evaluation? According to Zahavi, who follows Sartre on this point, both views are problematic and the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. In his view, shame essentially involves a complex combination of decrease in self-esteem and endorsement of the others’ negative evaluation.

Overall, this collection should not be viewed as an introduction to current theories, but as a many-sided survey of recent research or, as Zahavi puts it, as “a representative sample of what is currently happening in phenomenology” (p. 4). In that respect, the editor has achieved admirably well what he set out to do. This volume not only brings the reader into contact with a range of debates about major issues within contemporary phenomenology; it also demonstrates the relevance of the phenomenological approach to many areas of contemporary philosophy.

If there is one drawback to the book, it is that it largely ignores the area of research sometimes referred to as “Austrian phenomenology,” despite the significant influence it has had over the last decade. This omission makes sense given that the book is not primarily historical in its scope and perspective. Nevertheless, I think it would have been useful to have some discussion of the contributions to the current debates on phenomenal consciousness made by scholars of Brentano’s work.

## References

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