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REVISTA DE LIBROS/BOOK REVIEW

Experiencing Phenomenology: An Introduction, by JOEL SMITH, LONDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, 2016, 238 pp.

Both the phenomenological movement and the analytic tradition exhibit, despite their internal diversity, specific histories of themes and influences together with dialogues linking the major figures in each camp, without there being any parallel links across the two philosophical schools. Yet, the important thematic and even doctrinal points of coincidence shared by the two schools should not be overlooked. In this regard, this outstanding introduction to the topics and claims dealt with by the phenomenological movement is exemplary; indeed, it makes various timely incursions into analytic grounds and in this way contributes to bridging the gap between the two traditions.

The book is also exceptional in that the intellectual legitimacy of a “transcendental phenomenology” is not simply taken for granted, in contrast with the more usual introductory works on the phenomenological movement (Sokolowski’s *Introduction to Phenomenology* would be a well-known, even paradigmatic example of this). The notion makes only a fleeting appearance in Chapter 1, in the context of the discussion of methodological issues within phenomenology, and there Smith adopts the sensible option of concentrating on the issues themselves — explaining Husserl’s and Heidegger’s views — without making much of the idea, which does not resurface again.

The thematic material the book covers is usefully organized into 11 chapters, nicely subdivided into sections. The first two chapters are respectively entitled “The science of experience” and “The objects of experience”, while the rest — with the exception of the final “Conclusion” — are entitled using the unifying format “Experiencing X”, where “X” is successively substituted by: “things”, “properties”, “events”, “possibilities”, “oneself”, “embodiment”, “others” and “emotion”. These labels immediately suggest that phenomenology is concerned with the *experiencing* of objects, of properties, of others, etc.; and to my mind, they are

more successful as an early indication to the reader of what phenomenology is all about than the author's efforts in Chapter 1 to introduce his topic with the help of the notion of *appearing*.

Phenomenology as a movement is characterized by a style of philosophical inquiry which crucially involves the critical use of first-person reflection. However, it has no exclusive rights over such a style of inquiry. Here, for example, is a recent observation — fully in that style — by a respected *analytic* philosopher: “In the case of perception, it seems to one as though the temporal location of one's perceptual experience depends on the temporal location of whatever it is that one's experience is an experience of.” (Soteriou, “The Past Made Present”). The author is here claiming something about an alleged property — temporal location — of perceptual experiences, presumably as a result of phenomenological analysis. So, what is the difference with what we find in the phenomenological movement?

We can learn quite a bit about this from reading the first two chapters of the book. As explained there, phenomenologists from within the phenomenological movement tend to regard their discipline as a fundamental science or discipline whose claims — to be justified *a priori* — have absolute priority over the positive sciences and aim to embody the indubitability and necessity which was attributed to science in classical conceptions.

For Husserl and other phenomenologists, these views are associated with the alleged absence of presuppositions, and this, in turn, with so-called “phenomenological reduction” and its “bracketing” of (the existence of) objects. The reduction is supposed to mark the divide between the “phenomenological attitude” (which supposedly embraces it) and the “natural attitude” (which supposedly does not). But is this reduction meant to be only a methodological tool for concentrating on the description of how objects are “intended” or “interpreted” in experience? Or does it rather have ontological import, with it being further assumed that experience could remain essentially the same even if there were no mind-independent objects at all? Either way — as Smith points out — a strong presupposition is already hidden in the “phenomenological attitude”, which becomes obvious when one takes into account current relationist ideas concerning perception that are in keeping with naïve realism (cf. *Experiencing Phenomenology* [EP, thereafter] pp. 15 ff.). Smith's good point here illustrates how he brings up-to-date knowledge of developments in analytic philosophy to bear on disputes in the phenomenological movement. Yet, to my mind, Smith misses the opportunity here to mention the distinction between advocating the possibility of a *specific* (case by

case) detachment from objects in (individual) experience or understanding, and advocating the possibility of an intelligible *generic* detachment. This is a shame since there is at least one major figure in the phenomenological movement — Merleau-Ponty — whose position on the reduction amounts to denying the latter possibility while admitting the former.

Smith suggests that the abandonment of presuppositionlessness in the phenomenological movement is to be attributed to Heidegger. But, of course, it is one thing to renounce inquiry that is free of presuppositions, and quite another to advance a particular doctrine concerning which those presuppositions are. Heidegger's controversial doctrine on this point marks the advent of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the book moves on to explain the basics of this particular current within the movement [*EP*, pp. 25 ff.].

The conception of experiencing is intimately related, within the phenomenological tradition, to the notion of intentionality, and this, in turn, is closely aligned with the notion of directedness towards entities or “objects” in the widest sense. Chapter 2 is devoted to examining different views of what this directedness amounts to — mainly Husserl's and Heidegger's views. The relation of this topic with the controversy between internalism and externalism — with timely hints at developments in analytic philosophy — is explicitly tackled in the third chapter.

We face especially tricky issues here. For example, one might hold that, in Heidegger, the sort of world-detachability which we find in the ontologically strong interpretation of the reduction (“experience would remain unaltered by the absence of mind-independent objects”) is already ruled out in talk of human beings essentially dwelling in an environment, and so one might eventually be inclined to attribute to Heidegger some sort of externalist position [as mentioned on *EP* p. 46]. On the other hand, we may well attribute to Heidegger the notion that it is a shared language which holds the key to what the entities populating this environment are (language is what “opens the world”), and, as Cristina Lafont has shown, it is arguable that Heidegger held a semantically internalist position. If we adopt this latter stance, then the objects that confront us in experience (or better, understanding) would be conceived as dependent on a sort of “communitarian mind” — the socio-historical communities speaking particular languages. This is not discussed in the book; but admittedly, one might fairly retort that such developments are hardly within the bounds of a compact introduction, however skillfully it is crafted.

Another important controversy in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind which is also introduced in Chapter 3 concerns whether there are experiences — perceptual experiences primarily — whose content is non-conceptual, in contrast to the conceptual content that characterizes judgements. Of special interest here is the mention of the Heidegger-inspired answer to McDowell's conceptualist position, and the ensuing controversy [collected in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World*, edited by J. Schear in (2013)].

The next chapter moves around the notion of perceptual constancy (§3.1 of this chapter contains the finest introductory treatment of this notion I know of) and its relevance for determining what sort of properties we are aware of in perception. The views of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are discussed. In regard to Husserl's views, however, I find it somewhat odd that no explicit connection is made here with the immanence/transcendence contrast — which is tackled in the first two chapters.

Like much of analytic philosophy, the practice of philosophy within the phenomenological movement does not often appeal to empirical results at all for the justification of its claims (Merleau-Ponty is a glaring exception). Beyond this negative point, establishing a convincing doctrine for the strong sort of justification aimed at in the phenomenological tradition has always been a problem, ever since doubts about the legitimacy of phenomenology's crucial use of "reflection" were expressed by the neo-Kantian Natorp in his review of Husserl's *Ideas*.

In *EP*, this problem comes to the surface in several places. One particularly interesting instance is in Chapter 7. As is also the case in Chapter 6, on imagination ("possibilities"), Chapter 7 is mainly focused on the views of Sartre. The chapter deals with self-consciousness in experience, both the alleged awareness of one's experience while having it (*state* self-consciousness) and the putative awareness of the subject undergoing the experience (*subject* self-consciousness). Thus, for example, the differences between Sartre's views on the first topic and some current higher-order theories of consciousness are duly noted [cf. pp. 139-140].

The general framework of the views discussed in the chapter, be it related to the first or the second topic, is one in which experiences always "point to" themselves in some way or other. The ultimate reference for such notions is Husserl's view that experience itself is "given" in experience, i.e., that we have an implicit awareness of unreflected experience, so that experience is, to an extent, reflexive. For Husserl, such "givenness" provides evidence in favour of the phenomenologist's intro-

spective access to experience as an object of reflection. For Sartre, however, reflection on experience modifies spontaneous experience. The problem is nicely discussed in the chapter, as Smith explains how Sartre attempted to circumvent it by a Husserl-inspired doctrine that consciousness of consciousness is “non-objectual” (“non-positional”).

Perhaps one could complain here that the connection to the ultimate source of all “self-pointing views” is not made explicit. I mean by this, of course, Husserl’s famous treatment of the experience of time (“temporal objects” or events), to which much of Chapter 5 is devoted. The suggestion I would allow myself to make here, to favour progress beyond the material included or mentioned in Smith’s introduction, is to explore views that are not committed to any “self-pointing” element in the analysis of experience, or which even challenge any such approach to experience (like in the excellent “On the Phenomenology of Introspection”, by Charles Siewert).

Chapter 8 draws on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty to explain how phenomenologists have thought of the experience of embodiment and its relation to the experience of things; we do not experience our bodies themselves primarily as things, and, moreover, they are “implicated in our experience of things” [*EP*, p. 159], perhaps because this experience is primarily an “embodied understanding” of things.

Chapter 9 then focuses “on the account of how others are given that is presented by Husserl and Stein” with brief incursions into the work of Max Scheler and Heidegger (more recent developments along the same lines by Gallagher and Smith himself are usefully mentioned). The account is aptly presented against the background of the treatment of the “other minds” problem in the analytic tradition. Particularly welcome is the way the author draws on the views of the unfortunate Edith Stein.

Chapter 10 — the last chapter but for the very brief “Conclusion” chapter — moves on to deal with much of what has made phenomenology renowned outside academic circles in discussing Sartre’s views on emotions and Heidegger’s on moods, together with the ways in which both, emotions and moods, configure our confrontation with our environment.

Occasional complaints apart, Smith’s book is an exceptionally clear and well-organized introduction to phenomenology as practiced in the phenomenological tradition. The frequent short quotations of classic authors from within the movement are enlightening and contribute to a lively exposition. Moreover, the book’s usefulness is significantly enhanced by providing a list of suggested readings (which is divided into

“general”, chapter-by-chapter “primary readings”, and a chapter-by-chapter “further reading list”), plus a glossary, not to mention a comprehensive bibliography and well-organized index.

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