

Contributions To Phenomenology

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Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida: The Question of Difference

 Springer

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Introduction: Between Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida

'I am, I think, I live', means that I am one human being among others in the world, that I am related to nature through my physical body, and that in this body my *cogitationes*, perceptions, memories, judgments etc. are incorporated as psycho-physical facts [...] *The essence of consciousness, in which I live as my own self, is the so-called intentionality.* Consciousness is always consciousness of something.

Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*.

The seismic shift in the philosophical landscape produced by the work of Edmund Husserl is easily comparable to Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution'. Husserl's phenomenology revolutionised philosophy, producing a turn in thinking that spins on in the work of many of today's thinkers. This turn pivots, in many ways, on the concept of intentionality. Adapted from Brentano's psychological approach, Husserlian intentionality marks the very structure of experience as *relation* and makes the description of that structure the task of philosophy. In this, Husserl's phenomenology escapes solipsism and scepticism to assure itself of a firm ground for knowledge. However, this ground is called into question by the very fact that it is built upon *relation* and thus upon difference. And it is this question of difference which in many senses frames the rich, complex, and elusive relation between Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida.

Marrying Husserlian phenomenology with the hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey, Heidegger's magnum opus poses the question of Being and answers with the ontological difference. This primacy of the question as the *hodos* or 'way' of thinking echoes in the work of Levinas, for whom 'one comes not into the world but into question'. Philosophy itself is the 'community of the question' for Derrida. A question presupposes difference: difference between call and response; difference between one and the other; and difference between saying and listening; and so on. Difference, as the condition of the possibility of the question, is thus also the possibility of philosophy itself insofar as the latter begins with the question. But how do these questions of difference pose themselves and multiply themselves between Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida?

It was to this question that we initially sought a response when we organised a conference ‘Between Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida’ in 2013 in Dublin. While the collection of essays here is far more than a ‘conference proceedings’ and a number of essays herein were not presented at that conference, the project nonetheless took its first steps at that event. We would like to thank the Irish Research Council for its funding and the UCD School of Philosophy for supporting that conference, in particular the then head of school Maria Baghramian.

In compiling this collection, we were faced with the difficult decision of how to order the essays. Any thematic division seemed to limit each individual essay by forcing it to be ‘about’ only one thing. We therefore decided to order them alphabetically by authors’ surnames so that each essay can stand on its own and relate to each other essay in its own way. What all of the essays share, we believe, is a new way to approach the relation between each of the three thinkers.

The collection begins with a challenge to Levinas’s claim that we must leave the ‘climate’ of Heidegger’s philosophy to find an ethics. Ileana Bortun argues that Levinas overlooks the nature of responsibility already found within the Heideggerian structure of Being-with and Dasein-with. Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly investigate the relation between Derrida’s thinking and the tradition of philosophy. Taking ‘the limits of truth’ as a guide word, Cohen and Zagury-Orly follow Derrida’s departure from Heidegger and Levinas through the themes and times of truth, justice, and the impossible. Arthur Cools, in Chap. 3, approaches the relation between Levinas and Derrida from their shared mistrust of metaphorical language. However, ‘skin’ in the work of Levinas and ‘gift’ in that of Derrida, demonstrate the manner in which both thinkers invariably fall back into the metaphorical language they wish to shake off. Paul Ennis investigates the role of death in Heidegger and Derrida, framing his essay through the recent move away from phenomenology in thinkers such as Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier. Ennis argues phenomenology must confront its inevitable defeat by a time which exceeds the human. Lisa Foran returns us to the theme of language in an essay that centres on the possibility of naming. Foran argues that unlike Derrida, Heidegger and Levinas remain trapped in the tradition they wish to escape insofar as they name difference itself.

How philosophy defines itself has been a philosophical pursuit throughout its history. Tziovanis Georgakis in his contribution describes this concern with the enclosure of philosophy as both a farce and a *deus ex machina*. The paradoxical but unavoidable relation between heteronomy and autonomy frames his investigation into this *deus ex machina* as it operates in the work of Heidegger and Derrida. Carlos Gutiérrez begins with the question of how to listen to the other person without destroying their absolute alterity. Tracing otherness from Heidegger to Levinas to Derrida, Gutiérrez offers Hans-Georg Gadamer’s approach as a path between the extremities of the former thinkers; a path along which we might truly *listen* to the other. Sinéad Hogan takes up the work of all three of our thinkers interrogating their relationship through the prism of a graphic, which is to say an aesthetic, intervention. Hogan asks how the line between ‘aesthetics’ and ‘critical thinking’ becomes disrupted in the work of Heidegger and Levinas, via Derrida. Oisín Keohane describes the interrelation between Heidegger’s *Machtlose* and Derrida’s *impou-*

voir. François Raffoul explores the Heidegger/Levinas debate on the notion of responsibility. If Heidegger has taught us that Being is *transcendence* pure and simple, Raffoul then questions whether the Other can only be said to lie beyond Being.

The relation between the early Derrida and Heidegger is examined from the concept of time in Rajesh Sampath's contribution. Mauro Senatore traces Derrida's thought of the *usure*, suggesting that it is not only the interpretation of Levinas's metaphysics but also the 'metaphoricity of metaphor' at work in Derrida. Simon Skempton reconceptualises the notion of 'deconstructive personhood' along the lines of the Derridean theme of singularity; arguing that, despite their differences, Heidegger and Levinas share Derrida's concern with the impossibility of making personhood into a present and proper identity. Rozemund Uljée describes the closeness and distance between Heidegger and Derrida in their attempts to think difference in relation to the notion of revelation. Lawrence Vogel investigates the triangular relationship between Heidegger, Martin Buber, and Levinas regarding the notion of intersubjectivity. Vogel argues that each thinker identifies a potentiality he takes to be the defining mark of our humanity itself.

While no work on the relation between Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida could claim to be complete, we hope that this collection of essays reveals the depth of the relation between them and their continued relevance in and for philosophy today.

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