

Presentation

Phenomenon: Cartography of a Fundamental Concept*

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While it is true that philosophy did not wait for phenomenology to propose a strong theoretical usage of the concept of «phenomenon» — Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegelian thought clearly support this claim —, phenomenology seems to be expressly designed, as its name suggests it, to have phenomena as its privileged, or even unique, theme of inquiry. Some questions consequently arise: what kind of «phenomena» are we talking about? And what sort of «phenomenology» is involved? The long history of the technical term, «phenomenology», which dates back to the 18th century and still continues to be in force nowadays, complicates in two substantial manners the possible reply to the definition of «phenomenon» and, subsequently, of «phenomenology» as a discipline and as a method¹.

Only a few of the various approaches that we are witnessing in the history of philosophy had indeed the ambition of constituting a general philosophical project on phenomena. This applies first and foremost to what one could conceive as the «three phenomenologies of the 20th century»: the Brentanian, the Husserlian and the Heideggerian. The core question of this special issue of

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¹ For more on the issues involved, see: K. Schuhmann, «Phänomenologie. Eine Begriffsgeschichtliche Reflexion». In: *Selected Papers*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004.

Phainomenon, in line with the journal's title, devoted to «Phenomenon: Cartography of a Fundamental Concept», is thus to understand the transformations that the concept of phenomenon underwent at the dawn of the 20th century so as to give rise to such an enterprise named «phenomenology». Therefore it is a cartography that we intended to establish, in order to trace back the multifaceted history of this key-concept: from Brentano and his proposal that significantly distinguishes the psychical from the physical phenomenon, passing through the Husserlian changes and the transcendental stage of phenomenology itself, to finally attain Heidegger who accomplishes a radicalisation of the Husserlian legacy by an allegedly more fundamental interpretation, according to which the phenomenon, in a phenomenological sense, should be primarily considered as something that is not manifest.

A general remark, apparently paradoxical, is the basis of the second complication mentioned above, less historical than systematic in nature: since the 1990s and especially after the French reception of Heidegger, phenomenology has begun to redefine itself by its very opposition to the concept of «phenomenon», in favor of another, fairly complex, concept, the «event»². Hence, from phenomena without phenomenology which the history of philosophy, up to Lambert, has been littered with, throughout the three phenomenologies of the 20th century (descriptive, transcendental, hermeneutical), we arrive at the emergence of a phenomenology without phenomena – or, in any case, at the emergence of a form of phenomenology where the concept of phenomenon is pushed to the limits of the phenomenological scope³. Another substantial part of the cartography that we are presenting is devoted to this further transformation, driven by the option of exceeding — or even of abandoning — the phenomenological conception of phenomenon.

The special issue's objective, to put it in a nutshell, is to cast some new light on the conditions that have to be met in order for phenomenology to systematically

² In this regard, see: H-D. Gondek and L. Tengelyi. *Neue Phänomenologie in Frankreich*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011.

³ See, for instance: J.-L. Marion. *Reprise du donné*. Paris: PUF, 2016. In a different direction, but yet in dialogue with J.-L. Marion, see: J. Benoist. *Logique du phénomène*. Paris: Hermann, 2016.

exist, since it is clear that a paucity of research has been designed, in the critical literature, to unravel the complex threads of these ongoing modifications concerning the basic concepts of phenomenology, including the extinction of the concept of phenomenon from the phenomenological field, despite the great attention that has been paid so far to the historical situation in which phenomenology has its roots⁴.

The various contributions here collected of experienced as well as young researchers move along different lines that might, nevertheless, be gathered around a threefold questioning, aiming at: assessing the articulation between the phenomenologically diverse conceptions of phenomenon and some extra-phenomenological ones, considered both (a) from alternative philosophical traditions (Natorp's Neokantianism, Stumpf's or James's psychology, etc.) and (b) from alternative philosophical perspectives (analytical philosophy, metaphysics, theology); (c) measuring the relationship between phenomena and phenomenology in order to better understand the figures of phenomenology that have existed to date and eventually consider the crucial matter of what phenomenology is about.

⁴ As for the historical approach to the question concerning the origin of phenomenology, see: J.-F. Courtine. *La cause de la phénoménologie*. Paris: PUF, 2016; and J.-F. Lavigne. *La naissance de la phénoménologie*. Paris: PUF, 2005.