

Derrida's Contributions to Phenomenology

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Abstract: In this survey of secondary sources on phenomenology I have located the problematic of an aporia that lies at its center. Phenomenology has divided itself into transcendental idealism or empirical idealism and non-philosophy. In both these incarnations of phenomenology, Husserl's transcendental idealism and the radical empiricism in the philosophies of Heidegger, Levinas, Ricoeur, Blanchot and Merleau-Ponty, lies a form of theoretical essentialism and blindness to the meta-condition that structures phenomenology. It is différance, the space or interval between the transcendental and empirical which conditions and produces both the transcendental and empirical through the retrospective movement of the trace. Derrida's contribution to phenomenology, as I will argue in this paper, is his discovery of the quasi-transcendental, or the interval between the transcendental and empirical which determines phenomenology. It does this through the productive and differentiating movement of the trace. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, then truth would be neither transcendental nor empirical.

Keywords: Derrida, Transcendental, Empirical, Quasi-transcendental, Phenomenology

In this paper I will review literature in the phenomenological field and outline Derrida's response. Derrida demonstrates that transcendental is not conceivable without the empirical and vice versa as these come into being through différance and iterability. Truth is thus neither

transcendental nor empirical, but quasi-transcendental, a space between that allows the thinking of both. Upholders of the transcendental such as Husserl require the empirical to be excluded to establish idealism, whereas empiricists require the transcendental to be accounted for on empirical grounds, thus excluding the transcendental. Hence truth is neither transcendental nor empirical, but quasi-transcendental. The quasi-transcendental is the difference between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both.

Joseph J Kockelmans, in his book, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology*, represents wide-spread conceptions in Husserlian scholarship, such as that the transcendental reduction was necessary to bring about a rigorous a priori science of phenomenology. This is to be distinguished from the natural attitude or empirical positivism and relativism of the sciences in Husserl's time. Critics such as Kockelmans uphold Husserl's transcendental-empirical distinction, as they see the need to distinguish phenomenology as an a priori science, or transcendental idealism, from the natural attitude or empirical, positivistic, and hence relative and contingent sciences. As we will explore in subsequent papers on Derrida's readings on Husserl, this distinction between the transcendental and empirical is incoherent, as Derrida argues that the transcendental is nothing outside its iteration or repetition as the empirical. The transcendental is nothing outside the empirical and has to be repeated with a difference through the distinguishing

movement of the trace. The trace only retrospectively produces the transcendental and empirical. Kockelmans concurs with Husserl on the purifying function of the transcendental reduction to produce an a priori science. An a priori science brackets the empirical or the life world as contingent and relative to produce an absolute science grounded in transcendental idealism. This would ground phenomenology as a rigorous science, in a solid, unshakeable fashion. Kockelmans, as with most other critics, takes pains to distinguish essence and intuition from fact and the empirical, and to posit transcendent and noema as the basis of immanent and noesis.

In other words, Kockelmans, as with most other Husserlian scholars, posits the transcendental as the a priori condition of possibility as the empirical. With our subsequent readings of Derrida on Husserl, we will show that the condition of possibility of phenomenology is difference, rather than the transcendental. It is the distinguishing movement of the trace that produces the transcendental and empirical through the movement of iterability, rather than solely the transcendental. Traditionally the transcendental is thought to constitute the empirical, but this paper will show that it is difference which produces both transcendental and empirical, through the distinguishing movement of the trace. Derrida's phenomenology posits difference and the trace as the meta-condition that produces transcendental genesis and the retrospective division of transcendental and empirical as such - which Derrida acknowledges as an illusory distinction. This is because difference or the trace distinguishes nothing and separates nothing. The rigid distinction between the transcendental and empirical which many scholars of Husserl such as Kockelmans

hold, is thus shown to be an illusory distinction, and a theatricality, which produces the illusion that transcendental and empirical as distinct when they are in fact, the same. The transcendental is nothing outside the empirical and the trace or difference distinguishes nothing and separates nothing as a priori difference.

Likewise, renowned Husserl scholar J N Mohanty, in *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, upholds that the reduction was necessary to purify transcendental phenomenology and to distinguish phenomenology from naturalist psychologism. Mohanty defends the anti-psychologism of Husserl as necessary to preserve phenomenology as an eidetic and a priori science of foundations, which forms the basis of naturalist science or the life-world. Mohanty defends Husserl's anti-empiricism and criticism of naturalist psychologism as necessary for the institution of his transcendental idealism as a purified and absolute phenomenology. In his readings of *Logical Investigations*, Mohanty takes similar pains to uphold the distinctions between fact and essence, ideal and real, *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, expression and indication. The argument of Mohanty follows Husserl's paper that the ideal or transcendent forms the basis of the real or immanent. Mohanty thus upholds the distinctions between transcendental and empirical that Husserl makes in *Ideas* and *Logical Investigations* and seeks to establish Husserl as an idealist in the tradition of Descartes, Plato and Kant. As we will eventually see with our readings of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, expression does not exist without indication, expression is as much a sign as indication. The impossibility of the distinction between expression and indication is its own possibility. Expression and indication are the

same, rather than mutually exclusive, just as the transcendental is nothing outside its iteration as the empirical. The transcendental comes into being only through iterability, or repetition with a difference of the transcendental in the empirical. The transcendental thus has to be mediated in the empirical through iterability in order to come into being, indeed it is only an illusion that the transcendental and empirical are distinct as these are produced only through the retrospective division of the trace. The trace, or difference, distinguishes nothing, and separates nothing, and thus maintains the illusion that the transcendental and empirical are distinct; when they are the same. Mohanty defends Husserl as an essentialist, as we will see with our readings of Derrida on Husserl, the phenomenological reduction that isolates the transcendental is a theatrical performance. It is theatricality rather than a strict ontological divide, as nothing distinguishes the transcendental and empirical. As we will read with Derrida, the transcendental is not the condition of possibility for the empirical. Instead it originates from the meta-condition of difference, or the interval between the transcendental and empirical that produces both, through the retrospective division of the trace.

Matheson Russell, in *Husserl- A Guide for the Perplexed* defines the transcendental reduction as the operation which brings into view the fundamental subject matter of Husserlian phenomenology : i.e. pure intentional consciousness and isolates it as a sphere of being for investigation. According to Russell, “before Husserl developed the method of transcendental reduction, certain features of intentional consciousness had already announced themselves to philosophers and psychologists but had done so in a relatively

haphazard and ad hoc fashion. Until a clear methodological way of access to transcendental subjectivity is secured, Husserl thought, these initial insights into intentionality would remain partial and unscientific. Phenomenology cannot hope to attain the status of a fully-fledged science, so long as it captures only occasional, and fleeting glimpses of intentional being. The phenomenon of intentionality needs to be brought into captivity and studied under the microscope.”¹ For Russell, “transcendental reduction” is the tool to do just that. Russell describes the reduction as “the suspension of the natural attitude”, “the turning of regard (or the gaze),” the “exclusion of transcendencies”, the “bracketing of existence” the “refraining from positing”, and the “placing of objects into inverted commas”. Russell defends the reduction as necessary to resolve the crisis of the European sciences, which was lapsing into relativism and uncertainty. Russell thus discusses the reduction as the tool to put intentionality into intense focus, and bracket out the contingent and relative life-world. As I will discuss in my papers on Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is theatrical rather than ontological as the transcendental does not exist outside its iteration as the empirical. The reduction can only be enabled if the transcendental and empirical is distinguished by nothing, so paradoxically the reduction is more a staging of difference than an actual difference. Difference, or a difference which translates as nothing, separates the transcendental and empirical, and hence the reduction is not an

¹ Matheson Russell. *Husserl- A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York, London. Continuum. 2006. 58.

ontologically dividing act but the theatrical performance of the illusion of difference.

J L Mehta, in *Martin Heidegger- The Way and the Vision*, holds that Heidegger's enterprise was an attempt to overcome metaphysics, to think the unthought of Western philosophy. This was a move to go beyond essence and idealism, gearing towards thinking of philosophy as ontology or existence and Being. Heidegger, for Mehta, represented an attempt to overcome metaphysics in order to return philosophy to ontology, or a thinking of philosophy as Being-in-the-world or existential facticity. Like the scholars on Husserl, Mehta's defence of Heidegger's reversal of metaphysics is a form of theoretical essentialism. We will eventually see with Derrida that truth is neither transcendental nor empirical, but located in the space of difference or the quasi-transcendental. Derrida's meta-phenomenology posits difference as the meta-condition that structures both forms of phenomenological scholarship, truth is to be located in the space of the between, neither transcendental nor empirical, but quasi-transcendental. Husserlian idealism and Heideggerean existentialism represent two extremes of philosophy and non-philosophy or metaphysics and anti-metaphysics. What Derrida's intervention does is show the impossibility of choosing between the two, truth is rather the aporia or space of undecidability, between transcendental and empirical, philosophy and non-philosophy. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, truth is mediation, the between, difference, or quasi-transcendental. Mehta describes the fundamental tenets of Heidegger's thought as a thinking of Being or ontology and existential facticity or Being-in-the-world as a more fundamental form of philosophy, the essence of Being

being its temporality and thrown-ness rather than in an ideal essence. This reversal of metaphysics to embrace existence and Being, as we will see with our readings of Derrida on Heidegger, is a repetition of metaphysics as it borrows from the metaphysical vocabulary and ontological structure of metaphysics. It thus remains bound to metaphysics, only repeating it in a negative metaphysics or a reversal of Platonism, which remains a Platonism, and a form of metaphysics. Derrida thus shows that Heidegger does not manage to overcome, destroy, or escape metaphysics as he sets out to do, with his emphasis on philosophy as destruction or the overcoming of metaphysics.

Richard Polt, in *Heidegger- An Introduction*, describes Heidegger's destruction as a meticulous analysis and criticism. Polt describes Heidegger's deconstruction as necessary because "Dasein is its past. Without our inherited interpretations of the world, we would not be Dasein at all. We would be an animal without a culture, language or norms." ²Polt describes our past as "active in the present, making it possible for us to operate as Dasein. This applies to philosophy as well."³ Polt describes the problem as "the fact that we take our inherited interpretation as self-evident. We assume that our own way of acting and thinking is the only way, and we suppress the fact that it has historical origins." ⁴While Polt argues that Heidegger was not trying to escape from the past altogether, Heidegger's rhetoric about destruction as the overcoming of metaphysics and its inheritance, and his

² Richard Polt, . *Heidegger- An Introduction*. London - UCL Press, 1999. 47

³ . Ibid.37

⁴ Ibid.

pronouncements about the “end of philosophy”, tend to confirm Derrida’s suspicions that Heidegger reverses metaphysics only to repeat it by being bound to its vocabulary and ontological structure. As I will argue in my paper on Heidegger, to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology means to overcome metaphysics by moving beyond philosophy as realism and idealism, which are primarily epistemological, into philosophy as ontology, which involves a primordial grasp of philosophy as the disclosure or unconcealing of Being. As Heidegger has argued, destruction is not liquidating but putting aside and dismantling assertions about philosophy which are merely historical. In Derrida’s reading, Heidegger’s destruction of metaphysics as non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics remains a form of metaphysics. Thus it is ultimately a destruction of metaphysics is simply a repetition of it. Derrida thus demonstrates that metaphysics is repeated even in its destruction and thus is no different or the same as non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics as they share the same ontological structure and vocabulary.

Kevin J Vanhoozer, in *Biblical narrative in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, argues that Ricoeur sacralises secular hermeneutics and brings to phenomenology theological concepts of grace, hope and love.⁵ Vanhoozer argues that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic is a theology of mediation that brings together finite and infinite, divinity and man, and explores the interweaving and intersections between the two with his concepts of disproportion, fallen-ness and sin, in which the finitude of man mediates the infinite through, as man is fallible, and

fallen.⁶ Vanhoozer argues that in *Fallible Man* “Ricoeur shows that human being is ‘fallible’- evil is here admitted as a possibility.”⁷ Vanhoozer argues that “fallibility is for Ricoeur the constitutional weakness of human being, its ‘disproportion’ between the intended meaning of freedom and the experience of finitude.”⁸ As I will examine in a later paper on Ricoeur, Ricoeur’s fallibility and disproportion differs from Derrida’s differance in its interest less in the conditions of possibility for phenomenology than with theological conceptions of man as fallen and finite. Derrida’s mediation accounts for the genesis of the transcendental and empirical, through the differentiating movement of the trace, thus constituting a meta-phenomenology. In contrast, Ricoeur’s notion of mediation is a theological interest in the disproportion and fallen-ness which man’s existential condition brings to bear on expressing the infinite in an inadequate and incommensurate manner.

W. David Hall, in *Paul Ricoeur- The Poetic Imperative* argues that Ricoeur set Levinas and Husserl in dialogue on the constituting of the self in relation to Other. Hall argues that Ricoeur mobilizes Levinas against Husserl, in concurring that both criticize Husserl’s phenomenological reduction of the other to an alter-ego, that is, another self. Hall argues that Levinas thought this “is not an encounter with the other, but rather, an exclusion of the other, by reducing the other to an alter-ego. I do not encounter the other but my projection of

⁵ Kevin J Vanhoozer. *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1990. 4

⁶ Ibid. 5

⁷ Ibid. 21.

⁸ Ibid. 21.

him/her.”⁹ Hall argues that “Levinas turned Husserl’s idea of constitution around- the self does not ‘constitute’ the other through the reduction to alter-ego. Rather, the self is passively constituted in the confrontation with radical alterity, the fundamental ‘otherness’ of the other. This movement of the self toward the other, that is, from the reduction to oneness through pairing and analogical appresentation to the position of a community of intersubjective monads, is precisely what Levinas called into question.”¹⁰ Hall argues that “Levinas reversed the order of priority in the constitutive relationship that exists between self and other- the other is not constituted through my intentional consciousness, which appresents the other as my alter-ego. Rather, I am the face of the other, which calls me in the accusative.”¹¹ Hall points out that “against Husserl, Levinas argued that the self does not exist as an ego. While Husserl conceived the ego as a solitary monad intentionally apprehending the world through the reduction of everything that is not self, Levinas claimed that the condition for the genesis of the self is proximity and communication.”¹² Hall argues that “the self only exists in the first person of a dialogic summons as the I who answers the call with the response ‘Here I am’.”¹³ The self is constituted primordially as an ethical relationship, as a responsibility that is called into existence by the Other. In his essay, “At this moment, Here I am” Derrida argues that Levinas’ ontology of the relation to the self to other in the pronouncement of “here I

am” is predicated on a notion of being as presence, which is not strictly possible, because the self is always iterated and produced as a trace with the utterance “here I am”. Hence Derrida argues that Levinas has not overcome Heidegger’s notions of being and presence. Derrida also criticizes Levinas’ designation of woman as “wholly Other”, as this is equally essentialist and subscribes to a metaphysical notion of essence, in which woman as wholly Other is parasitic and secondary to Man. Derrida deconstructs the male and female relation to reveal that these are essentially the same rather than “wholly Other”. Derrida also criticizes Levinas’ notion of the traumatism of the Other, and the idea that the Other obligates one, because the ontological definition does not hold between self and Other, self is an unstable concept and indistinguishable from the Other, indeed we see in auto-affection that self has to relate to itself primarily before it contemplates a relation with the Other because it does not otherwise have a concept of difference, division from the self or separation from the self.

David Pellauer, in *Ricoeur- A Guide for the Perplexed* argues that “the disproportion of human being renders it ‘pathetic’, the moment when the concept of fallibility links up with the lived experience of an impoverished or wretched existence that does not actually fulfil its promise.”¹⁴ As a first approximation of this moment, Pellauer argues that “he returns to the connection between knowing and feeling as it involves degrees of feeling, where feeling itself, like knowledge, is intentional in that it refers to something other than itself.”

⁹David W Hall. *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*. Albany, State University of New York Press.2007.83.

¹⁰ Ibid. 83.

¹¹ Ibid.85.

¹² Ibid. 85.

¹³ Ibid. 85.

¹⁴ David Pellauer, *Ricoeur- A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York, London. Continuum. 2007. 32.

¹⁵Pellauer argues that “whereas knowledge sets up a cleavage between the knowing subject and known object, feeling ‘restores our complicity with the world, our inherence in and belonging to it, something more profound than all polarity and duality.’ Philosophical reflection can talk about this, but never quite really capture it experientially or ‘know’ it except indirectly, leading many philosophers mistakenly to reduce feeling to something merely subjective or at best having to do with ‘values’ that themselves are subjective and not objective. Feeling, instead, is like knowing, but also different from it, pointing to something like an inner conflict within ourselves”. ¹⁶Pellauer argues that “here is where degrees of feeling come into play, running from love of the world through need to desire and introducing the possible mistake of confusing pleasure with happiness.”¹⁷ Pellauer argues that “while pleasure is always finite, the perfection of happiness is infinite because it is meant to be all encompassing. But that we can mistake pleasure for happiness, prefer it, already points to the possibility of a bad choice, and through it to evil. Indeed, while it may look as though the origin of evil may lie more on the affective than on the cognitive level, it is intimately intertwined with both of them.” ¹⁸As I will argue in my paper on Ricoeur, this concern with fallibility and disproportion with the infinite is to be distinguished from Derrida’s difference, which is more meta-phenomenological with its concern with iterability and transcendental-empirical mediation rather than theological or Christian in its concern with fallen-ness,

finitude and sin. Derrida also does not emphasize the affective aspects of phenomenology such as misery as a human condition or subject-object conflation like Ricoeur as his interest is rather, the meta-conditions for phenomenology such as iterability and difference, instead of re-situating phenomenology as an affective; or finite science of mind like Ricoeur.

Colin Davis, in *Levinas- An Introduction*, points out that Levinas’ philosophy is a rescue of the Other from the oppression of the Same. As Davis explains *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas establishes a vocabulary to replace the categories of traditional thought- instead of totality, Being and ontology, he offers infinity exteriority and metaphysics. As Davis argues, “*Totality and Infinity* revolves around an encounter between self and Other. This encounter cannot be explained in exclusively ontological terms because it involves more than Being, entailing a breach which cannot be understood as part of Being’s relationship with itself. The encounter is also not an empirical event (though it may be enacted in any number of empirical events). Rather it is, in terms continually used by Levinas, original, essential, fundamental. This is because the encounter with the Other lies at the origin of the separateness of the self, only by discovering the irreducibility of the alterity of the Other can I understand that I am neither solipsistically alone in the world not part of a totality to which all others also belong.”¹⁹ This encounter, Davis argues, Levinas insists is ethical, and the ethical bond with the Other is the most fundamental subject for philosophical reflection, because

¹⁵ Ibid. 32.

¹⁶ Ibid. 32.

¹⁷ Ibid. 32.

¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹ Colin Davis. *Levinas- An Introduction*. Notre-Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press. 1996. 48.

there is nothing that precedes or has priority over it.

According to Amit Pinchevski in *By Way of Interruption, Levinas and the ethics of communication*, “Levinas’ contention is ethical- ethics is not a secondary level of knowledge, nor is it an outcome of a certain social structure- Levinas regards ethics as first philosophy. The critique of ontology brings Levinas to conceive of the relation to the Other ‘otherwise than being’ and to found it ‘beyond essence’. Ethics, as an involvement with that which escapes definition and incorporation but still confronts, is irreducible to ontology- it does not have an essence. Its ‘essence’ is precisely to unsettle essences, and its ‘identity’ is not to have an identity, to undo identities”.²⁰ According to Pinchevski, “concern for the Other is not a product of rational thought or calculation, nor is it a result of an agreement enforced by social institutions. Concern for the Other is the very basis of subjectivity. The involvement with an irreconcilable otherness is preontological and prior to any social contract since the experience of alterity is the most fundamental experience of subjectivity. Subjectivity is subjection to the Other, inasmuch as it is an exposure and openness to otherness.”²¹ Pinchevski describes the self as “fissured by the Other ‘despite itself’, always already in relation to the Other, an unthematizable relation, which comes to pass by awakening the self’s sensibility.”²² Derrida however will critique this flight towards the Other as a Jewish variant on metaphysics, rather than a

reversal or negation of metaphysics. It remains a repetition of Greek philosophy in a Jewish sense rather than a departure from metaphysics, as I will examine in my paper on Levinas. Derrida argues that Jewish metaphysics repeats the fundamental ontological structure of Greek metaphysics and hence is no divergence from it but essentially the same.

Gerald L Bruns, in *Maurice Blanchot- The Refusal of Philosophy*, argues that according to Blanchot “thinking responsibility is something more than an ethical concept in *The Writing of the Disaster*. More exactly, its ethical meaning consists precisely in the encounter with the foreign that “separates me from myself (from the ‘me’ that is mastery and power, from the free, speaking subject) and reveals the other in place of me, or it turns me into an *autrui*”²³, situates me on his site as an exile or outsider face to face with something other than a face. In the Outside, responsibility is no longer to another, that is, it is no longer strictly philosophical or ethical, it is now a response to the impossible. Responsibility is encumbering and a burden of one to the Other. Levinas defines ‘responsibility’ as responding to the Other in an indeclinable fashion, as responding for oneself to the other person and its demand, and as responding for the other in the sense of substituting oneself for the other person in its responsibilities.”²⁴ As Bruns argues, for Blanchot, this ethical demand of responsibility for the Other weighs heavily on the self as it denies one

20 Amit Pinchevski, *By way of interruption - Levinas and the ethics of communication*. Pittsburgh, Pa. - Duquesne University Press, 2005. 73.

²¹ Ibid., 73-74

²² Ibid., 74

²³ Maurice Blanchot. *The Writing of the Disaster*. University of Nebraska Press; 1995. 46.

²⁴ Gerald L Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot- the refusal of philosophy*. The John Hopkins University Press. 1997. 211.

agency and places one at total command and domination of the Other.

Bruno argues that “Blanchot never hesitates to turn Levinas inside out on just this point in the relation of the “Other to me” he says everything seems to reverse itself, by which he appears to mean I become the other to the other’s Same: ‘When the other crushes me into radical alienation, is my relation still a relation to the other? Is it not rather a relation to the ‘I’ of the master, to absolute egotistical force, to the dominator who predominates and ultimately wields the force of inquisitorial persecution?’. If so, then my response to the other must be one of ‘refusal, resistance, combat. However, this refusal, this resistance or combat, is not a counterattack-it is non-dialectical, like Bartleby’s ‘I would prefer not to,’ which Blanchot thinks of as “the core of refusal.”²⁵ Bartleby is Melville’s fictional American hero who refuses to submit to the demands of society by constantly reiterating “I prefer not to” to the demands of his employer. As Bruno argues, “this, Blanchot explains, is why there must always be at least two languages, or two requirements- one dialectical, the other not, one where negativity is the task, the other not, one where negativity is the task, the other where the neutral remains apart, cut off from being and from not being. The dialectical is an engagement of the Other on his terms, the taking on of encumbering responsibility, whereas non-dialectical response is a Bartlebyan one, the core of refusal, in refusing to participate in the asymmetric power-relation that responsibility for the Other puts one in.”²⁶ As argued with the previous section of Levinas however, Blanchot’s phenomenology of suffering at the hands of

the Other remains a repetition of metaphysics through inverting the self-other relation into an asymmetrical one rather than the traditional symmetrical relation of metaphysics. Derrida would thus argue that Blanchot, like Levinas, does not manage to escape metaphysics. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, truth is rather to be located in the quasi-transcendental, or the difference between self and other, presence and absence, or difference; rather than raising the Other to a totalizing and absolute concept as Blanchot and Levinas do. In his “Demeure” essay, Derrida deconstructs the division between fiction and testimony to show that they are not distinguishable but complicit. Indeed, fiction is the condition of possibility for testimony, as the public and true notion of testimony has to be defined against the private and fictitious notion of literature, to establish itself as such. Death is also the impossible possibility that determines life, the division between them does not hold strictly because life is conditioned by an awareness of its limit as death. We thus see a blurring of boundaries between fiction and testimony, life and death in Blanchot’s work because these dialectical oppositions are necessary to the definition of each term. Blanchot’s work examines the space of the neuter, that which belongs to neither end of the dialectic and this is somewhat similar to Derrida’s quasi-transcendental.

Remy C Kwant, in *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, argues that Merleau-Ponty “endeavours to understand the whole man, he sees man as a kind of unfolding of the body-subject. According to him, man is nothing else than a body-subject, provided we see this body-subject on all levels of its

²⁵ Ibid., 211

²⁶ Ibid., 211.

unfolding.”²⁷ Kwant argues that Merleau-Ponty “repeatedly denies the existence of a separate principle in man, distinct from body. He would not be able to do so if in man, apart from body-subject, there would be another form of subjectivity, for otherwise dualism would re-enter his philosophy by the back door.”²⁸ Kwant argues that Merleau-Ponty’s “philosophical thought shows a general tendency to reduce that which often is called the ‘light of the spirit’ to the chiaroscuro of the body.”²⁹ As I will argue in my paper on Merleau-Ponty, this reduction of man to corporeality likewise repeats metaphysics like Heidegger in a negative sense, and hence does not manage to escape metaphysics or overcome metaphysics. Phenomenology, according to Derrida, is the aporia between the transcendental and empirical rather than the privileging of either since transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. Phenomenology is conditioned by difference and the quasi-transcendental, or the difference between transcendental and empirical.

Derrida will argue that the reversal of the cogito and rethinking subjectivity in terms of embodiment and corporeality is a non-philosophy and anti-metaphysics that repeats metaphysics by negating and reversing it. Derrida’s notion of truth is quasi-transcendental rather than anti-metaphysical like Merleau-Ponty’s, which locates truth in the difference or difference between transcendental and empirical. Rather than privilege idealism or empiricism as both camps have done, Derrida posits the

quasi-transcendental, difference, or the mediation between transcendental and empirical as the space of truth. Difference enables the thinking of both transcendental and empirical, and thus a thinking of the conditionality of structurality as difference is the true resolution to the impasse between idealism and post-metaphysics, or philosophy and non-philosophy.

A common misconception of Derrida is that he continues the legacy of Nietzsche and Heidegger by negating the positive or the transcendental in favour of the negative or empirical, as Stanley Rosen argues in *Hermeneutics as Politics*. Rosen argues that Derrida’s difference is a nihilistic embrace of nothingness over the transcendental and an inversion of Hegel, as well as that contrary to Derrida, speech is superior to writing because of the politics encoded in the hierarchy: while one can adjust conversation according to the nature of the interlocutor, in the way that the equity of the judge adjusts the written law to the individual case, writing says the same thing to everyone. Rosen misses Derrida’s point entirely, which is to bring about democracy through his emphasis that speech is a form of writing and writing is hence prior to speech. Rosen also misses Derrida’s point on metaphysical conditioning by accusing him of being a nihilist and empiricist, Derrida rather locates the conditions of possibility of metaphysics as that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, but the difference between them, or difference. Out of difference arises the differentiating trace that distinguishes transcendental and empirical. This paper argues, contrary to Rosen, that Derrida is not an empiricist, or nihilist, but posits the meta-conditions that enable metaphysical perpetuation and production- which are difference and iterability. The transcendental is nothing

²⁷ Kwant, Remy C. *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*. Pittsburg, Pa. - Duquesne University Press, 1963. 46

²⁸ Ibid., 46

²⁹ Ibid., 46

outside its iteration as the empirical, and hence arises not from transcendental as condition of possibility, but through the movement of repetition, or the trace. The trace retrospectively distinguishes transcendental and empirical. Derrida's deconstruction is thus a meta-phenomenology rather than a negation or inversion of phenomenology as critics like Rosen argue.

Another critic who holds a view that Derrida continues Heidegger's legacy is Paul Manihotttil, in *Difference at the Origin- Derrida's Critique of Heidegger's Philosophy of the Work of Art*. Manihotttil argues that deconstruction radicalizes the task of destruction inaugurated by Heidegger. I would like to demonstrate that Derrida's work does not represent an extension of Heidegger's as I do not believe, as Manihotttil argues, that Derrida is critical of Western metaphysics or that the aim of Derrida's deconstruction is to undo the transcendental absolute of Western metaphysics. Derrida argues that the absolute is constituted by iterability and the trace, but does not in any way negate or invert the absolute, only investigating the conditions of possibility for its production. Manihotttil further argues that Derrida reduces every concept to the play of the text. I contest Manihotttil's view that Derrida's work negates presence and reduces everything to textuality. Rather, Derrida investigates the conditions of possibility for the perpetuation of presence and logocentrism, his arguments about textuality are not a reduction to the empirical but an argument about the fundamental mediation of meaning. The transcendental has to be iterated as the empirical and repeated in the empirical through the movement of difference and the trace rather than existing without a medium or in a vacuum as

Husserl's Cartesian reduction would have it. The transcendental exists only in and through iterability. This is what Derrida means by the statement, "There is nothing outside the text"³⁰, that truth or the absolute is irrevocably mediated, rather than existing without a medium, through iterability and repetition with a difference.

In *Structure, Sign and Play* Derrida describes history as "a detour between two presences- between structure, sign and play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play."³¹ Derrida argues that there is no "question of choosing between the two, but to conceive of the common ground, difference of irreducible difference"³², the monstrous birth of the quasi-transcendental. The quasi-transcendental conceives of difference, or the interval between transcendental and empirical, as the condition of possibility and common ground for both transcendental and empirical idealism.

This passage from *Writing and Difference* was written while Derrida had been working on his subsequent manuscript *Speech and Phenomena*, and in it we see the genesis of Derrida's thoughts on

³⁰ Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. 158.

³¹ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass- The University of Chicago Press, 1978. 292.

³² Ibid. 292.

metaphysics. It is no longer a question of simply choosing between transcendental idealism or a metaphysics of presence and radical empiricism with Nietzsche and Heidegger, because each thought of either requires the opposing term as its relational other and defining axis. Idealism means nothing when defined in isolation from the empirical, just as empiricism is an empty term without its relation to the transcendental. In Husserl for instance, his maintenance of the transcendental subject depends on his exclusion of the indicative, just as Heidegger requires the exclusion of the ideal from his situated Being in order to maintain a pure Being untainted by Christian spirituality. Transcendental is not conceivable without the empirical and empirical is not conceivable without the transcendental, they are only related dynamically through iterability and repetition with a difference. Truth is then not localizable to transcendental or empirical, but situated in between as difference and the quasi-transcendental. Deconstruction thus proceeds by revealing the aporia that thought cannot do without its ghost or unthought and then proceeds towards transgressing the limit toward thinking the unthought of discourse and bringing it to light. Deconstruction is thus justice as it reveals the dynamic interdependency between discourse and its shadow or ghost. It proceeds to demonstrate that thought cannot do without its ghost or unthought. Deconstruction is the thinking of simultaneous identity and difference, identity in non-identity as a priori difference is necessary for thinking both terms which thus share the condition of being determined by this prior difference, hence difference translates into sameness. Deconstruction shows that the possibility of a distinction is simultaneously its impossibility as that

which makes the distinction impossible, for instance what allows expression to exclude indication, is precisely the defining moment that upholds the distinction. It is necessary to exclude indication in order to maintain the transcendental subject, just as it is necessary for Heidegger to exclude Christian spirituality from his anthropological Being in order to maintain its worldliness and separation from the transcendental. Each moment of exclusion is necessary for the maintenance of the defining term as it means something only in relation to its other or unthought. Deconstruction is thus the thinking of the simultaneous similarity and difference, identity in non-identity of thought and its unthought. Deconstruction is the thought of the simultaneous one and its other, or simultaneous positive and negative, because the other or negative is the relational assumption that founds the possibility of thinking the one or positive. Deconstruction is thus the simultaneous thought of both one and other or both positive and negative, because these exist only in relation to each other, through iterability and difference.

The trap that many contemporary commentators fall into is assuming that Derrida privileges the empirical and continues the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, as Martin Hagglund assumes in his book *Radical Atheism*. Hagglund describes Derrida as a materialist who dethrones the sacred in his texts. Likewise Michael Marder, in *The Event of the Thing* argues that deconstruction is a realism that detaches the object from ideal origins in a post-phenomenological turn, thus returning to the thing as fundamentally empirical. My interpretation diverges from such interpretations of Derrida because I hold that they have failed to grasp the aporia of Derrida's thought: you cannot think the

transcendental without the empirical and vice versa, the transcendental and empirical are paradoxically similar and different, identical and non-identical. Derrida is not to be mistaken as an empiricist, rather he is a thinker of paradox, aporia, and the very conditions that make thought possible such as difference and iterability. Transcendental and empirical do not exist outside the structure of repetition as each term requires the other for the distinction to be upheld and only can be defined in relation to the other term as each term, is, on its own, an empty term that requires the exclusion of the other to be thought and conceptualised. The transcendental has to be excluded from the empirical to be defined, just as the empirical has to be excluded from the transcendental to be defined. As we will read with the papers on Husserl, his idealism can only stand with the expulsion and exclusion of indication from his philosophy, just as radical empiricists such as Heidegger, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur and Blanchot require the transcendental to be excluded from their philosophies to define them, accounting for the transcendental on empirical grounds. This act of exclusion is thus necessary, yet mistaken about the fundamental structure of metaphysics because transcendental and empirical only exist in relation to each other through iterability and difference. As Derrida demonstrates, philosophy since Plato has assumed the ontological structure and vocabulary of metaphysics, whether it has affirmed it as philosophy or deviated from it as non-philosophy. Transcendental and empirical are thus terms that are inscribed in language, whether we associate or disassociate ourselves from these terms, these metaphysical terms haunt the structure and vocabulary of our philosophy. True philosophy would, thus, as Derrida

demonstrates, come to terms with the necessity of both terms to thinking each other and acknowledge the quasi-transcendental, the between, the neither transcendental nor empirical, as the paradoxical space between that determines the thinking of both, or difference.

In this survey of secondary sources on phenomenology I have located the problematic of an aporia that lies at its center. Phenomenology has divided itself into transcendental idealism or empirical idealism and non-philosophy. In both these incarnations of phenomenology, Husserl's transcendental idealism and the radical empiricism in the philosophies of Heidegger, Levinas, Ricoeur, Blanchot and Merleau-Ponty, lies a form of theoretical essentialism and blindness to the meta-condition that structures phenomenology. It is difference, the space or interval between the transcendental and empirical which conditions and produces both the transcendental and empirical through the retrospective movement of the trace. Derrida's contribution to phenomenology, as I will argue in this paper, is his discovery of the quasi-transcendental, or the interval between the transcendental and empirical which determines phenomenology. It does this through the productive and differentiating movement of the trace. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, then truth would be neither transcendental nor empirical. Rather the difference or difference between transcendental and empirical would be its meta-condition and that which enables the thinking of its structurality. Truth is neither presence nor absence, Jew or Greek, being or non-being, self or other but the difference and difference between these two extremes, Derrida emphasizes the importance of iterability or repetition of both extremes as

essentially the same, truth is thus quasi-transcendental or the interval between transcendental and empirical which enables both. The concept is marked by its signature, or its breaking away from the origin, to signify a different kind of writing in order to communicate – which is the logic of the graft, intervening in order to signify anew, and renovate meaning and experience, to mark a double writing, and effect a displacement of the traditional hierarchy of meaning and a reversal. Deconstruction examines these principles of displacement and reversal, in order to bring about democracy, and emphasize writing as a primary form of communication. Writing brings about a force of signification that exceeds its origin, so there is always a surplus and excess of meaning, which can never be reduced to a univocal signified. In doing so deconstruction turns philosophy towards infinite possibility rather than a hierarchy, as meaning always exceeds its origin. Origin itself is an illusion and supplemented by the function and logic of the trace, which displaces it in order to communicate. Derrida inscribes in phenomenology it a measure of fallibility through his demonstrations that thought is always contaminated by its unthought, the ideal is always contaminated by contingency and undecidability. Derrida's arguments are modes of interrogation in which he questions the basis of presence, fully given to itself, uncontaminated by absence, contingency, the empirical, the Other, and as such inscribes the necessity of incarnation and a necessity for the mark to fail as presence as it has to differ from itself materially in order to be realized. Derrida thus inscribes failure in phenomenology, its necessity for the mark to die and survive itself as the trace to live on in the material world, and thus rescues phenomenology by

demonstrating that its success as an enterprise depends on including what it had excluded- which is transcendental-empirical difference.

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