

William McNeill, *The Fate of Phenomenology: Heidegger's Legacy*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2020, pp. 168, \$ 133.00, ISBN 9781786608901

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William McNeill's *The Fate of Phenomenology* is a much-needed book. Not only because it provides an important contribution to the *vexata quaestio* of the unity of Martin Heidegger's thinking in its various phases; even more, because it does this from a perspective which is as apparently obvious as mostly neglected in studies of this kind – that of phenomenology. In seven chapters, McNeill explores Heidegger's whole speculative journey – from his early Freiburg period to the 1973-1975 excerpts from *The Legacy of the Question of Being* – seeking to assess to what extent Husserl's phenomenological approach is maintained or rejected in the evolution of his thought.

This attempt – which for its breadth and methodological clarity can be considered unprecedented – returns an overall picture of Heidegger's path that escapes any trivial alternative between continuity and discontinuity (albeit ultimately emphasizing the latter more than the former). McNeill argues that the horizon of the later Heidegger departs clearly from the lexicon and the spirit of phenomenology. At the same time, however, he highlights that this horizon somehow inevitably results from the original appropriation of Husserl's teachings that had characterized Heidegger's phenomenology since its very beginning. What eventually emerges from *The Fate of Phenomenology* is on the one hand that Heidegger betrays phenomenology even when he claims his fidelity to it, on the other hand that he remains indebted to it even when he is explicitly betraying it.

Out of the book's seven chapters, the first three focus on the former aspect. As McNeill points out in Chapter 1, Heidegger firmly accepts the motto of phenomenology as formulated in the sixth *Logical Investigation*, "To the things themselves!". In fact, it is precisely the need to fully adhere to this imperative that makes him dissatisfied with the form that

phenomenology had assumed up to that moment. Already in 1919 Heidegger had begun to question several aspects of Husserl's approach, in particular its excessive theoreticalism and the centrality it assigns to the sphere of consciousness and subjectivity. This approach, implicitly adopting the epistemological model of the natural sciences, ends up abstracting from the "historical ego" of one's own lived experience" (p. 3), which in Heidegger's view is precisely the one and only dealing with the "things themselves".

As a follower of Dilthey no less than of Husserl, Heidegger aims to recover the constitutive historicity and the character of "mineness" of the experience, and thus tries to focus the primordial phenomenon of life "deriving its categories from the facticity of life itself" (p. 12). According to Heidegger, the exercise of keeping to the things themselves, if properly understood, must indeed take on a hermeneutical sense. Such an exercise is not about recording the supposedly immediate, objective givenness that manifests itself on the stage of a set transcendental consciousness. Rather, it means paying attention to the world, while continually questioning the assumptions involved in our understanding of and interactions with it.

The next two chapters further explore this "radicalization of phenomenology" (p. 23) undertaken by the early Heidegger, taking into account first and foremost his 1927 masterpiece, *Being and Time*. Both chapters focus on another decisive aspect of Heidegger's critique of Husserl: in full continuity with the dominant lines of Western philosophy, and in particular with Descartes, the phenomenology of his master never addresses the question of Being. As McNeill recalls, Heidegger acknowledges that Husserl arrives at the threshold of this question, when he introduces the concept of categorical intuition. Nonetheless, "for Husserl, it remained self-evident that Being means being given as an object for consciousness, so that there was no need to question what Being itself means as such" (p. 24). In those years, Heidegger thus finds a more fruitful interlocutor in Aristotle and, more generally, in the Greek world. The Greek experience (and in particular the notions of $\nu\omicron\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu$ and $\varphi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as developed by Aristotle in Book IX of the *Metaphysics* and in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* respectively) provides Heidegger with the resources to pursue non-objectivizing access to things, which is open to

their self-showing (ἀλήθεια) – to the Being of beings. It is therefore with the aim of recalling this experience, and not for a mere etymological mannerism, that Heidegger insists in *Being and Time* on the Greek origin of the word phenomenology. Phenomenology must be in charge of finding a λόγος for phenomena, not in the sense of the naive correspondence theories of truth, but in the Greek hermeneutical sense. For it, there is no possibility of an ultimate delimitation of its object but only that of a constant preparing the way, in “a critical, cautionary guidance of our seeing” (p. 35).

McNeill points out very well (and this is arguably one of the most relevant contentions of his work) that over time Heidegger becomes increasingly aware of one aspect: that concealment does not (always) depend on a lack of clarity on the side of the λόγος – as every science tends to maintain –, but inherently belongs to the manifestation itself – that is, to Being. No later than 1928, in parallel with Heidegger’s reflection on the concept of “world”, this increasingly clear departure from a scientific conception of thinking leads him to decisively abandon the name of phenomenology for his philosophy. In the new perspective he is aiming at, the confidently clarifying and Dasein-centered gesture of the phenomenology, which feels uncomfortable with any kind of opacity, has to be replaced by the gesture of letting be (pp. 52 ff.) that preserved in all its richness (and in all its mystery) the ontological dynamic of appearing itself.

This dislocation from the point of view of Dasein to that of Being constitutes the purpose of the following three chapters of the book, which concentrate on the central years of Heidegger’s life (ca. 1930-1970). In Chapter 4 McNeill dwells on the 1936 version of the essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Quite interestingly, this essay – together with Heidegger’s coeval writings on poetry – witnesses the replacement of the hermeneutic λέγειν of phenomenology with the peculiar saying or telling of the work of art, which “discloses Being in a being”, that is, creates “an active happening of Being as ἀλήθεια” (p. 73). Starting especially from two retrospective writings on *Being and Time* dating back to 1936, McNeill indeed points out (Chapter 5) that in this phase Heidegger conceives the task of thinking no longer in descriptive, but in creative terms. Meditating in full clarity on the temporality of Being indeed requires thinking that every “essence, including the ‘essence’ of

Da-sein, is ‘only created-not found’” (p. 96). Accordingly, the task of letting be cannot consist of the explicitation or description of contingently hidden phenomena, but in the creative leap into the *Ereignis* of Being, whereby the Dasein “casts itself away into that which is to be opened in naming” (p. 97). Clearly, as McNeill observes, this task can no longer pertain to phenomenology but calls for a poetic thinking.

Following the stimulating Chapter 6, wherein the author retraces the relation between the thoughtful experience of the history and epochality of the destining of Being” (p. 113) in the later Heidegger and the theme of destruction in the early Heidegger, there comes the last chapter, dedicated to the revival of the notion of phenomenology in the very last Heidegger (1970s). This chapter, while being probably the most welcome of the book, given that the critical literature on this topic is still very limited, is also the one that on the whole looks most incomplete. McNeill does an excellent job in contextualizing the notions of *Tautophasis* and *Phänomenophasis* in the aforementioned notes on *The Legacy of the Question of Being* by explaining how the logic of phenomenology is reformulated and, in some ways, reversed into a phatic and tautological thinking. What remains less clear throughout the chapter, however, is how this shall be put in relation with the contemporary notion of “phenomenology of the inapparent” (*Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren*) from the Zähringen seminar of 1973. Why does Heidegger still rely on the term phenomenology here? What exactly does *das Unscheinbare* stand for in this context? Does it refer to Being? To a $\Lambda\eta\theta\eta$ -dimension prior to Being? To Being as $\Lambda\eta\theta\eta$? On these specific questions, McNeill does not seem willing to take a very clear position, even if this undoubtedly depends, at least partially, on the effective fragmentation of Heidegger’s reflections thereon.

In providing an analysis of this later phase, McNeill furthermore appears to underestimate some real interpretative difficulties, such as that of the *retractatio* on Parmenides’ Fragment I (see HGA 14, p. 88; HGA 15, p. 395), which he takes as purely linked to the interpretation of the fragment (p. 134, n. 8) and which instead is arguably to be considered significant for the evolution of Heidegger’s thought as well (see HGA 15, p. 398; see also HGA 15, pp. 405-406).

At any rate, *The Fate of Phenomenology* remains a rigorous and brilliant book. McNeill is able to trace a history of the

Heideggerian phenomenology that integrates Heidegger's scattered retrospective reflections with an original critical reading of his texts – especially those of the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, he manages to highlight with great balance the lines of continuity and the points of rupture between the early and the later Heidegger. From this perspective, a section of Chapter 4 bearing the same title as the book (“The Fate of Phenomenology”, pp. 74-80) is particularly valuable and can even be considered the most original section of the entire work. Here, McNeill tries to conceptualize Heidegger's abandonment of phenomenology. Of course, Heidegger rejects the phenomenological approach as he finds himself in disagreement with it on several points; yet – he argues – Heidegger can also reject this path because, after all, it was successful and gave him a starting point for a new type of work. This is so true that “perhaps phenomenology does not in fact disappear, but disappears in name only, having undergone a certain transformation on the basis of a transformed self-understanding” (p. 77).

Some might reproach McNeill for considering the arc of Heidegger's phenomenology in an all too phenomenological way (it is tempting to read, for example, Heidegger's turn in the 1930s to more destinal tones from a broader perspective, e.g., in light of the kairologically dense political situation, or of the *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche and Hölderlin). However, strictly adhering to the internal logic of Heidegger's thought can be seen, from another point of view, as the peculiar value of this volume. What is arguably missing is rather a concluding chapter, embracing all the brilliant results of the volume and taking stock of them. The reader would expect, for example, to be accompanied in the understanding of the last years in which the term phenomenology reappears in the same way that he/she had been accompanied throughout the other phases of Heidegger's thought. What is at stake there? Is this new phenomenology the re-emergence of something that had never completely disappeared, or is it, in a sort of ring structure, a second turn that brings the very last Heidegger in surprising proximity to the first? Dismantling these further concealments will perhaps allow us to understand even better the fate of Heidegger's phenomenology that McNeill has given us eyes to see.

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