



Steven Crowell - Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger

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Given the ubiquity of Husserl's influence in the twentieth century, it is often vexing to interpret the complicated appropriation of his vocabulary by later writers. In particular, his placement of phenomenology in the transcendental tradition has been a source of contention among his successors. It is not surprising therefore, that as the posthumous publications force us to reevaluate the breadth of his work, the now caricatured relationship between Husserl and Heidegger requires some further clarification. It is this relationship in particular which forms the structure of the present volume. Given the radically different motives which drove both philosophers, this series of essays collectively attempt to interpret their work in terms of their analysis of normatively structured meaning. Read individually, the essays detail several key aspects of phenomenology's treatment of normativity in experience, both from Husserlian and Heideggarian perspectives. In so doing, an attempt is made to demonstrate the limitations of Husserl's approach which, Crowell argues, necessitate the work of Heidegger. In his analysis of the latter, Crowell further attempts to show that Heidegger's conception of authenticity as responsibility, is important in interpreting the nature of reason. To that end, the final set of essays centre themselves on issues in practical philosophy, examining among other things how the Heideggarian account of normativity surmounts that of Korsgaard, with which it is compared.

Here and throughout this volume, there is also a significant emphasis on history. In particular, Crowell's first essay "Making Meaning Thematic," attempts to evaluate the place of phenomenology in transcendental tradition. For Crowell, Husserl's thematization of meaning is a three tiered process: it involves the rejection of Kantian representationalism; an adoption of the Neo-Kantian interpretation of the categories; and an insistence on the first personal perspective of philosophical method. Owing to the lack of self-referential validity in Kant's Critique, phenomenology's radical step forward is not to "ignore the anthropological or subjective" dimension of Kant's method, but rather to thematise it, to render it "philosophy's primary datum." (15) Crowell draws a comparison with Emil Lask, for whom the ontological status of the categories could not be resolved in Kant's two-world theory. According to Lask, the categories are neither metaphysical nor psychological, and thus

Kant's epistemology fails to account for them as an object of knowledge. It is from this starting point that Lask develops a normative account of meaning. Whilst both Husserl and Lask's conception of the object as unity-of-meaning bear out similarities, it is only Husserl who insists that reflective analysis of intentionality is the route to meaning. For Husserl, "transcendental logic must finally be grounded in transcendental phenomenology." (23)

An important aspect of Crowell's thesis is that Heidegger's departure from Husserl on act-analysis, through grounding noetic acts in a practical comportment, does not subvert the centrality of subjectivity as it often taken to do. The remaining portion of the chapter broadly outlines this thesis before picking it up again in Chapter 8, "Subjectivity." Crowell begins here by distinguishing between the kind of self-apprehension disregarded by Heidegger, and the reflective self-disclosure offered to Dasein by practical involvements. For Crowell, Heidegger's untraditional conception of subjectivity "cannot be considered an adequate account of self-awareness." (173) The "I" of my practical engagements merely offers Dasein the "who" of its everydayness. The task, as Crowell writes, is to describe a "mode of self-awareness, one not subject to Heidegger's objections against the merely formal character of reflective I-consciousness." (173) Drawing on the work of Zahavi, Crowell outlines three conditions satiable by any first-person self-reference theory: that "the use of 'I' infallibly picks out the entity it purports to refer to" (176); that "self-identification is immediate, non-criterial, and non-inferential"; and it "requires that I 'dispense with every type of third-person reference.'" (177) Crowell's aim is to show that it is Heidegger's conception of conscience which ultimately satisfies these conditions.

Crowell centres on Heidegger's account of anxiety, which provides the framework by which Dasein grasps itself as the *solus ipse*. However, "this does not mean that I find myself alone; rather, I discover my subjectivity...irreducible to any 'totality of involvements.'" (180) It is in the breakdown of discourse, which manifests for Heidegger the call of conscience (*gewissen*), that we can find an analysis of self-awareness which satisfies these conditions. For Crowell, "The phenomenon of conscience belongs to the breakdown of the one-self" (181) – that which is reflectively grasped by Dasein in its practical dealings – and whilst Heidegger employs the term "Self" to describe what remains, Crowell interprets this as the "subjectivity, or first-person self-awareness of Dasein." (181) Here, third person referents have been relinquished, and it is merely the "self" which is being appealed to. Moreover, the infallibility of this self-reference is clear. Quoting Heidegger, he writes "though 'the call passes over what Dasein, proximally and for the most part, understands itself as' nonetheless 'the Self has been reached, unequivocally and unmistakably.'" (182) Drawing a comparison

with Kierkegaard, Crowell identifies what conscience “says” as “neither the one-self (who says ‘I’ but not as I myself), nor the authentic Self, (a modification of the one-self), but the hidden condition of both.” (183) Conscience, “as Kierkegaardian inwardness, is the hidden condition of the world as a space of meaning.” (184)

The significance of Crowell’s analysis here is that it lays the foundation for what is probably the book’s most interesting thesis: conscience as the origin of reason. Crowell argues that if we move from viewing Dasein as a creature who has been socialised into normative rules, to one who grasps itself in light of these norms, we necessarily require an appeal to conscience—and by extension, guilt—as the ground for self-awareness. *Dasein*’s responsibility “transforms a creature who is ‘grounded’ by social norms into a ground of obligation—one who ‘grounds’ norms by giving grounds, that is, reasons.” (187) This analysis, fleshed out further in Chapters 9 and 10, is dealt with in the book’s concluding section, concerning practical philosophy. In Chapter 11, “The Existential Sources of Normativity,” Crowell draws a comparison between the Heideggerian account of normativity and that of Christine Korsgaard. Whilst both theories are similar, he argues that Heidegger’s approach surmounts that of Korsgaard by avoiding three “logical aporias and phenomenological distortions” which befall her theory: “an equivocation in the concept of self-consciousness” (241); “an aporia in Korsgaard’s account of the person” (250); and “distortions in the phenomenology of action” (256).

For Korsgaard, self-consciousness is that capacity by which we fission the impulse-response nature of our animal instincts. Freeze-framing this dynamic, and the ethical question it forces upon us, creates the space in which we are compelled to choose our practical identities. Self-consciousness then, on Korsgaard’s account, is the existential source of normativity. As Crowell states, quoting Korsgaard, “Identifying with [a practical identity], its norms provide me with the principles that, in lieu of instinct, tell me ‘what justifies what, what counts as a reason for what, what is worth doing for the sake of what.’” (246) For Crowell however, this account equivocates on the nature of self-consciousness. Defined both as a mode of self-awareness, and in terms of reflection, as a “higher-order act that reifies a state into a kind of mental item or content of consciousness” (246), the description leads to an infinite regress by appeal to the latter as a “specific mental act”. (246) Moreover, he argues that even if such self-consciousness does open the space between instinctive impulse and physical response, there is no account given as to why such animal instincts lose their authority. Quoting Thomas Nagel, he writes “Why isn’t the reflective individual just someone with more information...How do reasons, laws, and universality get a foothold here?” (248) Heidegger

too approximates this point in his description of Angst, in which Dasein can no longer “press forward smoothly into practical possibilities for being.” (249) However, for Dasein to take over being-a-ground is not to progress from some “pre-normative ontological condition to one governed by norms; rather, it is to uncover...the condition that enables me to act not only in conformity to norms but also in light of them.” (249) Crowell argues that to appeal to self-consciousness as the source of normativity, necessarily invokes an equivocation in the account of that very self-consciousness, one that is ultimately avoided by Heidegger.

On her account of personhood, as the grounding of what we do in choosing one practical identity over another, Crowell levels against Korsgaard the same critique Heidegger offers on Kantian personalism, namely that it cannot do justice to the facticity of such an agent. Her account of animality, he writes, “oscillates between being part of one’s humanity and being something that stands over against it” and it is this equivocation that distorts her conception of personhood. (252) Moreover, conceiving of humanity in a manner “wholly governed by the concept of reflection, by a deliberating agent,” non-deliberated action must either be seen as a reversion to animality, or the “structure of deliberation must be smuggled back into it.” (256) In taking the latter perspective, Crowell argues, Korsgaard’s account “distorts the phenomenology of such action” (256)

Overall, this series of essays present a fascinating interpretation of key themes in Husserl and Heidegger. Whilst at times the transition between essays can seem somewhat bumpy, the organisation within the four sections provides a well thought-out thesis concerning their relationship, and will no doubt be of interest to anyone working through the areas of subjectivity, normativity and the philosophy of action.