JOURNAL OF
French and Francophone Philosophy
REVUE DE LA
philosophie française et de langue française

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Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française, Vol XXIII, No 1 (2015) pp 129-133.

Vol XXIII, No 1 (2015)
ISSN 1936-6280 (print)
ISSN 2155-1162 (online)
DOI 10.5195/jffp.2015.671
www.jffp.org

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The title of Simmons and Benson's *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* is likely to cause confusion. What exactly is the *new* phenomenology, we might ask ourselves? Is *new* here a temporal designation? And, if so, we may wonder, how new is this new? Does this *new* indicate what is *au courant* in phenomenology? Or, does it indicate something else entirely – some thematic shift in the phenomenological tradition? As it turns out the word *new* here means both of these things, but not in a way a reader of this journal might anticipate.

Considered temporally, one might expect a philosophical introduction to "the *new* phenomenology" to feature the thought of such figures as Jean-Luc Nancy, Catherine Malbou, or perhaps even Philippe Lacoue-Lebarthe. None of these thinkers, however, are treated even cursorily by this volume. Perhaps then, one might think, the *new* here is used merely to point to those phenomenological works following the trajectory of the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in the 20th century. Perhaps *new* in this case simply means *contemporary*, understood in that broad way in which it is used in our field to indicate anything following Friedrich Nietzsche or German Idealism. Understood thusly, we might expect this volume to provide a general introduction to the work of such thinkers as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, or Maurice Merlau-Ponty. And yet, each of these thinkers is treated only in passing by this volume; and there, always as part of a larger argument or consideration.

Given these facts, we must reexamine the use of the word *new* here. Perhaps by *new*, one might in turn think, the authors do not intend to signal a temporal change in phenomenological inquiry, but a thematic one. Maybe the *new* referred to in the title indicates some shift, conversion, transformation, or revolution within the phenomenological tradition.

Perhaps the authors use the word *new* in order to draw the reader's attention to the fact that many of the inheritors of the phenomenological tradition have challenged, critiqued, or abandoned it entirely. If this is the case, we might expect Simmons and Benson's books to deal those thinkers with a liminal relationship to phenomenology: Jacques Lacan, perhaps; or, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze; maybe even Jacques Ranciere and Alain Badiou; or, stranger still, Francois Laurelle, Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, or Ray Brassier. And yet, Simmons and Benson's *new* phenomenology does not include any of these thinkers.

So what exactly are we to make of the *new phenomenology* to which we are promised a philosophical introduction by Simmons and Benson? Fortunately, and perhaps sensing the possible confusion such a title might inspire, the authors waste no time in letting the reader know on the first page of their volume that:

> By [the] 'new phenomenologists,' we mean those French philosophers in the latter half of the twentieth century who all think in the wake of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – namely: Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95), Michel Henry (1922-2002), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Jean-Luc Marion (1946-), Jean-Louis Chretien (1952-), and to some extent, but in importantly different respects, Jean-Yves Lacoste (1953-), and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). (1)

In other words, the *new phenomenology* referenced in the title to this volume indicates those thinkers who have come, by and large, to be associated with the so-called "theological turn" in European philosophy. In this regard, the word *new*, as used by Simmons and Benson, expresses both a temporal change and a thematic shift since, after all, these new phenomenologists are both contemporary, and in many cases still living, and moreover aim to "'go beyond' historical phenomenology in their willingness to consider God and religious experience" (2).

Given its subject matter, we may then wonder why the authors did not entitle the book something more immediately recognizable and direct. Why not call it, for example, "The Theological Turn in Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction"? Such a title would have certainly forestalled the kind of confusion the current title is likely to inspire, allowing the reader to casually and immediately understand its contents and place it quickly upon his or her shelves next to their copy of Dominique Janicaud's critical introduction to the movement, *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), or perhaps one or two of John Caputo's many pieces on philosophy and theology. Such a quick and easy appraisal is however precisely what the authors of this volume hope to avoid. For, as they argue eloquently in the introduction,

such an understanding is fundamentally flawed and has contributed to a gross injustice in how these thinkers have traditionally been treated by the philosophical community. It is the aim of this volume, the authors declare, to correct such misunderstandings by critically rereading the relationship these thinkers have to one another, the phenomenological tradition as a whole, and a few of the key questions within contemporary philosophy, continental and analytic alike.

In this regard, it seems that the kind of confusion Simmons and Benson's title is likely to inspire is not only entirely intended, it may even be a necessary precondition for the kind of new reading and understanding of the phenomenological tradition the authors hope to inspire. Without the kind of cognitive dissonance such a title inspires when coupled with the collection of thinkers treated therein, the reader may all too easily rely on his or her complacent understanding of the scope and trajectory of these thinkers as vaguely theological. But, according to Simmons and Benson, though "all [of these thinkers] do engage in significant reflection on topics of concern to philosophy of religion," their work should "not be read as exclusively, or even as primarily engaged in a theological project," (2). It is therefore, they argue, only by first breaking with this hermeneutic prejudice that these thinkers belong to a "theological turn" happening in philosophy that the relevance of their work to "a wide range of central matters for philosophical inquiry and human existence," can be properly recognized (2). It is the aim of Simmons and Benson's book to shatter this traditional "theological" reading of the work of these *new* phenomenologists; and to forge a new, properly "philosophical," re-introduction to them. In this regard, *The New Phenomenology* can be read as a kind of critical response to Janicaud's piece. Its goal: to reframe the work of these authors within the phenomenological tradition anew in order to draw new readers to their tomes and to challenge older readers, already more familiar with their work, to reconsider their relevance to some of the major thematic questions within the history of philosophy.

It is with this goal in mind that the authors draft three theses around which the subsequent chapters of their volume are organized. First, the authors claim that "new phenomenology can be legitimately considered an heir to historical phenomenology," (7). This of course requires showing that a continuity exists between their work and the traditional phenomenological projects of Husserl and Heidegger, despite any thematic derivations or challenges they may subsequently introduce. Second, the authors claim that "new phenomenology should be weighed and considered in light of a variety of contemporary philosophical problems," (8). Finally, Simmons and Benson assert that "new phenomenology can be productively put into conversation with other contemporary philosophical perspectives," both analytic and continental alike (8). The organization of their book falls roughly around these three theses with the first two chapters focusing on the

first of these theses leaving the remaining six chapters to address the last two, there paying particular attention to how "new phenomenology" relates to Christian philosophy, analytic philosophy of religion, ethics, and politics. Only when read in light of these theses can this volume be understood properly and assessed appropriately.

The first of Simmons and Benson's goals is accomplished adequately enough, albeit rather quickly, in the first few chapters of this volume. There, the authors make short work of the traditional criticisms the thinkers treated within by them have received from the likes of Janicaud, namely: that their work breaks with the phenomenological tradition qua theological speculation. In response to this criticism, Simmons and Benson solidly justify a re-reading of these thinkers as faithful, though perhaps radical, participants in the phenomenological tradition. While this task is an essential step for this volume, and it is skillfully accomplished, it is not in these first few chapters that the real strength of this volume is on display. The real strength of the volume lies in what follows: where Simmons and Benson show how a properly phenomenological reading of these thinkers can be used to address anew key questions within the history of philosophy concerning the nature of God, ontology, acts of faith, and most interestingly, ethics and politics.

It is there, in the final chapters of the volume, where the authors treat the relation of the thinkers in question to the problem of normativity and the "possible futures for new phenomenology," that the intellectual momentum of Simmons and Benson's volume, which builds steadily from chapter to chapter, finally reaches its apex and proves of lasting value to the reader. And, it will be there, if nowhere else, that even the most reluctant and suspicious readers will be forced to critically reappraise the value this set of thinkers (generally dismissed as agents of a theological agenda) have for those concerned with key questions within the history of philosophy. For me, the real value of these final chapters is the way in which they are likely to draw new readers to phenomenology, especially those either unfamiliar with or suspicious of the continental tradition as a whole, particularly analytic ethicists and social and political philosophers, who I think will find in these pages a clear means of relating the "new phenomenologists" to questions he or she may be more familiar with.

For these reasons, we could conclude that despite the fact that the core content of this book consists in a treatment of a few key figures in French philosophy, Simmons and Benson's book is not really aimed at readers of this journal. This is not to say that those trained in continental philosophy or phenomenology couldn't benefit from reading it. To the contrary, Simmons and Benson's volume will prove vitally important to those interested in better understanding the work of Levinas, Henry, Derrida, Marion, and Chretien by better situating their work within the phenomenological tradition. Nevertheless, the reader who will benefit most

from this volume is someone less familiar with their work, either because he or she had previously dismissed them as overly theological, or by dint of their unfamiliarity with the continental tradition as a whole. In this regard, I see this volume being of most use assigned to high level undergraduates or first year graduate students, particularly those who are perhaps vaguely aware of the phenomenological tradition, but otherwise relatively uninformed concerning its contemporary developments, trajectories, and possible applications. Better still, I can see the value of this volume as an interdepartmental missive – something passed between offices from those of us who work in the phenomenological tradition to our analytic colleagues who are curious just what it is that we're up to. With any luck, Simmons and Benson's *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* might contribute to further tearing down the somewhat arbitrary walls that separate our two philosophical traditions, revealing as it does a number of points of overlap between the kinds of questions Levinas, Henry, Derrida, and Chretien raise and the kinds of questions driving contemporary analytic thought.