

## DERRIDA'S RECEPTION IN THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL FIELD

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### Abstract

In this paper I have examined Derrida's reception in the phenomenological field. I examined common misconstruals of Derrida as an empiricist and nihilist, and allegations that his post-phenomenology is a destruction of phenomenology. Contrary to these charges, I have argued that Derrida's post-phenomenology is a meta-phenomenology in its account for the conditions of possibility for transcendental-empirical distinction through his notions of differance and trace, as well as the quasi-transcendental. The quasi-transcendental is the interval between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both. Iterability and repetition name the conditions of possibility of ideality rather than being any simple destructive negation of it. The transcendental is only enabled by its signature, or difference from the origin in order to be communicated through space and time. It is the written mark, the quasi-transcendental, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, which makes possible the distinction between the transcendental and empirical at the same time it makes impossible a sphere of purely expressive signs without the distinction.

**Keywords:** Transcendental, Empirical, Quasi-transcendental, Metaphysics, Phenomenology

In this paper I review Derrida's reception in the field of phenomenology. This section differs from the review I gave earlier of phenomenologists in that it is a review of contemporary phenomenologists who have, unlike those covered previously, read Derrida, but read him erroneously, as I judge from my understanding of Derrida. I seek to address these misconceptions in this paper. Where contemporary phenomenologists describe Derrida's work as a disruption and interruption of phenomenology in critiquing the metaphysics of presence, I proceed to argue that characterizations of Derrida as a destructive critic of phenomenology are mistaken, and show how Derrida rather accounts for the conditions that make phenomenology possible with his notions of differance, iterability and the quasi-transcendental. Derrida is not to be mistaken for as a nihilist or an empiricist, rather he argues that phenomenology has to account for the conditions that make it possible. These conditions are differance, iterability, and the quasi-transcendental, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, but the paradoxical space between that determines and enables us to think both transcendental and empirical. Derrida thus performs meta-phenomenology rather than a destruction of phenomenology as his critics

claim, and indeed inscribes a phenomenology that is made more powerful, in acknowledging the conditions that make it possible.

Phenomenology has not seen its death, despite being now consigned to its place as a historical movement in philosophy, encompassing Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology took the form of transcendental idealism with Husserl and arguably took a more existentialist turn with Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Contemporary staple textbooks on phenomenology by Dermot Moran (*Introduction to Phenomenology*)<sup>1</sup> and Simon Glendinning (*In the Name of Phenomenology*)<sup>2</sup> describe Derrida's intervention with Husserl's phenomenology as a form of destruction or disruption. Simon Glendinning has argued that phenomenology is an essentially unfinished project, which has been interrupted and radicalised by Derrida's intervention. This paper will however, argue that Derrida's intervention is not an interruption, but a thinking of the conditions of possibility for phenomenology and its production. This Derrida achieves through his concepts of iterability and difference. Indeed, these concepts outline a meta-phenomenology by naming the conditions of possibility for transcendental-empirical difference. Dermot Moran has described phenomenology as having a "thoroughly modernist outlook" in its critical stance of the scientific world view.

According to Moran, phenomenology formally began with Husserl but was subsequently transformed by what he terms "Husserlian heresies" as Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty broke with Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction. Furthermore, Moran asserts that phenomenology has met a violent death and collapsed with Derrida's critique of presence and the possibility of intentional meaning. Contrary to this assertion, this paper will argue that Derrida's concepts of difference and iterability are meta-phenomenological concepts that outline the conditions of possibility for transcendental-empirical difference. Derrida's intervention does not, as Glendinning argues, interrupt phenomenology, or as Moran argues, destroy phenomenology. Rather Derrida questions the very conditions of possibility for phenomenology and accounts for its mode of production through his concepts of iterability and difference. Mohanty<sup>3</sup> on the other hand is a leading Husserlian scholar who argues that Derrida has misinterpreted Husserl with his readings of iterability and repetition. According to Mohanty, Derrida has construed repetition as the nominalistic and endless deferral of ideal meaning.

This is where I disagree with Mohanty's interpretation as well, as I do not regard Derrida as a nominalist or an empiricist. Derrida argues that ideality has to be constituted by repetition, but does not in any way elevate the nominal or empirical over the ideal but maintains the dynamic relationship between them as difference. Mohanty argues that Husserl's notion of repetition should rather be interpreted as the eidetic grasping of the transcendental. But the question remains as to *how* this eidetic grasping is possible. Can the transcendental be grasped without mediation by the empirical? Is the transcendental distinct from the empirical? Mohanty has side-stepped the question by renaming repetition as eidetic grasping, but has not answered the question about the conditions of possibility for this eidetic grasping which Derrida's notion of iterability addresses. While Mohanty is generally kinder to Derrida in writing that he does not regard Derrida's intervention as a destruction of phenomenology, indeed he calls Derrida a

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<sup>1</sup> Dermot Moran . *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Abington, Oxon. Routledge, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Glendinning. *In the Name of Phenomenology*. New York, Routledge, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> J.N. Mohanty. *Phenomenology: Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy*. Evanston, Illinois. Northwestern University Press. 1997.

Husserlian as much as any other Husserlian, I do not agree with his assessment of Derrida's reading of Husserl being misleading in its turn to nominalism. I would like to argue contrary to this strain of argument against Derrida made by leading phenomenologists such as Mohanty, Moran and Sokolowski in my paper, that Derrida's intervention is a turn to empiricism or nominalism which I do not think it is. Instead I will argue that Derrida's move is a rethinking of the conditions of possibility of ideality through his concepts of differance and iterability. Derrida's intervention is really a continuation of phenomenology rather than an interruption of it. He continues phenomenology through extending intentionality to its logical consequences to derive the notions of differance and iterability.

How is thought possible? How is being made to appear to consciousness? How does thought present itself to consciousness? Can thought escape mediation in its appearance to consciousness? Does not the separation of the transcendental and empirical, especially in the act of phenomenological reduction, result in an aporia of their non-correlation? Must phenomenology be either transcendental or empirical? Is it not the neither and the between (the quasi-transcendental) that enables phenomenology by joining it in an economy? In all its configurations prior to Derrida, phenomenology has upheld a transcendental-empirical distinction which either resulted in a system of transcendental idealism (Husserl) or empirical idealism (Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty).

The prevailing reception of Derrida from the phenomenological field is, as mentioned earlier, that he has disrupted or destroyed phenomenology in critiquing the metaphysics of presence, which leads him to privilege the empirical in place or absence and differance. The critics of Derrida from phenomenology such as Mohanty, Moran and Sokolowski regard themselves as phenomenological purists. Their criticisms however, are based essentially on a misreading of Derrida by classifying him as a nominalist and empiricist. They also regard Derrida as a relativist, another misconception I wish to contend. Derrida examines the conditions of possibility for the Absolute, he does not overthrow or abdicate the absolute. A close reading of *Introduction to Origin of Geometry* for instance, will demonstrate that Derrida discusses transcendental genesis which is invented through the retrospective differentiating movement of the trace. Derrida examines the conditions for the transmission of transcendental knowledge through history, which he calls *Ruckfrage* or re-activation. The transcendental is brought to life through differance and iterability, it is the iteration of the noema that ensures its transmission through history, the ideal must be repeated with a difference in order to be grasped by consciousness, and indeed the ideal exists only in and through consciousness.

Pure thought is always delay through its transmission through time, enabled by the differance of its signification through time. The transcendental is really differance, or iterability, enabled in its transmission through history by *Ruckfrage* or re-activation. The transcendental is nothing outside its repetition or iteration, which retrospectively differentiates and names the transcendental. A true reading of the transcendental takes into account not only *Korper* (ideality constituting sense) but *Leib* (sense constituting ideality), indeed *Leib* is the condition of possibility for the transcendental and ensures its continuation and transmission through history. As Derrida argues, without its historical incarnation, transcendental knowledge would not be communicated through the passage of time and history to reach its re-activation from the past to project itself into the future, and the "to come". This is the signature of the transcendental, in order to be communicated, it has to be perpetuated through space and time in an iteration which

differs and defers from the original, relayed spatially and temporally through difference. By thus being iterated and separated from the origin, it is also disseminated into a plurivocality of meanings rather than being confined to a transcendental signified or absolute origin.

Derrida's account thus is an examination of the conditions in which ideality is transmitted through the passage of time and history. It is not in any way, a relativism or a nominalism. As Derrida argues, historical incarnation sets free the transcendental, instead of binding it by reducing it to empiricism. It is the condition for its transmission through time, through iterability and difference. Derrida does not reduce phenomenology to empiricism, but does meta-phenomenology by examining the conditions of possibility for phenomenology's production, which is the act of re-activation, or iterability. Derrida also questions the irreducible basis of axioms when he mentions Godel's undecidability theorem in relation to Husserl's ideal axioms. This factor of undecidability adds a factor of contingency to the ideal object.

Axioms acquire their ideal status through sedimentation, but rather than reduce history which Husserl regards as adding to the contingency of the ideal object, such as adding to their true or false status and hence their undecidability, Derrida argues that the historicity of the ideal object and its sedimentations are essential to its transmission through difference and iterability. The undecidability of an axiom according to Derrida is not something which is reducible but essential in its very constitution as its condition for transmission through history. Undecidability is intrinsic to an axiom rather than separable from it. Derrida thus historicizes ideality through demonstrating that difference and passage through history is its condition of possibility.

Damien Byers, in his book *Intentionality and Transcendence: Closure and Openness in Husserl's Phenomenology*<sup>4</sup>, likewise accuses Derrida of misreading Husserl in identifying retention and protention as non-presences which demonstrate that ideality is constituted by repetition of the present in the non-present. His method of arguing against Derrida is to say that such displacements of past and future are not identities and thus essentially not repetitions, thus making non-presence non-complicit in the constitution of presence. Byers further argues that the past and future are not displacements but continuities constituted by the transcendence of the present. It is a contradictory argument to say the least. First Byers argues that retention and protention are not identities or repetitions of the present. Then Byers argues that these so called displacements are essentially continuities. How does this not contradict his claim that the past and future are not identities through repetition? His disputation of Derrida's powerful claim that retention and protention introduce non-presences into the constitution of presence simply does not stand upon close examination. Indeed a reading of his critique powerfully reinforces the strength of Derrida's reading of Husserl's own notion of temporality as the introduction of difference into the constitution of the transcendental.

### **Phenomenology and aporia**

At the heart of phenomenology lies an aporia. This aporia is the isolation of the transcendental from the empirical which are both theatrically produced as distinct only through the illusory movement of the differentiating trace or difference, which distinguishes nothing. This results in the suppression of the transcendental-empirical difference or difference which is really the condition of possibility for metaphysics. The transcendental is only produced theatrically through its mediation by the empirical rather than excluded from it. As Derrida

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<sup>4</sup> Damien Byers. *Intentionality and Transcendence: Closure and Openness in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Madison, Wisconsin. Noesis Press. 2002.

argues, all thought is mediation. All *Gegenwartigung* is *Vergegenwartigung*, Derrida's philosophy of mediation essentially resolves the aporia of the non-correlation between the transcendental or empirical, as well as the impossibility of instituting their distinction. It also acknowledges the essentiality of writing for the embodiment of the ideality in place of speech which leads to phonocentrism. It is the written mark, the quasi-transcendental, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, which determines the production of both through the distinguishing movement of the trace. The written mark functions as if it was transcendental, but without it no distinction between the transcendental or empirical would be able to take place, and were the distinction impossible no transcendental or pure expressive realm would take place either. Hence the phenomenological project becomes possible through this paradoxical relation of the quasi-transcendental, relating the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity in non-identity.

As Derrida argues, the Idea is nothing outside the history in which it displays itself. The idea is its signature, differing and deferred from the origin. Phenomenology must acknowledge its historicity as a condition of its ideality. Through his concept of differance, Derrida explores the contamination and inseparability of the transcendental and empirical. The transcendental is really differance. It is the retrospective trace distinguishing the transcendental and empirical producing them as an after-effect that invents the transcendental, which is always delayed and deferred through differance to be communicated. Derrida is interested in this differance or trace which is truly the condition of possibility for phenomenology rather than solely the transcendental. As Derrida argues, the very possibility of the transcendental reduction is enabled by the nothing that separates the transcendental and empirical, or differance.

Derrida's post-phenomenology thus saves phenomenology by acknowledging its very condition of possibility – differance, death and non-presence. This paper starts off from acknowledging the aporia that lies at the heart of phenomenology – the non-correlation of the transcendental and the empirical exacerbated by the phenomenological reduction, and proceeds to investigate how Derrida's post-phenomenology addresses or posits a resolution to this aporia through his notions of the quasi-transcendental, iterability and differance which are logical extensions of Husserl's notion of intentionality rather than any radical departure from it.

### Derrida's post-phenomenology

David Cerbone<sup>5</sup>, in *Understanding Phenomenology*, describes phenomenology as an effort to define the essential structures of consciousness, thus becoming a transcendental enterprise. But does the transcendental exist in a vacuum? Derrida will argue that the transcendental does not exist apart from the empirical, the transcendental has to be mediated by the empirical through repetition or iterability. The transcendental is the empirical. There is no difference between the transcendental and empirical subject, because the transcendental subject is the empirical subject, and the difference that separates them is precisely this difference that is nothing. In *Positions*, Derrida states that the distinction between signified and signifier becomes problematical the moment one acknowledges there is no transcendental signified. Derrida argues that the concept of the sign (signifier .signified) carries within itself the necessity of privileging the phonic substance, leading to the reduction of the exteriority of the signifier, of which

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<sup>5</sup> David R. Cerbone. *Understanding Phenomenology*. Cheham, Acumen, 2006.

signifier and signified are two parts of the same concept or unity. In other words, the signified does not exist. Neither does the signifier as it seems to erase itself, what persists is the infinite trace that is the play of differences within writing as difference which is the differal and deferral of meaning within the text.

The acknowledgement that the signifier is not exterior - which leads to the reduction of writing - leads to the acknowledgement that there never has been anything but writing. The transcendental and the empirical are part of the same text, essentially the same, nothing separates them. But the infinite trace that is the nothing that separates the transcendental and empirical, leads to the signifying of other traces and other differences and differences within the system. Hence, translation does not mean transportation of signified to signifiers. Rather it means transformation of the discursive signs to signify within the same text of the transcendental and the empirical, to signify in a different language.

This plays on the differences between the two languages but appropriates the master signifiers and transforms them to signify anew in the new language as sense, or the signified, has never been determinate in the first place. The trace is neither simply a signifier nor a signified, thus we run into difficulties when we try to conceive such a science from within the presently dominant horizon of logocentrism, which maintains a strict distinction between the signifier and the signified. To trace back the conditions of possibility for logocentrism and presence Derrida directs us to the movement of difference, which is the nothing that enables both the transcendental and empirical in the movement of its differentiating trace, and thus moves us away from a metaphysics of presence as it is not the transcendental but the arche-trace and difference which enables the production of metaphysics through iterability.

Derrida however, is not, as Dermot Moran argues, a skeptic, a relativist or an empiricist. Derrida posits the iterability as the condition of possibility for ideality through the retrospective division into transcendental and empirical through the movement of repetition with a difference, or the trace. Derrida thus contends that the condition of possibility for ideality is iterability. Derrida's post-phenomenology does not threaten phenomenology, indeed, it is a continuation of it as difference and iterability are logical extensions of Husserl's concept of intentionality. But there exist real threats to phenomenology which Derrida's post-phenomenology does address. Simon Glendinning<sup>6</sup> has discussed the threat that looms over phenomenology as phenomenism. In positing consciousness as the ground and condition of possibility of thought, indeed phenomenology, especially Husserl's, does run the risk of claiming, like phenomenism, that everything can be reduced to and is constituted by consciousness. Another threat that thus hovers over phenomenology is solipsism. Husserl's Cartesianism and Heidegger's privileging of human being and solitude as authenticity does indeed privilege a transcendental subjectivity that is elevated over the Other, which Levinas' and Derrida's later reconfigurations of phenomenology will address. It is the argument of this paper that the threats of phenomenism and solipsism in phenomenology are precisely what Derrida addresses in his post-phenomenology with his positing of the quasi-transcendental and iterability. Likewise, the scholars Michael Marder and Martin Hagglund have argued in their phenomenological accounts of Derrida that Derrida is a realist, a materialist and an empiricist. I argue that such characterizations of Derrida are inaccurate as they fail to grasp the aporia of Derrida's thought: the transcendental is not

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Glendinning. *In the Name of Phenomenology*, New York, Routledge, 2007.

conceivable without the empirical and vice versa, through iterability and differance. Derrida is not a materialist or an empiricist, rather he is a thinker of the founding conditions of possibility for metaphysics in its totality through his concepts of iterability, differance and the quasi-transcendental. The trace is not an empirical concept but an a priori difference that allows the retrospective division of the transcendental and the empirical, hence I would contest Hagglund's view of Derrida as an arche-materialist who posits atheism as the natural conclusion of his philosophy. Derrida is a thinker of the iterability and differance that is necessary for sustaining the metaphysical project rather than a materialist.

Tom Rockmore, in *In Kant's Wake*<sup>7</sup>, characterizes Derrida as a skeptic who makes knowledge impossible as every argument undercuts definite reference and no argument can suffice to pick objects out through words. As previously argued with Glendinning and Moran, I will argue that such characterizations of Derrida as a skeptic and nihilist who violently ends phenomenology are mistaken as Derrida merely examines the conditions of possibility for phenomenology and reconfigures it to acknowledge these conditions for metaphysical production. Derrida does not, in any way, destroy phenomenology. Indeed, Derrida continues phenomenology's legacy through his notions of iterability and differance which are derived from Husserl's concept of intentionality.

Hence this paper will argue, contrary to Glendinning, Rockmore, Mohanty and Moran, that phenomenology does not meet a violent death in Derrida. Derrida's intervention saves phenomenology by addressing the aporias that are intrinsic to it. Derrida wishes to address, not Husserl's transcendental leanings, but the closure of metaphysics it produces by suppressing differance in privileging presence by failing to acknowledge differance as the source of presence and logocentrism. Yet at the heart of phenomenology lies an inescapable death and ineradicable non-self-presence that constitutes it and gives rise to metaphysical production. This death is the non-presence or absence, the nothing which gives rise to both the transcendental and empirical in a movement of differentiating traces. It is named differance, the nothing of spacing between the transcendental and empirical which gives rise to the difference and deferral that produces both the transcendental and empirical, through a movement of traces. In *Introduction to Origin of Geometry*, Derrida negotiates a middle ground between Platonism and historicism.

Kant had succumbed to Platonism through his eradication of history from the transcendental, while Husserl, through his reduction of factual historicity to arrive at the eidetic origin of Geometry, likewise risks negating history which is the exemplar for the ideal and succumbing to Platonism. In place, Derrida argues that the ideal is tradition, and the Absolute is passage. Derrida does not succumb to historicism as he maintains the existence of the transcendental, which is enabled only through its iterability or repeatability. Rather Derrida argues that this transcendental must be reactivated through iterability and history. The transcendental must be repeated with a difference to form the quasi-transcendental. Derrida argues that historicity and differance, the transmission of the ideal through iterability and writing, is a condition of possibility for the ideal.

In *Introduction to Origin of Geometry* for instance, Derrida discusses Husserl's description of the first geometer's founding act of geometry as an act which has taken place "once" and is inaugurated for the "first time", thus becoming institutive and creative. How does

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Rockmore. *In Kant's Wake*. Malden, Blackwell, 2006.

phenomenology then transmit and reproduce itself? Derrida answers that it is through the iteration of a noema, the act of phenomenological reduction is reactivating and noetic by repeating the ideal in the empirical. Derrida thus writes of a relation of dependence between the repeated phenomena and the reactivated origin- this relation between the transcendental and empirical will eventually be coined as differance. Iterability and history is thus the condition of possibility of the ideal. Yet this iteration of origin gives rise to an aporia – how is transcendental correlative to the empirical? Are they the same and is there any difference between them since they are distinct?

This is the fundamental paradox of phenomenology, the transcendental is not the empirical, they are distinct, and yet the transcendental must be repeated in theatrical production through the empirical. The empirical mediates the transcendental through the differentiating trace which produces the illusion that transcendental is distinct from empirical. The difference which separates the transcendental and empirical is the difference which is nothing, or differance. This paper will examine differance and the quasi-transcendental as Derrida's argument for addressing the aporia of the relationship between the transcendental and empirical. Against the current scholarship that deems Derrida's intervention as a disruption or a destruction I would like to argue that Derrida's phenomenology is essentially a continuation of Husserl's notion of intentionality through his concepts of iterability and differance, indeed Derrida's reading is nothing but an extension of Husserl's notion of intentionality to its logical conclusion, rather than being any grave disruption of Husserl.

### **Differance**

Derrida traces the conditions of possibility for logocentrism by exceeding the text in locating the point of exteriority and transcending its totality. This he does by coining the term differance, which describes the point of interaction between philosophy and empiricism, or philosophy and non-philosophy. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida discusses differance:

We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy's founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The order that resists this opposition, that resists it because it sustains it, is designated in a movement of differance (with an a) between two differences or between two letters. This differance belongs neither to voice nor to writing in the ordinary sense, and it takes place, like the strange space that will assemble us here for the course of an hour, between speech and writing and beyond the tranquil familiarity that binds us to one and to the other, reassuring us sometimes in the illusion that they are two separate things.<sup>8</sup>

Differance is the difference or spacing between the transcendental and empirical that enables metaphysics to function, it is the movement that sustains metaphysics in the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical, or iterability. It is the movement of differance that relates the transcendental to the empirical, and reassures us with the *illusion* that the transcendental and the empirical are two separate things. Differance is the difference between the transcendental and empirical which is nothing, for the transcendental can only exist through its theatrical production in the empirical as repetition with a difference. Derrida traces the conditions of possibility for

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. David B. Allison, tr. Preface by Newton Garver. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 133

logocentrism by acknowledging the quasi-transcendental, which is the economy of both the transcendental and empirical. The quasi-transcendental is neither transcendental nor empirical, but is the difference, trace, limit or spacing between the transcendental and empirical which enables metaphysics to function. It is the difference between transcendental and empirical, or difference, which is the spacing or nothing that conditions both the transcendental and empirical in a mode of production through iterability or repetition. It is the written mark or quasi-transcendental, difference, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical which enables the possibility of their distinction and the impossibility of their separation as transcendental exists only in and through empirical through repetition with a difference. Were there no empirical for Husserl, it would not be possible to institute his distinction and exclusion of pure expressive signs from it.

### Phenomenology and Death

For Derrida, death constitutes life. The very act of hearing-oneself-speak presumes a need for signs, and thus solitary mental life needs indicative signs to communicate within oneself. Thus absence and the empirical have invaded solitary mental life, which cannot be reduced to pure expressive signs or ideality. At the heart of life is death. Death and non-presence is the condition of possibility for life. Death constitutes life, it is the impossible possibility that enables life.

Derrida writes of death that lies at the heart of phenomenology in *Speech and Phenomena*. He argues, for instance, that phenomenology is tormented, if not contested from within, by its own descriptions of the movement of temporalization and of the constitution of intersubjectivity. At the heart of what ties together these decisive moments of description is an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value, and with it a non-life, a non-presence, or nonself-belonging of the living present, an ineradicable non-primordially.<sup>9</sup> This death that lies at the heart of phenomenology constituting the present is the difference which is nothing, the difference, or *Vergegenwärtigung* and *Appresentation*, which bifurcates the a priori and aligns it simultaneously with non-presence and absence. This nothing is the trace of all repeatable traces which is the constituting value for presence, all productions and reproductions of presence arise out of this spacing or interval between the transcendental and empirical which Derrida calls difference. It is the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical in iterability which arises out of this nothing, or death, difference. Difference is the spacing or temporization between the transcendental and empirical, which produces the transcendental and empirical through the retrospective distinguishing movement of the trace.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida writes of the death of the book and the beginning of writing. The death of the book is the death of univocal and absolute meaning, for as Derrida argues, there is “nothing outside the text”, with the effacing of the transcendental signified. In its place Derrida argues that every signified is already in a position of signifier, it is the trace and the movement of traces in a production of differences in writing that produces meaning. It is the iterability between the transcendental and empirical and the difference between them which is nothing that gives rise to meaning. At the heart of phenomenology thus lies an inescapable death which produces it- this death is the non-presence and nothing of difference which gives rise to the production of the transcendental and empirical through iterability and writing. Death, or

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6-7

differance, is the nothing that conditions and produces life, and the phenomenological reduction to suppress differance and arrive at pure presence thus lands phenomenology in an aporia by excluding life's condition of possibility- which is death.

### Phenomenology in contemporary context

Today Phenomenology risks being eclipsed by later developments in philosophy, such as the burgeoning of analytic philosophy and analytic accounts of metaphysics and epistemology or philosophy of mind and philosophy of social sciences. Moran has also argued that phenomenology has been superceded by deconstruction and post-structuralism, another point which I disagree with. Derrida's intervention was a reconfiguration of, not a destruction of phenomenology. It is the argument of this paper that Derrida's intervention is a step towards reconfiguring phenomenology to make it of contemporary relevance by bringing it to acknowledge its historicity as a condition of possibility for its ideality. There is no ideality without repeatable, repeated marks.

Ideality is constituted by repeatability and history which is the equivalent of difference. Derrida puts repeatability and difference together together to get differance. Iterability is the condition of possibility of history and metaphysics as the ideal needs to be exemplified in order to come into being. As Derrida argues in the *Introduction to Origin of Geometry*, the historicity of geometry, the pure possibility of truth's appearance, is not a Platonic entity that exists outside of history. It is dependent on the fact of empirical history, of which it is the essence, for its appearance, and like any other phenomenological sense, its being is what it gives itself to be in history. As Derrida puts it, "The Absolute is passage". The transcendental is mediated through empirical history to come into being; there is no ideality without historicity. Science or empiricism is thus not excluded in post-phenomenology but made the condition of possibility for the representation of the ideal.

Dermot Moran has characterized phenomenology as "a way of doing philosophy" marked by having a "thoroughly modernist outlook"<sup>10</sup>. Moran argues that the modernist outlook of phenomenology is inseparable from its attempt to develop a "critique of the effect of the natural scientific outlook on human being in the world."<sup>11</sup> Derrida's account bridges metaphysical idealism and naturalist science, positing the relation between them as iterability or the empirical representation of the transcendental. Phenomenology thus moves away from being merely an anti-scientific or modernist philosophy to a philosophy which examines the conditions of possibility for ideality or traditional metaphysics- iterability and repetition in Derrida's post-phenomenology.

What Derrida's reconfiguration of phenomenology saves phenomenology from is phenomenalism and solipsism. Specifically this post-phenomenology is a reconfiguration of Husserl's phenomenology to save it from all the above problems by enabling phenomenology to acknowledge its historicity. Husserl, through his repudiation of history and naturalism, had in fact landed phenomenology in an aporia by negating the act of repetition that constitutes the ideal. Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty had returned phenomenology to the empirical or the things themselves. Sartre did this through intentionality that repudiated that the transcendental

<sup>10</sup> Dermot Moran . *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Abington,Oxon. Routledge, 2000. .3

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 309

ego exists over and above consciousness. Heidegger did this through his concept of being-in-the-world or a return to ontology over metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty did this through his suggestion of the intertwining of mind and body or the transcendental and empirical. Yet in doing so phenomenology was thus reconfigured by them into empirical idealism, which Derrida's radicalisation of phenomenology overcomes. He overcomes this by acknowledging the economy of both the transcendental and empirical. Phenomenology was an investigation into the constitution of human consciousness, the ego and perception, and the conditions that made thought possible. As a philosophical discipline, it exercised a profound influence on both Levinas and Derrida, who took on its presuppositions to rework them anew in their thought by expanding phenomenology to include what it had previously excluded- the "Other" and iterability. This paper examines phenomenology and its reconfiguration as post-phenomenology, specifically in selecting representatives from two sides of the camp, Husserl and Derrida. It will be asked if the reconfiguration of phenomenology as post-phenomenology was necessary to resolve certain underlying contradictions and aporias contained in its very premises.

### **The Transcendental**

Traditionally conceived, the transcendental is that which conditions knowledge and perception in phenomenology by giving it the properties of space and time. Tradition has posited the transcendental as the condition of possibility of the empirical, from Plato's Forms to Aristotle's *morphe* and Kant's synthetic *a priori*. The Transcendental in philosophy is that which goes beyond (transcends) empiricism and denotes the sphere of metaphysics or the ideal which transcends the empirical. The word transcendental means "going beyond", based on its Latin root, *transcendere*, to climb or go beyond, from *trans* and *scando*. In Husserl's thought, the transcendental is the ground of the empirical, and the transcendental ego which consciousness must be reduced to is the absolute that grounds consciousness and conditions our knowledge and perception of objects by uniting them in continuous unities of space and time. The transcendental is what is experienced in order to ascertain the *a priori* fundamental principles or structuring processes of all knowledge. A quasi-transcendental functions as the interval between the transcendental and empirical that enables the retrospective production of both through the differentiating movement of the trace. This repetition with a difference or iterability that constitutes the quasi-transcendental is the condition of possibility for metaphysics and ideality.

In contrast to the transcendental, empiricism is a theory of knowledge which asserts that knowledge arises from experience. Empiricism emphasizes the role of experience and evidence especially sensory perception, in the formation of ideas, while debating the notion of innate ideas. All knowledge of real existence must be based on the senses or self-consciousness. Empiricism asserts that no claims to real existence can be justified independently of experience, or *a priori*. Empiricism is thus scepticism towards idealism or the transcendental and a view that all justification of beliefs about real existence is dependent on experience, or empirical.

Positing the transcendental as the condition of possibility of the empirical has led to a logocentrism, or the privileging of presence. This fails to acknowledge difference and *a priori* difference as its source. The condition of possibility for metaphysics, as argued by this paper, is not the transcendental but the quasi-transcendental. The quasi-transcendental in Derrida's thought functions as the condition of possibility of knowledge through iterability or the exemplification of the transcendental in the empirical through the differentiating movement of the trace that produces the illusion that the transcendental and empirical are distinct. This is the

signature of the transcendental, differing from the origin and thus enabling its communication. This paper questions if the reconfiguration of philosophy by the positing of the quasi-transcendental solves the problem of the contradiction brought about by dichotomizing and reifying the transcendental and empirical. This contradiction is the aporia of non-correlation and distinctness, which Husserl indeed, repeatedly institutes through his act of phenomenological reduction. The phenomenological reduction suppresses the movement of differance and iterability which are the true conditions for metaphysics and ideality. This paper questions if the transcendental empirical distinction upheld by phenomenology or its conflation upheld by the quasi-transcendental in post-phenomenology is a more sound description of metaphysics, its mode of production and its conditions of possibility.

### **Intentionality and iterability**

In *Ideas I*, Husserl proclaims that the concept of intentionality “is a concept which at the threshold of phenomenology is quite dispensible as its starting point and basis”.<sup>12</sup> In the simplest of terms, intentionality signifies that consciousness is consciousness of something. This integrates the transcendental and empirical in a hyle morphe relationship. Consciousness contains sensory contents or hyle, such as the data of colour, touch, sound and the like which can only become part of intentional structures or forms (morphe) through animating synpaper. As Husserl expresses it, the material or hyle “furnishes a woof that can enter into the intentional tissue, material that can enter into intentional formations”<sup>13</sup>

Husserl, in his efforts to unravel the complicated workings of consciousness, seems continually only to entangle himself in greater and even knottier problems. For instance, the act of reduction and the suspension of the natural through the transcendental epoche seems to undo entirely the hyle-morphe relationship that Husserl indicates and the act of reduction hence lands phenomenology in an aporia by negating the movement of iterability and difference. This is where Derrida’s notion of iterability appeals to us as far more convincing, it is the repetition that retrospectively divides and differentiates transcendental and empirical in the reproductive movement of differance that makes metaphysics and philosophy possible. The reduction simply distorts the transcendental empirical hyle-morphe relationship in suggesting these can be separated. Intentionality is the logical precursor of differance, which posits the dialectical economy of both transcendental and empirical in a relation. This thus includes both consciousness and intended object in a dynamic relation of repetition with a difference.

### **Critics of Derrida**

Contemporary phenomenologists such as Dermot Moran and Robert Sokolowski mistakenly characterize Derrida’s reconfiguration of phenomenology as an attack on idealism and a privileging in its place of absence, differance, play, and the empirical. Moran characterizes Derrida as a relativist and a skeptic whose privileging of differance and deferral leads to nihilism in which meanings cannot be determined or are endlessly deferred in textual indeterminacy. Such readings of Derrida are essentially mistaken. Derrida’s deconstruction does not overthrow the ideal to privilege the empirical and lead to a destructive nihilism as they assert. It is an examination of the conditions of possibility for metaphysics. This is through differance which

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*. Trans. F. Kersten. Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1983, 231

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., §86, 233

enables transcendental genesis, as well as the principle of iterability, or the repetition with a difference which retrospectively differentiates transcendental and empirical through the trace. Iterability enables metaphysical production.

Derrida traces the conditions of possibility for transcendental genesis to the meta-concepts of differance and trace, the spacing or interval and temporization between the transcendental and empirical which enables their production. Derrida also does not repudiate idealism to replace it with empiricism or a play of meanings, but posits a priori difference, and iterability, or repetition with a difference of the origin. A priori difference is only produced in retrospect through the differentiating trace that produces the transcendental and empirical. These a priori conditions of differance and trace constitute a meta-phenomenology in accounting for transcendental genesis. Derrida's philosophy does not privilege absence or the empirical. Rather, it posits the quasi-transcendental as the supplement that enables the transcendental. It is the differance between the transcendental and empirical, or the spacing and repetition with a difference between them that makes philosophy possible. This is the play between presence and absence that makes philosophy possible, thus what Derrida characterizes is this fundamental relationship of differance which makes philosophy possible. Derrida does not overturn the transcendental in favour of the empirical. Derrida's philosophy is not empiricism but a philosophy of mediation, a positing of the quasi-transcendental as that which enables philosophy. This is the accounting for the meta-concepts that enable phenomenology as differance and the trace.

Dermot Moran is also mistaken in characterizing differance as merely the endless deferral of meaning leading to a nothingness or nihilism. Differance is an acknowledgement of the economy of the repetition of transcendental and the empirical in the reproductive movement of iterability rather than a lapse into empirical substitution or the elevating of the sign over the signified. It is an acknowledgement that the condition of possibility of signification is repetition, or representation. (*Vergegenwartigung*) I also contest Moran's view that Derrida privileges the singular over the universal. Derrida argues that the universal must be expressed through the singular. It is not his project to repudiate universals or idealism but to examine the conditions of possibility in which metaphysics produces itself, which is repetition and representation, or iterability.

In *Speech and Phenomena* for instance, the expressive represents pure ideality, a stratum of sense separated from empirical data, it is a form of transcendental signified and a metaphysics of presence. Derrida questions the strict distinction between the expressive and the indicative that Husserl makes. For Derrida this rigid dichotomization leads to a form of phonocentrism and logocentrism. Derrida questions the strict distinction between the transcendental and the empirical and argues for an interweaving between the two. This interweaving he calls differance, or the repetition of *Vorstellung* (ideality) in empirical life, which he calls *Vergegenwartigung*, reproductive repetition. *Vergegenwartigung* involves the objectification of something as being itself absent (past, merely imaginary) whereas repetition and recognition of an expression does not. The sign becomes made possible by its repeatability, or iterability, and in this repetition that Derrida locates the movement of trace, differance, or supplementarity. Derrida argues that the sign's possibility of repetition conditions presence, thus non-presence constitutes presence rather

than the reverse. In this sense ideality is bifurcated into two. As Derrida puts forth, the presence of the present is derived from repetition and not the reverse.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida questions the possibility of making a rigid distinction between the expressive and the indicative and isolating the expressive in order to privilege it as a site of presence. In questioning the reduction of indication, Derrida wishes to question the possibility of the existence of exclusive expressive signs. He argues that expression and indication is always interwoven and mutually implicated. This is through the relation of iterability or quasi-transcendental.

What Moran and Sokolowski miss entirely in their interpretations of Derrida is his positing of the quasi-transcendental in order to save phenomenology from an aporia by nullifying the reproductive movement of iterability through the act of phenomenological reduction. They simply assume that Derrida dismisses the transcendental and mounts an attack on idealism. While Moran is right in noting that Derrida posits the contamination of the transcendental and empirical, he is wrong to interpret this as amounting to a valorization of the empirical or the signifier over the signified. Derrida's suggestion that there is nothing outside the text does not, as Moran suggests, lead to a nihilism. Rather it is a suggestion that the transcendental must be contained or embodied by the text rather than posited as exterior and separate from it. Moran's charge that Derrida's repudiation of logocentrism leads to a rejection of the law of non-contradiction also misses the point of Derrida's account of metaphysics entirely, Derrida's argument precisely captures the aporia, and hence the contradiction, that metaphysics lands itself in by negating the constituting movement of iterability and differance in the phenomenological reduction. It thus locates this contradiction and resolves it through the positing of the quasi-transcendental, or the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical, or the mediation of the transcendental in the empirical.

Also, Derrida does not repudiate logocentrism. He merely examines the conditions of possibility for logocentrism- differance and the trace. Moran is also mistaken in charging Derrida with linguistic idealism with his statement that there is nothing outside the text. Derrida is not arguing that there is nothing outside language, but rather that language is instrumental for meaning and its condition of possibility for coming to fruition. Derrida's argument is for mediation of the transcendental through the empirical rather than an exchanging of idealism for context or the empirical. It is the argument of this paper that Derrida, far from being a destructive critic of phenomenology as Moran and Sokolowski argue, is in fact examining the mode in which phenomenology is made possible. This is through his notion of repetition and the principle of iterability which constitutes the ideal.

This makes for a more complete and sensible reading of metaphysics in place of one that lands phenomenology in an aporia through the exclusion of differance or the quasi-transcendental that occurs through the reduction. The phenomenological reduction is only enabled by the nothing, or differance, which distinguishes the transcendental and empirical. Hence, metaphysics should be brought to acknowledge this a priori condition of possibility that enables transcendental genesis and the very possibility of mediation of the transcendental and empirical through iterability. Phenomenology becomes enabled by differance as its condition of

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, David B. Allison, tr. Preface by Newton Garver. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973. 52

possibility as the very act of phenomenological reduction presupposes this a priori difference between transcendental and empirical which translates as nothing.

In this paper I have examined Derrida's reception in the phenomenological field. I examined common misconstruals of Derrida as an empiricist and nihilist, and allegations that his post-phenomenology is a destruction of phenomenology. Contrary to these charges, I have argued that Derrida's post-phenomenology is a meta-phenomenology in its account for the conditions of possibility for transcendental-empirical distinction through his notions of difference and trace, as well as the quasi-transcendental. The quasi-transcendental is the interval between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both. Iterability and repetition name the conditions of possibility of ideality rather than being any simple destructive negation of it. The transcendental is only enabled by its signature or difference from the origin in order to be communicated through space and time. It is the written mark, the quasi-transcendental, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, which makes possible the distinction between the transcendental and empirical at the same time it makes impossible a sphere of purely expressive signs without the distinction. The written mark functions as if it was transcendental, but without it no distinction between the transcendental or empirical would be able to take place, and were the distinction impossible no transcendental or pure expressive realm would take place either. Hence the phenomenological project becomes possible through this paradoxical relation of the quasi-transcendental, relating the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity in non-identity. It is thus made more powerful through an acknowledgement of the quasi-transcendental as its condition of possibility. In the next paper I will further outline Derrida's meta-phenomenology as an account of the conditions of phenomenology rather than being a simple destruction of it.

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