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Lyotard.

Phenomenology.

La Phénoménologie was Lyotard's first book, written while he was teaching in a lycée in Constantine, Algeria, and published in paperback in the series of small, introductory texts – *Que Sais-je* – by the Presses Universitaires de France in 1954. During his lifetime, the book went through 12 editions. The 10th edition of 1986 was translated into English and published, in 1991, by the State University of New York Press. On occasions, Lyotard amended the bibliography, but he did not edit his text. Even though his later work was to show signs of the influence of Wittgenstein and to become concerned with exegesis and interpretation of Kant's *Critiques*, the book on Phenomenology remained, muted but immutable, in the background. It represented the French response to the work of Husserl at a particular, mid-century moment, but it is also an important source for understanding the subsequent development of Lyotard's own thinking.

The 19th Century had seen a revival of interest in the study of Logic in Western Europe, but there was conflict between those who insisted on the formal characteristics of reasoning and those who took the study of logic to be indissociable from the psychological study of thought processes. This became a conflict between philosophical idealism and empiricism. Husserl was one of those who, at the turn of the century, sought to overcome this opposition by analysing formal logic positivistically. Hence his early *Logical Investigations* (1900/1, 1970)– logical enquiries which pre-dated the influence of his disciple, Heidegger, which became dominant after 1930. In the 1930s and early 1940s, there were two main tendencies in the French reception of Husserl's thought. The first was a tendency to consider Husserl's work as a form of modern scholasticism. The alternative response to Husserl's work seemed to involve seeking to constitute existentialism out of phenomenology. This pushed further the ontological interpretation of phenomenology advanced by Heidegger. Levinas, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur are the French thinkers most associated with the existentialising of Husserl which followed on from the publication of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* in 1927. Ricoeur published a translation of Husserl's *Ideen I*, with a detailed translator's introduction, in 1950. His philosophical exegesis was an attempt to distinguish Husserl's transcendental idealism both from Cartesian *a priorism* and from Kantian transcendental idealism. Ricoeur argued that "Husserl's 'question' ... is not Kant's; Kant poses the problem of *validity* for possible objective consciousness and that is why he stays within the framework of an attitude which remains natural. ... Husserl's question ... is the question of the origin of the world ...; it is, if you like, the question implied in myths, religions, theologies and ontologies, which has not yet been elaborated scientifically. (Ricoeur, 1950, xxvii-xxviii). Ricoeur's exposition of Husserl opened up the possibility that Husserl's work could help in attempting to analyse the foundations of Kantian *a priorism*. Phenomenology was not to be understood as another philosophy but as a method for analysing all modes of thought, including that of philosophy.

The bibliography to the first edition of Lyotard's book indicates that he was aware of these strands of phenomenological thought. He recognized that any response to phenomenology demanded that it should be understood as a movement rather than as a fixed philosophical position. He tried to outline the 'common style' of phenomenology after 'having rendered to Husserl that which is Husserl's: *having begun*'. (Lyotard, 1991, 34). He located the development of Husserl's thought in the context of late 19th century trends, highlighting that Husserl wrote *against* psychologism and *against* pragmatism. The first part of the book, devoted to Husserl, concluded that, according to Husserl, 'the truths of science are founded neither in God, as Descartes thought, nor on the a priori conditions of possibility, as Kant

thought, but on the immediate experience of evidence by which individual and world find themselves in harmony from the beginning.’ (Lyotard, 1991, 64). This conclusion was followed by a short ‘note on Husserl and Hegel’. Lyotard acknowledged that it was Hegel who had originally given ‘phenomenology’ its meaning, but he argued that the crucial distinction between the two thinkers was that ‘Hegelian phenomenology *closes* the system’ while ‘Husserlian description inaugurates the grasping of the “thing itself” before all predication’ (Lyotard, 1991, 68). In other words, to use Lyotard’s later terminology, Hegel’s dialectic was wrongly subordinated to an historical grand narrative. In this early text, therefore, we can find Lyotard’s latent hostility to totalising systems of thought. The challenge for the phenomenological movement was to resist becoming appropriated by systematic philosophy.

Lyotard’s account of Husserl was influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty, but, in *Discours, Figure* (1971), he was anxious to distance himself from what he regarded as Merleau-Ponty’s excessively cognitive interpretation. Through the 1970s, Lyotard pursued a quest to articulate the primacy of the libidinal or experiential. The search took him away from phenomenological philosophy, but it led him towards a phenomenological understanding of Kant’s transcendentalism. Most apparently in *Le différend* (1983), Lyotard sought to deconstruct the idealist legacy of Kant and to construct a libidinally-based critical philosophy, derived from close scrutiny of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. Although Lyotard did not subsequently return to close exegesis of the work of Husserl, his first book announced his methodological commitment to transience, and it influentially outlined the implications of the phenomenological style of thinking for research in the human sciences, notably in relation to Psychology, Sociology, and History. It was his phenomenological approach to the work of Kant, apparent in *Au juste: conversations* (1979), *L’Enthousiasme: la critique kantienne de l’histoire* (1986), and *Leçons sur l’analytique du sublime* (1991) which enabled him to articulate the later moral and political philosophy which, perhaps, was Lyotard’s greatest achievement.

Husserl, E., 1970, *Logical Investigations*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul. (translation of the second edition, 1913, of *Logische Untersuchungen*, Halle, Niemeyer, 1900/1.)

Husserl, E., 1950 (translation, notes, introduction and glossary of Ricoeur, P) *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, Gallimard, Paris.

Lyotard, J-F., trans B. Beakley, 1991, *Phenomenology*, Albany, State University of New York Press. (with a Foreword by G.L. Ormiston).