Book Reviews

Shaun Gallagher


Shaun Gallagher’s *Phenomenology* is a welcome reflection on the historical development of phenomenology including its contemporary relevance to cognitive science and neuroscience. The text has multiple audiences—seasoned phenomenologists in various disciplines and those who might benefit from an introduction to phenomenology, in order to either competently embrace this approach or relate to it as an outsider. The clarity and scope of Gallagher’s grasp of phenomenological philosophy as well as his involvement in the dialogue between phenomenology and those contemporary sciences make his book valuable for these audiences. I will also make an attempt in this review to address some of the specific concerns that might arise on the part of the readership of this *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*.

Gallagher neatly structures the text both historically and thematically. Information about the origins of phenomenology, the classical works that emerged through the 20th century, and some recent 21st century developments are presented by means of major, well chosen and sensibly ordered topics in chapters on naturalism versus transcendentalism, phenomenological research methods, intentionality, embodiment, temporality, self, the lifeworld, and intersubjectivity. The distinctive orientation and thesis running through these chapters is that the development of phenomenology has involved both continuities and discontinuities, harmonious unity and challenging tensions that have been and continue today to be generative. Gallagher offers a sympathetic understanding of Husserl’s unparalleled, pioneering efforts; considers such major associated thinkers as Jaspers, Scheler, and Gadamer; reviews such the major developers Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Gurwitsch, DeBeauvoir, and Ricoeur including hermeneutic, existential, and narrative strands; and touches on the turns taken by Levinas, Derrida, and Foucault, who have presented criticisms in the broader field of ‘continental philosophy.’ Readers will appreciate juxtaposed expositions of such classic items as Husserl’s noetic-noematic analysis with contemporary debates in the interpretation of the noema between “East coast” and “West coast” phenomenologists.
To his credit, Gallagher reports the contributions among these original philosophers, recognizing the importance of each without the overly brittle polemics that sometimes occur and with an appreciation of the kindred and significantly compatible nature of their differences. Although well educated phenomenologists in all disciplines will be familiar with the works from the dynamic tradition reviewed in this volume, Gallagher’s clarity and openness to the contributions of various philosophers will afford a good opportunity to rethink the history, consider how it has developed in the common topics that have been addressed, and connect the dots among great works that do not themselves take account of their overall interrelations. For the novice, a very useful introduction to phenomenology is provided by the straightforward language, smart organization, and abundant quotations from and references to seminal works in this broad yet differentiated coverage of phenomenology. Each chapter is concluded with a useful section describing further readings that encourage an extension of one’s understanding of the issues under consideration.

It should be noted that in his coverage of phenomenology, Gallagher focuses almost exclusively on the work of philosophers, a difficult and even daunting scope in itself for most writers. With this disciplinary focus, he offers readers a wonderful sense of the spirit and characteristic passion of phenomenology as well as a sound grasp of its methodological fundaments, rightly noting that phenomenology is a method, a way of seeing rather than and intrinsically opposed to any dogma. I will not trace Gallagher’s account of phenomenology here, but it is exemplary in its straightforward and accessible presentation of the classical literature. The basic ideas developed by phenomenologists are nicely spelled out with well chosen, lengthy quotations, which showcase the brilliance of these writers, and nuanced contrasts among phenomenologists. He includes such concrete analyses of phenomenological philosophers as Husserl’s analyses of perception, internal time consciousness, intersubjectivity, and the lifeworld; Heidegger’s analyses of spatiality (as ready-to-hand), sociality (being-with, solicitude), and self (das man); Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of the perception and embodiment; and Sartre’s analyses of ‘the look’ and the ego. The reader will also find interesting and important Gallagher’s contributions to our understanding of the ‘self-agency’ and ‘self ownership,’ as he articulates them with reference to a wide body of literature including studies of schizophrenia, somatoparaphrenia, and experiments with persons using robotic limbs.

Gallagher’s recognition of the transdisciplinarity of phenomenology is limited to its connection with work starting in 1990s cognitive and neurological sciences. He states, “Phenomenology as a research program died sometime