

## DERRIDA ON THE QUASI-TRANSCENDENTAL AND MADNESS

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### Abstract

Derrida's arguments are not absolute treatises to be taken at face value but a mode of interrogation in which he questions the basis of presence, fully given to itself, uncontaminated by absence, contingency, the empirical, the Other, and as such inscribes the necessity of incarnation and a necessity for the mark to fail as presence has to differ from itself materially in order to be realized. In order to succeed thus, phenomenology has to fail as it has to survive itself as the trace. Derrida thus democratizes phenomenology in showing its success depends upon its incarnation and death to self presence in order to realize itself through living on after its death as the trace.

**Keywords:** Derrida, Transcendental, Empirical, Quasi-transcendental, madness

This paper argues that Derrida democratizes phenomenology in demonstrating that transcendental and empirical difference is an illusion. By demonstrating that transcendental empirical difference is an illusion, Derrida shows that the struggle over claims for truth or the primacy of the transcendental or empirical have been sustained over illusory hierarchies and that this presents a false dichotomy and conflict. Phenomenology is not hierarchy but exchangeability, and the implication of transcendental-empirical difference being an illusion is that truth is not localizable to either transcendental or empirical, but translates as paradox, aporia and the quasi-transcendental. The transcendental and empirical are the same and the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, just as the empirical is the trace of the transcendental through iterability.

Phenomenology is rather determined by aporia- the third space of the quasi-transcendental which produces both transcendental and empirical through the distinguishing movement of the trace. Aporia, the third space, the quasi-transcendental and difference as the interval between the transcendental and empirical that determines both are shown to be the meta-conditions that govern metaphysics. This thesis thus posits the space of the third and between, namely the quasi-transcendental, as the root condition that governs metaphysics and allows it to function. Where phenomenology has historically defined truth as either transcendental or empirical, this thesis will proceed to demonstrate that truth is rather quasi-transcendental, neither transcendental nor empirical but a space between that enables the thinking of both. Against

current scholarship that defines the quasi-transcendental as immanence and contamination, I will argue that the quasi-transcendental is a relation of paradox.

The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity in non-identity, sameness in difference. Paradoxically, distinctions translate into non-distinctions because the difference between the transcendental and empirical translates as a nothingness, an a priori difference which is not a difference. Death thus lies at the heart of phenomenology and constitutes it as a priori difference, difference, distinguishes and separates nothing. Derrida reconfigures phenomenology through his discovery of the quasi-transcendental, the space of the third, paradox, aporia and the between, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, as the conditionality of thinking both transcendental and empirical. This quasi-transcendental determines metaphysics by being prior to transcendental and empirical and conditions its production and functioning. Derrida thus democratizes philosophy in demonstrating that its distinctions, its privilege of transcendental or empirical and its divide into materialism and idealism is based on illusion and myth of origin.

Phenomenology is thus determined by its other and its unthought, true phenomenology acknowledges that which has escaped its structure in transcendental and empirical determination, or the third space, between, aporia and interval of the quasi-transcendental, as the true condition that governs, produces, and upholds metaphysics. Derrida thus inscribes phenomenology in a more powerful form by bringing it to terms with its condition of possibility as the quasi-transcendental. I define the democratization of phenomenology as a site of inclusion, expanding phenomenology's horizons to include the other and unthought of phenomenology as its condition of possibility. As texts such as *Monolingualism of the Other* demonstrate, there is no pure language that is uncontaminated by the Other as all language is acquisition and assimilation. Also, *The Politics of Friendship* shows that the Other has to precede me before friendship is possible, just as Narcissus relates to Echo only by seeing the Other in himself. Along similar trajectories, phenomenology's Other or unthought is shown to be the basis for the One or thought. What this thesis thus proceeds to show is the unthought that forms the basis for thought, thereby expanding phenomenology beyond its territorial concerns of an either/or kind of truth because phenomenology is always determined by difference, the neither/nor, and the ghost of the text that returns to haunt it. At the same time, this thesis argues that Derrida's move to save phenomenology inscribes in it a measure of fallibility through his demonstrations that thought is always contaminated by its unthought, the ideal is always contaminated by contingency and undecidability,

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In *Positions*<sup>1</sup>, Derrida defines history as the history of the metaphysical concept, which does not exist outside of a system of differences and play. Derrida's work is thus a reworking of teleological history into histories, showing that transcendental and empirical do not exist outside relationality to each other as supplements and traces. Derrida demonstrates that phenomenology has proceeded through the exclusion of metaphor, or suppressing the metaphoricity of texts by privileging an either/or side of the binary, where phenomenology is to be viewed as constituted by metaphor, dynamically relating both transcendental and empirical rather than privileging either side.

Derrida's reading of Foucault

In 'Cogito and the history of madness', Derrida alleges that Foucault has discovered the complicity between madness and reason rather than the exclusion of madness from reason. Derrida writes that Foucault misreads Descartes when he attempts to read him as expelling madness from reason. According to Derrida, the move is more methodical and a hyperbolic exaggeration of sensory error and the state of dreaming than an attempt to expel or isolate madness from reason. Derrida argues that Descartes had been concerned more with the thinking of the oppositionality between madness and reason as a condition to ascertain the certitude of existence in his cogito. Whether I am mad or not, I think therefore I am. Therefore Foucault makes an error when he privileges madness itself or attempts to think madness itself over reason. Madness is not conceivable without its opposition to reason and Foucault's attempt to rationalize the separation of the cogito from madness indeed, undermines his own attempts to valorise madness and unreason over sanity. His rational method assumes what he seeks to expel. Foucault does not thus manage to escape reason as he sets out to.

### Works cited

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Positions*. University of Chicago Press. 1981. p. 58