

Why Face Colors up?

On a Phenomenological Space of Shame Feeling

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Abstract: Sartre regards shame feeling as one part of emotion and applies his own phenomenological theory of emotion to the study of shame feeling, which leads to two important conclusions: 1) What shame is ashamed of is “me”; 2) The existence of the Other is indubitable. But with the help of Scheler’s theory of shame feeling, Husserl’s doctrine of intuition and Heidegger’s ontological thinking, we find out that the hodological space carved out by Sartre from shame feeling is questionable: The path from shame feeling to “me” and the Other is inaccessible. Sartre’s false steps mainly result from his unphenomenological explanations of such major concepts of phenomenology as “phenomenon”, “intentionality”, “intuition” and “me”.

Key Words: shame feeling look the Other phenomenological space

Why does face color up? I look on this question as a question of shame feeling and I would like to make an investigation of it from a phenomenological viewpoint, further speaking, from the phenomenological positions held by both M. Scheler and J-P. Sartre.

Shame feeling (*Schamgefühl*) is originally a term used by Scheler in his article “On Shame and Shame Feeling”. I will use this word to comprise concept “la honte/die Scham” employed by Sartre/Scheler. Based on the texts, this report will reconstitute Sartre’s investigation of shame feeling and its conclusion with help of Scheler’s theory of shame feeling, Husserl’s idea of intuition and Heidegger’s ontology, and makes a just evaluation of Sartre’s theory of shame feeling, even of the achievements and limits of his phenomenological ontology so that we can acquire a clear understanding of the reason that face colors up.

I

Sartre thinks that shame feeling is a kind of emotion and that this emotion is directly related to acts. Let’s begin with acts.

Generally speaking, it is ahead going and non-reflective that we throw ourselves into the world. In the process of dealing with the world we necessarily encounter with many kinds of

problems. Then we will stop and make a reflection on these problems and put forward various solutions and again return to the world to get rid of the problems with the results achieved from the reflections. Therefore we can say that acts transit from non-reflection to reflection, from the world to ourselves and back again to the world.

But Sartre thinks that this ordinary idea about acts precisely conceals the most original act in the authentic sense: pre-reflective act.

What is a pre-reflective act? Sartre's study of emotion gives us an answer.

Sartre says¹ in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory* that the act of dread is at the beginning not a reflective consciousness of feeling-dreadful, just as the perception of this book is not a reflective consciousness of the perception of this book. In *Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre takes "pity" as an example and makes a further explanation of this problem²: I have a pity for Pierre and I must help him. For my consciousness there exists only one thing at present: Pierre-should-be-secured. In his body there appears a quality of "should-be-secured (*Pierre-devant-être-secouru*)", which exerts an impact upon me as a power does. But as soon as I begin to reflect on it, the reflection will "poison" my desire. At this time it is not Pierre any more but the moral imperative "this is good" that attracts me.

Sartre reaches a conclusion here that a consciousness of emotion is at first an act of pre-reflective act and that it is only self-consciousness in the non-positional sense.

Since emotion is a pre-reflective act, so how could we understand emotion? Psychologists regard emotion as a psychic process or psychic fact. Sartre cannot agree with them in any way: "I hope that this book can point out: The irregular and chaotic psychic facts as is looked generally, have their own signification. Without the understanding of this signification, the psychic facts alone are not accessible"³.

If we cannot begin with psychology, then from where should we study emotion? Sartre says⁴ that the task of a phenomenologist lies in the investigation of the signification of emotion, that is, pointing out some other things while making study of emotion, in such a way that people will find out the signified when exposing its signification.

From the introduction above we can see that early Sartre's phenomenology has in fact realized two breakthroughs: the breakthrough of reflective philosophy and that of psychology. He owes his first breakthrough to his clarification of the relationship between *Je* and *moi*. The article *Transcendence of the Ego* criticizes Kant and Husserl for their regarding *Je* as a formal structure of consciousness, and puts forward a clear idea⁵ that *Je* is nothing other than an infinite contradiction of *moi* as material and there is no place for *Je*⁶ in pre-reflective

¹ Sartre, "The Emotions: Outline of a Theory", in *Collections of Sartre's Philosophical Articles*, translated by Pan Peiqing, et al, Anhui Literature Press, 1988, p. 85.

² Sartre, *La Transcendance de L'ego, Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1981, p. 39.

³ Sartre, "The Emotions: Outline of a Theory", p. 106.

⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

⁵ Sartre, *La Transcendance de L'ego*, p. 37-38, p. 19, p. 44 respectively.

⁶ In "The Emotions: Outline of a Theory" Sartre even takes a venturesome step to think that *Je* does not

consciousness, while *moi* appears as an identity of quality and state. The reflective philosophy naturally loses its foundation without *Je*. The second breakthrough is owed to the phenomenological concept of meaning. It is Husserl's idea in *Logical Investigations* that meaning is a transcendence of psychic facts and psychic process.

Since the investigational method has been fixed, so how is Sartre, as a phenomenologist, going to define emotion in a positive way? And what kind of conclusion has he drawn from his study of emotion?

“Now we can think what emotion is. It is a transformation of the world. If the path pointed out clearly is not available, or if we cannot see the path at all, we are unable to stay in the so compelling and formidable world. All the paths are blocked, but we must still act ... It is at first a grasp of new relationship and new requirements. Only because it is impossible to grasp a certain object, resulting into a nervous state at the same time, consciousness grasps it or tries to grasp it through other accesses, which aim to change the object by changing ourselves.”⁷

Just as we “say”⁸ that the grapes are sour when they are unreachable, or as some people will fall to the ground in a faint when they see the beasts of prey, the emotion makes a magic transformation of our relationship with the world, of the real quality and structure of the world.

This is emotion. When consciousness is aware of the impossibility of changing the world, when the access of consciousness to the world has been interrupted, the body will change the world by changing itself non-reflectively. Then emotion appears.

Our question is: How is it possible that the shame feeling, as a kind of emotion, comes forth? Or, what kind of hodological space has it opened in the sense of phenomenology?

Sartre has given us two examples related to shame feeling.

Example A⁹: I just made an awkward or vulgar gesture: This gesture clings to me. Neither have I judged it, nor have I condemned it. I just experienced it. I just realized it for itself. But at this time I suddenly raised my head: Somebody was there looking at me. At one blow I realized my gesture as vulgar and I feel ashamed.

Example B¹⁰: Let's imagine that I glue my ear to the door or peep into the house without

exist in the process of my writing, in other words, writing is also a pre-reflective act, e.g., “Now I'm wondering whether I will write *donc* or *par conséquent*, this means reflection in no way. It is only because the two potentialities of *donc* and *par conséquent* appear as potentiality and conflict each Other” (Sartre, “The Emotions: Outline of a Theory”, p. 88)

⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

⁸ It should be paid attention to that here “say” is not some kind of saying or explanation at the level of reflection but accompanied with a physiological reaction: nausea. As for this, Sartre once said explicitly, “I cannot reach the grapes. Therefore I grasp the sour quality of the grapes through the act of nausea. I magically endowed the grapes with the quality I desired for” (Ibid., p. 91).

⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes, the Philosophical Library, Inc., 1993, p. 221.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 259ff.

intention due to jealousy, curiosity or vice ... And now I hear the footsteps in the hall: Somebody is looking at me ... The shame feeling exposes me to be this existence.

In those two examples where does shame feeling exist before it emerges? Is it that I consciously carry out my vulgar gesture? Or is it that this gesture has already existed in my body? Will my face color up when I am totally indulged with the listening or peeping? If the sound of the Other's footsteps brings shame feeling to me, then does it mean that shame exists in the Other? Sartre thinks that shame feeling does not exist in my consciousness or in my body, even not in a potential way, but it does not present itself in the Other, either. It only occurs in a certain kind of structure: "Shame is shame of oneself before the Other"¹¹.

Combined with Sartre's theory of emotion, it is not hard for us to understand the conclusion drawn by him. Likewise, shame feeling, as an emotion, precisely results from the interruption of an access from consciousness to the world. The question now is: who, through what way, cut off this access? The key to this question constitutes the hodological space, which Sartre has opened starting from shame feeling.

Sartre thinks that existence of the Other can be undoubtedly confirmed from shame feeling. As is well known, how to demonstrate the existence of the Other is always an intractable question for phenomenology. Husserl's demonstration starting from transcendental ego remains doubted, while Heidegger regards the existence of the Other as an inevitable moment of the *Mitsein of Dasein*. Sartre is also quite aware of the difficulties here. He admits that the existence of the Other cannot be demonstrated from perception, for the Other is not subordinate to the endless series appearing in the same genus like desks or chairs. Meanwhile he points out that the Other is not an invisible substance and it definitely exists. Therefore, we encounter with a huge difficulty: how to demonstrate the existence of the Other in a way of non-perception?

The answer offered by Sartre is that the essence of the Other

"must be to refer to a primary relation between my consciousness and the Other's. This relation, in which the Other must be given to me directly as a subject although in connection with me, is the fundamental relation, the very type of my being-for-others"¹².

Sartre means here that the existence of the Other does not express itself first as that of body but as that of consciousness. The Other's consciousness cannot be found in the world. The Other can only be given to us as a subject. "Look" plays a critical role in the process of givenness. When we are carrying out vulgar gesture or peeping through a keyhole, it is the Look of the Other that shuts off our connection with the world around us and compels us to see the Other indubitably in the feeling of shame. So Sartre makes a concise and penetrating sum-up: " 'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the truth of 'seeing-the-Other' "¹³.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 222.

¹² Ibid., p. 253.

¹³ Ibid., p. 257.

Starting from shame feeling we can still identify what the shame is ashamed of in an unquestionable way. As we all know, shame is always feeling ashamed of Of-what are we ashamed in the shame feeling? In the look of the Other my face suddenly colors up; In the look of the Other I have to admit that I am exactly the object focused on and judged by the Other; In the look of the Other I am objectified and alienated; In the look of the Other, “I am leaning over the keyhole as this tree is bent by wind”¹⁴, my freedom and transcendence is divorced from myself to be a given object. It is obvious that, according to Sartre, shame is not shame of something, “shame is shame of oneself”.

In my opinion Sartre’s phenomenology of shame feeling leads to two conclusions: Firstly, what the shame is ashamed of is the existence of *Je*, whose existence is not primary, for it relies on the existence of the Other; Secondly, the existence of the Other is out of question. *Je* and the Other are exactly the two-dimensional space opened by phenomenology of shame feeling. Sartre is fully confident of it:

“Thus the look has set us on the track of our being-for-others and has revealed to us the indubitable existence of this Other for whom we are. But it cannot bring us any further”¹⁵.

However, what this paper questions is precisely these two conclusions drawn by Sartre. Is it feasible and justifiable to transit from shame feeling to *Je* and the Other? Is it really possible that the two-dimensional space discovered by phenomenology of shame feeling exhibits the phenomenon of shame feeling?

II

If we want to put Sartre’s first conclusion into question, we must first make a critical review of the subsidiary background supporting the conclusions. I think that it is Sartre’s own ideas of “phenomenon”, “intentionality” and “look” that support the academic itinerary and its conclusions.

First of all let’s have a look at Sartre’s idea “phenomenon”. The first section at the beginning of *Being and Nothingness* is entitled “The Phenomenon”. In this section Sartre makes a positive statement, “Modern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it”¹⁶, and meanwhile he makes an explicit stress that there is no essence or absolute Being behind phenomenon, “What it is, it is absolutely, for it reveals itself as it is”¹⁷. In fact, this idea of phenomenon has come into being as early as in the epoch of *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*:

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. xv.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. xvi.

“All in all, phenomenology does not study facts but phenomena. The phenomenon here should be understood as ‘something self-unveiling’. The real is its appearance.”¹⁸

Sartre’s idea of phenomenon reminds us of Heidegger’s idea of phenomenon: “Das Sein des Seienden kann am wenigsten je so etwas sein, >>dahinter<< noch etwas steht, >> was nicht erscheint<<”¹⁹. As a matter of fact, this is not a kind of groundless association. Sartre himself once cited this expression²⁰. But it seems that Sartre has totally overlooked the warnings made by Heidegger immediately after this sentence:

“>>Hinter<< den Phänomenen der Phänomenologie steht wesenhaft nichts anderes, wohl aber kann das, was Phänomen werden soll, verborgen sein”²¹.

The phenomenological phenomenon does not first of all signify something that appears but exactly something that does not appear. It is not phenomenological for Heidegger to subordinate phenomenon to the appearing. We will see that besides this it will result into a misunderstanding of intentionality.

At first sight, Sartre’s formulation of intentionality is much adjacent to the definition by classical phenomenology. Take some for example, shame’s “structure is intentional; it is a shameful apprehension of something”²²; “The task of a phenomenologist lies in the study of the signification” and “signified” of “emotion”²³; “In fact consciousness transcends itself”²⁴. But Sartre makes a supplement after each sentence above respectively: “And this something is me”; “We know from the beginning that what this signified is: emotion means all in consciousness in its own way, or if we can say from the perspective of Being, it means all in human reality”²⁵; “Therefore it cannot withdraw into itself so as to doubt that it lies outside of objects. It can only be recognized through the world”. These supplements dissolve all the revolutionary significance of the theory of intentionality: Shame is originally meant to be ashamed of something, but with Sartre this something is determined as me; The signification and the signified of emotion is originally meant to be a transcendent object compared to consciousness, but Sartre regards it as one part of consciousness or human reality²⁶; The self-transcendence of consciousness is

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 18. Aufl., Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001, S 35-36.

²⁰ Cf., Sartre, “The Emotions: Outline of a Theory”, p. 68.

²¹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, S 36.

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 221. Underlined by Sartre.

²³ Sartre, “The Emotions: Outline of a Theory”, p. 69.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

²⁵ As for the two concepts “all in consciousness” and “all in human reality”, Sartre once took shame feeling as an example to make an explanation: It refers to “the expression on face”, “a synthetic totality” constituted by “the gesture of the Other’s body and fluster of our own organism” (Cf., Ibid., p. 102).

²⁶ Sartre even thinks that Heidegger also holds the same idea: “Heidegger thinks that we will regain all of the human reality, because emotion is just an assumption of itself and human reality ‘passionally dealing

understood by Sartre as a self-return of consciousness through the world.

Consciousness returns to a plane schema because intentionality is dissolved. Emotion can only operate within consciousness. Just as Sartre said, “Shame therefore realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself”²⁷. The conclusion here is correspondent with Sartre’s previous idea of phenomenon.

Sartre’s idea of “look” is remarkable. Contrary to the common idea, which takes on look as a way of perception, Sartre makes a strict distinction between look and perception. On the one hand, perception is the seeing of the world, of the Other as an object, while look is related to watched being or related to the Other’s consciousness. Sartre says, “To apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of being looked at”²⁸. On the Other hand, Sartre finds out that perception cannot happen together with look, “I cannot therefore direct my attention on the look without at the same stroke causing my perception to decompose and pass into the background”²⁹. Besides that, eyes play a different role in perception and look. In perception eyes are visual organ, while in look they lie in the position of background. Sartre points out further that when we encounter with the Other, “the eye is not at first apprehended as a sensible organ of vision but as the support for the look ... If I apprehend the look, I cease to perceive the eyes”³⁰.

Sartre’s distinguishing between look and perception shows his insight that he has as a phenomenologist. The eyes here does not take part in the intuition as a prominent moment. In fact I cannot perceive my distance with the eyes, but the distance is still there. For this Sartre has once had a deep understanding:

“The Other’s look hides his eyes; he seems to go in front of them. This illusion stems from the fact that the eyes as objects of my perception remain at a precise distance which unfolds from me to them (in a word, I am present to eyes without distance, but they are distant from the place I ‘find myself’ whereas the look is upon me without distance while at the same time it holds me at a distance”³¹.

How is the distance here produced? With Husserl’s theory of intuition, distance comes into being from the spacing between intuitive act and intuitive object; With Sartre’s concept of look, distance originates from my internal separation by look, in other words above, distance comes from the internal relation between me and me. This idea has come into configuration as early as in the epoch of *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*:

with’ the world” (Ibid., p. 69).

²⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 221.

²⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 258.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

“Consciousness is a victim of a trap, which traps itself. Just because when it experiences the new aspect of the world, it believes at the same time in this aspect, it is captured by its own faith, just as in dream, in an outbreak of hysteria. The consciousness of emotion is chained, but it does not mean that some existence outside of it chains it. It is chained by itself.”³²

We can see that with Sartre the dimension of object has been given up once more.

As far as the question, that is, of what a shame is ashamed, is concerned, plane “phenomenon”, dissolved “intentionality” and “look” without an object, all these theoretical subsidiary backgrounds will inevitably enforce Sartre to enter into an internal circulation of *moi* and thus to draw a plausibly dialectic conclusion. The restrictive effects of these backgrounds can go even further as to assure Sartre that phenomenology of shame feeling “cannot bring us any farther” and even to make him subordinate the problem of emotion, on which phenomenology might have enabled itself to do further research, to the inability of phenomenology:

“If phenomenology could have demonstrated that emotion is the realization of human real essence, which is emotion, then phenomenology could not expound why human reality should necessarily be expressed in such an emotion”³³.

Indeed, we might go on to ask: If we depart from the dimension of an object, how can we clarify why it is not pride but shame feeling that arises when I am seen by the Other while peeping?

What a shame is ashamed of should be orientated to objects, signification and value, but not to me or my quality or state. For this Scheler has given an explicit explanation:

“ ‘Shame’ is always ashamed of something. It has something to do with a certain fact, which ‘requires’ shame spontaneously. It has nothing to do with the state of ‘me’ in the form of our individuals”³⁴.

Scheler himself has made a detailed phenomenological analysis and description of shame feeling along this itinerary³⁵.

III

³² Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, pp. 98-99.

³³ Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, p. 106 (Underlined by Sartre).

³⁴ Scheler, “On Shame and Shame Feeling”, in *Subversion of Value*, edited by Liu Xiaofeng, translated by Luo Tilun, Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1997, p. 184.

³⁵ Cf., *Ibid.*. Part of this article has been published as early as in 1913 and the whole paper came out in 1933. But it seems that Sartre is not familiar with this text. Sartre has never been seen to cite it in the early works such as *Transcendence of the Ego*, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory* or *Being and Nothingness*.

If we are going to put Sartre's second question into question, we must first of all make a careful clarification of Sartre's concept "the Other".

With Husserl the Other does not express itself as a simple *Körper*, but as a *Leib* with psyche and consciousness. The difficulty of the problem of the Other lies in that although I can perceive the *Körper* of the Other, I can never experience the psyche of the Other, or I will be combined with the Other into a unity. Sartre is very clear of the difficulty here:

"The Other's soul does not give itself 'in person' to mine. It is an absence, a meaning; the body points to it without delivering it. In short, in a philosophy based on intuition, there is provided no intuition of the soul of the Other."³⁶

Thereupon Sartre decides to take another way:

"If we happen to appear 'in public' to act in a play or to give a lecture, we never lose sight of the fact that we are looked at, and we execute the ensemble of acts which we have come to perform in the presence of the look; better yet we attempt to constitute a being and an ensemble of objects for this look. While we are speaking, attentive only to the ideas which we wish to develop, the Other's presence remains undifferentiated If on the other hand, I want to verify that my thought has been well understood and if in turn I look at the audience, then I shall suddenly see heads and eyes appear. When objectivized the prenumerical reality of the Other is decomposed and pluralized"³⁷.

From this passage we can see that the Other cannot be perceived by us and cannot be counted by us, either. The Other is not a concrete individual, but neither can the addition of the concrete individuals amount to the Other. How can we apodictically know there is the Other? Sartre says that as long as you are really experienced being looked at, you will never be suspicious of the existence of the Other.

If the Other exists indubitably, where does he exist? According to the introduction above, the existence of the Other is very bizarre. If I encounter with the Other in the world, perceive the Other, recognize him and communicate with him, then I only arrive at its objectifying existence, which is probable and accidental; If I experience the Other in an evident way, clearly aware of my being looked at by him, then his existence is necessary, even if he is inaccessible to me in the present world. Of course at this time I have not shaped any concept or knowledge about him and even cannot exert any influence on him, namely, cannot communicate with them.

The path from Sartre's shame feeling to the Other lies in a critical moment, which is "look", in Sartre's words, "Seeing we are being looked at". Now the question is: Will "Seeing

³⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.

we are being looked at” inevitably result into our shame feeling and lead us to a conclusion, that is, there exists the Other?

Scheler takes a totally contrary contemplation of the same question:

“ ‘Seeing we are being looked at’ itself does not definitely result into shame feeling. Take an example of a shy woman. Suppose that she presents herself as a model before an artist, or as a patient before a doctor, or even before her servant when bathing, she would scarcely feel ashamed, just as she is facing with her lover’s intoxicated watch, although it originates from a totally different reason. As long as she feels herself to be “given” to an artist as aesthetic scenery or as a vision worthy of artistic value, the turning will not take place. Likewise when she knows that she is given to a doctor as a ‘patient’ or to a servant as a ‘hostess’”³⁸.

Scheler thinks that shame feeling will not emerge until the spiritual intentions conflict each Other. When the spiritual intention of the artist, the doctor or the servant turns to the woman as an individual and can be felt by her, then “artistic scenery”, “patient” or “hostess” will disappear and she will have an intensive reaction of shame feeling.

With Sartre the emergence of the Other (the sound produced by the footsteps of the Other) is a precondition for shame feeling. But is it also possible that I can feel ashamed before myself? Furthermore, sometimes I can be ashamed for another person. Scheler demonstrates this from his own experience³⁹: Somebody is telling us a somewhat obscene story. That does not make me ashamed at all between men. But it would be opposite if a young girl was at presence; or given that this girl did not feel ashamed, so we could not say that she had been affected by this emotion, but it suffices to make me feel ashamed intensively and make my face color up.

To sum up, Sartre’s phenomenology of emotion has indeed broken through the fence of the traditional psychologism and reflective philosophy, but his theoretical frame has been left with only two key words, that is, consciousness and world, and his fields of Being left with only two genera, that is, the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself, because he has conducted his own interpretations of some basic phenomenological concepts, such as “phenomenon”, “intentionality”, “perception” and “intuition” and etc., or we can say, he has deprived them of the dimension of object or signification. Sartre infinitely enhances the creative ability of consciousness or the being-for-itself. He even says, “We cannot conceive anything before consciousness”⁴⁰. When Sartre undertakes to discuss shame feeling and its hodological tendencies, those theoretical presuppositions begins to function. They restrict the theoretical interest of Sartre. For what a shame is ashamed of is not liable to stay in the world, or to belong to the being-in-itself. So what a shame is ashamed of originates inevitably from consciousness (or from the “I” created by consciousness) and returns to consciousness in the end; Due to the

³⁸ Scheler, “On Shame and Shame Feeling”, p. 180.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁰ Sartre, *La Transcendance de L’ego*, p. 79.

absence of the third dimension, we can at best deduce another subject from shame feeling.

Consequently, starting from shame feeling, we cannot stop before the Other or draw a conclusion that the Other exists indubitably. Starting from shame feeling, we are sure to transcend the Other and make for what a shame is ashamed of as the third dimension, only before which face can color up.

What, if anything, can phenomenology teach psychopathology (and vice versa)?

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What can philosophy possibly teach empirical science? Many have thought that philosophers could at most help clarify the concepts used by scientists – sometimes used too loosely by the scientists, or used misleadingly, perhaps even wrongly stretched beyond their natural habitat. But given this sort of picture, how could *phenomenology* – a “continental” style of philosophy, the main proponents of which are often stigmatized as being impossibly abstract and obscure – have anything to tell *psychiatry*? The psychiatrist has to face the harsh reality of the clinic every day; and surely, this is far removed from the philosopher’s ivory tower.

In this paper, I would like to offer some reasons for adopting a less simplistic view of the relation between phenomenology and psychiatry (and perhaps, by extension, between philosophy and empirical science generally). The paper may be viewed as an introductory outline of part of the research carried out at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen (www.cfs.ku.dk). In particular, I want to sketch some of the arguments that Josef Parnas, Dan Zahavi, and a host of Danish and international collaborators, have mounted in favor of the view that psychiatry has something important to learn from phenomenology in the Husserlian/Merleau-Pontyan tradition.¹ Towards the end I will also reflect a little bit on the kind of benefits that phenomenological philosophers may reap from engaging in a dialogue with psychiatrists and other empirical researchers, and very briefly consider some challenges that this kind of collaboration raises. But the main part of the paper

¹ A somewhat different phenomenological approach to psychiatry has been developed by the Japanese psychiatrist Bin Kimura. I cannot here trace the various differences and points of convergence between Kimura’s approach and that of Parnas and collaborators. However, one thing that seems obvious to me is that, whereas Parnas and colleagues mainly emphasize the value of a phenomenological account of normal experience, as a contrastive background for detecting and understanding the experiential anomalies characteristic of schizophrenia, Kimura offers a much more ontologically and genetically committal account, centered on the notion of the “between” or “betweenness” (*Aida*), of which schizophrenia is claimed to be a “functional disturbance” (cf. Tani 2006, pp. 307-313).