

## The blind spot of consciousness

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Délia Popa, *Apparence et Réalité. Phénoménologie et psychologie de l'imagination*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2012, 374 p.

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Broadly speaking, one could see at least some important themes in phenomenology as outlines against the background of the activity – passivity conceptual couple. This certainly does not mean that they are just derivatives or that they lack the significance of the couple itself. Background and outline are in the end correlative terms: one cannot conceive the one without the other. The activity and passivity in question are to be thought of in relation to consciousness. For a better understanding of the issue at hand, let's imagine a scale with the two concepts acting as its extreme points. My contention is that the way one conceives the theme of, for example, alterity in phenomenology finds itself directly connected with the degree of activity or passivity one concedes to consciousness. The phenomenology of Marion for example tends to reach the passivity extreme of this scale: the consciousness is stripped of its constitutive power, which in turn corresponds to a potent alterity, one that controls the conflict with the ego. On the other hand, a superficial reading of Husserl's phenomenology will find itself on the activity side of the scale: the alterity is in this context a mere derivative of consciousness. Délia Popa's new book, *Apparence et Réalité. Phénoménologie et psychologie de l'imagination*, published in 2012 at Georg Olms Verlag, is an interesting point of access to these themes, as it does this by a

detailed analysis of the imagination. The author has a doctoral degree from the University of Nice and is currently working at the Center for Philosophy of Law within The Catholic University of Louvain. Délia Popa is also the author of a book on E. Lévinas, *Les aventures de l'économie subjective et son ouverture à l'altérité* (2007).

It is my intention in this review to present a brief overview of the book under attention. First of all, the author correctly ascertains the fact that the phenomenal relief pertaining to the imagination is extremely diverse. The oneiric, artistic, mundane etc. instances of the imagination suggest its heterogeneous nature, which in turn makes the task of its definition all the more difficult. Despite this difficulty, a preliminary description of the imagination can be sketched: it, first of all, occupies a space that escapes the reign of the inferential thought; as the prime origin of images and fiction, it seems that the imagination does not contribute to the attempt to understand reality, to master it and, as an end result, to obtain truth. One can therefore easily understand why this faculty could be seen to lack any philosophical dignity, if one would compare it with the function of the intellect. But this is not the whole story, because imagination mediates between the intellect and the actual, sensible experience and thereby succeeds in surpassing the scope of the intellect.

As far as the function of mediation goes, Délia Popa maintains that the imagination negates the reality through its fiction, but, at the same time, by means of this very step, brings it closer. Its performance is therefore to be seen in a twofold manner: both adversary and champion of reality: “Un symbolisme spécifique de l'imagination est à faire valoir comme agissant en deçà de ses productions, soutenant l'ordre de la connaissance au sein de laquelle elles émergent. Grâce à lui, l'imagination relie des aspects divergents, concilie les opposés et unifie l'hétérogène, opérant des synthèses inespérées sans effacer les tensions dialectiques. Il y aurait ainsi lieu de considérer l'hypothèse qu'en niant la réalité de l'expérience que l'on cherche à connaître, l'imagination contribue cependant à l'approcher. La négation de la réalité par la règle de l'illusion est ainsi à relier à la fonction agrégative que la connaissance

mobilise pour former une représentation, l'imagination jouant pour la connaissance le double rôle d'instigation dialectique et d'harmonisation symbolique" (pp. 1-2).

The author insists throughout the book on the bearing the imagination has on knowledge. It first of all has the capacity to bring forth the sensible layers of thought, which is tantamount to recasting the foundation of knowledge: imagination guides thought towards images and by doing this allows it to get a grip on reality. This is however not the most important aspect when one takes into consideration the role of imagination. It succeeds in determining the very make-up of the subject's life by producing unprecedented forms of experience. This helps thought to escape the gravitational pull exerted by the normal and thereby to feel the urgency of the possible. It is the author's contention that the confrontation with the possible is responsible for thought's projections in respect to actual experience: the possible, which belongs to the domain of knowledge, becomes entangled with the reality of experience and thereby reveals its capacity to transform both reality and subject.

The importance of the interaction between the possible and the real cannot be stressed enough, as it reveals the connection between the theoretical and the practical. Délia Popa will favor the latter, because it brings the subject face to face with alterity. Otherwise put, the subjectivity discovers its facticity, its contingency: the meaning of experience is not exhausted through its active oversight, but rather intimately linked with the reality of experience, which is not only responsible for the constitution of sense, but also for the subject itself.

The author makes these ideas clear by distinguishing between the sense and reference of experience. The former is that which escapes consciousness in its constitutive role: it finds itself at the crossroads between the activity and passivity (transcendence) of consciousness. Otherwise put, it is Délia Popa's contention that there is an intimate link between the imagination and that which exceeds the active side of subjectivity, the passivity, which in turn is responsible for the actual construction of subjectivity. It is through these ideas

that the book under review can be seen as taking the side of such authors as Waldenfels and Lévinas in an ongoing debate of phenomenology. It represents an attempt to break free from the Husserlian transcendental idealism through an unexpected challenger, namely the imagination.

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