

On the Road from Husserl to Freire

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Tracing a path from Edmund Husserl to Paulo Freire is not like drawing a straight line on a map. Instead imagine following paths through a primal forest interlaced with woodcutters' trails. A map shows trails leading to various clearings, the largest usually at a point where many converge.

Two such clearings in this philosophic forest are those from Husserl and Freire. In "Thinking Together as One," Professor Duarte has not chosen to tread the path from Husserl to Freire but has instead given an insightful reading of Freire illuminated by Husserlian concepts. We will criticize some of Duarte's claims, by examining paths that one could follow from Husserl to Freire, and also by looking closely at the clearings, especially the one where Husserl's ideas dwell. Our own claim is that Duarte's leap from Husserlian intentionality to Freirian co-intentionality is unsupported by any appearance of the idea of co-intentionality in Husserl's writings. Where Duarte writes of intentionality he is on the mark, but our disagreement is based on an understanding of where Husserl stands in the history of philosophy and on what he intended his life work to accomplish.

The phenomenological project of the early part of the twentieth century, which Husserl initiated, was intended to ground all of science. He wants to find a ground for epistemology, form a real basis for science and return philosophy to its rightful place. Husserl here rejects Hegelian thought; his problems are different. Moreover, the reason twentieth century analytic philosophers are interested in Husserl is that their problems are also epistemological. Part of their problem is that everything depends on what the senses tell us, and we know that the senses can be deceived. The vexing question, "How can we be sure of anything?" will be solved by phenomenology. Its methods will get philosophy to pure perception that will solve the Cartesian problem. Until then, neither epistemology nor any of the sciences is grounded; all must wait until the phenomenologists finish the work which Husserl saw spread out before him. Starting from scratch, he believes the problem is one that logic cannot solve. When he gets to the question of other consciousnesses, the question is not intersubjective meaning. Rather, it is the following: How do you know it is there? How do you know there is a there there? The problem then is solipsism that cannot be solved until the project is over.

Turning to Duarte, it is difficult for us to accept an interpretation of Husserl which includes shared experience. At this point, shared experience is impossible for Husserl because it entails other minds. He is worried about the difference between immanent intentional experiences and transcendental intentional experiences. Immanent intentional experiences are what we have when thinking about our own thoughts, our own experiences. They take place within the mind of the subject and have no effect outside of it. Transcendental intentional experiences are another matter; a tree or another consciousness presents quite a problem for Husserl. How

does one know whether what one is seeing really exists independently? The Freirean philosophical dialogue where *cogitos* collaborate to construct meaning is too difficult a state of affairs for Husserl to deal with because it assumes a solution to a problem he has not solved. To understand his position, let us try to imagine Husserl doing a phenomenological analysis of dialogue. Would he treat it as he would treat a tree? Would he look for those things which exist in every case — for the essence? Husserl never did a phenomenological analysis like that because the problem of other minds, of inter-subjectivity, was not yet solved.

That is why we suggest that the path from Husserl to Freire must pass through Martin Heidegger's clearing in the forest. Heidegger makes a break with Husserl early in *Being and Time*. Heidegger addresses the Cartesian problem of the cogito, but he does not solve the subject-object dichotomy. Instead, he dismisses it, but states instead his position:

Historiographically, the intention of the existential analytic can be clarified by considering Descartes, to whom one attributes the discovery of the *cogito sum* as the point of departure for all modern philosophical questioning. He investigates the *cogitare* of the *ego* — within certain limits. But the *sum* he leaves completely undiscussed, even though it is just as primordial as the *cogito*. Our analytic raises the ontological question of the being of the *sum*. Only when the *sum* is defined does the matter of the *cogitationes* become comprehensible.¹

Heidegger dedicated *Being and Time* to Husserl, but it marked the definitive break between the two; indeed Husserl knew that Heidegger was rejecting the phenomenological project in proceeding to his analysis of *Dasein*. Descartes's problem starts with the ego, but Heidegger claims that paying attention to the subject-object dichotomy is a mistake. He argues that *Dasein* only exists in relationship, it exists out there (*Dasein* is Being there). For Heidegger *Dasein* is already outside the self and is pointing to where subject and object meet. The subject-object dichotomy is the big mistake, Descartes's mistake, which philosophy bought into.

Once we look at *Being and Consciousness* the way Heidegger proposes, the phenomenological project changes. Husserl's concern with intersubjectivity disappears and the problem of getting to the essence disappears. For Husserl, we need to bracket our biased nature. (There is a question, for many, of whether bracketing is possible.) For Heidegger, we have access to the object itself and the I, the Ego, only appears when we reflect; that is, consciousness is consciousness of something. The I is immanent for Husserl, and the transcendental becomes problematic. Heidegger says that there is no I in transcendental experience. Following Heidegger closely, Jean-Paul Sartre makes the same point as he saw his rejection of the transcendental ego as entailing a return to phenomenological intentionality. He thought he had proved the technique of bracketing (*epoché*) impossible. The self is out in the world with others. For Husserl, bracketing is something that can be done with a certain amount of practice. For Heidegger, learning how to bracket would be almost impossibly difficult. It would require becoming a totally authentic self; a goal to strive for, but not easily achieved. Here Freire is closer to Heidegger and Sartre than he is to Husserl.

Heidegger and many existentialists who follow him reject an important aspect of Husserl when they move from Descartes and Kant to the Hegelian project.

Heidegger introduces the Hegelian picture and gives it some warrant; other existentialists pick it up and run with it. Once Sartre says that bracketing is impossible, the idea of absolute truth is unobtainable and Truth becomes the consensus of informed opinion. That is where hermeneutics replaces the epistemological problem, and that is why dialogue regains its importance. Heidegger and Sartre become open to the Hegelian project and dialectic becomes a preferred method of philosophizing. So rather than thinking of Freire rewriting Husserl, it is better to think of Heidegger, Sartre and others as rewriting Freire. The most important “other” in Freire’s background is Karl Jaspers, a founder of existentialism, and an associate of Heidegger’s; Freire’s hermeneutics owes much to Jaspers.

Space does not allow us to describe completely the many further influences on Freire’s thinking. Freire’s well-known eclecticism is analyzed by Dennis Collins, who discusses philosophical streams from which Freire draws: personalism, existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, and Christianity.² Robert Mackie has analyzed Freire differently, citing his (1) early liberalism, (2) modern theology and catholic radicalism, (3) revolutionary socialism and (4) existentialism.³ Contemporary writing in critical education also contributes to present understanding of Freire.

To conclude, writing about critical consciousness, Freire cites Jaspers, saying, “Born of a critical matrix, dialogue creates a critical attitude. It is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. When two “poles” of the dialogue are thus linked by love, hope, and mutual trust, they can join in a critical search for something. Only dialogue truly communicates.”⁴

1. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1966), 43.

2. Dennis Collins, S. J., *Paulo Freire: His Life, Work, and Thought* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 28.

3. Robert Mackie, “Contributions to the Thought of Paulo Freire,” in *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, ed. Robert Mackie (New York: Continuum, 1981), 93-119.

4. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, ed. R. Mackie (New York: Continuum, 1973), 45.