From Phenomenology to Peri-Phenomenology:
Tracing Out the Trajectory of a Life in Philosophy

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Let me begin by saying that I am deeply honored and moved by the appearance of this collection of superb essays by distinguished colleagues and students. Each of their contributions bears on a different aspect of my published work, emphasizing unexpected aspects of that work as well as things that have eluded me for decades: ideas and concepts I misunderstood or ignored altogether. For this extraordinary gift, I am grateful beyond measure, and first of all to Brian Schroeder, who has compiled this volume with painstaking care and unfailing good judgment.

In this opening piece, I first trace out my development in philosophy in terms of the major themes that have preoccupied me, after which I offer a sample of my current preoccupation: the fate of emotion in its peripheral dimensions.

Where did I, where does anyone, begin to become a philosopher? As is so often the case, I had several starts. The first was wonderment over my early if uncomprehending readings of Nietzsche, Bergson, and Santayana. Santayana's *Skepticism and Animal Faith* was especially pivotal in showing me how someone could write so insightfully about things that I had always taken for granted: the shaky foundations of personal opinion (here is the skepticism) and yet the necessity of holding certain primal beliefs (here the animal faith). A second critical moment was encountering a series of inspiring teachers in my undergraduate and graduate years—among them, Richard Bernstein, Wilfrid Sellars, William Earle, and Mikel Dufrenne. Each of these mentors not only taught me how to read philosophy more insightfully but more importantly how to *do philosophy* by considering issues from the ground up. Their benevolent influence led to a third formative moment: writing my dissertation. Scrapping a project that would have been a scholarly study of Gaston Bachelard, I decided to tackle something more challenging: namely,

the relationship between poetry and ontology. This took me perforce into the subtle domains of poetic language and of poetic imagination.

It was dissatisfaction over what I'd try to say about poetic imagination that led directly to my first book, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*. I had come to realize that until I had achieved a basic understanding of what imagining is in its daily enactments I could not pretend to know what a specifically poetic imagination is all about. I wrote out every word of this book in long hand, sitting at a long table at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, where I was on a postdoctoral fellowship. It was lonely work, rendered still more lonely by the ancient British system of High Table. I had wanted to talk with Mary Warnock, the wife of the Head of Hertford (the college to which I had been assigned) and the author of a fine study of imagination; but the rules of High Table were such that no women, not even the Head's own spouse, were permitted to dine in this elevated space. As a direct consequence, I never spoke with Dr. Warnock, whose reclusiveness precluded a personal meeting outside of university space.

By the time this fledgling book was published in 1976, I had hatched the idea of writing a series of "phenomenological studies" in the wake of my analysis of imagination: on memory, thinking, and feeling. I wasted no time in setting out to write the book on memory, only to discover that the intentional model of mind, which had been quite serviceable in the case of imagining, was inadequate for a full account of remembering, especially in two domains: body memory and place memory. These latter forced me to think "memory beyond mind," as I came to call it. The volume that resulted from this pursuit took me a decade to write, and finally appeared as *Remembering* in 1987. It was a book divided against itself: the first half being an intentional analysis of different modes of memory, the second a speleological investigation into experiential depths that lie beneath the operations of remembering in the mind.

By then, it had become apparent to me that I needed to address place itself, given that it had received short shrift from philosophers—above all in early modernity, when space came to reign supreme over place. I became passionate about filling in this conspicuous gap in the literature: how could philosophers, who pretended to be giving a full account of experience, overlook the entirely essential dimension of place? I proceeded to explore that dimension in a series of four books written in succession and published in the period 1993–2005. *Getting Back into Place* offered a phenomenological account of place as it figures differentially but altogether basically in human experience: in landscape and seascape, in architecture, in wilderness, and still

elsewhere. I stressed the role of body in being implaced, but also displaced, in one's everyday world. *The Fate of Place* presented a systematic account of the discussion—or lack thereof—of place in Western thought, ranging from the pre-Socratics to the present. *Representing Place in Landscape Painting and Maps* took up the question of how place has come to be represented – not only in the West but in other cultures as well. It led me to reflect on the root impulse of mapping, which I came to call "chorography," the tracing-out of a region. This was followed by *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*, which considered the question of how place figures in earth art as well as in certain adventuresome forms of contemporary painting. It completed a tetrad of books that contributed to the emerging field of "spatial studies" that had become of conspicuous concern in the wake of thinkers such as Foucault, Lefebvre, and Deleuze and Guattari.

This cycle completed, I ventured into special investigations into the human glance, resulting in *The World at a Glance*, published in 2007 and my longest book ever (despite being on an apparently trivial subject!). In this volume, I demonstrated that rather being than an act of minor importance (as when one refers to "a mere glance") the glance figures centrally into our full acquaintance with the visual world, often being the primary source and vehicle of the most penetrating inroads into that world. Here I came up with the idea of the Logic of the Less—whereby what seems at first peripheral or superficial may entail what is most consequential in terms of yielding telling insights as well as having certain concrete effects. I also proposed the idea of "peri-phenomenology," a form of description that pays special attention to what surrounds things or events rather than to what belongs to their central core—a core which I regard over-valorized in Western philosophical obsessions such as substance and the self.

It was a short step from this glance-work to my most recently published book, *The World on Edge*, which employs peri-phenomenology in the context of the Logic of the Less in order to describe the often unsuspected importance of edges in human experience. I take edges to be of truly formative, and sometimes of transformative, significance, and not merely as marking where things or events peter out. They serve to define much of what we undergo, which would be incoherent without their peripheral presence.

Up Against the Wall: Re-imagining the U.S.-Mexico Border Wall (2014), co-written with Mary Watkins, represents a continuation of my research on the edge, especially in the parts written by myself. I construe borders and boundaries in particular as having considerable import

when it comes to issues of migration and immigration, particularly efforts at controlling these forms of forced movement -- in contrast with acts of hospitality that open the doors of houses and (all too rarely) whole nations to those who seek protection and relief from destitution and violence. My concern with the cloistering that comes from structures that feature impassable walls has been extended to the cruel cloistering found in prisons and detention centers around the world today.

I regard my newest area of research, that which investigates emotions in their peripherality (for example, as in the "collective effervescence" found in contagious crowd behavior) as yet a further step in underlining the importance of edges in human experience—in this case, the edges of feelings and emotions that are shared among members of a given group of human beings who are present with one another. This research, which I tentatively title *Peripheral Emotions*, is currently a work in progress. It is both brand new and yet a return to my long-held project of writing a volume on feeling. (Thinking is still to come, though a beginning has now been made in "Thinking in Transit," an essay co-written with Megan Craig.)

A quite different direction of my lifetime research is found in *Spirit and Soul* (1991), which collects writings in the area of depth psychology and psychoanalysis—abiding interests of mine and the basis of clinical training I received at an earlier stage of my career. Here I investigate how soul differs from spirit, and both from mind considered as the scene of sheerly cognitive activity. Soul in my view allies itself with the lived body and with place, whereas spirit attempts to break free from body and place alike. Soul is the vivifying force of all that is immanent in human experience while spirit is verticalizing—always seeking transcendence, often to the detriment of those who pursue it dogmatically.

Despite many deviations and vicissitudes, the overall trajectory of my life in philosophy has been that of a steady departure from the mentalism that characterizes phenomenology in its origins in Husserl (to whose thinking I was still close in *Imagining*) toward an emphasis on factors that take us out of our self-enclosed minds—ec-statically and out-wardly—into the environing life-worlds which we traverse and to which we belong. In getting there, two factors are indispensable: body and place. Merleau-Ponty is the acknowledged master of the bodily route into the world. I have moved from his unsurpassed descriptions of somatic experience to ask the question: *where* does the body take us? My answer has been: *into place* or, more comprehensively, *into the place-worlds that encompass and locate us*. In my way of thinking,

body-in-place is the primary unit of human experience—on the basis of which such other peri-phenomena as glances and edges and certain features of emotions are to be understood. They cohere in their very incoherence; they are arrayed in their disarray on the disparate phenomenal surfaces of what we encounter in the ongoing life-worlds that make up the bulk, the force and the meaning, of our existence on earth.

Despite these alterations in the arc of my writing, in the fifty years in which I have been actively writing philosophy my aim has always been two-fold: to offer an ever more detailed and more precise description of certain major but often neglected facets of experience; and to devise concepts and ideas that allow this same description to be not merely reproductive or representational of that experience but to suggest new ways of understanding these facets, regarding them as essential rather than as adventitious – fresh takes on familiar matters that call for a construal that escapes the limitations of constrictive classical and modern models. This dual purpose continues to animate my writing at the present moment even as I undertake new investigations into previously uncharted territory.

I here present a sample of my most recent direction of research. It was first presented at a meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in October, 2018, and is entitled "Emotion at the Edge." It appears here in modified form.

I

The edges of my emotional life intersect with the edges of the emotional lives of others, real or fictive. It is a matter of an edge-to-edge situation, and as such it is the emotional analogue of other edge-fraught situations—for instance, the experience of being "up against the wall," as when migrants find themselves confronted with a massive structure that abruptly forecloses any further movement forward; or, more mundanely, when the tire of the car I am parking cozens up to a curb. The difference between the two ways of being edge-to-edge is that the edges of physical structures are more or less unrelenting—forcibly so with walls and street curbs, less so

with the way the edges of my body fit closely but comfortably with the clothes I am wearing. In all such cases, the material structure of one set of edges is contiguous with that of another set. Whereas with emotional edge-to-edge situations we are dealing with something essentially labile: something that is more likely to involve permeation than confrontation. Edges in these circumstances may have "character"—allowing us to identify them as emotions of a given kind (anger, fear, joy)—but they don't have a structure that directly reflects the materiality of their actual composition. Moreover, they are *yielding*: not merely as giving way to insistently applied pressure but as reflecting the actual circumstance in which I and others are mutually embroiled, touching at each others' edges in ways that are not mere registrations of an encounter but that incorporate the encounter and modify it in ways that are variously synchronized.

Take my experience of the Woman's March in New York City in January, 201— when I found myself profoundly moved to be part of an enormous mass of people who were experiencing, *together*, a common revulsion at the election of Donald Trump. It was not that everyone in this mass of marchers was experiencing exactly the same emotion; instead, it was a situation in which an emotion roughly characterizable as "chagrin" was being *shared out*, however diversely it was experienced by individual marchers. Such sharing-out occurred at the edges and through the edges of the marchers—not just because they were walking shoulder-to-shoulder *en masse* (this was a material condition of the experience) but because their emotional experiences became deeply confluent. This was especially evident in the case of the phenomenon of the swelling non-articulate outcries that were passed on by the crowd: coming from behind, moving through the part of the marchers where one was situated, and then passing on to those in front. At each stage, these outcries (close to collective howls) were conveyed by the edges of the acoustic masses that moved through the entire crowd with a rhythm and a wave pattern of their own. This rhythm and pattern carried the chagrin that was felt in common. The result was that one complex but coherent emotion emerged from a heterogeneous conflux of intersecting emotional intensities that were communicating at their edges, both those that were near and those farther away. All this was situated in an extraordinary interplay of near and far spaces for which no precise spatial metric could be given (how far back did a given howl originate? one did not need to know). The marchers felt themselves to be immersed in a densely qualitative matrix of emotional intersectionalities that put on dramatic display what Theresa Brennan has analyzed under the heading of "the transmission of affect."[1]

II

In addition to such transmissive situations that involve whole groups of people, there are peripheral emotions one undergoes on one's own: for example, a pleasant state of mind as experienced in the lilt of a day in which most things have gone right. We feel buoyant, uplifted emotionally even though we can't trace this to a single cause. This is not a matter of a pointedly affirmative emotion such as joy, which for Spinoza is the emblematic example of a positive affect (one that increases our "force of existing"). Rather, the pleasure seems to descend upon us and distribute itself around us, like a nimbus.

There is nothing dramatic, much less melodramatic, in this kind of circumstance. Just for this reason, we rarely thematize it. Indeed, we often lack a distinctive name for such an experience, and for this reason it, and a host of other such non-dramatic passing emotions, have been neglected in many previous discussions of emotion—as if not worth concerted attention. Yet they call for scrutiny as showing us a dimension of our emotional life that is rarely explored as such: that of emotions at and as the edge, namely, "peripheral emotions." Such emotions are "edgy"—by which I do not mean such as to put us *on edge*: to make us uneasy, nervous, distractable. Rather, being at the edge of an emotion is a distinctive manner in which our emotional life is lived at the periphery of our fully engaged experiences. Such emotional edgefulness is literally *ec*static, something that takes us *out of ourselves*—out of our habitual self-repeating selves. They also take somewhere else than where deeply felt emotions take us. For they come not from within us but *from without*, and as such they transport us outside our inured ways of being. How can we understand better this emotional elsewhere, this outer edge of our affective lives?

III

An important caveat: just because emotions, gentle and strong, are often conveyed to us through their edges, and reach us through our own sensory edges, does not mean that they are superficial phenomena. "Peripheral" does not signify trivial or inconsequential. Just as Cézanne brought Mt. St. Victoire to our collective attention by presenting an adroit interplay between the colors and

edges of this mountain—showing its majesty in paintings that can be considered masterful edgeworks—so the edges of emotions, like bodily gestures, often contain in compressed form a sense and force of emotion not otherwise accessible. Far from being merely indicative signs of pre-existing experiences and meanings, the edges of emotions are *telling*: they tell us things we might not otherwise know. The alarm in the voice of my Santa Barbara friend was *all in its edge*—in the expressive configurations of her words as she talked to me on the cell phone. She didn't have to say to me explicitly "this is a dire situation": this message was ensconced in the emotional edges of the words she spoke and in the pauses between them. It was on the very emotional surface of her speech that the depths of her alarm became evident.

If St. Augustine could speak of the "innumerable dens and caverns of memory" (*Confessions*), we can say of peripheral emotions something like the reverse: these emotions are found in the apertures and at the surfaces of felt meaning. This meaning, whatever its origins and history, is brought to a distinctive mode of manifestation set forth by edges: the edges we hear, the edges we see, and the edges we imagine—all of these, all at once, in a dense but coherent amalgam of emotionality. Looked at this way, emotions, far from being "messy" as we are tempted to say, come to us with a precision all their own. I maintain that this precision—implicit as it often is—is due largely to their edge-structure.[2] For it is in their edges that emotions come to their fullest expressive being. It is there that they manifest themselves most effectively.

At the same time, emotional edges—as with edges of many other kinds—are capable of taking us beyond themselves. They invite their own transcending, taking us to places unknown and unanticipated. Listening to my friend on the phone, I actively imagined what it would be like to be buried in a sudden mud slide—how I would cope with it if it were to enter my house, driving me onto the roof. Edges, including emotional edges, have an *other side* to which we can gain access by an active emotional imagination. We can enter thereby into entire emotional edge-worlds that are *somewhere else* than in the immediate affective present. In this way, the "fixities and definites" (Coleridge) of customary emotional life are at least momentarily transcended, and we are *shown elsewhere.*

Sartre considered emotions as efforts to transform "magically" certain alarming or frustrating circumstances.[3] But he missed the specific means by which this happens: the edges by which we both grasp the immediate emotional import and through which we can enter into worlds not otherwise accessible. These worlds are sometimes imaginary and so purely possible, but

sometimes they are perfectly real. But we could not get to either kind of world except through the edges of the emotions we experience.

IV

There is a decided tendency to think of emotions as coming from deep within us—from the profundity of our being. There, in the psychical and/or physiological depths, they are fully felt; there too, they *are our own*, exclusively so: others may have elicited or exacerbated them, but once they emerge in our innards they belong to us, they are considered to be *part of us*. As singular occurrences, they are felt to be uniquely ours: "ours to be in one way or another."[4]

This way of regarding emotion is strongly tempting, especially in Western modernity. It characterizes what Descartes called "passions": that is, what we experience as the result of an elaborate internal apparatus that includes the senses, animal spirits, the heart, and the brain. Other modern thinkers, however different in overall orientation, have followed suit – notably Kierkegaard, who sees emotions as revelatory of who we are at various stages on life's way, with anxiety a key emotion throughout. In being anxious, we experience our life in its sheer possibility: as what is uniquely possible for each of us. Similarly, the Romantic preoccupation with melancholy (starting a tradition of reflection that eventually leads to Freud) presents us with a model of emotion not only as stemming from our personal depths but as something virtually unfathomable in its rootedness in our human subjectivity. For all these thinkers, emotion stems from somewhere within us, however this "within" is to be interpreted; consequently, we must think of it and deal with it in its unique interiority to our personal existence.

But all such emphasis on emotion as a creature of human and especially individual depth, tempting and even convincing as it may be, overlooks another entire dimension of our emotional lives. This is its *peripherality*. I point to the way in which many emotions occur at the edges of our experience, and often remain there as well. Such emotions are not situated within us, in some psychical *bathos* or physiological substrate; they appear at, and often as, the perimeters of our ongoing experience. Their locus is extra-subjective, *out there* rather than *in here*; they are ad-herent rather than in-herent. We certainly feel them, but we take them to be impinging upon us rather than as upwelling within us: as coming to us rather than coming from inside us.

We need to distinguish specifically "peripheral emotions" from the peripheral dimension of all emotions. The former refers to those emotions that are most explicitly and fully realized at the perimeters of our ongoing lives: especially those that come from being in the company of others—where their transmission is favored—but also when I am by myself and feeling emotions that seem to come to me from a certain elsewhere. At the same time, all emotions have peripheral features—that is to say, distinctive edges in space and time. As such, they call for a close peri-phenomenological description that pays special attention to their very peripherality—all the ways in which they realize their edgewise being, their forming, being at, and (on occasion) exceeding their own edges. In actual experience, however, the two modes of peripherality often join forces. A first example will demonstrate this collaboration.

I receive a telephone call from a friend in Santa Barbara. She tells me of the sudden onslaught of mud slides in that city. In the immediate wake of the fires that have denuded the surrounding hills, these slides were released by a torrential rain last night. They have devastated more than 100 houses—crushing them outright with boulders brought down by the slides, inundating them with swiftly moving mud masses that measure up to 20 feet high; more than 15 people have been killed already, with more missing. Her voice is tremulous, charged with apprehension, filled with fear—not just for herself (her house is close to the danger zone but is not in it) but for others who are more directly in harm's way. Her fears extend to the future as well: the campus on which she teaches is endangered, and she cannot help but wonder if students will be willing to continue coming to a place that has shown itself to be so vulnerable to extremes of weather as Santa Barbara has now become. The intense emotion felt where she is—three thousand miles from where I'm at in New York City—is conveyed instantaneously to me: I not merely infer her distress, I *feel it directly*. The effective edges of her emotional state—expressed not only in her words ("terrible," "catastrophic") but in the tense pauses between them—get through to me right away. I not only take in her literal words but I *take over* the emotion conveyed by her voice—a complex emotion composed of dismay, terror, and concern for the future. The jagged edges of her distraught emotional state enter into the receptive outer edges of my listening self: her emotion has become mine through the intermeshing of their differential edges.

For an emotion to have an edge, the emotion itself need not have a simple structure, an obvious "handle"; it can be (and often is) composite; but if it is passed on to others, it must have

an effective edge. By "effective" I mean that the edge needs to have enough of a shape to be perceived, felt, and recognized. It is this shape, amorphous as it may be by objective standards of measurement, that constitutes it as an edge. An emotion, no matter how diversely generated or currently configured, comes edged. Thanks to its edge, it possesses what William James calls "the sting of reality." By means of the same edge, it can be transmitted to someone who is far away.

This transmission is not confined to one-on-one conversations. Sometimes we "pick up" an emotion from a crowd of people we have just joined—say, their sadness. We may not know exactly from where in particular this sadness stems, that is, what is its cause; all we know is that it reaches us, as if proffered to our attention. As we first encounter it, it is at the periphery of our consciousness. As such, it is decidedly *liminal*, a threshold we are invited to cross. Its emotional locus is peripheral throughout: outside myself but also outside other members of the crowd from whom I take up the emotion. Such picking up by the edge, at the edge, occurs not only in the midst of crowds whose "collective effervescence" (Durkheim) fosters such effects, sometimes in virtually irresistible ways—as at the Nuremburg rallies. But it also happens in solitary states, as when a reader of a novel is accustomed to situations in which she feels that she experiences the emotions of certain characters quite directly: say, Swann's jealousy in *Remembrance of Things Past*. From perusing the pages of Proust's novel she enters directly into Swann's emotional state.

Emotions do not belong originally, much less exclusively, to myself as the subject who undergoes them. It is true that the way I subsequently process them—take them in and take them up—is something that does belong to me. This is the *endogeny* of emotion and is to be distinguished from the *exophany* of emotion: its overt manifestation. Such exophany is what happens at the manifest edge of an emotion, and it cannot be reduced to the endogenous process of dealing with it. It may well precipitate *exogeny*—generation from without whereby the emotion works as a precipitant of other events—but in and by itself it is sheer showing, an emotional display that is out there before me.

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Not only do emotions have distinctive edges but the fact that this is so suggests that emotions themselves need to be understood differently. Emotions are not just subjective states, mere passing episodes—in short, something merely transitory and trivial, mercurial and passing. (Much less are they the opposite: fixed and predictable as if they were tokens of types.) Nor are they exclusively *my* possession. Instead, they are the kind of thing that flourishes in a third space that is neither strictly subjective—as belonging to an "inner self"—nor altogether transindividual: as with a disembodied spiritual self that is reputed to rise above raw emotion. Emotions occupy an intermediate space: an in-betweenness (*bayniyya*) in Ibn Arabi's richly suggestive word.[5] In that space, they are neither wholly stable nor are they entirely in flux. Instead, they are *events with edges*: where edges give the requisite determinacy for an emotion to be expressed and recognized as such, to be nameable (however imperfectly), and to have sequelae in the life of the subject. These same edges are the means by which we get in touch with our emotions, and through which these same emotions show themselves to ourselves and to others.

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[1] See Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[2] See Eugene Gendlin, "Implicit Precision," in *Saying What We Mean*, ed. Edward S. Casey and Donata M. Schoeller (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 111–137.

[3] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40, 56–57, esp. 56: when emotional, consciousness "abruptly transmutes the determinist world in which we live into a magical world."

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), 68. I replace "mine" in this citation with "ours."

[5] See Chittick, William. "The In-Between." Chittick, William. *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets.* Oxford: Oneworld, 2005. 101-114.