The essays in this volume are selected from the programs of the 1996 Georgetown and 1997 Kentucky annual meetings of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. They reflect the diversity of SPEP interests and conversations and share a common concern with the question of philosophy's responsibility to itself, to the other, and to the legacy of those whose thinking challenges our complicity with the status quo. Grouped under the headings: As Witness In Response; From Hegel to Critical Theory; Interrogating the Politics of Race, Sex and Gender; Phenomenology and Hermeneutics; and Postmodern Responsibilities, these essays explore the implications of the continental traditions for contemporary thought and examine the ways in which this way of thinking calls on us to rethink our responsibility to the past, present and future.

**As Witness, In Response**

We open this volume with the voice of the survivor, the witness, the shard of a generation of children who had to be destroyed lest their innocence undermine the dehumanization of the Jews essential for the execution of The Final Solution. Speaking for himself and speaking for the children of the Holocaust who cannot speak, Bernd Magnus speaks of the Shoah from the perspective of the child who, having never experienced what we would call a normal life, had no way of experiencing the terrors of his life as a “horrific distortion”. As an eight year old who was too old to forget and too young to understand, Bernd Magnus tells us that for him and other children who survived The Final Solution, evil is the norm. But how, he asks, could evil become the norm for those who knew how to distinguish good and evil? His answers take their cue from Hannah Arendt and draft on the thinking of the Jewish sage Hillel, the pastor in the German Confessing Church, Martin Niemoeller, and the Harvard philosopher, Stanley Cavell.

As Bernd Magnus identifies himself as having been formed by the terror of the Final Solution, Tina Chanter sees Levinas’s thought as marked by the trauma of the Shoah. Calling Levinas’s May 1976 lecture “La Mort et le Temps” a “token of last things which provokes a response to Levinas’s death,” Chanter reflects on “the question that trauma poses to us as survivors of Levinas . . . as teachers of philosophy in the twentieth century.” “La Mort et le Temps” is a response to and critique of Heidegger’s notions of time, Dasein, and Being-toward-death. According to Levinas, Heidegger’s departure from tradition in these lectures falls short of the required exit; for when Heidegger substitutes the question “Who is time?” for the question “What is time?” he reduces the who to the me. In his preoccupation with the mineness of death, Heidegger is blind to the questions raised by the alterity of death and the death of the other. Levinas insists that we confront the scandal of the death of the Other; for this scandal calls me to my responsibility for the other and puts me in question. Reading Levinas as responding to the absurd and terrible dyings of our century, Chanter calls us survivors and calls on us to respond to the gift of Levinas’ work and death by confronting the legacy of the Shoah.

In a rich essay more resistant than most to summary, John Llewelyn seeks to articulate a Kantian/anti-Kantian sense of critique in Levinas in terms of the notions of prediction and dedication. Levinas says that every said must be unsaid, every dictum must be dedicted. Or, rather, what is already has been. Dedication is pre-diction; for the dictum is made possible by an always already uttered, absolutely past performance of a Saying which, despite its present participial grammar has the logic of a pluperfect tense which involves, moreover, not the time of my own protentive and retentive consciousness but the time of the other. In addition to developing this sense of critique (with Husserl and Derrida always nearby), Llewelyn explores its significance for matters political, religious, and aesthetic.

**From Hegel to Critical Theory**

Hegel’s philosophy of nature may seem an unlikely topic for a SPEP paper. But taking her cue from Georges Bataille’s suggestion that “the
problem of Hegel is given in the action of sacrifice,” Elaine Miller presents the philosophy of nature as an extended metaphor of the process of death and transformation that is spirit as well. It is fable presented as science which moves from the self-sacrifice of the plant for the animal to the sacrifice of nature as a whole for the sake of spirit. Like Christ and Dionysius, each lower level of nature, and eventually nature as a whole, offers itself in self-sacrifice for what is higher, in which it is reborn. Needed to say, the same movement recapitulates itself throughout the various levels of spirit.

Andrew Buchwalter accepts, with qualifications, Habermas’s thesis that Hegel’s legal-political theory is rooted in the subject-philosophy Habermas rejects in his discourse-theoretic account of law. However, he questions whether the paradigm shift to dialogue holds all its claimed advantages. Set over against Habermas’ endeavor to anchor solidarity in anonymous, “subjectless” structures governing public deliberation is Hegel’s focus on forms of political sentiment and other subjective phenomena that institutional structures presuppose for their meaning and validity.

Enrique Dussel also focuses on the insufficiency of a formal intersubjectivity as the basis of political morality, carrying on his dialogue with Karl-Otto Apel. His claim is that discourse ethics subordinates goodness to validity. The formal principle needs a material principle to take it from validity to truth and a feasibility principle to take it from moral validity and practical truth to ethical possibility. It is only the concrete synthesis of these three moments that can give us acts, institutions, or systems of ethical life that can be called Good. After developing this scheme at the level of fundamental ethics or basic principles, Dussel develops it as a critical ethics of liberation, thereby continuing the work he began in 1973 in Toward an Ethics of Latin American Liberation.

Richard Lynch also turns our attention to Habermas’s most recent magnum opus, Between Facts and Norms, in which he seeks to extend the discourse-theoretical moral theory of the 1980s to provide norms for democratic governments and the laws they enact. But Habermas sometimes equivocates on the concept of legal norms. Sometimes he describes them as basic rights, but at other times the notion embraces the legislative expression of collective goods. The latter move introduces teleological and flexible features of values that do not express validity claims strong enough to command; thus it threatens to undermine the distinction between facticity and validity, positivity and legitimacy that is so basic to Habermas’s theory.

Christopher Zurn’s point of departure is Axel Honneth’s distinction among self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem as three distinct but ideally integrated dimensions of healthy self-relation. Zurn argues that this model and feminist theory can be mutually beneficial and develops a correlation between Honneth’s triad and the work of Andrew Dworkin, Susan Okin, and Iris Marion Young. Honneth’s scheme, it is claimed, can help us see that such dichotomies in feminist theory as atomistic autonomy vs. affective mutuality, legal universality vs. cultural difference, and justice vs. care can be seen as distinct but essential aspects of the ontogenesis of comprehensive recognition. It is the debate between universalism and difference politics that gets examined here in most detail. Zurn’s essay reminds us that feminist philosophy, to which we turn next, is also a form of critical theory.

**Interrogating The Politics of Race, Sex, and Gender**

The authors of the essays in this section argue that feminist theory must attend to the intersections of race and sex. They insist that the category woman account for the diverse situations of women. As they work through the specifics of the intersections of race, sex, and gender, these essays reveal the powers and limitations of the hermeneutic, existential, phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and postmodern approaches to feminist issues.

Christina Hendricks asks us to read the work of Julia Kristeva through the borders of the looking glass rather than on either of its sides. Reading Kristeva through the borders, Hendricks argues that the semiotic is a “precondition only in terms of the symbolic, whose representational logic requires origins as part of its norms of description.” She insists that Kristeva argues for a mobile and multiple notion of identity. This concept of identity, according to Hendricks, moves us to refigure our understanding of identity politics; for we find that identities that acknowledge the stranger
within cannot be the basis of a politics that insists on specific rights for those with discrete identities. This reading bridges Kristeva’s earlier theoretical and later political writings by refusing to see the disruptions of the semiotic as more primordial than the identities of the symbolic.

In “On Castration and Miscegenation: Is the Phallus White Skin?” Patricia Huntington teaches us how to read Lewis Gordon’s Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism within the context of recent debates in feminist theory. Huntington argues that Gordon’s hermeneutic, phenomenological, and existential analyses of the phallus as white skin functions as an important corrective to feminist psychoanalytic analyses of woman as the other of the phallus as male. She also argues that Gordon’s position regarding the abject position of dark skinned people refers us to the work of Kristeva. Without disputing Gordon’s claim that Black men have less symbolic power than white women, and without challenging Gordon’s argument that people with dark skin suffer more exploitation than other marginalized groups, Huntington finds that without reference to Kristeva’s thesis of the semiotic Gordon risks falling prey to the reductionism he argues against. According to Huntington, without consideration of Kristeva’s accounts of the kinesthetic and preverbal dimension of the psychic structure of the lived subject we will ignore the deeply physical levels of repressed and preconscious associations operating in antiblack racism, homophobia, and misogyny.

In her essay “Maternal Bodies and Nationalism,” Robin Schott appeals to a hermeneutics of the material body to challenge postmodern images of the discursively constructed plastic body. Though Schott finds that these images neglect the “material locatedness of bodies in history and culture” she also recognizes that the postmodern attention to images effects a denaturalization of the body that is essential to the feminist project. Her hermeneutics of the material body solves this postmodern dilemma by distinguishing the material from the natural body. Using this distinction, Schott explores the intersections between nationality and motherhood to make two points: one, that a hermeneutics of the maternal body is the ground of a feminist critique of nationalism; and, two, that this critique is a necessary precondition for resistance to the exploitation of women.

Where Robin Schott finds postmodern critiques of subjectivity inadequate, Ellen Armour relies on them. Her essay “Writing/Reading Selves, Writing/Reading Race” argues against “feminist theory’s dominance by white solipsism” and argues for the concrete multiplicity of the subject. Appealing to the work of Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti and working with Derrida’s deconstructive techniques, Armour reads Mary Daly’s Outercourse against the backdrop of Patricia Williams’ The Alchemy of Race and Rights. Williams, Armour tells us, narrates the story of a fragile, oxymoronic subject. Daly situates herself as the questing hero with a “larger than life claim to subjeckthood.” Armour attributes these different experiences of subjectivity to race. She argues that feminist politics will be “subject to race’s effects in problematic ways” unless it makes whiteness as well as Blackness visible.

Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Kay Picart’s essay argues for the philosophical significance of René Magritte’s painting and its importance in resisting and re-visioning traditional boundaries separating artist and philosopher. She takes us on a tour of fifteen of Magritte’s “surrealistic” paintings (in spite of his dislike of the term); but it is no ordinary museum tour. She brings the paintings into conversation with Husserlian phenomenology and seeks to confirm Husserl’s own claim that aesthetic experience is most akin to phenomenological experience in terms of such themes as the transcendence of things to their names, a resistance to psychologism, and disrupting the familiarity of the world. It is precisely by violating the Husserlian principle of regional integrity that Magritte achieves these effects.

Ronald Bruzina argues that the account of intersubjectivity given in Cartesian Meditations is provisional at best for reasons intrinsic to Husserl’s phenomenology itself. Einfühlung plays a critical role in the human experience of recognizing others as like ourselves, but is intrinsically bodily in nature and as feeling does not function in the mode of subject-object intending. Accordingly, no transcendental-constitutive analysis of intersubjectivity can do justice to the phenomena of intersubjectivity that has not adequately incorporated bodiliness and non-subject-object intentionality into the account.

EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION
The Fifth Meditation can only be a point of departure for further inquiry.

James Risser explores the relation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics to Heidegger’s thought. The two agree that hermeneutics is factual life caught in the act of interpreting itself. But Gadamer himself suggests that he does not follow Heidegger to the thinking of Being itself that comes after the “Kehre.” Risser counters that it is not quite that simple. For both of them hermeneutics involves a return to what is there that is essentially homecoming. The crucial question of their relation is to be found in the tragic character of homecoming for Heidegger and the question whether Gadamer is essentially an Hegelian who domesticates the strangeness that Heidegger thematizes. Risser gives us a more Levinasian Gadamer, for whom the voice of the other is always the voice of the stranger.

Patrick Bourgeois argues that the confrontation between hermeneutics and deconstruction must focus on the question of ethics. He argues that like deconstruction, Paul Ricoeur’s is a philosophy of or at the limit of reason, one that offers a rich but alternative account of alterity. Unlike deconstruction, Ricoeur’s philosophy is one of both limits and extensions. Just as Kant did not stop with the first Critique, as if he were a positivist, but continues on to the extensions of the second and third, so Ricoeur, ever mindful of the limits of reason, is not paralyzed by them. Focusing on Oneself as Another, Bourgeois follows the debate set up by this challenge through several rounds.

**Postmodern Responsibilities**

The essays in this section gather the names Husserl, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lingis, Bataille, Derrida, Deleuze, Henry, and Levinas to speak of philosophy’s epistemological and ethical responsibilities. They show that these responsibilities are linked. Reading these essays we find the issue of responsibility tied to the questions of the other, the paradoxical, and the strange(r). We also discover that the requirements of finitude demand that we accept responsibility for the event we do not control and for the one we do not know.

The question of finitude is often formulated as the question of the meaning of death and dying. In his essay “An Ethic of Accompanying the Dying,” Alexander Hooke analyzes the ways in which Alphonso Lingis grounds the possibility of an ethical community in an understanding of death as a demand to respond to the call of the other. Lingis calls this ethical community a community of consecration. Telling us that it lacks sustaining institutions or a common language, and distinguishing it from rational communities of common purposes and goals, Lingis, Hooke tells us, argues that this community of otherness and response is the ground of all communities despite the fact that it is easily forgotten/forsaken.

As Hooke finds Lingis directing us to remember the community that grounds all communities, Charles Scott finds Heidegger thinking back to the beginnings of philosophy. In his close reading of sections 81–82 of Die Beiträge zur Philosophie, he calls our attention to a dual crisis. One crisis concerns Heidegger’s thinking. Here it is a matter of the ways in which Being and Time has been misunderstood and of Heidegger having to confront the fact that what happens to his thinking is out of his control. The second crisis concerns Western philosophy. Here it is a matter of confronting Western philosophy’s aversion to the questioning that marks its origin. These crises are not unrelated. They concern the “strangeness” that we cannot control and the “unsettling movement [that] dwells within philosophy’s stabilizing, defining occurrences.”

Gilles Deleuze, as read by Daniel Smith, returns philosophy to the questioning that sustains it. In his essay “A Life of Pure Immanence: Deleuze’s ‘Critique et Clinique Project,’” Smith argues that Deleuze identifies philosophy with a particular mode of creativity rather than with a particular set of concepts. Deleuze, we are told, is fundamentally concerned with the problematic of Life. In answering the question: “What role do literary analyses play in Deleuze’s philosophical oeuvre?” Smith tells us that Deleuze calls on literature, art, and science to detail the paradoxical features of life as a power of vitality (“producing singularities and placing them in continuous variation”) and innovation (“creating ever-new relations and conjugations between these singularities”).

Bruce Milem’s “The Impossible Has Already Occurred: Derrida and Negative Theology” brings the questions of the other, otherness, and language to the issue of the impossibility of the desire to name (know) God. Derrida sees deconstruction and negative theology as energized by similar impossible desires—the desire to destroy
claims to absolute truths and the desire to create a place for the coming of the wholly other. Milan, however, argues that negative theology and Derrida conceive of the impossible differently. For Derrida the impossible refers to an event that has not yet arrived; for the negative theologian it identifies an event already come. The difference is more than a matter of timing. It is a matter of faith, of allowing a particular text (the scriptures) privileged status and of hope. For the negative theologian history has already been transformed. For Derrida one can only hope that it may become something other.

It is perhaps fitting that we end this section by returning to the question of beginnings and to the figure who opens this volume, Levinas. Again we confront the question of the impossible. Jeffrey L. Kosky reads Jacques Derrida’s analysis of the gift as an impossible phenomenon as “an ordeal for phenomenology.” It throws us back to phenomenology’s original insight regarding the unconditional principle of the appearance of appearances and challenges Husserl’s drift toward a theory of intentionality that privileges the limits of the gaze. Calling this drift a betrayal, Kosky links Derrida’s analysis of the gift to Levinas’ phenomenology of the Infinite and the face and to Michel Henry’s descriptions of Life. He argues that each of these phenomenologies returns us to the origins of phenomenology where givenness rather than intentionality is privileged. Kosky concludes by reading Jean-Luc Marion’s work as inspired by these subversions of intentionality and as pursing the original phenomenological insight that “the meaning of appearance [implies] precisely to appear with or without justification.”