



The continuation of Phenomenology: a fifth period?

By Dr Lester Embree

In this article the author takes a reflective look at the past, present and future of phenomenology in a kind of Presidential 'state of the science' approach. The Encyclopedia of Phenomenology acts as the authoritative positional backdrop for this ground-breaking article. Embree isolates several recognizable 'stages' in the development of phenomenology, and ponders whether its current growth and permutations isn't leading us into a new stage. If so, this has implications for the way phenomenologically-oriented scholars and philosophers approach their discipline.

Introduction

As leader of the team that edited the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology, I was the first concretely to recognize how complex, extensive, and dynamic the phenomenological tradition actually is.¹ By now, of course, this work is out there for all to read, and the several long reviews in English, French, Japanese, and Spanish show that I am not the only one who has been drawn into pondering this entire tradition.²

In this essay I want to report some aspects of our effort that are not especially obvious in the work and to suggest ways in which the

¹ Lester Embree et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997).

² Reviews by Carlos Buscarini in *Escritos de Filosofia*, Vol. ??? (1998), by Philippe Cabestan in *Alter: Revue de Phenomenologie*, No. 6 (1998), by Robert Sokolowski in *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 15 (1998), and by WADA, Wataru in *Genshogaku Nenpo*, the Annual Review of the Phenomenological Association of Japan, Vol. 15 (1999).

phenomenological tradition can be carried further by those who are, like me, interested in fostering its continuation. My purposes are not theoretical (I doubt I can muster the detachment for that); instead, they are practical.

A Planetary and Multidisciplinary tradition

The first concern in editing an encyclopedia is selecting the topics for entries. An initial list was made and the original estimate was for 100 entries. But we just kept finding out about more and more forms of phenomenology and relevant specialists to write about them, so that we ended up with 166. We decided at the outset to have a thematic than a biographical emphasis, and thus wound up including entries on only twenty-eight figures along with the forty thematic entries that are actually the core of the work. In addition, we included entries on figures (e.g., Foucault and Jaspers) and tendencies (e.g., structuralism) that had early connections with phenomenology, but could ultimately not be considered phenomenological. We also included some traditions (e.g., analytical philosophy and Marxism) and some figures (e.g., Hegel and

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Kant) with even less historical connection with phenomenology, but with which useful comparisons and contrasts could nevertheless be made.

Setting the 118 entries of the mentioned types aside, there remain forty-eight entries of an historical kind: four devoted to tendencies and stages within philosophical phenomenology; twenty-one devoted to phenomenological tendencies in non-philosophical disciplines; and twenty-three devoted to national traditions chiefly of philosophical phenomenology. My remarks here are based on these forty-eight historical entries. But before I say anything more, I should mention that I am neither by talent nor by training an historian. Nevertheless, the entries of the sorts I am drawing upon do tend to proceed with historical concerns for such issues as when a series of events began, who did what and when, and what the chief philosophical sources for the non-philosophical tendencies that have emerged are. And when I review these forty-eight entries together, some patterns do clearly emerge. My larger historical sketch is therefore based on these several dozen smaller historical accounts.

Phenomenology begins late in the 1890s with Edmund Husserl. The decisive act consists in transcending his teacher Brentano's immanentism: although all immediate objects of awareness had previously been considered to have "existence in" conscious life, they now come to be seen instead as transcendent of that life, yet still directly accessible to our awareness. The chair across the room, for example, is not an image in my mind standing for something to which I cannot have direct access; rather it is something over there that I directly encounter by seeing it and can also encounter by walking over and sitting on it. The era of epistemological representationalism that is thereby left behind--and the interpretation of the physical sciences that engendered and supported this epistemology ever since Descartes--does not need to be rehearsed on this occasion. But it is astounding to

consider that so many great minds took for granted what now, after Husserl, can seem preposterous.

Husserl's initial positive interest was with the philosophies of logic and mathematics, which can be collectively termed formal sciences.³ His *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1900-1901 included not only a name-making refutation of logical psychologism, but also contained extensive analyses of the mental operations in which numbers, propositions, and akin objects, which are not inherent parts of mental operations, are intended to or constituted in various ways.

The period of the phenomenological tradition best that then arose in Germany--a period (and tendency) that is best called realistic phenomenology--will be discussed presently. At this point it can be said that Husserl's new approach has its first major philosophical influence outside Germany through the work of NISHIDA, Kitaro in Japan, who went on to send a number of students to Freiburg to study with Husserl during the 1920s. The Japanese tradition languished during the 1930s and 1940s for political reasons, but was revived by the 1960s, and is quite vigorous today.

Phenomenology was also planted in Russia before World War I and continued to grow as something of an underground tradition during the Soviet period; there is now hope for a new flourishing there. Moreover, phenomenology can be seen to begin in Spain early in the 20th century with the work of Ortega y Gasset; from there it spread to Latin America between and after the wars through efforts by Manuel Garcia Morante, Jose Gaos, Joaquin Xirau, Francisco Romero, Antonio Caso, Eduardo Nicol, Xavier

³Cf. Thomas M. Seebohm, Dagfinn Føllesdal, & Jitendra Nath Mohanty, eds., *Phenomenology and the Formal Sciences* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

Zubiri, Roberto Walton, Javier San Martin, Antonio de Almeida, and quite a few others.

Besides this geographical dissemination of phenomenology, there is also a spreading of phenomenology from philosophy to other disciplines, which can be provisionally referred to as “non-philosophical disciplines.” The Encyclopedia includes entries on twenty-two of these disciplines, and no doubt we missed a number of them, especially of the evaluational and practical disciplines. Even though philosophy has tended to lead, there is undoubtedly more Phenomenology outside philosophy than within it. The beginning here was also just before World War I and consisted of phenomenology spreading into psychiatry in the early work of Karl Jaspers and in the life long involvement of Ludwig Binswanger. Today there is an impressive international tradition of phenomenological psychiatry, chiefly led from France and Germany.

The more than a score of other non-philosophical tendencies began later. There is insufficient time on this occasion to name further individuals, but the disciplines as well as the national traditions into which phenomenology spread from Husserl’s beginning can at least be mentioned for the subsequent decades.

During the 1920s there is evidence of phenomenology--especially philosophical phenomenology--in Australia, France, Hungary, The Netherlands and Flanders, Poland, and the United States, and phenomenology can also be identified in the non-philosophical disciplines focused on communication, education, gender, music, and religion. Then the 1930s saw phenomenology begin in Czechoslovakia, Italy, Korea, and Yugoslavia, and in reflections on architecture, literature, and theater as well. That makes at least nine non-philosophical disciplines and more than twelve nations (the many Latin American nations have not been mentioned by name) in Europe, the New World, and Asia

before World War II (which is not to assert that all of the non-philosophical disciplines were necessarily represented in all of the nations mentioned, although phenomenological philosophy certainly was).

During the 1940s and 1950s, phenomenology spread to Portugal, the Nordic countries, and South Africa, and also into reflections on ethnicity, film, sociology, and politics. In the 1960s and 1970s, it spread to Canada, China, and India, and to dance, geography, law, and psychology. And finally, in the 1980s and 1990s, it spread at last to Great Britain as well as to economics, environmentalism, ethnology, medicine, and nursing.

Not only is the planetary and multidisciplinary spread of phenomenology during the 20th century impressive, but for the century as a whole, it seems that only psychoanalysis and Marxism might be compared with it in these respects--and both of those have seen better days, while phenomenology continues to thrive. If one considers all the countries and disciplines involved, it can be said that phenomenology is the philosophical tradition of the 20th century.

I might insert here that when I have made this point on previous occasions in the United States, I have been interrupted with the question: What about analytical philosophy? My answer, which tends to silence the room, is that analytical philosophy is indeed also a century-old tradition in philosophy, but has chiefly thrived in the former British empire, i.e., Great Britain and its former colonies, the United States included, which is where English is spoken and where Oxford and Cambridge are considered the most prestigious universities. In contrast, phenomenology is a planetary and quite polyglot tradition. Analytical philosophy is an ethno-regional manifestation tied to a language and is thus akin to neo-Confucianism.

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It can also be wondered if the analytical tradition has the relatively continuous as well as broad and deep flow of ideas from philosophy to the non-philosophical disciplines that phenomenology has. Unfortunately, all I can do is to pose the question and to hope that somebody else can answer it authoritatively. The idea of positivism, whereby the “moral sciences” ought to be pursued after the fashion of the naturalistic sciences, comes from the 19th Century and does still seem to predominate in the cultural sciences, but its continual endorsement within naturalistic theory of science is not a continuous, wide, and deep flow of ideas.

It ought not to be surprising that there is a great deal of national and disciplinary myopia within phenomenology, which is to say that we tend to focus upon what is happening in our own disciplines and countries. The delight one can feel when finding out about developments in other countries already indicates this. Thus with the exception of sociology--where, as a consequence of Alfred Schutz's thought, there clearly are American, German, and Japanese traditions--the greatest weakness of our encyclopedia concerns the entries on the non-philosophical disciplines. Most of these were written by Americans and Western Europeans because the personal networks through which the editorial team of philosophers recruited authors of entries are also chiefly made up of Americans and Western Europeans. Beyond that, most of the American colleagues in the non-philosophical disciplines were relatively less acquainted with disciplinary colleagues in other countries, presumably because they are preoccupied with their struggles within their larger and less friendly disciplines. The situation seems to be somewhat better for philosophers in the NATO area, where more international travel as well as multiple language skills seem to obtain. Here there are numerous opportunities for further development, and specific suggestions will be made below.

Stages of philosophical phenomenology

To give the above sketch a bit more substance, let me add remarks based on the introduction that Jitendra Mohanty and I wrote for the encyclopedia edited by the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology. Composing the introduction was one of our last tasks--in part because we needed to see the whole first, but also because that whole became increasingly overwhelming! After pondering for weeks how to compose an overview that could lead into the whole, yet would not be hopelessly superficial, it occurred to me one day while driving to the university that rather than trying to summarize the results of phenomenological work, we might simply report the growth and revision of the agenda of issues and approaches in the history of phenomenology. Let me now summarize that quickly in relation to the four “stages” cum “tendencies” that are roughly discernible. Most of these agenda items are subjects of entries in the encyclopedia

(1) In addition to the formal sciences, the topics of language, perception, and re-presentation (memory, empathy, expectation, and imagination) have been on the agenda since the turn of the century. In the realistic phenomenology that predominated immediately before and after World War I, the items of gender, law, philosophical anthropology, religion, and value were added to the agenda, as were then also aesthetics, architecture, music, and literature, and, later, film. The eidetic method whereby knowledge of universal essences is gained is central for realistic phenomenology, which is not only a stage within the history of phenomenology, but also a tendency that has continued throughout the rest of the century.

(2) Constitutive phenomenology is one of the names Husserl gave his mature philosophy, which first emerged in print in 1913. The transcendental phenomenological epoche, reduction, and purification then became methodologically central, and the issues of the

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body and of the philosophies of the naturalistic and cultural sciences were added to the agenda. That agenda retained the previous issues, but the entire agenda was reordered in such a way that the grounding of the positive sciences in a transcendental first philosophy became central. I personally consider it unfortunate that so many non-Husserlian phenomenologists reject this interest in the philosophy not only of the formal and cultural sciences, but also of the naturalistic sciences.⁴ Nevertheless, this tendency too continues as a way of practicing phenomenology.

(3) Late in the 1920s there arose what is best called existential phenomenology. This happened through a misunderstanding of the intentions of Heidegger's main work, *Sein und Zeit* and may have begun with Hannah Arendt's thesis on love in St. Augustine. Although there were parallels in Japan during the 1920s, this third tendency within philosophical phenomenology chiefly predominated in France during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Literature--especially theater--and gender were raised higher on the agenda; in addition, ethnicity, politics, and, most interestingly, old age were added within an overall refocusing on the actualities of human life or existence. This stage can also be seen as a tendency that continued even when it no longer predominates.

(4) With the post-World War II restoration of phenomenology in Germany, the fourth tendency came to predominance during the 1960s into the 1990s. This is hermeneutical phenomenology and Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur have been, of course, the leading European figures, while Joseph Kockelmans has been the central figure in the United States. This tendency appreciates Heidegger's methodology

⁴Cf. Lee Hardy and Lester Embree, eds. *Phenomenology of Natural Science* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992).

of interpretation. All of the previously mentioned items, except, perhaps, gender, are still on the agenda, and technology and environmentalism have clearly been added.

As mentioned, all four tendencies have continued since their inceptions and the "stages" mentioned are based on temporary predominances of one or another revision of the agenda and/or methodological emphasis. By the 1990s, however, philosophical phenomenology has become heavily burdened with the past in a way that fosters ignorance. Those involved in different tendencies try less and less to keep up with developments in sister tendencies and sometimes even with the work of more than one or two figures. Efforts are necessary to remember aspects of the century-deep past.⁵ And it seems to me from my limited perspective that after about forty years hermeneutical phenomenology has become less methodologically self-conscious, and indeed has begun to degenerate into a mere style of scholarship on texts from the history of philosophy rather than investigation of the matters themselves. Heidegger's now utterly unignorable Nazism has not helped. It is also not clear that deconstructionism can genuinely claim to be phenomenological.

I will speculate about a new and fifth stage in the history of phenomenology presently.

The questions of approach and field

The multiplicity of methods, as well as the growing number of issues on the agenda (and those for the agendas of the non-philosophical disciplines have not even been touched on), can lead one to wonder about the unity of the phenomenological tradition. This tradition is indeed a unitary one can shown in two ways above and beyond adducing the sheerly historical

⁵Cf. John Drummond and Lester Embree, eds. *The Phenomenological Tradition in Moral Philosophy*, in preparation.

circumstances that members of a tradition chiefly turn to other members in the present and past for ideas; namely, the unity can be shown with a sketch of a widely shared approach and with an overall characterization of the field of matters approached, a procedure that is itself an attempt at a phenomenological rather than an historical answer.

Late in the encyclopedia project, I remembered something I used to urge on graduate students studying historical figures: if you think you understand a figure's position, you should try to characterize its opposite. Remembering that, I tried it on phenomenology and easily concluded that its opposite was what Husserl called objectivism, which is what many call positivism, but which might best be called naturalism (and I quickly added an entry with that title). Naturalism is, of course, a world view stemming from the naturalistic sciences and the technologies based upon them. For naturalism, Being qua Being is the "nature" of the naturalistic sciences and the most responsible cognitive approach is the method of that kind of science, although within philosophy, modern logic rather than mathematics is the formal technique. (To a phenomenologist for whom logic is as much a special science as mathematics is, much of naturalistic philosophy of science then often seems to consist of exercises in applied science.)

After determining that naturalism is the opposite of phenomenology, I played the same intellectual game again, i.e., I asked what the opposite of naturalism is, and easily came up with a position that crucially appreciates culture and conscious life as well as the approaches necessary to investigate them. Generally speaking, then, I now tend to think that philosophical phenomenology is a philosophy of culture, whether or not that title is used. The difference of phenomenology from other philosophies of culture will be commented on presently. It could be that there are two major and opposed philosophical (if not

intellectual) tendencies in the 20th century, and that they chiefly relate to two genera of science, something that might not be surprising to an historian of modern culture more sophisticated than I.

Support for the notion that phenomenology is a philosophy of culture can be gathered from the fact of fruitful relations between philosophical phenomenology and only some scientific disciplines. For example, there is considerable phenomenological philosophy of naturalistic science, but there are no phenomenological tendencies within chemistry, botany, etc., while the opposite is the case for sociology or psychology.

Let me insert here the suggestion that what I have been awkwardly and inadequately calling "non-philosophical disciplines" might better be called "cultural disciplines," and let me add that such disciplines include those of a practical species, such as nursing and psychiatry, and also broadly axiomatic disciplines, such as architecture and literary criticism, as well as strictly theoretical or cognitive disciplines, i.e., the cultural sciences.⁶ There are external forces that lead disciplines of these three sorts to misrepresent themselves, especially when those of the practical sort seeking the cachet of scientificity and those of the theoretical sort are seeking the cachet of practicality, but I do not believe a philosopher is obliged to go along with such forces--and when one does not do so, this taxonomy works.

Turning now to the question of the unity of the century-old phenomenological tradition in relation to the variety of tendencies within its philosophical component and also within many different cultural disciplines, the first thing to recognize is that different disciplines and

⁶Cf. Mano Daniel and Lester Embree, eds. *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994).

subdisciplines each have their own different sets of problems and that these problematics change over time. Hence any characterization of the phenomenological approach must be both generic and capable of great specification. Moreover, if such a generic approach can be characterized, then how it is different from other philosophies of culture might also become visible.

I recognize six features that seem to characterize the generic approach of phenomenology.

(1) Phenomenologists tend to oppose accepting unobservable matters--e.g., the so-called outer world beyond the reach of sensuous awareness and also the unconscious in some psychological conceptions, and it is thus convergent with empiricism but not positivism because conscious life (but not ideal objects) is considered observable in at least classical empiricism.

(2) As mentioned, phenomenology tends to oppose naturalism, which is not to say that there are not naturalistic emphases in some authors--Husserl to begin with--who believe one should analyze the experience of nature before exploring the remainder of the socio-cultural world.

(3) Phenomenology tends to justify cognition--and also evaluation, and even action--on the basis of what Husserl called Evidenz, which is best called "evidencing" in English, i.e., the awareness of matters in the most clear, distinct, and adequate way possible for matters of the sort in question.

(4) Phenomenology tends to consider ideal objects such as numbers and propositions, but also universal essences, to be observable, or evidenceable, in a broad signification of these terms. However, it deserves mention that few phenomenologists today believe ideal objects to exist in themselves.

(5) Phenomenologists tend to practice reflective observation on what can be called encounterings

as encounterings of objects and also on objects as they are encountered, although few use this terminology. Nevertheless, practically all phenomenologists would thus distinguish loving and the beloved as loved, remembering and the remembered as remembered, willing and the willed as willed, and so on.

(6) Finally, phenomenologists tend to recognize description of matters in universal, a priori, or eidetic terms as prior to explanation in terms of causes, purposes, or grounds.

Two points deserve repetition. First, the terminology of "encountering" and the "encountered as encountered" is not widely shared, but the methodological positions characterized are. And, second, this is an attempt to characterize a generic approach that can be specified by tendencies that have predominated at different periods within the history of philosophical phenomenology as well as for the problematics of the other cultural disciplines (and note that philosophy is also a cultural discipline).

A fifth period?

With a new millennium before us, those who are committed to phenomenology may wonder how it might best be continued. I do not believe that there can be any doubt about it continuing, at least for a few decades. There is simply too much cultural momentum now built up for us to think otherwise. There are also several interesting new and renewed interests that suggest that a fifth period might be starting.

Issues in the philosophy of technology and in environmental philosophy have been addressed in hermeneutical phenomenology, but can also be addressed in other ways. Most reflections on gender have of late been post-modern in style, but there is also now a very strong phenomenological interest in Simone de Beauvoir in this respect, and even talk of feminist

phenomenology.⁷ In France, there is a great revival of phenomenological interest in religion. Then again, at least in the United States, there is renewed interest in race and ethnicity, which was added to the agenda by Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir nearly fifty years ago when they encountered America. And there is increasing interest in ethics and even politics.⁸

If one believes in the relevance and importance of phenomenology, what can one do to advance it? So many soi disant phenomenologists actually spend their time on interpretation of texts in ways that are not especially phenomenological, and so much collective behavior greatly resembles Bible study groups, that there is constant need to call continually for investigation of the matters themselves, which has always been phenomenology's strength. That is by far the most important thing.

If hermeneutical phenomenology has become history of philosophy, and if a fresh interest not in the texts themselves, but in the matters themselves has begun—which is what seem to have characterized the beginnings of the previous new internal tendencies and periods of the tradition—we might wonder about a fifth period. Is it beginning? What form will it take? My guess

⁷Cf. Lester Embree, ed. *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, forthcoming), and Linda Fischer and Lester Embree., eds. *Feminist Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, in press).

⁸Cf. Kevin Thompson and Lester Embree, eds., *The Phenomenology of the Political* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) and John Drummond and Lester Embree, eds, *The Phenomenological Tradition in Moral Philosophy*, in preparation.

is that the general theme would then be collective as well as individual human life in the socio-historical world, a theme that is suitable for a reflective-descriptive philosophy of culture. The methodological shift would be away from any naturalistic emphasis on the one hand, although nature, non-human life included, would be a basic issue, and on the other hand, away from modeling all encountering of objects on the reading of texts as well. And maybe it would be called “cultural phenomenology.”

To advance phenomenology, one can also work to foster communication among the hundreds if not thousands of phenomenologists in the more than twenty national traditions through conferences, lecture tours, visiting professorships, etc.; this is already happening for philosophical phenomenology and includes Latin America as well as Western Europe and East and South Asia. I myself have recently been in Mexico, Peru, Argentina, and Brazil this year and hope to go to Eastern Europe in the immediate future.

Even more contact is needed among the more than twenty cultural disciplines. At least in the United States these seem as isolated from one another as from philosophy. Moreover, they include relatively small percentages of members in each of their disciplines. Often called “qualitative” or “interpretative,” these phenomenological tendencies seem to include what might be called refugees from positivism. The mainstreams in these non-philosophical disciplines appear typically more oppressive than that which philosophical phenomenologists still struggle against in the United States. Sometimes, then, our colleagues in other disciplines go through a process whereby “phenomenology” first means “anything by positivism,” and then they develop greater conceptual and methodological rigor. Philosophers might make themselves useful at that point.

Too often philosophers forget their deeper heritage of being not “specialists,” but “generalists,” in the signification that the practice of “philosophy” originally imposed no restriction on one’s intellectual delights. Hume was also an historian and Kant also a physicist. But for more than a century, philosophy has unfortunately been increasingly considering itself an academic speciality on a par with others and with its own problematics, methods, terminology, journals, departments, societies, etc., in which philosophers have come to speak and write chiefly, if not exclusively, for one another. In phenomenology, however, there has been at least some continuation of the earlier tradition—e.g., Alfred Schutz also taught sociology and social psychology and Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a professor of psychology at the Sorbonne for several years.

If philosophical philosophers returned to broader interests, they could connect with colleagues in the non-philosophical cultural disciplines, who might appreciate some help. But I urge my fellow philosophers to be prepared for different agendas of issues and specifications of the general

approach. (Colleagues in other disciplines already struggle to be patient with philosophical interests that they do not share.)

Moreover, the sets of issues that fall under the titles of art, class, environment, gender, morality, politics, religion, science, technology, and the like are extraordinarily complex and multifaceted. Increasingly, they are receiving multidisciplinary treatment from what, accordingly, can be called “multidisciplines.” Phenomenological philosophers can help form and otherwise develop such multidisciplines, knowing from the outset that communication within such will not be easy.

For philosophical phenomenologists, the benefits of communicating with cultural scientists can be great, especially if the fifth period is oriented toward basic culture. Not all philosophical problems have been formulated and much is to be learned. I hope that I live long enough to see whether my predictions concerning a fifth period of phenomenology are confirmed.