

Bryn Mawr College

Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

Philosophy Faculty Research and Scholarship

Philosophy

2008

Review of *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology*, by Dermot Moran

Robert J. Dostal

Bryn Mawr College, rdostal@brynmawr.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/philosophy_pubs



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Citation

Dostal, Robert J. Review of *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology*, by Dermot Moran. *Husserl Studies* 24, no. 1 (2008): 59-63.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College.
https://repository.brynmawr.edu/philosophy_pubs/2

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

Moran, Dermot: *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology*
Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005 (Key Contemporary Thinker series)
ISBN: 0-7456-2122-8
297 pp. With bibliography and index.
\$59.95 (US dollars) hardbound; \$24.95 (US dollars) paperback.

With this contribution to the “Key Contemporary Thinkers” series from Polity press, Dermot Moran provides us with a clear, reliable, and sympathetic introduction to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. In the “Acknowledgements” with which the text begins, Moran writes that he wants “to explicate Husserl’s achievement primarily for those coming to him for the first time...the neophyte” (p. vii) and that he has “tried as far as possible to present [Husserl’s] project *from within*, in terms of its own motivations rather than in comparison and contrast with other philosophers.” (p. vii) He adds that he does not intend to address Husserl’s critical legacy nor to engage in extensive critique of his positions. He accomplishes what he sets out to do very well. The writing is clear and free of jargon. He approaches Husserl’s work charitably, and he avoids engaging in the many controversies around the interpretation of Husserl’s writings and their broader significance. This does not mean that Moran refuses to see difficulties and problems with aspects of Husserl’s thought. He does and he points them out. Moran makes good and judicious use of the *Nachlass* (Husserl’s unpublished writings), Husserl’s correspondence, and the extensive secondary literature on Husserl. He provides a useful bibliography of Husserl’s published work and the secondary literature. In short, Moran shows himself to be an excellent guide to the work and life of Edmund Husserl.

The book is structured both chronologically and systematically. The first three chapters are introductory: a brief but comprehensive introduction, a rich yet concise

biographical chapter, and an overview of Husserl's conception of philosophy. The next two chapters are chronological: a chapter on Husserl's *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891) and a chapter on what Moran calls the breakthrough to phenomenology, the *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901). In the following three chapters Moran addresses Husserl's work after 1901 systematically rather than chronologically. There are chapters on (1) Husserl's eidetic phenomenology of consciousness, (2) his transcendental phenomenology, and (3) on the controversial themes of embodiment, otherness, and intersubjectivity. The final chapter, the conclusion, considers Husserl's contribution to philosophy.

The first three chapters lay out some of the difficulties in coming to terms with Husserl's philosophy, introduce Husserl's project and some of its basic concepts (intentionality) and distinctions (natural/philosophical attitude), and provide some context for the study with a biography of the philosopher whose life was his work. Yet there is more to the life than the work. We learn about his friendship with Thomas Masaryk and his conversion to Christianity. We learn about his family and his students. Brentano is his most significant teacher. Moran points out the importance of the work of Bolzano and Lotze, and relatively diminishes the significance of Frege, for the early philosophical development of the young mathematician Husserl. The biography depicts the young Husserl's difficulties in establishing a career, his rise to international repute, and his disappointment later in life with his failure from his perspective to establish a school of thought and with the political and intellectual developments in Germany and Europe. The chapter on Husserl's conception of philosophy argues, correctly I think, that Husserl

never gave up on the idea of philosophy as a rigorous science. Moran provides us with an interpretation of the oft cited statement from Husserl's old age ("Der Traum is ausgeträumt! ["The dream is over!"]) which understands this as an expression of Husserl's disappointment with the turn of events in the political and intellectual life of the 1930's, i.e., the popularity of the existentialism of Heidegger and Jaspers and the rise of fascism. Husserl's dream was a dream of Europe realizing its *telos*, the life of reason. This dream he would not see realized.

Moran's distinction between Husserl's "eidetic phenomenology" and his "transcendental phenomenology" is a distinctive feature of Moran's approach to Husserl. It is the principle that organizes his systematic approach to Husserlian phenomenology. Other approaches to Husserl's phenomenology have organized themselves around the distinction of realism (*Logical Investigations*) and idealism (*Ideas*) or the distinction of static and genetic phenomenology. According to Moran: "What distinguishes the *transcendental* from the *eidetic* approach is precisely that the eidetic still operates with 'belief in the world' (*Weltglaube*) and has not made the constitution of the world itself a problem, so is not yet a philosophy of 'ultimate foundations' which explicates just how the phenomenon of world is constituted."(p. 131) This distinction follows from Husserl's distinction of the eidetic and transcendental reductions. Though he never states it explicitly, Moran sometimes seems to be suggesting that the eidetic approach to phenomenology is independent of the transcendental approach—something that the mature Husserl would not accept. In the introduction Moran states that he proposes to read Husserl "as both phenomenologist and transcendental philosopher."(p.1) A subtitle

in Chapter 6 reads “From Eidetic Phenomenology to Transcendental Idealism.” It is the case that Husserl in the *Logical Investigations* does not present phenomenology as transcendental philosophy. But, as Moran recognizes, shortly after the publication of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl began to present phenomenology as transcendental and idealist. He stays with this understanding of phenomenology as transcendental for the rest of his life. Moran even points out that there are intimations of idealism in the *Logical Investigations*. For Moran the transcendental turn is the turn to idealism. His discussion of the transcendental character of phenomenology is almost solely in terms of idealism. It would have been useful to point out that this “turn,” if that is what it was, was largely motivated by the attempt to make sense of the position the speaker of the phenomenological speech must be in such that the “eidos” is revealed and naturalism and naïve realism is avoided. Moran does point out that the turn to transcendental philosophy comes with the “discovery” of the reduction, the *epoché*. The consideration of the distinction between the natural attitude and the phenomenological (i.e., philosophical) leads one to consider the phenomenological to be transcendental. Moran is clear that Husserl’s transcendental idealism is not a subjective idealism and that it entails what Moran (and Kant) call “empirical realism.”

In the chapter on eidetic phenomenology Moran discusses, among other things, intentionality, the noetic-noematic correlation, evidence, temporality, sensation, perception, and judgment. Husserl was most interested in cognition and judgment, but as he pursued their constitutive features he became increasingly interested in the pre-predicative and the pre-cognitive. Moran comments time and again on the Husserl’s

“Cartesian” approach to consciousness (e.g. p. 143: “his overall Cartesian approach to consciousness”). Like Descartes, Husserl takes a “voluntarist” approach to consciousness, that is, mental acts are acts of the will. Further, phenomenology is the science of what appears to consciousness, yet Moran rightfully points out that Husserl does not consider consciousness to be as transparent as Cartesianism does. Husserl acknowledges the significance of emotions, the unconscious, drives, and instincts for the conscious life, but does not provide much of an account of them. Moran points out further (p. 148) that Husserl finds there to be a phenomenological distinction between the ideal life of consciousness and the physical, but, at the same time, Husserl denies that this entails a metaphysical dualism (which can be found in Descartes). The self, for Husserl, is a psychophysical unity. Importantly in this chapter, Moran underlines the significance of the distinction between sensation and perception for Husserl. And he argues that one of Husserl’s most significant achievements is to show that picture-consciousness is a specific modality of consciousness, not to be confused with perception. Husserl develops a critique of representationalism that is profoundly important for Heidegger and much of subsequent 20th century philosophy.

In the penultimate chapter, “The Ego, Embodiment, Otherness, Intersubjectivity and the ‘Community of Monads,’” Moran takes on a set of questions with which Husserl quite clearly struggled and about which his efforts have received much criticism. Moran shows how the concept of the ego developed in Husserl’s work from the *Logical Investigations* to his late unpublished speculations. There is much mystification in the literature about the “transcendental ego.” Moran lets us see how the distinction of the

empirical ego from the transcendental or “pure” ego led Husserl to speculation about a pre-personal ego, about an “anonymous” ego, about an absolute ego. Moran discusses the concept of “person” in Husserl’s work and how it arises out of the social. And he considers the relation of the ego to the body (*Ideas II*). “The psychic, as Husserl understands it,” writes Moran, “is not an independent domain, but one dependent on or ‘founded on’ the physical.”(p. 211) Our bodiliness, our embodiment, is central to our relation to others, our intersubjectivity. Moran notes that “there are considerable problems with Husserl’s account of the apperception of the other in *CM V* [*Cartesian Meditations V*], and he himself was aware of these problems...”(p. 224) However problematic Husserl’s treatment of intersubjectivity is, it is the case that for Husserl, according to Moran, “the objectivity of the transcendent real world outside us is an achievement of ‘transcendental intersubjectivity.’”(p. 225) He finds evidence of this Husserl’s writing as early as the 1910/11 lectures. It is, he says, constantly reiterated in Husserl’s later writings. This chapter concludes with a section entitled, “Husserl’s Metaphysics of the Ego” in which Moran briefly discusses what he takes to be Husserl’s metaphysical claims about the ego—claims that are “complex, paradoxical, and deeply ambiguous.”(p. 231) According to Moran “Husserl tried to develop a systematic account of the universe as a whole as something with *teleological* and even *theological* meaning.” (p. 231) Moran goes on to say that he believes that Husserl “did take seriously the claim to have found an absolute source of the world.”(p. 231) He cites *Erste Philosophie* where Husserl refers to the transcendental ego as the “bearer of the world.”(Hua 8: 505) Yes, Husserl considers the ego “absolute” in some sense. But the concept of the “absolute” does not necessarily take one into theology. Further, though occasionally Husserl writes

about a “system” of transcendental philosophy which he hoped to accomplish (and did not), this does not amount to a “systematic account of the universe as a whole.”

In the brief final chapter, “Conclusion: Husserl’s Contribution to Philosophy,” Moran succinctly summarizes Husserl’s accomplishments, raises difficulties, and speaks to Husserl’s influence. In the space of about 6 pages he raises at least 8 large difficulties or problems: 1) intuition, 2) perception, 3) evidence, 4) relation of psyche and body, 5) reduction, 6) metaphysics, 7) paradoxes of temporality, and 8) intersubjectivity. This pretty much covers the range of Husserl’s thought. For the most part, Moran accuses Husserl of being “unclear” about these central and basic aspects of his philosophy. According to Moran, Husserl “seems not to be able to give us a proper philosophical analysis of the kinds of ‘fullness’ and ‘presence’ that belong to the complete intuition of an object.”(p. 239) Husserl’s reliance on the concept of “profile” for his account of perception seems appropriate for sight but not the other senses. Husserl does not “adequately characterize” what counts as evidence.(p. 240) Although in the earlier treatment of the question of the relation of consciousness to the body, Moran had defended Husserl against charges of dualism, here Moran speaks of Husserl’s “dualist essentialism.” Given that defense, this charge I found to be the most surprising. With regard to the reduction, Moran claims that the essence of perception after the reduction turns out to be the same as that before the reduction. Like most readers of Husserl, he is puzzled about Husserl’s metaphysical commitments, especially since the early Husserl is clear anti-metaphysical. Husserl’s account of temporality leaves us with various paradoxes, not the least of which is the concept of the *nunc stans* which is itself not a

modality of time. Finally, with regard to intersubjectivity, Moran flatly states that “how egos or monads...relate to one another is a difficult problem that Husserl is not able to answer. At best he can give detailed description of the structure and nature of this interrelation and communication.”(p. 243). I find this last sentence revealing. The language of this last critical section is replete with problems that Husserl could not solve. Here, not elsewhere in the book, Moran does not seem to remember that, among other things, Husserl is redefining what philosophy should be. In the first place it is descriptive. It does not promise to solve all problems nor to resolve all paradoxes. Perhaps a “detailed description of the structure and nature...” of whatever is all we can appropriately ask of philosophy. I would agree with Moran that Husserl’s treatment of many of these basic concepts do leave us with questions. Husserl’s work is certainly unfinished and, in many respects, puzzling. As Moran recognizes, Husserl himself was not satisfied with much of his own writing. That is why Husserl began again and again, why his manuscripts are so repetitive, and why Husserl goes over the same ground time and again with slightly different vocabulary or from a different starting point.

Moran views Husserl as a philosopher who is “today quite neglected.”(p. 1) Though this may be so, I think that Moran somewhat understates the significance and influence of Husserlian phenomenology for 20th century philosophy. This book reminds us in quite specific ways of the deep debt that subsequent thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty owe to Husserl’s work. Moran considers the re-emergence of an anti-naturalistic tradition within analytic philosophy to be an opportunity for revisiting Husserl with fresh eyes. This too may be so, yet the approach of this book which remains

almost entirely internal to Husserl will not motivate someone coming from that context. Perhaps it is too much to ask. But showing the reader how Husserlian phenomenology deals with various philosophical issues in contrast to other approaches might better motivate a serious reader to pursue a consideration of phenomenology. Having said this, I should also say that this book is a fine introduction to the philosophy of Husserl. The only other introduction with which I am familiar is the one by Bernet, Kern, and Marbach. Their introduction, a good one, is more an overview and summary than it is an introduction. There are other introductions to phenomenology (Moran is the author of one) but that is another matter.

Robert J. Dostal

Bryn Mawr College

