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Lester Embree

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Husserl as Trunk of the American Continental Tree¹

Lester Embree

Abstract

The historico-political category of ‘Continental philosophy’ arose in the United State and includes such figures as Adorno, Arendt, Beauvoir, Cairns, Carr, Cavailles, Deleuze, Derrida, Fink, Foucault, Funke, Gadamer, Gurwitsch, Habermas, Heidegger, Held, Ihde, Jaspers, Jonas, Kersten, Kristeva, Ingarden, Landgrebe, Levinas, Lyotard, Marcel, Marcuse, Marx, Merleau-Ponty, Mohanty, Natanson, Ortega y Gasset, Patočka, Reinach, Ricoeur, Sartre, Scheler, Schutz, Seebohm, Sokolowski, Spet, Stein, Stroeker, and Waldenfels. What these diverse figures share is (a) an early but not necessarily continued critical involvement with Husserl’s phenomenology and (b) subsequent intellectual interaction with others who also began that way. Some comments on relations with analytic philosophy are also included with this historical sketch.

Keywords: Husserl; Continental philosophy; phenomenology; American philosophy

Introduction

This essay suggests an image concerning the unity of contemporary Continental philosophy in the United States and also the United Kingdom: *Continental philosophy is like a tree in which the thought of Edmund Husserl is the trunk and the philosophical positions of the major Continental philosophers are branches.* This image can accommodate the recognition of big branches that, at least for a while, grow as thick as the trunk and even have their own branches, as happened in the case of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. But metaphors often have limitations. This one works only if it is disregarded that the branches of trees remain in substance the same as the trunk and draw their nutrients exclusively from it, whereas ‘branching off’ in philosophy often entails turning to new sources of inspiration, and the forgetting of origins.² Put completely and literally, the thesis of the present essay is that the major figures currently considered Continentals in the United States and the United Kingdom (a)

had major early and often critical contact with Husserl's thought and (b) continued to interact with others who had also done so. The second condition is necessary in order to exclude some figures who met only the first condition. Minor Continental figures have the interaction but not the original engagement with Husserl's phenomenology. Support for the thesis is offered below with brief comments on or quotations from works by major Continental philosophers from before the First World War, from the period between the wars, and from after the Second World War. But some historical and autobiographical remarks are in order first.

About a Word

It seems that I personally originated the current use of 'Continental' in 1978 when I became the first editor of the book series that the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc. sponsors at Ohio University Press. Our first question was what to call the new series. A bit earlier I had been to a meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy at Catholic University and heard somebody characterize Theodor Adorno as a phenomenologist, which seemed odd to me. By then I had also noticed that colleagues interested in hermeneutics were, with prominent exceptions such as Joseph Kockelmans, beginning to ignore its twentieth-century rebirth in what was then considered Heidegger's existential phenomenology. Moreover, structuralism as well as critical theory had arrived from Europe in the late 1960s. The then-prevailing rubric of 'Phenomenology and Existentialism' was becoming too narrow to cover all this. These other tendencies were in much greater contact with one another within Europe than with so-called Anglo-American analytic philosophy and were likely to join the tacit professional-political alliance of the earlier-arrived phenomenology and existentialism within the mass situation that is American philosophy. (There are over 12,000 college-level teaching positions in philosophy in the United States and about 10,000 in the rest of the Earth.)

Some authors resist the qualification 'Anglo-American' in a statement like this and ironically ask if Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wittgenstein are not also Continentals. Such a question shows ignorance of how there are ranges of phenomena, those of history included, that resist exact conceptualization and thus also the method of counter-instances and instead require thinking in terms of what predominates in those ranges. There can be no doubt that, despite opposition from minority directions, so-called analytic philosophy predominated, i.e., was the majority view, in the United States as well as the United Kingdom in the second half of the twentieth century. This is what 'Anglo-American' responsibly signifies. How unitary analytic philosophy is will not be dealt with here, but it can be wondered if perhaps 4,000 philosophers can fail to be internally divided

despite an ideology by which they believe themselves united. After all, most of c. 180,000,000 European Americans overlook their often deep ethnic differences in order for all to be 'White'. There are also those who attack the usage of 'Continental' in contrast with 'analytic' because one is geography-based and the other methodology-based. This complaint cannot be taken seriously if one considers the diversity of sources for names, e.g., Johnson and Kaufman, and if one has the good manners to call others as they prefer to be called. It is then also good manners not to use 'Anglo-American' if 'analytic' is preferred by the analysts.

Let me be clear that the largely political category of twentieth-century Continental philosophy is chiefly applied in the American situation, although there is now interest in it at least at some major publishing houses in the United Kingdom. Colleagues of my acquaintance on the Continent (actual Europeans!) are at best ambivalent about having the inter-orientational discussion that they have participated in for a century explicated and labelled in relation to the American situation into which that discussion is imported in sometimes curious ways. Exiles brought what became analytic as well as Continental philosophy to the United States in the 1930s, but by the 1950s Americans were studying abroad again and brought home for retail distribution philosophies they had, so to speak, bought wholesale, a process that still goes on.

There is currently a discussion about how the difference between Continental and analytic philosophy might be overcome. Perhaps those within a complex tradition with an ideology not only of unity but also completeness and exclusiveness are reacting to another century-old tradition with many different views, and perhaps others are trying to overcome exclusion, as minorities often do. There may be some *naïveté* in all this because there has always been conflict among traditions and also between tendencies within them in the pasts of philosophy and other cultural forms, science and art included, and more rather than less of this might now be expected in a profession of over 20,000 professors on Earth who are in better communication than ever before because of e-mail and the internet. Also, it seems to me that some insight into what is common about each of the traditions is necessary prior to a fruitful comparison. Furthermore, talk of the 'analytic/Continental split' intimates that there was a prior unity that was somehow sundered, which also seems dubious. And this depends on what 'unity' might signify. To say that these are two derivations from Kant or Hume or Descartes is one thing, while to say that there was an earlier time of greater interaction, e.g., when Russell read Husserl and Heidegger studied mathematical logic, is another. The vast increase in the numbers of philosophers certainly played a role in the separation of traditions. And, all of this has given rise, finally, to the question of where a student might best seek a Ph.D. in Continental philosophy in the United States, which has occasioned some amazing recommendations from the analytic mainstream.

But at least Continental philosophy is no longer considered an upstart trend to be ignored by the majoritarian orientation in my country, where decades of antagonistic exclusion has led to the formation of alternatives, i.e., the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, the Husserl Circle, the Heidegger Circle, the Merleau-Ponty Circle, the Sartre Circle, the Beauvoir Circle, etc., not to speak of the various journals, book series, and doctoral programmes.

A curious aspect of the Anglo-American discussion of the CP/AP 'split' is the attempt in some textbooks published in the United Kingdom to extend 'Continental philosophy' back far enough historically to include the whole nineteenth century.³ In this respect, let me comment on the introduction entitled 'What is Continental Philosophy?' by Simon Critchley in the volume he co-edited for Blackwells. This introduction concludes by saying that the volume 'very much reflects the professional place of what has come to be known as Continental philosophy in the English-speaking world. That is to say, it is an irritable and slightly swollen appendix within the corpus of Anglo-American philosophy' (Dr Critchley does not recommend an appendectomy).

From the first page of this introduction it is clear that it is 'the analytically trained philosopher' who is first of all addressed, that the companion is organized by the names of figures rather than topics, which 'largely (and for good or ill) reflects the way the Continental tradition is taught and talked about in the English-speaking world', and that 'this chronological sequence begins with Kant, who in many ways is both the final great figure common to both the analytic and Continental traditions and announces the parting of their ways'. Critchley then goes on a page later to write that,

Of course, it would be possible to imagine a 'Companion to Continental Philosophy' that might begin around 1900 and with the publication of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Such an organization of the volume would have the virtue of reminding readers that the contemporary division (or gulf) between 'analytic' and 'Continental' traditions is essentially a division between traditions inspired by Frege's philosophy of logic and language and *those traditions derived from an often critical confrontation with Husserlian phenomenology*. Of course, what is peculiar about these seemingly divergent traditions is that they have a common ancestry in the work of Bolzano and Brentano [my italics].

As I have shown with italics, this passage actually states much of the thesis of the present essay, but if the ultimate sentence is accepted, do we need to go back to Kant only because Bolzano and Brentano are not great figures?

(Whether Freud was from the outset a continuing source for Continental philosophy is another question.)

Then come chapters on Fichte, Schlegel, Novalis, Schelling, and Hegel, followed by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and even Bergson and then neo-Kantianism. Quite interestingly, this remarkable scope is defended in national-curricular as well as allegedly historical terms:

(i) twentieth-century developments in Continental philosophy are largely unintelligible without reference to their nineteenth-century precursors, especially Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche; and (ii) this period of the history of philosophy, in Britain at least, is woefully under-represented in syllabuses, where it is possible to receive a degree in philosophy without having read much, if anything, of Germanophone [*sic!*] philosophy between Kant and Frege.

What of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and John Stuart Mill? They are the giants of the tradition that Husserl and his teacher, Franz Brentano (who did not get one of the fifty-six chapters on figures in this companion), ‘considered’ themselves to be continuing. Perhaps these thinkers are already well enough represented in the typical British curriculum, or at least those curricula that include history of philosophy, as some say analytic programmes typically do not.

In any case, my original expression over twenty years ago often explicated the implicit qualifier ‘twentieth-century’, and thus did not cover all these earlier figures, although current Continental interpretations of earlier figures going back to the Pre-Socratics were included. There is a place in my arboreal metaphor for the seeking of sources, but it implies that the plant above ground is different from the soil it grows out of or, non-metaphorically speaking, that the historical phenomenon is distinct from its historical background. Making this distinction is easier when there is a discontinuity in the phenomena and, in this respect, I agree with Robert Sokolowski, who writes: ‘Husserl . . . cannot be considered as continuing a tradition that had taken shape before him; even Martin Heidegger, as strong a philosopher as he was, can be understood only in the tradition opened up by Husserl, but Husserl did not have any such overshadowing predecessors.’⁴

My contention about what unifies Continental philosophy was also somewhat anticipated by Dermot Moran when he wrote recently: ‘As Husserl’s conception of phenomenology deepened and broadened, he came to see himself as the founder of a new movement, and through his subsequent efforts and those of his students, phenomenology gradually developed to become the most important current of European thought throughout the century as a whole.’⁵ Going beyond how phenomenology was the most important European current, *my contention is not only that some figures more or less followed in Husserl’s direction but that for many*

others he was seen as the figure against whom one initially needed to define one's own position even if one ceased to refer to him as one who continued to interact with other Continentals later. Inclusion of continued interaction as a criterion is important in order to exclude from Continental philosophy Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Rudolf Carnap, and others early on and also more recently in the analytic tradition who have reacted to Husserl. Perhaps Kant played a similar role for much of nineteenth-century philosophy, but that is also beyond my scope here. Finally, there are also neo-Scholastic reactions to Husserl, but that tendency, as well as neo-Kantianism, does not begin from Husserl and they are thus, on my view, not in the twentieth-century Continental tradition.

Back in the late 1970s, I finally proposed to my colleagues in CARP that we call our series at Ohio University Press the 'Series in Continental Thought'. We needed something broader than merely 'Phenomenology' because it was doubtful that we could then recruit enough manuscripts to which that label, even in a reasonably broad signification, might be applied, and 'Thought' rather than 'Philosophy' was included in perhaps excessive optimism that the original Continental tradition of close and conscious ties with the cultural sciences might be fostered or even restored in over-specialized America.⁶

I must also report autobiographically that I came to the present contention chiefly through leading the team that edited the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*.⁷ That work includes comparative entries on many of what I had previously considered tendencies merely allied politically in American philosophy with phenomenology under the rubric of Continental philosophy. But the authors of such entries regularly mentioned early contacts with Husserl's thought. This crystallized for me in a conversation with Michael Naas in 1999 as he told me how Jacques Derrida has recently been telling how difficult it has been for him to distance himself from Husserl; Derrida will be quoted below. What follows is the results of my efforts to trace the pattern of early contact with Husserl and subsequent interaction.

Before the First World War

Twentieth-century Continental philosophy begins with Edmund Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1900–1. The sea change that he brought about ends the representationalism that goes back to Locke if not Descartes or further and thus abandons the so-called theory of ideas that was used to solve the so-called problem of knowledge. Hans-Georg Gadamer describes this situation well:

But above all, [phenomenology] aimed its attacks at the construction that dominated epistemology, the basic discipline of the philosophy of

that time. When epistemological inquiry sought to answer the question of how the subject, filled with its own representations, knows the external world and can be certain of its reality, the phenomenological critique showed how pointless such a question is. It saw that consciousness is by no means a self-enclosed sphere with its representations locked up in their own inner world. On the contrary, consciousness is, according to its own essential nature, already with objects. Epistemology asserts a false priority of self-consciousness. There are no representative images of objects in consciousness whose correspondence with the things themselves it is the real problem of epistemology to guarantee.⁸

Some who do not recognize that the problem of knowledge has been dissolved accordingly doubt that phenomenology has addressed the most important question. (Hume's recognition that representationalism precluded standpoints from which to observe whether internal representations correspond to external objects also went long unappreciated.) Would the suggestion that one reflectively observe one's encounterings as encounterings of objects and objects as-they-are-encountered help such colleagues?

Phenomenology's new fundamental category is 'intentionality'. Many consider it sufficient to assert that this is the directedness that Franz Brentano observed in mental processes, but his student Edmund Husserl held that 'Brentano's significant discovery that intentionality is the fundamental characteristic of psychic phenomena can be made fruitful only by the elucidation of the peculiarity that we call synthesis.'⁹ A student of Husserl, Dorion Cairns, has explicated this assertion in terms of continuous and discontinuous identifying and differentiating intensive syntheses of objects that are immanent as well as transcendent of the intensive flux.¹⁰ It may well be that many *soi-disant* Husserlians need to appreciate synthesis more deeply.

Within the phenomenological tradition and even though Husserl was evolving in a different direction by 1905, something arose from the *Logische Untersuchungen* that is best called 'Realistic Phenomenology' (see the entry in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* by Barry Smith of this title). The currently most widely recognized figures of this component tendency are Max Scheler and Adolf Reinach in the first generation and Roman Ingarden and Edith Stein in the second, but there are many others, including some now active in the twenty-first century. Most such realists did not accept the transcendental phenomenological *epochē*, reduction, and purification that Husserl came to consider his major methodological contribution. Scheler in particular had met Husserl in 1901; he always had criticisms of and was criticized by Husserl, and some have even wondered if he should be counted as a phenomenologist, but he is certainly a Continental.

Another Continental, Hans Jonas, went to Freiburg in 1921 and had this to say near the end of his life:

For myself, I confess gratefully that for the beginning philosopher phenomenology is a wonderful school in which to learn his trade. Respect for phenomena, practice in observing them, the rigorous task of describing them call for high standards to which one must strive. Yet even all this could not make philosophy into a ‘rigorous science’ – that was a dream which Husserl brought with him from his early days as a mathematician and for which he had to be excused.¹¹

The interest here is in philosophy, but it may be remarked in passing that Husserl’s new thinking (and even though it was initially focused on the theory of logic and mathematics) was taken up before the First World War in psychiatry by Karl Jaspers and Ludwig Binswanger and that, while some see structural linguistics as begun by Ferdinand de Saussure, there was structuralism previously in Eastern Europe based on the incomplete Russian translation of the *Logische Untersuchungen* that Roman Jakobson belonged to and that structuralism later incorporated Saussure’s massive contributions.¹² The *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* records phenomenological tendencies in over twenty disciplines beyond philosophy and in philosophy in over twenty nations at the time of its publication.

Not only through editing the *Encyclopedia* but also through recent travel in Latin America, Eastern as well as Western Europe, and East Asia, I have become keenly aware of phenomenology outside the NATO sphere, i.e., Nishida, Kintaro and the Kyoto School in Japan, Ortega y Gasset, who carried phenomenology to Latin America after the Fascist revolution in Spain, and what was begun in Russia with Gustav Spet and continued in the USSR (see the *Encyclopedia* entries on these figures and national traditions), etc. In our introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, J. N. Mohanty and I discuss how phenomenology stood at the end of the last century in comparison with analytic philosophy, Marxism, and psychoanalysis in terms of its continuing influence on non-philosophical disciplines and its spread over the planet and came to the conclusion that it is the pre-eminent philosophical tradition of the twentieth century. But of course that conclusion requires a broad historical and planetary perspective to appreciate, just as the present contention about Continental philosophy does.

Between the World Wars

Husserl’s philosophy had become transcendental in his unique signification of that word by the time he published his *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie, Erstes Buch* (1913).

His closest followers, i.e., Dorion Cairns, Aron Gurwitsch, and Alfred Schutz, emerged during the 1920s, but all of them had serious disagreements with the master. Schutz, for example, only accepted a constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude. Husserl's last two assistants, Ludwig Landgrebe and Eugen Fink, also began their connections with him during the 1920s, and were deeply affected and also influential, but published works in metaphysics after the Second World War. Martin Heidegger also began with Husserl in the 1920s; it can be wondered how much he is a phenomenologist after his '*Kehre*', but before it there can be no doubt.

Critical theory, i.e., the Frankfurt School, is probably the most distant from Husserl within Continental philosophy today. Nevertheless, in his entry in the *Encyclopedia*, Martin Schnell asserts that 'What we have is a one-sided attempt on the part of Critical Theory somehow to relate to Phenomenology.' Theodor Adorno of course wrote his thesis, *Die Transzendenz des Dinglichen und Noematischen in Husserls Phänomenologie*, in 1924, Herbert Marcuse was an assistant to Heidegger, and Jürgen Habermas in the beginning often discussed phenomenology and certainly adopted the notion of '*Lebenswelt*' into his own position. The thesis here is not that Husserl is the main influence on all figures and tendencies in twentieth-century Continental philosophy, but rather that what the others all share is initially a more or less critical relation to his philosophy and later, relations to others who also began that way.

Hannah Arendt has been called an existential phenomenologist by John Frances Burke in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* because she 'provides a rich description of the fundamental phenomena that distinguish politics as the human activity *par excellence*'. Her principal sources are the early Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. Concerning Husserl, however, under whom she also studied, she says:

Husserl's insistence on 'the things themselves', which eliminates . . . empty speculation and goes on to separate the phenomenally given content of a process from its genesis, had a liberating influence in that Man himself, and not the historical or natural or biological or psychological flux into which he is sucked, could again become a theme of philosophy. – This separation has become much more important than Husserl's positive philosophy, in which he seeks to make us tranquil about a fact over which modern philosophy cannot become tranquil – that man is compelled to assent to a Being which he has never created and to which he is essentially alien.¹³

Existential phenomenology chiefly developed during the 1930s, with the centre of phenomenological gravity shifting from Germany to France.¹⁴

Gabriel Marcel told Herbert Spiegelberg that he read Husserl's *Ideen I* and attended his lectures at the Sorbonne, but was not impressed (see the entry on Marcel in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*); this may be a mild form of the ambivalence that many Continentals express.

It is widely recognized that Raymond Aron motivated Sartre to spend 1933–4 in Berlin to study Husserl's thought and that this resulted in two early and very phenomenological books on imagination by him. Equally deserving of wide recognition is this comment by Simone de Beauvoir:

I . . . dipped into Husserl for the first time. Sartre had told me all he knew about Husserl: now he presented me with the German text of *Leçons sur la conscience interne du temps*, which I managed to read without too much difficulty. Every time we met we would discuss various passages in it. The novelty and richness of Phenomenology filled me with enthusiasm; I felt that I had never come so close to the real truth.¹⁵

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's relation to Husserl is also widely recognized, but a passage in his first publication is still worth reading:

The 'suspension' (*epochē*) of the natural movement which carries consciousness toward the world, toward spatio-temporal existence, and which encloses it – this phenomenological reduction does not merely tend to a more faithful introspection: it is truly an introduction to a new mode of knowledge which moreover manifests the world as well as the self. But, however, if we no longer give any thoughtless priority to things, to states of consciousness engaged in space and time, and to casual explications than are to be admitted (*sic*), and if we follow the articulations of 'phenomena' in living consciousness, then the characteristics and connections which manifest themselves with evidence will allow new laws to appear to us.¹⁶

The existential was not the only tendency within French phenomenology during the 1930s and afterwards. In his entry on France in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Jean-François Courtine discusses the leadership by Jean Cavallès of a tendency focused on the philosophy of logic and mathematics that is actually emphasized in the publications of Husserl's lifetime. This tendency would also seem to be one of the sources for another undoubted Continental, Michel Foucault, whose substantial introduction to the French translation of Binswanger's *Traum und Existenz* draws upon Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*.¹⁷ Finally, even the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan had a early period in which he studied Eugene Minkowski and Max Scheler as well as Husserl.¹⁸

After the Second World War

Before 1961, when Merleau-Ponty died, not only did existential phenomenology continue in France, but German phenomenology began to revive from the Nazi period and American phenomenology finally began to grow. Fink and Landgrebe continued their influential work. Gadamer emerged as a major figure and helped make the interpretation of texts central for a period that can thus be called hermeneutical phenomenology. Beyond that there have been major efforts by Gerhard Funke, Klaus Held, Werner Marx, Thomas Seeböhm, Elisabeth Stroeker, and Bernhard Waldenfels in Germany. I have already referred to Habermas.

In America there were, as mentioned, Cairns, Gurwitsch, and Schutz, who had a concentrated influence during the 1960s at the New School for Social Research. Others, including Maurice Natanson, J. N. Mohanty, and Robert Sokolowski and then David Carr, Don Ihde, Fred Kersten, myself, and yet others came afterwards in phenomenology.

In France, Paul Ricoeur's translation of Husserl's *Ideen I* in 1950 was crucial, as was his series of studies of Husserl.¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas studied Husserl intensively during the late 1920s, co-translated the *Cartésianische Meditationen* into French in 1931, and regularly commented on Husserl's thought afterwards. And of course Jacques Derrida's early work was also focused on Husserl, something he has recently discussed repeatedly, e.g.,

From the very beginning, Husserl and phenomenology, the teaching of phenomenology, were, for me, a discipline of rigor, a method to which I conformed all the more systematically, coolly, and calmly, insofar as I felt no real affinity, *pathos*, or 'sympathy' for Husserl. I feel much closer to Heidegger than to Husserl in terms of existential tonality. Husserl is the one who taught me a technique, a method, a discipline; he is the one who has never left me. Even in the times when I felt I had to question some of Husserl's presuppositions, I tried to do so while remaining faithful to the phenomenological discipline. Of course, things changed – this is a very long story – but it was always from within a reading of Husserl that I tried to find the resources for posing questions back to him.²⁰

Finally, for France, one easily finds the early relations to Husserl in Gilles Deleuze, *La Logique du sens* (1969),²¹ a small book, *La Phénoménologie*, by Jean-François Lyotard,²² and in the dissertation of Julia Kristeva, and these are undoubtedly sources for Continental philosophy in the United States today.²³

Recently

More recent decades are not very clear to me, but I have not noticed different and powerful thinking coming from a novel direction. What

branches out near the top of a tree at any given time is thin, and one must wait to see which twigs become major and which become minor branches or even fall off. And it is easy to become excited about a development that dries up in a very few years (here I recall a colleague enraptured with the thought of Medard Boss some twenty years ago). Furthermore, one can ask whether what was typical of most of the first century of a philosophical tradition must continue to be explicit in the second.

Then again and as mentioned, for all its later discovered unity as a tree of which Husserl is the trunk, Continental philosophy has long been a unifying political category within the professional situation of American philosophy, but today one can wonder if the category is still needed or whether its component tendencies can all now go their separate ways. This seems to be the sentiment of David Wood, who, in addition, nicely dates the birth of Continental philosophy several decades before its christening:

The unity and integrity of Continental philosophy, with all its carefully managed internal debates, is eminently deconstructable. Was not continental philosophy born in the United States in the late 1930s as the name of the enterprise of protecting and preserving the heritage of European, especially German, philosophy, in the face of a very different, largely hostile native tradition? Was it not born in a defensive gesture, a traumatic reaction to apparently overwhelming external pressures, not wholly related to the general problem of integrating various émigré traditions into the United States? Continental philosophy, I am suggesting, is a kind of American (and to a lesser extent British) philosophy, an artefact of history. Heidegger is not himself a Continental philosopher. He is a German philosopher appropriated by 'Continental philosophy' in America. – This is not a bad thing. But we can ask whether the defensiveness that gave rise to Continental philosophy is still necessary, or whether there might not come a time when we would have the confidence to put away our Continental philosophy badges and become more simply ... philosophers.²⁴

In this respect too, one can only wait and see. Perhaps the situation will be clear by 2010 or 2020, but I predict that identification with particular tendencies such as critical theory and phenomenology, and not merely with philosophy generically, will continue if not intensify. The smaller the tendency (above a critical mass, of course) and the more coherent the doctrine, the longer it would seem able to last. Perhaps analytic philosophy will also undergo a devolution into component tendencies as diverse conceptually as the tendencies that make up Continental philosophy.

It is easy to find things to object to in any philosophical work and difficult to find what must be accepted and has staying power. Husserl is difficult to understand and, even though it is widely overlooked, much of his main work is about logic and epistemology, which attracts little Continental interest today at the same time that it is attracting more and more interest in analytic philosophy. Nevertheless, if one does take up an historical perspective, Husserl is the giant figure in relation to whom others of influence in twentieth-century Continental philosophy have defined themselves. One practical implication of all this is that a respectable doctoral programme in twentieth-century Continental philosophy ought regularly to include courses on Husserl so that subsequent major figures in that broad tradition will be more readily intelligible.

To close, let me quote from a recent French book: ‘In an essential way, Phenomenology assumes in our century the very role of philosophy. In fact, after Nietzsche had brought to an end and completed all possibilities – even inverted – of metaphysics, Phenomenology, more than any other theoretical initiative, undertook a new beginning.’²⁵

Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida, USA

Notes

- 1 I am grateful for comments on an earlier draft of this essay to Robert Bernasconi, Kirk Besmer, Timothy Casey, Steven Crowell, Norman Cabbage, William Hamrick, Len Lawlor, Dermot Moran, John Scanlon, Barry Smith, Robert Sokolowski, and David Wood, and I am especially grateful to Samuel J. Julian for tracking down many sources and discussing their significance with me. None of these colleagues is responsible for the view that I finally express here.
- 2 Astonishingly, James R. Watson, *Portraits of American Continental Philosophers* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), includes not one Husserlian.
- 3 See Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder (eds), *Companion to Continental Philosophy* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) and William McNeill and Karen S. Feldman, *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
- 4 Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 211.
- 5 Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.
- 6 For many years I believed that Don Ihde had also and independently invented ‘Continental’ to characterize one wing of the powerful department he built at SUNY Stony Brook, but in recent discussion he denied originating the expression and was not sure where it came from. Hugh Silverman more recently told me in conversation that he took the expression from me at Duquesne back to Stony Brook, something Ihde can neither confirm nor deny. For an insightful analysis of the ‘American Continental Establishment’, see Don Ihde, *Consequences of Phenomenology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986).

- 7 Lester Embree *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997).
- 8 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Phenomenological Movement' (1963), in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 131.
- 9 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), §17.
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