ADVENTURES IN PHENOMENOLOGY

By F. I. G. RAWLINS

THE year 1938 marked the end of two lives rich in achievement, those of Edmund Husserl and Samuel Alexander. Not only so, but 1859 witnessed the birth of each of them. So far as Great Britain is concerned, it is scarcely possible to imagine a greater contrast between two contemporaries in regard to influence and knowledge of their works: Alexander, widely recognized and read; Husserl, almost unknown, except to the few. Perhaps it is needless to pursue this matter further, except to remark that Husserl has been but little translated into English, and that in the original German his style, but more particularly his thought, is difficult and complex to a degree rarely encountered even in the *Geistesliteratur* of Continental philosophers and psychologists.

All the more, therefore, is it an occasion for deep satisfaction that in gratitude to the great thinker of Freiburg, some of his old students, admirers and critics, who now hold distinguished positions themselves, should have combined to contribute in English a volume of philosophical essays in his memory, under the editorship of Prof. Marvin Farber of the University of Buffalo*. At the end, they have included a fragment by the master himself (in German), dealing with the origin of space. It is a precious little thing, vivid and informal, written in two days during the spring of 1934. We will leave it at that. Our concern is more with those who in this book have laboured, with considerable success, to bring Husserl before the English-speaking world of scholarship. But lest it should be imagined that his genius has meanwhile become sterile, or his flame extinguished, be it remembered that a regular publication entitled *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* exists, devoted to the furtherance of his doctrines. In the United States, too, the presence of many of his disciples at the head of philosophical faculties is a testimony to Husserl's power as a teacher.

To trace the pattern of his thought, it is well to recollect that the nineteenth century produced a heavy pressure by scientific facts to obtain possession of the domain of 'intrinsic requiredness', a terrain necessarily strongly defended by the philosophers, but—on balance—favourable to attack. Husserl knew this only too well, and initiated counter-measures designed to focus attention upon 'things themselves' rather than upon such doubtful devices as learning and evolution to explain logical principles. This urge to basic contemplation of an object is extraordinarily difficult to implement: it is akin to an art. In any event, it is the activity which for Husserl constituted phenomenology. The word itself, however, appeared in English long before that, seemingly towards the end of the eighteenth century, when it was used in a far more naïve sense by Robison. Moreover, the present context has little in common with the term occasionally found in the theory of models, beloved of nineteenth century physics.

Phenomenological observation is more than straightforward attention; it is essentially reflective. The difference is between description of objects *per se* and that of *intentional* objects. Generally, observation

within the natural sciences is 'simpliciter', rather than of the extreme kind demanded by Husserl. It is important to realize this in view of the way in which phenomenology exhibits certain parallels with Aristotelianism, and therefore with the concepts of substantial form and matter as the schoolmen knew them. For us to-day, the fear of introspection may go too far: clearly if the process leads to an arbitrary, even capricious, dichotomy between genuine and spurious reactions, then it is reprehensible. But nobody can seriously discard it in so far as it concentrates our mental powers upon things themselves. At least it formed at one time a fair part of the psychologist's method, even if to-day its findings are considered as a creed outworn.

We have now arrived at the threshold of Husserl's early battles, namely, those with the manifestations of 'psychologism' in its various forms. This arch-enemy, as he conceived it, is a tendency to make reason depend upon something other than itself. Phrases like 'the group mind' or 'the mind of a certain cultural epoch' are suspect from this point of view. Reason is reason *pure et simple*, and to assert otherwise is to forfeit any claim to be on the side of the angels. Years ago, Koffka saw this hazard clearly enough, and with characteristic courage assembled all the forces of the *Gestalt* psychologists to vindicate their integrative principles at the crucial point. And on the whole, not unsuccessfully. In fact, 'once bitten, twice shy'.

Can it, however, be said that, as the history of thought through the ages is unfurled, any well-established philosophical system as such has attained even partial victory over the evils of psychologism? A reply to this question is one of the most remarkable passages in this collection of essays. The perennial philosophy is found to face up to the problem squarely, and starting from Plato's onslaught upon the Sophists, to grapple with it. Recalling the present-day interest in the revival, in modern form, of scholasticism, this inherent capacity of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas and their followers to provide a contingent for Husserl's army is extremely significant. His radicalism, issuing in a fierce striving for a 'presuppositionless' philosophy, is enough to entitle him to a high place among the candid friends of learning, be they of the world or of the cloister. Indeed, the word 'psychophysics' has come into use now, a study partially anticipated by Brentano, when he introduced his conception of intentionality of consciousness. He tries to distinguish between physical and psychical phenomena by ascribing to the latter a species of vectorial property. The details are rejected by Husserl; but the suggestion is intriguing on account of its obvious importance for theories of the numinous on one hand and of the psychological view of causality on the other. It was G. E. Müller who once remarked that contact with psychological problems was a pre-condition for any final acceptance of a system of physics. At this stage it is just as well perhaps that not everybody is irrevocably committed to a completely rigid necessitarianism in human affairs.

The question now is whether the *supposedly* real is *really* real. This is almost, if not quite, the fundamental connexion between phenomenology and epistemology. In other words, what, if anything, does the 'reality-phenomenon' tell us about 'real' reality? A number of criteria can be advanced in favour of the reality-phenomenon, of which the following are examples, not necessarily complete:

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(1) Readiness, (2) persistence, (3) the perceptual periphery, (4) boundaries in concrete objects, (5) independence, (6) resistance, (7) agreement. A conservative view would suggest that there is at least a measure of reality behind the reality-phenomenon; but this is not to assert that complete identity can be expected in the case of sense perception. It may well be that some kind of equivalence is the most that mankind can achieve.

Phenomenology has already been likened to an art. This resemblance receives new force from the concept of 'horizon' which Husserl first evolved in 1913. To explore the horizon implies a move away from 'under one's nose' to a broader context. In *Gestalt* terminology it is a drive for integration; in poetry the psalmist's cry, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help". Again, horizon simulates a frame, a hand outstretched towards articulation and a recognition of wholeness. But there is no need for such a frame to be irksome; ever new horizons appear as we shift away from the centre, a type of expanding experience. Teleological metaphysics invoked 'art' to couple together object and human situation: Husserl substituted 'constitution' and, as a result, found himself in an atmosphere of intense radical idealism.

A difficulty, apparently inseparable from much of this activity, arises from the temptation to assume that its penetrating light can be cast upon problems of theoretical physics in their present form. At the moment, this is an error. The contrast is mainly between logical empiricism and phenomenology, with little effect outside what the men of science would commonly call philosophy. Logical empiricism, flowing from the Sophists, continues in its historic course alongside, but separated from, the waters welling up from Plato and Aristotle and finding rest in Descartes and Leibniz. In a way, these latter seem nearer to Husserl. However, the natural sciences to-day are not altogether enamoured of Cartesianism, and a natural question to ask is whether any bridges exist, or whether they have already been blown. Two signs look hopeful (at least as regarded by those who believe it not impossible to retain and even to reinforce the solidarity of knowledge); one is the conviction, almost universally held, that Greek geometry is not *a priori*, and the other is the progress made in recent years in symbolic logic. A full grasp of these disciplines is only possible by liberating problems of origin from that mental habit which confuses mind with nature. Clearly, what is involved is no less than the whole structure of history, a position which some other thinkers have adopted, if not with quite the same ruthlessness as Husserl. It is interesting to notice how his radicalism pervades everything he does; it is with him much more than a mere *fapon de parler*. For example, he rejects the classical and more traditional concept of a 'root', in favour of the Empedoclean term. This latter is altogether more primitive. It connotes a rough, shapeless thing, rather than the perfect form of mature growth. This is potency—and teleology—with a vengeance; not the ideal—though that is what is sought—but the possibility of life and development. In this is displayed the true historian, and simultaneously the need for 'intentional history' if phenomenology is to live.

Paradoxically enough, however, Husserl produces an analysis of the origin of mathematical physics—without recourse to actual historical inquiry as we know it—by means of his intentional-historical

method; an example of the lengths to which empathetic treatment can go.

So far, phenomenology has appeared mainly in the company of the exact sciences; this, however, is far from the limit of its powers. We are faced with what it has to say about the social sciences, art, and in general, the immediate activities of mankind. Later on, however, it will be needful to return to mathematical symbolism, seeking therein the bond between Husserl's earliest work and our hopes for the future. Meanwhile, he strives to appreciate to the full the problem of the *alter ego*. His way of thinking can best be illustrated by a remarkable passage in which he 'dares' phenomenology to enter the dark corners of other people's experience and not to run away, adding that fear of the dark is only for children in philosophy, expecting at any moment to meet the bogey of solipsism. One cannot resist putting this side by side with the Pauline care for those of (spiritually) tender age, offering them milk rather than meat. Thus, as in Corinth long ago, so in Freiburg, the master will demand no more of his followers than he thinks they can bear. Even Leonardo da Vinci confesses to terror of a dark cave when searching for prehistoric bones, but overcoming his emotion, continues his quest and achieves his object. In the abstract, Husserl did much the same in his groping after a phenomenological basis for the social sciences. Above all, he is not prepared to immunize the physical world against mankind.

A natural step from here is into the realm of art. A measure of æsthetic purity involves appropriateness in that there must be purposeful accuracy for the expression of feeling: greatness in a work of art, however, demands profundity in making manifest the depths of being previously experienced. Some years ago Birkhoff evolved his æsthetic formula and by its means gained considerable success in objective judgment relating to patterns, vases, music and poetry. His method was restricted almost entirely to the formal domain of art. Later, the present writer attempted an application of *Gestalt* principles to paintings, based essentially upon energetics. This treatment tried to penetrate the fringe of the connotative region. Phenomenology shows a certain divine discontent with the ontological in its more naïve forms, very roughly analogous to the tendency of æsthetic experience to turn inwards upon itself. Nevertheless, though art may be more imaginative than truly inventive, there is an undisputed place for what Samuel Alexander has so well called 'constructive excitement'. Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus" contains the words "He binds with more cunning the boughs of the willows to whom the roots of the willows are known". This applies not only to the poet and to the philosopher but also to the man of science. In the early stages of knowledge trial and error may be the only way of making progress; later, a comprehensive grasp of 'requiredness' may enable the whole to be rapidly completed. One gains the impression that Husserl himself no less than those who write in support, or in criticism, of his doctrines are resolved to avoid the cruel folly of conducting a blind man into a pitch-dark room, to look for a black cat that isn't there.

For something like a couple of centuries physicists have worked away without any apparent regard whatsoever for metaphysics. Philosophers, for their part, have not failed to notice the impressive strength of scientific fact arrayed against their own internal conflicts of opinion and so forth. But they are con-

tinually re-examining some of their systems and stressing the need for yet another consideration of the relations between science and philosophy. Phenomenology has not escaped, but has been provisionally eased out a little on a frame of neopositivism. But the source of inspiration is still Husserl himself. Even his omissions and denials possess importance. For example, for him experience is immediately social in a limited sense, but to say "that one's own experience contains the actual experience of others as real, immanent elements" would be unacceptable by him.

Already in this review a mild defence of introspective methods in experimental psychology has been offered. In virtue of certain materialistic approaches to phenomenology which have been made, it is unavoidable that they must become attractive targets. But their very weakness was one reason among several which impelled the then youthful Wertheimer to heroic efforts to end or to mend psychology as it then was. The result was the founding of the *Gestalt* concept. Ironical as it may be, perhaps intentional-history is asserting itself within the sphere of embryonic research.

That phenomenology is an art, a methodology and even a way of life all at once, should not blind us to its main characteristic as a mental construct suitable for dealing with the Universal rather than with the Particular. It is therefore not surprising that some of Husserl's followers should be attempting something like a metaphysics of the factual element. One such system is sketched in the work now before us. It is distinguished for its moderation and resilience. At least, it is held, mankind can express a desire to understand the world without postulating that it is wholly 'intelligible'. It will suffice for the purpose if the world is 'fact', but not 'mere fact'. The significant point is contained in the attitude that slavery to fact may be quite as oppressive as that to 'authority' and the rationalizers. The latter types of bondage produced a series of explosions too well known to need recapitulation here. But a decision in advance never to venture outside 'mere fact' (if only, so to say, for fun, to see what happens) is as dyspeptic as it is unenterprising. Metaphysics is not prepared to come to terms finally either with 'authority' or with 'mere fact', if only because, should the world be meaningless, so would metaphysics be too. Doubtless there will be some dissent from much of this, but it is refreshingly robust all the same. One should not read these essays in and around Husserl's life and influence unless reasonably shock-proof. Their charm—which applies to one and all—resides very largely in an engaging humility and a certain lack of the doctrinaire, ready to 'take it all back' if something better can be found.

A contribution entitled "Men and the Law" is included in the collection. At first glance it would seem to have little to do with phenomenology. But it is followed by another, the theme of which is symbolic logic. The juxtaposition of these two articles was a happy thought, for between them they supply something very valuable indeed. Briefly, it amounts to this. The law says *yes* or *no*. It is not directly concerned with the vast majority of the events of daily life, which fall well within the excluded middle. Its power is of another kind. Now mathematicians are intent upon the quest of finding a place for *possibility* in symbolic logic, as 'objectivized' by Hilbert's quantifier ($\exists x$). Is it at least conceivable that, far ahead, some light will come from this

quarter to illuminate the very practical twilight subjects like rheology and, more generally, the applied sciences? A philosophy of the latter is awaited with some impatience for regions in which academic simplifications do not, and cannot, hold, and wherein 'facing the facts' is almost literally all that can be done.

So now, Prof. Marvin Farber and his colleagues bring their tribute volume to an end. Poured forth in honour of a master mind, their libations leave a most gracious and lasting impress, as they trickle silently away.

ESTABLISHMENT OF VEGETATION ON COAL TIPS AND OTHER SPOIL MOUNDS

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SPOIL mounds of varying type and composition are the inevitable end-product of many mining and manufacturing operations. Anyone familiar with the Black Country of England or the mining areas of South Wales, to cite two important examples, well knows how the countryside can be disfigured by these tips. Under natural conditions considerable time may elapse before even a coarse grass or scrub vegetation becomes established on such material, and then the result is of little aesthetic or economic value. While in the past a certain amount of work has been undertaken locally in reclaiming tips of various kinds, usually through afforestation, such programmes have been limited in scope and difficult to maintain. It is only recently that there has been any widespread interest regarding the vegetation of spoil mounds by artificial means, with or without preliminary levelling, in order to improve the landscape, amenities and living conditions in the districts concerned. It is the purpose of this short article to indicate how knowledge on the ecology of pioneer vegetation, both forest and grassland, can be applied to this particular problem, and to suggest methods of establishing a vegetation cover on what may appear to be a not particularly promising medium.

In Great Britain, the industries responsible for spoil mounds include coal-mining, quarrying for iron and other minerals, and the manufacture of chemicals pottery and glass. The vegetation of the tips and general waste material from these industries has been referred to in the reports of the Scott and Kenne Committees, and is receiving the attention of several Ministries, of local planning organizations such as the West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, of local authorities such as borough councils in South Wales, and of the industries themselves. The problem is also being studied in the United States, South Africa and Germany.

When once the planning authority has decided on the general purpose of the reclamation, whether for amenity purposes (landscape improvement and provision of parks and recreation grounds) or for yielding an economic return, it becomes the task of the plan ecologist and the soil specialist to decide which species