obligation. This is one of the few places in which Hannay’s skill as a biographer is called forth, and he indeed recounts the course of their relationship and separation with insight. Other episodes from Kierkegaard’s life that are worth relating are few and far between, consisting in the main of rather trifling occurrences apart from their subject’s unique, and often unbalanced, interpretations. Indeed, it is here that what is genuinely interesting in Kierkegaard’s biography is most apparent (one might say exclusively apparent)—not in the outward events of this writer’s life, or even the course of his philosophical reflection (for which one may read his books or the non-biographical scholarship that already exists), but in deeper psychological waters into which Hannay does not venture. Although the raw material for such a project is plentiful (beginning with the omnipresence of death in Kierkegaard’s early life, a decidedly melancholic temperament, and his frequent bouts of paranoia), Hannay plainly has no interest in making Kierkegaard the subject of a psychological analysis, wishing instead to remain on the terra firma of textual analysis and intellectual biography, yet the price he pays for having done so is to have given us a work that is scarcely more interesting than the life it recounts and less interesting than the texts Kierkegaard left us.

In the end one cannot fault the biographer for the less than fascinating life of his or her subject. Søren Kierkegaard was nothing less than one of the preeminent writers of his time. He also was nothing more. If *Kierkegaard: A Biography* is to be recommended at all, it is less for the biographical material Hannay provides than for his chronological treatment of Kierkegaard’s texts, a treatment that typically provides illumination upon the work of eminent thinkers, this book being no exception.

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*Fenomenologia dell’essere umano. Lineamenti di una filosofia al femminile*  
[Phenomenology of Human Being: Features of a Female Philosophy]  
ANGELA ALES BELLO  

The increased presence of women in the recent history of philosophy has generated a question hardly imaginable in previous eras of Western thought: Has philosophy changed because of this increased presence, or has it remained the same, with its traditional load of interrogatives and methodologies? Quite evidently, gender issues flourished in the twentieth century, and in particular over the last thirty years, as a direct consequence of the growth of feminism in almost all academic areas. However, this is not what Angela Ales Bello chooses to deal with in her
Instead, she intends to probe the influence of female philosophers at a deeper level, namely at the level of reinterpretation of “classical” philosophical topics. It is Ales Bello’s hope to be able to demonstrate that women have brought about new philosophical perspectives within old philosophical contexts, and precisely by virtue of their being women. She believes that there is “a characteristic manner of proceeding in philosophical inquiry that reveals a feminine attitude” (17).

Ales Bello focuses on phenomenology. She wants to show that Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Edith Stein, and Gerda Walther contributed to the development of phenomenological studies in a way that would have been impossible for their male colleagues. In particular, she explores the reformulation of Husserl’s discipline that these three authors achieved. Ales Bello takes Edmund Husserl as the intellectual interlocutor of these three female philosophers for three reasons. First, as Ales Bello is one of the foremost Italian authorities in the history of phenomenology, her reader can thereby be assured of the reliability and accuracy of her analyses. Second, she lets Husserl play the double role of a “classical” philosopher revisited by women and a male philosopher revisited by women. Third, Husserl represents a specific conceptual background that Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther knew very well, and which they explicitly acknowledged as moving beyond in their development of new phenomenological horizons. Husserl may thus be regarded as a theoretical and historical filter through which their originality can be tested, and their distinctive quality of being female can be detected.

Interestingly, the first chapter of the book deals with a crucial issue in the history of Husserl’s philosophy—namely, idealism versus realism. It is with regard to this issue that the phenomenological movement experienced a dramatic fracture between those who followed Husserl toward an idealistic conception of philosophy, and those who wanted to keep a firmer grip on empirical reality. Among the three female philosophers Ales Bello discusses, Hedwig Conrad-Martius is the one who most explicitly rejected Husserl’s approach. According to her interpretation of Husserl’s position, he dissolved the ontology of the external world by granting epistemological and methodological primacy to the logical space of the subject’s consciousness, as if the empirical could be reduced to the logical, invariant structures of experience within the subject’s cogitatio. While both Husserl and Conrad-Martius thought of the cognition of the external world as a collection of phenomena given to the subject via experience, Conrad-Martius refused to deny any ontological autonomy of the empirical on the basis of mere epistemological considerations. She was deeply aware of the enormous progress achieved by the Naturwissenschaften since the beginning of the twentieth century, and she did not want to ignore the input coming from these areas of research. Thus, separating ontological and epistemological themes, she depicted the empirical as a necessary precondition for the birth and evolution of the invariant structures of experience, to which alone Husserl devoted his attention. Edith Stein and Gerda
Walther also affirmed the ontological autonomy of the external world against Husserl’s phenomenological idealism, but in a less dramatic way. Instead of proceeding from the individual subject alone, they investigated specific experiences of intersubjectivity, with particular regard to the cases of empathy and religious faith. Through extensive phenomenological analyses of empathy and faith, Stein and Walther revealed the necessity of an ontological alterity—i.e., something external to the subject’s consciousness—for the possibility of such experiences.

In the second chapter, Ales Bello highlights the contrast between these three female philosophers and Husserl by recalling Conrad-Martius’ publications on the phenomenology of nature, in which she maintained that the external world should be granted complete ontological autonomy, equal, if not prior, to that of the subject. If any dependency of the empirical on the subject was to be indicated, she argued, this form of subordination was to be encountered exclusively at the phenomenological level. In this manner she rejected Husserl’s own approach, which she regarded as endorsing an undeclared primacy of the subjective phenomenological level over the ontological.

The mood of the book changes in the third chapter, when Ales Bello outlines Conrad-Martius’ and Stein’s theories of the soul. Quite contrary to the role he played in the first two chapters, Husserl is now embraced as the preeminent point of reference, whose illuminated theories supply promising paths to follow. His typology of the soul, divided into a psychic activity (of the Seele) and a spiritual one (of the Geist), provides both Conrad-Martius and Stein with the general conceptual framework for their phenomenological analyses of the soul. That both were able to adopt this general framework is particularly striking when we consider that their inspiration in this particular regard derived from two quite different sources: for Conrad-Martius this was the psychological research of Jung and Jaspers, whereas for Stein it was the work of Bergson.

In the fourth chapter, Ales Bello sketches the main features of Stein’s and Walther’s phenomenology of community, once again turning a more critical eye on Husserl. While Husserl had hinted at the possibility of a sociological or political phenomenology (viz. the intentional character of empathy, the parallelism between the subject and the community, the relevance of social and historical habitualities in the forming of the subject’s structures of experience), both Walther and Stein were disappointed by Husserl’s failure to articulate and elaborate this possibility in any depth. Criticizing Husserl’s position as “solipsistic,” or “egologocentric,” the task of developing an actual phenomenology of community fell to Walther and Stein. As anticipated in Ales Bello’s first chapter, one of the results of their analysis was the discovery that, from an ontological point of view, there must be more than the lone individual subject. In fact, they argued that the subject manifests the need for the presence of other subjects and for their mutual interaction (viz. empathy and love); besides, it is only in this manner that a subject can come to light, evolve and realize its own being-a-subject.
The fifth chapter discusses another theme already anticipated in the first chapter: religious faith. Not dissimilar to the cases of empathy and love, religious experience was also used by Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther to distinguish their position from Husserl's. Against the teaching of their mentor, they considered religion a topic worth analyzing using the instruments of phenomenology. This did not imply that philosophy was now to be seen as a courtroom for the mystical. On the contrary, as had already happened with Conrad-Martius' phenomenology of nature, the three phenomenologists opened the field to all the cultural realities that have characterized the history of the Western world, endorsing a pluralistic and thoroughly open-minded approach. Science, art, politics, religion, philosophy—all were said to be valuable areas with distinctive traits and specific assumptions, both epistemological and ontological. All these diverse fields of human inquiry could be combined with one another, while at the same time recognizing and respecting their independence and autonomy. Stein and Walther thus came to formulate a phenomenology of mystical experience, which they saw as philosophically acceptable insofar as it presented itself in the form of actual human experience that is in many respects no different from many other more trivial experiences.

Ales Bello's *Fenomenologia dell'essere umano* is a clear, learned, and synthetic sketch of the works of three major phenomenologists. But what does this sketch tell us about the female element that, according to Ales Bello, these philosophers introduced within the "classical" context of phenomenology? Ales Bello claims that "three fundamental moments can be enunciated: the kind of research, the specificity of the method and the prevalence of the topics" (17). In other words, the female element sought by Ales Bello is identified in the fact that these three women chose to pursue phenomenological studies, favored a realistic approach, and shared an interest in the realms of nature, community, and religion. Put in this way, however, the indication of something uniquely feminine in these three features sounds rather dubious. First, a number of male philosophers present the same set of characteristics (viz. Adolf Reinach, Jean Herring). Second, in the same historical period, other female philosophers pursued quite different research, using alternative methods, and preferring other topics (viz. Hannah Arendt, Ayn Rand). Third, and more radically, the categories employed by Bello are, in the end, too broad to determine conclusively whether Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther did in fact reconfigure phenomenological inquiry in a decidedly female manner. Nature, community, and religion, not to mention phenomenological realism or phenomenology, are umbrella-terms that are simply too broad in meaning to be employed convincingly in the identification of a typical female territory. Quite a number of male authors could be included under the same umbrella.

This problem becomes more obvious, and more serious, in the concluding section of her book, where Ales Bello offers a few remarks concerning the gender issue she is addressing. For example:
We cannot ignore ... that if there is a feminine sensitivity in tackling issues, in facing the solution of problems, this sensitivity can characterize some philosophical positions endorsed by women.... What we want to underline ... is that this change of attitude, programmatically proposed and actually maintained in the phenomenological analyses, is very congenial to the feminine sensitivity and henceforth appeals to many female scholars (189–90).

Appealing to a “feminine sensitivity” sounds like an attempt to defend a position that one knows to be weak—and indeed, there is a problem here. In order to identify some possible features of feminine sensitivity, we can return to Ales Bello’s Introduction, where she mentions Edith Stein’s work on pedagogy:

In general ... the female species is characterized by the unity of the entire bodily-spiritual personality, in which all potentialities are harmonically developed, whereas the male species tends to the elevation of single energies activated at the highest degree; hence a different attitude towards the real and a different direction of one’s activity follow (13).

Reading her reflections further suffices to make clear just how poorly founded Ales Bello’s thesis really is:

This does not mean, in the first place, that these characteristics are to be found only in biological female beings—they can be found also in male ones—and, in the second place, that the specific qualities so positively described are present in all women (13–4).

In order to avoid this problem, she might have restricted herself to the claim that Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther contributed in enriching the phenomenological movement in a general way, i.e., as philosophers tout-court. Together with a number of male colleagues, they allowed phenomenology to develop new dimensions of inquiry, beyond those acknowledged by Edmund Husserl. The philosophical genius of Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Walther, together with their sociological relevance in terms of women’s self-assertion, would have been enough to glorify their names. Bello is evidently dissatisfied with such a solution. Why does this glorification extend to their gender? I can only hypothesize an answer, of course. It is likely that she intended to help the development of gender studies, which only recently has gained strength in the Italian academic context, which has been generally more skeptical about these studies than the
Anglo-American.

From a scholarly point of view, Angela Ales Bello’s book succeeds as an illuminating collection of historical and theoretical investigations of three great phenomenologists, and as such is to be recommended. But as a contribution to gender studies it is highly questionable.

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*The Phenomenology of Modern Legal Discourse*

WILLIAM E. CONKLIN

William Conklin’s *The Phenomenology of Modern Legal Discourse* draws on literature, case study, and continental philosophy to take contemporary legal language to task. Conklin is critical of the ways in which modern legal discourse negates litigants, and proposes in his book that the very language of the courts is responsible for undermining the people it professes to represent. The book is written for lawyers and law students, laden with citations, cross-references, and historical contextualization. Given its breadth and cursory treatment of the philosophers it discusses, it provides an expansive, albeit superficial, introduction to the continental tradition. At the same time, it cautions would-be lawyers to the potential travesty of their own profession. First-year law students and seasoned lawyers alike would be advised to take Conklin’s detailed and deftly outlined position into consideration, if only to understand the limitations of the juridical domain.

Like many writers of the phenomenological tradition, Conklin does not explicitly offer a normative assessment of that which he dissects. Rather, he picks apart the nuances of modern legal discourse to uncover what happens to the experiences of litigants when they are translated into language that is understandable to lawyers. He crafts a position that is part phenomenology, part critical theory, highlighting the semantic violence that the judicial branch inflicts upon the lifeworld. Though he does not condemn legal discourse outright, he issues a tacit warning for legal scholars and students about the potential imperialism of their field.

The book begins provocatively. The reader’s attention is first drawn to Franz Kafka’s *K* (from *Der Prozess*) as he meanders his way through the impenetrable channels of the convoluted German legal bureaucracy. K is the paradigmatic litigant, claims Conklin, insofar as he returns home one random day to discover that he has been issued a subpoena to appear in court. What follows for him is a tortuous route of self-discovery, in which neither K nor his legal advisors