

Husserl and Stein

RICHARD FEIST and WILLIAM SWEET, Editors

Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003; 202 pages.

With the popularity of Edith Stein growing so rapidly today, new collections of critical essays such as this are in urgent demand. Feist and Sweet's collection is especially welcome, for in locating Stein in the context of the early days of phenomenology, and in addressing explicitly the relation of her thought to Husserl's it fills an important niche for the newcomer to Stein studies. Sweet and Feist introduce the ten essays here collected with a twenty-page discussion of "Husserl, Stein, and Phenomenology," in which they offer brief biographies and general historical observations that will prove especially helpful to the student who comes to this subject with little or no knowledge of phenomenology. But this student is also to be cautioned, for the editors occasionally repeat misleading caricatures and common misconceptions. We find an example of the latter when they write: "Husserl is reputed to have said that Stein was the best doctoral student he ever had—which is remarkable given that Heidegger was also a student of Husserl's—and in 1916 he chose Stein to be his assistant..." (10). In point of fact, Heidegger never studied under Husserl; he served as his assistant (following Stein), but he never took any courses or received any formal supervision from Husserl. (This criticism might seem trivial, but little points like this often prove extremely important. If we continue to misinform our students in this regard, for example, how are they ever going to understand how it is that we find Husserl, in his notorious letter to Pfänder of January 6, 1931, bemoaning the fact that Heidegger has never understood phenomenology?) Such minor shortcomings aside, Sweet and Feist do provide the student with the bare basics required for accessing the material, and the essays that follow continue to flesh out the general historical context while at the same time illuminating important particular features of the respective phenomenologies of Husserl and Stein. Only four of the ten short papers here collected focus on Stein; four discuss quite particular aspects of Husserlian phenomenology, and two present different portions of the historical context of early phenomenology. The collection opens with the historical pieces, then moves on to the studies of Husserl, closing with the four essays on Stein.

In "Brentano and Intentionality," Rolf George points out how Brentano's development of the notion of intentionality was initially inspired and remained informed by critical reflection on Aristotelian psychology. Along the way, George takes his reader on a learned historical romp through some neglected territory of early modern philosophy, pausing to make certain that we appreciate Brentano's indebtedness not only to the tradition of Aristotle, but also to the pre-Kantian tradition to which Leibniz belonged. Anoop Gupta turns our attention to a different historical context in "Altered State: American Empiricism, Austrian Rationalism, and Universal Intuition." As he remarks, "James was read by Husserl, and in turn [Husserl] was studied by Gödel after 1959, in order to clarify his notion of intuition" (38). Gupta argues that this notion never did get clarified, and that it is only within the framework provided by naturalized epistemology that we can properly appreciate the cognitive value of intuition.

Richard Holmes tackles the notorious central question of "The Sixth Meditation"—namely, "how a phenomenologist can explicate a subjectivity

that both belongs in the world and yet constitutes objectivity and its world" (49). Building on his analysis of an analogy drawn from quantum physics, Holmes argues that we must rethink the nature both of the Ego and of its constitutive activity. He concludes: "The solution to the problem of how to explicate the subject as both constituting the world and itself as in the world while being independently and apart from the world appears in seeing that the subject and object are present only as I constitute them and not before. The photon was not somewhere before it is detected nor is the egg or I" (55). René Jagnow's impressively argued "Carnap, Husserl, Euclid, and the Idea of a Material Geometry" has as its goal the formulation of "a coherent notion of such a geometry" (58), and each of its three parts is devoted to one step in this formulation. In the first part, Jagnow critically assesses the account of a material geometry that Carnap offered in his doctoral dissertation (*Der Raum*, 1922), demonstrating that it fails due to two problems: "intuition is restricted to a limited region of space and material geometry is constructed as an axiomatic system in the contemporary sense" (58). In the second part he argues that Husserl's account of spatial intuition enables us to avoid the first problem, and in the third part of his paper he suggests "a non-standard interpretation of Euclid's method in the *Elements* that circumvents Carnap's second problem" (58). Feist's "Reductions and Relativity" deals with a related issue. After outlining Herman Minkowski's geometrical articulation of special relativity, central to which is the conception of "space-time," Feist suggests that it was quite natural for Hermann Weyl subsequently to explicate Minkowski's interpretation in the philosophical language of Husserl's phenomenology. Feist does a good job of explaining how Weyl saw himself able to proclaim that "the real world, and every one of its constituents with their accompanying characteristics, are, and can only be given as, intentional objects of acts of consciousness" (Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, trans. H. L. Brose [New York: Dover, 1952], 4). David L. Thompson states the somewhat bold main point of "Are There Really Appearances? Dennett and Husserl on Seemings and Presence" as follows: "Husserl's description of phenomena as present to subjectivity and Dennett's rejection of real seemings share a common understanding of mental reality and of the nature of consciousness" (111). Thompson does, however, tone this point down a bit in his concluding paragraph, in which he points to what he takes to be the fundamental difference between the tasks of the two thinkers: "I wish to emphasize once again, in conclusion, the radical disparity between Husserl's project and Dennett's project. Husserl sets out to find a solid foundation for science in the investigation of consciousness. Dennett wants to explain consciousness on the basis of science. What they have in common is their conception of the nature of consciousness, or at the very least, their agreement about what consciousness is not" (117).

The four papers on Stein are probably the most valuable in this collection. In "Other Bodies and Other Minds in Edith Stein: Or, How to Talk about Empathy," Judy Miles argues against "certain feminist critics who have claimed that it is incorrect to describe empathy as 'projection'" (119). Miles presents the feminist criticism quite concisely: "We have seen that the Oxford English Dictionary defines empathy as 'the power of projecting one's personality into the object of contemplation' and this certainly seems to capture Edith Stein's understanding of the notion. The four authors of

Women's Ways of Knowing, however, complain that the OED's definition of empathy as 'projection' favors the masculine point of view. They write, 'this phallic imagery may capture the masculine experience of empathy, but it strikes many women—Nel Noddings, for example—as a peculiar description of 'feeling with'" (121; Miles cites: Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing* [New York: Basic Books, 1986], 122; she also notes Nel Noddings, *Caring* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 30). Miles rightly wonders what exactly it is that is phallic about projection, and she also takes Noddings to task: "While [Noddings's] idea of 'receiving the other into myself' might seem a kinder, gentler image than that of 'projection' I think that Noddings's description is actually the wrong way to talk about empathy and not Stein's or the OED's" (122). This is a well-argued, no-nonsense little piece, and it will make the reader wish that Miles had been able to pursue a subsequent, positive task of articulating Stein's view of empathy at far greater length. As it happens, however, Ernest J. McCullough continues this very task in "Edith Stein and Intersubjectivity." McCullough's concise treatment of Stein's conception of the person as a "psycho-physical being" is of particular value, for it points to the Aristotelian foundation not only of Stein's thought, but also of the work of many of Husserl's students who were at the same time his first and most powerful critics. Marianne Sawicki has written extensively on Stein, and her expertise in the area of early phenomenology becomes apparent already in the opening sentences of her short but insightful contribution, "The Humane Community: Husserl versus Stein." This brief contribution targets the area of social/political theory, which—as she admirably documents—remained largely neglected by Husserl. As she correctly points out, Husserl's few comments in this regard appear to have been inspired by Stein's research. Given the necessary brevity of the paper, Sawicki does a remarkably good job of pointing to the relevance of the powerful, emerging mentality of National Socialism in the early days of the phenomenological movement. Chantal Beauvais contributes the closing selection of the book, "Edith Stein and Modern Philosophy." Attempting to situate "Stein's work in relation to contemporary debates" (158), Beauvais adopts Ricoeur's distinction between "strong modernity" and "weak modernity" (which he introduces in *Oneself as Another*) and argues that Stein integrates the central concerns of each of these "modernities" in her notion of "transcendental truth." Toward the conclusion of her argument, Beauvais points out the fundamental relevance of Stein's conception of empathy, thereby pulling together all four of the papers on Stein included in Feist and Sweet's collection.

The major drawback of this collection perhaps serves a positive function. The papers are so short that none of them is really capable of doing justice to the subject matter. The reader is constantly left with the feeling that far more could, and should, be said about these things. This is especially the case with the papers on Stein. Perhaps this collection will help to foster general interest in the work of this profound thinker, who has been marginalized for far too long, and thereby further the task of honest, rigorous phenomenology.

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