

INTERPRETING HUSSERL

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DAVID CARR

INTERPRETING HUSSERL

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INTERPRETING HUSSERL

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for
LESLIE CARR
with love and thanks

Preface

Edmund Husserl's importance for the philosophy of our century is immense, but his influence has followed a curious path. Rather than continuous it has been recurrent, ambulatory and somehow irrepressible: no sooner does it wane in one locality than it springs up in another. After playing a major role in Germany during his lifetime, Husserl had been filed away in the history-books of that country when he was discovered by the French during and after World War II. And just as the phenomenological phase of French philosophy was ending in the 1960's, Husserl became important in North America. There his work was first taken seriously by a sizable minority of dissenters from the Anglo-American establishment, the tradition of conceptual and linguistic analysis. More recently, some philosophers within that tradition have drawn on certain of Husserl's central concepts (intentionality, the noema) in addressing problems in the philosophy of mind and the theory of meaning.

This is not to say that Husserl's influence in Europe has altogether died out. It may be that he is less frequently discussed there directly, but (as I try to argue in the introductory essay of this volume) his influence lives on in subtler forms, in certain basic attitudes, strategies and problems. If analytic philosophers now take seriously some important accomplishments of Husserl's early and middle years, the central theme of his late work, the interplay between lifeworld, history and rationality, seems to be reappearing as a problem in recent German and French thought.

One way or another, it is clear that Husserl has long since ceased to be merely the founding father of phenomenology, or the forerunner of this or that philosopher, or the precursor of certain

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trends. He has joined the ranks of those great thinkers whose thought seems inexhaustible in its richness, to whose works we are repeatedly returning, and whose ideas we are continually trying to understand and appropriate.

The essays in this volume, previously published in different places, have been brought together in the hope that in collected form they may contribute to that work of appropriation. They were written between 1972 and 1986, and thus represent various stages in the project of 'interpreting Husserl' in which I am still engaged. I have not attempted to eliminate any inconsistencies which may have resulted from changes in my interpretations or criticisms over the years. Only minor and superficial revisions have been made. Certain themes and concerns persist: the problem of conceptual relativism, the relation of phenomenology to history, the concepts of intentionality and of the lifeworld. While the essays might have been arranged according to such themes, or in chronological order, a third principle of arrangement in the end seems most appropriate.

Part one is entitled simply 'Husserl' to indicate that I am dealing here primarily with problems internal to the philosopher's work. The emergence of history as an important concept in Husserl's late writings, and the problems it poses for his phenomenology, are matters which began to interest me when I translated Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences*¹ and which led to a book on the topic.² Two of the papers in this section deal with the same themes, one in connection primarily with the *Crisis*, the other dealing chiefly with *Experience and Judgment*. A third is related to them, and deals with the problem of intersubjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl's phenomenology seemed to me to be threatened from within by a form of conceptual relativism in these late works, but it subsequently occurred to me that the roots of this threat could be traced to earlier works as well. 'Phenomenology and Relativism' tries to show this, and since it deals with the early Husserl I have placed it first in this group. The chronology of Husserl's work then leads me to follow it with the essay on the Fifth Meditation and to conclude with the two discussions of the late works.

The essays in Part Two, 'Husserl and Others', attempt to relate Husserl to other philosophers and currents of thought, each in

connection with a particular topic: certain analytic philosophers on intentionality, Dilthey and Heidegger on temporality, Kant on the transcendental ego, J.N. Findlay on realism, idealism and the *epoché*, hermeneutical philosophers on self-evidence, etc. To the original titles of these essays I have in some cases added subtitles which help identify their contents. Two of these essays were originally written in German and appear here for the first time in English.

The third section is entitled 'Husserl and Beyond'. In these essays Husserl serves as a point of departure for the development of ideas he might or might not have found congenial. They were written as preparatory studies for a book on the philosophy of history in which the concepts of temporality and of the social subject play an important role.³ The book is not about Husserl and in some respects departs even from phenomenology, but it owes much to Husserl and would not have been possible had I not been trying to think through and beyond him. The same is true of these essays, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to include them here.

NOTES

1. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans., with an introduction by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
2. *Phenomenology and the Problem of History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
3. *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).