

ANGELA ALES BELLO,

*Edith Stein and Edmund Husserl. Philosophical Exchanges*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2025, pp. 222

Angela Ales Bello's *Edith Stein and Edmund Husserl. Philosophical Exchanges* proposes with gentle wisdom and mature erudition a profoundly helpful vision, which also is a summons to do, and to stand in the tradition of, "Classical Phenomenology". So, what is it?; what is "Classical Phenomenology"?

Reading the book, I got the impression that what was being intimated, described, or revealed was something essentially straight and yet flexible in relation to which different positions (in this case those of Husserl and Stein) oscillate: a yardstick, a measure, an ideal. Inadequate images came to mind.

First, Hermes' staff *Caduceus* with its two serpents spiralling up along it and with wings on the top, often mistaken for Asclepius' staff with its single serpent. Both staffs are used as a symbol of medicine, but Hermes' staff *Caduceus* is also a symbol of commerce, perhaps representing the healing properties of equally balanced positions for the purpose of negotiation.

The second image that came to mind is the double helix of the structure of DNA, which spirals around itself by its own double shape, as it enables and sustains life. We understand this shape to be characteristic of all life, while containing in itself the "straight measure" which can be bent (to a limited extent), compressed, and twisted without losing its functionality, probably because it is spiritual in nature and therefore transcends its material substructure.

Classical Phenomenology is of course the return to the things themselves: a discipline so fundamental that no image could be adequate for it. But the two perspectives portrayed, that of Husserl and that of Stein, brought those images to mind: two complementary positions, of a teacher and of a student, oscillating around an ideal and best interpreted in the light of each other. Other positions oscillate around the same standard, but what is so engaging about this book is that the two perspectives in their oscillations "reveal" the standard in its straightness, to an extent I have not seen before.

I note that this vision is gaining ground, also as regards Husserl and Stein. It has for example become relatively common to refer to there being a common position of Husserl and Stein on empathy. The recent study by James Jardine: *Empathy, Embodiment, and the Person. Husserlian Investigations of Social Experience and the Self* (Springer, Berlin 2022), includes, for example, under "Husserlian investigations", Stein's investigation of empathy. Stein, of course, was a "Husserlian" in the sense that she was a student of Husserl and was profoundly inspired by him. Thus, it does make good sense to call her position "Husserlian". But she was also something else and more than this – something that allowed her to complete Husserlian investigations in the most becoming of ways. The synthesis (of Stein's and Husserl's phenomenology of empathy) also allows for what Dermot Moran, for example, refers to as *The Phenomenological Approach* (in

*The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, 2019, pp. 205-215): a collective approach, which significantly contributes to the usefulness of phenomenology for practical research (see for example Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, Routledge, London 2014).

Yet, there are aspects about the vision's clarity in Ales Bello's book that surprised me. I had not expected to see that interpreting both Husserl and Stein by means of each other is not only helpful for what concerns "their" understanding of empathy and intersubjectivity, but also for "their" understanding of metaphysics, ethics, and religion. This research agenda seems to me to be a game changer, one that will equip "Classical Phenomenology" to play its role in contemporary philosophy as its mean and straight standard much better than it has hitherto.

Ales Bello's clarity about the straight standard of "Classical Phenomenology" is achieved by means of three insights. The first insight consists in assuming that "philosophical anthropology", despite Husserl's rejection of the term, is central to the inquiry of both authors. It allows for an understanding of "consciousness" to be key to the constitution of the human person and for Stein's religiously informed educational anthropology to find a space directly in the phenomenological project.

The second insight is a sensible handling of the realism/idealism debate so that its excesses are cancelled in both authors. The third insight is a reading of Husserl's metaphysics (from *Grenzphänomene*), that sees it as truly explanatory of his phenomenological position despite its "privacy", understanding this latter to be typically "Protestant" and as such chosen by Husserl.

To illustrate the relative newness and radicality of the focus on "Classical Phenomenology" let me point to two instances of interpretation of Husserl, which despite not reading his understanding of empathy in the light of Stein's and thus acceding to "Classical Phenomenology", has achieved great prominence in the phenomenological tradition.

Emmanuel Levinas, who hosted and translated Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, dedicated his entire career to critiquing intentionality as violent as regards the other. His take on Husserl may have been influenced by Heidegger, but it is clear that were one to read *Cartesian Meditations* in the light of Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy*, such a stance as Levinas' would not be likely to occur, nor would it indeed be defensible. Yet, Levinas' many followers, who did not share the vision of "Classical Phenomenology" intimated by Ales Bello and inclusive of Stein's "Husserlian" perspective, *did* think it credible. Reading Husserl on his own – in a manner at odds with "Classical Phenomenology" thus gave rise to some formidable critics of phenomenology.

Another of these is Paul Ricœur. He read Husserl (inclusive even of *Ideas II*, which contained Steinian accents), as not providing a constitutional analysis of the body and therefore as being unable to address the matters he wanted to discuss in his *The Voluntary and the Involuntary (Introduction)*. He had, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, read Stein's *Psychic Causality*, he could not have arrived at that idea. He would also have been led to the constitutional analysis of the body present in *On the Problem of Empathy*, founding the analyses of the *Contributions*. From the perspective of "Classical Phenomenology"

the body, the psyche, emotions, instinct, and sociality are indeed all phenomena with which Phenomenology deals through both eidetic and constitutional analyses. There is no need to restrict methodology to eidetic phenomenology, as Ricœur with regret proposes as his methodology in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*.

The emphasis on “Classical Phenomenology” therefore clearly does represent a shift in attention. The new reading of Husserl proposed by Ales Bello reveals that knowing Stein is an aid to knowing Husserl: since it brings out with great clarity what may otherwise be so implicit, that it is easily overlooked. The opposite is also the case: Knowing Husserl is likewise an aid to knowing Stein. This insight will give the reading of Stein’s ontology and metaphysics in the light of Husserl’s new impetus in the years to come.

However, the best of it all is that the focus obtained allows for things to fall into place in the useful discipline that is Classical Phenomenology.

It is the great achievement of Angela Ales Bello to have presented us with the clear vision of it in *Edith Stein and Edmund Husserl. Philosophical Exchanges*. The book crowns a lifetime of work in the service of discipline and is to be welcomed as a milestone.

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