

Book Review

Edmund Husserl, *Briefwechsel* (Husserliana Dokumente III). Edited by Karl Schuhmann in collaboration with Elisabeth Schuhmann. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994. NLG 2500/USD 1500, in ten volumes, as follows:

- vol. I: *Die Brentanoschule*, ix+215 pp.
- vol. II: *Die Münchener Phänomenologen*, xi+293 pp.
- vol. III: *Die Göttinger Schule*, xv+601 pp.
- vol. IV: *Die Freiburger Schüler*, xvii+580 pp.
- vol. V: *Die Neukantianer*, ix+244 pp.
- vol. VI: *Philosophenbriefe*, xv+516 pp.
- vol. VII: *Wissenschaftlerkorrespondenz*, xi+330 pp.
- vol. VIII: *Institutionelle Schreiben*, xii+336 pp.
- vol. IX: *Einführung und Register*, vi+209 pp.

During the first three decades or so of this century, it was in the German-speaking world that almost all of the most important philosophical advances were being made. The figure primarily responsible for this predominance of Germanic philosophizing was Edmund Husserl, and the present mammoth edition of Husserl's correspondence provides a document of the period that is of immense historical importance. The philosophical heart of the edition is contained in the first four volumes, which correspond to the four phases of Husserl's philosophical career: as follower of Brentano, as mentor of the realist phenomenologists in Munich (the founders of the 'phenomenological movement'), and as professor, successively, in Göttingen and Freiburg. The remaining five volumes of letters pertain to Husserl's correspondence with philosophers and other scholars outside the inner circle of the phenomenological movement, with institutions and editors, and with family members and friends. Volume X comprises a masterly introduction to the edition by the Schuhmanns, together with chronological tables and seven separate indexes enabling the user to trace references in the letters to Husserl's own publications, manuscripts and lectures, as well as to persons, institutions and places.

The edition is prepared according to strict critical principles in the style of the Husserliana series, and each of the first nine volumes contains a text-critical appendix comprising variant readings as well as indications as to the sources, dating and context of the letters and also of the drafts and transcriptions reproduced in the main text. The editors have provided myriad clarificatory footnotes to the letters themselves, giving relevant details of

the events and persons mentioned. These notes and the many indexes make the edition very easy to use. Not merely does it constitute a historical monument in its own right, but it is also – like Karl Schuhmann's *Husserl-Chronik* (a work that is now, not least in virtue of the wealth of material here presented, in need of radical revision) – a work of reference which will do much to facilitate further research into the period in question and into the background of Husserl's thinking.

Strict critical principles imply also that the letters appear as far as possible in a form in which they are untouched by editorial hand. All extant letters are included without further comment, even letters of the "I have forgotten my umbrella" type. Some may suppose that a more satisfactory result would have been achieved had the editors sought out and published only what seemed to them to be philosophically valuable or interesting in the material in hand. Decisions of this sort were indeed made, in effect, by the editors of the works of Brentano and Wittgenstein. The consequences of these decisions are already clear to those engaged in scholarly work on these philosophers: the existing editions will have to be done again from scratch.

Much of what is philosophically interesting in Husserl's letters is of course already known. Fragments of this correspondence were often used in the introductions to the successive volumes of the *Husserliana* series, and editions already exist of Husserl's correspondence for example with Frege, Ingarden, Meinong and Weyl. Even in respect of the latter, however, the present edition offers a bonus in the form of greater completeness: it includes not only minor letters from Husserl to Ingarden which were not included in the *Briefe an Roman Ingarden* of 1968, but also, and more importantly, Ingarden's extant replies to Husserl's letters, including a valuable draft by Ingarden on the issue of idealism-realism composed in July 1918 (III, 183–200).

The edition shows Husserl as a tireless propagandizer on behalf of his own work. But equally they reveal him as someone whose primary and most passionate concern is for *the things themselves*. Moreover they make clear that Husserl was not someone who would try to seal himself off from criticism. Indeed those who were most critical of his thinking were often, most strikingly in the case of Ingarden and the famous Daubert, those with whom Husserl sought most intensively to remain in contact.

The edition reveals much effort on Husserl's part to secure posts for his students and disciples; they thereby reveal also much backbiting and petty intrigue. One theme which runs through the edition is Husserl's sad priority dispute with Meinong (e.g., at II, 83 f., VI, 200, VII, 59). Another is his

philosophical dependence on the external stimulation provided by cigars and strong coffee (II 48 ff., 61 f., 66 and compare Husserliana IV, 321 and XXVIII, 409). The edition reveals also occasions when Husserl is admitted to hospital with nicotine poisoning (II, 200, X, 40, cf. also IV, 366: 'tobacco, for some days even coffee and tea: everything was taken away from me').

Husserl enjoyed a financially comfortable position by the standards of his time (X, 22 f.), receiving money (and trousers) from the family business. As far as outward historical circumstances are concerned, however, he seems to have lived a sad life. He had to reach the age of sixty before he and his 'phenomenology' began, in 1919, to enjoy their first successes across a wider front. But his enjoyment of these successes is mixed with the recognition that phenomenology itself will be subject to influential misunderstandings, not least on the part of Scheler, a 'genius of reproductivity and of secondary originality' (III, 81), and of Heidegger. (See Husserl's account in 1931 of what he saw as his betrayal by Heidegger in letters to Pfänder (II, 182 f.) and Mahnke (III, 475 f.)) It is mixed also with sadness at the German defeat in the war and at the loss of his own son (whom he had rather pushed to join the army) and at the accompanying material and spiritual deprivations of the post-war period (e.g., at III, 163 and 54, where Husserl refers to 1923 as the 'ninth year of war'). He and those close to him were then subject to many of the effects of the German depression and to the growth of antisemitism in German universities, something of which Husserl himself complains as early as 1921 (III, 24), and whose rise seems to go hand in hand with a decline in his own Fichteanism.

The letters throw some valuable philosophical light on the development of Husserl's thought and on the detailed views of his correspondents. In volume I, when Husserl defends his view of logic and his doctrine of 'laws of essence' against Brentano, Brentano responds with a powerful attack (I, 32 ff.). Anton Marty provides an interesting reply to Husserl's statement of his views of 1901 on intentionality and immanence (I, 83 f.). Interesting, too, is Husserl's 1902 draft of a letter to Stumpf on general objects and categorial intuition (I, 170), in which Husserl rejects the view, occasionally hinted at by Twardowski, according to which universals would exist as *parts* of the individuals which instantiate them. Volume II, similarly, contains a nice account of logical necessity (presented in a letter addressed to Lipps: II, 126), as well as a criticism of the 'ontologism' of the Munich school addressed to Spiegelberg in 1935:

Every piece of solid scientific work on the basis of the pre-given world . . . offers [merely] 'transcendental guiding threads' for authenti-

cally philosophical questioning belonging to an absolutely universal and radical science of intentionality in which all objectivity, the objective universe, 'transcendentally constitutes itself'. So you see, I do not reckon your work, or any of the other writings of the Munich school . . . to philosophy, any more than I do physics or the concrete human sciences (II, 253).

The remaining volumes contain a useful statement of Husserl's theory of concepts and of the *Ich*-problem, addressed to William Hocking (III, 143 ff.), detail on Husserl's 'monadology' in letters to Dietrich Mahnke (III, 491 ff.), and a long account, addressed to G. von Spett, of Husserl's views on the noema as 'concrete' and 'abstract' object (III, 535–541). They contain a striking comparison of the relation of Brentano's views to those of Avenarius (VI, 148 f.), and a useful clarification by John Venn of issues regarding Husserl's early views on '*Inhaltslogik*' (VII, 265 f.). We find a nice statement of Husserl's relation to Kant in a letter to Cassirer of 1925 (V, 4), and useful background material on his earlier positive relation to Brentano (e.g., at VI, 19). Volume VI contains an interesting defense by Dilthey, written just before he died, against the charge of historicism raised against him by Husserl in his *Logos* article of 1911 (VI, 43, compare also the discussion with Misch: VI, 276 ff. and with Mahnke: III, 460). Husserl's response (VI, 47) consists in an admission to the effect that the entire sphere of bodily being is indeed a sphere of 'relativities', but that, against Dilthey, there are yet objective absolutes which stretch as far as the domain of the *a priori* reaches.

As the Schuhmann introduction stresses, however, these letters do not primarily illuminate Husserl's detailed philosophical views. Rather, they tell us something about the nature of the grand visions and goals by which he was motivated, about what he called, without a trace of irony, his 'awesome life-task' (*ungeheure Lebensaufgabe*: IX, 46), namely (as he puts it in letters to family friends, still without the slightest trace of irony): 'a complete reform of philosophical science' (IX, 171), 'a complete transformation of the whole style, of the necessary way of posing the problems of the entire philosophy of the millennia and, included therein, a complete reform of the sciences' (IX, 78). All of this is to bring, moreover, a 'transformation of humanity' (III, 25, X, 23 ff.). This is Husserl's 'great mission' (III, 405) and his life and the fulfilment of this mission are inseparably one (IX, 54). Subject to a fate willed upon him by God (IV, 412), he is, as he puts it, 'a pure functionary of the Absolute', yet one who is at the same time (in 1934), as a 'Protestant N<on>A<rian>', subject to all kinds of 'external hustle and bustle' (VII, 218; see also III, 104: "Even I am constantly in danger of being driven off

course from my life-task, my mission").

Hence, too, as someone who is driven by 'demons' (IV, 407 ff.), Husserl must be careful to safeguard his body through constant recuperation in fashionable mountain-resorts: 'what for other people is a luxury is [for him] almost a necessity of life' (IX, 68). — Compare, in this connection, the editors' remarks (X, 18) on what they see as the *petit bourgeois* character of Husserl's life.

All of this is of course more than strikingly *German* in tone and pretension; and Husserl does indeed conceive his phenomenology as the legitimate heir of the German culture of Lessing, Herder, Schiller and Goethe (VII, 27). It is after all 'the historical mission of the German people . . . to light the way for all other peoples in philosophy' (V, 172). And as Bosanquet puts it in a letter to Husserl of 1921: 'Certainly the country which has produced you and Einstein cannot fail [to be] the principal factor in the intelligence of humanity' (IX, 163).

In 1915, Husserl writes of his sons and '[o]ur [other] splendid soldiers out in the field They have gone out to fight this war in the Fichtean spirit as a truly sacred war' (VI, 301). The Schuhmann introduction documents how Husserl's conception of himself and of his own philosophy against the background of this German historical mission took on concrete form above all through his lectures on Fichte given to military personnel in 1917 and 1918 (Husserliana XXV, 267-293). What German idealism propagated as mere *Weltanschauung*, Husserl 'cashed out in terms of pure conceptuality' (Schuhmann, X, 11). At the same time the Schuhmanns document also Husserl's earlier, Brentano-inspired, dismissal of German idealism as 'mystical paraphilosophy' (X, 10n).

Now there are some who would argue in favour of a conception of post-Kantian German-language philosophy in terms of two distinct streams, of *German* and *Austrian* philosophy, respectively. Husserl, or at least the early Husserl, a native of Habsburg Moravia and admirer of the writings of Adalbert Stifter (IX, 504), would then naturally be counted, along with Bolzano, Mach, Wittgenstein and the Brentanians, as a leading representative of the latter, Austrian stream. Husserl himself, however, at no stage conceives his own philosophy in light of any putative distinction between 'Austrian' and 'German' traditions. Certainly he reports that his teacher Weierstrass in Berlin had told him that he would have better chances for an academic career 'as an Austrian in Austria' (III, 500), and in 1917 he describes Ingarden as an 'Austrian Pole' (III, 316). In 1931, again, he refers to 'my old Austria' (IV, 179). But in each such case he is almost certainly referring to Austria in purely geographical terms. The closest he comes to acknowledging something 'Austrian' in the history of philosophy is in a letter of 1911, a letter which bears testimony to his own increasing alliance with the German ('critical') mode of philosophizing,

in which he writes of Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre*

as occupying a quite singular rank in the logical literature of the nineteenth century Bolzano was great and original however only as logician and as critic of the foundations of mathematics In the properly philosophical domains, those of the critique of reason and of metaphysics, Bolzano characterized himself as a late descendant of German enlightenment or of the school of Leibniz. He was never gripped inwardly by the colossal problems of the critique of reason of a Hume or a Kant and he never penetrated their mysterious depths. He has no idea that it is upon the illumination of these depths that the destiny of philosophy depends. (VII, 97f.)

Husserl goes on to reject as 'historical nonsense' the idea that Bolzano felt himself to be either a Czech or a 'National-Deutscher': rather 'he was an "Austrian", and by the way a philosopher and citizen of the world.' (VII, 99)

The Schuhmanns probably do well, then, to ignore the issue of Husserl's Austrianness. For, like Meinong and Frege, Husserl was from at least around 1910 precisely a 'National-Deutscher', one who was caught up in the furore of German nationalism at the start of the war and who believed in a 'longed-for unification of German-Austria and Germany' at its close (IX, 57) – though unlike Meinong and Frege he was not an antisemite. Already in 1912 Husserl sees philosophy as pertaining to 'the highest interests of our national culture' and to Germany's 'world-historical calling' (V, 24). Compare also a letter of 1925, in which he writes of the 'divine mission' of the German nation, seeking at the same time to distance himself from that sort of national propaganda 'in which the French are masters' by stressing that this divine mission must be conceived

in the greater context of the different nations. The highest and purest of the German, as of every nation, has at the same time supranational significance – it is destined to bring about ideal effects also in other nations, and to heighten spiritually the values which arise in the latter. (VIII, 15)

Was any people 'of a higher level of spirituality' so reduced in its state as the German people after the war, Husserl asks his Canadian friend and student Bell in 1919:

Luther, Lessing, Leibniz, Kant, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and so on, are after all not mere advertisements of some cheeky Berlin trade representative. There is a soul of the German people, in which these names are engraved, in which they signify inherited powers und infinite tasks. And to murder this soul – has there ever been a more gruesome murder in the whole of world history? (III, 6)

In a letter of 1919 consoling Fritz Kaufmann that he was not able to serve his Fatherland in the war, Husserl reminds him that phenomenology, too, 'is a *necessarium*, and a national, though also a supranational, value' (III, 343). In July 1933 he is still insisting: 'I think I was not the worst German' (IX, 92), and in 1934 he remains optimistic as to the ultimate victory of the 'higher spirituality' of the German people, and so of his own phenomenology:

Whether *sub specie aeterni* I can call myself 'German', whether my philosophy can call itself 'German', this I see as a theological question, which may remain open for whomever, but which is in and of itself already decided. (VII, 13f.; see also III, 494)

The question is theological, as the Schuhmanns put it, because in Husserl's eyes 'God prevails as the entelechy in the teleological process of worldly happenings and is its incontrovertible guarantor' (X, 22). But is the question even important? Certainly it is true that, without his sense of mission, as without his coffee and cigars, Husserl's strictly philosophical bequest to humanity would have been significantly reduced. It seems however to be no less true that the nature and content of this bequest, which continues to influence the world of philosophy on its own terms, is quite independent of the stimulants which helped to bring it into being.

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Notes

1. See Karl Schuhmann, "Markers on the Road to the Phenomenological Movement", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (1983): 299-306.