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Edmund Husserl between Platonism
and Aristotelianism

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Editors' introduction

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According to the so-called “Linati schema”, produced by James Joyce in 1920 in order to help his friend Carlo Linati better grasp and understand the fundamental structure of *Ulysses*, Chapter 6 of the actual “odyssey” is dedicated to the two mythical sea monsters “Scylla” and “Charybdis”. It is 2 p.m., Leopold Bloom is in the National Library and, as Joyce explains to his friend, those two sea monsters stand here for “Plato” and “Aristotle” or, better, they represent the “Scylla of Platonism” and the “Charybdis of Aristotelianism”. Our Ulysses, Bloom, is being caught in the crossfire of Russell, who firmly believes that “the deepest poetry of Shelley, the words of Hamlet bring our mind into contact with the eternal wisdom, Plato’s world of ideas”, and Stephen, who harshly says that “that model schoolboy”, i.e., the Stagirite, “would find Hamlet’s musings about the afterlife of his princely soul, the improbable, insignificant and undramatic monologue, as shallow as Plato’s”.¹

It is precisely by keeping this section of *Ulysses* in mind that we wrote the “call for papers” for the 2016 issue of *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*. Indeed, the essays published in the present volume should be taken as a first attempt to systematically raise and address the question as to the philosophical, more than just historical, relation between Edmund Husserl and the two fathers of Western philosophy *tout court*, namely, Plato and Aristotle; therefore as to the presence and influence of what are usually referred to as “Platonic” and “Aristotelian” tradition upon his thought. As the reader will immediately realize, the contributions cover a wide range of different problems and themes, running from ethical issues to history of logic, from pure theoretical topics (e.g., the notion of “analogy” in connection with more ontological concerns, or the status of the notions of essence and *eidōs*) to those of practical philosophy and variations thereupon. Furthermore, they cover themes that were explicitly the object of Husserl’s own reflection, as well as topics of original comparative analysis.

In a time in which the term “phenomenology” (regardless of its being Husserlian or other) seems to be characterized by what we would label “semantic indeterminacy”, if not even “vagueness”; in which any and every philosophical position can be accompanied by the adjective *phenomenological* without any satisfactory explanation of why this should be the case; in which, in other words, *phenomenology* seems to be understood as a mere “method” or approach (e.g., as a “first-person approach”), or as a “style of philosophizing”, the editors of the present volume firmly believe in the

¹ J. Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993), 178–179.

necessity of reading Husserl anew in order to explicitly recast his project and philosophical agenda. Faced with the difficulty of finding a place in the contemporary philosophical arena for Husserl's phenomenology, we have decided to try an alternative path. Indeed, rather than taking as a starting point the current debates about, say, philosophy of mind, new realisms, or cognitive sciences, we decided to approach a philosopher like Husserl in relation with traditional themes and historical figures (i.e., in relation to what philosophers used to refer to, and without guilt, as *philosophia perennis*). Accordingly, the present volume should be taken as the editorial expression of a deeper discontent with the *status quo* of Husserl scholarship, which tends to adopt a piecemeal attitude so as to single out such and such a specific, more digestible, or fashionable aspect of his philosophy that can "still" play a role in the current philosophical babel, which is granted the right to single out the legitimate philosophical questions as well as the methods to address them. By contrast, our concern was not, and has never been, whether Husserl can be still considered modern or "suitable": our main goal being to understand his profundity, even if by current philosophical standards it will turn out to be utterly *unzeitgemäß*.

The untimely character of Husserl's philosophy was in no way the result of intellectual isolation, anachronism, or even lack of interest for the historical trajectory leading to our philosophical present. Far from this, it was the mark of a radical attitude towards the historically situated character of philosophy: Husserl's thought was untimely because it was not lost in the present, subdued by it, just as much it disdained a purely exegetical attitude towards philosophy.

It is of course well known that Husserl, also due to his intellectual biography, did not write much about past thinkers. It is also well known that his interest for history in general, and for the history of philosophy in particular, grew through the years. But, even without delving into the complex topic of the evolution of his relation to these fields, one is forced to acknowledge that Husserl never believed that the present academic interests had to dictate the philosophical agenda, nor, on the other hand, that the study of the history of philosophy could, by itself, pave the way to any real philosophical accomplishment. "History is an instructive book for the expert who knows how to read it. Who has no philosophy can also learn nothing from it,"² wrote Husserl back at the end of the nineteenth century. While, at the final moment of his career, he maintained that "we must understand past thinkers in a way that they could never have understood themselves" (Hua VI, 74). Between these two distant stages of Husserl's reflection, we find the more and more self-conscious attempt to develop philosophy as a radical enterprise that is possible only in virtue of one's embeddedness in a specific cultural tradition, namely, the philosophical one, and to view such philosophical tradition itself as transparent and meaningful only to those who are guided by the personal motivation of embracing it and responding to its internal, and often hidden, driving ideals.

Because the tradition in question is the one initiated in Ancient ^{Greece} Greek and culminating in the conflicting figures of Plato and Aristotle, the task of situating Husserl's thought with respect to the legacy of these two thinkers is part of the effort of understanding phenomenology "from within", foregrounding its internal conception of

philosophy and the enduring motives that define it. In other words, it is part of the effort to let phenomenology speak to the present in its own language, rather than forcing it to speak in the language of the present.

We are grateful to the editors of the journal, Burt C. Hopkins and John J. Drummond, for giving us such an opportunity, to all the contributors and their patience and, last but not least, to Kimberly Baltzer-Jaray (University of Guelph) for her translation of and introduction to Reinach's fragment on the notion of essence that we publish here as an appendix.