



LAUDATIO ET GRATITUDO.

TO LESTER LMBREE: GREAT PERSON, PHENOMENOLOGIST AND LEADER

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A LESTER EMBREE: GRAN PERSONA, FENOMENÓLOGO Y LÍDER

María-Luz Pintos-Peñaranda

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela
mariluz.pintos@usc.es

Abstract: Insight into Lester Embree's C.V. Recovery and recognition of his inner purpose with regard to his critical detachment from a particular orientation of phenomenology. Phenomenological theory only makes sense as preparation for real practice. When did the view that we, the "soi disant" phenomenologists, are far from the genuine practice of phenomenology arise in Embree? And, who inspired him, apart from Husserl himself? These are key questions to understand unity and inner coherence in Embree's C.V., and they meet two aims. The first one is to find the link between his initial entry in phenomenology and his critical stance, particularly evident in the last two decades of his life. The second one is to identify who could have been his guide and model—apart from Husserl—from the beginning of his life as phenomenologist until his last two decades, when he wrote his comments on pseudophenomenology. In any case, Embree has been a critical voice who compels us to think about the orientation we are giving to the phenomenology inherited from Husserl. He is therefore a brave and honest philosopher, full of great humanity. In addition to these qualities, it is worth noting both his creative intelligence and foresight to see—earlier than others—the evolution followed by phenomenology until now and his valuable multidisciplinary contribution. Praise to Lester Embree.

Keywords: Embree. Intellectual and personal trajectory. Phenomenological practice. Courage. Honesty. Leader. Husserl. Cairns.

Resumen: Mirada hacia el interior del C.V. de Lester Embree. Recuperación y reconocimiento de su propósito interno con respecto a su distanciamiento crítico hacia cierta orientación de la fenomenología. La teoría fenomenológica únicamente tiene sentido como preparación para una real práctica. ¿Cuándo emerge en Embree su consideración de que los "soi disant" fenomenólogos estamos alejados del verdadero ejercicio de la fenomenología? Y, ¿en quién se inspira él además de en Husserl? Estas preguntas son importantes para entender la unidad y coherencia internas en el C.V. de Embree y sirven para satisfacer dos objetivos. El primero es hallar un vínculo entre su entrada inicial en la fenomenología y su posicionamiento crítico manifiesto especialmente en las últimas dos décadas de su vida. El segundo objetivo es determinar quién pudo actuar para él —además de Husserl— como guía y modelo desde el comienzo de su vida de fenomenólogo hasta esas dos últimas de su vida en las que escribe sus comentarios sobre la pseudofenomenología. En todo caso, Embree es una voz crítica que nos fuerza a pensar acerca de la trayectoria que nosotros estamos dando a la fenomenología heredada de Husserl. Él es, así, un filósofo valiente y honesto y de una gran humanidad. Se unen a estas cualidades su gran inteligencia creativa y su sorprendente perspicacia para ver —antes que otros— la evolución que ha seguido la fenomenología hasta hoy y la valiosa contribución multidisciplinaria actual. Alabanza a Lester Embree.

Palabras clave: Embree. Programa vital e intelectual. Práctica fenomenológica. Valentía. Honestidad. Líder. Husserl. Cairns.

INTRODUCTION

On examining the very extensive *Curriculum vitae* of our dear friend and colleague Lester Embree, it is worth noting that all his manifold activities and publications appear as a unitary whole without dispersion at all but with harmonious unity. This unity, present in his *Curriculum* throughout several decades, has been possible thanks to the driving force of his lifelong intellectual and personal trajectory, which provided the boost for that sense of coherence and continuity.

The life of a thinker can be addressed in two different ways: *from without* and *from within*¹. *From without* means referring to "facts", i.e., the most visible and memorable events of his life and professional CV. *From within* means making sense of this person's spirit, that is, all that drove him to be the main player in all those facts and not in others. I will try here to look at Lester Embree's life *from within*. In this endeavor, I will start from the conviction that what a person does through his lifetime is usually closely linked with what that person *wanted to be* and *wanted to do*. In this way, all the actions which become "facts" of his biography are indeed the visible outside of his inner invisible intellectual and personal career.

As I approach Lester Embree's figure to seek and understand his aim to initiate and promote so many phenomenological projects and activities and why he steered his research and publications in the way he did, I am aware this is a very large task for so few pages. However, no matter how superficial, it is with great pleasure that I will make my tiny contribution to this end, which many other colleagues will undoubtedly round off paying attention to aspects I have overlooked. In addition, it goes without saying that these are entirely personal reflections, which perhaps may be shared as well by other colleagues who had a close relationship with our philosopher. Yet, even though being my personal insight, they do not lack objective grounds. A long-standing relationship necessarily results in many hours of epistolary and oral conversation, and also in the knowledge of the direct references Lester Embree has left written about what

¹ In this regard, see José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras Completas*: Vol. VI (1941-1955), Madrid: Taurus, 2006, pp. 125f.

he wanted and was attempting to do as a member of the “phenomenological tradition”, as he liked to call this school.

1. CONTINUANCE OR ABANDONMENT OF THE PRACTICE OF EDMUND HUSSERL’S PHENOMENOLOGY

I would like to begin this section by explaining, in my own way and words, as I understand how we should follow Husserl and, therefore, how to practice the phenomenology he founded.

There are three different ways of resorting to an author in search of support to develop a given topic: The first one is the *erudite* approach: one should dive into his texts in an attempt to find what his views on that particular matter are. Answers are sought in his writings, and the task is over once the mission is successful.

Such answers may be twofold: a) no substantial contribution on the subject has been made by the author in any of his writings; b) the author has discussed the topic in this or another text, speaking one way or the other.

Based on the kind of response (a) or (b), the erudite researcher may write his essay portraying himself as being well acquainted the author. For instance, if he made research on Husserl, then he could even cast himself as “Husserlian” since he indeed has a strong grasp of the author’s writings, and his essay might provide an overview or an in-depth interpretation of what Husserl has written in his works about the issue under consideration.

Other scholars who come next may be based on that overview or in-depth interpretation to offer, in turn, other overviews and in-depth interpretations, in the same vein or a different one. Others that will come afterwards may state their views on such syntheses and interpretations, and on what others have commented on them..., and so *ad infinitum*.

The second way focuses on *assumptions*: the researcher, based on a certain degree of knowledge of the author’s writings—may it be a deep or partial—and after failing to find any trace of the subject of his interest in them, shall therefore attempt to “put himself in the author’s shoes” and penetrate into the realm of assumptions. The aim would be to assume or hypothesize how the author—say,

for example, Husserl–, would have approached the issue in the case of having addressed it in his reflections.

Roaming the territory of assumptions without the author (usually now deceased) being able to validate or discredit them presents two drawbacks: a) the first one is that the “Husserlian” researcher may have made either a correct or an incorrect assumption, b) and the other problem being that one will never be fully confident about its correctness or incorrectness.

Other (“Husserlian”) researchers who may come next are entitled to focus on what has been said in this kind of essays to rule out the validity or invalidity of such assumptions. Others will follow who will have their say on all those hypotheses and on the subsequent discussion on them..., and so *ad infinitum*.

The third way highlights the *reiteration of the author’s attitude*: it is no longer a matter of producing scholarly studies nor putting oneself in the author’s shoes and developing a hypothesis about “what the author’s thought on a particular issue would be”.

Reiterating the author’s attitude–Husserl’s, in this case–means *searching for some key issue in his thought that, although not directly linked, allows us to apply it to the matter under research*.

Reiterating Husserl’s attitude implies reiterating the phenomenological attitude he started and acting oneself as a phenomenologist.

In doing so–and only in doing so–we can obviate the danger he always warned us against, and besides, we will be sure to follow his guidelines.

In the letter–full of autobiographical notes–that Husserl wrote to Cairns in 1930, he expressed his regret that almost all his students had quit halfway, frightened by the essential and necessary radicalism required by phenomenology. As a result,

Nearly all–he says there–have annihilated themselves, they have fallen back into “realism” and anthropologism, or into a systematic philosophy, the deadly enemy of philosophy of phenomenological science [...] Just think that my writings do not present results to be learned but *foundations so that everyone can undertake something*

*on their own. These are methods to be able to undertake tasks by oneself and solve problems on one's own.*²

Though we may therefore—and, in many cases, we clearly must—refer to the texts of Husserl or his direct disciples containing some specific consideration on this issue, or though we may—and, in many cases, we distinctly have to—present our own assumption, more or less correct, about “how his own thought or”, in any event, “of some of his famous disciples about a specific topic could be”, Husserl’s words lead straight into the third way mentioned above: “making the phenomenological method my own” and, from it, attempting to pursue what he calls the way forward, that is, “undertaking tasks by oneself and addressing this problem on my own”.

2. CONTINUANCE OR ABANDONMENT OF THE PRACTICE OF PHENOMENOLOGY ACCORDING TO LESTER EMBREE

After what has been said above, it may now be easier to understand Lester Embree. He repeatedly remarked that some talk “about” phenomenology rather than attempting, and used to call this doing “scholarship” or “argumentation”:

The first vice can be called “scholarship” [...] Scholarship includes editing, interpreting, reviewing, and translating [...] The second vice seems best called “argumentation”. By and large, arguers rant [...] Many self-identified “phenomenologists” devote most if not all of their efforts to constructing arguments for and against theses rather as is done in the analytical philosophies, where many cannot comprehend that others approaches than argumentation are even possible.³

Most *soi disant* phenomenologists today unfortunately still devote most of their energy to scholarship.⁴

² Edmund Husserl, 1859-1959. *Recueil commémoratif publié à l'occasion du centenaire de la naissance du philosophe*, Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1959, p. 285. Our italics.

³ Lester Embree, *Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la investigación fenomenológica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, Morelia: Jitanjáfora, 2003, pp. 10-12.

⁴ Lester Embree, “Introducción al Panel acerca del quinto estadio de la Fenomenología”, *Acta fenomenológica latinoamericana, Volumen III: Actas del IV Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fenomenología*, Morelia / Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo: Círculo Latinoamericano de Fenomenología Lima / Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2009, p. 166.

Most *soi disant* phenomenologists today are just scholars—he said—contributing to secondary literature.⁵

Most *soi disant* phenomenologists today do not go beyond studying earlier writings and are not committed to carrying out fresh research.⁶

His comments about what he sometimes labelled as “pseudo-phenomenology” have sparked—mainly—oral comments of dismay and even rebuttal and rejection, and they confront us with something which is at least conceptually awkward. Perhaps this is due to the fact that nobody likes to be reflected—he himself or a large part of the members of his school—in a mirror, and thus something which they had overlooked but thought convenient either to keep on doing or to be the right thing to do had become apparent. What Paul Nizan said in reference to another context applies here to define the situation about Lester Embree’s comments. Nizan said that “there is the convenient trend of erasing from our culture all the thinkers that raise troublesome issues on the ground that they are harmful”⁷. Harmful or wrong, or perhaps exaggerated, all this has the same meaning: the reluctance to recognize we face a real problem. A problem which, in our case, is becoming more widespread within the current orientation of phenomenology, when over a hundred years have passed since Husserl put it in motion.

Alongside those who are reluctant to accept this problem we find as well voices that have understood the essence of Lester Embree’s concerns. Such is the case of Antonio Ziri6n who, on the occasion of the presentation of Lester Embree’s *Reflective Analysis*, clearly highlights that Embree’s idea

more than an idea, it is in him an obsession, but, in my view, –he says—an obsession fully justified by the current situation in the world of phenomenology [...] We all agree that what mainly prevails not only at local and national levels but also at global levels, and not only in phenomenology but in the rest of philosophy and humanistic disciplines is erudition, for although it is essential indeed for the purpose of investigation of the things themselves, it is not an end in itself [...] Probably more

⁵ Lester Embree, “La interdisciplinariad dentro de la fenomenolog6a”, *Investigaciones fenomenol6gicas* 8 (2011), p. 19.

⁶ “Notes on the Future and Past of our Tradition / Quelques notes sur le future et le pass6 de notre tradition”, unpublished manuscript of the opening speech at the Simposio di fondazione of the Rete Euromediterranea di Fenomenologia per il Dialogo Intercultural (REN), Naples, June 2007.

⁷ Paul Nizan, *Pour une nouvelle culture*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1971, p. 143.

than 80 percent –Ziri6n goes on to say, giving concrete figures on his own–of all kinds of texts (books, essays, etc.) that are published in philosophy and human sciences are just erudition. The downside is not only this massive imbalance, but also the kind of simulation which makes us think that this erudition is the genuine research.⁸

In the same line, Javier San Mart6n acknowledges that within phenomenology “authors tend to focus more on the commentary of texts than on the things themselves”⁹.

Lester Embree’s words raise a number of questions. The first one is whether he completely rejects the work of interpretation and criticism of the sources of phenomenology or not, and, in any case, to what extent? A related question, of a more positive tone, is what kind of research Lester Embree regards as truly “phenomenological”–that is, does he mean the one that goes in line with Husserl? Lastly, the third question, which we will only address after answering the ones posed above, concerns the chronology of the relationship between Lester Embree and phenomenology. When did that disaffection and way of valuing the work of –as he says–the “*soi-disant*” phenomenologists arise in him? Do we know who inspired him? Needless to say, it is evident that his source of inspiration is the message, according to him, emerging from Husserl himself. But perhaps, has he been inspired by someone else, for instance, a Husserl’s disciple?

In order to answer the first question, one has only to see the various explanations given by Lester Embree himself. As already mentioned, real phenomenological research is *not*, according to him, collecting, commenting, criticizing or comparing what is written in the source texts of phenomenology, but rather undertaking a phenomenological analysis¹⁰ on *the things themselves*, i.e., on a specific matter which is constituent of the human being or his world. This is, then,

⁸ Antonio Ziri6n Quijano, “Para la presentaci6n de *An6lisis reflexivo. Una primera introducci6n a la investigaci6n fenomenol6gica* de Lester Embree”. Manuscript of the text presented in 2008 at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicol6s de Hidalgo, Morelia: M6xico.

⁹ Javier San Mart6n, “La pr6ctica de la fenomenolog6a seg6n Lester Embree. Comentario al libro *An6lisis reflexivo. Reflective analysis*”, *Investigaciones fenomenol6gicas* 4 (2005), p. 215.

¹⁰ As is well known, he preferred to say “reflective analysis”. I understand this is a redundancy as every analysis is reflective in itself, particularly if it is phenomenological analysis.

an attitude, which happens to be the same one designed and carried out by Husserl at all times. It would, however, appear that things do not exist for pseudo-phenomenologists, being the texts the only real thing, namely, the ideas expressed in the texts of the leading figures of phenomenology, on which the former work and where things are discussed. Thus, it seems that for those who understand–misunderstand–that this means doing phenomenology, contact with the real world where we subjects live is absent. Basically, there is not a lot of difference between the “neglect of lifeworld” the objectivism of natural sciences has fallen into and the “neglect of lifeworld” inherent in this approach of phenomenology which Lester Embree attempted to warn us about. Subject and world are replaced by discussions and reflections on texts, which can be easily proven. Hence, we dare say, together with Embree, that instead of Husserl’s true disciples we are rather his dreadful imitators. If Husserl were witness to this current situation within phenomenology, he would feel as much hurt as when in 1930 he wrote to Dorion Cairns those words we have reported *in supra* warning of “the deadly enemy of the philosophy of the phenomenological science”. For Husserl, you are only a true phenomenologist when the phenomenological attitude and method “to undertake tasks *by oneself* and solve problems on one’s own” is followed.

However, when Lester Embree presents phenomenology “as an approach in which scholarship on texts is subordinate to investigation of things; in which one observes reflectively rather than speculates; and in which one produces analysis rather than arguments”¹¹, *this in no way means denying the need to work on the texts written by the leading figures of the phenomenological tradition*. The problem, for him, does not lie in using, studying or commenting these texts, but rather in *identifying* this necessary task with the practice of phenomenology and not going beyond. According to Embree,

people who are phenomenologists may often engage in scholarship, but are not phenomenologists when they do so (and if they confuse their investigative results with their results, it is nearly as bad).¹²

¹¹ Lester Embree, *Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la investigación fenomenológica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, p. 534.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

As pointed out by Antonio Ziri6n, alongside “an incompetent or even irresponsible erudition, which indeed confuses the end with the means and research with an endless string of texts about texts” there is, of course, “qualified erudition, which is aware of its historical situation and constraints”¹³. Lester Embree heard these words in Mexico and did not contest them. It would indeed be a contradiction if he had disagreed with this!

To ensure that Lester Embree approved to approach the texts of phenomenology in order to recover, study and comment them, we must bear in mind three key facts in his intellectual career:

First fact: When Lester Embree advocated the direct practice of phenomenology without reducing it to text reading, he could do so because he had previously understood *thanks to Husserl’s own texts* the course of action followed by the founder of phenomenology. Had he not grasped this way of proceeding in Husserl’s own texts, Embree’s critical remarks warning us of the “diversion” in the practice of phenomenology would have been groundless. This is why he started his book published online in 2012, *Can the Doing of Phenomenology be Learned?*, listing a couple of things: on the one hand, the ability to interpret phenomenological texts can certainly be learned, even though this does not mean practicing phenomenology; on the other hand, –and the most important to us here–his direct reference to the fact there is no justification if we do not make our own phenomenological descriptions and analyses, since *they are within our reach*, in Husserl’s works like *Ideen*. At the core of his message it therefore lies the belief that we must turn to *Ideen* and other Husserlian texts to learn from them how to make our own phenomenological descriptions and analyses of everything we face and which sparks our interest. Clearly, without reading them we cannot take Husserl’s texts as a model. Embree needed to resort to them! Likewise, he also had to drink from the springs of many other phenomenologists’ texts. As he himself says:

[...] There can be no doubt that skill at interpreting phenomenological texts can be learned. But phenomenology is not the interpretation of texts. It is rather the reflective observation, analysis, and eidetic description of phenomena, which is to say mental or intensive processes and things-as-intended-to or encountered in them and there are not anywhere near thousands of items of this sort and this despite

¹³ Antonio Ziri6n, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

methodological descriptions in such works as Edmund Husserl's *Ideen* (1913). One can wonder why.¹⁴

Most of the reflective analytical thought expressed here comes from my examination of work of others to whom I am deeply grateful.¹⁵

In his book *Reflective Analysis*, after this second fragment, Embree mentioned a very extensive list of names, both pre-phenomenologists and phenomenologists, some of them already deceased and others still alive and from his generation. These were the authors he confessed to having read and examined in his texts. Providing such a long list is especially significant as what Embree does is to claim that, in order to know how to conduct a phenomenological description, we have to go *first* through the process of studying both the work of Husserl and his disciples and followers. Naturally, this applies both to Lester Embree himself and to any other who aspires to do phenomenology. Following the phenomenologist instructor's directions would be, however, the only way to avoid reading and studying phenomenology texts on the part of the beginner. Without opening a debate now on whether this method is the best suited, the most rewarding or the most effective for the beginner, there is no doubt that when the phenomenologist instructor gives guidelines, he is necessarily based on his preliminary reading and study of phenomenology texts, which is where he takes inspiration to be able to instruct the uninitiated. Therefore, this proves that the texts are always there for all beginners, whether directly or indirectly; and it could not be otherwise.

Second fact: As we all know, a large part of Embree's activity over many years has involved retrieving, editing, analyzing and commenting the texts of Husserl's closest disciples: Dorion Cairns, Alfred Schutz and, especially, Aron Gurwitsch. Not only did he carry out this task to recover those source texts of the phenomenological tradition and make them accessible and available for future use, but he also had in mind the aim of performing a thorough study on the texts of those he considered his teachers *in order to* learn from them –particularly, to understand the phenomenological approach and method in their

¹⁴ Lester Embree, *Can the Doing of Phenomenology be Learned?*, p. 7. Published online at www.reflectiveanalysis.net

¹⁵ Lester Embree, *Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la investigación fenomenológica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, p. 26.

descriptions and analyses—to broaden his knowledge and, eventually, to put into practice when conducting his own descriptions and analyses all he had learned.

Third fact: If the two above-mentioned facts appear insufficient to establish that Lester Embree only disowned the *identification* of the scholarly and philological knowledge of texts with the actual practice of phenomenology, *but not* resorting to texts of the phenomenological tradition, there is still a third fact that clearly and definitely proves it. In the last two decades of his life, he himself put every effort in writing his own texts *to be read by others*, and with a very clear purpose: instructing, that is, showing the uninitiated in phenomenology how to observe, analyze and describe phenomena eidetically. It would then be highly contradictory if Embree fully advised against resorting to phenomenology texts, but nonetheless he himself invited the uninitiated to read and work on his own texts, that is, not even written by Husserl or any of his direct disciples but by Embree himself. In my view, though, there is no such contradiction. He believes it is necessary to get initiated in the practice of phenomenology by drawing on the texts of those who preceded us in this tradition and left their mark in doing phenomenology. The aim is to learn from them in order to *move on, immediately after, to put into practice what we have learned*, bringing it into our descriptions and analyses.

Thus, we remain under the impression that Lester Embree has endeavored to avert the danger of resorting to texts and becoming trapped in the task of reading and text-hermeneutics. We should be propelled instead, based on them, to undertake the methodological steps of self-conducted phenomenological “practice”, as proposed by Husserl. First of all, we should feel encouraged to apply the phenomenological method and attempt both our own description and eidetical analysis of the things encountered and see for ourselves the excellent results. Afterwards—specifically, only after having verified what is gained by this practical procedure—, one could go to the texts and get as many conceptual resources as possible—without which description and analysis would be limited—to be used as a guideline to pursue applied phenomenology. It is thus a question of exploring on a deeper level, as Embree states in his last fragment *in supra*.

After having reviewed and commented the facts belonging to Lester Embree’s intellectual path, let us take a step back to seek and access the “within” of his *Curriculum*. It is true that Embree’s interest as a phenomenology instructor, at

that early stage, was fully focused—"obsessively" focused, to quote Ziri6n—on disregarding immersion in texts. Javier San Mart6n says that "one might even think that the book [*Reflective Analysis*] is written 'against' scholars, for it is high time we did phenomenology and not text commentaries"¹⁶. Yet, as San Martin remarks with a certain detachment from Embree's stance, "it is not that scholars never do phenomenology. They often go—we go—to the things through texts [...]"¹⁷. And in stating this, San Mart6n says that he agrees with what Roberto Walton told him in some conversation: when we work on texts, it is because we attempt to look at the things, and texts provide help. The aim, says San Mart6n, is "to go to the things themselves by means of the texts"¹⁸. Indeed, according to Walton,

investigation is not only directly addressed to the things, but also does so indirectly through the texts [...] A genuine phenomenologist must go far beyond the texts and deal with the things themselves, but the dual path implies that we look at the things thanks to the threads provided by the texts. In other words, since they help to gear towards the things themselves, texts are read—he says— with a view to them.¹⁹

This sounds entirely acceptable, but Walton's reasoning is based on the assumption of a "genuine" phenomenologist, i.e., genuinely Husserlian. Of course, there are excellent phenomenologists who use the texts *to go* to the things in order to describe and analyze them! However, Embree's remarks are not addressed to them, and they should not feel alluded. What Embree is talking about is the lack of genuineness and authenticity in many of us who play a part in the field of phenomenology, writing texts or introductions, giving seminars or lessons and participating in conferences. Thus, in my humble opinion, even though this kind of arguments are not wrong at all, they regrettably lead to downplay the gravity and universality of the situation and, in the end, do not encourage us to promote a change. On the contrary, Lester Embree's purpose, on unveiling the current situation, was *to make us react*. Reacting is only possible

¹⁶ Javier San Mart6n, "La pr6ctica de la fenomenolog6a seg6n Lester Embree", *Investigaciones fenomenol6gicas* 4 (2005), p. 216.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Javier San Mart6n, "La percepci6n como interpretaci6n", *Investigaciones fenomenol6gicas* 6 (2008), p. 16.

¹⁹ Roberto J. Walton, "Lester Embree, *An6lisis reflexivo. Una primera introducci6n a la investigaci6n fenomenol6gica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction into Phenomenological Analysis*, Morelia: Jitanj6fora, 544 pp.", *Escritos de Filosof6a* 45 (2005), p. 310.

if we are previously aware of this situation and, therefore, we feel intellectually challenged. Only in this way would we be in a position to accept the method provided by Husserl "to be able to perform tasks by oneself and solve problems on one's own", as mentioned above.

The criticism that could be levelled against Lester Embree may therefore appear appropriate, but deep inside it will perhaps continue to self-justify a phenomenology that indulges in theory in the same way as it—phenomenology—is abstracted from the concrete and real things every human subject deals with in their daily life. Maybe there is an overall tendency to this abstraction and, ultimately, to this kind of blindness in all philosophy. In fact, other European philosophers, like Herder and Marx, perceived this trend and warned against it, each in his own time and circumstances. Let me recall their wise words below:

Men educated on the basis of abstract words—said Herder—have often heard so many, which has rendered them unable to see what is in front of their eyes.²⁰

It can be said—according to Marx—that human history works in the same way as paleontology. Most gifted intellects are unable to see things which are right in front of them, in principle, due to a kind of blindness to draw up judgements. Then, when dawn breaks, it comes as a surprise to notice that things unseen have already been showing evidence everywhere.²¹

I should like to make one more point concerning Lester Embree's invitation to avoid lingering in readings which can lead us to get embroiled in argumentations *instead of* applying the phenomenological method to our daily life. It seems not to be easy for a person who is still uninitiated in phenomenology to carry out phenomenological descriptions unless he has the required theoretical knowledge to perform them. In order to achieve this, reading only one introducer to the practice of phenomenological analyses, be it Lester Embree or any one of us, may not be enough. In general, any Husserl's follower—and Embree is one of them—is not exempt from reflecting his *subjective* preferences in that introduction for the uninitiated. It may well be the case that some phenomenological aspects

²⁰ J. G. Herder, *Werke*. Band 6: *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 292.

²¹ Letter sent by Marx to Engels from London on March 25th 1868, in Karl Marx / Friedrich Engels, *Cartas sobre las ciencias de la naturaleza y las matemáticas*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1975, p. 62.

are more emphasized than others²²; similarly, new concepts—sometimes even questionable from an orthodox perspective—may be introduced; or, on the contrary, certain phenomena, which in the Husserlian-phenomenological descriptions would always be present—namely, the passivity or the transcendental ego²³—, can be set aside; or the choice can be made to rely solely on the technical terminology regarded as indispensable²⁴. This is why attempting an introduction to phenomenology based exclusively on directions of “just one” phenomenologist instructor or introducer may be “risky” or, at least, “debatable”. Phenomenologically speaking, chances are that the result would not satisfy everyone.

However, Lester Embree was fully aware of this issue. What is more, he himself admitted that, in his search for concrete analyses avoiding argumentation, “colleagues well informed about phenomenology will often recognize places where the analyses in this text [*Reflective Analysis*] could have been carried much further”²⁵. His own decision about what to include in or exclude from *Reflective Analysis* makes the result appear as, he says, “an early stage of an archeological investigation where only the top layer of the entire site is excavated [...] The hope [...] is that surface work will better prepare the way for deeper digging”²⁶. He himself has moved in this field (“deeper digging”) in another kind of writings, devoted to constitutive phenomenology at a more theoretical level. Yet, as we are trying to show, when he writes as a *phenomenologist instructor*, he—just like any other playing that role—has to take this kind of decisions. This does not mean at all a renunciation of the theoretical foundations of phenomenology but a selection of those which, according to Embree, are needed to successfully undertake phenomenological descriptions and analyses.

²² In this regard, cf. Lester Embree, *Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la investigación fenomenológica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, pp. 14-18. In the Preface he says that in this book “the great emphasis is placed on operational (*‘aktiv’*) and then on habitual/traditional (*‘sekundär passiv’*) processes, but there is hardly an allusion to automatic (*‘primär passiv’*) ones”. See p. 14.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, where Embree says there are no references, for example, to the process of the intersubjective constitution of objectivity, to the transcendental reduction and to the being-in-the world. This is meant to avoid falling into argumentations or dealing with aspects that would take to greater depths in a first introduction. See pp. 14-16.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Now it is time to develop the third question—actually a two-fold one—mentioned *in supra* about Lester Embree's attitude: When did that way of thinking about the "soi disant" phenomenologists—because of being far from the true practice of phenomenology—surface in Embree? Who did he find inspiration in, apart from Husserl? These are key questions to understanding unity and internal consistency in Embree's *Curriculum vitae*, and intend to meet two objectives. The first one is to resolve whether there is a link between Embree's position—theme and purpose in his last two decades of life—and his initial entry in phenomenology—which took place in 1962, but whose work in this field continued over the years thereafter. Once this link is found, the second aim is to identify who could have been his guide and model from his beginnings as a phenomenologist until his last two decades of life, when he wrote the above mentioned comments on pseudo-phenomenology.

Embree used to say that as soon as he entered the New School, philosophy became promising and thrilling because right after being introduced to phenomenology his intellectual life had a positive turnaround and he got hooked on it for good²⁷. It then seems the link between the beginning and the last leg of Lester Embree's phenomenological activity has been found, and it has the name of the person who indelibly marked his entry in the world of phenomenology when enrolling at the New School: Dorion Cairns. In my view, Cairns played a pivotal role in making young Lester Embree clearly understand Husserl's message, and, as a result, in making him hold true for ever to that initial commitment to Husserlian phenomenology until the point of taking a stand about the current state of phenomenology the way he did in his last decades of life. No wonder, then, that the dedication of the book *Reflective Analysis* is worded as follows: "Dedicated to the memory of my teacher, Dorion Cairns, from whom so much has been learned, including—above all—the duty to examine, correct and extend the reflective analyses received from others, our teachers included"²⁸.

This dedication is not only an explicit acknowledgement to Cairn's teachings, but also a reminder about continuing—*extending*—phenomenological analyses on one's own. Therefore, we can perhaps understand that the need of practicing and

²⁷ Lester Embree told me about this in August 2005, recalling his days of studying philosophy. He said that, since then, phenomenology had been his fundamental purpose, and had been wholly committed to it. I could notice the emotion in his voice, as if, at sixty-seven, he were still feeling the same enthusiasm as when he had his first contacts with this tradition.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

applying the phenomenological method quickly sparked in Embree thanks to Cairns' lessons. Undoubtedly, from these lessons and their private conversations emerged the message Embree took to his heart, as evidenced in these words:

In an era when practically all *soi disant* phenomenologists devote themselves entirely to the interpretation of texts, Dorion Cairns is among the few who made a strict distinction between what may be called scholarship, which includes translation as well as interpretation of texts, and what may be called investigation, which is concerned not with texts, but with the "things themselves" in the signification whereby anything is a "thing". Like Husserl, Cairns regularly offered methodological reflections: he not only described the things reflectively observed, but also described how he had been able to analyze them, emphasizing reflection, analysis, "seeing", and description.²⁹

There are two fragments by Cairns that illustrate remarkably well what Embree expressed above. The first one can be read in the Preface to his doctoral dissertation of 1933. Referring to Husserl's manuscripts, he points out that the founder of phenomenology conducted concrete analyses on which he based his theory. The beginner in phenomenology Embree could possibly have learned from this way of working that it is imperative to carry out concrete analyses and describe what one perceives, and, in addition, [analyses] can be conducted on any subject:

The manuscripts are, then, an indispensable source providing not only indications of changes in theory but also the wealth of *concrete analyses* upon which the published theories are founded. They too *are of widely varying [...] themes [...]* Husserl's conscious purpose is not to take up the philosophic tradition where his predecessors have left off, to criticize their theories and solve their problems. The "phenomenological reduction" [...] involves a deliberate attempt to break absolutely with all tradition. The ideal of Husserl's philosophy is a purely descriptive theory of what we see; science and cultural facts are merely certain of the things that we see and wish to describe. [...] Whatever Husserl says is *an exhortation to the reader that he look at the facts themselves and see for himself*.³⁰

²⁹ Lester Embree, Entry "Cairns, Dorion (1901-1973)", in Donald M. Borchert (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2006², pp. 5f.

³⁰ Dorion Cairns, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013, edition by Lester Embree, pp. IX-X. Our italics. Cf. too, *ibid.*, p. 198, where Cairns speaks of the need to reflect upon any

Cairns's second fragment is illustrative of this phenomenological attitude which made such an impact on Lester Embree:

So far as *philosophizing* is concerned with another's thoughts. It is *criticizing*. No true philosopher, as such, merely accepts or merely reproduces another's thoughts. The true philosopher starts anew—independently, solitarily. But this understanding of the work done by others can make his own philosophizing surer and quicker. He must see for himself. But sometimes he can more easily avoid the pitfalls that others have discovered and marked. Thus, in the social history of philosophizing there can be not only mere repetition and mere novelty, but also progress. Even the less able philosopher may improve on the results of a more able predecessor.³¹

This idea that the phenomenologist cannot simply replicate theoretical arguments but must analyze—reflectively—and describe everyday life phenomena by himself grew stronger and stronger in Lester Embree until he felt the need, since the late nineties, to openly express it, thereby starting a new stage in his phenomenological journey.

This new stage has a lot to do with a number of events which took place in his life in the nineties. First, in 1990 Lester Embree moved to Florida Atlantic University, in Boca Raton, Florida³²; then, in 1992, as in those years he was the President of the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology (CARP), he was invited by Alexander Schimmelpenninck, from Kluwer Academic Publishers, to begin work on the preparation of an *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*³³—which led him to pioneer this major task—; and thirdly, as a direct consequence of this assignment, Embree reached out to a lot of people involved in phenomenology, and this set before his eyes an issue which had a large impact on him, marking a “before” and an “after” in his perception of what was going on in the phenomenological tradition at that time: Embree verified by himself that the Husserlian-phenomenological attitude had many followers who were *not* professionally involved in the field of philosophy but in sciences or branches of

spontaneous act of the natural attitude of the subject “in order to describe the transcendental acts in which the world phenomenon is posited by the transcendental ego in the natural attitude”.

³¹ Dorion Cairns, “Philosophy as a Striving toward Universal Sophia in the Integral Sense”, in Lester Embree (ed.), *Essays in Memory of Aron Gurwitsch*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc./University Press of America, 1983, p. 42. Lester Embree included this essay by Cairns, as an Appendix, in his book *Fenomenología continuada. Contribuciones al análisis reflexivo de la cultura*, Morelia: Jitanjáfora, 2007, pp. 285-306. See pp. 305f.

³² Embree joined this University in 1990 as “William F. Dietrich Eminent Scholar”, and carried out his teaching a research activity in the College of Arts and Letters.

³³ *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997.

knowledge *alien to philosophy* and differing greatly from each other: nursery, education, physical education, architecture, psychology, medicine, ethnology, sociology, economy, archaeology, etc.³⁴. Embree found out that, although the terminology used by these non-philosophical disciplines may not be entirely appropriate, what matters is their willingness: as *practical* disciplines—this is the key point—they have grounds to gear their phenomenological perspective and efforts towards specifically analyzing matters, actions and experiences of their interest and concern—in other words, their phenomenological program cannot be only confined to text hermeneutics. In their daily professional activity, the practitioners in these disciplines *have encounters* with the issues, actions and experiences of individuals, which accordingly play a crucial role in their phenomenological orientation³⁵.

It is very significant that Lester Embree paid tribute again to Cairns in a special way, when he published his book *Fenomenología continuada. Contribuciones al análisis reflexivo de la cultura* in 2007, by including a complete essay of Cairns' authorship as an Appendix after the chapters of his book. He himself justified such inclusion stating that "[...] an essay by who has been my dear teacher is included to show the philosophical position from which the reflections here proceed"³⁶: reflections of a special kind because "they address various aspects which are part of the sociocultural world"³⁷. Specifically, they are aspects—dimensions, as Embree says—of the American world: national culture, ethnicity, generation, gender and environment. Embree addresses his reflective analysis in a phenomenological way to these dimensions of the culture as it can

³⁴ Currently, phenomenological bibliography in these disciplines is very extensive. For a first approach, see the corresponding "entries" in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. There are over twenty non-philosophical disciplines. On the occasion of the OPO founding ceremony held in Prague in 2002, one of the most important projects devised mainly by Embree, he stated in his inaugural speech that "finally, and this may be my most wishful impression, there seems to be some move toward increased interaction between phenomenological philosophers and colleagues in other disciplines with phenomenological or phenomenology-like 'qualitative' or 'interpretative' tendencies. [...] in the *Encyclopedia* actually twenty-three non-philosophical disciplines were identified with phenomenological tendencies" (Lester Embree, "General Impressions of our Tradition Today", inaugural speech of the *Founding of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations* (Prague, 2002), published in the website o-p-o-phenomenology.org. For Embree this trend was a notable feature of the fifth stage in phenomenology. He declared that "along a different dimension, it seems to me that there is huge potential for philosophical phenomenologists to study the work in disciplines beyond philosophy [...]" (Lester Embree, Manuscript entitled "Globalization and the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations", with some words spoken in Soochow University, Taiwan, in September 2006).

³⁵ See, for example, the descriptions Embree makes in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* in the entries "Human sciences" and "Cultural disciplines", and "Disciplines Beyond Philosophy: Recollecting a Phenomenological Frontier", in Lester Embree / Thomas Nenon (eds.), *Phenomenology 2005*. Volume 5: *Selected Essays from North America. Part 1*, Bucarest: Zeta Books, 2007, pp. 217-282.

³⁶ Lester Embree, *Fenomenología continuada. Contribuciones al análisis reflexivo de la cultura*, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

be helpful to identify deep-rooted prejudices and examine them, as he himself says in the "Preface".

When this book by Lester Embree was published, I wrote a comprehensive review³⁸ where I explained, in reference to the first six chapters, that some readers may not be sure whether this has something to do with the stereotypical idea they have of the Husserlian phenomenology. In order to counterbalance this idea, it may be useful to recall that in the human sciences, for Husserl, our reflection needs to be targeted at the subject as concrete historical being, that is, the subject with his personal life within a concrete cultural world, which is a world of convivence. Contrary to the "objectivistic attitude" of the philosophy and the other sciences of his time—which was reductionist and abstract—, the Husserlian "personalistic attitude" invites us to address both men and women as *persons*, which means describing what constitutes their life as persons. If one of the key identifying characteristics of every human being is that his existence originates and develops in a concrete socio-cultural world (*Lebenswelt*), then, for Husserl and in accordance with his phenomenological attitude, questions also need to be asked about the essential structure of every concrete cultural world. According to him, *prejudices* are one of the intrinsic features of any cultural world, and they shape the life of every human being regardless of the particular culture they belong to. The power and effectiveness of prejudices lies in that subjects, from the beginning of their lives, will take them as "natural" despite being only "cultural"—this is known in phenomenological terms as naive "natural attitude". This natural naivety every new subject starts his life with will enable and will—inexorably—lead him to embrace the prejudices of his culture. As a result, these concrete prejudices will to a large extent determine his way of interpreting all that surrounds him, his way of reacting at an emotional level and his way of acting or wishing to act, as Embree often reminds us throughout this and other essays.

One of the strengths of the phenomenological method of description of the essential structure of every personal life and of every concrete cultural world is that Husserl applied it to the Western culture of the period between the centuries in which he happened to live—a period of crisis of knowledge and of historical-

³⁸ María-Luz Pintos-Peñaranda, "Lester Embree: *Fenomenología continuada. Contribución al análisis reflexivo de la cultura*, Morelia-México: Jitanjáfora, 2007, 317 pp.", *Investigaciones fenomenológicas* 6 (2008) 419-430.

cultural uncertainty. The consequence Husserl draws from his description is that Western culture is soaked with—in his own words—one of the most nefarious prejudices, but being a pre-judice, it goes unnoticed as such from the first moment of our existence as it is “natural” to become accustomed to it and, in the same way as to the rest of the aspects of one’s culture, adopt it as “the” most usual way of interpreting, valuing and acting. Such prejudice is “objectivism”. Not only did it rule all the sciences of the time, but—until our days—it has gradually been shaping the way how we Westerners focus our existence, both individually and socially.

This all means, therefore, that unveiling and describing cultural prejudices—usually unspoken—is not only an inherent part of the phenomenological attitude, but every phenomenologist, following the footsteps of Husserl himself, should begin his reflective analysis by unveiling and describing, especially, by focusing on his sociocultural environment to thoroughly describe it and not confining himself to conducting the text philology or scholarly argumentation that Embree has often denounced. While Husserl was primarily concerned with the prejudice of “objectivism” because, in his view, besides standing out above the rest it was accountable for the crisis which led to the scientific and historical wrong course in the Western world, Embree, in this book, focuses on other cultural prejudices, which are of great concern to us nowadays. In the first five chapters of his book, by making a description of different dimensions of every human life developed in a sociocultural world, Embree identifies and unveils, among others, prejudices such as racism and classism, and, in addition, he provides a rich analysis on the differences and interrelations of individuals and groups by virtue of their belonging to one generation or another, an ethnic group, a social status, a gender or a given culture (in particular, this last analysis covers the connection between American and Japanese culture). Chapter 6, “The good health of ecosystems”, is particularly worthy of mention. Here, the author wishes to show how analytic reflection about our “encounters” with all that surrounds us in our daily life—he uses the example of the encounter with another non-human species, like the vegetables in our garden—can lead to concrete actions at an individual level—for instance, about “how we should act to promote the good health of an ecosystem”. This is an example of a model of analysis for practical implementation. Furthermore, the aim in this chapter and in the previous ones is to phenomenologically research relatively unexplored dimensions of the “lifeworld”

so as to show that phenomenology is useful to reach such issues from an analytical-reflective point of view (establishing identifications and differentiations), without being limited to it but to access a valuing of beliefs, emotions and actions which have been previously spotted as such belonging to a culture through those dimensions chosen to explore³⁹.

It therefore appears that Lester Embree's endeavor in describing beliefs (*doxic believing*), emotional valuing (*pathic or axiomatic valuing*) and what one wishes to do (*praxic willing*) follows Husserl's procedure⁴⁰. However, the question now is about the relationship between this Embree's task and Cairns' teachings. Why does Embree wish to make visible that his reflections in *Fenomenología continuada*⁴¹ are grounded in Cairns' philosophical position? A tentative answer is that Cairns considers that philosophy and the research carried out in the various scientific disciplines "are not necessarily disparate activities"⁴². Philosophy is not only a theory of knowledge; epistemology is part of something broader: a philosophy both of valuation and action; so, philosophy is as well a practical discipline because it culminates in action. From this it follows, as advocated by Cairns and Embree as well following his teacher, that both philosophy—and, within this field, phenomenological philosophy—and the different sciences that aim at the human being, society and human culture not only seek to know about the world, but they also pursue to be able to value the different possible ways of interacting with the world. Moreover, these reflections are addressed both to how we interact with the world and how the world we interact with is like⁴³. Therefore, the task of philosophy and non-philosophical sciences share a great deal in common⁴⁴.

³⁹ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 420-423.

⁴⁰ Husserl believes that the activity of the human subject of thinking, valuing and willing (to do) or, in other words, of thinking, valuing and taking action are inextricably linked: "Das tägliche praktische Leben ist naiv, es ist ein in die vorgegebene Welt Hineinerfahren, Hineindenken, Hineinwerten, Hineinhandeln" (E. Husserl, *Cartesiansche meditationen und pariser vorträge*, Husserliana: Band I, Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1950, §64, p. 179); "Die wertenden und wollenden Akte: das Fühlen, Wollen, Sich entschliessen, Handeln, sind nicht aus der Sachspähre ausgeschaltet, sondern gehören [...] durchaus der Sachspähre zu" (E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Zweites Buch, Husserliana: Band IV, Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1952, § 4, pp. 26 f).

⁴¹ And as well, therefore, in the other book which is, said by Embree himself, a continuation of this: *Ambiente, tecnología, justificación: Análisis reflexivos*, Bucarest: Zeta Books, 2009.

⁴² Dorion Cairns, "Philosophy as a Striving toward Universal Sophia in the Integral Sense", p. 41.

⁴³ Cf. Lester Embree, *Fenomenología continuada. Contribuciones al análisis reflexivo de la cultura*, pp. 218f.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 218. Lester Embree believes that, in this case, Cairns provides an overview different from that of Husserl, and different from that of Aron Gurwitsch and Alfred Schutz too, since, as he says, both follow Husserl's intellectualist approach.

On several occasions, I specifically asked Embree which of these three phenomenologists—Cairns, Gurwitsch or Schutz—he felt closer to. As is known, he has both published essays about them and edited texts written by them—they played an important role in his *Curriculum*. Photographs of Husserl, James, Cairns, Gurwitsch and Schutz have always been hung on the wall opposite his office desk. With whom of these last three did he feel more identified? He never gave me a precise answer because probably each one had given him something invaluable and he felt somehow comfortable with the three of them. He had a close relationship with Gurwitsch for some fifteen years, and they shared certain personality features. He never met Schutz in person, but shared with him the same enthusiasm and interest in analyzing the concrete cultural world in which we humans live. However, it is undeniable that Cairns's style of writing, his strong phenomenological focus on specific issues, his usage of purposeful terminology and, above all, some features mentioned above make this phenomenologist be Embree's great inspiring force after Husserl.

My purpose here is very unpretentious: I have attempted to draw attention to Cairns both for his decisive influence on Lester Embree's beginning in phenomenology and for his strong and continuing presence in Embree's life, particularly in the last two decades of his biography. Future researchers will perhaps trace this and other influences present in Embree to verify them in every detail and, if so, make them public for everybody to know.

3. PRAISE AND GRATITUDE TO LESTER EMBREE

What I have written up to now responds to an inner need of mine, that is, letting myself in what I consider to be an important area of the *within* of Lester Embree's C.V. in order to contribute both to his appreciation and acceptance of his message. This aim can only be achieved if we rescue the reasons behind his driving force.

His clear stance on phenomenology and his own research are consistent, in my view, with Husserl's own design of what phenomenological activity entails.

His criticism certainly has real foundation—large or small, depending on how everyone remains open to understand it—on our distancing from this activity. Besides, his phenomenological position was also in line with his most profound personal convictions. *Theory and practice* must always go hand in hand, so the

phenomenological theory makes sense only as preparation for real practice. This is the reason why Embree roundly refused to speak about “application” of phenomenology, as if such application were a mere secondary possibility and not something consubstantial and completely inseparable from the proper understanding and exercise of phenomenology. This Embreean conviction explains and gives meaning to his appreciation for *detailed analyses* rather than developing great abstractions—there is, however, a happy paradox in Embree: he managed to perfectly combine this appreciation for specifics and small things with a strong expertise to articulate comprehensive overviews, as is the case of the description of the five stages in the evolution of the phenomenological tradition⁴⁵.

Above all else, I reckon that, regardless of agreeing with him or not on all his approaches, Lester Embree stood out for his courage and honesty—two rare human values. Not all of us are capable of speaking out as he did when our thinking involves targeted criticism towards our colleagues. He, of course, has had the strength to do it, and I therefore wish to express here my admiration for his person. These are qualities every leader should have, and Lester Embree has indeed been a very good one. In this regard, Michael Barber’s concise description of the various dimensions of Lester Embree’s activity gets straight to the point and could not be more appropriate:

He was a great entrepreneur for phenomenology, always imagining and realizing new phenomenological projects and setting up new organizations. His service to phenomenology included encouraging the practice of phenomenological method, fostering multidisciplinary engagement, mentoring a generation of younger phenomenology scholars, and helping the tradition of phenomenology to flourish across cultures.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Embree developed this panoramic view of the evolution and stages of phenomenology while working on the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. Afterwards, he has presented it on many occasions. See, for instance, “La Continuación de la Fenomenología: ¿un quinto período?”, *Franciscanum. Revista de las ciencias del espíritu*, Vol. 41, 122-123 (1999) 13-24; “The Continuation of Phenomenology: A Fifth Period?”, *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, Vol. 1, 1 (2001) 1-9.

⁴⁶ Michael Barber, “Lester Eugene Embree (1938-2017)”, in the section “Obituaries”, *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*. An extensive presentation—and so far, the more detailed—of Lester Embree’s huge boost to promote phenomenology both in the USA and the rest of the world is offered by Thomas Nenon in “La promoción de la fenomenología como esfuerzo práctico”, *Acta Mexicana de Fenomenología. Revista de investigación filosófica y científica* 2 (2017) 203-211. In my view, this essay has not only been written by Thomas Nenon in his role as CARP president and Lester Embree’s successor in this position, but also from his heart. Both Barber’s heartfelt obituary and Nenon’s extensive essay are, each in his own style, the gift which best would have pleased Lester. He, who lived alone, liked—better, needed—to be

Following Barber's excellent description, I should like to add one fact to round it out and help us see Lester Embree as a great person and leader, always willing to provide opportunities to young people in need of increasing their academic merits with a view to their future scientific careers. When I met Lester in 2000, he was 63 years old, and already a very influential person in the American phenomenology. At that time, I was a European phenomenologist between youth and maturity after a twenty-year university teaching career. In our first meetings, one of the things that impressed me the most was that I realized that leadership can be exerted in ways different to the European customary practice. The difference lies in the outstanding interest the senior and leader shows in the younger ones and in how things are going for them—both at personal, professional or academic level. I felt enormous admiration for the high-rank professional that neither sees grounds on his position to distance himself from those with a lower professional status nor tries to outstand and heighten his name in any organized activity or event. Lester Embree was, in this regard, quite far from the more stereotypical European leader. On one occasion, I could notice that his assistant's name was written before his own at the beginning of an essay. I, puzzled, asked him about this unusual order in the authors' names. He provided a rapid response: his current professional status allowed him not to have to rank first, yet his young assistant would have a good chance to become known. The candor of his explanation won me over, and even led me to rebuild my image of Europe and the United States.

Thanks to Lester Embree I realized—it became increasingly clearer through my relationship with him and the world of the American phenomenology—that it is high time for us Europeans to accept that, in many areas, we carry a burden of ideas and attitudes which prevent us from moving forward. We, philosophers of our ancient European continent, often proudly return to our past philosophy as if collecting "facts" to remember them as the great moments, the great works or the great figures of our past, this being more "monumental history" (*monere*) than philosophy, as Nietzsche would say. Running in parallel to that is the attitude of the "antiquarian", who loves the past because he feels it as his own and, therefore, wants to preserve it with excessive veneration. Thus, European past

recognized and loved. Likewise, for those of us who have held our colleague and friend in such great esteem, both writings are most appreciated.

philosophy becomes for the antiquarian *his* own history⁴⁷, which fills him so much that he disregards his aspiration to focus attention on the present. We are moving within this attitude when the role of philosophy is just considered to be scholarly and philological research on texts or past figures. What is more, we Europeans have a bondage, which in many instances is crippling, in the vainglory and pride of possessing a philosophy that goes back centuries. What a European philosopher learns, when contemplating an American leader like Lester Embree, is that all the knowledge now available thanks to our past philosophy should be used *to* become involved in an analysis of the current major issues and problems, specially, of our current cultural and social life. You will recall that it was in the United States where groundbreaking conferences like "Lifeworld and Technology" (1987) or "Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Action" (1993) were held. Likewise, the first conference on feminist phenomenology (1994) or on "Environmental Ethics and Metaphysics" (1995) took place there as well, and so on. These few examples highlight that American phenomenology gives attention to decisive current issues, unquestionably, grounded on previous philosophical trends *to* make them have an impact on our concrete lifeworld. Not coincidentally, Lester Embree was the promoter, organizer or co-organizer of all these vanguard events. He blazed a path to follow: moving towards the present and the future, not to the past. For a European phenomenologist like me, the encounter with this approach and this sociocultural and human interest shook my own stereotypes and confirmed my idea about what we can achieve with philosophical and phenomenological reflection. Embree was, after all, a leader in the responsible practice of philosophical reflection which, in turn, followed Husserl's lead⁴⁸.

Lastly, I cannot end this essay without expressly mentioning what Lester Embree was entirely devoted to during the final months of his life. He became actively involved in supporting Bernie Sanders' campaign for the U.S. presidency, which led him to dedicate a considerable amount of time to this task. He believed

⁴⁷ Even though Nietzsche was mainly referring to his contemporary historians, criticising their interpretation of historiography as "monumental" or "antiquarian", his message is also true for European philosophy and philosophers. Knowledge of the past must be used in order to better understand the present of our cultural and personal life. See F. W. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*.

⁴⁸ When Husserl says that the specific feature of the human subject is "reason", he links it to the ability of acting freely and personally from oneself. The ability for reflection about reality and the ability for self-reflection amounts for him to the rational form of existence. This endowment leads the subject –that is, it *can* lead him, it *should* lead him—to be responsible, in the sense of being able to value and distinguish true from falsehood, just and unjust, what to do and what not to do, etc; in addition, it leads him as well to be responsible in the sense of not being relieved from making this kind of differentiating valuing. Human being is fully capable to make valuative and committed differentiations at all times. Being rational implies the responsibility of becoming aware, valuing and deciding accordingly. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*, § 73, and the essays of Kayzo.

in the need for progressive change, and this speaks volumes about his attitude and kind of commitment to real history. Good fortune—or, maybe, a very helpful lucidity in his final state of impotency—happened to bring death to his door just the day before January 20th 2017. I truly believe that his seventy-nine-year-old heart would not have been able to bear what happened after that day. Therefore, even though we greatly grieve his passing, he could finally rest in peace. As the philosopher and sage Seneca put it centuries ago,

think about how good a suitable and timely death is,
how harmful it is for many to have lived too long.⁴⁹

Translator: Evaristo Quintáns

⁴⁹ M. A. Séneca, "Consolación a Marcia", in *Escritos consolatorios*, Madrid: Alianza, 1999, p. 94.