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Herbert Spiegelberg

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Maurice Hamington

SPIEGELBERG, Herbert (1904–90)

Herbert Spiegelberg was born on 18 April 1904 in Strasburg, Alsace (then in Germany) into a Jewish intellectual family. His father Wilhelm was an eminent Egyptologist and professor in Strasburg, then later in Heidelberg and Munich. His uncle on his mother's side, Heinrich von Recklinghausen, was an unorthodox philosophical autodidact. Early in his life Herbert Spiegelberg became interested in philosophical problems and was as a young man already skeptical towards religion, especially in its ideological variants. Nevertheless, Spiegelberg underwent the Protestant confirmation in 1919, having been convinced by his fellow Alsatian Albert Schweitzer that it was mainly a societal

convention, although Schweitzer also pointed out Christianity's positive ethical implications. In America Spiegelberg became associated with the Quakers (also through Schweitzer's mediation), deeply impressed by their hospitality and social kindness. Though he began his university career by studying jurisprudence, Spiegelberg became increasingly more interested in philosophy, under the tutelage of Heinrich Rickert at Heidelberg, then at Freiburg where he studied under Edmund Husserl, then at Munich with Alexander Pfänder.

It was during the Freiburg and Munich periods that Spiegelberg turned to phenomenology. Spiegelberg considered Pfänder as his real teacher and, convinced of the importance of Pfänder's writings, he later republished and translated some of his writings into English. Spiegelberg defended his PhD thesis in 1928 in Munich under Pfänder. The dissertation was entitled "Das Wesen der Idee" (The Essence of the Idea), and dealt with problems raised in Husserl's seminal work *Logische Untersuchungen*, particularly the Second Investigation on the ideal unity of the species. This short dissertation was published in 1930, in the last volume of the official publishing organ of the Phenomenological Movement, the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung*, published by Husserl in conjunction with Max Scheler and Alexander Pfänder.

Because of his Jewish origin, Spiegelberg was unable to complete the *habilitation* examination necessary to become professor in the German university system. Instead, he emigrated in 1933, first to Switzerland and England, where he held several temporary teaching positions, and then in 1938 to the United States. In 1944 he was naturalized as a US citizen and in the same year married Eldora Haskell who had emigrated from Bulgaria. In 1941 Spiegelberg found employment as an instructor of philosophy at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, where he was promoted to full professor in 1953. In 1961–2 he served as Fulbright Professor at the University of

Munich, and from 1963 to 1971 he was a professor of philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Spiegelberg died on 6 September 1990 in St. Louis.

Spiegelberg directed a well-known annual phenomenological workshop at Washington University from 1965 to 1972. He was a member of numerous philosophical societies and was a founding member of the "Husserl Circle." Among many other academic affiliations, he belonged to the advisory board of the Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, as well as the journal *Husserl Studies*. Spiegelberg is widely known for his two-volume historical survey, *The Phenomenological Movement* (1960), which remains the most encompassing and comprehensive account of the history of the phenomenological movement. Besides his historical studies in phenomenology, he also published several substantial works on ethical issues, such as *Gesetz und Sittengesetz* (Law and Moral Law), *Steppingstones Toward an Ethics for Fellow Existents*, and *Sollen und Dürfen* (Ought and May).

Spiegelberg devoted himself to essentially two branches of philosophical research: phenomenology and moral (and legal) philosophy. His work in the latter field was influenced by the phenomenological philosophy of his teacher Pfänder. Within phenomenology, his publications can be subsumed under two related categories: historical and systematic.

Concerning his historical work, Spiegelberg was interested in presenting the so-called "Phenomenological Movement," a term coined by its founder Husserl, in the most true and historically adequate manner. His two-volume book with this title, written in English and intended as an introduction to phenomenology in America, is both historically and philosophically a model of philosophical historiography. Besides the best-known figures (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre), Spiegelberg was the first to devote serious historical research to recovering the phenomenological groups in Munich and Göttingen. For this latter task, Spiegelberg col-

lected the scattered and in many cases unpublished writings of thinkers such as Reinach, Pfänder, and the infamous Johannes Daubert, whom he identified, among some other scholars in phenomenology (especially K. Schuhmann and B. Smith), as one of the most forceful thinkers of the entire movement, although Daubert had not published a single word. Though many of these phenomenologists have fallen into oblivion in the public eye, they lie ready for rediscovery in this superb scholarly work. Spiegelberg is also responsible for chronicling many anecdotes in the history of the phenomenological "scene," presenting a plethora of historical "groundwork" (letters and other historical documents) that he for the most part collected himself. A selection of these historical essays has been collected in *The Context of the Phenomenological Movement*.

The Phenomenological Movement shows that Spiegelberg had an excellent understanding of the theories the phenomenologists were professing. He insisted in the last edition of this standard work that "all [he] wanted to be [was] a guide but not a mere chronicler." Many of his essays dealing with phenomenological themes in the stricter sense have become classic essays in the tradition of phenomenological philosophy proper. Among them, one needs to mention his studies on "'Intention' and 'Intentionality' in the Scholastics, Brentano and Husserl," "Husserl and Pfänder on the Phenomenological Reduction" (both also reprinted in the *Context*), and his book-length study *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry* (1972). This handbook-type study presents a sovereign blend of historical accounts of phenomenological psychology in "some major schools of psychology" (Brentano, Husserl, Jaspers, Binswanger, Goldstein, Boss, among many others) as well as systematic assessments of their philosophical achievements. This work also features highly interesting comparisons between phenomenological efforts at psychology with approaches in contemporary psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Lacan, and others). Spiegelberg took this attempt seri-

ously as bringing phenomenology into the arena with other philosophical schools and generally academic concerns, in order to study "the impact of phenomenology in areas other than philosophy," as he points out in the preface. Generally speaking, he saw phenomenology as a descriptive discipline dedicated to a realistic account of the world, and thus was rather critical of Husserl's transcendental turn to idealism.

His systematic interest in phenomenology as an important contribution to contemporary philosophy, especially to ethics, led him to become an editor and advocate of the work of his teacher, Pfänder. Pfänder was considered one of the very important representatives of the phenomenological movement but by the end of World War II was already nearly forgotten. Not only out of mere reverence for his teacher, but also from the conviction that Pfänder's work merited a renewed attention, Spiegelberg edited and translated several works by the Munich philosopher, and wrote a short introductory monograph on Pfänder's phenomenology. Already the titles of Pfänder's works that Spiegelberg selected indicate that Spiegelberg especially admired Pfänder's work on moral philosophy and sought to help it gain greater attention.

Parallel to these multifarious activities, Spiegelberg continued to pursue his own systematic work in moral philosophy, beginning with his dissertation and first book-length study *Antirelativismus* of 1935 to his last work, *Steppingstones*, published in 1986. Although *Sollen und Dürfen* was not released to the public until 1989, it had already been completed by 1937 during Spiegelberg's sojourn in England where he had come under the influence of British moral philosophy. For political reasons, the work could not be published in Germany at the time. Nevertheless, it presents, in Spiegelberg's own opinion, his best-developed systematic contribution to moral philosophy. Already in *Antirelativismus*, Spiegelberg attempts to salvage values from any sort of "relativism and skepticism" by applying the

method of eidetic intuition that Husserl developed in the *Logical Investigations* to the sphere of values and the moral imperative – a task Husserl had carried out with respect to pure logic. He further pursued this line in his *Gesetz und Sittengesetz*, in which he attacks what he calls "legism," in other words, an "over-emphasis on the role of law, regardless in which field it occurs." He applied this criticism mainly to the spheres of ethics and legal philosophy.

As Scheler had similarly argued against Kant's focus on living in accordance with the "moral law" (*Sittengesetz*), Spiegelberg proposes a return to an ethics of values that he sees realized already in ancient philosophy, mainly in that of Aristotle. He criticizes a "legistic" ethics for being "removed from life" and "artificial." Instead, a "law-free ethics" insists on a "fundamental givenness" that enables the intuitive graspability of oughts, ought-nots and may's. Only on this basis can one hope to erect a new "practological philosophy" that avoids the errors of "legism." As these formulations clearly reveal, his attempt at an ethics is inspired by the phenomenological method of intuition. This is remarkable since phenomenology's intuitionism is usually held to be incompatible with making normative, ethical claims. Spiegelberg attempted this positive, law-free ethics in the manuscript entitled *Sollen und Dürfen*. In this work, he emphasizes the ethical right of the individual. It is only from the individual's right that duties can be derived. In his preface from 1983, Spiegelberg acknowledges the advances that modern ethics, especially in Analytic philosophy, has made in the latter half of the twentieth century and the limitations of the phenomenological approach. Nevertheless, he sees some modern developments prefigured in his earlier conceptions, especially in the work of Georg Henrik von Wright.

The individual and the ensuing solidarity of individuals in our global society are also the focus of his ethical essays, written between 1944 and 1983, which Spiegelberg collected in his *Steppingstones Toward an Ethics For Fellow Existents*. In these essays, he addresses

specific contemporary moral issues in the nuclear age, and prefaces the work with a quotation from Einstein: "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything" Besides systematic pieces on the problem of selfhood, human equality and human rights and the question of fairness, Spiegelberg offers a number of remarkably timely reflections on contemporary issues. He takes position on issues such as the rights of the "naturally handicapped," the burning problem of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the question of legitimate civil disobedience in a nation that is preparing for nuclear warfare. These reflections culminate in the recurring phrase of the individual's "accident of birth" that merely by chance places one among a group or nation of "haves" or "have-nots." From this follows not only the demand for solidarity in our global society, but also the duty for those born as "haves" to lend support to the "have-nots." This is already formulated in his "Creed" of 1937, written in Latin: "*In consortis locum quem casu tantum non occupas te transpone et sortem actu suam tuam potentia respice.*" "Transpose yourself into the position of your companion in fate, it is only by accident that you do not occupy his place; and respect the fate that is his by actuality as the one which could be potentially yours."

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