PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE
UNITED STATES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
ACTUAL SITUATION

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The initial treatises on phenomenological psychology were written during the first quarter of this century, although some of these studies did not appear in print before the end of World War II. Most of these studies were of a purely theoretical nature and focused almost exclusively on the perspectives which Husserl’s phenomenology opened for the realm of psychology. However, from the very start there have been books and essays in which the phenomenological method was applied to concrete problems in psychology.

The question of what phenomenological psychology precisely is and its meaning and function in regard to philosophy as well as in regard to empirical psychology was dealt with almost exclusively in that period by Edmund Husserl who, beyond any possible doubt, is the father of this contemporary movement in psychology. Husserl’s view has been applied concretely to psychological problems by M. Scheler, A. Pfänder, M. Geiger, E. Stein, K. Jaspers, A. Gurwitsch, E. Straus, to mention some of the most important authors.

In the thirties publications by Gaston Bachelard, Eugène Minkowski, and J.-P. Sartre, appeared to be added to this list, whereas in the interim Heidegger had presented a new interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology under the general heading ‘her-
menueutic phenomenology' in his book *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger's theoretical ideas were then later applied to psychology and psychiatry by Binswanger, M. Boss, and others.

After World War II a great number of people wrote on phenomenological psychology; among these authors, Drüe, Schuetz, and Graumann in Germany must be mentioned, whereas in France Merleau-Ponty, Gsdorf, and Ricoeur, and in the Netherlands Buytendijk, Linschoten, Van den Berg, Strasser, and Van Lennep should be mentioned. Some of these people remained faithful to Husserl's original ideas, taken mainly in the interpretation of Sartre, whereas others have stayed closer to Heidegger's conception of phenomenology.¹

As far as the United States is concerned, serious interest in the phenomenological movement began to manifest itself immediately after the second World War. It seems to me that the publications and lectures of Schuetz, Gurwitsch, Straus, and Farber have contributed much to this development. Since 1950 a great number of people have written and spoken about phenomenological or existential psychology, but to the best of my knowledge and (with a very few exceptions) until now no original contributions have been made here, either in the purely theoretical realm, or in the application of the phenomenological or hermeneutical methods to concrete psychological problems.

Furthermore, we must say that here in the United States there is still an enormous confusion concerning such fundamental questions as 'what is phenomenological psychology?', 'what is the difference and the relationship between phenomenological and existential psychology?', 'what is the meaning and function of phenomenological psychology in regard to empirical psychology on the one hand and philosophy on the other?' This confusion originates