

DOROTHY F. SCHMIDT

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

✧ *In Memoriam* ✧



PROFESSOR LESTER EMBREE

Professor of Philosophy

12 pm, Friday, February 10

Majestic Palm Room, Student Union

Memorial is open to the entire FAU community:
students, staff, administrators and faculty

Memorial Statement 2017

Professor Lester Embree, Ph.D., passed away on January 19, 2017 at the age of seventy-nine. Professor Embree held the William F. Dietrich Eminent Scholar in Philosophy Chair for over twenty-five years at Florida Atlantic University. He worked tirelessly to promote, disseminate, and sustain the growth and practice of phenomenology. Accepting the basic definition of phenomenology as the study of the structures of consciousness as experienced from a first person point of view, Embree cultivated a preference for certain types of phenomenological investigations: transcendental constitutive phenomenology and naturalistic constitutive phenomenology. With intellectual roots deep in phenomenology, Embree repudiated the excesses and overreaching of positivism. Embree believed that phenomenology provides important theoretical and methodological resources for illuminating the constitutive features of the socio-cultural world.

Professor Embree earned his Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research in 1972. This fact takes on major significance because it indicates Embree's unquestionable grounding in phenomenology. The New School for Social Research was affectionately known as the German University in Exile. It became the American home for scholars trained in the phenomenological tradition who desired to continue their work in phenomenology after having been forced to abandon their native countries.

Embree's career was distinguished, among other things, by his extraordinary intellectual pedigree, having studied with some of the major phenomenologists who themselves had a direct line of intellectual descent back to the founder

of phenomenology, the great Edmund Husserl. Professor Embree completed his doctoral work with Aron Gurwitsch and took classes with Dorion Cairns and Alfred Schutz. His genealogical connection to phenomenology also includes the influential role he performed in setting up the archives for the papers, manuscripts, photocopies and files of major figures in phenomenology, among others, Alfred Schutz, Aron Gurwitsch, Herbert Spiegelberg, Winthrop Bell, and Dorion Cairns.

Consistent with his direct link to the founders of phenomenology, Professor Embree became the global ambassador of phenomenology. He is most deserving of this honor because of his recognition that the success of phenomenology required an unlimited labor of love. In other words, it became clear to Embree that in order for phenomenology to have become an enduring reality, it must become a tradition, a project that is taken up and remains alive by being enacted over and again by persons across generation. Embree took upon himself the unselfish task of shouldering the practical work of advancing phenomenology. Indeed, his efforts are evident through his work in North America, then over the past decades or so, increasingly through his efforts on behalf of actively supporting phenomenological work in other parts of the world and in bringing together active scholars from philosophy, psychology, nursing, archeology, and architecture.

Scholarly Contributions

Professor Embree was also a prolific and diligent scholar, having published 5 book-length investigations, 94 book chapters, 89 interpretive essays, 46 edited books, and 31 edited works of other authors. Many of his works have been translated into several languages including Castilian, Japanese, Russian, Polish, Romanian, and Chinese. Embree found his distinctive phenomenological voice in his volume *Reflective Analysis*. Favoring the experience of engaging in original phenomenological investigations, while eluding more text-based analysis, Embree conceived phenomenology as essentially reflective analysis. Accordingly, Embree held the view that "The basic contention of *Reflective Analysis* is that phenomenology is most fundamentally an approach, rather than a set of texts or concepts: phenomenologizing involves modes of observation and analysis that we can learn to perform better."

In addition to his own original scholarly efforts and, as part of his mission to spread phenomenology, Professor Embree actively facilitated the establishment of venues for publishing work in phenomenological philosophy. "Working with other members of the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Embree played an important role in the establishment of the 'Series in Continental Thought' with the Ohio University Press, where he also served as Chairman of the Editorial Board from 1978 through 1984, and the series 'Current Continental Research' that was co-published with the University Press of America. (*contd.*)

LESTER EMBREE

Memorial Statement

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He also served as Chairman of its editorial board from 1981-1997. While Professor Embree was President of CARP, CARP established the series 'Contributions to Phenomenology' (CTP) with William McKenna as the founding editor of that series with Kluwer Academic Publishers (now Springer Verlag). This series, now with over 56 volumes, has since served as one of the most important series for current research in phenomenology since its inception in 1998; as of 2008, it includes 13 volumes in which Embree served as editor or co-editor."

Another of Professor Embree's scholarly achievements concerns his foresight in exploiting the potential of electronic publishing to provide students and scholars with easy access to the Internet. To this end, in 2001, Embree published a collection of essays entitled *The Reach of Reflection: Issues for Phenomenology's Second Century* with the then new electronpress at www.electronpress.com, with Steven Crowell and Samuel J. Julian serving as co-editors. He also coordinated the electronic publication of *Essays in Celebration of the Foundation of the Organization of Phenomenological Organization* in 2003 and 2004. Perhaps the crowning achievement of Embree's publication efforts was the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* in 2007 in the CPT series. Among other things, this comprehensive volume is noted for the diversity of entries on topics and prominent figures in the phenomenological tradition, and also for numerous entries detailing the state of phenomenology in over twenty-two countries.

In addition to his contribution to phenomenology through publishing, Embree also worked tirelessly to organize and host numerous conferences. These conferences provided a forum for gathering young scholars and more advanced scholars to pursue studies in phenomenology. In the many scholarly conferences he attended, he could be counted on to regularly provide illuminating comments on the views of authoritative phenomenologists, particularly those of the New School; to offer encouraging compliments and insightful criticisms; and to occasionally indulge in instances of clichéd humor. This kind of organizational work done by Embree is widely known in the phenomenological community because Embree did not allow cultural differences or national boundaries to prevent him from bringing together diverse individuals who shared an interest in phenomenology. Consistent with his desire to extend the influence of phenomenology, Embree gave 200 presentations in various conferences and academic settings.

Professional Service: Organizing Phenomenology

One of Embree's great services was to foster the growth of phenomenological organizations worldwide, and he was frequently involved in the beginnings of such organizations. He served on the boards of 35 phenomenological societies and belonged to 20 philosophical societies. Indeed, his professional affiliation with scholarly organizations is truly amazing and speaks to the caliber of Embree's dedication to the global spread of phenomenology, as well as the flourishing of phenomenology within North American University. The following are some of the numerous organizations to which Embree had an affiliation. He was an active member of the Merleau-Ponty Circle and coordinated some of its meetings. He was also a member of the Husserl Circle. Not one to be restricted by artificial disciplinary boundaries, he was a founding member and served on the Executive Committee of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (SPHS). Being a member of the most active society for the study of phenomenology, the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), Embree established the CARP's annual Aron Gurwitsch Memorial Lecture. The lecture series has featured some of the most notable and outstanding scholars in phenomenology from around the world.

As a graduate student, he was instrumental in establishing the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology (CARP). Most recently, Embree was active in various international settings, facilitating the founding of such organizations as: the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations (OPO), the Círculo LatinoAmericano de Fenomenología, the Central and European Conference in Phenomenology (CEECOP), the Nordic Society for Phenomenology (NoSP), Phenomenology for the East Asia Circle, Réseau Euro-Méditerranéen de phénoménologie pour le Dialogue Intercultural (REM), the Círculo LatinoAmericano de Fenomenología (CLAFEN), and the International Alfred Schutz Circle for Phenomenology and Interpretive Social Science.

Professor Lester Embree was, unquestionably, a great impresario 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 and intellectual traditions. Embree proudly advocated for scholars to actually engage in the joys of doing phenomenological investigations and not settle for scholarship on texts about doing phenomenology. For him phenomenological investigation is an actual, viable mode of philosophical practice.

Embree also devoted much time to critically thinking through the ways in which developments in culture and politics impacted the pursuit of the life of the mind. He was courageous enough to share his views on academic life and work with any one who expressed an interest.

Despite his distinguished status in the phenomenological tradition and his position as an eminent scholar, Embree cultivated and sustained an active interest in faculty governance. For him, academic work was not some convenient escape from life, but a call of the highest order that required a life of dedication. He took it upon himself not only to promote this way of life, he also protested against existential threats to its flourishing. To this end, he relentlessly pursued scholarly excellence, even if it meant being a global phenomenologist.

We end this memorial statement with the following quotation from John Dewey's *A Common Faith*:

We who now live are parts of a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, [repairing], and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant.

There is no exaggeration in claiming that Professor Embree sought to conserve, transmit, and expand the heritage of phenomenology so that those who come after him may receive it more solid and secure. With Lester's passing, phenomenology has lost one of its great animating and visionary spirits.

