

Contributions to Phenomenology 120

Marco Cavallaro
George Heffernan *Editors*

The Existential Husserl

A Collection of Critical Essays

 Springer

Contributions to Phenomenology

**In Cooperation with The Center for Advanced
Research in Phenomenology**

Volume 120

Series Editors

Nicolas de Warren, Department of Philosophy
Pennsylvania State University
State College, PA, USA

Ted Toadvine, Department of Philosophy
Pennsylvania State University
State College, PA, USA

Editorial Board Members

Lilian Alweiss, Trinity College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland

Elizabeth Behnke, Ferndale, WA, USA

Rudolf Bernet, Husserl Archive
KU Leuven, Belgium

David Carr, Emory University
Atlanta, GA, USA

Chan-Fai Cheung, Chinese University of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, Hong Kong

James Dodd, New School University
New York, USA

Alfredo Ferrarin, Università di Pisa
Pisa, Italy

Burt Hopkins, University of Lille
Lille, France

José Huertas-Jourda, Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Canada

Kwok-Ying Lau, Chinese University of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, Hong Kong

Nam-In Lee, Seoul National University
Seoul, Korea (Republic of)

Dieter Lohmar, University of Cologne
Cologne, Germany

William R. McKenna, Miami University
Ohio, USA

Algis Mickunas, Ohio University
Ohio, USA

J. N. Mohanty, Temple University
Philadelphia, USA

Dermot Moran, University College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland

Junichi Murata, University of Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan

Thomas Nenon, The University of Memphis
Memphis, USA

Gail Soffer, Roma Tre University
Rome, Italy

Anthony Steinbock, Department of Philosophy Stony Brook
University Stony Brook
New York, USA

Shigeru Taguchi, Hokkaido University
Sapporo, Japan

Dan Zahavi, University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark

Richard M. Zaner, Vanderbilt University
Nashville, USA

Scope

The purpose of the series is to serve as a vehicle for the pursuit of phenomenological research across a broad spectrum, including cross-over developments with other fields of inquiry such as the social sciences and cognitive science. Since its establishment in 1987, *Contributions to Phenomenology* has published more than 100 titles on diverse themes of phenomenological philosophy. In addition to welcoming monographs and collections of papers in established areas of scholarship, the series encourages original work in phenomenology. The breadth and depth of the Series reflects the rich and varied significance of phenomenological thinking for seminal questions of human inquiry as well as the increasingly international reach of phenomenological research.

All books to be published in this Series will be fully peer-reviewed before final acceptance.

The series is published in cooperation with The Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology.

Marco Cavallaro • George Heffernan
Editors

The Existential Husserl

A Collection of Critical Essays

 Springer

Editors

Marco Cavallaro
Institut für Philosophie
Universität Koblenz-Landau
Landau in der Pfalz, Germany

George Heffernan
Philosophy Department
Merrimack College
North Andover, MA, USA

ISSN 0923-9545

ISSN 2215-1915 (electronic)

Contributions to Phenomenology

ISBN 978-3-031-05094-7

ISBN 978-3-031-05095-4 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05095-4>

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

This volume is the direct result of a contingent encounter with existential consequences. In July 2017, we, the editors, met at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Husserl Circle in Rethymno, Crete. Heatedly debating the complex thought of a leading German philosopher in the midst of a hot Greek summer can have not only unhealthy but also salutary after-effects. Until now the association of Husserl's name with existential or existentialist philosophy has been unconventional, to say the least. Indeed, how is “der Meister der Wesensschau,” as Dietrich Mahnke once dubbed him,¹ to be thought of in connection with a philosophy that claims, famously or infamously, that “existence precedes essence”?

If, however, one refrains from making precipitous inferences regarding the rather palpable differences between the connotations of the words *Wesen* in Husserlian phenomenology and *essence* in French existentialism, and takes care to interpret Sartre's programmatic pronouncement only upon careful reflection, unanticipated associations may gradually emerge. Sartre namely says: “What they [les existentialistes] have in common is simply the fact that they think that existence precedes essence [l'existence précède l'essence], or, if you will, that *subjectivity must be our point of departure*.”² As is well known, subjectivity figures as an equally central theme in Husserl's philosophy, and is, though not exactly the point of departure, surely the pivotal point of its chief methodological device, the transcendental-phenomenological *epoché* and reduction.

Despite this *prima facie* deep connection between Husserlian phenomenology and existentialist thinking, the current body of literature on this topic is not very extensive. It may have been for this reason as well that, inebriated by the Greek sun (not to mention the Cretan raki) and enthused by the lively discussions with the other participants at the Husserl Circle meeting, we came up with the idea of a

¹See the dedication in the “proto-existentialist” pamphlet of Dietrich Mahnke, *Der Wille zur Ewigkeit: Gedanken eines deutschen Kriegers über den Sinn des Geisteslebens* (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1917).

²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 20 (italics added and translation modified).

collection of essays that would shed some light on this hitherto relatively neglected dimension of Husserlian scholarship. Thus was born *The Existential Husserl: A Collection of Critical Essays*.

This volume aims to initiate, or, more accurately, to revitalize, a long-delayed and long-dormant exploration of the existential and even existentialist aspects of Husserl's thought. At the latest since the publication of his research manuscripts collected in *Die Lebenswelt*,³ and especially of those gathered in *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*,⁴ an inchoate awareness of Husserl's existential philosophy and of what may perhaps even be called his "existentialism" (*sit venia verbo!*) has been growing in the community of Husserlian scholars. The contributions of this collection not only substantiate this fact, but also deepen the discussion and highlight important critical aspects of this promising direction in Husserlian scholarship.

In "[Husserl's Phenomenology of Existence: A Very Brief Introduction](#)," George Heffernan provides a preliminary justification for the collection by establishing beyond any reasonable doubt that there is such a philosopher as "the *existential* Husserl"—while bracketing, but also inviting, and even provoking, the accompanying question whether there is such a philosopher as "the *existentialist* Husserl."

In "[Transcendental Anthropology and Existential Phenomenology of Happiness](#)," Jagna Brudzińska proposes to overcome purely cognitive accounts of the phenomenon that do not do justice to phenomenal polarities and subjective ambiguities. She seeks to accomplish this by providing a phenomenological-anthropological description of happiness that focuses on both the intentional subject striving toward happiness and the lived experience of happiness by the subject itself. Thus she highlights the genetic-temporal, ethical-social, and existential-teleological aspects of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) in Husserl's sense of bliss (*Seligkeit*).

In "['I Want, Therefore I Can': Husserl's Phenomenology of Heroic Willing](#)," Marco Cavallaro investigates the concept of heroic willing in Husserl's late ethical thought and lays out the transcendental-phenomenological conditions of heroism. First he provides the basic outlines of the phenomenology of willing that Husserl works out in the lectures and research manuscripts of his years in Göttingen (1901–1916). Then he considers the problem of the irrationality of life and world, which becomes a central issue in Husserl's reflections on ethics during his Freiburg period (1916–1938). Finally he sketches how Husserl responds to this problem by developing the concept of heroic willing. In short, Cavallaro argues that heroic

³Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution—Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937)*, *Husserliana* XXXIX, ed. Rochus Sowa (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).

⁴Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie: Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik—Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908–1937)*, *Husserliana* XLII, ed. Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).

willing is Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological solution to the existential problem of practical irrationality.

In “‘*Mag die Welt eine Hölle sein*’: Husserl's Existential Ethics,” *Nicolas de Warren* explores the indigenous existential concerns of Husserl's ethical thinking after the First World War by focusing on his “Freiburg Manuscripts.” These posthumously published research manuscripts contain reflections in which Husserl re-frames the “imaginative destruction of the world,” a centerpiece of the phenomenological method of suspension and reduction, in ethical terms. This move leads Husserl to confront existential questions: Is it possible to strive to become an ethical person if one cannot assure oneself of the ethical meaningfulness of the world? Would I still want to be an ethical person in a world that is hell? Can I even live in a meaningless world? In response to this haunting of ethical life by the scepter of its own impossibility, Husserl develops his original doctrine of absolute values, the affective basis of ethical imperatives, the significance of what we care about, and the idea of the autonomy of freedom as grounded in the self-responsibility of ethical persons and their responsiveness to their chosen values.

In “The Development of Husserl's Categorical Imperative: From Universal Ethical Legislation to Individual Existential Exhortation,” *George Heffernan* argues that it is useful and fruitful to understand the development of Husserl's categorical imperative as a *Leitfaden* to the evolution of his moral philosophy, shows that his ethics presents at its different stages not one categorical imperative but several categorical imperatives, and explores the philosophical significance of his mature categorical imperative, which is distinguished not by its abstract, formal aspects, but rather by its concrete, material—and individual, *existential*—dimensions.

In “A Phenomenological and Logical Clarification of Individual Existence,” *Carlos Lobo* attempts to explain how, in the context of the old conflict between abstract logical thought and existential subjective thinking, the problem of individuation emerges as a touchstone for deciding whether there is an existential turning point in Husserl's phenomenology. He does this by posing the question of how Husserl tries to surmount the classical metaphysical and logical opposition between existence and essence, as well as that between an extrinsic individuation (through space and time) and an intrinsic individuation (through complete logical determination of an individual essence), and by attempting to reformulate the old opposition between necessity and contingency in radically new terms, so that it can become possible to conceive, in a formally coherent way, of a *free* individual without reverting to the intractable dilemma of freedom versus necessity.

In “Is Husserl's Later Ethics Existentialist? On the Primal Facticity of the Person and Husserl's ‘Existentialist Rationalism’,” *Sophie Loidolt* argues that Husserl's later reflections on ethics exhibit existentialist elements insofar as they acknowledge the unique existence of the concrete individual, not only as a theoretical topic, but also as “an issue” *for* this very individual; address the questions concerning existence and duty, for a whole life and for one in constant renewal; and recognize the individuation of the authentic person by a “call,” that is, the moment of decision in a specific situation involving a choice of who one is, the impossibility of justifying oneself according to universalist standards, and the necessity of taking absolute

responsibility for one's decisions. All these reflections lead Loidolt to speak of Husserl's "existentialist rationalism," which, in articulating the tensions between the rational and the irrational in the primal facticity of the person, remains obliged to the ideals of the Enlightenment.

In "[Birth, Death, and Sleep: Limit Problems and the Paradox of Phenomenology](#)," *James Mensch* analyzes what Husserl in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* describes as "the paradox of human subjectivity," which involves our "being a [transcendental] subject for the world and at the same time [as human] an object in the world"; formulates the limit paradox that, as humans, we are mortal, but as transcendental subjects, we cannot assert that we are; and poses the question whether the phenomenological method, as applied to limit problems of life and death, can render intelligible the relation between a deathless transcendental subjectivity and its mortal human counterpart.

In "[Husserl, Jaspers, and Heidegger on Life and Existence](#)," *Dermot Moran* provides historical and philosophical insights helpful for understanding the decisive debates about the salient differences between the approaches of phenomenology, philosophy of existence, philosophy of life, and existentialism to various pivotal issues, including Husserl's universal rationalism, his late attention to the problems of existence, the primacy of subjectivity, the meaning of life and the life of consciousness, the freedom of the will and of the conscious agent, the life-world and the idea of a science of it, and intersubjectivity and the life of spirit.

In "[Authentic Existence in Husserl and Heidegger](#)," *Thomas Nenon* examines Heidegger's analysis of authentic existence in *Being and Time* (1927) and Husserl's development of the idea of genuine existence in the time leading up to Heidegger's *magnum opus*. He argues that, contrary to the common supposition that Heidegger has a great deal to say about the idea of authentic existence whereas Husserl does not, in his middle and later periods Husserl's work actually went in a direction that paralleled Heidegger's in certain significant respects. He cautions, however, that there remained an important difference between these thinkers that came to separate them during the 1920s.

In "[Kierkegaard and Husserl](#)," *Bernhard Obsieger* presents a systematic exposition of Kierkegaard's view of the three different normative approaches to life, namely, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious; compares and contrasts this view with Husserl's apprehension of the meaning of human life; and attempts to show that Kierkegaard's account of the three fundamentally different approaches to life both poses a challenge to and offers an important alternative to Husserl's position that ethical life must be regarded as the only coherent life and as the only ultimately satisfactory life.

In "[Husserl's Concept of the Absolute Ought: Implications for Ethics and Value Theory](#)," *Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl* challenges the supposedly clear picture of two completely distinct theoretical approaches to a phenomenological ethics and value theory in Husserl's work, the one rationalistic and the other personalistic; clarifies the notion of an absolute ought by means of a three-level model that explains the transition from Husserl's earlier to his later views in terms of the difference between a purely object-oriented and a reflectively subject-related usage of "absolute ought";

and argues that, notwithstanding considerable reorientations between the earlier and the later elaborations, a strong continuity prevails in terms of an overarching theory of reason.

In “[Revisiting Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology of the Ego: Existence and Praxis](#),” Rosemary Rizo-Patrón de Lerner seeks to overcome the notion that Husserl’s phenomenology, which is often misguidedly supposed to be primarily theoretical or monolithically eidetic, is unable to address questions concerning concrete existence, historical facticity, ethical life, and metaphysical problems, and aims to provide a novel, unitary interpretation of Husserl’s philosophy by uncovering the eminently practical nature of transcendental subjectivity, which ultimately exists as an intersubjective community of active egos with essentially existential roots.

In “[The Existential Situatedness of the Transcendental Subject](#),” Rochus Sowa contrasts the human person, thematizable in the natural attitude with the general structures specific to persons, and the transcendental subject, thematizable in the phenomenological attitude as the subject that constitutes the world and itself as a human person in the world. Applying this distinction, he clarifies the concepts of world-constitution and self-constitution as a “letting-appear” of world and human subject to demonstrate the identity of the transcendental subject as transcendental person and human person and thus the situatedness of the transcendental subject in the world as well as in innumerable situations of human life. He concludes by showing that even in “deworlding” transcendental-phenomenological reflection, the transcendental subject situates itself worldly.

In “[Existential Choice: Husserl Meets Heller](#),” Andrea Staiti develops a vindication of Agnes Heller’s conception of existential choice by drawing on Husserl’s manuscripts and lectures on ethics. After reconstructing Heller’s view and the criticism that has been leveled against it, he turns to Husserl and argues that existential choice is necessary in order to shift from a naïve to a self-reflective stage of the good life; that there is a tight link between existential choice under the category of difference and existential choice under the category of universality; and that the revocation of existential choices does not annul their impact on life. He suggests, as a result, that there is a certain irrevocability of existential choices even when life forces us to give up on them.

Taken collectively, the contributions of this volume demonstrate that Husserl’s phenomenology provides rich resources not only for conducting investigations involving theoretical inquiries concerning logic, epistemology, and theory of science, but also for engaging in practical sense-reflections (*Besinnungen*) on existential—and perhaps even “existentialist”—questions concerning the meaning of life or a life of meaning.

At this point, we co-editors have the distinct pleasure of expressing our immense gratitude not only to our contributors but also to Panos Theodorou and Fotini Vassiliou, who graciously and generously hosted the 2017 Husserl Circle meeting at which the idea for this volume was conceived; to Burt Hopkins, the Permanent

Secretary of the Husserl Circle, who also co-organized that event; to Dieter Lohmar and Jagna Brudzińska, who co-organized what amounted to a direct continuation of that meeting, namely, the conference titled “Husserl und das Denken der Existenz” at the Husserl Archives of the University of Cologne in 2018; and, last but not least, to Nicolas de Warren and Ted Toadvine, the Series Editors of Contributions to Phenomenology, for their patience and understanding in seeing this project through to its conclusion.

Landau in der Pfalz, Germany
Andover, MA, USA
March 2022

Marco Cavallaro
George Heffernan

Contents

Husserl's Phenomenology of Existence: A Very Brief Introduction.	1
George Heffernan	
Transcendental Anthropology and Existential Phenomenology of Happiness	31
Jagna Brudzińska	
"I Want, Therefore I Can": Husserl's Phenomenology of Heroic Willing	45
Marco Cavallaro	
"Mag die Welt eine Hölle sein": Husserl's Existential Ethics	65
Nicolas de Warren	
The Development of Husserl's Categorical Imperative: From Universal Ethical Legislation to Individual Existential Exhortation.	87
George Heffernan	
A Phenomenological and Logical Clarification of Individual Existence	115
Carlos Lobo	
Is Husserl's Later Ethics Existentialist? On the Primal Facticity of the Person and Husserl's "Existentialist Rationalism"	145
Sophie Loidolt	
Birth, Death, and Sleep: Limit Problems and the Paradox of Phenomenology	163
James Mensch	
Husserl, Jaspers, and Heidegger on Life and Existence	185
Dermot Moran	

Authentic Existence in Husserl and Heidegger	209
Thomas Nenon	
Kierkegaard and Husserl	227
Bernhard Obsieger	
Husserl's Concept of the Absolute Ought: Implications for Ethics and Value Theory	251
Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl	
Revisiting Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology of the Ego: Existence and Praxis	277
Rosemary R. P. Lerner	
The Existential Situatedness of the Transcendental Subject	301
Rochus Sowa	
Existential Choice: Husserl Meets Heller	325
Andrea Staiti	
Index	345

About the Authors

Jagna Brudzińska is a Diplomed Psychologist, a Professor of Philosophy at the Institute for Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and a Research Fellow at the Husserl Archives of the University of Cologne, where she is lecturer and editor of the critical edition of Husserl's *Erfahrung und Urteil* in his *Gesammelte Werke* or *Husserliana*. Her research encompasses Husserl, phenomenology, modern theory of subjectivity, psychoanalysis and theoretical psychology, and philosophical anthropology. Her publications include, in addition to numerous papers on topics in these areas, *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically: Phenomenological Theories of Subjectivity and the Psychoanalytic Experience*, co-edited with Dieter Lohmar (Springer, 2011), *Der Mensch als Soziales Wesen: Phänomenologische und Anthropologische Perspektiven*, co-edited with Dieter Lohmar (Walter de Gruyter, 2017), and *Bi-Valenz der Erfahrung: Assoziation, Imaginäres und Trieb in der Genesis der Subjektivität bei Husserl und Freud* (Springer, 2019). She is the president of the Polish Phenomenological Association, coordinator of the International Network *Genetic Phenomenology and the Human Sciences*, and organizer of the International Research Summer School in Genetic Phenomenology.

Marco Cavallaro is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Philosophy of the University Koblenz-Landau. After completing an M.Phil. at the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Cologne with a dissertation on Husserl's theory of science (*Wissenschaftslehre*). His publications engage with Husserl's reflections on habit, phantasy, and transcendental subjectivity. He is co-editor of *Phenomenology of Phantasy and Emotions* (WBG, 2022) as well as of a forthcoming collection of essays on Husserl's and Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Currently his work focuses on phenomenological ethics and virtual phenomenology.

Nicolas de Warren, formerly Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wellesley College and Research Professor in Philosophy and Director of the Center for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy at the Higher Institute of Philosophy

at the University of Leuven, is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. He studied in Paris, Heidelberg, and Boston, where he received his Ph.D. from Boston University in 2001. He has authored several books, including *Husserl and the Promise of Time: Subjectivity in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Original Forgiveness* (Northwestern University Press, 2020). He has edited several volumes, including (with Andrea Staiti) *New Approaches to Neo-Kantianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), (with Jeffrey Bloechl) *Phenomenology in a New Key—Between Analysis and History: Essays in Honor of Richard Cobb-Stevens* (Springer, 2015), and (with Thomas Vongehr) *Philosophers at the Front: Phenomenology and the First World War* (Leuven University Press, 2017). In 2013 he was the recipient of a European Research Council Grant for a project on the impact of the First World War on twentieth-century philosophy. He has also published scores of papers on phenomenology, aesthetics, political philosophy, and European philosophy. His book *German Philosophy and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press) is forthcoming.

George Heffernan is Professor of Philosophy at Merrimack College in Massachusetts. He received his B.A. and M.A. from The Catholic University of America and his Ph.D. from the University of Cologne. He specializes in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism and concentrates on evidence, understanding, and meaning. His publications include *Bedeutung und Evidenz bei Edmund Husserl* (Bouvier, 1983), *Isagoge in die phänomenologische Apophantik* (Kluwer, 1989), *René Descartes: Regulae ad directionem ingenii/Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence: A Bilingual Edition of the Cartesian Treatise on Method* (Rodopi, 1998/Brill, 2014), “A Tale of Two Schisms: Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl’s Move into Transcendental Idealism,” in *The European Legacy* (2016), “Camus and Husserl and the Phenomenologists,” in *Brill’s Companion to Camus: Camus among the Philosophers* (Brill, 2020), and “Phenomenology, Psychology, and Ideology: A New Look at the Life and Work of Else Voigtländer,” in *Phenomenological Investigations* 1 (2021). His research has been supported by the Basselin Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Order of Saint Augustine. He is completing an edition of Augustine’s *Contra Academicos vel De Academicis/Against the Academics or On the Academics* that addresses the perennial issues raised by Hellenistic skepticism, revised by Cartesian rationalism, and revisited by contemporary epistemology.

Carlos Lobo is a phenomenologist, epistemologist, and logician who currently works in collaboration with the Husserl Archives of Paris and other research centers and scientific committees in France and abroad. His publications aim at developing fundamental but underexplored phenomenological themes and showing their importance for the basic understanding and critical clarification of current issues in formal logic, probability theory, physics, biology, the social sciences, and aesthetics. His

recent publications include “Husserl’s Reform of Logic: An Introduction,” *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 15 (2017); “Some Reasons to Reopen the Question of Foundations of Probability Theory Following the Rota Way,” in *The Philosophers and Mathematicians*, ed. H. Tahiri (Springer, 2018). A translator of Weyl and Husserl, he is also co-editor of *Weyl and the Problem of Space: From Mathematics to Philosophy* (Springer, 2019), *Écrire comme composer: Le rôle des diagrammes en musique* (Delatour, 2020), and *When Form Becomes Substance: Diagrams, Power of Gesture and Phenomenology of Space*, (Springer/Birkhäuser, 2021).

Sophie Loidolt is Professor of Philosophy at the Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany. She is a member of the Young Academy of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a Recurrent Visiting Professor at the Center for Subjectivity Research, Copenhagen. Her work centers on issues in the fields of phenomenology, political and legal philosophy, and ethics, as well as transcendental philosophy and philosophy of mind. Her publications include *Anspruch und Rechtfertigung: Eine Theorie des rechtlichen Denkens im Anschluss an die Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls* (Springer, 2009), *Einführung in die Rechtsphänomenologie* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010), and *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (Routledge, 2017).

James Mensch is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague. His main areas of research are classical phenomenology and its contemporary social and political applications. He is the editor of the book series, *Body and Consciousness*, with Ibidem Press, and is a member of the Central European Institute of Philosophy. He is the author of numerous papers and 14 books, from *The Question of Being in Husserl’s “Logical Investigations”* (Nijhoff, 1981) to *Decisions and Transformations: The Phenomenology of Embodiment*, which was published by Ibidem Press in 2020 to initiate the series *Body and Consciousness*. His recent publications include *Selfhood and Appearing: The Intertwining* (Brill, 2018) and *Patočka’s Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2016).

Dermot Moran holds the Joseph Chair in Catholic Philosophy at Boston College. He was previously Professor of Philosophy at University College Dublin. He is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Institut International de Philosophie. His publications include *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Routledge, 2000), *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Polity, 2005), *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and, co-authored with Joseph Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* (Continuum, 2012). His edited works include *Husserl’s Logical Investigations*, 2 vols. (Routledge, 2001); *The Phenomenology Reader*, co-edited with Tim Mooney (Routledge, 2002); *Phenomenology: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, 5 Volumes, co-edited with Lester Embree (Routledge, 2004); *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy* (Routledge, 2008); *The Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity*,

co-edited with Rasmus Thybo Jensen (Springer, 2014); *Empathy, Sociality, and Personhood: Essays on Edith Stein's Phenomenological Investigations*, co-edited with Elisa Magrì (Springer, 2017); *Conscious Thinking and Cognitive Phenomenology*, co-edited with Marta Jorba (Routledge, 2018); and *Perception and the Inhuman Gaze: Perspectives from Philosophy, Phenomenology, and the Sciences*, co-edited with Anya Daly, Fred Cummins, and James Jardine (Routledge, 2020).

Thomas Nenon is Professor of Philosophy and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost at the University of Memphis. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Freiburg and worked there as an Instructor and as an editor at the Husserl Archives. His teaching and research interests include Husserl, Heidegger, Kant and German Idealism, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of the social sciences. His publications include *Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis: Kants transzendental-philosophische Theorie der Wahrheit* (Karl Alber, 1986), and, co-edited with Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana XXV: Aufsätze und Vorträge 1911–1921* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1987) and *Husserliana XXVII: Aufsätze und Vorträge 1922–1937* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1989), as well as, co-edited with Philip Blosser, *Advancing Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Lester Embree* (Springer, 2010), and, co-edited with Lester Embree, *Husserl's "Ideen"* (Springer, 2013). He has served as a review editor for *Husserl Studies*, as a member of the Executive Committee of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, and as the Director of the Center for the Humanities. His current research interests include Husserl's theories of personhood and subjectivity as well as Kant's and Hegel's practical philosophy.

Bernhard Obsieger is Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University/Madrid. He earned his Ph.D. at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where he is a member of the FEN-HER group, and has participated in several research projects on phenomenology and hermeneutics. Currently he is also part of a research project on Kierkegaard's earliest writings. Most of his publications relate to Husserl, in particular to questions concerning time-consciousness, ethics, and the phenomenological method. Recently his work has focused on ancient philosophy and Kierkegaard's existential thought. In his research, he tries to combine a systematic, problem-oriented approach with the need for doing justice to the historical nature of philosophy. His paper, "Husserls Frage: 'Kann ich mein Leben leben, ohne dass ich es wollen kann?'" (*Phänomenologische Forschungen* 2015), was awarded the essay prize of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung.

Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Graz. Her research focuses on the contributions of Husserlian phenomenology to current debates in normative ethics and metaethics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and the theory of the emotions. Her book publications include *Edmund Husserl: Zeitlichkeit und Intentionalität* (Karl Alber, 2000) and *Mediane Phänomenologie: Subjektivität im Spannungsfeld von Naturalität und Kulturalität* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2003). She has also co-edited several volumes, including (with John

Drummond) *Emotional Experiences: Ethical and Social Significance* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), and has been co-editor of *Husserl Studies* (with Steven Crowell) since 2008. She has published numerous articles on various topics in phenomenology, for example, the first-person perspective, the critique of psychologism, relativism, representationalism, self-deception, the fact/value dichotomy, and moral supervenience. Her current publication projects center on the attempt to achieve a systematic conception of the emotions, the person, and ethics on a solid phenomenological basis.

Rosemary R. P. Lerner is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Humanities at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. She earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the Catholique Université de Louvain, Belgium (1996). She has been secretary of the Latin American Circle of Phenomenology (CLAFEN) since 1999 and of the Peruvian Circle of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics (CIPHER) since 2004. She is a member of several phenomenological societies and advisory boards of international philosophy journals and book series. Her research interests are Husserl's and Kant's transcendental philosophy, the continental phenomenological tradition, and the intertwining of epistemological, practical, axiological, and intercultural philosophical problems. Her publications include *Husserl en diálogo: Lecturas y debates* (Lima, 2012), *El exilio del sujeto: Mitos modernos y posmodernos* (Lima, 2014/2015), *La agonía de la razón: Reflexiones desde la fenomenología práctica* (Madrid, 2015), and, most recently, *La racionalidad ampliada: Nuevos horizontes de la fenomenología y la hermenéutica* (Lima, 2020).

Rochus Sowa studied philosophy, psychology, and linguistics in Germany. He was awarded the Husserl Prize of the University of Freiburg, Germany, for his M.A. thesis, "Wesen und Wortbedeutung: Eine Untersuchung zur sogenannten Wesensschau als phänomenologischer Methode der Begriffsklärung bei Edmund Husserl," and received his Ph.D. from the University of Leuven, Belgium, for his dissertation, "Ideation, freie Variation, materiales Apriori: Husserls Lehre von der Wesensanschauung und seine Methode der Aprioriforschung, Neu dargestellt unter dem Primat des eidetischen Satzes und unter Zugrundelegung des als Sachverhaltsfunktion aufgefassten Wesens." He was Assistant at the Husserl Archives in Leuven from 2000 to 2012 and is editor of *Husserliana XXXIX: Die Lebenswelt* (Springer, 2008), co-editor of *Husserliana XLII: Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Springer, 2014), and collaborator on *Husserliana XXXVI: Transzendentaler Idealismus* (Kluwer, 2003). He has published numerous papers and lexicon entries on Husserl's phenomenology, especially on Husserlian eidetics, in German, English, French, and Polish.

Andrea Staiti is the Rita Levi Montalcini Professor of Philosophy at the University of Parma, Italy, and a Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the Philosophy Department at Boston College, where he formerly held a position as Associate Professor. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Freiburg and is an alumnus of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung and of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

He works in phenomenology, German Idealism, Neo-Kantianism, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Central European Philosophy, theory of knowledge and history of science, philosophy of mind, metaethics, theories of personhood, and philosophical anthropology. His publications include *Geistigkeit, Leben und geschichtliche Welt in der Transzendentalphänomenologie Husserls* (Ergon, 2010), *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit, and Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), *A Commentary on Husserl's "Ideas I"* (De Gruyter, 2015), and *Etica naturalistica e fenomenologia* (Il Mulino, 2020). He is a founding co-editor of the *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy* (De Gruyter, 2019 ff.).

Husserl's Phenomenology of Existence: A Very Brief Introduction



George Heffernan

Abstract The philosophical world of a Europe in crisis during the 1920s and 1930s was strongly attracted to what was known in the German-speaking world as *Existenzphilosophie*. Yet “philosophy of existence” was not the only contemporaneous style of philosophizing, and in the Afterword (1930) to his *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913) Edmund Husserl deemed it necessary to respond to the criticism that his phenomenology, which concentrated on investigations of the essential—the necessary and the universal—in human experience, did not confront and could not solve “the problems of so-called ‘existence’”. This introduction presents evidence to show that Husserl’s phenomenology, which is basically essentialist in character, also encompasses a phenomenology of human existence.

Keywords Husserl · Phenomenology · Existence · Philosophy of existence · Existentialism

1 Historical and Philosophical Horizons of the Theme

For understandable reasons, the academic and cultural world of a Europe in crisis during the 1920s and 1930s was strongly attracted to what was known in the German-speaking world as *Existenzphilosophie*.¹ Yet “philosophy of existence” was not the only contemporaneous style of philosophizing, and in the Afterword (1930)

¹ Arendt 1946b, 1948a, 1946/1948b; Becker 1929; Bollnow 1943; Brecht 1948; Fischer 1935; Heidegger 1927; Heinemann 1929, 1950, 1951; Hessen 1947; Janke 1982; Jaspers 1931, 1932, 1935, 1938; Pfeiffer 1933; Przywara 1939; Reiner 1927, 1931; Wust 1920, 1934, 1937; Zimmermann 1977.

G. Heffernan (✉)
Philosophy Department, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA, USA
e-mail: heffernang@merrimack.edu

to his *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913) Edmund Husserl deemed it necessary to respond to the criticism that his phenomenology, which concentrated on investigations of the essential—the necessary and the universal—in human experience, did not confront and could not solve “the problems of so-called ‘existence’”.² The controversy appeared to suppose a disjunction, or even to presuppose an opposition, between transcendental phenomenology and existential philosophy, not to mention the many differences—real and perceived, irreconcilable and reconcilable—between transcendental phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie* (Dilthey), *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* (Jaspers), and philosophical *Anthropologie* (Scheler, and, according to Husserl, Heidegger too).³

The ultimate emergence of existential phenomenology from classical (Husserlian) phenomenology, German philosophy of existence, and French existentialism seemed to complicate rather than to clarify the relations between these other philosophical approaches and classical phenomenology, though the nuanced literature has ultimately led to an enhanced understanding of these philosophical developments, which have over time become inextricably interlinked.⁴ Yet the impression persists that transcendental phenomenology, as distinguished from existential phenomenology, is vulnerable to the basic critique that Husserl took great pains to refute in his response to the challenge of philosophy of existence.⁵ As a result, a phenomenology of existence, that is, a genuine and rigorous philosophy of individual and universal human life in the sense and spirit of Husserl (which goes far beyond the traditional investigations of the *Lebenswelt* and the usual themes associated with it), has remained a rather conflicted concept, the eventual recognition of which has required a gradual achievement.⁶ Of course, some may still even wish to insist that “an existential Husserl” is “a contradiction in terms”. As Husserl emphasized, however, phenomenology operates not with fixed but with fluid terms and works to reduce their ambiguity and to enhance their determinacy by recourse to the clarity and distinctness of “the things themselves”.⁷ Therefore the question concerning “the existential Husserl” should not be about presupposing the applicability of traditional expressions or the validity of accepted criteria for deciding who should be considered a transcendental

²Husserl, *Hua* V, 138–162, here 140. The *Nachwort* was first published in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, vol. XI (1930), 549–570. The works of Husserl are cited and quoted by volume (in Roman numerals) and page (in Arabic numbers) of the *Husserliana* (henceforth: *Hua*) edition. See References.

³Breeur 1994; Dilthey 1911; Heffernan 2019; Heidegger 1927, 2004; Husserl, *Hua* III/1–2 (1913), *Hua* XXV, 3–62 (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* [1910/11]), and *Hua* XXVII, 164–181 (*Phänomenologie und Anthropologie* [1931]); Jaspers 1919, 1953; Scheler 1976; Stein 2013, 2014a, b, c.

⁴Arendt 1946a; Bollnow 1948, 1953, 1955, 1965; Gadamer 1987; Hartmann 1972a, b; Heinemann 1957; Ricoeur 1957; Sartre 1996; Spiegelberg 1965; Thurnherr 2007; Tietz 2009.

⁵Compton 1997; Cooper 2012; Crowell 2009; Kockelmans 1997; Lawrence and O'Connor 1967; Sebbah 2009; Wicks 2009; Wrathall 2009; Wrathall and Dreyfus 2009.

⁶Crowell 2016; Heffernan 2017c, 2020; Natanson 1962, 1973; Spiegelberg 1960, 1975, 1981.

⁷*Hua* XIX/1, 5–29; III/1, 9, 139–140; XVII, 13–15.

phenomenologist, an existential phenomenologist, or simply an existentialist, but rather about discerning the subtle distinctions between the relevant overlappings and underlappings that were incipient and inchoate in Husserl's time but have ever since emerged and continue to emerge in gradually more adequate clarity.⁸ A new approach is needed, one that neither remains captivated by the calcified classifications of the past nor reads anything back into the past that is not actually there.⁹

In fact, one of the great ironies of Husserl's life and work is that he is well known for his descriptive investigations (*Untersuchungen*) of epistemological phenomena but not so much for his sense-reflections (*Besinnungen*) on existential questions.¹⁰ This is odd, given that Husserl's philosophy of existence grew organically out of his choice of a life of philosophizing, into which he did not exactly ease at an early point in time and which exhibits an undeniable and enduring existential, even religious, character.¹¹ Studying mathematics as a discipline but embracing philosophy as a way of life, Husserl aimed to achieve "inner solidity", "inner security", and "inner clarity" by means of a "critique of reason", without which, he believed, he would have "lived in vain".¹² He also struggled with chronic bouts of severe self-doubt¹³ and profound depression¹⁴ to continue working in philosophy. Throughout, he focused intensely on "the meaning of [his] life, [...] [his] mission".¹⁵ Yet he also underwent several experiences that any balanced, nuanced account of his life would

⁸ Cf., e.g., Möbuß 2015, 2021.

⁹ Husserl himself argues that with the proper method and on the right approach it is possible to understand thinkers of the past better than they understood themselves and better than they could have understood themselves. See *Hua* VI, 71–74. On the historicity and horizonality of understanding as a hermeneutical principle, with its implications and complications, for example, the problem of the hermeneutical circle, the question concerning the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices, the ambivalence of the experience of temporal distance, and the phenomenon *Wirkungsgeschichte*, see Gadamer 1975, 180–185 and 250–290.

¹⁰ Heffernan 2023.

¹¹ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 11 April 1919, *Husserliana Dokumente* (henceforth: *Hua Dok*), Band III, *Briefwechsel* (henceforth: BW) III, 422; to Arnold Metzger, 4 September 1919, BW IV, 408; to Erich Przywara, 15 July 1932, BW VII, 237; to Daniel Feuling, 30 March 1933, BW VII, 88; to Gustav Albrecht, 22 December 1935, BW IX, 124. Cf. *Hua* XXXIX, 164–167 (November 1933).

¹² *Hua* XXIV, 442–449 (Personal Notes of 25 September 1906, 4 November 1907, and 6 March 1908). Cf. *Hua Dok* I, 488.

¹³ Husserl to Hans von Arnim and Family, 22 December 1896, BW IX, 136; to Franz Brentano, c. 15 January 1898 (Draft), BW I, 196; to Arnold Metzger, 4 September 1919, BW IV, 408; to Maximilian Beck, 15 March 1929, BW II, 11; to Dorion Cairns, 21 March 1930, BW IV, 21–22. Cf. *Hua Dok* I, 17, 196.

¹⁴ Husserl to Heinrich Husserl, 20 September 1906, BW IX, 276; to Gustav Albrecht, 8 September 1909, BW IX, 45–46; to Dietrich Mahnke, 19 July 1917, BW III, 415; to Albrecht, 27 September 1917, BW IX, 54–55; to Mahnke, 1 November 1919, BW III, 423; to Mahnke, 17 October 1921, BW III, 435; to Flora Darkow, 28 February 1923, BW IX, 168; to Mahnke, 8 June 1928, BW III, 467, 469; to Dorion Cairns, 21 March 1930, BW IV, 21–22; to Ruth Rosenberg, c. 22 May 1932, BW IX, 407; to Albrecht, 3 June 1932, BW IX, 82–83; to Mahnke, 4/5 May 1933, BW III, 491, 493. Cf. X, 39–40, and *Hua Dok* I, 191–192, 195–196, 199, 201, 211, 219, 222, 227, 236.

¹⁵ Husserl to Gustav Albrecht, 27 September 1917, BW IX, 54.

describe as “crises”. Bracketing his difficult beginning period as *Privatdozent* in Halle (1887–1901),¹⁶ and refraining from a systematic investigation of his personal, professional, and philosophical struggles for “solidity”, “security”, and “clarity”,¹⁷ a short list of Husserl’s major crises should include at least four.

2 Husserl’s Existential Crises

2.1 The First World War

First, there is the moral and spiritual crisis that the First World War and the defeat of the German Empire presented to Husserl, his colleagues, and his compatriots. Because the phenomenological movement was new, the younger generation was especially hard hit by the war, which claimed the lives of many distinguished phenomenologists, including Rudolf Clemens (1914), Fritz Frankfurter (1914), Hermann Ritzel (1915), Waldemar Conrad (1915), Heinrich Rickert jr. (1917), and Adolf Reinach (1917), all of whom were associates or students of Husserl.¹⁸ He also lost one son and almost another in the conflict, for Wolfgang was killed (at the battle of Verdun in 1916) and Gerhart was seriously wounded.¹⁹ Along with 3000 colleagues, Husserl co-signed the patriotic “Declaration of the Professors of the Universities and Technical Colleges of the German Empire” of 23 October 1914,²⁰ but, unlike some,²¹ he did not take public positions or publish writings on the war.²² Observing privately that “the war has destroyed young blood full of hope”,²³ however, Husserl described the power of the Great War to destroy the validity of ideas in the following way: “This war, the most universal and profound lapse into sin of

¹⁶Husserl to Franz Brentano, c. 15 January 1898 (Draft), BW I, 196; to Alexius Meinong, 27 August 1900, BW IX, 137; to Dorion Cairns, 21 March 1930, BW IV, 21–22. The move to Göttingen was also not unproblematic, since there Husserl had to struggle against faculty resistance to attain the status of Ordinary Professor (*Hua Dok I*, 90); on 28 June 1906, at the age of 47, he was finally named “Personal Ordinarius” in the Philosophical Faculty by Wilhelm II of Prussia (*ibid.*, 96–97). Cf. Vongehr 2017, 9–11.

¹⁷Cf. Sanchez 2007, for a good start in the right direction.

¹⁸Cf. De Warren and Vongehr 2017, 232–235 (Clemens), 240–241 (Frankfurter), 270–275 (Ritzel), 236–239 (Conrad), 266–269 (Rickert jr.), and 250–265 (Reinach).

¹⁹Cf. De Warren and Vongehr 2017, 53–115. Husserl’s daughter, Elisabeth (Elli), served as a nurse at a field hospital. Cf. *ibid.*, 53.

²⁰The main (ironic) claim of the Declaration was: “Our belief is that for the entire culture of Europe salvation depends on the victory that German ‘militarism’ will achieve.” See De Warren and Vongehr 2017, 20–21.

²¹Max Scheler and Dietrich Mahnke come to mind, with *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* (1915) and *Der Wille zur Ewigkeit: Gedanken eines deutschen Kriegers über den Sinn des Geisteslebens* (1917), respectively. For more on Husserl and the war see De Warren 2015.

²²Hoeres 2004, 43, 47–48, 74, 144, 245, 249, 430.

²³Husserl to Natorp, 1922, BW V, 149.

humanity in its entire recorded history, has indeed exposed all 'valid' ideas as lacking in clarity and genuineness."²⁴ Finally, given the Antisemitism and the *Dolchstoßlegende* ("stab in the back"-myth) of the post-war years, Husserl suffered the added pain of being made to feel that he had no right to mourn the loss of the war "properly" as a German patriot but rather only "improperly" as a Jewish outsider.²⁵

2.2 *The Disillusionment with Heidegger*

Second, there was a profound and prolonged crisis of a personal and professional nature in Husserl's life in the late 1920s and early 1930s.²⁶ This crisis went to the heart of the relationship between transcendental phenomenology and philosophy of existence. Beginning in 1916, namely, Husserl came to regard Heidegger, whose philosophical ability he originally held in the highest esteem,²⁷ as his successor in the phenomenological movement.²⁸ Although their differences had clearly emerged by 1927/1928, as, for example, they could not agree on a common text for their planned article on phenomenology for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,²⁹ Husserl still arranged for Heidegger, who, with Jaspers, was widely regarded as a representative of philosophy of existence,³⁰ to succeed him at the University of Freiburg in 1928/1929.³¹

In the summer of 1929, however, Husserl attended Heidegger's Inaugural Lecture, "What is Metaphysics" (24 July), and studied *Being and Time* and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* as well as some of his other writings (July–August).³² Heidegger had dedicated *Being and Time* to him "in reverence and

²⁴ Husserl to Winthrop Bell, 11 August 1920, BW III, 12: "Dieser Krieg, der universalste und tiefste Sündenfall der Menschheit in der ganzen übersehbaren Geschichte, hat ja alle geltenden Ideen in ihrer Unklarheit und Unechtheit erwiesen."

²⁵ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 17 October 1921, BW III, 431–435.

²⁶ Sheehan and Palmer 1997, esp. 1–32.

²⁷ Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 24 December 1921, BW III, 215; to Paul Natorp, 1 February 1922, BW V, 150; to Dietrich Mahnke, 25 November 1925, BW III, 451; to Fritz Kaufmann, 20 April 1926, BW III, 347; to Mahnke, 3 August 1927, BW III, 455–456; to Ingarden, 19 November 1927, BW III, 234; to Mahnke, 26 December 1927, BW III, 457–458, 462; to Alexander Pfänder, 6 January 1931, BW II, 181–182; to Mahnke, 4/5 May 1933, BW III, 492–493.

²⁸ Husserl and Heidegger, BW IV, 127–161.

²⁹ Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 26 December 1927, BW III, 236–237. The correspondence between Husserl and Heidegger in this time (BW IV, 144–149) remained cordial. Cf. Hua IX, 237–301, for the several versions of the Britannica article.

³⁰ Heidegger, of course, rejected both "philosophy of existence" and "existentialism" as designations for his philosophy. Cf. Heffernan 2017a, 567, 574 (n. 71).

³¹ Husserl to Heidegger, 21 January 1928, BW IV, 151. Cf. Husserl, Recommendation (Draft), January 1928, BW VIII, 194–195.

³² Malvine Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 2 December 1929, BW III, 255. Cf. Breuer 1994, 3–8.

friendship” (1927),³³ and Husserl had read proof on the manuscript “with joy” and gladly published it in his *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*.³⁴ Yet there appears to have been a mutual awareness that the mentee had directed the book against his mentor.³⁵ Eventually, Husserl’s judgment was that he could “not fit [*Being and Time*] into the framework” of his phenomenology and that he had to “reject it methodologically wholly and completely and essentially also materially”;³⁶ that he had “nothing to do with this H[eidegger]ian profundity [Tiefsinn], this ingenious unscientificity [geniale Unwissenschaftlichkeit]”, that Heidegger’s “open and hidden critique was based on gross misunderstanding”, and that Heidegger was “involved in the formation of a philosophical system” that he considered it his own “life’s work to make forever impossible”;³⁷ and that “the Heid[egger]ian and the other ‘Existence’-Philosophy” used “caricatures” of his thoughts to “pervert” and “devalue” his own phenomenology as “overcome” and “superfluous”.³⁸ Husserl also let Heidegger know that he did not approve of his development since *Being and Time*, that he had come to the conclusion that “[Heidegger’s] ‘phenomenology’” had “nothing to do with [his] own”, that he saw in “its pseudo-scientificity a hindrance to philosophical development”, and that he wanted to “separate [his] own phenomenology completely from the so-called H[eidegger]ian ‘phenomenology’”.³⁹

A part of the problem was that Husserl was feeling lonely and isolated by the fact that, as he put it, “‘existential philosophy’ threatens to become the all-dominating fashion”.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Husserl had come to regard Heidegger’s influence in philosophy as a “misfortune”,⁴¹ to count Heidegger among his “antipodes”,⁴² even his “enemies”,⁴³ and perhaps to plan an “article against” him.⁴⁴ Over the years, Husserl

³³ Heidegger 1977, v. Cf. *ibid.*, 38, n.

³⁴ Husserl to Fritz Kaufmann, c. 20 April 1926, BW III, 347.

³⁵ As Heidegger had confided to Jaspers in 1926. See Heffernan 2017a, 566, 573 (n. 53–54).

³⁶ Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 2 December 1929, BW III, 254. From the beginning (c. 1917), Heidegger also thought that he could not fit his existential philosophy into Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, though he did not tell this to his mentor. Cf. Heffernan 2017a, 566.

³⁷ Husserl to Alexander Pfänder, 6 January 1931, BW II, 184. Husserl adds (*ibid.*): “All the others already saw this long ago—only I did not. I did not hide my conclusion from H[eidegger].”

³⁸ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 4/5 May 1933, BW III, 493. See also Husserl to Ludwig Landgrebe, 5 February 1933, BW IV, 305.

³⁹ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 8 January 1931, BW III, 473, 476. Husserl did not wish, however, for his differences with Heidegger to become the stuff of “gossip”, so he requested that Mahnke be “discrete”.

⁴⁰ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 8 January 1931, BW III, 473: “So fühle ich mich in dieser Zeit, in der die ‘Existenzialphilosophie’ zur allbeherrschenden Mode zu werden droht, recht vereinsamt.”

⁴¹ Husserl to Ludwig Landgrebe, 8 October 1931, BW IV, 272. Cf. Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 26 January 1931, BW III, 477.

⁴² Husserl to Roman Ingarden, 19 April 1931, BW III, 273–274.

⁴³ Malvine Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 18 May 1933, BW III, 504.

⁴⁴ Roman Ingarden to Husserl, 24 March 1930, BW III, 265. Ingarden encouraged Husserl to speak his “weighty word” against “the so-called ‘existence philosophy’” and Heidegger.

had grown accustomed to having other gifted students, including Edith Stein and Roman Ingarden, “break” with him, above all over what they perceived as his “move into transcendental idealism”,⁴⁵ but he was especially disappointed with Heidegger, whose emerging “National Socialism and gruff Antisemitism” exacerbated their break,⁴⁶ which, by the way, Husserl did not regard as “a break in the usual sense”.⁴⁷ Heidegger, who joined the N.S.D.A.P. on 1 May 1933 (as party member #3125894), served as an activist “Führer-Rektor” of the University of Freiburg from 1933 to 1934,⁴⁸ delivering his hortatory rector’s address, “The Self-Assertion of the German University” (“Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität”),⁴⁹ on 27 May 1933. Bestowing cultural legitimacy on the fledgling regime of Chancellor Adolf Hitler (named by President Paul von Hindenburg on 30 January 1933), Heidegger typically declared to students: “Let not doctrinal propositions and ‘ideas’ be the rules of your Being. The Führer himself and alone *is* the present and future German reality and its law. [...] Heil Hitler!”⁵⁰ Soon frustrated in his leadership position, Heidegger resigned as rector of the university after only a year in office,⁵¹ but for a variety of personal, philosophical, professional, and political reasons he and Husserl had drifted further and further apart between 1929 and 1933.⁵² This trend was finalized as Husserl witnessed Heidegger’s ostentatious displays of support for National Socialism.⁵³

This entire development, accompanied by Husserl’s lack of self-confidence and Heidegger’s lack of solidarity,⁵⁴ brought the final end to what Husserl would bitterly

⁴⁵ Heffernan 2021b.

⁴⁶ Husserl to Ludwig Landgrebe, 28 May 1932, BW IV, 288–289.

⁴⁷ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 8 January 1931, BW III, 473: “Es ist kein Bruch im gewöhnlichen Sinn erfolgt [...]”

⁴⁸ Heidegger 2000, 79–274.

⁴⁹ Heidegger 2000, 107–117.

⁵⁰ Heidegger 2000, 184–185 (October 1933): “Nicht Lehrsätze und ‘Ideen’ seien die Regeln Eures Seins. Der Führer selbst und allein *ist* die heutige und künftige deutsche Wirklichkeit und ihr Gesetz. [...] Heil Hitler!”

⁵¹ Heidegger was Rector from 21 April 1933 to 27 April 1934. Cf. Thomä 2013, 552, 554; Heidegger 2000, 388.

⁵² Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 8 January 1931, BW III, 473–476; to Ludwig Landgrebe, 1 October 1931, BW III, 270. Husserl and Heidegger had social contact as their philosophical relationship ended. Husserl invited Heidegger to his home for a “philosopher’s tea” on 22 June 1930, and for the fiftieth anniversary of his doctorate on 23 January 1933, and Heidegger attended both gatherings. See Malvine Husserl to Elisabeth Rosenberg, 22 June 1930, BW IX, 378, and 25 January 1933, BW IX, 416.

⁵³ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 4/5 May 1933, BW III, 491–500; Malvine Husserl to Mahnke, 4/5 May 1933, BW III, 500–502; Malvine Husserl to Mahnke, 18 May 1933, BW III, 502–504.

⁵⁴ The letter of Elfriede Heidegger to Malvine Husserl of 29 April 1933 (BW IV, 160–161) is an exception to the rule. It is not true, by the way, that Heidegger as Rector forbade Husserl entry to the University of Freiburg. See Heidegger 2000, 639.

recall as “this supposed philosophical friendship between souls”.⁵⁵ Thus Husserl saw a direct correlation between the rise of Heidegger’s commitment to National Socialism and the fall of his own relationship with him. After he resigned as Rector of the University of Freiburg in 1934, Heidegger continued his membership in the N.S.D.A.P. and his association with National Socialist programs, for example, by serving on the Committee for the Philosophy of Law in the Academy for German Law (*Ausschuß für Rechtsphilosophie der Akademie für Deutsches Recht*).⁵⁶ At the end, Heidegger, pleading illness, did not attend Husserl’s funeral on 29 April 1938, an affront for which he later sought to apologize to Husserl’s widow, Malvine.⁵⁷

In the last decade of his life, then, Husserl had to look on rather helplessly and hopelessly as one of the most recognized “philosophers of existence” of his time—and his chosen successor in the phenomenological movement—emerged as one of the most powerful and prominent National Socialists of the German academy, thus giving him all the more reason to prefer transcendental phenomenology to “so-called ‘philosophy of existence’”.⁵⁸

2.3 *The Antisemitism of National Socialism*

Third, the break with Heidegger became increasingly linked to the existential and legal-political crisis generated by Husserl’s situation under the National Socialist regime. Although both he and his wife had been baptized into the Protestant confession (he in 1886 and she in 1887),⁵⁹ Husserl and Malvine remained Jews by race under the laws of the *Machtergreifung*. On 6 April 1933, Husserl, together with all other “non-Arian” civil servants of the state of Baden (the location of Freiburg), was “vacated” from his university position by a regional decree, and on 14 April he was placed on “enforced leave of absence”.⁶⁰ Husserl described this decree and the Reich-wide measure of 7 April 1933, the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*), as “the

⁵⁵ Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 4 May 1933, BW III, 493: “[Der schönste Abschluß dieser vermeintlichen philosophischen Seelenfreundschaft war der (ganz theatralisch) am 1. Mai öffentlich vollzogene Eintritt in die Nationalsozialistische Partei. Vorangegangen ist der von ihm [Heidegger] vollzogene Abbruch des Verkehrs mit mir (und schon bald nach seiner Berufung) und in den letzten Jahren sein immer stärker zum Ausdruck kommender Antisemitismus—auch gegenüber seiner Gruppe begeisterter jüdischer Schüler und in der Fakultät.] Das zu überwinden, war ein schweres Stück.”

⁵⁶ Members of the committee included Hans Frank, Julius Streicher, Carl Schmitt, and Alfred Rosenberg. I may have slightly exaggerated the importance of this committee in Heffernan 2016, 23.

⁵⁷ Heidegger to Malvine Husserl, 6 March 1950, in Heidegger 2000, 443.

⁵⁸ It did not matter much at the time that Heidegger eschewed the designation *Existenzphilosophie* as applied to his philosophy of *Sein* and *Dasein*. Cf. Heffernan 2017a, 567, and 574, n. 71.

⁵⁹ Schuhmann 1977, 10, 15, 20.

⁶⁰ Schuhmann 1977, 428.

greatest personal injury of [his] life".⁶¹ A Kafkaesque situation ensued, for a decree of the regional Ministry of Culture in Karlsruhe cancelled the earlier decree with respect to Husserl on 28 April, another decree confirmed the cancellation on 20 July, and none other than Heidegger, who had become Rector of the University of Freiburg on 21 April, signed the cancellation on 28 July.⁶² Yet Husserl's academic freedom and his personal liberty remained in jeopardy, as is evidenced by, for example, his desired but frustrated participation in the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy in Prague (1934).⁶³ After the Nuremberg Race Laws had been passed on 15 September 1935, Husserl was stripped of his permission to teach (*Lehrbefugnis* or *venia legendi*) on 15 January 1936, effective retroactively to 31 December 1935.⁶⁴ Husserl's surviving son, the jurist Gerhart, and his daughter, Elisabeth, emigrated to the United States in 1936 and 1937, respectively.⁶⁵ Yet Husserl, like Socrates, chose to live out his life in his own country.⁶⁶

2.4 The Crisis of Philosophy as a Rigorous Science

Fourth, by the mid-1930s Husserl was undergoing an intellectual and spiritual crisis. In August–November 1934, for example, he wrote: "*Philosophy as science*, as serious, rigorous, even apodictically rigorous science—the dream is over."⁶⁷ Yet in 1935 he also wrote: "[...] 'Do you still believe in a philosophy as rigorous science? Have you slept through the start of the new time?'—O no. I do not 'believe', I do not 'preach': I work, I build, I take responsibility. I show myself the new scientificity [...]."⁶⁸ However one interprets these and such statements, it is clear that they

⁶¹ Husserl to Gustav Albrecht, 1 July 1933, BW IX, 92: "[...] daß ich das neue Beamten-gesetz und dann die Beurlaubung als größte Kränkung meines Lebens empfunden habe."

⁶² Schuhmann 1977, 429, 433. Husserl was temporarily protected by the fact that he had lost a son in the First World War. After the death of Hindenburg (1934) the *Frontkämpferprivileg* clause was abolished.

⁶³ *Hua* XXVII, 240–244.

⁶⁴ *Hua* Dok I, 472.

⁶⁵ Gerhart taught at the University of Washington from 1940 to 1948 and returned to Germany in 1952. Elisabeth, who had studied art history, remained in the United States and is buried with her husband, Jakob Rosenberg, an emigrated art historian who taught at Harvard University from 1937 to 1963, in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁶⁶ Husserl was invited to explore the possibility of a position at the University of Southern California, but he demurred for financial and institutional reasons. Cf. the correspondence between Husserl and Ralph Flewelling of November 1933 and January 1934, in BW IX, 231–232. Cf. also Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, 31 December 1933, BW III, 512 (and n. 220); 8 January 1934, BW III, 515.

⁶⁷ *Hua* VI, 508: "*Philosophie als Wissenschaft*, als ernstliche, strenge, ja apodiktisch strenge Wissenschaft—*der Traum ist ausgeträumt*." Cf. *Hua* XXV, 3–62.

⁶⁸ *Hua* XXVII, 238: "[...] 'Du glaubst noch an eine Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft? Hast Du den Aufbruch der neuen Zeit verschlafen?'—O nein. Ich 'glaube', ich 'predige' nicht: ich arbeite,

must be understood in context.⁶⁹ Yet they constitute at least *prima facie* evidence of Husserl's sense of tension between his dream of what he had envisioned philosophy to be and the nightmare of what the world, including the academic world, was in the process of becoming. On the one hand, Husserl had overcome the self-doubts of his early years and become convinced of the revolutionary power of phenomenology as a force for philosophical renewal: "For the future, however, I am certain, completely certain, that there can never again be a philosophy of the old style, that with transcendental phenomenology the method, meaning, and problematic of philosophy have undergone a total transformation and a final one. Is such a conviction not a great piece of hubris? But I cannot see it any other way based on work that is most sober and has been checked countless times."⁷⁰ On the other hand, he made an extra effort to check any tendency to overconfidence and to practice genuine modesty in the practice of phenomenological reflection: "I attempt to lead, not to instruct, only to indicate, to describe, what I see. I make no claim other than that of being permitted to speak according to the best of what I know and believe, first of all before myself and in the same way also before others, as one who has lived through, in all its seriousness, the fate of a philosophical existence."⁷¹ In the end, Husserl died as he had lived, as a genuine, honest philosopher.⁷²

3 Existential Readings of Representative Works of Husserl

Awareness of these crises in the life of the man should not, of course, tempt anyone to attempt to apply them without further ado as templates for understanding all his works. The existential character of Husserl's life should, however, also not prevent readers from recognizing the existential content of some of his works, even of those that they have not usually read with such content in mind. Several examples

ich baue, ich verantworte. Ich erweise mir die neue Wissenschaftlichkeit [...]."

⁶⁹ See *Hua* XXIX, xviii (Reinhold Smid, Editor): "Husserl wehrte sich gegen die Ansicht, daß der Traum der Philosophie als Wissenschaft ausgeträumt sei."

⁷⁰ Husserl to Gustav Albrecht, 30 December 1933, BW IX, 99: "Aber der Zukunft bin ich absolut sicher, ganz sicher, daß es nie mehr eine Philosophie von dem alten Stil wird geben können, daß mit der transzendentalen Phänomenologie Methode, Sinn, Problematik der Philosophie eine totale Verwandlung, und eine endgültige, erfahren haben. Ist eine solche Überzeugung nicht eine tolle Hybris? Aber ich kann nicht anders als es so anzusehen aufgrund nüchternster und unzählige Male überprüfter Arbeit."

⁷¹ *Hua* VI, 17 (1936): "Ich versuche zu führen, nicht zu belehren, nur aufzuweisen, zu beschreiben, was ich sehe. Ich erhebe keinen anderen Anspruch als den, in erster Linie mir selbst gegenüber und demgemäß auch vor Anderen nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen sprechen zu dürfen als jemand, der das Schicksal eines philosophischen Daseins in seinem ganzen Ernste durchlebte."

⁷² Among his last words were these (*Hua Dok I*, 488 [13 April 1938]): "Leben und Tod als das letzte Streben meiner Philosophie. Ich habe als Philosoph gelebt und will als Philosoph zu sterben versuchen."

demonstrate the existential character of the content of selected works. The sampling of readings that follows is neither random nor comprehensive, but it is representative.

3.1 A “Breakthrough” and Its Existential Applications and Implications

Following his *Philosophy of Arithmetic: Psychological and Logical Investigations* (1891), Husserl's philosophical “breakthrough work” (*Hua* XX/1, 293) came with his *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901), the first volume of which, *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* (*Hua* XVIII), clarified the confused and confusing relationships between logic, psychology, and ontology in his time by refuting the claims of psychologism, that is, the position that psychology, as the primary and ultimate science of human subjectivity and its objectivities, is the discipline that explains the validity of logical laws as natural laws governing human thought processes. Yet these theoretical studies also sowed the seeds for practical fruits. For example, the self-evidential existential significance of the First and Sixth Investigations lies in the fact that the Husserlian human being is not only a “sense-intending” being in theoretical science but also a “meaning-seeking” being in practical life. Thus the inquiry into the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of an expression (*Ausdruck*) anticipates the question concerning the meaning (*Sinn*) of a life (*Leben*), “sense-intending” and “sense-fulfilling” acts assume existential functions, and the meaning of life, or, more modestly, a life of meaning, emerges not as a sensuous but as a categorial intuition capable of degrees, grades, and levels of intentional emptiness or fullness. The fact that readers may not be accustomed to read the *Logical Investigations* in this way, that is, to recognize the implicit but not hidden existential dimensions of the work, is not dispositive. As Husserl himself once pointedly wrote: “Of course one cannot read and understand the *Logical Investigations* like a newspaper.”⁷³

3.2 Essence Precedes But Does Not Supersede Existence

Husserl's “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1911) represents a defining moment in the development of his philosophy from “descriptive psychology” to “pure phenomenology”.⁷⁴ There Husserl argues that phenomenology is a pure, that is, non-empirical, science, one that yields absolute knowledge of the contents (acts and

⁷³ *Hua* XX/1, 320: “Man kann die *Logischen Untersuchungen* freilich nicht wie eine Zeitung lesen und verstehen.”

⁷⁴ Husserl later regretted the former designation as “a self-inflicted misunderstanding” (*Hua* XX/1, 313; XXII, 206–208).