

Chapter I. Introduction

The Task of Thinking



Time is not of the essence. Essences are nothing in time, although their instantiations occur in time. Essences are idealities, not realities; formal, not material; universal, not individual. An essence or idea regulates the becoming of its corresponding individuals, which is to say, it sets the goal, the *telos*, of their becoming. The essence binds together every changing moment into a whole of becoming and thereby gives unity to multiplicity. It remains constant in the midst of change. Everything essential is fixed a priori, outside of time. Everything in time is regulated by essence. Every possibility, every contingency, has its basis in necessity, in essence. Outside of time while regulating all becoming in time, essence entails both the beginning and the end of the becoming of its corresponding individuals. In this way it sets the parameters of an individual system of becoming. As a consequence, essence proves to have priority over each of its individuals. It is first by nature, whereas individuals are only first for us, but second by nature.—Thus read the most fundamental insights that guide Edmund Husserl in the articulation of his thought.¹

The priority of essence is not only drawn out by Husserl, but is also reflected in his thought in two possible modes of eidetic analysis: static and genetic. Genetic analysis focuses on the twists and turns in the becoming or constitution of individuals in time and thereby on the “‘history’ of consciousness” (SGM, 339/137).² It is still eidetic analysis, but one nevertheless focused on becoming. Static analysis, by contrast, is concerned with constituted individuals or with essences, without regard to time. Husserl sharpens the distinction between these two modes by noting that genetic analysis is “explicative,” whereas static analysis is purely “descriptive” (340/138). The latter accesses essences, their structures and relations, directly; it focuses on them primarily in isolation and describes them with a view to completeness. Genetic analysis, on the other hand, accesses them only secondarily or derivatively insofar as it is

concerned to explain how something becomes constituted. In doing so, it takes its bearings by the essence of what is constituted, the insight into which is first yielded, once again, by static analysis. Hence genetic analysis presupposes static analysis; they are connected in a hierarchy in which the former is founded on the latter. Husserl draws this out as follows: “It is clear that one will initially start out from individual fundamental types, some of which will . . . occur necessarily, while others will offer themselves as possibilities. The question is about the guiding threads of the system. The types of objects offer themselves as such, thus as guiding threads with respect to ontology. And thereby the constitutive teleologies. In this connection, ideal possibilities of harmonious givens are spun out, ideal possibilities of monadic streams in which the unity of a product [*Leistung*] is constituted, and, in addition, other possibilities are considered as counterforms” (344/141). Static analysis describes the fundamental types (and countertypes) and thereby provides genetic analysis with the guiding threads or parameters for the explication of the teleologies that are rooted in those types. In other words, static analysis describes the end of genesis, whereas genetic analysis explicates the means thereof. Together with a third, mediating mode, these two modes of analysis form a hierarchical progression. Phenomenology begins with the “universal phenomenology of the universal structures of consciousness” and proceeds up to “constitutive phenomenology” and beyond to the “phenomenology of genesis.”³ Each mode is integral to phenomenology taken as a whole, but for Husserl it is static analysis that is decisive, for it marks the beginning on which the other modes are founded and so in a certain sense already entails what follows.

These insights not only form the basis of phenomenological inquiry as a whole, but they also provide the key to Husserl’s own self-understanding; they indicate the guiding threads, the tracing of which enables the determination of what phenomenology is for him. In this connection, the pivotal insight is into the normative function of essence. Namely, just as each individual is governed by an essence, likewise Husserl regards thought itself as having an essence, one that is bound up with the essence of human being, with humanness (*Menschentum*) in general. Thus phenomenology not only discloses essences but itself has an essence.⁴ He refers to this essence differently—at times expressly as ‘essence’, ‘idea’, or ‘norm’, at others as ‘concept’, ‘sense’, or ‘telos’, and at still others as ‘task’—but in each case he means the same.⁵ In light of what was said at the outset about essence, it follows here that whereas a thought unfolds in time, specifically in the thinker’s attempt to fulfill his task, that task itself is atemporal. It does not change, even though the thinker may get clear on it only over time, step by step. Insofar as the task fixes the norm of the thought’s development, insofar as it is the unifying center amidst the myriad twists and turns of the thought’s unfolding, that development proves to be subordinate to the task. It determines not just the end, but the beginning as well, and in so doing binds together the multiple phases into a singular unity.

Furthermore, just as it sets the parameters of that development, it also fixes the problems to be addressed in seeking to fulfill the task.⁶

Husserl himself repeatedly asserts the unity of his thought; he believes himself to be in pursuit of one task—it is literally his *idée fixe*.⁷ This is in no way contradicted by the various approaches he undertakes over the course of his career, for, as should become clear below, they simply mark alternative attempts to fulfill the same task.⁸ If one starts with what these attempts most obviously have in common, Husserl's task is at first glance best captured by the epithet 'theory of knowledge' or 'epistemology'. Accordingly, his primary intention would be to explain knowledge, both what it is and how it comes to pass. This would require, first of all, the establishment of the foundation of knowledge—whence the epithet 'foundationalist', which also may be used to describe his task.⁹ It is due to his pursuit of the foundation that essence takes on and retains such prominence in Husserlian thought.¹⁰

In accordance with the insight into the aforementioned priority, phenomenology is centered on essence—from start to finish. It aims at being not just one eidetic science among others, but rather *the* eidetic science, the science on which all others are founded—initially in the form of "pure logic," then expressly as radical eidetics. As such it is intended to be the science of all sciences, that is, the first or archontic science, which discloses the norms for the others.¹¹ Furthermore, in performing its foundational function, it is intended to do nothing less than save humanity, and in fact precisely by giving it, just as in the case of the sciences, a new orientation. Especially in this regard theory proves to be thoroughly practical for Husserl.¹² To establish phenomenology as just this science is the intention that guides his analyses no later than as of his "breakthrough into phenomenology" in the *Logical Investigations*¹³ and it continues to do so up through his final work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.¹⁴

But whereas the insight into the fundamental role of pure logic remains operative throughout this span,¹⁵ the nature of the foundation sought undergoes a radicalization upon the discovery of the epoché. This method enables the disclosure of the Archimedean point on which all else rests: the pure ego.¹⁶ In radicalizing phenomenology, the epoché ushers in the much discussed "transcendental turn."¹⁷ Contrary to first appearances, however, this turn does not mark a break with the inaugural work of phenomenology, but is instead a progressive deepening of the fundamental insights gained there, region by region¹⁸—hence the talk of radicalization.¹⁹ Even if it is "a long and thorny road"²⁰ that leads from the *Logical Investigations* to his first mature work of transcendental phenomenology, namely the first book of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, it is nevertheless one continuous, which is not to say seamless, road.²¹

However, this talk should not be misconstrued. Although it involves a progression, the movement of phenomenology is not dialectical but more

recursive in character, that is, it unfolds by way of zigzagging or a reflective spiral from the heights down to the ground of conscious life and then, from that ground, back up into the heights—at least that is Husserl’s abiding intention.²² If the talk can be of dialectic at all, then it must first be of an inverse dialectic, which is to say, not one primarily of sublation and synthesis, but rather of boring and laying foundations.²³ It is incipiently a drive to reach the absolute ground, the Archimedean point. Only after reaching it can there be any construction of a “system of doctrine [*Lehrsystem*].”²⁴

Although it may not be obvious on the surface, especially due to its founder’s own seemingly boundless productivity,²⁵ the entire movement of phenomenology is regulated by one task, one “purposive sense [*Zwecksinn*]” (see *FTL*, 8 and 5). As Husserl says: “There is no ‘royal road’ into phenomenology and therefore none into philosophy. There is only the *one* road prescribed by phenomenology’s own essence” (*Ideas I*, 201). The movement is *pre*-scribed by its essence—which is *one* essence—or in other words, the teleology of the thought is predelineated by its telos. Only by coming to terms with this essence or task will it become possible to understand fully the whole it prescribes, and this holds no less for the parts it comprises.

In order to penetrate to the core of this whole, in order to disclose “its inner sense, its hidden teleology” (*Crisis*, 16/18), one might wish to follow a directive that Husserl himself gave in 1933, and thus relatively late in his career. He says that “a genuine elucidation of the historical development of a philosophy (*in* the philosopher) can be given only in light of its mature sense-formation [*Sinngestalt*]; only then does one understand the structure of the *dynamis* in each lower level.”²⁶ Proceeding in this way would mean engaging in a “dynamic” or genetic analysis.²⁷ And yet, as seen above, it is first and foremost the static analysis that yields the guiding insight into the *dynamis* of a thought, which is to say, into its task. Thus an alternative and literally more radical approach would be to look to the “mature sense-formation” for confirmation of what is discerned in the beginning, at the root of his thought. This is not to say, however, that in proceeding in this way the concern would lie with a natural beginning and end, such as those bounding the span of a life. Rather, it is crucial that one discern the *sense* of the structure and movement of the “decisive phases” of the particular thought, or the telos after which the thought strives in each of its phases.²⁸ This requires that one ask not only “What is phenomenology?”²⁹—in answer to which ‘epistemology’ might count as a satisfactory answer—but also, and more important, “Why phenomenology?” This is the more radical question. For it is the *Why* (here the *dynamis*) that lends unity and thus determinacy to the *What* (Husserl’s thought as a whole) and thereby makes clear its singularity amidst the multiplicity of other thoughts, to say nothing of other “phenomenologies.”

The present study aims at nothing more and nothing less than fixing the essence, the idea of phenomenology. This calls for the explication of both what moves Husserlian thought and the parameters within which it moves. However, they cannot be grasped immediately. Instead, the task of thinking that guided Husserl's articulation of phenomenology, and most fundamentally of transcendental phenomenology, must be approached by way of a new "method," specifically by means of what above was referred to as the logotectonic epoché.³⁰ Under its scope, thought is detemporalized, denaturalized. It is wrested thereby from the temporal continuum of thought largely presumed to exist today, as well as from a nature, or Being and becoming, that gives rise to thought. In this way it becomes possible to take thought—in this case Husserl's—on its own terms. This is the decisive step to be taken if an answer is to be given to the question "What is phenomenology?" For it is a question about essence. Contrary to Husserl and the moderns, however, the answer to it is not *the* answer to the question "What is called thinking?" but one that goes towards answering it. The difference here lies in the insight that thinking is not only of one kind, that it does not have only one task, but that it is differentiated by virtue of its—different but finite—tasks.³¹ Husserl strove to fulfill his task, one that distinguishes his position from other positions that, together with his, are constitutive of modernity. It can be grasped only by excluding time, by denying time, as well as Being in time, any priority. Time is not of the essence. Time is beside the point as long as the concern lies with what is unchanging. Time contributes nothing essential to the consideration. To inquire into what thought is and, prior to that, why it is, is not to ask after time.

1. The Idea of Phenomenology

If one were to apply the aforementioned directive to Husserl's own thought, that is, if one were to seek to grasp the *dynamis* uniting its several phases so as to be in a position to elucidate "the historical development of a philosophy (in the philosopher)," then one would have to turn to *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, assuming, of course, that the final phase of Husserlian thought coincides with its "mature sense-formation."³² As the title of that work suggests, Husserl sees the European sciences in crisis. Yet the crisis thematized there is not confined to them, but rather, as the heading of the work's first part indicates, theirs is but a symptom of a deeper-lying, far more perilous crisis, one that actually poses the greatest danger since it strikes at the very root of European culture and thus of humanity.³³ Husserl notes that "the crisis of a science means nothing less than that its genuine scientific character, that the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable" (*Crisis*, 1/3). The scientific char-

acter—that is, the essence—of a science is expressed precisely in the science’s task and its corresponding method. It is only when they no longer provide sufficient guidance that a science can fall into crisis. This failing guidance is signaled by the questionableness of science’s essence, or more precisely of the proper understanding of that essence and, by extension, the task and method it prescribes. This is no local disturbance, however. Rather, since the destinies of the sciences and man are inextricably interwoven, the crisis of concern here proves to be rooted not only in the questionableness of the sciences, but also of man himself—in their uniquely European manifestations—and in fact first and foremost in the questionableness of the essence of each.

Yet none of this is to say that the crisis marks an end. Instead, it indicates an impending shift or cut: insofar as being in crisis means being essentially in question, the crisis itself is the expression of a vital tension, of an Either-Or that demands decision. It is a decision about the proper understanding of the essence of science and, prior to that, of man. As the right decision, it depends on the crucial insight into the one thing needful, into both the task and the method of its fulfillment. It alone can bring about the end of the “present” crisis; and made rightly, it will result in a beginning, in a new life for the “new man.”³⁴ It is precisely this decision that Husserl seeks to hasten by means of his reflections in the *Crisis*.³⁵

1.1 The Crisis, its Source and Dimensions

Husserl considers the source of the crisis to be positivism, which came to power after the conclusion of Hegelian philosophy.³⁶ With its virulent skepticism, positivism has caused everything essential to become questionable. It is not the question itself, of course, but rather its character that is responsible for the crisis. And this is what receives Husserl’s scrutiny. It is the skeptical ingredient in the questionableness that makes all the difference here. Its dominance not only signals but, prior to that, contributes to a loss that literally undermines European humanness and threatens it with “the greatest danger of drowning in the skeptical deluge” (12/14), for positivism’s inherent skepticism helps pull the ground or the Apriori out from under humanity and its sciences.³⁷

He pinpoints the loss as follows: “Skepticism about the possibility of a metaphysics, the collapse of the belief in a universal philosophy as the guide of the new man, means precisely the collapse of the belief in ‘reason’” (10/12), and thus of “the belief in an ‘absolute’ reason through which the world has its sense, the belief in the sense of history, the sense of humanness, in its freedom, namely as man’s capacity to provide his individual and universal human existence with rational sense” (11/13). In light of this, it becomes clear that whereas the crisis of concern to him in his last phase is ultimately and eminently a crisis of sense and so of reason, at base it is one of belief. That is the

deepest point of tension as Husserl sees it; that is what must be decided. It is on account of this that Husserl calls it a vital crisis. He regards it as nothing less than a life-or-death struggle³⁸ between belief and unbelief, between universal philosophy and skepticism.³⁹ It is precisely this loss of belief in reason that Husserl seeks to remedy by means of phenomenology.⁴⁰ It is the Why, the motivation of his quest for a new foundation.

Phenomenology not only ends in crisis, but is born in crisis as well—in both individual and universal crisis.⁴¹ To the extent that they are explicitly thematized, the crisis of European culture, as well as the philosopher's personal responsibility in redressing it, are concerns that are confined to Husserl's "phenomenological period," which stretches roughly from 1900 to his death in 1938.⁴² Yet, although his thought culminates in reflections on these concerns and although his first writings, as he notes in retrospect, were "born of distress [Not], of unspeakable mental distress, of a complete 'collapse,'" it is in fact not until after the completion of the *Logical Investigations* in 1900–01 that he begins to grow aware of the crisis as such. It is only later that he begins to develop "an eye for practical and cultural realities" and thus to sense the "intrinsic hollowness" of the intentions that prevailed in that culture during the 1890s, the germinal phase of phenomenology.⁴³ Up until the turn of the century, he says, he had focused almost exclusively on "theoretical" issues.⁴⁴ Eventually, however, he came to understand the theoretical as being bound up with the practical, and in fact as being preliminary to it since the solutions of the problems found in the former sphere were to provide the basis on which those in the latter can be addressed.⁴⁵ It is precisely from this juncture that pure, transcendental phenomenology springs.⁴⁶ The deepening sense of the crisis goes hand in hand with the deepening sense of his task. In an "instinctive" response to the questionableness not only of the sciences in general and of philosophy in particular, but also of the whole of humanity, Husserl's intention to establish an ultimate foundation already guided his efforts in his *Investigations*. But it is not until his discovery of the epoché in 1905 that the "idea of phenomenology"⁴⁷ begins to become explicit. It sets the most radical phase of phenomenology in motion, for in it phenomenology becomes "critically" aware of the crisis and its source, and of what is needed to overcome it. In ever deepening cognizance of the loss of the ground of European humanness, Husserl's task must be to restore precisely that ground; he must begin anew. This calls for the reinstatement of the Apriori—or rather the first radical institution thereof, since Husserl views the whole of the philosophical tradition as having struggled towards it only naively. He considers himself the first to have gained insight into the true ground; and so it is his responsibility to bring this light to humanity.⁴⁸ It is this conviction that gives rise, on the one hand, to what he calls the "non-platitudinous sobriety and radical objectivity" of his writings from the *Investigations* on. They are "borne by a personal ethos," which he hopes to reawaken in European human-

ness.⁴⁹ But, on the other hand, it is also the source of the pathos⁵⁰ that occasionally erupts in his appeals to himself and to humanity, to the “self” that binds the one to the other.⁵¹ His “exhortations” are not just to a philosophical life, but, prior to that, to a transcendental-phenomenological life.⁵²

1.2 Natural Order and Critique

Although Husserl was aware of having a task already in 1896,⁵³ it is only after the discovery of the epoché in 1905 that its contours become more determinate.⁵⁴ For it alone is what enables Husserl to secure the absolute ground, the lost Apriori.⁵⁵ This discovery ushers in the “turn” to transcendental phenomenology, precisely because it is what makes everything possible. In it he sees the ultimate starting point, the true beginning. However, the insight into this ground is not enough. Husserl is obliged to bring it to intuition, to make it visible to others. And this is what occupies his reflections throughout his “transcendental” period. His sense of obligation, of responsibility, accounts for his unflagging preoccupation not only with the order of his presentation, but, first and foremost, with the beginning. For without the right beginning, there can be no right order; regardless of how well one builds one’s edifice, it will be but a “castle in the clouds” (*Wolkenschloß*) as long as the proper beginning has not been made. Given this emphasis, Husserl is justified in calling himself “an actual beginner.”⁵⁶ He is nothing more and nothing less—in complete compliance with his task.

Soon after the discovery of the epoché, and thus of the means for the most radical beginning, Husserl determines his task to be “a *critique of reason*,” and in fact “of logical and practical reason, of any valuing reason whatsoever” (PN, 297).⁵⁷ For him this is not just one among other possible tasks, but rather the “general task that I must solve if I am ever to be able to call myself a philosopher.” There are indeed other tasks, but they are encompassed by the critique of reason. Insofar as they are at all worth pursuing, they fit within that general task. As subtasks their solution contributes to its solution. And everything depends on its solution: “Without getting clear in general terms on the sense, essence, methods, main points of a critique of reason, without having thought out, drafted, established, and founded a general outline for them, I cannot live truly and truthfully.” This task is of vital importance to him—from at least 1906 on. As a personal task, its solution will not only enable him to live, but also to become a philosopher, a hope he harbors until his dying day.⁵⁸

Whereas the critique of reason is the task he sees for himself in 1906, and thus after his so-called transcendental turn, it is nevertheless of a piece with the task that guided his earlier work: “Since the publication of the *Logical Investigations*, my life has gained inner firmness. And from now on it shall and must show inner unity. Unfortunately, my personality can no longer become full and complete” (296). This unity is gained above all, he then notes, by dis-

closing the unity of the phenomenological and the psychological.⁵⁹ His entire Being is wrapped up in his work. He is literally fighting for his life, because he is fighting for his “self”: “But I must live for my tasks and seek my value and my inner certainty in their fulfillment. You shall know them by their fruits.⁶⁰ And by my fruits I will know myself; I will be able to respect myself if I ripen them in myself through hard work and in a well-ordered sequence” (297). Again, these tasks are situated within the general task of a critique of reason. And yet this task is not just Husserl’s personal task; he does not consider it something peculiar to himself, but rather something that bears upon others: “But thank heavens, there has been no lack of fruit, and more fruit is ripening. The proper values that were able to thrive on this trunk,⁶¹ which—alas! [*Gott sei’s geklagt!*—is broken and malformed in so many places, must now be ripened. That will be my life henceforth; that is the field of my life’s proper tasks. I do not want to despair, but to hope; I want to be content when I do work that will actually benefit my successors” (296–97). It is to be the trunk of a “sound tree,” in this case the tree of knowledge, which is rooted in the Archimedean point and which is transcendental phenomenology, while also being cultivated by this phenomenology.⁶² The critique called for is precisely the establishment of the proper order, from the root up into the heights.⁶³

Husserl’s drive for clarity—which is the drive for unity—not only concerns his personality, his self, but also the problems he deals with. This drive leads him first into the depths and, after he has reached the bottom, then up into the heights: “In devoted work, in purely objective engrossment, I want to and must approach the high goals” (297). Below and above are bound together into one whole. To get clear on this whole, he must fight against the temptations of skepticism: “I am fighting for my life, and that is why I confidently believe that I shall be able to progress. The most severe vital distress, the self-defense against the dangers of death, gives undreamt-of, unmeasured strength.” The source of the danger is also the source of his strength for overcoming that danger.⁶⁴ It compels Husserl to achieve clarity where there is otherwise only darkness. The clarity he aims at is not partial, but is about the whole. Hence, his life-or-death struggle is an all-or-nothing struggle: “Only one thing can fulfill me: I must gain clarity, otherwise I cannot live; I cannot bear life if I cannot believe that I shall gain the ability to look actually into the promised land, on my own and with clear eyes.” Husserl regards himself as wandering through the desert of skepticism (and dogmatism). He is at once Moses and Columbus: he is seeking the way into the “new world.”⁶⁵ And only clarity will grant him safe passage.

To fulfill his intention, it is not enough, he says, to have “knowledge of the goals, guidelines, standard measures, methods, and position taken on other knowledge and sciences. We also need the actual work. We have to pursue the paths ourselves. We must solve the individual problems step by step. Thus, what is needed here is above all a treatment of the phenomenology of reason,

step by step, and on the basis of that the actual elucidation of logical and ethical reason in the form of the principles and fundamental concepts proper to each" (298). He must actually work, which requires that he proceed "step by step." The sequence of inquiry is not arbitrary; there is an ideal order, which is set in advance by the things themselves (*die Sachen selbst*).⁶⁶ The deed called for in each case is guided by the insight into this order.

Thus, to reach the "promised land," he must be true to the things themselves. They alone provide the sole hope: "Pure reflection, pure inner life, absorbing the problems into myself and being turned purely and only to them—that is the hope of my future. If I do not succeed in this, then I may only live a life that is much more a death. I still may hope. But the hour has sounded in which I must reach *the* decision. The mere 'will' as a single resolution is not sufficient. Needed is inner renewal or inner purification and firmness. Against all externalities, against all the temptations of Adam, I must arm myself with nine layers of bronze" (300).⁶⁷ The decision called for is made once;⁶⁸ it initiates the would-be philosopher into the ethos that will bear him along the road to the "promised land." But his resolve must be continually renewed: this is the critical or rigorous attitude that animates pure phenomenology. One must purify oneself (and repeatedly so) of the "prevailing habits of thinking," of skeptical and dogmatic temptations. These are the extremes through which the phenomenological ethos safely guides one: "I must go my way as confidently, as firmly resolved, and as seriously as Dürer's Knight, despite Death and the Devil. O, my life has been serious enough. The cheerfulness of the sensuous enjoyment of life has become foreign to me and must remain foreign to me. I may not be passive (and enjoyment is passivity); I must live in work, in battle, in the passionately serious struggle for the wreath of truth. There will be no lack of cheerfulness: there will be clear sky⁶⁹ above me if I progress courageously and confidently, just as it is above Dürer's Knight! And God be with me as with him, although we are ever sinners."⁷⁰ That is to say, although we all stray repeatedly from the path set by the things themselves.

Precisely because it is so difficult to continue on this path, to abide by the things themselves, to proceed with the proper rigor, Husserl needs more than inner conviction: "More than anything else,⁷¹ I need divine assistance [*himmlische Mithilfe*]. Good working conditions and inner concentration, inner oneness with the problems." But he also needs the aid of others who, on his view, have sought to move along the same path as that on which he is moving in his work: "How weak I am: I need the assistance of great souls. From the fullness of their strength and their pure will, they must fortify me. I suckle from them until I am full, and learn to divert my gaze from the hustle and bustle of everyday life that pulls me down." He needs them not for their problems, not for their various approaches to the "eternal problems" of philosophy—this could not be the case precisely because, in beginning for the first time, Husserl necessarily breaks with all pre-phenomenological disciplines, including every philoso-

phy—but rather for his ethos: they lend him, literally, the “ethical” strength required for the passage between Death and the Devil to his goal.⁷² He therefore desires strength both from within and from above.

In another diary entry, dated November 11, 1907, Husserl gives further insight into his understanding of the relation of his present inquiry to his earlier work: “How my heart swelled with pride as they [i.e., the *Logical Investigations*] began to have a prompt and strong effect—something I had never dared hope for—especially on the young generation; how the hope that this generation now placed in me elevated me, how close I seemed to be to reaching the great goal of gaining actual insight into logic, into the critique of knowledge, and into the critique of all reason, to fixing the natural order of the problems, to finding the natural order of the investigations, to raising the problems themselves to the greatest level of precision, to working out the methods to the point of purity and complete certainty, and then, with this clarity of the goal set and of the method, of doing—step by step—the one thing needful in each case” (300–1).⁷³ Can phenomenology be reduced to epistemology? If so, then what of logic and the critique of reason? What determines the natural order of the problems and the investigations? What counts as precision with respect to the problems? And, then, after Husserl has achieved clarity in all the areas listed here, what is the goal set? What is the method and why? And what is the one thing needful in each case? The answer to each of these questions is rooted in Husserl’s task, and in it alone. It defines the natural order, which has an end, the ultimate aim, but above—or rather: below—all, one beginning. Getting clear on this is the work called for by the insight into the goal: “Now my passionate endeavor is first of all none other than to get on an absolutely firm track. At the moment, all my striving revolves around the question of the natural order of the investigations and around the way in which the fundamental investigations themselves are again to be begun and ordered” (301). The firm track is one of naturally *ordered* problems and corresponding investigations. They are bound together in a hierarchy, which is based on a firm, definite beginning. Husserl’s interest in the problems is not a matter of fancy; on the contrary, it is dictated solely by the things themselves. To be faithful to them and to win over others to such faithfulness is his task. That is why he is concerned with the “natural order,” and especially with the beginning. Everything depends on it.

1.3 System and Norms

By the time he published his manifesto, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” thus by 1911, Husserl had come to regard the prevailing crisis no longer as merely a personal affair,⁷⁴ but as affecting the entire age: “The spiritual distress [*geistige Not*] of our age has indeed become unbearable” (*PRS*, 336). It has its source in

the failure of philosophy: Despite the fact that since its “earliest beginnings philosophy has claimed to be rigorous science, and in fact the science that satisfies the highest theoretical needs and that enables, from an ethico-religious point of view, a life governed by pure rational norms” (289), despite the fact that philosophy has never given up this claim entirely, it was nevertheless “unable to satisfy the claim . . . in any of the epochs of its development”—not in Greek antiquity, not in the modern era, and not in Husserl’s day. The distress to which this failure gave rise is unbearable not only because it “leaves no part of our lives untouched” (336), but especially because it strikes at the very root of all life. And precisely for this reason it proves to be “the most radical vital distress [*die radikalste Lebensnot*].” Because this distress threatens its ground, the whole of human life is in jeopardy.⁷⁵ This distress manifests itself in different ways but in all quarters as a “crisis of foundation,” a rootlessness, a directionlessness. Husserl is convinced that the “highest interests of human culture demand the development of a rigorously scientific philosophy,” which secures the ground of those “high interests”; furthermore, that for “a philosophical revolution [*Umwendung*]” to succeed—and that means here: in order to regain the ground, or gain it for the first time—“it must in any case be animated [*beseelt*] by the intention to found philosophy anew in the sense of rigorous science” (293). The insight into what is needful is not enough, then; one must also be imbued with the right ethos and will in order to reach one’s goal. For the afflictions of his age there is “only one remedy”: “scientific critique and in addition a radical science, rising from below [*von unten anhebend*],⁷⁶ grounded in sure fundamentals, and progressing in accordance with the most rigorous method” (337)—in other words: “philosophy as rigorous science,” both as program and as ethos. This is the discipline that is to pursue the “general task” of a critique of reason.

Because no one has succeeded in establishing philosophy as a rigorous science, Husserl’s new science must make an absolute beginning, a clean break with all that has come before, to the extent that such a break is possible. This means that phenomenology must part with every previous philosophy and science. The rigorous scientist can have recourse to nothing save the things themselves and the intuition in which they are given immediately (see 340–41). As noted above, however, the things themselves prescribe an order of inquiry, in other words, a system. But of what kind? Not a “philosophical ‘system’ in the traditional sense” that is imposed upon the things from “on high”; thus not a system that, as a kind of “Minerva,” “springs from the head of a creative genius” already completed and then is “preserved in the silent museum of history alongside other such Minervas” (291–92). Rather, the kind of system at which Husserl aims represents, at most, an inversion of such a Minerva, for it grows out of the things themselves; it accords with the order they prescribe. He introduces it by way of a question: “Or is it to be a philosophical system of doctrine that, after the colossal preparatory work of generations, actually begins

from below [*von unten her*] with a fundament free of doubt and rises up like any sound edifice, in which stone is set upon stone, each as solid as the other, in accordance with guiding insights? On this question minds [*die Geister*] and paths must part" (292). Step by step, stone by stone, the edifice is constructed. But the first order of business is to secure the ground on which that edifice is to be built. This is the path Husserl will take, leaving all those behind who are unable to persist in the radicality such a system demands.

Husserl's system has two extremes, first the lowermost limit and finally the uppermost limit.⁷⁷ The philosophy he seeks to establish is the most rigorous because it is the most radical. It is, as he will later say, a "beginning science," and in two senses of the word. First and foremost, because it focuses principally on *the* beginning, on the lowermost limit: "But by its essence, philosophy is the science of true beginnings, of origins, of the *ρίζώματα πάντων* [roots of everything]. The science of the radical must itself be radical in its procedure—and in every respect. Above all it must not rest until it has obtained its own absolutely clear beginnings, that is, its absolutely clear problems, the methods prescribed by the proper sense of these problems, and the lowermost field of work wherein the things are given with absolute clarity" (340–41).⁷⁸ But it is also a "beginning science" because it intends to reorient and reorder all aspects of human culture from this ground up and thereby to usher in a genuine renaissance or renewal of human life.⁷⁹ This is the ground from which alone one can rigorously and "ethically" work up into the heights, and in fact asymptotically up towards the uppermost limit, which is God, or "absolute reason."⁸⁰

The will to rigorous science, and in fact to philosophy as rigorous science, is bound up with a specific ethos, which was touched on above in the form of Husserl's personal ethos. The will is one's personal commitment to the ethos. One must maintain this will, persist in the ethos, and do the work it demands if there is to be any hope of freeing oneself and humanity from the prevailing crisis. The practical intention of Husserlian thought comes to the fore here as well: "However, the question is to be asked not only from the standpoint of the individual, but also from that of humanity and of history, namely insofar as we consider what it means for the development of culture, for the possibility of a constantly progressive realization of the eternal idea of humanity—not of man *in individuo*—that the question be decided predominantly in one or the other sense" (334). For Husserl the answer to this question decides what kind of philosophy is called for. It is thus not only a theoretical, but also and ultimately a practical decision. Either rigorous science or crisis—there is no middle ground and no higher third. For this reason, once one has gained "the will to rigorous science," one must make a total break with all other disciplines, as well as with every philosophy. There can be "no attempt at mediation" between phenomenology and another position, there can be "no compromises" whatsoever (337). The claim of phenomenology is total; it is the first First Philosophy and, prior to that, the first First Science because it is the first genuinely rigorous sci-

ence.⁸¹ And necessarily so, for every other position has failed to attain sufficient rigor, that is, to be “true to the roots [*wurzelecht*].”⁸² Precisely due to their failure to secure an absolute foundation, he says: “Not philosophies but the things and the problems are the point from which the impulse to inquiry must issue” (340).⁸³ On his view, then, Husserl does not and, for principal reasons, cannot stand in any tradition.⁸⁴ This is ruled out by his constant reference to the standard-setting character of the things themselves, or his invocation of what he will soon refine into the “principle of all principles”: we can reach the great goal only “if with the radicalism that belongs to the essence of genuine philosophical science we accept nothing given in advance, allow nothing that has been handed down to us to pass as a beginning [or principle], nor ourselves to be dazzled by any name however great, but rather seek to gain the beginnings in a free devotion to the problems themselves and to the demands that issue from them.”⁸⁵ If one abides by this demand, then Husserl’s question about the proper path to be taken turns out to be only rhetorical. He does not see a true option here, but only one path, the one leading to the “roots of everything.” For the same reason he sees only one task and only one will to one philosophy extending through history.⁸⁶ To stray from this path, after having seen its necessity, would mean plunging into countersense—or sin.⁸⁷ On the other hand, to fail to bring others to the insight into the proper road would be to fail to do one’s duty to humanity, which he considers no less sinful.

In this regard, Husserl remarks that our personal goals are bound up with eternal ones, just as our responsibility to ourselves is bound up with a responsibility to others: “our ethical responsibilities . . . extend to the utmost reaches of the ethical ideal, up to the point denoted by the idea of human development” (334). We must never lose sight, he says, of “the responsibility with respect to humanity” (337). This duty issues not from the priority of intersubjectivity over subjectivity so much as from that of essence over the individual or factual entity. Our responsibility, then, is to the eternal in the sense of the essence or idea of humanity.⁸⁸ Doing our duty thus entails not losing sight of the priority of the eternal over individual, temporal concerns: “For the sake of time we must not sacrifice eternity; in order to alleviate our distress, we must not bequeath to our descendants distress upon distress as an ultimately ineradicable evil. The distress here stems from science. But only science can definitively overcome the distress that stems from science.”⁸⁹ Only like can overcome like. Therefore, since the distress issues from the discord of past and present philosophy with its essence, the only remedy is philosophy as rigorous science, which accords fully with that essence.

1.4 *Ethos, Ought, Teleology*

As a consequence of both his rejection of the traditional system and of the infinity of the phenomenological system, Husserl asserts that “science can

never again be the perfected creation of the individual”; instead each individual must work “in co-operation with those imbued with the same ethos [*Gleichgesinnten*] to help a scientific philosophy make its breakthrough and to develop further, step by step” (333), stone by stone, in the eternal work on the tower of phenomenology and the universal philosophy it founds. But precisely because this work cannot be done alone, the ethos must be passed on to others. New strength must be harnessed for rigorous science: “Whoever is capable of awakening belief”—both in himself and in others—“whoever is capable of arousing understanding of and enthusiasm for the greatness of a goal, will easily find the strength that is devoted to that goal” (340). By the same token, whoever is called is devoted to the eternal. But: “Those who set the goal in the finite, who want to have their system, and who want soon enough to be able to live by it, are in no way called to this task” (338). The construction of phenomenology is never-ending.

As always in Husserlian thought, however, this construction is not capricious, but proceeds according to eidetic norms. Each stone, as it were, must be scrutinized before it is added to the tower: “All life is position-taking [*Stellungnehmen*], all position-taking is subject to an ought [*Sollen*], to a verdict concerning validity or invalidity according to claimed norms that carry absolute weight. So long as these norms were not disputed, were not threatened and ridiculed by any skepticism, there was only one vital question: how best to satisfy the norms in practice” (336). These norms are rational norms; the “ought”⁹⁰ determines what is valid and what is not, which is to say, what is rational and what is not. And the verdict is reason or unreason. Thus the question ‘How am I to satisfy these norms in practice?’ is a question of reason, namely: How am I to live a rational life? How am I to act rationally? This, again, is the juncture of theory and praxis in Husserlian thought. All roads save one lead up to reason.

The critique of reason, which again is the task of tasks for Husserlian phenomenology, has two analogously related sides: that concerning the individual subject and that concerning humanity. Both sides are to be taken not as facts but as essential determinations. Thus, on the one hand, the task is to describe the universal eidetic structures of subjectivity, above all its intentionality, and to account for reason. On the other hand, the task is to explicate the teleology of humanity, or the senseful, intentional, historical becoming of man—according to his essence—in other words, the teleology that entails his rationalization.⁹¹ The former side calls for static analysis; the latter, for genetic analysis. As noted at the outset of this introduction, the latter presupposes the former. The beginning is to be made with static analysis. It discloses the Archimedean point and its essential structures of individual consciousness, which then act as guiding insights for the explication of the collective con-

sciousness, that is, of the becoming not only of man but also of humanity in history. All with a view to the verdict of reason.

Since the static analysis is the most radical of the two, and since the beginning is of the greatest importance to Husserl's endeavor, it constitutes the focal point of the present study. Prior to addressing it, however, it is necessary to complete our account of Husserl's understanding of the idea of phenomenology and the whole it defines. This requires that the second direction of the critique of reason, that of the rationalization of humanity, be considered. It is the primary concern of the so-called genetic phase of Husserlian thought, which culminates in his *Crisis*. There it becomes particularly audible what he has been fighting against since the birth of phenomenology, as well as how it is that he can describe philosophizing as a fight for life—for both his own and humanity's. In taking up this work, we come full circle, though not in order to fulfill Husserl's "genetic" directive, but to demonstrate that the unity of his thought derives from the singularity of his task. Again, despite every reference to chronology in the foregoing and in what is to come, the sole concern is with the detemporalized task. It is what makes the difference in the whole; it is the point of unity of the whole of Husserlian thought in its multiplicity.

The crisis of the European sciences brought about by skepticism was seen to be more fundamentally a crisis of European humanness. It is at bottom a crisis of essence or rather of the belief in essence. That is, the essence of man has grown questionable. And that questionableness signals the faltering of belief in his self, in himself as a rational being. Hence, it is a crisis of reason. It calls for decision.

Were they to succumb to skepticism, were they to cease to believe in reason, Husserl tells his fellow Europeans, they would "renounce [their] own truth" (*Crisis*, 12/14). As for what this truth is, the traditional definition of man (*Bestimmung des Menschen*) provides Husserl with the decisive clue: man is the *animal rationale*, the rational being (*Vernunftwesen*).⁹² It is of his essence (*Wesen*) to be rational. And that is why the skeptical obfuscation is so dangerous: "If man loses this belief [in reason], then that means nothing less than: he loses the belief 'in himself,' in the true Being proper to him that he does not always already have, not already with the evidence of the 'I am,' but only has and can have in the form of a struggle for his truth, to make himself true. Everywhere true Being is an ideal goal, a task of *epistêmê*, of 'reason,' as opposed to Being that is unquestioningly 'taken for granted,' merely thought to be in *doxa*" (11/13).⁹³ Pivotal here (and for the whole of his thought) is, on the one hand, Husserl's revaluation of the sense of human Being: it is strictly becoming.⁹⁴ On the other hand, his binding of becoming to a goal, a telos, that always remains ideal. Accordingly, Husserl regards the designation '*animal rationale*' less as a description of man as actualized—that is, of how he is and remains—

than as a specification of his ownmost possibility, his *dynamis*—that is, of how he ought to be. He sees in it first and foremost man’s destiny (*Bestimmung*), the prescription of his proper vocation, of his task: to strive to actualize his *self*, to fulfill his essence, in short: “to make himself true.” The telos at which all his striving is aimed is true Being, which is “absolute reason” or God.⁹⁵ It “alone can satisfy him, make him ‘blessed’ [‘selig’]” (275/341). But although it is proper to him, the desired actualization or entelechy⁹⁶ necessarily remains denied to him, for true Being as idea lies in the infinite.⁹⁷ Consequently, man’s struggle for his telos—or his teleology as Husserl also refers to it—is an endless, “a constant becoming in a constant intentionality of development” (272/338); it “proceeds in stages of self-reflection and self-responsibility,” from the ground of his *dynamis* upwards towards his entelechy, thereby moving always only step by step from lower to higher, latent to more manifest levels of self-understanding, from *doxa* to *epistēmē*.⁹⁸ Human life is essentially this teleology: “being human is a being teleological and being what one ought to be [*Sein-Sollen*]” (275/341); whether man knows it, whether he intends it or not, “this teleology holds sway in each and every activity and project of an ego” (276/341)—even when he is wholly submerged in *doxa* or under the spell of skepticism, it works latently. But it is only to the extent that he is conscious of and wills his telos, only to the extent that he reflects upon and is responsible to his self, that he is able to achieve greater self-understanding and move closer to his actualization; for otherwise he merely takes Being for granted and moves merely blindly towards his ownmost goal. And this is where the belief Husserl calls for, as well as the danger of skepticism, comes in. When man truly believes in reason, he believes in himself; when he so believes, he wills his actualization; and when he so wills, he struggles to make himself true. On account of this, Husserl says that in wanting to be rational, man is already rational.⁹⁹ Yet the belief on which this will to rationality and man’s consequent becoming are based is not to be confounded with religious faith,¹⁰⁰ or in more Husserlian terms: with a belief bound by dogma;¹⁰¹ rather, it springs solely from man’s “free” intuition of his essence, that reason not only gives sense to his life but is his sense, his truth, his task. For Husserl, belief—in the active and not the passive sense, which is peculiar to unreflective modes of human life—is a “presentiment” (*Vorahnung*),¹⁰² an anticipation of one’s essence. It provides an “intentional guide” for the struggle to fulfill that essence, just as in sensory perception, for example, we have a presentiment of an object prior to having it adequately, one that points us in the direction of adequacy, even if such adequacy is ultimately unattainable.¹⁰³ What begins as the consciousness of one’s essence is thereby transformed into deed: it becomes a “practical goal” that compels the will ever onward and upward (see VL, 321/275). Skepticism (no less than dogmatism) causes man to lose sight of his telos and thereby impedes his becoming, his teleology.

In its present crisis, as Husserl experiences it, European humanness stands to perish in a “conflagration of unbelief” (348/192).¹⁰⁴ If man is to be saved from this fate, he must be set back on his proper course, and knowingly so; and that requires that his ears be opened to the call to a “life of apodicticity” (*Crisis*, 275/340). Just this is Husserl’s intention in the *Crisis*, as in all of his “introductions” to pure phenomenology.¹⁰⁵ To succeed in this endeavor, he regards it as imperative that the belief be restored, the faltering of which marked the end of metaphysics and the rise of positivism. However, this cannot be achieved simply by pitting the desired belief against the prevailing unbelief, for the one belief need not be any more convincing than the other. Rather, it must be made intuitively perspicuous which of them possesses such apodictic force that man cannot but believe in the ground.¹⁰⁶

To shed light on this ground, Husserl turns from the present destitute state of European humanness to its history, where the desired belief still played an animating role. In fact he turns to the history of philosophy—of universal philosophy in its exclusively European manifestation—since he sees in it “the functioning brain on whose normal functioning genuine, healthy European spirituality depends” (*VL*, 338/290–91): philosophy has demonstrated repeatedly that it has an “archontic function”¹⁰⁷ with regard to the development of European science and culture; its generations have been “the bearers of this spiritual development” (*Crisis*, 273/339). By extension, European humanness is also considered to have had and still have such a function with regard to humanity as a whole. For this reason the crisis addressed here is not confined to Husserl’s Europe but is actually of global proportions—as would be its resolution. Thus there is a telescopic, founded relationship: from (European) philosophy to European humanness to humanity as a whole; the first is to lead the next and it in turn is to lead humanity. (This, of course, mirrors the telescopic or analogous relationship between the individual subject and the community of egos or between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. These founding relationships are rooted in Husserl’s understanding of essence, specifically of the self.)

In fact Husserl finds the ground, the disclosure of which is to enable such a resolution, in the unifying sense of the history of philosophy; it is simultaneously the origin and the end of this history, and as such binds together all of its moments: “We gain self-understanding and thereby inner support only by elucidating [history’s] unifying sense, which, from its origin on, has been inborn in history with the newly established task, which moves [all] philosophical endeavors as a driving force [*Triebkraft*]” (12/14).¹⁰⁸ The history Husserl has in view is a continuum: it is *one* progression, *one* teleology, which has *one* underlying, unifying sense, and is directed towards and guided from beginning to end by *one* telos.¹⁰⁹ Yet the unity of history cannot be discerned, and thus the desired self-understanding and inner support not gained, so long as one allows oneself to be distracted by superficial differences in that history; instead, one

must “break through the crust of the externalized ‘historical facts’ of the history of philosophy, interrogating, exhibiting, testing its inner sense, its hidden teleology” (16/18). In other words, it is necessary to pinpoint philosophy’s abiding task, what it sought to achieve but did not: “through inquiry into what was originally and always wanted as philosophy and was wanted continually by all philosophers and philosophies that have communicated with one another throughout history,” we gain access to the said ground, “that ultimate genuineness of the origin [*Ursprungsechtheit*], which, once seen, conquers the will apodictically.” The apodictically conquered will is the one that has been awakened to the one thing needful and consequently strives to fulfill that abiding task, which is to say, to realize the essence of philosophy.

Having penetrated its outer crust, Husserl finds that what philosophy has always wanted was to be rigorous science, that is, universal philosophy, which is directed towards, guided by, and in the service of the proper, the “apodictic” telos of man and thus of history: namely absolute reason. As noted, such philosophy was to establish the foundation for and hierarchy of all human endeavor, in one teleological progression, from the ground up. In view of this inner, unifying sense it becomes evident that, “although it itself was not conscious of this” (17/18), from its ancient beginnings on all genuine philosophy, in its quest to become rigorous science, has been (latently) directed towards the “final form of transcendental philosophy—as phenomenology” (71/70).¹¹⁰ Thus throughout its long history, genuine philosophy has harbored phenomenology as its “secret desire.”¹¹¹ Not unlike the philosophy of the modern era, as whose heir Husserl regards himself, the institution of his phenomenology proves to be “at once a repetition and a universal transformation of sense. In this it considers itself to have been called to begin a new age, completely sure of its idea of philosophy and of its true method” (12/14).¹¹² Husserl understands himself as continuing the radical ethos of modern philosophy while also having to break with his predecessors, namely “to transform fundamentally and essentially [*grundwesentlich*] the total sense of philosophy” (16/18); this he intends to do by first getting clear on the requirements of rigorous science, laying a new foundation that does not suffer from the lack of clarity that had led to the dissolution of philosophy formerly, and so preparing the way for a possible metaphysics. All this promises to bring about the renewal of European humanness, which is to lead in turn to the renewal of humanity as a whole. On Husserl’s view, it is through phenomenological philosophy, and it alone, that the crisis can be resolved.

And yet in the midst of the prevailing lack of belief in philosophy, the will to philosophy as the source and means of man’s salvation from this present crisis has to seem paradoxical, if not plain absurd. This accounts for the “painful existential contradiction” into which Husserl notes he and his audience have fallen “as philosophers of this present” (15/17). But despite this state of affairs,

as philosophers they have come to see that the possibility of a metaphysics means the possibility of a true humanity and that as a consequence it is their responsibility not to give up in the face of the foundering of belief; they “cannot let go of the belief in the possibility of philosophy as a task, thus in the possibility of a universal knowledge.” To do so would be to renounce not just their personal truth, not just that of European humanness, but also humanity’s, and that would spell the end of man: “The entirely personal responsibility for our own true Being as philosophers, our inner-personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true Being of humanity; this Being exists only as being directed towards a telos and can come to actualization, if at all, only through philosophy—through us, if we are philosophers in all seriousness.”¹¹³ For philosophers to proceed in seriousness, they must “maintain the belief that has sense only in relation to the one goal, the sole goal that is common to us all, to *the* philosophy.”¹¹⁴ As has been seen, this philosophy is first and foremost philosophy as rigorous science, which is to say: pure, transcendental phenomenology. Thus it is the task, the responsibility of phenomenologists, who in Husserl’s eyes are the preeminent “functionaries of humanity,”¹¹⁵ to reawaken man’s belief in himself and thereby his will to reason as his ownmost telos. To do so is to reestablish the philosophical form of life, an ethos that formed the basis of Greek humanness in antiquity as well of European humanness in the modern era. In accordance with it, man struggles endlessly for self-understanding, for his sense. His ideal is a life based on autonomous rather than “blindly traditionalistic” inquiry; he lives by the maxim that one “freely give oneself, one’s entire life, its *rule* based on pure reason, on philosophy” (5/8). This ethos is not just any form of life among others; rather, it is *the* form of life; it has, as it were, an archontic function since it grounds all other human endeavors. Husserl sees himself and his contemporaries on the brink of a new age, though one they can inaugurate only if they are serious philosophers who work together in community—who philosophize together, or *συμφιλοσοφεῖν*,¹¹⁶ as Husserl is also wont to say—and cultivate a *philosophia perennis*.¹¹⁷ Called to be the “functionaries of humanity” and, by extension, of the absolute, and bound together by their will to rigorous science and thus to rationality, they must take up the fight that will decide everything: the “vitality [of true philosophy in contrast to its skeptical adversary], however, consists in its struggle for its own genuine and true sense and thus for the sense of a genuine humanness. To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and to make the possibility of a metaphysics evident as a true possibility—that is the sole way in which to set a metaphysics or a universal philosophy on its work-filled course to actualization. This alone will decide whether the telos inborn in European humanness with the birth of Greek philosophy, namely the telos of wanting to be a humanness based on philosophical reason and to be able to exist only as such—in the infinite movement from latent to manifest reason and in infinite striving for self-