Introduction

INTRODUCING HUSSERL'S *CRISIS*

This book offers an explanatory and critical introduction to Edmund Husserl's last work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936 and 1954, hereafter '*Crisis*'),[1] a disrupted, partially published and ultimately unfinished project, written when its author was in his late 70s, struggling with declining health and suffering under the adverse political conditions imposed by the German National Socialist Regime that had come to power in 1933. The *Crisis* is universally recognized as his most lucidly written, accessible and engaging published work, aimed at the general educated reader as an urgent appeal to address the impending crises – scientific, moral and existential – of the age. Husserl is writing with the authority of a life-time of practice as a phenomenologist and with a fluidity previously not often found in his tortured prose. There is the strong sense of a philosopher with a mission, a mission to defend the very relevance of philosophy itself in an era defined both by astonishing scientific and technological progress and by political barbarism. The *Crisis* is also, undoubtedly, Husserl's most influential book, continuing to this day to challenge philosophers reflecting on the meaning of the achievements of the modern sciences and their transformative impact on human culture and on the world as a whole. The *Crisis of the European Sciences* is, by any measure, a work of extraordinary

[1] The German edition is Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (hereafter 'K'), Walter Biemel ed., Husserliana (hereafter 'Hua') VI (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954), partially translated by David Carr as *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (hereafter 'C') (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

range, depth and intellectual force. It reveals a thinker who, still in possession of his subject, is embarking on a powerful and sustained defence of the very phenomenology he himself had been instrumental in developing and which he was attempting to rescue from the current generation of philosophers who, he claimed, had misunderstood his efforts.

Sadly, the *Crisis* was also the last work that Husserl was able to publish in his life-time. In fact, over the course of his working life, Husserl managed to publish no more than half a dozen books, chiefly: *Logical Investigations* (1900–1),[2] *Ideas* I (1913),[3] *Lectures on Internal Time Consciousness* edited by Martin Heidegger (1928),[4] *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929)[5] and *Cartesian Meditations* (published in French in 1931).[6] The *Crisis* was Husserl's last project, and it did not appear as a book but initially in the form of two journal articles. In fact, only the first two of the projected five parts of the *Crisis* appeared in print in the newly founded *Philosophia* journal, edited by the exiled German Neo-Kantian philosopher Arthur Liebert (1878–1946)[7] and published in Belgrade in January 1937 (but

[2] See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols, trans. J.N. Findlay, ed., with a New Introduction by Dermot Moran and New Preface by Michael Dummett (London, New York: Routledge, 2001). Hereafter 'LU' followed by the Investigation Number, the volume number of the English translation in bold, then section and page number; followed by the Husserliana volume and page number.

[3] Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch: *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie* 1. Halbband: *Text der 1–3. Auflage*, ed. Karl Schuhmann, Hua III/1 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), trans. F. Kersten as *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1983). Hereafter '*Ideas* I'.

[4] Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J.S. Churchill ed. Martin Heidegger (London: Indiana University Press, 1964).

[5] Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. D. Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969). Hereafter 'FTL' followed by the section number and the page number of the English translation and the Husserliana volume and page number.

[6] For the English translation, see Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967). Hereafter 'CM' followed by the section number and the page number of the English translation and the Husserliana volume and page number.

[7] Arthur Liebert, a Prussian Jew, was a Neo-Kantian philosopher who became head of the Kant-Gesellschaft in 1910. He was born Arthur Levy in Berlin (he changed his name to Liebert when he converted to Christianity) and studied philosophy in Berlin. A committed humanist, he published his first book on Pico della Mirandola and completed his doctorate under Friedrich Paulsen and Alois Riehl. For many years he edited *Kant-Studien*. He lectured in Berlin from 1919 until 1933, when he was dismissed under the Nazi laws. He then went to Prague, where he founded the *Philosophia* society and organized the publication of its journal, *Philosophia*, which appeared between 1936 and 1938, aiming to be an international voice

dated 1936).[8] Husserl continued to work on further parts but fell ill in the summer of 1937 and eventually died on 27 April 1938, unable to bring his planned project to completion. An edited version, still incomplete, based on Husserl's manuscripts and containing many supplementary texts, was published in 1954, edited by Walter Biemel (b. 1918), a Romanian-German philosopher who had written his doctoral thesis with Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Aside from his official publications, Husserl left a considerable *Nachlass* (his literary estate) consisting of extensive notes of his lecture courses, as well as more exploratory research manuscripts that continue to be edited in the Husserliana series.

The text of the *Crisis,* as we currently have it, then, is the outcome of editorial work carried out first by Husserl and his assistants Eugen Fink (1905–75) and Ludwig Landgrebe (1902–91) and then by Walter Biemel on the printed parts, together with a bundle of associated manuscripts that Husserl himself had assembled as the K-III Group of manuscripts. Given these circumstances, the *Crisis of the European Sciences* is more a collage, a patch-work of fragments, than an actual, unified book. Yet it is still a remarkable philosophical accomplishment in many respects. Husserl himself regarded the *Crisis* as containing his most important work, 'the richest results of my life's work of over forty years', as he put it in a letter to Arthur Liebert (Hua xxix xxxiii).

The *Crisis* claims to offer an introduction to transcendental phenomenology, and, of course, Edmund Husserl is best known for founding and developing the new science of *phenomenology*, developing an insight into the *intentionality*, or directedness, of conscious

serving philosophy. In 1939 he emigrated to Birmingham, England. He returned to Berlin in 1946 as full professor and dean of the education faculty, but he died soon afterwards. He wrote several Kantian studies and three books whose titles have relevance to Husserl's theme: *Die geistige Krisis der Gegenwart* [The Present Spiritual Crisis] (Berlin 1923), *Die Krise des Idealismus* [The Crisis of Idealism] (Zurich 1936) and *Von der Pflicht der Philosophie in unserer Zeit* [On the Duty of Philosophy in Our Time] (Zurich 1938). As a Neo-Kantian, and in agreement with Husserl, he opposed irrationalism and mysticism in philosophy, on the one hand, and also naturalism, on the other, and was also worried about philosophy collapsing into a relativistic worldview.

[8] The first two parts (i.e. §§ 1–27) of the *Crisis* were published in *Philosophia* Vol. 1 (1936), 77–176. Although dated 1936, the journal was in fact held up by a printer's strike and the editor Liebert's travels, and did not actually appear until January 1937. Husserl himself received his copy on 7 January 1937.

experiences that had been proposed by his teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917). Phenomenology, as developed by Husserl and furthered by his students (e.g. Edith Stein (1891–1942), Ludwig Landgrebe, Eugen Fink) and followers (e.g. Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61)), quickly established itself as the dominant philosophical approach on the European continent in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, phenomenology continues to hold its own as a movement of international significance, both within Continental philosophy and also as a specific outlook and methodological approach to human subjectivity in the cognitive and health sciences. Phenomenology may be characterized broadly as the descriptive science of consciously lived experiences and the objects of those experiences, described precisely in the manner in which they are experienced.[9]

Husserl's understanding of phenomenology evolved and changed over his life, and the *Crisis* represents the mature expression of his transcendental phenomenology. Initially, he focused on individual processes of consciousness – perception, imagination, memory, time-consciousness and so on – understood as 'lived experiences' (*Erlebnisse*), mental episodes. But gradually he came to recognize the need to address the manner in which the flowing, connected stream of conscious experiences is unified into a *life*, centred around an *ego* but interconnected with other egos in a communal life of what Husserl calls broadly 'intersubjectivity', leading, finally, to the shared experience of a world as a whole (primarily experienced as the familiar 'life-world'). This turn to the ego, especially, led Husserl's phenomenology in a transcendental direction (and Descartes (1596–1650) is, for Husserl, the father of transcendental philosophy). The *Crisis* revolutionized phenomenology with its introduction of the life-world understood as the historical world, as we shall discuss in the course of this book.

Husserl had a deep fear that his phenomenology had been misunderstood. In his draft 'Foreword to the Continuation of the *Crisis*', Husserl fears his labours in the development of phenomenology are in danger of being discarded as irrelevant and outmoded, especially with the growing interest in life-philosophy, existentialism and

[9] See Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

what Husserl broadly characterizes as 'irrationalism' in philosophy. Husserl's urgent tone reflects not just his own sense of impending mortality, his need to critically assess his own achievement, but also the need to confront the intellectual crisis shaking Europe at a time – the mid 1930s – when the Nazification process was in full swing in Germany. Husserl had a strong sense the whole scientific culture of Europe was being threatened and undermined by a descent into irrationalism. He outlines the dangers confronting European culture and the intellectual confusions lying at the very heart of the positive sciences that appear, on the surface, to be so successful. Indeed, the *Crisis* is – a decade before Heidegger's famous critique of humanist ideals in his 'Letter on "Humanism"' (1947)[10] – a profound critical interrogation and reflection on the meaning of humanity and the humanist ideals of the Enlightenment.

Husserl's aim is, therefore, extremely ambitious. He says he is seeking to understand nothing less than 'the origin of the modern spirit' (C 57; K 58), and, in particular, the nature of the particular 'bestowal of meaning' or 'sense-bestowal' (*Sinngebung*, C 58; K 58) that has brought about the intellectual edifice or construction known as modern science. In his writings on culture, Husserl explicitly employs the German term '*Geist*', which has no exact equivalent in English, but which can broadly be translated as 'culture'. Spirit signifies the collective efforts and achievements of human conscious endeavour, and can be extended to mean all conscious life, including that of animals.[11]

Husserl begins the *Crisis* by announcing a 'crisis' not just in the extraordinarily successful natural sciences, but also in the 'total meaningfulness' of cultural life (C 12; K 10). After the German defeat in 1918, an entire generation seemed to have lost its faith in Western civilization and its supposed progress. As Husserl put it, humanity

[10] See Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 239–76. Heidegger's letter was originally written to the French philosopher Jean Beaufret in 1946 as a response to certain questions put to Heidegger regarding his relation to Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism. In his letter, Heidegger believes 'humanism' is an essentially metaphysical position deriving from Roman philosophy that fails to capture what is essential to human existence: 'Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough' (p. 251).

[11] The German *Geist* can be translated as 'mind', 'spirit' or 'culture', as well as 'ghost' or 'spectre'. Husserl speaks of 'the spirit of philosophy' and 'the spiritual battles' of Western culture (*Crisis* § 3).

appeared to have lost its faith in the 'ideal of universal philosophy' (C 10; K 8). Husserl, furthermore, in Hegelian fashion but without explicit reference to Hegel (1770–1831), regards the history of modern philosophy as presenting the shape of modern humanity itself (C 16; K 14). The move towards naturalism in modern philosophy mirrors the scientific embrace of naturalism and objectivism, with a consequent loss of a way of understanding values and indeed a complete misunderstanding of the 'enigma of subjectivity'.

Husserl's extended meditation on the development and current predicament of modern science and modern philosophy includes a critical evaluation of the circumstances that give birth to the (then relatively new) science of *psychology*. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, Husserl is concerned to show that empirical psychology is a failed science since it fundamentally misunderstands the true nature of subjectivity, due to its acceptance of the fundamental split between objectivity and subjectivity brought about by modern science and further installed into the heart of modern philosophy by Descartes and his successors. For Husserl, the crisis of psychology (with its retarded development and methodological difficulties, C 4; K 2), is emblematic of the crisis facing the cultural sciences as a whole; these sciences have a distorted conception of subjectivity which is threatening their very meaningfulness as sciences. He therefore embarks on an intensive investigation of the meaning of human cultural interpenetration with the world, the world of living experience, what he calls the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*), which we shall discuss in Chapter 6, as a way of re-orienting and grounding both the natural and the human sciences. The term 'life-world' – which was already in use well before Husserl – began to appear in his work from around 1917. He acknowledges the influences of the discussion of the 'pre-found' world of experience in the early positivist Richard Avenarius (1843–96),[12] and the world of naïve experience in the philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach (1838–1916). Earlier incarnations of the concept include the

[12] See Richard Avenarius, *Der menschliche Weltbegriff* [The Human Conception of the World] (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1891; reprinted Elibron Classics, 2005). Avenarius speaks of the world as 'the pre-found' (*das Vorgefundene*). Husserl discusses Avenarius in his *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (hereafter 'BPP' followed by English page number and Husserliana volume and page number), trans. Ingo Farin and James G. Hart, *Husserl Collected Works* Vol. XII (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), pp. 22–8 and 107–11.

natural, surrounding world (see, especially, *Ideas* I §§ 27–9) and the 'natural concept of the world'.[13] The life-world, as Husserl characterizes it, is the world of the pre-given, familiar, present, available, surrounding world, including both 'nature' and 'culture' (however they may be defined), that envelops us and is always there as taken for granted. The life-world also provides a set of horizons for all human activity. The life-world is, in Husserl's terms, the 'fundament' for all human meaning and purposive activity. Although he is fascinated by the idea of the evolving human historical and cultural world (which has been the object of the particular sciences for millennia), in fact, in the *Crisis*, he is not specifically interested in the life-world for its own sake (what he would regard as a 'naïve' science of the life-world), but rather in meditating on the life-world as both support and counterpoint to the world of science as a way to understanding transcendental phenomenology. Husserl wants to understand the life-world in terms of the manner in which it provides cooperating subjects with the background and horizons necessary for the whole accomplishment of the objective world.

In the *Crisis*, Husserl uses two German words more or less interchangeably for 'crisis' – '*Krise*' (e.g. C 203; K 207) and the Greek-derived term '*Krisis*' (C 3; K 1). In the opening sections (*Crisis* §§ 1–7) Husserl makes a number of bold and interrelated claims:

1. There is a crisis of foundations in exact sciences.
2. There is a crisis brought on by the positivity of the sciences.
3. There is a crisis in the human sciences, since they model themselves on the exact sciences.
4. There is an explicit crisis in psychology, the supposed science of human spirit.
5. There is a crisis in contemporary culture ('a radical life-crisis of European humanity').
6. There is a crisis in philosophy (traditionally understood as the discipline which addresses the crisis in the sciences and in life).

All these crises are interlinked and have, according to Husserl, a common solution: transcendental phenomenology, which, with its secure

[13] See, for instance, Husserl's discussion of the 'natural concept of the world, i.e., that concept of the world in the natural attitude', BPP, esp. 15; Hua XIII 125.

and grounded clarification of the concept of *subjectivity*, offers a way out of these crises.

The *Crisis*, then, is not only a critical study of the current state of the sciences (chiefly physics and psychology), but also Husserl's preferred way to introduce students to his mature transcendental phenomenology.[14] Husserl intended the *Crisis* to be the authoritative and final statement of his mature phenomenological method – he himself speaks of it as a kind of 'discourse on method' (C 250; K 254). For Husserl, phenomenology cannot be seen as simply one philosophy among others; rather, as he articulates in the *Crisis*, it represents the mature form of modern philosophy itself, the highest form of transcendental philosophy, the epitome of self-conscious thinking that has interrogated its own assumptions and therefore can be genuinely seen as the most radical and fundamental form of reflection. To come to terms with phenomenology is, in Husserl's opinion, to come to terms with the cultural, scientific and philosophical achievement of the West ('Europe' in his broad sense). Husserl is offering a narrative, telling a tale involving an intellectual reconstruction of some defining moments in the intellectual history of the West and seeking to introduce transcendental phenomenology as a way of making sense of this history. Indeed, in his 'Foreword to the Continuation of the *Crisis*', Husserl speaks of 'the teleological-historical way' into transcendental phenomenology (C 102; K 435). Similarly, in a late note written in the summer of 1937, he calls it his 'historical way' into transcendental phenomenology (Hua XXIX 426) and claims that it is the principal and most systematic way, as we shall explore in Chapter 5.

For Husserl, the practice of philosophy is neither a private pursuit nor a merely cultural exercise; rather, as the pursuit of truth, it is an urgent matter for humanity itself. Furthermore, philosophy mediates our humanity to ourselves. Philosophers are 'functionaries of humankind' (*Funktionäre der Menschheit*, C 17; K 15), honest bureaucrats whose function it is to steer social and cultural development on

[14] Husserl was particularly concerned, as we shall see, to define phenomenology as an absolutely fundamental science that deals with the entire manner in which the objective world is disclosed to and experienced by concrete living subjects. He was equally concerned, however, to distinguish phenomenology, as a science of subjectivity-correlated-with-objectivity, from all forms of empirical *psychology*, which, for him, were based on a naturalistic misconstrual of the transcendental nature of this world-constituting subjectivity and intersubjectivity (see *Crisis* § 53).

the right path. The overall crisis, for Husserl, then, is the failure of European rationality, despite the enormous advances of the sciences in the technological domination of the world and in the technical organization of society, to have supplied a cure for the social and psychic illness of the time, because of the crucial neglect of the subjective contribution to the experience of the world. Thus, in his 1935 'Vienna Lecture', he contrasts folk medicine with scientific medicine and wonders why there has been no scientific equivalent of medicine for cultural ailments. Phenomenology will provide that cultural medicine for our time.

In this study, I plan, through a guided reading of the *Crisis*, to introduce Husserl's mature transcendental phenomenology and discuss critically his main concepts and methodological moves. I shall not assume any prior familiarity with Husserl or with phenomenology. In referring to Husserl's *Crisis* I shall use the English translation by David Carr published by Northwestern University Press,[15] which is based on the Husserliana edition edited by Walter Biemel. It must be noted at the outset that Carr's version of the *Crisis* contains a significant majority – but not all – of the texts of the German Husserliana edition. Where the non-translated parts are referred to, I shall provide the relevant translations. In 1992, other important research manuscripts broadly associated with the *Crisis* – including the text of Husserl's Prague lectures of November 1935 – were published in German as Hua XXIX.[16] A further large volume of writings on the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) – one of the key themes of the *Crisis* – recently appeared as Hua XXXIX (2008).[17] Insofar as the material published in Hua XXIX and XXXIX casts new light on Husserl's thinking in the *Crisis*, I shall refer to it in my commentary.

[15] Carr's translation is excellent but does not translate the full text of Hua VI. Certain editorial decisions have been imposed, e.g. Husserl makes great use of emphasis (in the German text represented by wider spacing of the letters, '*gesperrt*'), but Carr does not always reproduce the italics. Carr often divides long sentences into shorter ones and divides a single complex question into several shorter ones.

[16] See Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlaß 1934–1937*, ed. Reinhold N. Smid, Hua XXIX (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992).

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

Because the *Crisis* is a fragmentary and unfinished text, I shall proceed thematically. Having introduced Husserl and his philosophy, and explained the genesis of the *Crisis* project, I shall focus on the themes of the natural sciences (in the figure of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)), the human sciences (in particular psychology and history), Husserl's discovery of the life-world and his effort to develop the most advanced form of transcendental phenomenology. Finally, I shall discuss the influence of the *Crisis* in the twentieth century and beyond. In spite of everything, the *Crisis* is a relentlessly optimistic work, a work that looks to the future, a paean in praise of the philosophical life. For these reasons, the *Crisis* has inspired philosophers as varied as Jan Patočka (1907–77), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schutz (1899–1959), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), and Hilary Putnam (b. 1926).

HUSSERL'S TERMINOLOGY AND METHOD

A word of warning is necessary at the outset: while the *Crisis* is undoubtedly Husserl's most accessible and readable work, it is still a difficult and challenging text. It unfolds a narrative, but it does not do so in a straightforward manner. It is not always easy to follow the flow of his argument since Husserl – ever the honest philosopher – shares his hesitations and uncertainties as he unfolds his own thoughts. In this respect, he is the paradigmatic 'self-thinker' (*Selbstdenker*), as he himself calls the philosopher.[18]

Husserl's method of exposition in the *Crisis* involves a very particular procedure of interpretation that is only occasionally explicitly addressed in the text (primarily in *Crisis* §§ 7, 9(l) and 15). Husserl is developing a narrative, a *hermeneutical recuperation of the history of modern science and philosophy.* Although he does not use the term 'hermeneutics' (the word does appear infrequently in his later writings, presumably under the influence of Dilthey and Heidegger), he does speak of 'interpretation' (*Interpretation*, *Deutung*) or 'exposition' (*Auslegung*, see C 11; K 9), which he characterizes as primarily

[18] *Selbstdenker*, literally 'self-thinker', which Carr sometimes renders as 'autonomous thinker', is one of Husserl's favourite idioms, see e.g. C 393; K 511 and C 394; K 512.