Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity and Values in Edmund Husserl
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As a phenomenological psychologist, I am honored to be able to make some brief comments introducing the work of my colleagues in philosophy. From the perspective of my discipline, psychology, I look at this book not only as a collection of discrete scholarly achievements. More than that, this collection embodies a lived-experience, an event—and not a solitary experience, but a shared one.

This book is the fruit of the collaboration of Husserl scholars who gathered in Rome in the summer of 2012, at the invitation of Dr. Susi Ferrarello. The participants gathered to share their perspectives on phenomenology’s contemporary implications. The event was envisioned not merely as an occasion for scholarly monologues but, rather, as an invitation to dialogue. In this context, we should remember that for Husserl, the activity of phenomenologizing finds its fulfillment not in solitary reflection but in community, and not in a static form of community, but rather in a community which generates increasingly open and expanding inquiry, welcoming others into the conversation.

In 1934, nearing the end of his life, in his notes in response to Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl describes the beginning of phenomenological exploration as a solitary one:

I at the start of the phenomenological reduction and then solitarily phenomenologizing in “solipsistic” solitude, i.e. in which I still have no fellow phenomenologizer. (Fink 1995, 191)

He then poses the question, “How far can this solipsistic phenomenology reach?”

He answers by observing that the aim of this path of inquiry is “the progressive development of a phenomenological community,” which implies a “transcendently wakeful communalization as co-searching and living life as a whole accordingly” (Fink 1995, 191).

That the process of communalization he envisions is fully social, and not merely scholarly, is evident in Husserl’s use of quasi-religious language (for instance “conversion,” which he places within quotation marks) to describe the requisite shift in attitude, and his description of the outcome as “a living community of transcendentally awakened subjects.”
He then returns to the question, “how long can I phenomenologize as solus ipse, as the ‘only man,’ how long can I remain at it … how long can I want to remain at it” (Fink 1995, 191)?

In these late reflections, Husserl takes phenomenology’s ultimate aims to be directed toward the social world: as he writes, human life is “we-life,” and a search for individuated realization that, in a way, “each has to understand in a sense appropriate to himself” and yet “is a striving of the we toward unity in a we-satisfaction,” which finds its fruition in “the creation of a new environing human world” (Fink 1995, 192).

It seems to me that a radical reading of Husserl’s words requires us to assess the degree to which our phenomenological work has succeeded, by asking whether our work contributes to this intersubjective end. How, in other words, does the present work reflect an engagement with and a promotion of the kind of “wakeful communalization” which Husserl described?

You have in your hands (or on your screen) a text. Is the fulfillment of lived-philosophy to be found in the artifacts produced—viewed discretely, as empirical objects—or the process through which they came to be and from which they have an impact in the world? To view a book such as this primarily as an object seems to me to reflect a particular kind of “natural attitude” that we lapse into in the course of scholarly life. Of course, the production of such objects is a requirement of scholarly life—but, as phenomenologists, we know that the meaning of something like an essay or a book is not exhausted by its facticity.

To regain a wider horizon upon which to engage with a text like this requires, I suggest, employing a kind of bracketing of our everyday academic attitude, within which its contents are viewed as factual accomplishments, to be assessed solely on the basis of the eloquence, novelty, and disciplinary value of their arguments as new contributions to the field—as important as all of these are within the academy.

But if we bracket the facticity of these attributes—without neglecting their value—we can make ourselves available to a wider horizon upon which each of these essays may be read as a window onto the world and a way of asking questions about the world. Because, ultimately, this is what philosophy does and is what this volume’s contributors sought to do.

It might seem presumptuous for a psychologist to propose a frame within which to view these philosophical essays. I suggest that by applying the bracketing which I have suggested, the reader can look through these essays back at the world. Proposing this shift in attitude to the reader, in relation to this volume’s chapters—which is arguably not merely descriptive, but also the adoption of a kind of hermeneutic
attitude—is, in a way, a kind of intervention, psychologically speaking. Shifting from a natural attitude to another kind of wakefulness does require a break, even a rupture, from the reflexive flow of everyday life—but this is the kind of rupture that phenomenology requires all the time. And it is perhaps phenomenological psychology’s task—hand-in-hand with phenomenological philosophy—to suggest alternate ways in which experiences as mundane as picking up a book could be lived differently.

So, as we enter into this text, I propose that we quite consciously set aside the natural attitude of scholarly reading and ask ourselves, how do each of these authors bring us back to reflection on the lived-world? What are the implications of their investigations for the lived-world of everyday experience? Asking these questions, of both our own and of others’ work, is a way of bringing together Husserl’s call for the progressive development of a phenomenologically-informed community and the development of a new way of living life as a whole.

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References

This volume is the result of a conference on the theme of values and intersubjectivity held in Rome in the summer of 2012. In a friendly and lively atmosphere, experts and students explored issues pertaining to value and intersubjectivity within the context of Husserlian phenomenology. The aim of this book is to shed light on value and practical experience, by moving beyond the common dichotomy between positivistic and deontological perspectives. In this sense, this volume offers a third phenomenological way of approaching this issue. Although the general background of this book is Husserl’s phenomenology, the contributors also draw on other philosophical resources, such as Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Heidegger’s hermeneutics, and Scheler’s phenomenological realism.

In their contributions to this volume authors address questions such as: What are the existential and ethical motivations for phenomenological reflection? How do we constitute a shared life-world? How do we experience value? How can we describe values as intentional objects? What is the essential structure of the experience of evaluation, or of valuing an object of perception? What is the experience of altruism?

In chapter one, “The Context of Phenomenological Inquiry in Husserl and Heidegger,” James McGuirk reflects on the attitude of doing phenomenology by thematizing lived experience as an otherness to which the phenomenologist can relate. The author claims that in making the “things themselves” the starting point for phenomenological inquiry, Husserl clearly intends to anchor his philosophical reflections in the givenness of the meanings in ordinary lived experience. Because of this, phenomenology can be said to begin not with what is most difficult, but with what is easiest, in the sense that it is to ordinary experience that we must turn in order to uncover the fundamental structures of experience in general. In making the natural attitude its theme, phenomenological inquiry is explicitly about transforming the “taken for granted” givenness of self and world into a problem.

In the first part of the chapter, the author outlines a related problem: he focuses on the shift of perspective involved in moving from the natural to the phenomenological attitude. According to McGuirk, by Husserl’s own admission this shift involves a very unusual kind of reflection, which does
not seem to be motivated by the ordinary experiences it seeks to thematize. Phenomenological investigation, then, seems to involve close attention to everyday life, even though its mode of investigation is quite foreign to the ordinary attitude of living which it thematizes. Nowhere is this clearer than in Husserl’s description of the motivation for the performance of the phenomenological epoché in *Ideas I*, where the motivation appears to be a curiosity that is not quite anchored in the concerns of daily life. Thus, phenomenology investigates the concerns of the everyday, while the investigation is not primarily motivated by these concerns.

In the final part of the chapter, the author returns to texts of Husserl which suggest that the curiosity that motivates the thematization of the natural attitude is not, in fact, motivationally neutral, but firmly anchored in a personalism that acts as context for the life of rational discovery. Husserl provides a sketch for a phenomenological account of the motivation to phenomenology that, while not as existential as that of Heidegger, suggests a deep awareness of the need to situate phenomenological inquiry in a lived context.

In chapter two, “Husserl on Freedom and Reflection,” Hanne Jacobs further explores the question of the motivation for phenomenological reflection and reduction by inquiring into the kind of freedom that is involved in the performance of this phenomenological reflection. The author distinguishes the freedom to reflect from two other forms of freedom described by Husserl—namely, bodily freedom and the freedom of the person. The first kind of freedom occurs on the level of bodily movement and is situated at the level of passive experience. The second kind of freedom arises in rational agency in the form of active position-takings (*Stellungnahme*) that are situated on the active level of experience. In her discussion of these different experiences of freedom, the author pays special attention to what makes these different forms of freedom possible.

In chapter three, “Husserl’s Intersubjective Reduction,” Nathan Phillips focuses on Husserl’s use of the concept *Umwertung* or revaluation to describe the phenomenological reduction. How is phenomenological reduction a revaluation? What are the implications of this revaluation for the parallel between phenomenological psychology and transcendental subjectivity? To what extent does Husserl’s description of phenomenological reduction as an *Umwertung* shed new light on the problem of ethics and intersubjectivity? Specifically, how does the phenomenological reduction contribute to Husserl’s analysis of empathy and the immanent analogical apperception of the other? And what are the implications of the reduction as revaluation for Husserl’s theory of value? This chapter focuses on
Husserl’s writings on intersubjectivity in the period 1905-1920, in order to situate Husserl’s analysis of intersubjectivity in the context of the development of the theory of phenomenological reduction. Thus, the chapter focuses on the implications of the reduction for Husserl’s understanding of intersubjectivity in the years between the first decisive emergence of the phenomenological reduction in 1906-07, including the analysis of the theory of value from 1908-1914, culminating in the description of reduction as Umwertung in Ideas I of 1913.

In chapter four, “Return to the Life-World,” Abraham Olivier opens up an analysis of the relationship between individual and life-world, through a comparison of Husserl’s and Hountjondji’s thought. In fact, to these philosophers, the call for a return to the life-world of subjectivity is central, in which subjectivity qua “like-ness” of experience is inextricably bound to intentionality qua “about-ness” of experience. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, the author argues that the specific life-world to which subjects are intentionally aligned is the precondition of their subjectivity, both in the sense of subjective experience and selfhood. Secondly, the author shows that this argument has decisive ethical implications. This amounts to an advocacy for a return to subjectively lived ethical experience, a return which, paradoxically, will strengthen rather than weaken objectivity.

In chapter five, “The Life-World as an Ethical Appeal to Mankind,” Peter Reynaert seeks to explain how Husserl had already developed his notion of the life-world early on in his phenomenology and understood it from the very beginning as an ethical concept which defined the human condition. The presence of this problematic gives Husserl’s work an ethically inspired coherence. It is possible to trace the origin of this central concept in his later philosophy back to the period in which he worked on his Ideas. In the Ideas, he coined the term Umwelt (surrounding world), which later became the Lebenswelt (life-world) and described its defining characteristics by contrasting these with the world of the physical sciences. In the second book of Ideas, Husserl criticized naturalism for obscuring the correct phenomenological analysis of the world of pre-scientific experience and for its foundational role for the naturalistic attitude, a thesis repeated in the Crisis. This aspect of his criticism of naturalism is well known. But, more importantly, Husserl’s anti-naturalism also has an ethical inspiration. He claims that this life-world is also the object of a world-view (Weltanschauung), which is basically an ethical conviction. A world-view concerns what matters for mankind: It formulates the values and the ethical aims people of a certain age want to live for. Husserl goes on to argue that the true ethical goal of mankind, his real vocation, is to
develop a non-naturalistic philosophy as rigorous science, which fulfills the normative ideal of the worldview, which a particular worldview cannot realize, due to its historical context. He also claims that his phenomenology is an important contribution to this fulfillment of real humanity.

In chapter six, “Considerations on the Material Apriori,” José Ruiz Fernández focuses on a specific moment of intersubjective experience by questioning the possibility of founding a material apriori truth. The goal of this chapter is to consider the phenomenological evidence of what is usually referred to as “material a priori truth” in a new light. Through a consideration of the evidence we have for the proposition that something colored necessarily has a surface, the chapter attempts to show the difference in kind between this and the evidence we have of other propositions also involving necessity, and it concludes that two different types of evidence of propositions involving necessity have to be recognized. The author’s main focus is upon the fact that such evidence revolves around the linguistic meaning employed being rooted or consolidated in a factual world. The chapter proposes an understanding of synthetic a priori truth that reconciles some intuitions of classical Husserlian phenomenology with some intuitions of linguistic meaning that can be found in the later Wittgenstein.

In chapter seven, “The Aporia of Husserl’s Projected Axiology and the Possibility of Another Beginning,” Panos Theodorou reflects on the issue of values and emotions. Husserl, generally speaking, wanted to accomplish an uncovering of the emotive life in terms of intentional lived-experiences in which values were given as their correlative objectivities. Equally well known, however, is the common interpretation that Husserl failed to develop that analysis in a satisfactory way. In this chapter, Panos Theodorou seeks, firstly, to offer a summary presentation of the reasons why this project failed. Husserl neither managed to arrive at a clear view on what values qua phenomena are, nor did he escape from an “immanentistic” perspective regarding the essence of intentional experiences; secondly, the author seeks to elaborate on a way out of these shortcomings of Husserlian phenomenology. On the one hand, the chapter makes an effort to arrive at a phenomenologically lucid account of values as intentional objectivities. On the other hand, it is suggested that this new Leitfaden can lead us to a different perspective regarding the possibility of viewing the structural constitution of the intentionality of emotive acts.

In chapter eight, “Husserl and the Truth of Hedonism,” Claudio Majolino and Emiliano Trizio discuss the issue of hedonism as presented by Husserl in the lectures he delivered at the University of Freiburg in 1920 and in 1924 on ethics and theory of values. The doctrine of hedonism
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plays a central role within these lectures. Far from being considered simply as a particular ethical approach among others, hedonism is instead pictured as “the antagonist of a true ethics” and virtually identified with the empiricist and skeptical attitude towards ethics and practical reason as such. Accordingly, hedonism as seen by Husserl not as an historically determined ethical theory but a philosophical mistake, whose driving motives are intrinsic to the very essence of practical reason itself, just as epistemic skepticism appears as an unavoidable stumbling block in all philosophical understanding of logic and theory of knowledge.

In the final chapter, “Brentano’s and Husserl’s Axiology,” Susi Ferrarello seeks to outline what axiology is for Husserl and his master Brentano. In this chapter, the author compares Husserl’s views on axiology with those of his master, with the aim of showing the implications of these conceptions of axiology for values and the objectivity of the values. The goal of the chapter is to arrive at an overall definition of value itself and to distinguish it from the object that holds a value. By analyzing the ethical works of Brentano and Husserl, the author describes the difference between the value and the object that bears a value, between its essence and the state of affairs.

I want to offer thanks to the people who made the conference and this volume possible. I would like to thank the associations Slancio, Koiné, and Umbriaroma. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Federico Mari, Xavier Letizia, Emanuela De Bellis, Andrea Di Somma, and Lorenzo Mari, who patiently helped me with the organization of the event; Enrico Piciarelli, who worked on the graphic; Patrick Eldridge, Marc Applebaum, and Simon Summers, for their English revision; and Hanne Jacobs, Trevor Perri, and the staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who assisted me in the creation of this volume.

Susi Ferrarello
In several of his published and unpublished writings, Edmund Husserl refers to the phenomenological stance as involving a very unusual kind of reflection. The phenomenological attitude involves reflection upon lived experience, but in a way that is quite other than ordinary, or what might be called natural attitude reflection. Put in simple and uncontroversial terms, natural attitude reflection reflects upon lived experience in a way that is prejudicial, because it takes for granted the unproblematic existence of the world and others as the dynamic context for meaningful experience, as well as the role consciousness plays in the constitution of these meanings. The role played by consciousness in the constitution of meaning is not a question in the natural attitude and still less is the meaning of consciousness itself a question. Phenomenology, by contrast, involves turning the reflective gaze towards precisely this co-belonging of the meant and how it is meant. It is, as such, the mission of phenomenology to make the givens of experience and their mode of givenness into problems for reflection and analysis. In this way, phenomenology is concerned with “looking at what is ordinarily lived through” (er-lebt).

However, because this form of reflection is so unusual, accounting for its possibility presents a challenge. That is, if phenomenological reflection involves making a critical problem of what must be taken for granted in ordinary “living along with things,” how can the motivation for such a turn be accounted for? For example, my failure to lift a heavy box might well motivate me to reflect upon the weight of the box, its handles, or my stance in relation to it, but it will not generally lead me to reflect upon my perceptual constitution of physical objects, or the body’s kinesthetic role in relation to this. The first form of reflection is situated in terms of practical living and is unproblematic, while the second addresses itself to the very structure and the conditions of possibility for this situatedness and
therefore cannot be motivated from within such situatedness. This is to say that, in at least the majority of cases, the problems we encounter neither call for the kind of reflection which phenomenology entails, and nor do they stand to gain from such reflection. It is for precisely this reason that the motivation to reflect phenomenologically is a problem.

This problem was not, of course, unknown to Husserl. In one of his best-known treatments of the problem, for example, Husserl explains the phenomenological stance through an appeal to the freedom of the will. In section 32 of Ideas I, he describes the “putting out of play of the natural world” as something I can accomplish in “complete freedom” (Husserl 1982, 61). In other words, the kind of global or radical reflection that phenomenology entails, is explained as a possibility for the thinking subject. Now, while this is fine as far as it goes, it can be considered something of a negative explanation of the epoché and the possibility of the reduction, in that it says nothing more than that there is no prima facie reason that would make this unusual type of reflection impossible. But this is by no means an account of what would motivate engaging in such reflection. Rather, it asserts that we engage in phenomenological reflection because we can, but tells us very little about why we would want to, or about the kinds of experiences that could lead us toward such reflection.

§1

In relation to this question of the motivation to radical reflection, Husserl is often compared unfavorably with Heidegger, whose early work anchors transcendental phenomenology more explicitly in factual life. Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity deliberately and thoroughly takes up the issue of the motivation for the turn to the radical kind of reflection that phenomenology is.¹

I am specifically thinking here of Heidegger’s analyses of anxiety and the call of conscience in Division II of Being and Time. It is common amongst commentators to identify these specific analyses as the Heideggerian re-working of the phenomenological epoché and reduction;² inasmuch as while anxiety causes the world to slip into insignificance, it also discloses Dasein as Being-in-the-world as such, which is to say that it individualizes Dasein by uncovering the existing self as the point of orientation of all significance. What slips into insignificance is not the world as such, but the world of everyday comportment, the hold this world has upon us and the form of self-understanding, which arises on its terms. Dasein’s average and everyday self-understanding in terms of the world is dislodged and relativized, but only so that it can be re-appropriated in
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In much the same way that for Husserl, the *epochē* and reduction were meant to dislodge the claims to ultimacy of the natural attitude, so anxiety, for Heidegger, shatters the hold of Dasein’s ordinary, worldly self-understanding in terms of onticity. And, as was the case with Husserl, this dislodging discloses the level of transcendental world-constitution, which can, for the first time, be attended to explicitly. Importantly for Heidegger, this fundamental disclosure constitutes a challenge that is existential and not just epistemological. Thus, the phenomenon of conscience is understood by Heidegger as a calling in which Dasein challenges itself to live in terms of the primordially ontological orientation of its being. In other words, Dasein calls upon itself to harness its ontic concerns, under the umbrella of an authentically ontological self-understanding as finite being-in-the-world. In short, conscience is a call that calls Dasein to live in the truth.

While we cannot explore this matter in greater detail here, it is enough to say that through his analyses of anxiety and the call of conscience, Heidegger is able to make sense of the reduction—which discloses the ultimate transcendental constitution of experience—in terms of both its motivation and its urgency because he links it to the concern for one’s own existence. As Steven Crowell has suggested, Heidegger thereby establishes the relationship between reason and existence by articulating “our capacity for entering into the space of reasons” (Crowell 2007, 49) in terms of an existential motivation to engage the world rationally. Even more importantly, this connection is phenomenologically explicated, through a close attention to the lived experiences that justify radical reflection. Through these analyses, Heidegger has anchored the motivation for the reduction and the disclosure of the level of transcendental world-constitution in the lived experiences of the individual, whose concern for the meaning of her being are precisely what draw her to the kind of fundamental reflection that is involved in phenomenology. And Heidegger does not hereby dismiss Husserl’s epistemological concerns, but instead situates them in the more encompassing context of existence. At the level of explanation, there is, to be sure, a certain “after the factness” about this, in the sense that phenomenological analyses, which are only available after the discovery of the phenomenological perspective, are used to explain the phenomenological turn itself. However, the crucial point is that the movement towards and the motivation to phenomenological reflection makes itself felt at the level of existence, as a tension in lived experience. That is, the call of conscience which calls us to radical reflection requires a phenomenological sensitivity to be properly and carefully articulated, but
it does not need phenomenology in order to be experienced. Leaving aside any question about whether Heidegger is right to identify the call to radical reflection in precisely the experience of anxiety, we can at least say that he has succeeded in giving an account of the motivation to phenomenology in the landscape of individual life. This seems to be a marked advance over Husserl’s account.

§2

Are we being fair to Husserl by identifying his account of the motivation to think phenomenologically—that is, radically—entirely with §32 of the first book of the Ideas? On the one hand, a case can be made for evaluating Husserl’s thought on the basis of the major works published during his lifetime, but at the same time, it is clear that a concern with the question of situating phenomenological reflection was one that preoccupied Husserl both before and long after §32 of Ideas I. In fact, throughout his career, Husserl often sought to contextualize the work of phenomenology, in the sense of giving reasons for phenomenological inquiry as well as the meaning of these reasons for a human life. Throughout his life, he was concerned with the pursuit of truth and truthfulness as the highest possibility of human life, and he therefore tends to anchor phenomenological research in concerns that are fundamentally ethical and existential.

In texts such as the Cartesian Meditations (Husserl 1988, 6), the Crisis, and the Nachwort zu meiner Ideen, Husserl frames his phenomenology in terms of a radical conscientiousness, understood in terms of “the ultimate self-responsibility of the philosopher” (Husserl 1989b, 406). He thinks of this as being in accordance with the demand of the Platonic ethos, where philosophy is “the fulfillment and correlate of an ethical demand of radical intellectual conscientiousness” (Husserl 1981, 69). Philosophy is the pursuit of “absolutely justified knowledge” (Husserl 1981, 69), not beholden to anything outside of itself. In some respects, this is another way of restating the idea of the pursuit of philosophy as a presuppositionless science, in the sense that the absolute demand for justification by definition cannot entail a wider context of significance. The major difference between Husserl’s and other statements of the principle is that Husserl’s understanding of the radical nature of this imperative dissolves the sovereignty of the epistemological imperative and merges it with a concern that is existential and ethical. This is clear from the fact that the language that anchors the demand for presuppositionlessness (self-responsibility, etc.) has an ethical rather than an epistemological character.
The dissolution of the sovereignty of the epistemological imperative is not, of course, to be thought as the dissolution of the imperative itself, which remains of crucial importance for Husserl. At the same time, it is clear that he intended these ethical and epistemological imperatives to be thought together. The interweaving of the ethical life with the life of radical intellectual conscientiousness is most fully discussed in the introductory sections of his last major work, the *Crisis*, a text which seems to be largely motivated by the attempt to re-inscribe a sense of the importance of the life of science into our understanding of the nature and meaning of human existence (Husserl 1970, 12)—an importance that Husserl felt had been unduly compromised in the existentialist phenomenologies of Heidegger, Scheler, and Jaspers (Husserl 1997, 485-500). For Husserl, then, the quest for absolute justification is the ultimate problem of existence, or the horizon of the meaning of human existence (Husserl 1970, 13; Husserl 1989b, 406), and in this way he manages something which the discussion in *Ideas I* had failed to achieve. His elaboration of the quest for the absolute justification of knowledge in terms of self-responsibility constitutes a reason for the unusual reflection that phenomenology involves, in the sense that the demand for an articulation of the final horizon of existence is what motivates phenomenological research as the science of sciences. Furthermore, this motivation is grounded not in scientific inquiry itself but, rather, itself grounds scientific inquiry in human self-relation. In other words, the demand for radical reflection does not simply emerge out of the life of ontic scientific discovery, but provides the context for such a life.

This is without doubt a more satisfying account of the context for the phenomenological turn than was provided in *Ideas I*, but it comes at a cost. The main problem with this account is that while Husserl’s appeals to self-responsibility and truthfulness provide a context for his phenomenology, they do not themselves seem to belong to the domain of phenomenological inquiry. They appear to be more exhortative than phenomenological, in the sense that they provide a motivation for doing phenomenology, but fail to phenomenologically articulate the demand that is this motivation. In other words, Husserl suggests an ethical or existential context for phenomenological reflection, but fails to give any account of how this demand manifests itself, such as Heidegger provides through his analyses of anxiety and conscience.
§3

In the remainder of this discussion, I want to look at a text of Husserl’s in which he does in fact go some way towards doing what we have accused him of not doing; namely, he situates the imperative to radical reflection in specific lived experiences. I want to make a modest proposal, to the effect that while Husserl did not make this kind of phenomenology of the motivation for phenomenology a major research theme, there are hints in certain texts which provide at least the elements of such an account.

One of these is the third Kaizo essay of 1924, entitled Erneuerung als individualethisches Problem (Husserl 1989a, 20-42). Now, the problem of renewal (Erneuerung) is not, of course, unique to this text. It was one of the central themes shaping the trajectory of the late work Crisis, where the crisis in question, as we have seen, has nothing to do with crises in any of the specific sciences, but is rather a crisis of the meaning of science as a whole for life, or a crisis in our apprehension of the scientific enterprise as the crucial defining moment of human existence. In the Crisis, it is the task of philosophers, as “functionaries of mankind” to continually reanimate or reestablish (Nachstiftung) this mission, by anchoring the problem of life in science and science in life.

However, what the Kaizo essay does—and herein lies its novelty—is to systematically articulate the way this imperative manifests itself in the life of the individual. The establishment of science in life remains, no doubt, a problem for mankind in general (“nicht blosse Individualethik, sondern Sozialethik” [Husserl 1989a, 21]), and yet it is only individuals who actually experience the urgency of this call to renewal such that some account of the way in which this comes to expression must be possible.

Husserl tells us that this call to renewal is initially and most urgently encountered as the call to bring one’s life as a whole into view. The language of “call,” which Husserl employs throughout the text, is significant not only because it personalizes the mission of grounding the sciences, but also because it is suggestive of a passivity or affection in the life of the subject as the basis for this personalization. Now, whilst it is true that this call is initially discussed in terms of vocational life (Berufsleben)—specifically, the vocation to philosophy—this particularity quickly gives way in the text to an understanding of the call as an existential imperative which characterizes human life in general. It makes itself felt in all forms of life, such that it cannot with justice be considered the province only of philosophers. Husserl notes, for example, that “It is
peculiar to the human being that she can, at any time, bring her life as a whole into view as a constituted unity” (Husserl 1989a, 31-32).

This “bringing one’s life as a whole” into view is understood as an attempt to justify one’s life (Husserl 1989a, 30) and to frame it in terms of reasons (Vernunft) (Husserl 1989a, 32). This Kantian motif is very much consistent with the suggestions in the other texts mentioned, as regards self-relation as the horizon for radical phenomenological reflection. And the notion of gathering one’s life as a whole, as something for which one must answer, also seems to anticipate a theme that will become so central for Heidegger, in which the disclosure of Dasein’s being-in-the-world as such is accompanied by a guilt that is understood ontologically as rooted in Dasein’s failure to answer for itself in terms of what it is (Heidegger 1979, 282f).

However, there remains a crucial ambiguity here, in the sense that Husserl’s use of the notion of a “call” may seem somewhat rhetorical. This means that Husserl continues to present this gestalting of life as a whole as an act of freedom, as something we elect to do as opposed to an affectivity such as the mood of anxiety, where what motivates the gestalting is experienced as something almost uncomfortable and intrusive. For Heidegger, the call of conscience accuses us as “guilty” and calls us to account for ourselves, thereby inhibiting the self-comportment of the average or everyday (Heidegger 1979, 277, 279). The fact that in Husserl’s account, the subject as person rather than as constituting ego is brought into view, is perhaps an advance on the motivation to the performance of the epoché in Ideas I, but not by much, for as long as this continues to be understood in terms of the possibility of free and rational inquiry, we are returned to a presentation of radical reflection that is unmotivated and poorly accounted for.

However, going further in the essay, we notice a crucial development that challenges this understanding, by decentering the freedom of the subjective turn towards the domain of radical reflection; here, the substantive notion of the call re-emerges. At several points in the text, Husserl tells us that what motivates the gestalting of one’s life as a whole is a sense of the perpetual inadequacy of our response to the challenge to truthfulness (Husserl 1989a, 38) that permeates the life of ontic discovery. The life of ontic discovery contains within it clues that motivate a more radical kind of mindfulness because, for Husserl, the demand for justification that defines it involves a striving for completeness that remains forever out of our reach (Husserl 1989a, 34). What is striven for, he says, is an ideal of divine perfection that motivates the life of reason but which can never be fully discharged within that life. Max Scheler once
wrote that striving for knowledge must disappear with the acquisition of complete knowledge (Scheler 1992, 153), and while this may be true, Husserl’s claim here is that such complete knowledge is essentially unattainable, which means that we can never quit striving. As such, the striving is infinite and cannot be dispelled.

This infinite striving, Husserl suggests, is what most essentially characterizes human life and is born out of a nagging sense that one’s response to the call to self-justification is perpetually inadequate. As a result, Husserl increasingly comes to frame the question of renewal in terms of a responsive will to renewal (Erneuerungswillen), thereby situating the life of reason in the context of an individual life in which this ethical command is experienced (Husserl 1989a, 42).

The importance of this cannot be overstated. For one thing, Husserl now speaks about the radicalness of phenomenological reflection not as something to which we simply turn because we can, or because we should, but as something motivated by an affection in the life of the subject, namely a tension that is given as the experience of a call to complete self-justification that will not let us rest, and to which we can never adequately respond. At the same time, it is a call that we cannot ignore. As such, an irremediable failure is inscribed in the life of the rational subject, in the sense that its motivation to truthfulness is, ultimately, explicable in terms of a striving for a completeness that it can never attain. Again, this may remind us of Heidegger—and perhaps even more so of Lévinas—in the sense of suggesting a grounding of rational life that is not finally recuperable through that life, but whose irrecoverability instead motivates radical reflection or radical self-relation.

Phenomenological analysis can itself be grasped as sensitive to this infinite striving, in that even simple perceptual objects are understood to be given in and through horizons of givenness that are inexhaustible and which preclude any possibility of closure. The call which we cannot measure may, in this sense, be understood as the call of the world for which we are, as Thomas Prufer (1993) put it, “datives of manifestation,” a manifestation that draws us to it as knowers while remaining ultimately irreducible to our knowing.

This also means that the notion of freedom, which Husserl never abandons, must become transformed and attenuated in relation to radical reflection. In the Ideas, and even in the early parts of the Kaizo essay, it appeared as though freedom was the ultimate context or horizon for phenomenological reflection, in the sense that such reflection simply lay within the sphere of the possibilities of the thinking subject. Now, the freedom of the subject is understood as the appellant of the call to self-
justification, as well as that which enables a response. The will to renewal has become central precisely because it is only the will, and not reason itself, that can measure the ethical command that grounds the life of the subject (Husserl 1989a, 42). Radical reflection is no longer something I execute because I can, but is a response to an affective tension in my subjectivity, experienced as a striving to measure the call to absolute truthfulness and therefore self-justification. For Husserl, this response is enacted as the life of reason or rational discovery, but what is important is that its intimate connection with the ineliminable call to self-justification means that the former can no longer be accounted for in terms of a self-activating willing. It is now framed in terms of passivity or affection in the life of the subject, and this in turn is satisfying because it offers both a suggestion about the motivation to phenomenological reflection, as well as the outline of a phenomenology of this motivation in terms of how it is encountered in lived experience.

§4

Husserl situates radical reflection in the context of the affective life of the subject and thereby contributes to a phenomenological account of the belonging together of reason and life which was crucial to his thought from its very beginnings. The ethical subject seeks to justify itself to itself by framing its life as a whole in terms of an injunction to truthfulness, even though this injunction can never be satisfactorily discharged. This introduces an irrecoverable split in the subject, which is experienced as a call that will not release us but which will enable the fullest form of self-realization possible for a human being. Now, the call does not, of course, compel radical reflection, but this is also true for Heidegger, whose account of conscience only motivates radical reflection when we “hear it authentically” (Heidegger 1979, 294). In other words, anxiety and the call of conscience do not necessarily lead us into radical reflection, but they can enable us to make sense of it after the fact. The same is true of Husserl’s account, but we can at least say that his treatment of the problem in this text suggests a way of understanding the motivation of radical reflection that resonates more genuinely with lived experience.
References


§1 Introduction: The Freedom to Reflect

At a certain point in the 1920s, Husserl writes, “one cannot stumble into philosophy” (Husserl 1959, 19). Indeed, according to Husserl, doing philosophy requires a radical shift from the so-called natural attitude to a genuinely philosophical attitude, and this shift does not occur unsolicited. At the same time, however, everyone is free to make this shift. More precisely, as Husserl insists in *Ideas I* when he defines and describes this shift in phenomenological terms, the performance of the epoché is something in which we are perfectly free (Husserl 1982, 57-60). For Husserl, the philosophical attitude is a phenomenological-transcendental one and can only be brought about by the method of epoché in which the philosopher brackets the world or, correlatively stated, inhibits the general-thesis of the world. In and through this bracketing, what normally remains unthematized while experiencing the world becomes apparent—namely, this experience itself, purified from mundane presuppositions (e.g., conscious experience being psycho-physically conditioned by a brain). Thus, the freedom to bracket amounts to the freedom to reflect phenomenologically. It is this kind of freely enacted phenomenological reflection that, in Husserl’s view, constitutes the genuine beginning of philosophy. One might wonder, however, how are we to think of this freedom to reflect phenomenologically?

In order to get to grips with the kind of freedom involved in the performance of phenomenological reflection, I propose that we take a closer look at the way in which Husserl describes freedom more generally. Unlike some other philosophers, Husserl does not define or state what he understands freedom or free will to be, nor does he ascribe a central role to freedom in his philosophical work or provide systematic phenomenological descriptions of the kind of conscious lived experience
to which this philosophical notion could refer. Nevertheless, as shall be
discussed below, dispersed throughout Husserl’s work are descriptions of
the experience of freedom and the different ways in which we experience
ourselves as free. In what follows, I differentiate between three kinds of
freedom described by Husserl: bodily freedom, personal freedom, and the
freedom to reflect. This classification is by no means exhaustive, nor is it
intended to provide the final word on what a Husserlian phenomenology
has to say about freedom. Rather, my aim is to tease out the features of our
different experiences of freedom and to provide an account of the freedom
that lies at the basis of a phenomenological philosophy.

§2 Phenomenological Descriptions of Freedom

In Husserl’s view, the transcendental attitude is only reached in the
strenuous and methodologically concise effort of epoché, or through the
free actualization of taking a peculiar kind of distance to everything that
we believe in and stand for, whether knowingly or not. This freedom to
bracket all world-directed belief, both implicit and explicit, habitual and
newly acquired, is not one that we are naturally acquainted with or even
aware of. That is, as Husserl states in the epilogue of Ideas I, there are no
motives within our natural lives to make the shift to the transcendental
attitude (Husserl 1989, 420). Consequently, the freedom to perform the
epoché is a freedom to which one must be introduced, hence the numerous
introductions into transcendental phenomenology written by Husserl
during his lifetime. In these works, Husserl repeatedly sets out to convince
his readers of the very possibility of this free act of epoché, which he urges
us to perform in order to arrive at the new attitude that he thinks is
essential to the enterprise of philosophy as phenomenology. Insofar as the
possibility of performing the epoché is not prefigured by the life in which
it arises, and insofar as the beliefs and commitments that characterize our
conscious lives go against such a bracketing, we can understand why
Husserl writes that there are no easy or “royal ways” (Königswege) into
philosophy (Husserl 2012, 3). The freedom to reflect phenomenologically
is a hard-fought freedom, and its actualization is under threat of being
compromised, as the specificity of the reflection is easily misunderstood—
when it is taken to be some kind of psychological reflection, for example
(Husserl 1982, 148). Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Husserl
characterizes the enactment of the freedom to bracket and reflect primarily
in negative terms. For example, he describes the freedom of the epoché as
the freedom to thrust aside the habitual way of living in the natural
attitude, as “against the universal habitualness or familiarity” (Husserl