

§1. *From Berlin to Halle through Vienna: Mathematician and Philosopher*

Edmund Husserl was born in 1859 in Prossnitz (Prostejov), a small city in the actual Czech Republic, at that time part of the Austrian Empire. One of four siblings, Husserl grew up in a well-established liberal Jewish family. Records do not report him as a brilliant school child, although he proved to be excellent at mathematics. From 1876 to 1883 he studied mainly physics and mathematics, first in Leipzig, where he also attended philosophy lectures by Wilhelm Wundt, one of the founding fathers of experimental psychology, then in Berlin, and finally in Vienna, where he obtained his doctorate with a thesis on the calculus of variation.

Husserl returned to Berlin in 1883 in order to work as an assistant of Carl Weierstrass, the founder of modern analysis. Husserl's interests, however, moved progressively away from mathematics towards philosophy. Following an advice of his old friend, Thomas Masaryk, who was later to become Czechoslovakia's first President, Husserl spent the two subsequent years in Vienna in order to study with Franz Brentano. Brentano, then one of Vienna's most influential intellectual personalities, had a great impact on Husserl, who will later recall Brentano's lectures as having given him «the courage to choose philosophy as a profession» (cf. Husserl 1919). Husserl had many personal discussions with Brentano during those years and learned about Brentano's notion of intentionality, about his project of a reform of logic, about his new theory of judgement, and about the idea of descriptive psychology.

In Vienna Husserl started to work intensively on the philosophy of mathematics. Following Brentano's advice he soon moved to Halle, in order to obtain his habilitation. In Halle he attended lectures by Carl Stumpf, a former Brentano-student who was soon to become one of

Husserl's closest friends. Husserl's habilitation thesis, *On the Concept of Number*, was accepted in 1887 by a commission composed, among others, by the great mathematician Georg Cantor.

During the same year Husserl married Malvine Steinschneider, who had previously converted, like Husserl himself, from Judaism to Protestantism.

§2. *In Halle as a Privatdozent: the Logical Investigations*

Husserl spent fourteen difficult years in Halle as a *Privatdozent*. He felt depressed both, because most contemporary philosophy looked shallow to him and because of the lack of public recognition for his own work. Apart from some scattered grants, Husserl had no stable income for him and his family to live on during all those years. The first volume of his *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, a book based on the 1887 thesis, had been published in 1891. It contains a psychological analysis of the concept of number, with the intention to determine the basis on which it could be abstracted. The book provides original insights into concepts such as *multiplicity*, *unity* and *something*. It argues in favour of the distinction between small numbers, which are attributed to intuitively given multiplicities, and bigger numbers, which are given merely symbolically.

The general reception of Husserl's first book was lukewarm and in 1894 Gottlob Frege, the father of modern logic, wrote a harshly critical review (cf. Frege 1894). Even before Frege's criticism, however, Husserl felt dissatisfied with the book, so that the planned and partly written second volume, which was to deal with negative, imaginary and irrational numbers, as well as with the general logic of symbolic systems («semiotics»), remained for ever unfinished.

Difficult as they were, the Halle years constitute the gestation period of Husserl's path-breaking *Logical Investigations* which appeared in two volumes in 1900 (the *Prolegomena*) and 1901 (the *Logical Investigations I-VI*).

The *Prolegomena* established Husserl as a central figure in the fight against what was then called 'psychologism', a disparaging term widely used to characterise a whole set of positions accused of reducing normative disciplines such as logic and epistemology to a branch of empirical psychology (cf. Kusch 1995). By embracing antipsychologism, Husserl was consciously abandoning, as he put it, «the viewpoint [he] had earlier adopted as a disciple of Brentano» (cf. Husserl 1994, V: 43). Husserl wrote those words in correspondence to Paul Natorp, a neokantian philosopher of the School of Marburg, who had already insisted, in a series of publications published since 1888, on the autonomy of logic and knowledge from empirical psychology (cf. Natorp 1888, Natorp 1891, Natorp 1893 and Natorp 1897Natorp). One does not turn neokantian merely by corresponding with such a philosopher, though, and even during the last part of his Halle years, Husserl followed with great attention the publications of the different members of Brentano's school, especially Kasimir Twardowski, who had introduced the difference between content and object of an experience (cf. Twardowski) and Alexius Meinong, the influential Austrian ontologist. Most issues dealt with in the six *Logical Investigations* were widely discussed among Brentano's followers. Among those topics one might mention, for instance, the nature of intentionality, the question of the intentional object of a judgement, the relation between meaning and grammar, between perception and judgement, and the ontology of part and whole.

In 1901, shortly after the publication of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl was finally offered a position as an associate professor at the University of Göttingen. His nomination to full professor, embarrassingly rejected in 1905 because of the alleged «lack of scientific relevance» of Husserl's work (cf. Husserl : 294), followed at last in 1906.

### §3. Professor in Göttingen: transcendental Phenomenology

With Felix Klein, Hermann Minkowski, David Hilbert, Ernst Zermelo and later Hermann Weyl, Göttingen was one of the leading centres for mathematical studies in the world. Although Husserl soon got in contact with the local mathematicians, his efforts at the beginning of the Göttingen years were focused on teaching with the hope of motivating students and scholars to share his philosophical interests and methods. It was only after 1905, however, that an increasing number of original and motivated students came to Göttingen in order to study with Husserl. There was first a group coming from Munich, students of the psychologist Theodor Lipps whom Husserl had criticised in his *Prolegomena*. The most outstanding among them were Johannes Daubert and Adolf Reinach. Later many others, coming from very different places, would follow. Among them one might mention Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Roman Ingarden, Alexander Koyré and Edith Stein.

Husserl published only four minor articles between 1901 and 1911. He spent much time and energy trying to find a system that would help him to unify the research he had done so far. He read and revised earlier published and unpublished material, in order to determine the course of his further research. He experienced his failure to come to a clear and unified philosophical view as an existential deficiency, as if his life had «fallen into pieces» (Husserl : 296). In a crucial moment, during 1906, he came to the view that «in order to call himself a philosopher», he had to conceive a «critique of reason, a critique of pure and practical reason, of valuing reason as such» (*ibid.*: 297).

In spite of many doubts and moments of despair, the publicly silent years in Göttingen proved to be extremely fruitful. In lectures, seminars, talks and in an overwhelming amount of manuscripts, Husserl started to work on new issues such as remembering,

imagination, time-consciousness, empathy, motivation, intersubjectivity, embodiment, the will, probability and modality. He also returned to some of the topics he had treated in the *Logical Investigations*, among them the nature of normative disciplines, judgement and predication, the theory of perception and attention, and the relation between dependent and independent meanings.

Husserl's work on such a great variety of topics was now accompanied by explicit reflections on philosophical methodology. First results in this respect were reached when Husserl wrote down the content of five lectures he had given during the spring 1907 under the title *The Idea of Phenomenology* ('Die Idee der Phänomenologie', HUA II). Husserl had been intensively studying and teaching Kant in those years, and *The Idea of Phenomenology* explores the kantian conception of a transcendental inquiry into knowledge. It is in this context that Husserl introduced the notion of a *reduction*, as a methodological move leading to the suspension of all existential claims concerning the transcendent objects of knowledge.

The five lectures on *The Idea of Phenomenology* were immediately followed by the lectures *Thing and Space* ('Ding und Raum', HUA XVI), which were meant to apply the newly found transcendental method to perception theory. *Thing and Space* deals with issues such as the perception of aspects as opposed to the perception of objects, temporal and spatial perceptual fields, perceptual constancy, perception of moving objects, kinaesthesia, and the relation between the intentional and the phenomenal content of perception. Here, as in several other writings after the *Logical Investigations*, the precise relevance of the new methodology to the suggested treatment of the issues at stake is sometimes unclear.

The 1911 essay *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* (cf. 'Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft', HUA XXV: 3-62), published in the newly founded journal *Logos*, is more transparent in this respect. Husserl attacks the prejudices that hamper genuine philosophical inquiry and which originate, he submits, both from naturalism and from the relativistic consequences of historicism. He sets up philosophy as a

discipline that follows the ideal of scientific rigour in the search of true knowledge, shuns any form of relativism, while rejecting the naturalistic worldview involved in scientism.

The publication of the *Logos* essay appears to have had a liberating effect on Husserl. In 1912 he decides to establish, together with his former students and colleagues Moritz Geiger, Alexander Pfänder, Adolf Reinach and Max Scheler the *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* ('Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung'). In the preface to its first volume the editors write that what unites them is «not a school system, [...] but the shared conviction that it is only through a reconsideration of the original sources of our intuitions and of the essential insights [Wesenseinsichten] obtained from them, that the great philosophical traditions can be re-evaluated [...]» (HUA XXV: 63-64). What is here proclaimed is a methodological principle which is often expressed with the famous slogan «zu den Sachen selbst» («to the things themselves»), which corresponds to Husserl's idea that philosophy ought to be problem - rather than history - oriented and intuition- rather than speculation-driven.

The first volume of the *Yearbook* contained a long essay, in fact a whole book, by Husserl himself. It is the first book of the *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, now generally referred to as *Ideas I* (cf. 'Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie', HUA III,1). *Ideas I* is primarily a methodological treatise. Two further books were planned, where the methodology was to be applied. Some of the material on which those books would have been based was published posthumously in *Ideas II* and *III* (cf. HUA III,2 & HUA III,3).

For a long time, and under the influence of Husserl himself, *Ideas I* was considered as the central work of Husserl's philosophy, the work where he had finally found the unifying principles he had been seeking for and where husserlian phenomenology was established as a new philosophical doctrine. As a consequence, previous publications, particularly the *Logical Investigations*, were taken to represent a

passing, immature stage on the path towards what phenomenology was to become in its full bloom.

Indeed, it was in *Ideas I* that Husserl first published his theory of the phenomenological *epoché*, the suspension or bracketing of all existential assumptions involved in our natural attitude towards the world. How much of this idea was already there in the *Logical Investigations*, however, and how much of it needed to be added in order to reach the present position, has been open to dispute. Similar qualms have been raised with respect to the topic dealt with at the beginning of *Ideas I*, namely the conception of pure phenomenology as an a priori science dealing with essences as opposed to the contingencies empirical sciences are interested in. And even in the case of Husserl's new theory of intentionality, with the substitution of the distinction between act and content by the distinction between noesis and noema, one might at moments have the suspicion of a terminological uplifting with little if any substantial import (cf. Bell : 154). Controversial as these points might be, there is one aspect of Husserl's new philosophical doctrine that can hardly be overlooked. In *Ideas I* one is confronted for the first time with some crucial features of what Husserl will later call his 'phenomenological', and sometimes even 'transcendental' 'idealism' (cf. HUA III,1: 442; HUA XII: 178; HUA I: 114ff; cf. also Philipse ). Typical for this new doctrine are passages as the following:

«[...] the entire spatio-temporal world [...] is a being which the mind posits in its experiences, which can be intuited and determined merely as the identity of a multiplicity of motivated appearances, and which is nothing above that. [...] Reality, the reality of the thing taken singularly just as much as the reality of the whole world, is essentially [...] dependent. It is not something in itself absolute which is secondarily related to something else; rather, it is nothing in the absolute sense, it has no 'absolute essence' whatever; it has the essentiality of a merely

intentional, conscious thing, of a conscious presentation or appearance» (HUA III,1: 106).

Many of Husserl's students and friends were bewildered by what they considered to be an unmotivated, even incoherent idealistic turn. Roman Ingarden, most prominently, but also Adolf Reinach, Alexander Pfänder, and many others continued to consider the *Logical Investigations* as providing a sound ground for what they thought phenomenology ought to be. Indeed, it is a striking fact that passages as the one quoted above contrast with Husserl's view at the time of the *Logical Investigations*, when he wrote, for instance:

«It is a serious error to draw a real distinction between 'merely immanent' or 'intentional' objects, on the one hand, and 'transcendent', 'actual' objects, which may correspond to them, on the other [...]. It need only to be said to be acknowledged that the intentional object of a presentation is *the same* as its actual object, and on occasion as its external object, and that it is *nonsense* to distinguish between the two» (HUA XIX,1: 438-39).

Talk of an 'external' object in the latter sense is hardly compatible with the former idea of an object being 'nothing above' what the mind posits in experience. It is no surprise, then, that immediately after the publication of *Ideas I*, Husserl would start a complete revision of the *Logical Investigations*, with the obvious intention to make it as compatible as possible to the new doctrine. The revised, and for a long time official version of the first five *Logical Investigations*, together with the *Prolegomena*, were published in 1913. The new edition of the sixth *Investigation* followed much later, in 1921.

Even during his years in Göttingen, Husserl did not interrupt his contacts with Brentano, whom he continued to consider with great admiration and devotion. In 1907 he travelled to Florence, together with his wife, to visit his former teacher. Husserl tried to explain to Brentano the motives of his antipsychologism and the main lines of his

recent thoughts, but Brentano remained sceptic. In a letter to a friend, Brentano commented that Husserl had made some 'grotesque claims' during the meeting (cf. Schuhmann : 103), and Husserl himself noticed that «there was no understanding» (cf. Stumpf : 166).

New intellectual relationships started to become more important in Husserl's life. Wilhelm Dilthey, who inspired much of 20<sup>th</sup> century hermeneutics, held a seminar in Berlin on the *Logical Investigations* during 1905. Husserl travelled to Berlin in order to meet Dilthey. Their conversation appears to have had a significant influence on the development of Husserl's thought after the *Logical Investigations*.

As many of his contemporaries and in spite of his open support for the policy of the German government (cf. Husserl , VI: 300-301; HUA XXV: 267-292), Husserl experienced the outbreak of the war in 1914 as a disaster. His two sons were under the arms, and Wolfgang, the younger son, died on the battlefield in 1916. Husserl felt exhausted and his work did not advance in the way he would have wished.

In 1916 Husserl left Göttingen for a new start in Freiburg, where he became Heinrich Rickert's successor. Although he was offered a prestigious position in Berlin in 1923, and one in Los Angeles in 1933, Husserl remained in Freiburg, where he became Emeritus in 1927, until his death.

#### §4. *Professor and Emeritus in Freiburg: Time-Consciousness, Intersubjectivity and History*

During the years as a full professor in Freiburg Husserl finally experienced the public recognition he deserved. He was particularly pleased in 1922 to be invited by the University of London to give a course of four lectures on phenomenology. On that occasion he travelled to Cambridge, where he met C.D. Broad, G.F. Stout and G.E. Moore. Seven years later, shortly after his retirement, Husserl was invited for a series of lectures in Paris, at the Sorbonne. In Paris even

more than in London, he could experience how influential his work had become by then. He was at last an acclaimed and widely respected philosopher.

The number of his disciples increased in accordance. His lectures attracted students not only from Germany, but from all over the world. Among those who attended Husserl's lectures in Freiburg, one finds some of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Rudolf Carnap and Emmanuel Levinas.

The years in Freiburg were once again years of great productivity and few publications. Between 1916 and 1938, Husserl published only three long texts, *Formal and transcendental Logic* (HUA XVII) in 1928, the *Cartesian Meditations* (published in French as 'Méditations Cartésiennes', HUA I) in 1931, and *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (HUA VI) in 1936. He also published some articles. Among them three articles for the Japanese journal *The Kaizo* in 1924 (cf. HUA XXVII), the 'Phenomenology' entry for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1929 (cf. HUA IX; Husserl ) and a remarked preface for the English translation of *Ideas I* in 1930 (cf. HUA III, 3). A great majority of Husserl's manuscripts from this later period remained yet unfinished. Most prominently, Husserl did not manage to finish *Ideas II* and *III*, which were supposed to deliver the summa of husserlian phenomenology; he did not even come close to the establishment of a coherent manuscript containing his reflections of 1917 and 1918 on time-consciousness (cf. HUA XXXIII); and he did not succeed in his plan of publishing the German version of the *Cartesian Meditations*.

The impressive amount of unpublished work left by Husserl after his death is the effect of his rather peculiar working method. Husserl became increasingly unable to revise any manuscript he had written some time before. As he would go through it, he would quickly feel so much dissatisfied with it that he would start to write a new text all over (cf. Ingarden : 159). Aware of his problem, he began to hand his manuscripts to his assistants, primarily Edith Stein, Ludwig

Landgrebe and Eugen Fink, with the hope that they would bring the untidy convolutes of mostly stenographic writings into publishable format. But since he could not agree on whatever final text they would prepare for publication, most manuscripts remained unpublished. There were exceptions, though, such as the *Lectures on the Phenomenology of inner Time-Consciousness* ('Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins', HUA X), which had been prepared by Stein in 1917 and which were finally published by Heidegger in 1928.

Many of the topics Husserl dealt with during the years in Freiburg were not entirely new and he often returned to earlier, sometimes even much earlier reflections, albeit he seldom shared his previous conclusions. For one thing, at least since *Ideas I*, he kept reformulating and reshaping the methodology on which his own understanding of phenomenology was supposed to be based. But he also came back to such issues as the nature of logic and the theory of judgement, the relation between psychology and phenomenology, the connections between imagining, picture-perceiving and remembering, and, as we saw, time-consciousness.

At least two topics, however, became increasingly important in Husserl's late philosophy. There was first the question of intersubjectivity. Husserl worked again and again on this very topic from 1905 until nearly the end of his life. In this perspective the French version of the *Cartesian Meditations* was simply a progress report on this long and in fact never ending research project. Husserl thought of it as one of his most important projects, one that would cast a radically new light on phenomenology and dispose of many widespread misunderstandings. One such notable misunderstanding was echoed by Gilbert Ryle, when he suggested that phenomenology would imply solipsism (cf. Ryle : 362; Husserl , VI: 181). Husserl considered his work on intersubjectivity as proving that phenomenology was not only compatible with the rejection of solipsism, but that it provided, in fact, the first thorough philosophical

analysis of what it means for somebody to conceive another body as a person, bestowed with a genuine subjective view on the world.

As with many other important philosophical figures, one might wonder how Husserl could live through a period of western history so moved and painful, while thinking about issues such as the status of the phenomenological reduction or the nature of the transcendental ego. The outbreak of the Great War heavily affected Husserl's emotional balance. The war itself had inflicted on Europe horrendous human costs. It was followed by the progressive degradation of Germany's civil society, and finally by Hitler's takeover in 1933. Faced with these catastrophic developments, Husserl's concern with his own time became less emotional and more intellectual. Indeed, the second major topic that attracted Husserl's attention in the last decade of his life was precisely the question of the moral and cultural crisis of western society.

In 1917, speaking to German soldiers about Fichte's ideal of humanity, Husserl had still celebrated, with a kind of pathos one is not used to hear from him, the historical duties of those Germans «who wish to win this war for the ongoing revelation of godly ideas in our wonderful German nation, in order for it to raise to true glory, to elevate itself by itself and with it the whole of humanity» (HUA XXV: 293). As the war had ended, however, Husserl came to recognise that the «tormented youth» was returning to university «with a strong aversion to the idealistic agitations of war rhetoric, with a profound distrust of those philosophical, religious and national ideals which were instrumental to war propaganda» (HUA XVII: 94). Husserl had understood that «[...] what this war has exposed is the most intolerable philosophical just as much as moral and religious misery of humanity» (Husserl : 163).

Husserl had learned the lesson and from that moment on he started to inquire into the reasons that could have led a society scientifically and technologically so advanced into irrationality and moral disaster.

In the *Kaizo* articles he diagnosed the failure of philosophy to generate the sort of intellectual and moral renewal it had aimed to achieve since Descartes. Returning to a topic he had already treated in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, he suggested that philosophers have underestimated the importance of the critical role their discipline has to play with respect to modern science and society.

It is in this context that Husserl introduced the famous, albeit equivocal notion of the *Lebenswelt*, the life-world, a notion that plays a crucial role in *Crisis*. If Husserl's work around the *Cartesian Meditations* was aimed at disproving the charge of a solipsistic conception of consciousness, the inquiries associated to *Crisis* led Husserl to recognise that a full understanding of human consciousness and of its products could not be attained without considering the role society as a whole, with its history and culture, played with respect to it. A phenomenological analysis of the life-world, of the world as it appears to us in our daily experience, ought to endow us with the critical means to evaluate the human, existential and moral import of scientific theories along with any other cultural product in its historical evolution. For Husserl, the question philosophy needs ultimately to address, the question the sciences have proven unable to handle, became the question as to whether «the world, and the human existence in it, can [...] have a sense if [...] history has nothing more to teach us than that all shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, the ideals and norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense and well-being into misery»(HUA VI: 4; Husserl : 6).

### §5. *Disgraces: Heidegger and the Nazis*

Even during the last ten years of his life and in spite of his great scientific achievements and of his international recognition, Husserl had to face several hurting disappointments.

There was first the disenchantment with his former pupil and colleague Martin Heidegger. Husserl had long considered him as his most brilliant student, the one who had understood better than any other the nature of transcendental phenomenology. In 1927, when Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* appeared in the *Yearbook* with a dedication to him, Husserl still thought that Heidegger was intending to work within the framework of transcendental phenomenology. As a consequence, Husserl explicitly supported Heidegger's nomination to his own succession in Freiburg in 1928. By 1931, however, Husserl had radically changed his mind, so much that after having gone through a more careful study of *Sein und Zeit*, he came to the sweeping conclusion that «philosophically I have nothing to do with this Heideggerian profundity, with this brilliant lack of scientificity; [...] Heidegger's criticism, both open and veiled, is based upon a gross misunderstanding; [...] he may be involved in the formation of a philosophical system of the kind which I have always considered it my life's task to make for ever impossible» (Husserl II: 184). This sounds as if something very serious had happened between 1928 and 1931.

Rather than one single event, however, a whole series of events and misunderstandings appear to have been at the basis of Husserl's deception with regard to his past pupil and friend. As a matter of fact, Heidegger had a highly ambivalent attitude towards Husserl since the very beginning of their relationship. In a letter to Löwith from 1923, he had already stated: «...I am now convinced that Husserl was never a philosopher, not even for one second in his life» (PTP: 17; cf. also Carman 2003: 53-63). Nevertheless, Husserl had asked Heidegger to collaborate in the redaction of the 'Phenomenology'-article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1927. In the exchanges they had about the

article Heidegger started to raise objections which were so fundamental that a common conception of phenomenology became impossible (Biemel 1950).

Husserl had expected that with Heidegger's nomination in Freiburg, they would regularly meet and discuss about philosophy in the way they used to do before Heidegger had left for Marburg in 1923. Nothing like that happened and Heidegger, now busy developing his own philosophy, was less and less interested in talking to his former mentor. On the top of it, Heidegger was starting to attract more and more students into his lectures and seminars, thus weakening Husserl's influence in Freiburg.

Husserl had already given up on Heidegger when Hitler took over in 1933. His bad opinion about his former assistant and colleague was only confirmed by Heidegger's nomination to Rector of the University of Freiburg and by the consequent fact that he officially joined the National Socialist Party. In a letter to a colleague, Husserl went so far as to explicitly accuse Heidegger of anti-Semitism (cf. Husserl III: 493).

The deception about Heidegger came only as a first stroke in a series of humiliations Husserl and his family had to encounter in the years to come. Husserl had always understood himself and his philosophy as deeply entrenched in the German cultural tradition, a tradition of spiritual values of which Germany was to be depositary in Husserl's view. For Husserl, to stand for the German nation was a natural consequence of having one's life and thought governed by the values on which that nation was supposed to be built. Although he did change his mind about the moral justification of the war, he had not regretted the sacrifices he and his family had made in it. The takeover by the Nazis thus came to him as a « cyclone, an earthquake, a universal flood» (Husserl IX: 91). In 1933 Husserl first and then his son Gerhard were excluded from University because of their Jewish origins. Husserl wrote that he felt as if he had been «attacked at the roots of [his] own existence» (Husserl III: 98). He managed to overcome this last crisis by choosing once again to dedicate his full

energy and all of his time to philosophy, writing what was to become his last major work, the *Crisis*.

Husserl became seriously ill during the summer 1937. He never recovered and died in April 1938. A few days before his death, expressing a religious attitude that had accompanied him throughout his life, he told his spouse: «God has taken me into his mercy. He has allowed me to die» (Husserl III: 315).

As from the moment in which Husserl had decided to become a philosopher, he had recognised that for him philosophy was «not a matter of a career, but a personal destiny, serious to the point of death or life» (Husserl IX: 104). In spite of his devotion to philosophy, and in spite of his striving for a rigorous and scientific form of it, Husserl never aspired to the establishment of a closed philosophical system. On the contrary, in his mind philosophy should aim to be «a rigorous science which [...] discovers its problems, methods and theories in an endless progress», thus making «any [...] 'system' forever impossible» (Husserl , VI: 459). In line with this principle, Husserl, who gave the impression of an emotionally and socially conservative person, never closed his mind to new ideas and questions, thus modifying and improving his philosophy until the very end of his life.

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