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Transcendental Phenomenology as Human Possibility

Husserl and Fink on the Phenomenologizing Subject

Springer

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Problem of Humanity in Phenomenology

> Es ist mir immer klarer geworden, […] dass hier eine der grössten Aufgaben eines Systems der Philosophie liegt: die Aufgabe des rechten Anfanges, die Emporleitung des Erkennenden von der Stufe natürlicher Erkenntnis-Naivität zur Stufe des Anfangs "absolut gerechtfertigter Wissenschaft", der der "Philosophie".[1]

This little piece of meta-philosophical reflection presents us with a specific image of philosophy. It is an image evoking a long tradition and a host of accompanying metaphors, aims, and ideals. Notions such as radical beginnings, architectonics, ground, foundation, and absolute justification are the building blocks of this kind of thinking about the role and scope of philosophy, and Edmund Husserl is rightly identified with this tradition, as well as often viewed as one of its most prominent representatives.

Yet this is not the only image of philosophy, nor is it the only one reflective of Husserl's phenomenological project. "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated," – so opens Sellars one of his essays – "is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term." (2007: 369). Here, we are presented with a different understanding of the philosophical endeavor; one which is not so much about building an edifice of knowledge as it is about 'knowing one's way around' various things and, perhaps, various *kinds* of knowledge of things. (ibid.). The former looks up to the ideal of verticality of knowledge, while the latter keeps an eye out for its horizontality. The telltale indicators of the latter are a heightened awareness of the contextuality of knowledge and a deep sensitivity to historical circumstance and discursive formations. These two approaches may not be mutually exclusive, but there is certainly some tension between them. It is easy to see why: whereas the success of the former apparently hinges on possessing the appropriate philosophical blueprints in advance, the latter rejects that ideal as mostly incoherent and opts for piecemeal exploratory progress instead. This does not mean that the second approach precludes

[1] From a letter written to Winthrop P. Bell on December 13, 1922 (Hua Dok III/3: 43). Henceforward, Hua Dok III will be referred to as (Bw).

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philosophers from theory- or system-building altogether. However, it does mean that such advancements can only be realistically pursued at a later stage, rather than serve as starting points for research. Their status of *endpoints* of research becomes equally precarious, and the philosopher must be open not only to making corrections on the fly, but also to the possibility that their thinking is an infinite task, rather than a straightforwardly attainable platform for all future problem-solving.

The stroke of genius that provided phenomenology with its conceptual breadth and range of applicability was the insight that these two approaches were not merely potentially complementary, but rather necessarily supplementary. For Husserl, the kind of philosophy Sellars would define and pursue several decades later was already part of his research program, but only made sense insofar as it was tethered to the larger foundational idea of absolutely justified philosophy. Conversely, trying to uphold this latter regulative ideal while making no reference to the factual circumstances and limitations of those pursuing it would amount to little more than baseless, hollow speculation. Phenomenology emerged from these various intersecting strands of vertical and horizontal research as a uniquely ambitious conception of philosophy with its own standards for scientificity, rigor, and evidence.

Its ambition was a product of two factors. The first one was the remarkable scope of this new science; as Husserl's thought evolved, his understanding of the range of applicability of phenomenological insight broadened. Framed as a universal platform for descriptively engaging almost all aspects of human experience, Husserl's phenomenology thus developed into the privileged tool, and necessary companion, of almost all kinds of reflective inquiry. This became especially clear during the last decade of his life, as he became increasingly interested in providing a phenomenological explanation of history, rationality, and teleology. In this way, phenomenology's distinct descriptive apparatus was enriched by some far-reaching normative potential, and the injunction to philosophers to serve as 'functionaries of mankind' became an essential component of phenomenology's self-understanding.

The second factor contributing to its ambition was its promise to deliver a unique and unprecedentedly universal kind of knowledge. For Husserl, the anchoring point of this promise was the transcendental ego; because it was simultaneously the source and the only true field of disclosure of such knowledge, finding appropriate means of access to it became the central methodological problem of phenomenology. This turned out to be no small difficulty, for the desired universality was a function of the transcendental ego's non-worldliness. Consequently, much of Husserl's heavy methodological machinery was developed in the attempt to bridge the gap between the natural attitude of the mundane ego and the special phenomenological attitude necessary for disclosing the transcendental egological structure behind it.

The difficulties with this general picture are both well-known and well understood. Some of them, like the apparent problem of solipsism, are relatively easily dismissed as mere misunderstanding. Some, like the more general problem of integrating intersubjectivity into the transcendental framework, take more effort and an attentive eye, but are not only doable, but in fact necessary. Some problems, however, are particularly obstinate, and resist interpretative removal almost entirely. The

most famous example is Husserl's own. The so-called 'paradox of human subjectivity', explicitly referenced in the late *Crisis*, but discussed throughout many of his works, points out the puzzling duality of phenomenologically understood subjectivity: it is at once a worldly ego and a transcendental ego, i.e., an object in the world and a sense-bestowing subject for the world. Of course, the issue here is that they are not two distinctly individuated subjects, but one, and yet, on account of their contradictory positioning with respect to the world, seem to be at odds with each other. We will recall that Husserl talks of dissolving this difficulty in the very next section of the *Crisis* (Hua VI, §54). Coming from a philosopher generally averse to paradox, this was perhaps not surprising. Yet, most readers will probably find that his proposed solution is not entirely satisfactory. Even if the section is taken merely as a condensed allusion to results reached elsewhere, a fundamental problem still remains. It seems, namely, that Husserl's formulation of the alleged paradox, as well as his solution to it, both depend on having already 'bought into' the transcendental project. It is unclear why there should be any tension between bestowing sense on our world and on others while still being an object in and of this world, *unless* one has implicitly decided in advance that 'sense-bestowing' was somehow at least partly a *non*-mundane process or activity.[2] In other words, pending full acceptance of the rationale behind transcendental phenomenology, its insights might be seen as nothing more than solutions in search of problems.

This is an oversimplification, and, to an extent, an exaggeration of the theoretical issue of the exact relation between the mundane and the transcendental ego. However, the problem sketched above is indicative of two practical difficulties looming in the background. Given the insistence on a radical difference between empirical and transcendental knowledge – mirroring the equally radical difference between the respective egos acquiring it – the first question that arises is who exactly is the one 'doing' the transcendental experiencing. The curt answer, that it is clearly the transcendental ego, does not suffice here, for it merely shifts the problem one step further. Obviously, phenomenologists and transcendental phenomenologists alike are human beings with careers, private lives, worries, moods, emotions, etc. Yet, Husserl insists, all this psychological and existential make-up somehow gets suspended while doing phenomenology to such a radical extent, that the remaining investigator can hardly be called a human being anymore. Instead, they are now a transcendental ego, the only theoretical platform capable of thematizing and disclosing the transcendental achievements that have been taking place anonymously up until that point.

Breaking through this anonymity is, according to Husserl, an unnatural and highly contrived act. It involves a methodologically focused shift from the natural, everyday style of living to a special kind of theoretical attitude. However, what

[2] In a generally highly uncharitable reading of Husserl, Carman raises a similar point and points to the, as he calls it, 'vicious' Husserlian circle of methods presupposing results, and vice versa (2003: 54). We shall return to this problem repeatedly over the course of our discussion and try to work out a solution. As it will turn out, the line between a vicious and a hermeneutic circle is an exceedingly thin one, and occasionally blurry in Husserl.

could possibly be the motivation for this shift? It cannot be a desire to better understand the transcendental depths of experience, for those are, by definition, closed off in the natural attitude. In other words, one cannot have them as a hazy but visible goal of investigation and methodologically build toward them, for they can only appear *after* one has perfected the laborious methods and performed the shift into a completely new and unnatural attitude. In this sense, phenomenology appears as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: its methods, designed with the goal of finding a specific kind of structure, are then legitimized *by* this structure tailored specifically to them, and supposedly discoverable only by them. This is the bad kind of investigative circle, for it can never eliminate the possibility that phenomenology is a self-contained bubble with an entirely fictitious subject matter.[3] Husserl was not unaware of these practical questions, although his interest in them ebbed and flowed over the years, and his answers to them, implicit and explicit, wavered over several occasionally contradictory positions. As we will see, these vacillations were in harmony with larger shifts in his understanding of some core commitments of phenomenology. Thus, when Husserl coyly speaks of the "event of the transcendental epoché" (Hua xxxiv: 312), a proper understanding of this event will help us develop a deeper understanding of the role and place of the human being – and of its relation to the transcendental ego – in phenomenology.

We have isolated two basic questions that should be answerable within the framework of transcendental phenomenology: *who* engages in phenomenological activity, and *why*? The long and convoluted history of Husserl's attempts to answer these reflects his repeated attempts to confront the various strands of Ancient Greek, Cartesian, and German Idealist legacies determining his phenomenology. The inherited core ideal of a presuppositionless philosophical science was especially limiting in this context, for it greatly reduced the scope of phenomena that could be used in accounting for the motivations of the philosophical beginner. This, coupled with Husserl's highly critical view of the limitations of empirical knowledge, meant that most of the historical and existential reality of the philosopher had to be ignored, if not entirely effaced, if the shift to transcendental knowledge was to be executed. As we will see, this open and ambiguous question regarding the humanity of the phenomenologist would go through many permutations, before ultimately developing into an emphatic phenomenological affirmation of possibilities which are intrinsically human.

[3] Nor can the motivation to engage in the Husserlian kind of transcendental research be said to arise from supposed contradictions inherent in the natural attitude. At a very basic pre-scientific level, natural experience is very rarely plagued by contradictions, and even when such cases do arise (think of, say, discrepancies in visual perception), they are taken in stride and accounted for in the course of experience. Furthermore, regardless of the possible structures operative 'behind' the stream of experience, *knowledge* of those structures is simply not necessary for them to function properly. A sturdier case for motivation for transcendental investigation could perhaps be made by focusing on the kind of paralogisms, and especially the antinomies, described by Kant. However, even such highly sophisticated cases of reasoning could hardly account for the radical Husserlian move of suspending the validity of the world without knowing in advance that one will then find the 'true absolute topic of philosophy', i.e., the transcendental ego.

This book explores this complex development against the backdrop of Husserl's close collaboration with Eugen Fink, which took place during the last decade of Husserl's life. This choice is not arbitrary; the historical circumstances of Freiburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s make for a suspenseful story, and Fink was one of its main protagonists – not only as Husserl's new, highly talented protégé, but also as a student of the rapidly rising philosophical star, and, incidentally, Husserl's old protégé, Martin Heidegger. In this highly charged philosophical climate (a foreboding climate, with an imminent political and personal catastrophe for Husserl looming just around the corner), Fink was in some ways a link between two understandings of phenomenology. But our interest in him goes beyond historical circumstance. His highly original recasting of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology in terms of a *transcendental theory of method* was, among other things, an attempt to explicitly address our two guiding questions, namely the 'who?' and the 'why?' of phenomenology.

Because Fink perfectly catalyzed and amplified that strand of Husserl's thinking which was grounded in the Cartesian ideal of absolute radicality of beginning, his answer to the two questions was as counterintuitive as it was unequivocal. According to Fink, phenomenology was decidedly not a human activity, but rather a caesura in worldly history, lying outside the scope of human possibilities altogether. If the goal of phenomenological methods for Husserl was something like a de-naturalization of experience, for Fink it was a full de-humanization of the phenomenologist. This position, we shall see, did not come about *ex nihilo*. Rather, it was a reaction to, and in some ways a reaction against, Husserl's rather unsuccessful articulation of transcendental philosophy in contrast to psychology from the late 1920s. One significant boon of Fink's radicalization of phenomenology was that it allowed him to elegantly and rather effortlessly circumvent the problem of motivation by introducing the notion of 'transcendental fore-knowledge'. This served as a copula between the two registers of experience, and provided the initial push in the direction of the phenomenological reduction. Additionally, the radicality of Fink's approach coincided and usefully aligned with Husserl's ongoing disputes over the true sense of phenomenology in the early 1930s. This was, by then, primarily a debate with Heidegger, and, for Husserl, a debunking of what he saw as the corrosive anthropologism of Heidegger's position. At that historical moment, a theoretically charged distancing from human praxis must have seemed like a good idea to Husserl, and for a brief moment in mid-1931, he seems to have almost conceded to the Finkian dehumanizing interpretation of phenomenology.

It wasn't long before Husserl realized that such a thoroughgoing revision of the basic impulses behind his philosophy was not tenable after all. Thus, in late 1931, a crucial break with Fink took place, as Husserl managed to find other conceptual means for explaining the relation between the mundane and the transcendental. This allowed him to transform his understanding of who was phenomenologizing, and with what motivation, and ultimately to recast phenomenology as the philosophical way toward attaining what he referred to as 'higher humanity'. By the completion of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, – the crowning achievement of the Husserl-Fink collaboration – Husserl's recoil from Fink's conception of phenomenology had

already been complete. The phrase 'higher humanity' which appears there, however, is only understandable if we understand its prehistory, which is at least as old as Fink's first attempts to build upon Husserl's differentiations between psychology and transcendental phenomenology.

This does not mean that the notion of humanity is tied exclusively to the context of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*. In fact, as we will try to show toward the end of our discussion, in articulating the idea of a higher humanity, Husserl was drawing upon and revising some of the concepts which had appeared as early as the important *First Philosophy* lectures. There, as in the later writings characteristic of Husserl's *Crisis*-period, 'humanity' does not simply refer to a collection of human beings, but evokes a nexus of intertwining and normatively rich concepts such as history, rationality, teleology, ethics, science, and cultural renewal.[4] But Husserl also recognizes that 'humanity' in this broad sense crucially intersects with the more local sense of the humanity of the individual phenomenologist. Indeed, their singularly important vocation, benefitting all mankind, is only conceivable if they themselves are human, and can therefore establish a meaningful rapport with non-phenomenologists. This narrower sense of humanity, emerging from his work with (and against) Fink, will be the primary focus of this book.

The fact that Husserl had already had similar, if not entirely developed, thoughts before should not be taken to mean that no progress has been made, and that no evolution of thought has taken place. Fink's meta-phenomenological intervention was instrumental in introducing an additional layer of self-awareness into Husserlian phenomenology. It was the kind of self-awareness that made it possible to view phenomenology as taking part in the "drama of history" (Waldenfels 1995: 10) without collapsing into historicism, to see it as an eminently human endeavor without crossing into anthropologism, and, finally, to see it as a practical undertaking without succumbing to irrationalism. Although it must be conceded that the Husserl-Fink collaboration was ultimately a failure, – insofar as its project of drawing up a system of phenomenology eventually petered out, and Husserl rejected that which came out of it – it was that interesting kind of philosophical failure which enriches and furthers the debate.

So, the story we will be telling here is a complex and complicated one, but it can be summarized in two simple joint claims: Husserl's philosophy of the early 1930s presents an attempt to articulate phenomenology as a human, practical endeavor, and his collaborative work with Fink is key to understanding the nature of this attempt, and the motives behind it. In arguing for these claims, we will be using the questions of the 'who?' and 'why?' as our guiding thread, and will be revisiting them as they appear in various contexts throughout the discussion.

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[4] In much the same way, 'Europe' is for Husserl not simply a designation for a continent, but the name for the tradition which gave birth to these regulative ideals. For a discussion of Husserl's phenomenological reflections on this topic, cf. Miettinen 2020. For a more general discussion of Husserl's, Heidegger's, Patočka's, and Derrida's views on the philosophical concept 'Europe', cf. Gasché 2009. A brief but useful reference to the different ways Husserl uses the word 'humanity' is found in Moran and Steinacher 2008: 337f., n.48.

Although it focuses on a relatively short period of only a few years – beginning with Husserl's plans for a new systematic work and ending roughly with the completion of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* – this discussion does not always allow for straightforward exposition. The reasons for this are varied. On the one hand, the timeframe we are focusing on was a veritable explosion of influences on all sides. The increasing dissatisfaction with Heidegger and the parallel exposure to a relatively alien way of thinking with Fink, a rethinking of the relation to Dilthey and a growing need to present his work to foreign audiences, plus a quickly approaching political upheaval, were all factors that led Husserl to reevaluate the core tenets of his philosophy. On the other hand, almost every idea or conceptual innovation of this period, whether by Husserl, Fink, or even Heidegger, was a reaction to some existing issue or thought. Finally, for all the changes of course – occasionally major but brief, and occasionally minor but with staying power – Husserl nevertheless managed to stay relatively consistent throughout his career. In other words, no change is too small to be ignored, but even the apparently biggest changes should not be exaggerated, for their provenance is not always immediately transparent. All this makes an accurate hermeneutic snapshot of this particular moment – which is what the present investigation tries to accomplish – exceptionally elusive. In order to provide a stable point of reference and orientation between these fluctuating and intersecting currents, our discussion will be structured around the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*. That book, with its unique vision of a transcendental theory of method couched in ontological and metaphysical terms, will serve as a springboard for our discussion of Husserl's different attempts to account for the 'who and why' of phenomenology. This strategy seems prudent and advantageous for two reasons.

First, although these questions do appear in Husserl's earlier work, they are very rarely the focus of his attention, and usually crop up as a side-effect of some other concern. It is with Fink that they become crucially important in their own right, as his focus on the nature and role of the phenomenologizing ego introduced the idea that phenomenological activity must itself be subjected to phenomenological investigation. This shift in focus then becomes tangible in Husserl's own work from these years and later. But, it also clarifies some of Husserl's earlier, usually muddled reflections on these issues. Therefore, the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* acts like a large beacon, illuminating both that which immediately preceded it, and that which came immediately thereafter. Secondly, the collaboration which led to this book was decisive in preparing the last big development of Husserl's career, insofar as it forced him to develop an account of the factual reality of the phenomenologist. This account of the phenomenologist's humanity led to the insight that the transcendental attitude is necessarily intertwined with, rather than separate from, the historical subject and its various mundane attitudes and their corresponding habitus. The *Crisis*-stage of Husserl's thought, based around the historical-teleological categories such as 'humanity' and 'mankind', would not have been possible without the prior

historical opening of the category of 'phenomenologist-as-human'.[5] Thus, there is considerable explanatory force behind the contention that the specific period we are focusing on illuminates much of what would come after it. While scholars have certainly been correct to point out that the problem of history was the true novel development of Husserl's late philosophy (Carr 1987: 71; Mohanty 1995: 73), this claim must be followed by the qualification that Husserl's later interest in history itself had a prehistory. That interest, as we shall see, properly germinated during Husserl's collaboration with Fink.

The following book is divided into six chapters. The scene-setting second chapter opens with a brief overview of the scholarly reception of the Husserl-Fink collaboration, and provides the historical context leading to the inception of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* project. At this early stage, our discussion will be moving at a very general level; once we establish the reasons and the logic behind Husserl's plans for a systematic presentation of his philosophy, we will turn to Fink's arguments for the uniqueness of phenomenology. These arguments will turn out to hinge on his understanding of the radicality of the phenomenological science, which, in turn, is rooted in an original reinterpretation and expansion of its ontological commitments. We catch a first glimpse of this reimagining in some scattered references to the philosophical unity of ontology and meontics from this period. Although the text of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* does not explicitly refer to 'meontics', the idea of a specific kind of 'being' outside of ontology is clearly central to understanding that work. It is this idea that allows Fink to solve the aporia of

[5] The immediate context of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* can be seen as a preparatory stage for the *Crisis* and the texts related to it. By choosing to focus our investigation on this stage, and effectively ending our discussion with late 1933/early 1934, we are giving ourselves more space to explore the exceptionally intricate development of Husserl's thought within a relatively short timeframe. Unfortunately, this also means that we omit detailed discussion of that part of Husserl's thought many scholars find to be the most exciting, fecund, original, or indeed, most relevant to today's times, namely, the period of the *Crisis* and complementary writings. This late stage of Husserl's career has attracted considerable scholarly attention which has, in turn, led to a more general reevaluation and rejuvenation of Husserl's large body of work. We shall briefly discuss some broad consequences of the 'late Husserl's' thinking, as well as mention some avenues it opens up, in the concluding part of this work. Let us, however, mention a few scholarly sources that will certainly prove useful to any reader looking to enter the complex field of Husserl's *Crisis* book and of the massive literature in its wake. For a general and helpful overview of the main arguments of that work, as well as of some of its surrounding context, cf. Orth 1999, Dodd 2004 and Moran 2012. For more focused discussion of specific problems, cf. the volume edited by Hyder and Rheinberger 2010. Excellent explorations of the issues at the intersection of phenomenology and history and of the rich historical and philosophical context behind the *Crisis* can be found in Carr 1987, 2014. Heffernan explores the ambiguous sense of the notion of 'crisis' in Husserl in a recent paper. (2017) Steinbock's overview of the complementary volume of manuscripts and research notes to the *Crisis* volume of the *Husserliana* is still very instructive and useful (1994), and also does a good job of preparing the reader for Steinbock's own original contribution inspired by the last stage of Husserl's career. (1995b) Finally, Derrida's early volume focusing on a short supplementary text to the *Crisis* is particularly noteworthy, and has since become a true philosophical classic. (1962)

"… whether and how the horizon from which 'being' [„Sein"] is finally to be understood is itself 'existent' [„seiend"]." (Hua Dok. II/1: 184/2).

Fink's unambiguously negative answer to the question above forms the backbone of his understanding of phenomenology. The centrally important distinction between transcendental and mundane being can also be put as a (me-)ontological difference between the origin of the world and the world itself (157/143). This crucial move accomplishes two things. By casting phenomenology as a science of the 'origin of the world', it reflects Husserl's own insistence on the centrality of 'world' in phenomenology. Simultaneously, it also provides Fink with the conceptual tool for explaining the entire movement of knowledge implied in phenomenology, ranging from initial to transcendental naïveté, to absolute knowledge, and 'back' into the world. This movement is captured by the layered notion of 'enworlding'. In the third chapter, we first expand on the rich historical context which influenced the development of the key issues of 'world' and 'worldliness' in phenomenology. A better understanding of this context will prepare us for a discussion of the complex issue of primary and secondary enworlding, and of Husserl's reaction to it. The rest of the chapter traces the genesis of that notion in Fink, and provides a first glimpse into its depth, i.e., into the twofold 'transparency' of phenomenological knowledge entailed by it. The insight that gradually emerges from this discussion is that the notion of enworlding is not merely an account of the 'ontification of the Absolute', but also an account of the *knower* of this constitutive process.

A look into this account reveals that the phenomenologizing ego is, properly speaking, not a human being at all for Fink; we refer to this central position as his 'epistemological anti-humanism'. At this point, transcendental theory of method merges with metaphysics, and this counterintuitive conclusion becomes the core claim of the Finkian vision of transcendental phenomenology. In the fourth chapter, we demonstrate how this claim serves both as a function of, and a basis for, the self-expression of the Absolute. There is a distinct sense of metaphysical inevitability here: if the otherwise entirely ineffable absolute knowledge is to be attained, not only should phenomenological methods distance the phenomenologist from their humanity, but they in fact must do so. The phenomenological reduction thus becomes the source of the most radical transformation imaginable, insofar as it produces an ontologically heterogenous aspect of the phenomenologizing ego, and simultaneously discloses it as its true nature. In this sense, Fink's phenomenology is not merely non-human; if true knowledge is to be attained, it must actively suppress the human dimension of the phenomenologizing ego, and is thus *anti*-humanistic. To be sure, there is a tinge of hermeticism to this position, and various questions inevitably arise. How could the human being ever undergo such a transformation, and what exactly would it entail? After undergoing it, how and why would they 'return' to the natural attitude? A specific methodological problem concerns the language in which these non-mundane insights would then be communicated to people outside of this epistemologically privileged position: could a mundane language even serve this purpose, and could non-phenomenologists even understand these insights? Finally, the problem of motivation resurfaces in a particularly pressing form; given the unprecedented radicality of transcendental science, as well as

the fact that it lies entirely outside the scope of human possibilities, no mundane reasons could fully account for pursuing it. All these questions are answered by Fink's complex doctrine of primary and secondary enworlding. (Whether those answers are satisfactory is another issue, dependent on metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological presuppositions.) What seems clear is that Fink's thinking leads Husserl's phenomenology to a precipice where an explicit decision between speculation and phenomenological evidence is necessary. Before addressing Husserl's various ways of responding to this Finkian challenge, we round off the overview of the context of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* with a brief look back at the time immediately *before* Fink would start working as Husserl's assistant. In the second half of the 1920s, we find Husserl trying to articulate the path into transcendental philosophy via psychology. The issues raised there, as well as the stumbling blocks encountered, would shape much of the ensuing debate between Husserl and Fink, as well as provide a general blueprint for Husserl's later rejection of Fink's position. As we trace these developments, the important notion of 'parallelism' – of psychology and transcendental phenomenology, as well as of the mundane and the transcendental ego – emerges and begins playing a progressively more important explanatory role for Husserl. However, we will see that that notion, sitting awkwardly at the crossroads between descriptive metaphor, epistemological insight, and metaphysical postulate, does not quite succeed in explaining the nature of the radically new science of phenomenology, nor the motivation for pursuing it. Considering how influential these relatively unsuccessful manuscripts were in shaping Fink's initial perspective on phenomenology, it is no wonder that the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* tackled precisely these issues with great focus.[6]

The upshot of our examination of the context behind the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, coupled with an overview of its main themes, is the surprising insight that Husserl and Fink started their collaboration with the same concerns and goals, responded to the same criticisms, and worked with the same tools, and yet ended up arguing for contradictory positions within that collaborative project. This divergence is best seen on the question of who engages in the radical science of transcendental phenomenology. Whereas for Fink there is no doubt that this science implies a shedding of the horizon of human possibilities, Husserl understands it as an

[6] Given the scattered and somewhat confused nature of Husserl's early (which, in this context, means pre-Fink) reflections on the issue of motivation, it is perhaps not surprising that subsequent scholarship has tended to view this question as one primarily raised and explicitly discussed by Fink. His 1933 paper, in which he summarizes Husserl's phenomenology and defends it against some contemporary criticism and misunderstanding, has been particularly influential in this regard (1966: 110ff.). One of the most famous references to this paper, and to the fact that the natural attitude contains no motive to go beyond itself, is found toward the very end of Sartre's almost contemporaneous *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where he contends that the epoché can only appear as a miracle in Husserl (1966: 83/49). Sartre's perspective and his criticism of Husserl's vagueness on this topic were certainly hindered by limited access to numerous manuscripts on precisely this issue. For an insightful analysis of some of Husserl's earlier thoughts on the relation between the natural and the transcendental attitude from *Ideas I*, and of how they foreshadow much of what would occupy Husserl later in his career, cf. Staiti 2015.

eminently human undertaking on the road to a 'higher humanity', thus unequivocally rejecting the Finkian notion of secondary enworlding. What exactly does this mean, and how is this development to be explained?

The rest of the book tackles these questions, this time by focusing much more closely on Husserl, and the evolution of his thought parallel to the unfolding of his work with Fink. The fifth chapter explores one crucial aspect of this evolution, namely, Husserl's contemporaneous dispute with anthropologism and, in particular, with Heidegger. In exploring how this dispute was an extension of Husserl's earlier debates with historicism, we will also see how his usual responses and counterarguments to it turned out to be ineffective against Heidegger's reimagining of phenomenology, and blunted by a richer philosophical concept of phenomenological theory and practice. The peak of Husserl's resistance to what he perceived as anthropologistic distortions of transcendental phenomenology was his mid-1931 lecture *Phenomenology and Anthropology*. This lecture, we try to show, was also the moment of his greatest proximity to Fink's anti-humanistic vision of phenomenology, but even then, that proximity was only a partial one. That the unprecedented methodological radicality of Fink's position was a useful ally in the debate against an opponent as dangerous as Heidegger is not surprising. However, Husserl never quite shared the metaphysical commitments behind that radicality, and thus couldn't uphold its consequences in the same straightforward way Fink could. This becomes clear even within the *Phenomenology and Anthropology* lecture itself, which ends on somewhat opaque notes on the 'intrinsic affinity' between mundane sciences such as psychology and anthropology, and phenomenology. This ultimately leads Husserl in an unpromising and confused direction, and further obfuscates the issue of the relation between the mundane and transcendental ego. This is again illustrated on the example of our basic question of the 'who and why', as it becomes clear that phenomenology flounders between a striving for absolute radicality and transcendentality of insight, and the need to retain a meaningful relation to the worldly situation of the transcendental knower. In particular, the problem that plagues Husserl's attempts of this time is how to set up the phenomenological project without falling into the trap of circularity, while at the same time trying to avoid simply presupposing the rationale and the results of that project.[7]

Husserl was clearly aware of the mounting difficulties along the Finkian path, and he must have been aware that the philosophical public that would be open to

[7] This difficulty becomes especially obvious once Husserl's work from this period is contrasted with Heidegger's hermeneutically charged phenomenology. Heidegger's explicit embracing of a certain kind of ineliminable explanatory circularity seems to eliminate much of the problems Husserl was forced to grapple with. Further investigation of this topic would possibly show that it is not merely a matter of accepting circularity, either; perhaps an embracing of a certain kind of special presupposition, or decision, might also be necessary. Whether that decision can be made *by* the philosopher, or whether it is, in some way, made *for* them, is a question the answer to which seems to depend on one's philosophical sensibilities. There is perhaps a kind of an unavoidable circle there, at least in the sense that there can be no proper reason to philosophize that is itself outside of philosophy. Heidegger expresses this point well in his book on Nietzsche, when he speaks of the problem of philosophy's self-grounding:

being convinced by Heideggerian 'anthropologistic' arguments would hardly be persuaded otherwise by an even sharper turn away from the factuality of the human being. Thus, by late 1931, we can identify a significant change in his approach, and find a noticeable step away from Fink's direction. In the sixth chapter, we trace the steps of Husserl's definitive break with the anti-humanistic thrust of Fink's evolving thought, and demonstrate how that break also led Husserl to an emphatic reaffirmation of the humanity of the phenomenologist. Their humanity, it will turn out, flows into a broader notion of higher humanity, which, by the end of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, is explicitly articulated by Husserl as the *telos* of transcendental phenomenology. The crucial conceptual innovation that enabled this shift was the notion of the *coincidence* of the mundane and of the transcendental. This notion may appear at first to be identical with Husserl's older concept of 'parallelism'. However, as we argue, it was conceptually richer insofar as it introduced a historical component into the relation in the form of a *retroactive localization* of the transcendental. This innovative approach, it is argued, finally enabled Husserl to adopt a more comprehensive perspective on the uniquely ambiguous situation of the phenomenologist, who is not only a reverberation of the 'paradox of subjectivity' like any other human being, but also finds himself in the precarious situation of having to transcendentally reflect on that paradox while expressing his findings with mundane means.[8]

This richer phenomenological perspective on the humanity of the phenomenologist and of their peculiar science, articulated in terms of a philosophical quest for 'higher humanity', lets us reconstruct phenomenologically satisfactory answers to the two questions guiding our discussion. A heightened phenomenological awareness of the historical and existential context determining the natural attitude shows that that essential background cannot be simply ignored, 'turned off', jumped over, or suspended in one go and without remainder. It may be tempting to read Husserl's very late critical reflections on *Ideas I* as a wholesale rejection of his earlier efforts

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> It concerns the fact that, whatever philosophy is, and however it may exist at any given time, it defines itself solely on its own terms; but also that such self-determination is possible only in as much as philosophy always has already grounded itself. (1961: 24/16)

It is impossible to read these lines and not be reminded of Husserl's thoughts on the nature of the 'absolute calling' of philosophy, on its status as a vocation in the truest sense of the word, as opposed to a mere job or career. But much like in the case of Heidegger, this kind of a unique determination of philosophy carries with it the sense of 'being called upon'. In what sense is the philosopher free to choose the pursuit of philosophy, then? Husserl is generally uneasy about this sort of inner tension and tries different things in order to alleviate it. We will return to this question in more detail later in our discussion. For an interesting discussion of the general logic of this kind of interplay between the decision *for*, and the event *of*, – albeit from a Heideggerian perspective on language – see Derrida 1987: 147-54, n.1. Derrida speaks there, echoing Heidegger, of this 'always already there', and of a kind of originary acquiescence, an originary 'yes' which must be in place in order for language to 'speak' and be spoken. It is only a small leap from this to the theme of philosophy's self-grounding, and one could easily see how the Heideggerian notion of an originary *Zusage* could refer to philosophy itself.

[8] A wonderful collection of essays exploring various facets of this complex issue is found in Landgrebe 1982.

in favor of an exclusively "historical way" into transcendental phenomenology (Hua XXIX: 425). But that would be a mistake, for the difficulty described there is primarily a practical one: introducing the epoché and the reductions into the natural attitude "*in einem Sprunge*" cannot work because that would mean that phenomenology omits discussion of all the factors determining both that natural attitude and the circumstances which led to suspending it. For that reason, the reduction cannot mean a suspension of history, à la Fink, but is rather a way of illuminating the ways an attitude is embedded in history. "It therefore becomes palpable," Husserl writes, "that a complete systematic introduction that leads one into phenomenology begins as a universal historical problem, and must be conducted as such." (426).

Thus, *contra* Fink, whatever phenomenology ultimately ends up disclosing, the starting point of its research must be the human being. However, *contra* various forms of historicism or anthropologism, it does not have to claim that the human being is also the endpoint of its research. This is where its claim to transcendental insight becomes centrally important, and its specific methods of uncovering anonymous constitutive mechanisms decisive. Yet, breaking through the contingency of historical, worldly existence does not mean abandoning humanity or unmasking it as an imperfect way of truth-appearing in the world. On the contrary, Husserl argues, it means transforming humanity into a more advanced and more rational form of itself, now aware of its unique place in the universe, straddling two distinct but inextricably linked registers of experience. A better understanding of the 'who' equips us with a more profound understanding of the 'why' in this case. As we try to show toward the end of our discussion, the question of motivation for pursuing transcendental phenomenology can only be answered if we recognize that it is never merely a question of *epistemological* motivation for Husserl. Rather, whatever epistemological motives there may be, they must be underpinned and driven by an *axiological* motive, since the striving for a higher rationality, and, consequently, a higher humanity, is for Husserl ultimately a striving for the good. It is no wonder that Husserl's idea of science is thoroughly determined by notions such as radical responsibility, honesty, eternity, new life, and harmony; his understanding of the scientific endeavor is primarily an *ethical* one.[9] To be sure, there is an element of philosophical hubris here, and the specific pathos of Husserl's phenomenology that became more and more pronounced over the years, clearly discernible already in the early 1920s, is the dominant force holding these strands of thought together. Yet, for all its unabashed ambition and occasional bathos, Husserl's phenomenology, especially in later years, does exhibit an almost irresistible philosophical optimism. The

[9] See Bernet 1979: 129ff. for a brief but instructive formulation of this claim. "The practical motivation at work in Husserl's philosophical theory is the ethical demand for *absolute responsibility*", Bernet writes, the latter being "a responsibility which extends not only to theoretical statements and investigative activities, but also to human life as a whole." (131) This point is underlined by Melle as well, who argues that Husserl's phenomenology is properly understood as offering a kind of a philosophy of *salvation*, because "it is the key to a radical cultural renewal of mankind, without which no humane future will exist." (1995: 111). We shall have more to say about the genesis of this kind of ethical demand in Husserl in the last chapter of our discussion.

legitimacy of this optimism and its correlate ambition hinges on recognizing phenomenology as an eminently human and deeply humane undertaking,[10] indebted to the core values of the Enlightenment. (cf. Luft 2011: 8–12). However, in order to recognize it as such, we must first understand the path that led Husserl to such broad ethical and normative questions about humanity. This path, we want to show, was not accidental, and Husserl's late interest in these issues was not merely phenomenology's "most important side effect for the world of human culture" (Staiti 2014a: 271), but rather the logical conclusion of his philosophy.[11] Husserl's disagreement with Fink over who was doing phenomenology and why was, as we shall see, the decisive crossroads on this path, and the transition from the humanity *of the phenomenologist* to humanity *as such* was a centrally important theoretical issue.

Finally, a few words on interpretation. Fink's position sketched out in this discussion clearly presents only a small subset of his thought, limited to a few years very early in his career. That we find there a thinker with an intimate knowledge of Husserl's work, as well as a thinker of staggering ambition and originality, is a testament to Fink's philosophical genius. However, he was no more immune to the intricate context of the time than Husserl, and no less prone to philosophical radicalization in the face of criticism. In any case, the somewhat unfavorable picture of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* that we end up painting will nevertheless hopefully show that that book was a product of a highly specific philosophical moment. This also means that it is not representative of Fink's later thought, the discussion of which we omit completely, as it is irrelevant to our discussion of Husserl.

The situation is more complicated in Husserl's case. Taken separately, the claims we will be exploring and arguing for against the backdrop of his various manuscripts are relatively modest, and occasionally appear even before the work with Fink. However, when read together, these claims – that the transcendental ego is a specific theoretical-practical mode of the mundane ego and that the motives for adopting it develop from existential and ethical concerns, for example – do point to a somewhat 'softer' understanding of transcendental phenomenology. This 'softening up' has usually been understood as dangerous flirting with existentialism or anthropology, and seen as undermining the basic transcendental-scientific impulses

[10] We are ignoring here the meta-philosophical (but also socio-political and historical) question of the genealogy and coherence of supposedly universal concepts such as 'humanity', 'mankind', and 'rationality'. Clearly, even philosophical categories purporting universality necessarily reflect some specific and relatively localized history, and are therefore partly parochial. An aspect of this issue is perhaps discernible in phenomenology's fraught relation to presuppositions: while transcendental phenomenology wants to set itself up as a presuppositionless science, that very ideal grows out of a specific historical understanding of the nature and scope of science. What Husserl correctly understands toward the later part of his career is that transcendental science should work on carefully selecting the presuppositions it wants to adopt, instead of trying to eliminate them altogether.

[11] Staiti's otherwise excellent book makes no mention of Fink, which is a strange omission for a work which aims to provide "a critical study of Husserl's late work." (2014a: 1). Nevertheless, it is a book very much worth reading, and in the context which interests us here, its eighth chapter is particularly illuminating.

of Husserl's project. Any such 'anthropological interpretation' of phenomenology, it has been argued, "… was a complete misreading, possibly the most serious misinterpretation ever made in the field of phenomenology." (Kelkel 1991: 35). Some commentators have held that any existential reading of Husserl's project was similarly misguided, and have argued that such interpretations were "incredible" and in need of challenging (Embree 1999: xi). However, it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of such overly reductive approaches to Husserl's philosophy while still maintaining that transcendental phenomenology must be able to understand itself as a human undertaking, regardless of its possible focus on formal sciences and philosophy of science. Indeed, as we try to show, the only way to fully understand that focus, and the methods accompanying it, is by adopting a broader perspective on the role and scope of philosophy itself. This is something Husserl understood better than most philosophers of science.

To be sure, accommodating the broader human reality in such a philosophical project means allowing for the possibility of imperfect explanation, ineradicable ambiguity, and open-ended goals. The phenomenological reduction is no longer understood as a philosophical 'coming back home' to transcendental subjectivity, because a partially obscure starting point of research cannot yield any particular knowledge in advance, least of all any knowledge of structures seemingly disclosable only after taking a radical philosophical plunge. Some unclarity is thus installed into the very concept of motivation for phenomenology, but this unclarity is reflective of the peculiar starting point of the phenomenologist. Husserl and Fink decisively showed that this peculiarity of the philosophical beginning must itself become part of phenomenological systematics. In what follows, we turn our attention to the twists and turns of their many attempts to shed light on this moment on the brink of philosophy, and see how they, in turn, illuminate both phenomenology and those pursuing it.