

## THE PERSON AND THE COMMON LIFE

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JAMES G. HART

THE PERSON AND THE COMMON LIFE  
Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics

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Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics

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*To Jenni*

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## Preface

What follows attempts to synthesize Husserl's social ethics and to integrate the themes of this topic into his larger philosophical concerns. Chapter I proceeds with the hypothesis that Husserl believed that all of life could be examined and lived by the transcendental phenomenologist, and therefore action was not something which one did isolated from one's commitment to being philosophical within the noetic-noematic field. Therefore besides attempting to be clear about the meaning of the reduction it relates the reduction to ethical life. Chapter II shows that the agent, properly understood, i.e., the person, is a moral theme, indeed, reflection on the person involves an ethical reduction which leads into the essentials of moral categoriality, the topic of Chapter IV. Chapter III mediates the transcendental ego, individual person, and the social matrix by showing how the common life comes about and what the constitutive processes and ingredients of this life are. It also shows how the foundations of this life are imbued with themes which adumbrate moral categoriality discussed in Chapter IV. The final Chapters, V and VI, articulate the communitarian ideal, "the godly person of a higher order," emergent in Chapters II, III and IV, in terms of social-political and theological specifications of what this "godly" life looks like.

Although this work has the sustained purpose of presenting Husserl's social ethics with the unifying threads just mentioned, it is comprised of numerous studies which by reason of their complexity often assume the guise of being relatively independent of the overall narrative. These studies use Husserl's writings as a vehicle "to the issues themselves." In this respect they resemble the scholastic treatises and manuals written, e.g., "according to the teachings of St. Thomas." Thus this work is written in the spirit of a transcendental phenomenological scholasticism *secundum sententias Edmundi*. Because allegiance to such a tradition resembles a contingent fideism and inauthentic appropriation of culture the Husserlian resolve to remain perpetually a beginner of a philosophic community of inquiry takes on the sense of a mandate rather than a confession of one's humble attainments. Such a sustained concern with beginnings and dialogue makes this kind of tradition aspire to be more than merely one tradition among others even though access to its discussions requires prior initiation and familiarity with its concepts and distinctions.

Another feature of this study must be noted. Many of Husserl's familiar positions are not fully and properly grasped by the student or Husserl himself until the social-ethical and theological aspects of his thought are made explicit. One works philosophically also when one confronts and supplements a thinker's well-known and central thoughts with his or her less well-known or seemingly peripheral ones in an effort to find consistency and the fuller picture. In these senses much of Husserl's own philosophical work is still to be done. As an Husserlian scholasticism this book not only takes as its starting point Husserl's writings and takes account of the sizeable body of commentaries, secondary literature, etc., but it also hopes to initiate reflection on a series of issues which can be the touchstones for thinking about social philosophy within a framework which encompasses both transcendental phenomenology and contemporary issues.

Ullrich Melle has pointed out a special difficulty for the reader of this book: it develops a theoretical position on the basis of texts of Husserl which, to a great extent, have not yet been published and therefore the reader has the doubly difficult task of not only determining the merits of the theories built on Husserl's ideas but also of being at a disadvantage in determining in what sense these texts are Husserlian. For the most part, whenever I thought a particular text helped make my case I have rendered a translation of the Husserl text. I also referred to it according to the Archival signature – the original pages when possible. These latter are identifiable usually by the page (the final number) appearing with a letter of the alphabet, e.g., A V 21, 101a. When I was not able to cite the original text I cited the pages of the archival transcription; these latter pages usually appear without the alphabet signature, e.g., A V 21, 101.

I am happy to acknowledge the antecedents of this book to which I am indebted. First of all two books awakened my interest in Husserl's wider philosophical positions by bringing together in a tantalizing systematic way excerpts from numerous *Nachlass* texts: Alwin Diemer, *Edmund Husserl* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1965) and Alois Roth, *Edmund Husserls Ethische Untersuchungen* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960). René Toulemon's *L'essence de la société selon Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962) remains a rich synthesis as well as a source of published and unpublished texts which chart the basic areas of Husserl's social philosophy in a pioneering synthetic manner. Michael Theunissen's *Der Andere: Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965) is an encompassing study and survey of twentieth century social ontology, the richest pages of which perhaps are those devoted to Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. His perhaps most important yet underdeveloped theme is also central to this work, namely the "we" of dialogue and community. Bernhard Waldenfels' *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs: Sozialphilosophische Untersuchungen in Anschluss an Edmund Husserl* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971) is likewise an achievement of almost encyclopedic proportions. It is a synthesis of Husserl and a critique from the perspective of dialogical thought. As will become evident in this work I agree with the general political direction Waldenfels wished to move toward but

I also think there are aspects of Husserl's thought which are more congenial to that direction than Waldenfels seems to think. Although I scarcely refer to Waldenfels, in some respects this work is a response of (a possible) Husserl to (early) Waldenfels. In other respects it supplements Waldenfels' work with more explicit ethical considerations. Karl Schuhmann's recent learned study of Husserl's political theory *Husserl's Staatsphilosophie* (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 1988) appeared when this book was basically finished. I briefly discuss it in the final chapter.

The writings of Thomas Prufer, Robert Sokolowski, Iso Kern, and Klaus Held may be singled out as providing the most pervasive influence on my reading of Husserl – but no responsibility may be assigned to them for how their influence bore fruit or failed to be fertile in this book.

Special thanks are due to the Husserl-Archives Louvain for the use of unpublished Husserl materials, to Steven Laycock and Ullrich Melle for their steady encouragement and comments on early versions of this work. My colleagues in the Religious Studies Department at Indiana University are thanked for the occasional colloquia in which early versions of parts of this work were thrust upon them; their collegial response is appreciated.

The communitarian conclusion is indebted in countless ways to my community friends, especially Mike and Nancy, Bill and Glenda, Darryl and Vivian, Richard and Patricia, Hal and Jill, and Dan; it is owed in deeper ways to my family friends, Jenni, Mechthild, Beth, Jessie and Emma; special thanks are due to my daughter Jenni, to whom I dedicate this book, for helping me learn the proper sense of “we.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I have cited the Husserl texts from *Husserliana* (Nijhoff and Kluwer, 1950 ff.) in the body of the work as *Hua* with the volume number in Roman numerals. When possible I have also given the English translation. Because this interpretation regards the social-ethical positions which often connect to Husserl's philosophical theology I have taken the liberty of referring to my earlier studies. Here are the abbreviated forms of the references with their fuller title:

1) “A Précis...” refers to “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology” in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, ed. Steven Laycock and James Hart (Albany: SUNY, 1986).

2) “Zen Buddhism and Transcendental Phenomenology...” refers to “Zen Buddhism and Transcendental Phenomenology: A Start of a Conversation,” *Zen Buddhism Today*. Annual Report of the Kyoto Zen Symposium, No. 5 (1987), 145–160.

3) “From *Mythos* to *Logos* ...” refers to “From *Mythos* to *Logos* to Utopian Poetics,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, 25 (1989), 147–169.

4) “Divine Truth...” refers to “Divine Truth in Husserl and Kant: Some Issues in Phenomenological Theology,” in *The Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion*, ed. Daniel Guerrière (Albany: SUNY, 1990); note that there

are numerous serious editorial mistakes in this deleted printed version.

5) “Phenomenological Time...” refers to “Phenomenological Time: Its Religious Significance” forthcoming in *Time and Religion*, ed. J.N. Mohanty.

6) “Constitution and Reference” refers to “Constitution and Reference in Husserl’s Phenomenology of Phenomenology,” in *Husserl Studies* 6 (1989), 43–72.

7) “Entelechy...” refers to “Entelechy in Transcendental Phenomenology: A Sketch of the Foundations of Husserlian Metaphysics,” forthcoming in the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, formerly *New Scholasticism*, (1992).

Part of Chapter VI was presented at a colloquim at Freiburg University organized by Ashraf Noor. Another part of Chapter VI was presented at the American Academy of Religions. For a more sustained treatment of the (Kernian) theory of reason presented here, i.e., as self-displacing and re-presenting, see “The Rationality of Culture and the Culture of Rationality,” to appear in *Philosophy East & West* (1992). A further elaboration of the themes of culture may be found in “The Entelechy and Authenticity of Culture,” to appear in *Husserl Studies*. For an elaboration of transcendental idealism as philosophy within the noetic-noematic correlate see “Being’s Mindfulness: the Noema of Transcendental Idealism,” to appear in a volume on the noema, edited by John Drummond and Lester Embree, published by the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America.

Earlier versions of parts of Chapters III and V appear in my “I, We, and God: Ingredients of Husserl’s Theory of Community,” in *Husserl-Ausgabe und Husserl-Forschung*, ed. S. IJsseling (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), 125–149. An earlier and different version of some parts of Chapters II and IV appears as “Axiology as the Form of Purity of Heart,” in *Philosophy Today* (1990). My thanks to the editors of these volumes for permission to use this material. Finally, thanks to Professor Samuel IJsseling, Director of the Husserl Archives in Louvain, for permission to quote from Husserl’s *Nachlaß* and for the courtesy extended by the Archives.