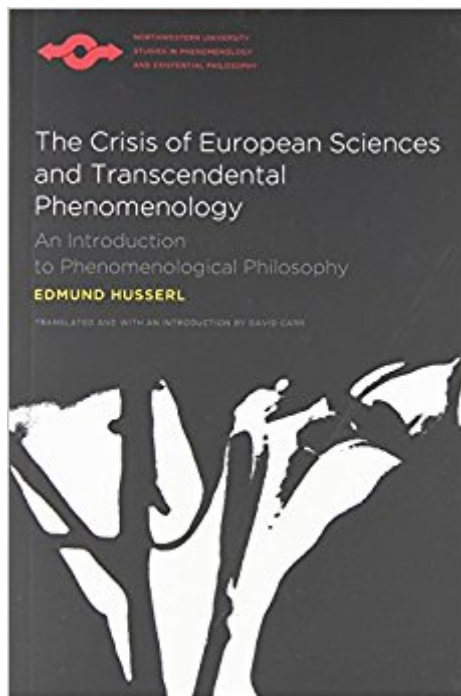


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The Crisis Of European Sciences And Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction To Phenomenological Philosophy (Northwestern University Studies In Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy)



Synopsis

The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, Husserl's last great work, is important both for its content and for the influence it has had on other philosophers. In this book, which remained unfinished at his death, Husserl attempts to forge a union between phenomenology and existentialism. Husserl provides not only a history of philosophy but a philosophy of history. As he says in Part I, "The genuine spiritual struggles of European humanity as such take the form of struggles between the philosophies, that is, between the skeptical philosophies--or nonphilosophies, which retain the word but not the task--and the actual and still vital philosophies. But the vitality of the latter consists in the fact that they are struggling for their true and genuine meaning and thus for the meaning of a genuine humanity."

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Customer Reviews

It is somewhat ironic that Phenomenology, as a term or as a philosophical school, has yet to really reach the popular consciousness, given that phenomenology is in many respects a study of consciousness and how reality impacts consciousness. Phenomenology in the most formal sense of being a school of philosophy is largely traced to Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl's great work at the turn of the last century, Logical Investigations, set the stage for the development of phenomenology as a way of seeing, a descriptive study with roots in empiricism going back to inspiration from Aristotelian ideas. This is a key word - description. Rather than being a set of constructs and principles typical of previous philosophical systems,

Phenomenology attempts to describe reality fully as reality is presented to our senses. Phenomenology is different from scientific study in that it does not pretend toward a universal truth or experience unmediated through our subjectivity (a principle modern science seems to be incorporating more and more). Editor Dermot Moran has a solid introduction to the subject, including distinctions of different kinds of study, some of the personalities involved in the development of phenomenology, and the current state of the discipline. This book by Husserl is one written late in his career. The Nazi party was well on its way to taking complete power in Germany, and other forces of despair were very present in the Western culture. Husserl's protege Heidegger had gone from phenomenology to existentialism, a philosophical framework that Husserl distrusted, but understood as completely in keeping with the overall crisis of meaning and purpose that he saw taking root in society at its very core.

Husserl is a tremendous apologist of "philosophy as rigorous science." This volume ("The Crisis") serves as the philosopher's clearest and most distinct exposition of the problems that beset modern Civilization and that still prevent many of us from appreciating an understanding of reality unmediated by empiricist and historicist biases. Most succinctly, Husserl has shown how and why it is possible for practical judgment to remain unbiased, and for theoretical/pure reason to remain in touch with life. Husserl has helped later generations re-discover a rational/classical alternative to both modern reason and modern irrationalism. With Husserl, the critique of modernity points to a reason above "the machine." That is why Husserl rejected the anti-rationalist disposition displayed by his brilliant student, Martin Heidegger, whose inconclusive turn to pre-Socratic Wisdom arguably suffered from an inadequate understanding of the Socratic/"mediating/moderating" Quest for wisdom. With Husserl, two options were disclosed to public attention: 1) a "new [atheistic, nihilistic] thinking" finding its core representation in Heideggerian "Existentialism"; 2) Classical (pre-Cartesian, non-Machiavellian) Rationalism, or "rational life" not subject to the Cartesian tendency to decay into the historicization and mechanization of reason/philosophy. Most scholars today have found a way to dilute "Existentialism" to a degree that makes it possible to place "Existentialism" at the service of the powers that be (conformism). Among the very few who prefer to seek out a classical, non-historicist understanding of reason and history, we find two of Husserl's students--Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss.

"The Crisis of European Sciences" is an unfinished work by the early 20th century phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. Husserl's aim with his philosophical research was to establish a new type of

philosophy which would create a foundation for knowledge out of the human mind itself. He argued that although Western science was capable of explaining the natural world through materialist empiricism, that a real understanding of the human self requires that the phenomenon of the human experience be the starting point of philosophy, and that this understanding could potentially serve as a philosophical grounding for the sciences. All human beings experience the world in ways that are structured by consciousness, such as Kant argued, but for Husserl, the Enlightenment attempts at creating a firm epistemology fell short. In order to elucidate the relationship his own philosophy has to the Enlightenment tradition, Husserl recounts the history of Enlightenment epistemology, his reasons for finding traditional scientific empiricism to be insufficient for philosophy, and the structure of his phenomenology. Although "Crisis" is an unfinished work, I found it to be an excellent introduction to Husserl's philosophy. Previously, I had only known about Husserl in reference to his influence on Heidegger. I felt this book to be an adequate corrective to this shortcoming on my part. Husserl begins "Crisis" by explaining his reasons for writing it. In the post-WWI world, European academia was experiencing a wave of neo-Romanticism, along with a general notion that science was incapable of solving Europe's cultural and political problems. Husserl had spent much of his celebrated career developing a new foundation for rationalism.

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