CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHENOMENOLOGY

IN COOPERATION WITH
THE CENTER FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH IN PHENOMENOLOGY

Volume 76

Scope

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L'ubica Učník • Ivan Chvatík • Anita Williams
Editors

The Phenomenological Critique of Mathematisation and the Question of Responsibility

Formalisation and the Life-World

Springer

Contents

The Phenomenological Critique of Formalism: Responsibility and the Life-World

Ľubica Učník, Anita Williams, and Ivan Chvatík

Abstract Self-responsibility and self-critique have been themes in philosophy since Plato's Socrates endorsed the demand to 'know thyself' [γνωθι σαυτον]. In the modern philosophical tradition, self-critical reason, a reason that gives the law to itself, has been at the very centre of the practice of both epistemology and ethics. In the twentieth century, the European phenomenological philosophers Edmund Husserl and Jan Patočka brought new clarity and a sense of urgency to the critical thinking surrounding the need for responsibility. Using Husserl's and Patočka's thinking as the starting point for a critical reflection, this volume proposes different approaches to reflect upon the increasing formalisation of all aspects of our lives, which is particularly relevant for the present age.

Keywords Formalisation • Mathematisation • Life-world • Responsibility

> Husserlian theory of modern science is nothing other than a reflection on the perils of fruitfulness, on the ruses of genius, on the irrationality which rationality itself endangers – not, to be sure, necessarily, yet not wholly accidentally, either. (Might not this shadowy side of rationality, this negative aspect of science, lie at the roots of certain specific evils that not only occasioned the catastrophe that Husserl sought to prevent with his reflections but that, unfortunately, are also still very much with us?) (Patočka 1989 [1971]: 226).

Our aim is to contribute to debates surrounding the prevalence of the formalisation of knowledge leading to an instrumentalisation of the world that is oblivious to human lives, with their everyday needs, hopes and aims. Contributors concentrate on the issues of formalisation and the ethics of responsibility, founded

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Everydayness, Historicity and the World of Science: Husserl's Life-World Reconsidered

Dermot Moran

Abstract Husserl is credited with introducing the term 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) into twentieth-century philosophy. Many European philosophers – including Jan Patočka, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, and Hans Blumenberg – have embraced Husserl's conception and have integrated it into their own thinking albeit interpreted in different ways. Husserl introduces the life-world in his *Crisis of European Sciences* Section 9 (1936) as the "forgotten meaning fundament of natural science" and goes on, in the course of that work, to characterise the life-world in not entirely compatible ways. Despite the large literature on Husserl's conception written since then, in many ways the concept remains deeply problematic. In this paper, I trace the main contours of Husserl's concept and I argue that the life-world as the ultimate context and horizon of human experience must be thought of not just as the counterpart of the scientific world, but as the inherently communal world, the world 'for others', the world available 'for everyone' (*für jedermann*), the historical world.

Keywords Phenomenology • History • Historicity • Life-world • Husserl

> In Husserl's later work the magic word *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) appears – one of those rare and wonderful artificial words (it does not appear before Husserl) that have found their way into the general linguistic consciousness, thus attesting to the fact that they bring an unrecognized or forgotten truth to language. So the word "*Lebenswelt*" has reminded us of all the presuppositions that underlie all scientific knowledge. (Gadamer 1998: 55)[1]

In the three-quarters of a century since Husserl announced his conception of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) as the "forgotten meaning fundament of natural science" in Section 9 on 'Galileo's Mathematization of Nature' in his *Crisis of European*

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[1] As I shall point out below, it is inaccurate for Gadamer to claim that the word '*Lebenswelt*' does not appear before Husserl; the term is listed, for instance, in Grimm's *Deutsche Wörterbuch* of 1885, see Editor's Introduction in Husserl 2008: xlvi.

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Sciences (Husserl 1970),[2] a section written in 1936, much has been written to clarify Husserl's concept; and yet it remains deeply problematic. Many twentieth-century European philosophers – including Jan Patočka (Patočka 1976, 2008 [1936]), Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1984, 1987),[3] Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1995: 69 ff)[4] and Hans Blumenberg (Blumenberg 1986) – have embraced Husserl's conception and have integrated it into their own thinking.

As early as 1936, prior even to the publication of Husserl's *Crisis* articles in *Philosophia* (which actually appeared in early 1937), the young Czech philosopher and student of Husserl, Jan Patočka, published his Habilitation thesis in Czech entitled *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (Patočka 2008 [1936]). In this original and groundbreaking work, Patočka employed Husserl's concept of the life-world as a way of understanding communal human existence and applying it to Heideggerian problems connected to historicity and finitude.

Similarly, the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schütz was drawn to the concept of the life-world early on. Already in Husserl's lifetime, Schütz wrote on human natural and social experience in his *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (translated as *The Phenomenology of the Social World*) (Schütz 1972, 1974 [1932]); a work that was praised by Husserl, and which appeared 4 years before Husserl's own *Crisis* (1936) but was based on close contact with the Freiburg master. In his 1932 work, Schütz distinguishes three kinds of world on the basis of relation to temporality: the "world of contemporaries" (*soziale Mitwelt*), "world of predecessors" (*Vorwelt*) and the "world of one's successors" (*Folgewelt*), as well as the social world of the present, which he calls "the realm of directly experienced social reality" (Schütz 1972: 142–144).[5] Schütz also explicitly invokes the "environment" (referring to Husserl 1983: §41),[6] which he defines as "that part of the external world that I directly apprehend", including not just natural objects but social objects, languages, and so on (Schütz 1972: 170). This is what Schütz calls "the world of the we" (Schütz 1972: 171). It is the public social world. In his analyses Schütz emphasises the stratification of the life-world into zones and hierarchies, the manner in which experience is "typified" (organised around identifiable empirical types such as 'dog', 'tree' and so on), and the manner in which a background has to

have *relevance* to the issue on hand in order to motivate action (see Schütz 1966b). In his later publications, written in the USA in English (see, for instance, Schütz 1966a), Schütz wrote extensively on the life-world and, through his work, it became an important theme in American sociology, especially in the 1970s (see Schütz and Luckmann 1973).

The German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984, 1987),[7] acknowledges that he borrowed his concept of the life-world from Husserl and Schütz (see Rasmussen 1984). Following Husserl, Habermas emphasises the 'always already there' character of immediate certainty that belongs to this world (Habermas 1998b: 243). Thus he defines life-world as the "horizon within which communicative actions are 'always already' moving" (Habermas 1987: 119).

Similarly, for Habermas, as for Husserl, the life-world is the overall 'horizon' within which human agents act. It is the culturally transmitted and linguistically structured backdrop of all meaningfulness in our human lives. According to Habermas, Husserl's life-world "forms a counter-concept to those idealizations that first constitute the object domain of the natural sciences" (Habermas 1998a: 239). It is an explicitly concrete notion. However, Habermas goes on to criticise Husserl for not also recognising (due to what Habermas claims is Husserl's blindness to "linguistic intersubjectivity") that the life-world itself demands certain idealisations, namely the *validity claims* that transcend local circumstances, and are carried by the linguistic practices of the community. Life-world, for Habermas, is made possible only through intersubjective communicative action. Thus Habermas proposes to relinquish "the basic concepts of the philosophy of consciousness in which Husserl dealt with the problem of the lifeworld", so as to understand the life-world as "represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretive patterns" (Habermas 1987: 124). For him, language and communication are constitutive of the life-world. On the other hand, Habermas sides with Husserl in being interested not so much in the factical features of specific life-worlds but rather in the invariant formal structural features according to which the life-world functions as a horizon for communication and discourse.

The German philosopher of transcendental semiotics, Karl-Otto Apel, similarly acknowledges positively the "quasi-transcendental status" of the pre-given life-world in Husserl but sides with Martin Heidegger in believing this world to be historically conditioned, public, and linguistically mediated; conceptions Apel believes (erroneously, I would maintain, in the light of my account in this paper) to be missing from what he characterises as Husserl's "evidence–theoretic" conception (Apel 1998). In fact, a long line of German thinkers including Theodor Adorno (see, for instance, Adorno 1940),[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer (especially in his

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[2] German edition: Husserl 1954. This edition includes Parts I and II of the *Crisis* published in Husserl 1936, the text of Part III (prepared for publication by Husserl but withdrawn) as well as a selection of associated documents. It is partially translated by David Carr (Husserl 1970). Hereafter the *Crisis of European Sciences* will be cited as '*Crisis*', followed by the page number of the Carr translation (where available) and followed by the Husserliana volume square brackets. For a commentary on the *Crisis* including a discussion of the life-world, see Moran 2012.

[3] Note especially the title of Volume II, subtitled *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*.

[4] He explicitly invokes Husserl's notion of the world as the horizon of all meaning, and the 'life-world' as the "unproblematic background of assumption" (Luhmann 1995: 70).

[5] Schütz credits Schiller for the term *Folgewelt*.

[6] German edition: Husserl 1976. Henceforth, English translation cited with German page reference, which is included in the margins of the translation.

[7] Especially Volume II (Habermas 1987).

[8] In this text Adorno makes reference to Husserl's *Philosophia* articles as situating psychologism in the whole history of modern philosophy from Descartes.

Truth and Method) (Gadamer 2004: esp. 243–254),[9] Helmuth Plessner, Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse 1964: 162–166),[10] Klaus Held (Held 2003), Bernhard Waldenfels (see, for instance, Waldenfels 1990, 1995), Dieter Lohmar (see the essays in Mall and Lohmar 1993) and Elmar Holenstein (Holenstein 1998) have all been directly influenced by Husserl's late reflections on the life-world in the *Crisis*, and have incorporated this notion into their own work.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this long tradition of invocation and discussion of the life-world, the deep meaning and transcendental sense of Husserl's concept of the life-world remains troublingly obscure.[11] In this paper, therefore, I shall examine Husserl's scattered remarks about the life-world (primarily in *Crisis*, especially §§33–38, §43, and §51), in order to try to present a coherent exposition of this influential yet ambiguous concept. I shall explicate how the 'life-world', for Husserl, is both an empirical and a transcendental concept. Furthermore, I shall address the question as to how the life-world can function both as a universal *ground* (*Grund, Boden*) of all experience and as a potential *horizon* (*Horizont*) for experience. Husserl characterises the life-world in both ways and they certainly appear to be in tension with each other. Overall, I shall argue that Husserl's conception of the life-world as a dynamic historical horizon for human activity pushes the concept in the direction of the 'historical *a priori*' which he was exploring in his late writings.

What Kind of Concept Is the Life-World?

The first question that must be asked is the following: what kind of concept is the concept of the *Lebenswelt*? Is it an empirical or a transcendental concept? Or does it somehow operate in both the empirical and transcendental domains?

The life-world, in Husserl's hands, is a rich and multifaceted notion with some apparently paradoxical or even contradictory features that have puzzled and frustrated even sympathetic commentators. Thus David Carr, the translator into English of Husserl's *Crisis*, for instance, speaks of "many faults and confusions in his (Husserl's) exposition" of the life-world (Carr 2004: 359). Similarly, Toru Tani points out that Husserl introduced the life-world primarily to offer a grounding and

unity to the concept of the world found in the natural sciences, and yet goes on in the *Crisis* to think of the life-world as the concrete historical world (Tani 2004 [1986]). The life-world is a world of cumulative tradition acquired through what Husserl calls *sedimentation* (*Sedimentierung*) (Husserl 1970: 362 [372]), according to which certain earlier experiences become passively enfolded in our ongoing experience, just as language retains earlier meanings in its etymologies. As Husserl says in the 'Origin of Geometry', "cultural structures, appear on the scene in the form of tradition; they claim, so to speak, to be 'sedimentations' (*Sedimentierungen*) of a truth-meaning that can be made originally self-evident" (Husserl 1970: 367 [377]). Indeed, Husserl speaks of 'sedimentation' as "traditionalization" (Husserl 1970: §9 h, 52 [52]).[12] In this sense, Husserl speaks of the life-world as a world of "living tradition" (Husserl 1970: 366 [376]). Husserl's former student Aron Gurwitsch correctly captures this aspect of life-world when he writes: "The term *Lebenswelt has essentially a historico-social connotation: a Lebenswelt is relative to a certain society at a given moment of its history*" (Gurwitsch 1957: 357, emphasis in original). Hans-Georg Gadamer, similarly, writes:

> The concept of the life-world is the antithesis of all objectivism. It is an essentially historical concept, which does not refer to the universe of being, to the 'existent world.' ... the life world means something else, namely the whole in which we live as historical creatures. (Gadamer 2004: 247)

This is an apt formulation: the life-world is that in which we live as historical and communal beings. It has to encompass the historical evolution of world.

Tani further wants to distinguish the life-world understood as "the world of transcendental life" from Alfred Schütz's conception of the life-world as the world of concrete daily life. Two questions have to be addressed: is Husserl's conception of the life-world a transcendental or a naturalistic conception? And is this exactly where the notion of the historical *a priori* comes into play?

Husserl's own discussion is confusing. He sometimes talks explicitly about the human life-world or human environment (*die menschliche Lebensumwelt*) and seems to be primarily interested in the kind of historical worlds (and world views) that humans have occupied in different cultures and at different times. In this regard, he speaks of 'life-worlds' in the plural. He rarely discusses non-human life-worlds, although he does talk of animals, plants and nature as forming part of the human life-world. On the other hand, as Rochus Sowa points out, Husserl's real focus is on the *a priori* essential (eidetic) structures that belong to any life-world whatsoever (Sowa 2010). He is in this sense interested in the eidetic laws that make possible worldhood as such, the nature of horizonality, the nature of temporalisation into the past and future, the manner in which intentional anticipations are directed within this life-world, the structures of sedimentation, and so on. Here Husserl insists on the *unity* of the life-world and its overall *universal*

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[9] In this section, Gadamer discusses Husserl's later conception of life in relation to Dilthey, Count Yorck and Heidegger. According to Gadamer, Husserl shares with Dilthey a distrust of the Neo-Kantian conception of the lifeless cognitive subject. Both wanted to infuse the transcendental subject with life. Husserl, however, in his later work, realised the importance of the phenomenon of world which is constituted by a "fundamentally *anonymous* intentionality" (Gadamer 2004: 246).

[10] Herbert Marcuse discusses Husserl's analysis of Galileo and the way in which a 'cloak of ideas' (*Ideenkleid*) has been cast over the natural world by the mathematical sciences. Marcuse takes Husserl's point further in emphasising that the sciences have always linked the projects of the domination of nature and the domination of humankind (Marcuse 1964: 166).

[11] Among the important recent discussions of the life-world are Sowa 2010 and Luft 2011.

[12] Husserl usually employs the verb 'to sediment' (*sedimentieren*) or the verbal noun 'sedimentation' (*Sedimentierung*); see, e.g. Husserl 1970: 149, 246, 362 [152, 249, 373].

structure. In order to make clear how Husserl's use of the term developed, let us look back over the occurrences of it in his works.

The Evolution of the Term *'Lebenswelt'* in Husserl

Husserl begins to use the term 'world' (*die Welt*) already in *Ideas* I,[13] where he speaks of world in terms of the "horizon" surrounding our perceptions, and of the "world of appearance" (*Erscheinungswelt*) (Husserl 1983: §41) and the "world of experience" (*Erfahrungswelt*) (Husserl 1983: §§47–48). The "natural, surrounding world" (*die natürliche Umwelt* is discussed in *Ideas* I in terms of the experience of life in the natural attitude (Husserl 1983: §§27–29). He even uses the term "environment" (*Umgebung*), but the term *Lebenswelt* does not begin to appear in his research writings until his Freiburg period, from around 1917. The term *Lebenswelt* has only a marginal appearance – it occurs a total of four times – in the *Cartesian Meditations*, all in Section 58 (Husserl 1960).[14] Husserl's *Crisis*, therefore, remains the main locus in Husserl's published works (i.e. the works he published during his own lifetime) for the term. The *Crisis* offers an extensive yet somewhat formal treatment of the concept of the 'life-world' or 'world of life' (*Lebenswelt*). It is in the *Crisis* that Husserl claims to have uncovered the life-world as a fundamental and novel phenomenon previously invisible to the sciences and to have identified it for the first time as a "universal problem" (Husserl 1970: §34). Indeed, there is – as Husserl himself insists – a specific and entirely new science of the life-world itself that would, among other things, offer a new basis for grounding the natural and human sciences (Husserl 1970: §51). There never has been such an investigation of the 'life-world' as "subsoil" (*Untergrund*) for all forms of theoretical truth (Husserl 1970: 125 [127]). This science of the life-world would be descriptive of the life-world in its own terms, bracketing conceptions intruding from the natural and cultural sciences (this requires a special *epochē*, as Husserl says in Husserl 1970: §36), and identifying the "types" (*Type*) and "levels" (*Stufe*) that belong to it. In this sense, Husserl speaks of an "ontology of the life-world" (*Ontologie der Lebenswelt*) (see Husserl 1970: §51; 1992: 140). For Husserl, the life-world is thus uncovered as a new theme for science, and as a new domain for scientific exploration. The problem of the life-world as discussed by Husserl is related to a cluster of other notions, including "horizon" (*Horizont*), "surrounding world" (*Umwelt*),[15] "environment" (*Umgebung*),[16] "world view" (Husserl uses various terms including *Weltanschauung* and *Weltvorstellung*), and even the late concept of "generativity" (*Generativität*); i.e. the manner in which human lives intersect across a chain of generations, leading to the overall and complex problem of the constitution of 'tradition' and indeed the "a priori of history". Finally, in Husserl, the life-world has to be understood as both the "personal world" (*die persönliche Welt*) and the "historical world". Paradoxically, the life-world, as the personal, historical world, is not just opposed to the 'world of science' but also includes it. Husserl's life-world, then, is a complex notion that needs a great deal of unpacking.

In his lectures that were published posthumously as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1910/1911),[17] Husserl's interest in what later became the life-world is found initially in his discussion of the "natural concept of the world" as found in Richard Avenarius (Avenarius, 2005 [1891]). *Ideas* II also contains a long discussion of the "spiritual world" (*die geistige Welt*), and indeed it is in one of the supplementary texts associated with *Ideas* II that we find *Lebenswelt* used for the first time (Husserl 1989: 284, 374–375).[18] In this supplement Husserl writes that the "life-world of persons escapes natural science" (Husserl 1989: 375). The term 'life-world' also appears in Husserl's Kant Society lecture of 1924 (Husserl 1965c: 232), in the lecture course *Phenomenological Psychology*, 1925 (Husserl 1968: 240, 491, 496),[19] where it is given extensive treatment and the idea of a twofold science of the life-world (empirical and *a priori*) is first raised[20]; as well as in the supplements to

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[13] On the various senses of 'world' in Husserl, see Bernet 1990. *Ideas* I is famous or notorious for its thought experiment concerning the possible "annihilation of the world" (*Weltvernichtung*).

[14] French translation: Husserl 1931. The German text was not published until 1950 (Husserl 1950). Hereafter referred to with English and [German] page numbers. The term 'life-world' appears four times in *Cartesian Meditations* §58 (Husserl 1960: 133–136 [160–163]) in regard to the topic of the "constitution of humanity" as an I that lives in a plurality of other I's in an overall "surrounding world" [*Umwelt*] (Husserl 1960: 133, 135 (twice), 136 [160, 162, 163]). Of course, the term *Lebenswelt* was in use in Husserl's manuscripts from around 1917 and in Heidegger's lectures from 1919.

[15] At times Husserl tends to use "life-world" and "surrounding world" (*Umwelt*) as equivalent terms, but at times he also differentiates them. "Surrounding world" [*Umwelt*] – Cairns's and Carr's translation to capture the '*Um-*' which means 'around' or 'surrounding' – is sometimes given a more restricted meaning, for example, for the 'habitat' of an animal; whereas 'life-world' is treated as a more fundamental context in which all meaningful activity and passivity occurs.

[16] Husserl tends to use the word '*Umgebung*' (Cairns and Carr translate this primarily as 'environment') for the narrow background against which perceptual objects appear; see Husserl 1960: 79 [113]; 1970: §72, 260 [264]; 1954: 480 & 487. Husserl speaks of the "I-environment" (*Ich-Umgebung*) and the "environment of persons that surrounds each of us". Overall, the term '*Umgebung*' has less than a dozen occurrences in the *Crisis* Husserliana VI edition. However, Husserl is not exact in his use of these terms and sometimes uses '*Umgebung*' in place of '*Umwelt*' for the habitat of animals and humans, see Husserl 1954: 354.

[17] These lectures were first printed as '*Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*' (Husserl 1973a). English translation: Husserl 2006. Hereafter followed by page numbers in English translation and [Husserliana volume]. See, for instance, Husserl's discussion of the "natural concept of the world, i.e., that concept of the world in the natural attitude" (Husserl 2006: 15 [125]).

[18] German edition: Husserl 1952. Here and henceforth, English translation cited with German page reference, which is included in the margins of the translation.

[19] Partially translated into English by John Scanlon (Husserl 1977). Henceforth, only German edition referenced.

[20] Rochus Sowa lays great stress on the importance of these 1925 lectures for first outlining Husserl's conception of an overall science of the life-world that can be pursued in both an empirical and an *a priori* eidetic manner (Sowa 2010).

Husserl speaks of the results of the phenomenological method as follows:

> The world took on an infinite wideness as soon as the actual life-world, the world in the 'how' of the givenness of mental process [*die wirkliche Lebenswelt, die Welt im Wie der Erlebnisgegebenheit*], was observed. It took on the whole range of the manifold subjective appearances, modes of consciousness, modes of possible position-taking; for it was, for the subject, never given otherwise than in this subjective milieu, and in purely intuitive description of the subjectively given there was no in-itself that is not given in subjective modes of the for-me or for-us, and the in-itself itself appears as a characteristic in this context and has to undergo therein its clarification of sense. (Husserl 1974b: 11 [232])[21]

In 1992, other important research manuscripts broadly associated with the *Crisis* – including the text of Husserl's Prague lectures of November 1935 – were published in German as Husserliana Volume XXIX with many new texts on Husserl's concept of life-world (Husserl 1992). A further large volume of writings on the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*), yielding a huge amount of new information, appeared as Husserliana Volume XXXIX in 2008 (Husserl 2008). These texts add greatly to our understanding of the life-world as Husserl came to understand it, but do not resolve the problems associated with it.

Of course, Husserl did not invent the term 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*), and in this regard Hans-Georg Gadamer is simply wrong to claim that he did. The German term '*Lebenswelt*' was already in use well before him. Indeed, the term has a pre-history in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century in, for instance, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsche Wörterbuch* of 1885 (see Husserl 1992: xlvi), where a reference is found to the use of the term by Ehrenberg in 1847. Somewhat later, in the early twentieth century, the poet Hugo von Hoffmansthal (around 1907/1908) and the life-philosophers Georg Simmel (in a work from 1913) and Rudolf Eucken also employed the word '*Lebenswelt*' in their writings. Another very similar word, '*Lebewelt*' (world of living things), is to be found among geologists and palaeontologists (e.g., Karl Diener, 1862–1928) to refer to the world of flora and fauna (the living world), and, indeed, Husserl himself uses both '*Lebewelt*' and '*Lebenswelt*' (Orth 2000). Thus, for example, Husserl himself already employs the word 'living world', or what one might call the 'organosphere' (*Lebewelt*), in *Ideas* I (Husserl 1983: 115 – it appears in all three editions published during his life). To complicate matters, the late editor of the Husserliana edition, Karl Schuhmann, replaced this term *Lebewelt*, which he assumed was a misprint, with the word '*Lebewesen*', based on a similar context in which that latter word appears in *Crisis* (Husserl 1970: §69, 239 [242]); which is, to my mind, an odd kind of reasoning. Why should an occurrence of a word in a later text be used to correct the occurrence of another word in an earlier text? It is actually more probable that the term is not a typographical error and that Husserl himself wanted to talk about the '*Lebewelt*'.

It is not clear whether Husserl knew of the occurrence of the term '*Lebenswelt*' as used by Georg Simmel and others. Presumably it was a term that was simply gaining currency at that time; it appears for instance in Martin Heidegger's early lecture courses from his Freiburg period (1919). As previously mentioned, the proximate source for Husserl's conception of life-world is actually Richard Avenarius's conception of the 'natural world', to which Husserl adverts in many of his writings, including the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* lecture course of 1910/1911 (Husserl 2006: esp. §§8–10, 12–28 [122–138] and Appendix III, 107–111 [196–199]). Husserl was deeply interested in the discussion of the 'pre-found' world of experience in Avenarius, an early positivist (1843–96),[22] and in the similar conception of the world of naive experience found in the philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach (1838–1916) (see, for instance, Mach 1914).

Richard Avenarius advocated a scientific view that was termed "empirio-criticism". According to this position, the natural concept of the world is simply an experience of the world as a constant stream of changing appearances (*Variationserscheinungen*). There is operative, for Avenarius, a "principle of co-ordination" (*Prinzipialkoordination*), according to which we experience constancy in this world of fluctuating experiences (Husserl 2006: 109 [198]). We encounter things already as "pre-found" (*das Vorgefundene*) in these experiences, and we attach "significance" (*Deutung*) or value to them. Furthermore, according to Avenarius, we experience others as having similar experiences to ourselves, and similarly we share an "experience of our environment" (*Umgebungserfahrung*) in which we are involved and which develops alongside us as we develop. Husserl admires much of Avenarius's description, which he takes to be a reasonably accurate description of our naive experience of the world, but he criticises Avenarius for not recognising the need for the application of the phenomenological *epochē*, or bracketing, which would allow this whole domain to come to light. In other words, Avenarius fails to recognise the need for the specifically *phenomenological attitude* (Husserl 2006: 110 [198]). Avenarius, according to Husserl's diagnosis, remains, then, a prisoner of naturalism, despite his own efforts to avoid metaphysical constructions and materialism in general.

As we have seen, 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*), for Husserl, is a term that has many significations, depending on the context, and the term takes on richer and richer significance in Husserl's later work. Thus A.F. Aguirre has summarised Husserl's treatment of the life-world in the *Crisis* under a number of helpful headings in relation to the sections of the work in which they appear (Aguirre 1982: 87):

- "the forgotten meaning-fundament of natural science" (*vergessenes Sinnesfundament der Naturwissenschaft*) (Husserl 1970: §9 h, 48 [48]);
- the unexplored presupposition for Kant's philosophy (Husserl 1970: §§28–32);

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[21] German edition: Husserl 1965a, b. Here and henceforth, English translation cited with page numbers in English and [German].

[22] The title literally means 'The Human Conception of the World'. Unfortunately, this book is not translated into English. Avenarius speaks of the world as 'pre-found' or 'found in advance' (*das Vorgefundene*). For Husserl's discussion of Avenarius, see Husserl 2006: 22–28 [132–138] & 107–111 [196–199].

- the pre-given world, the correlate of the natural attitude (Husserl 1970: §38);
- the theme of historians who try to reconstruct the life-worlds of peoples (Husserl 1970: §38 147 [150]);
- the theme of a non-transcendental ontology (Husserl 1970: §37);
- the theme of a transcendental science (Husserl 1970: §38);
- the unthematised horizon which has never been brought to explicit attention.

One could add further characterisations. Husserl often characterises the life-world as "intuitive" (*anschaulich*), "real" (*real*), "concrete" (*konkret*), in contrast to the world of mathematical natural science which is "objective", "ideal" and "abstract" (Biemel 2000). It connotes primarily the "world of experience" (*Erfahrungswelt*) as immediately given and intuited as something already there and 'taken-for-granted' or "obvious" (*selbstverständlich*). This is perhaps the oldest meaning in Husserl's discussions. As we saw above, Husserl introduces the term 'life-world' to encompass — or indeed sometimes replace – other terms he had been employing, including the "natural world" (*die natürliche Welt*), "the intuitively given surrounding world" (*die anschauliche Umwelt*) (Husserl 1970: §9a, §59), the "straightforwardly intuited world" (Husserl 1970: §33), the "taken-for-granted, pregiven world of experience, the world of natural life" (Husserl 1970: 204 [208]), the "environment" (*Umgebung*), the "world of experience" (*Erfahrungswelt, Erlebniswelt*), the world of culture (*Kulturwelt*) (Husserl 1968: 113), "world-life" (*Weltleben*), the "human world", and so on (Orth 1999: 132–136). These are in one sense all overlapping domains; on the other hand, it is normally the case that the positive sciences – both natural and human sciences – categorise these domains in different ways.

The most prominent characteristic that Husserl attributes to the life-world – and indeed the earliest characterisation of it that he offers – is that the life-world is always "pre-given" (*vorgegeben*), always "on hand" (*vorhanden*) (Husserl 2006: 107 [196]). Husserl speaks repeatedly of the phenomenon of the "pre-givenness" (*Vorgegebenheit*) of the world, prior to all theorising. In this sense, the life-world is insurmountable, and Husserl speaks of it as possessing a certain 'unsurpassability' (*Unhintergehbarkeit*). It cannot be shaken off or transcended; we cannot get behind it or leave it behind, as it were. Even the occupants of the Mir space station must bring their life-world with them, they need to have not just air, food, shelter and protection from physical threats, but also a genuinely human world, time for sleeping and eating, communication, a sense of belonging to a community, and so on. All this humans bring with them, just as – to use an image of Heidegger's, snails carry their shells on their backs.

One of Husserl's primary claims in the *Crisis* is that the life-world is the permanent backdrop (he sometimes uses the word *Hintergrund* (Husserl 1970: 189 [192])) of all our experience, although it is rarely foregrounded for explicit scientific examination:

Consciously we always live in the life-world; normally there is no reason to make it explicitly thematic for ourselves universally as world. (Husserl 1970: 379 [459])

As a background concept, Husserl's concept of the 'life-world' is not just a new additional broad term for the *world as a whole* (*Allwelt*), the totality of all things, and it is certainly not to be identified with the philosophical idea, later developed by the modern mathematical sciences, of 'the world in itself' (*Welt an sich*), or 'the true world' (*die wahre Welt*); rather, it is, as Bernhard Waldenfels puts it, a "polemic counter-concept" that Husserl introduces to counteract and correct various modern scientific and philosophical tendencies of conceiving the world, including the leading Neo-Kantian conception of world found among his contemporaries (Waldenfels 1998: 72). In this sense, Husserl's conceptualisation of the 'life-world' acts as a counterpoint to his analysis of the nature of formalised scientific knowledge and the manner in which technological advances made possible by this formalisation have shaped modern culture. It must be borne in mind that Husserl was writing at the very time when the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle[23] were advocating in opposition to everyday experience a 'scientific conception of the world' (*eine wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung* – the term itself is found in the *Manifesto* of the Vienna Circle).[24] According to the Vienna Circle *Manifesto*:

The scientific world conception is characterized not so much by theses of its own, but rather by its basic attitude, its points of view and direction of research. The goal ahead is unified science.

Husserl strongly opposes this attitude of scientisation of the life-world. In a supplement to *Ideas* II Husserl writes that "[t]he life-world of persons escapes natural science, even though the latter investigates the totality of realities" (Husserl 1989: 374). Furthermore, in *Ideas* II, Husserl sharply contrasts objects of nature in the scientific sense with everyday natural-attitude objects of experience:

In ordinary life [*im gewöhnlichen Leben*] we have nothing whatever to do with nature-objects [*Naturobjekten*]. What we take as things are pictures, statues, gardens, houses, tables, clothes, tools, etc. They are value-objects [*Wertobjekte*] of various kinds, use-objects [*Gebrauchsobjekte*], practical objects. They are not objects which can be found in natural science. [*Es sind kein naturwissenschaftlichen Objekte*]. (Husserl 1989: §11, 27)

Tables and chairs are not natural objects in the world alongside protons, neutrons and electrons. Scientific entities can be grasped only under a new and very special attitude. It is perhaps the case that Husserl did not pay enough attention to the distinction between objects which actually belong to the life-world but which can perhaps only be observed through microscopes or telescopes (because they are very

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[23] On the complex history of the Vienna Circle, logical positivism and logical empiricism, see Uebel 2003; Richardson and Uebel 2007; Stadler 2004, 2001.

[24] Between 1928 and 1937, the very period in which Husserl was developing his views on the *Lebenswelt*, the Vienna Circle published ten books in a collection named *Schriften zur wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung* (*Writings on the Scientific World-Conception*), edited by Moritz Schlick and Philipp Frank. For the text of the Manifesto of the Vienna Circle, see Sarkar 1996.

small, e.g. dust mites, or very far away) and theoretical entities which are unobservable.

The life-world also has an inescapably *subjective* and intersubjective character that cannot be completely objectified. The life-world is "a realm of subjective phenomena" (Husserl 1970: §29). It is the sphere of the "merely subjective relative" (*bloss subjektiv-relativ*), in contrast to what is objectively there as established by science. This intersubjective and personalistic sense of life-world is a complicating factor; it cannot simply be viewed – as the naturalized sociological sciences do – as simply the world of culture, understood in an objectified sense, as something ('behaviour') that can be studied objectively from the third-person standpoint. The personal character of world makes it a domain of appearing that is always perspectival, partial and one-sided, first and second personal. There can be no 'view from nowhere' (Husserl's follower Maurice Merleau-Ponty is perhaps the first to speak of *la vue de nulle part*) concerning the life-world.

Living in the World of 'Everydayness' (*Alltäglichkeit*) and Belief in Being (*Seinsglaube*)

The primary meaning of the life-world is, for Husserl, as we have seen, the "world of everyday experience" (*Alltagswelt*), the "intuitive" world (*die anschauliche Welt*) or the "pre-given" surrounding world (Husserl 1970: 47 [47]). In the *Crisis*, the term *Lebenswelt* first appears in Section 9h in the discussion of Galileo, where it is introduced as "the forgotten meaning-fundament of science" (Husserl 1970: 48 [48]). The life-world and its structures are precisely what get covered up by the "cloak of ideas" (*Ideenkleid*) of modern mathematical science. Husserl writes:

> Prescientifically, in everyday sense-experience, the world is given in a subjectively relative way. Each of us has his own appearances; and for each of us they count as [*gelten als*] that which actually is. In dealing with one another, we have long since become aware of this discrepancy between our various ontic validities [*Seinsgeltungen*]. But we do not think that, because of this, there are many worlds. Necessarily, we believe in the world, whose things only appear to us differently but are the same. (Husserl 1970: §9, 23 [20])

Husserl even speaks in the *Crisis* §72 of the "subscientific everydayness of natural life" (Husserl 1970: 260 [264]), here using the very term 'everydayness' (*Alltäglichkeit*), which has more usually been associated with Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962: §52).[25] Furthermore, and tellingly, both Husserl and Heidegger speak about *absorption* in everyday life, spontaneous "living along" (*Dahinleben*) (Heidegger 1962: 396 [345]). In discussing the everyday character of experience Husserl stresses the 'taken for granted nature' of reality, the manner in which things appear as definitely there, presented in the context of a

certain embodied experience of space, time and causality; whereas Heidegger stresses more the nature of everyday moods, indifference, and the experience of temporality (including being-towards death).

Husserl and Heidegger both use the German verbs '*dahinleben*' ('to vegetate') and '*hineinleben*' ('to take each day as it comes', 'to go with the flow') to express existence in the everyday world – living in an inauthentic manner, as Heidegger will say.[26] For Husserl, as for Heidegger (whose equivalent concept is 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-sein*) as elaborated in Heidegger 1962: §§12–13), human beings are beings who essentially live 'immersed' in a *world* understood as a vaguely defined context of meaning and action. As Husserl's student Ludwig Landgrebe writes (summarising Husserl):

> It is essentially impossible to find men in any 'pre-worldly' state, because to be human, to be aware of oneself as a man and to exist as a human self, is precisely to live on the basis of a world. (Landgrebe 1940: 53)

Unlike Heidegger, Husserl does not characterise everyday living in the world in a somewhat prejorative manner. It is not 'inauthentic' for Husserl, rather it is 'naive', living life 'with blinkers on' as he sometimes says. It is a kind of life that is asleep, unaware of itself. In one of the earliest occurrences of the term 'life-world', in Supplement XIII of *Ideas* II (written around 1917–18) Husserl writes (and note the reference also to 'functioning subjects'):

> The life-world is the natural world – in the attitude of natural life [*Einstellung des natürlichen Dahinleben*] we are living functioning subjects [*fungierende Subjekte*] together in an open circle of other functioning subjects. Everything objective about the life-world is subjective givenness, our possession, mine, the other's, and everyone's together. Subjects and possessions are not equal; the subjects *are*, without qualification, what is not personal is surrounding world, what is lived is lived experience of the surrounding world [*Umwelt*], and that holds also for what is seen and thought, etc. (Husserl 1989: 375)

Heidegger himself states that it has become commonplace to say that humans require a 'surrounding world' or 'environment' (*Umwelt*) but the deeper ontological meaning of this statement is not appreciated – to be in a world is an *a priori* character of human existence (Heidegger 1962: 84 [57–58]). Husserl's version of this claim is to speak of natural 'world-life' (*Weltleben*) (Husserl 1970: 51 [51])[27] and he indeed characterises humans as essentially belonging to the world, as being in his phrase, "children of the world" (*Weltkinder*); a term not used in the *Crisis* itself but occasionally found in other manuscripts from the 1920s and 1930s (Husserl 1965b: 169; 1968: §43 and pages 216, 239), where being a 'child of the world' is explicitly linked to living spontaneously in the naively experienced world of the natural attitude. In a supplementary text (No. 22) from the 1925

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[25] German edition: Heidegger 1977. Henceforth English translation is cited with page number of English translation and [German Edition].

[26] The German verb '*hineinleben*' means literally 'to live into', 'to immerse oneself into', but it is used in colloquial German expressions to mean 'to take each day as it comes' [*in der Tag hineinleben*]. Similarly '*dahinleben*' has the colloquial sense of 'to vegetate' or 'to live lazily'.
[27] The term 'world-life' (*Weltleben*) appears in Husserl 1970: 68 [69], 119 [121], 125 [127], 255 [259], 284 [331].

Phenomenological Psychology lectures in Husserliana Volume IX, he speaks of living as a "world-child" and then of disrupting this world, breaking with its implicit "worldly belief" (*Weltglaube*):

> We can be children of the world [*Weltkinder*], we stand 'on the ground of the world', we are in the world, [this is] completely self-evident. We have the straightforwardly valid world, and everything new that inserts itself into its open unknown horizon unrolls in new experiences, in new anticipations of thought. That is simply the case – we live in this belief. And now precisely we do not want to be children of the world any more, we no longer want 'to live straightforwardly in belief in the world', we do not 'live in' all the passive belief-motivations and in the active mental doings of believing and 'have' according to them now this or that being on the universal ground of the existing world [*auf dem universalen Boden der seienden Welt*] with all the special meanings [*Sondermeinungen*] and validities belonging to it, that we had earlier carried out, through which we [constitute] our surrounding world with the being-content and sense [*mit dem Seinsgehalt und Sinn*], that we had earlier acquired, and which is now for us a habitual acquisition, to which we can return to hold on to as our familiar possession. (Husserl 1968: 462, my translation)[28]

The aim of transcendental phenomenology is, as Husserl always insists, to disrupt the natural flow of our spontaneous living in the world with all its habitualities, beliefs, acceptances, and to experience what that brings to light; namely, the interwoven character of our constituting activities through which we give 'sense and being' (*Sinn und Sein* or *Seinssinn*) to our world and everything in it.

The Intertwining of Nature and Culture in the Life-World

The life-world is often used to mean the whole set of intentional experiences that we have both of nature and culture. In his 1925 *Phenomenological Psychology* lectures, where the natural conception of the world is given a fairly full exploration, Husserl speaks of the "intertwining" (*Verflechtung*) or interpenetration between

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[28] The German text (which is not translated in the *Phenomenological Psychology* volume) reads: *"Wir können Weltkinder sein, wir stehen 'auf dem Boden der Welt', wir sind in der Welt – ganz selbstverständlich. Wir haben die schlicht geltende Welt, und alles, was sich in ihrem offen unbekannten Horizont an Neuem einfügt in neuen Erfahrungen, in neuen Denkantizipationen, das ist einfach so und da – wir leben im Glauben. Und nun wollen wir eben nicht Weltkinder sein, wir 'leben nicht mehr schlicht im Weltglauben', wir 'leben nicht in' all den passiven Glaubens-motivationen und aktiven Denktätigkeiten des Glaubens und 'haben' ihnen gemäss nun dieses und jenes Seiende auf dem universalen Boden der seienden Welt mit all den zugehörigen Sondermeinungen (uns geltenden), die wir früher vollzogen hatten, durch die wir uns unsere Umwelt mit dem Seinsgehalt und Sinn, den sie für uns hat, früher erworben haben und der nun für uns habitueller Erwerb ist, auf den wir nur zurückgreifen als auf unsere altbekannte Habe"* (Husserl 1968: 462). The text in Husserliana IX is actually incorrect as some words have been omitted. I quote the corrected text here as confirmed by Thomas Vongehr of the Husserl Archives, Leuven. I am also grateful to Sebastian Luft for checking the text and translation.

nature (as the object of the sciences and natural experience) and spirit (as culture) (see *Phenomenological Psychology* §16). The life-world, then, has to be understood as including all the things (and events) that surround us in life as perceptual objects, instruments and tools, food, clothing, shelter, art objects, religious objects, and so on. The life-world therefore encompasses both the world of what has traditionally been designated as 'nature' (as it presents itself to us *in our everyday dealings* with it, including rocks, mountains, sky, plants, animals, planets, stars, and so on, but understood in a pre-scientific sense – in the manner in which I see the moon rising or moonlight reflected on a lake); as well as what is usually known as the world of 'culture', including ourselves, other persons, animals in their social behaviour especially as it intersects with our lives, social institutions, artefacts, symbolic systems such as languages, religions, cultures – in other words, our overall natural and cultural environing world. It is precisely "the world of our interests" (*Interessenwelt*) (Husserl 1973b: 138), practical and theoretical, pre-reflective and reflective, everything we are engaged in actively or passively. It is the world of *praxis* as he will later describe it in his Vienna lecture. But this world also widens out into the "infinite world", as Husserl points out (Husserl 1973b: 138 ff). There are no finite boundaries that can be drawn; the life-world expands indefinitely in all directions, including in our directions of thought.

In *Crisis* §34, Husserl insists that we could develop an "ontology of the life-world" which would document the different "ways of being" (*Seinsweise*) of life-world entities understood as utensils, artworks, talismans, tokens, and so on: i.e. things as they *mean* to us in their specific senses, as they have a certain "value and validity" (*Geltung*) for us rather than "things of nature" (*Naturobjekte*) in the sense of science (Husserl 1970: §34). The life-world, in this sense, contains tables, chairs, pens, lights, and so on (which must never be confused with physical objects as understood by the sciences, i.e. the objects of physics). These are physical things and cultural objects at the same time. We live in a "culture-things-environment" (*Kultur-Sachen-Umwelt*), in "our practical living environment" (*unsere praktische Lebensumwelt*) (Husserl 1973b: 138). Of course, this practical everyday world has always included technological tools, implements, and so on, and these have a historical character. We simply accept the existence of electricity, the colour of electrical light from street lamps, the background noise of cars on the highway in the distance, the jet trails that criss-cross the sky.

How, then, can Husserl maintain and exploit the contrast between the life-world and the scientific world in cultures where science and technology mediate the experience of the world itself? If modern technological tools and practices are an integral part of the life-world, how can one still maintain the distinction between the world of naive experience and the scientific world with its own special objects (atoms, cells, neurons, black holes, and so on)? The life-world, on the one hand, on Husserl's conception, grounds and supports the world of science (which is essentially different from it); and, on the other hand, it also completely encompasses the world of science, since all scientists as human beings are themselves members of the life-world and scientific discoveries evolve in and are carried along by historical human communities and cultures. Husserl's answer is to point to life-world as a

horizonal structure; one that includes contexts, possibilities, temporal distantiations which are intuitively experienced and can never be objectified in science. Rather than being an extant totality of things, the life-world is actually a *horizon* that stretches from indefinite past to indefinite future and includes all actualities and possibilities of experience and meaningfulness.

Husserl and Kant on Whether the World Can Be Experienced

In his important 1924 lecture, 'Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy', delivered to the Kant Gesellschaft, in one of Husserl's relatively rare public addresses to his fellow philosophers, and in the *Crisis*, which has the character of a missionary tract, Husserl develops his conception of life-world in confrontation with Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy. Like Husserl, Kant too wants to account for the *a priori* constitution of the objective world and to explain why there is a 'fit' between the world as given in scientific knowledge and the activities of humans as embodied beings acting in space and time, connecting events in causal chains, and so on; but he naively assumes that the 'real' world is precisely nature as constructed by modern science, with its uniform notions of space, time, causation, continuity, identity, and so on. Kant did acknowledge the need to project a conception of the world as an unconditioned whole and as having a certain continuous and harmonious flow. He neglected the life-world, however, as the world experienced by embodied, fleshly subjects who act with the assumption that their world is shared intersubjectively.

Husserl opposes Kant's view that the world as such is not experienceable in itself. Kant has the view that the concept of the world as a whole is a limit concept that cannot be brought to intuitive fulfilment in any possible set of experiences. Already in his *Phenomenological Psychology* (1925) Husserl gives his assessment of Kant:

> Kant insists that the world is not an object of possible experience, whereas we continue to speak in all seriousness of the world precisely as the all-inclusive object of an experience expanded and to be expanded all-inclusively. (Husserl 1968: §11, 95)

For Husserl, contra Kant, there is a genuine experience – an intuition – of the world as a kind of vague background of our focused experiencing of objects. There is a direct and immediate "experience of the world" (*Welterfahrung*) as really there, in the present (Husserl 1965b). The world is grasped and co-intended as a *horizon* of experiences, and there is a genuine experience of the horizon or what Husserl calls "world-consciousness" (*Weltbewusstsein*). Husserl writes:

> The contrast between the subjectivity of the life-world and the 'objective', the 'true' world, lies in the fact that the latter is a theoretical–logical substruction [*Substruktion*], the substruction of something that is in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable in its own proper being, whereas the subjective, in the life-world [*das*

lebensweltlich Subjektive], is distinguished in all respects precisely by its being actually experienceable. (Husserl 1970: §34d, 127 [130])

Husserl also criticises Kant's naive understanding of transcendental subjectivity. Kant never appreciated the depth of the Cartesian transcendental breakthrough in the *cogito*. But the main point I want to emphasise here is that the intuitive experience of the world is something very real – albeit the world is not intuited as a very large object, as it were.

The Life-World as Horizon

The life-world is characterised by Husserl, as we have seen, as a 'universal *horizon*' (*Horizont*) (Husserl 1970: 281 [327]). Husserl thinks of the 'world' in general as a horizon of horizons. Husserl's concept of *horizon* is innovative but it is also a complex and many-sided concept.[29] The foundational meaning of the notion of 'horizon' is the co-perceived context within which a perceived object is perceived; literally the visual backdrop to something seen. The term comes from the Greek *horizein*, which means 'to draw a boundary'; the Greek *horos* means 'boundary'. This is because Husserl always begins with perception as the basis form of consciousness. Each act of perceiving has not only its immediately focused object, but also the background horizon or 'halo' that is co-presented but not adequately filled in. The horizon also assumes a relation to the perspective of the perceiver; for example, the profile of the mountain as seen by me from this position. In his later writings, such as *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), Husserl confesses that in his *Logical Investigations* he still lacked a concept of 'horizon-intentionality' to complement his object-intentionality (Husserl 1974a: 177).[30] Husserl goes on to say that every form of intentionality has its horizon-structure and suggests that horizons are "pre-delineated potentialities" that have a determinate structure and can be explicated even if they are essentially indeterminate (Husserl 1960: §19, 45 [82]). There are not just perceptual horizons in the present, there are also horizons stretching into the past and the future. History unfolds in horizon. In this regard humans live within the *horizons* of their historicity; 'horizon' here meaning a boundary, which at the same time provides a supporting context for comprehending life (Husserl 1970: §2). Horizon generally, then, expresses the idea of a certain indeterminate context that moves with the progress of the perceiver or agent. Horizon has both spatial and temporal connotations but its real sense for Husserl is as a kind of flexible and expanding 'context of sense or meaning', that has a momentum of its own. He explicates the concept of 'horizon' in his *Passive Synthesis* lectures, where he speaks of a "horizon of references" built in to the experience itself:

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[29] On Husserl's concept of horizon, see Kwan 2004; Walton 2010.

[30] English translation: Husserl 1969. Henceforth, only German edition cited.

...everything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being intertwined and permeated with an intentional empty horizon, that is, by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness with respect to appearance. It is an emptiness that is not a nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled out; it is a determinable indeterminacy. (Husserl 2001a: 42 [45–46])[31]

A horizon, no matter how vague and amorphous, is not nothing. Horizons are characterised by their very nature as possessing a certain openness, indefinability, and a constantly shifting (withdrawing and at the same time drawing us further in) character. We can never arrive at a horizonal limit any more than we can literally find the end of the rainbow. In this regard, Husserl speaks of a peculiar "horizon-consciousness" (Horizontbewusstsein) (Husserl 1970: §47). This horizon can be understood as a network of intentional implications, a context, a framework, in many different senses. The point is that there is no experience without its horizons, just as each word in a language depends for its meaning on the other words in the language; or, as Heidegger points out, road signs form a system and a network where one sign assumes the existence and specific sense of the other signs. There is, furthermore, always, as a limit of all horizons, a "world-consciousness" (Weltbewusstsein) implicated in our intentional acts. World is the horizon of horizons.

According to Husserl, furthermore, the open horizon of the world includes, for example, my consciousness *of other humans*; even those not actually known to me:

> There need be no one in my perceptual field, but fellowmen [Mitmenschen] are necessary as actual, as known, and as an open horizon of those I might possibly meet. Factually I am within an interhuman present [in einer mitmenschlichen Gegenwart] and within an open horizon of mankind; I know myself to be factually within a generative framework [in einem generativen Zusammenhang], in the unitary flow of a historical development [Geschichtlichkeit] in which this present is mankind's present and the world of which it is conscious is a historical present with a historical past and a historical future. (Husserl 1970: §71, 253 [256])

This open horizon, for Husserl – as for Heidegger – has an *a priori* character. It is in part constituted through what Husserl calls "empathy" (Einfühlung), although this would require a much deeper discussion. Empathy is Husserl's name for a whole set of experiences that open on to the other – "other experience" (Fremderfahrung). As Merleau-Ponty will later recognise, the constitution of the other person is very much implicated in the more general problem of the constitution of the world.

[31] German edition: Husserl 1988. Henceforth, the English translation is cited with page numbers in English and [Husserliana volume].

Life-World as 'Fundament', 'Ground' and 'Underground'

In contra-distinction to the characterisation of life-world as a horizon with all its connotations of openness, Husserl also characterises the life-world as "ground" (Grund) or "soil" (Boden) (Husserl 1970: §7), "fundament" (Fundament), or, indeed, as the "underground" or "subsoil" (Untergrund) for scientific inquiry (Husserl 1970: §9b, §29 and §34a, 124 [127]), the "unspoken ground of cognitive accomplishments" (Husserl 1970: §30), and "constant ground of validity, an ever available source of what is taken for granted" (Husserl 1970: §33). The two characteristics – ground and horizon – could be seen as in tension: openness versus groundedness. In what sense can the life-world function both as *horizon* (an indefinite and vaguely delineated limit) and as a *ground* (a self-evidence or validity that is incontrovertible, even apodictic)? As a horizon, the world appears not to be objectifiable at all, but to retreat as emptily co-intuited *behind* the directly presented objects of experience that are primarily intuited (for Husserl, in the first instance, primary physical things as perceived). On the other hand, a 'ground' normally is construed as something like a reason, something that gives the sense of legitimation, justification, entitlement, stability, security, a rational basis, a principle on the basis of which true assertions can be made (he speaks of seeking a truly apodictic "ground" like the Cartesian *cogito* (Husserl 1970: §30) and a "universal apodictic ground" (Husserl 1970: §7).[32] Husserl often invokes the metaphor of 'ground' and indeed phenomenology itself aims at "ultimate grounding" (Letztbegründung) – logic, for instance, can never be a secure science until it is grounded in the universal "life-world" (Husserl 1970: §36). But one should not attribute to Husserl a rigid sense of 'ground' in the form of a Cartesian, axiomatic, self-evident first principle from which evident truths are deduced. The concept of ground, like that of horizon, for Husserl, also has a certain relativity to the observer – for those on a ship, the ship is their ground, their ultimate reference point. In his *Intersubjectivity* volumes, where he discusses the notion of "home-world" (Heimwelt) versus "alien-world" (Fremdwelt), Husserl speaks of people having a sense of what is their natural home or place (esp. Husserl 1973b, c). For someone born on a ship, the ship with its rolling movement has the sense of home and ground. In this sense 'ground' has to be understood also as a kind of sustaining horizon rather than as the opposite of horizon. Husserl also understands 'ground' as possessing an intrinsic openness and fertility; it has a promising richness that invites further exploration (the work of art is a good example of an object that, as Heidegger points out, institutes horizons and even whole worlds). Thus Husserl writes:

> The ground of experience [Erfahrungsboden], opened up in its infinity, will then become the arable field [Ackerfeld] of a methodical working philosophy, with the self-evidence,

[32] Indeed, perhaps because of his dissatisfaction with Husserl's concept, Heidegger singles out the concept of "ground" (Grund) for explication in his paper submitted to Husserl's Seventieth Birthday Festschrift (Heidegger 1969).

furthermore, that all conceivable philosophical and scientific problems of the past are to be posed and decided by starting from this ground [*Boden*]. (Husserl 1970: §27, 100 [104], translation modified)

The way to reconcile the concept of life-world as horizon with life-world as ground is precisely to think of grounding in a new sense – not as rational grounding in something like its original Leibnizian sense ('nothing is without a ground or reason') but as a constant ongoing contextualisation and re-contextualisation whereby meaning itself is secured through its horizonal connections with meanings lived through and established in the non-objectifiable world of living and acting. Husserl himself is quite clear that the kind of grounding provided by the life-world is different from logical or epistemic grounding. Indeed, it is literally a pre-logical ground of the logical. Thus he writes:

There has never been a scientific inquiry into the way in which the life-world constantly functions as subsoil [*Untergrund*], into how its manifold prelogical validities act as grounds for the logical ones, for theoretical truths. And perhaps the scientific discipline which this life-world as such, in its universality, requires is a peculiar one, one which is precisely not objective and logical but which, as the ultimately grounding one, is not inferior but superior in value. (Husserl 1970: §34, 124 [127])

The life-world cannot therefore function as some kind of principle of *rational* grounding in the traditional philosophical sense. By its very nature, it cannot provide any kind of *objective* grounding at all; certainly not the kind of ultimate principle that traditional rationalism (e.g. Spinoza) sought. The peculiarity of the grounding of the life-world is that it provides an ultimately subjective, pre-logical, pre-rational, temporally dispersed, never fully actual grounding. It provides a kind of evidencing. The life-world itself is an always-available source of what is taken for granted (Husserl 1970: §33, 122 [124]), given in a "primal self-evidence" (Husserl 1970: 131). Indeed, the life-world is a "universe of original self-evidences" (Husserl 1970: §34d, 127 [130]), which itself provides the grounding for every conceivable type of evidencing. In this sense, the life-world is the ground of all "accomplishing life" (Husserl 1970: §34d). It is a world which provides the "constant ground of validity" and the continuing confirmation of evidence.

The Life-World as the Intersubjective, Communal We-World (*Wir-Welt*)

Husserl is also insistent that the world as the ultimate context and horizon of human experience cannot be conceived solipsistically as just *my* world, but must be thought of as an inherently communal world, a world "for others", a world potentially available "for everyone" (*für jedermann*) (Husserl 1970: 296 [343], 358 [369]). The life-world enables *communalisation*. Its manner of being given is that of being available 'for all'. In other words, the very idea of a world includes the idea that there are infinitely many different possible ways of experiencing it and an open, undefined and hence infinite plurality of "co-subjects" (*Mitsubjekte*) who do or could so experience it (Husserl 1970: 164 [167], 184 [188]). The very idea of world, accordingly, has an *a priori universality*. Furthermore, this world is not disclosed to me alone but has a *communal* character:

Obviously, this is true not only for me, the individual ego; rather we, in living together [*in Miteinanderleben*], have the world pregiven in this 'together', as the world valid as existing for us and to which we, together, belong, the world as world for all, pregiven with this ontic meaning [*Seinssinn*]. (Husserl 1970: §28, 109 [111])

Being given 'for all' (not just all present but all possible subjects) is part of the 'being-sense' or ontic meaning of the world. A world is what is in principle there for any subject whatsoever. A genuine Robinson Crusoe experience is *a priori* impossible, Husserl insists. The social world is a world of communication – a world shared between communicating subjects, a "communication community" (*Mitteilungsgemeinschaft*); a term that will later be taken up by Habermas.

Conclusion

Having examined the many dimensions of Husserl's rich and multifaceted conception of the life-world, it is time to draw some conclusions. The term certainly does have an empirical meaning in Husserl, who often uses it as a kind of shorthand for the whole world of spontaneous life in the natural attitude; and also, in the plural, for the historical worlds of particular cultures (Heidegger too talks of the life-worlds of the Ancient Greeks or of the early Christians). Following Alfred Schütz (although not exactly recognising his own intention), the term has become a sociological term to connote the world of everyday life. But the term also has a deeper, transcendental sense in Husserl. It identifies a formal structure of coherence that makes meaningful life possible. In this regard, life-world has, as Husserl says, an inescapably subjective character. There cannot be a purely objectivist description of the life-world as such, since life-world involves the human subject (and subjects) in their particular stances, attitudes and points of view. As a consequence of this essentially communal and intersubjective character, the world is never just an objectivity lying 'outside' us. It is precisely the world of our "interests", purposeful activities, strivings, "abilities" (*Vermögen*) and "habitualities" (*Habitualitäten*) (Husserl 1970: §36).[33] It is the world in which we 'live and move and have our being'; the world in which we act and suffer (*tun und leiden*), live and strive (*leben und streben*) – to invoke some of Husserl's own phrases. It is the world that pulsates according to our life interests (Husserl 1954: 500). It is, as Husserl himself stressed, the historical world as long as we understand this in terms of the *a priori* structures of historicity.

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[33] On Husserl's conception of habit, see Moran 2011.

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