Introduction

The unmistakable sense of urgency that characterizes Edmund Husserl's explicit thematization of, and central focus on, Europe and the West in his reflections in the late 1930s must certainly be understood as a response to a precise historical and political reality—namely, the rise of fascism. And, where intellectual life is at stake, it must be seen as a response to German Nazism's hostility toward spirit (*Geist*). If, however, these late works are viewed exclusively from such an angle, then Husserl's recourse to Europe's cultural history and its origins in Greek philosophy as a means to counter the barbarism of the time may appear hopelessly naive—the response of a philosopher living in the thin air of his high-flown abstractions—particularly if one thinks of the atrocities that were still in the offing.[1] Nonetheless, the political realities of the day do not entirely explain the central importance granted to Europe in these writings. Indeed, in the so-called Vienna lecture, titled "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity," and subsequently in his unfinished work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, though Husserl clearly has fascism's grip on Europe in view, he in fact diagnoses a disease and a crisis in which Nazism is simply the most blatant symptom. It is a crisis of such drastic proportions that only a complete shake-up of Europe's traditions—its entire intellectual and cultural history—could offer hope of bringing about a reversal of Europe's otherwise inexorable decline and end. If Europe becomes so prominent in Husserl's late thought, and if he conjures its Greek heritage in the idea of a universal rational science, then it is because for him Europe is intimately tied to the very idea and promise of reason and rationality. What is called

"Europe" in Husserl's thinking is certainly not limited to a geographical entity. Nor is it to be equated simply with a historical, cultural, political, or economic reality. Europe, insofar as it can be traced back to its origins in the Greek idea of a universal rational science—philosophy—is inseparable from the project of a life predicated on reason. From this perspective, Husserl's later works only make explicit something that was a fundamental presupposition since the beginning of phenomenological thought: that philosophy, and phenomenological philosophy in particular, is not merely a finite European phenomenon but a life project that, although it goes by the name of *Europe*, nevertheless concerns humanity as a whole. Consequently, what happens to Europe necessarily affects all of humankind. Given this crucial importance of the question of Europe, it comes as no wonder that about the same time that Husserl conceived of the Vienna lecture and began writing *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, other thinkers within the same tradition of philosophical thought—Martin Heidegger, as well as Jan Patočka—offered their own accounts of Europe. Furthermore, phenomenological thought's emphasis on the intricate relation between philosophy and Europe has been the reason why, in the aftermath of Husserl, Heidegger, and Patočka, many thinkers' reflections on Europe (whether they are neo- or postphenomenologists) are not just occasional or haphazard events. If these thinkers—with Jacques Derrida being first and foremost among them—have broached, critically or not, the issue of Europe, it is precisely owing to what became explicit with Husserl, namely, that philosophy and Europe are linked in more ways than one.

In this book—which, at first glance, may resemble a history of ideas, or a conceptual history—I intend to discuss the different conceptions of Europe in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Patočka, and Derrida. In short, this is a philosophical inquiry into "Europe," one that is exclusively restricted to elaborations of Europe within the phenomenological tradition. In spite of the prominence that the term *Europe* (as well as the term *Occident*, which more often than not is closely aligned with it) enjoys in philosophical thought from the eighteenth century on—one thinks of Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and especially Nietzsche—this philosophical prehistory of the phenomenological reflections on Europe will not be enlarged on here. Nor will there be any discussion of the huge literature on the subject that emerged in the wake of each of the Great Wars. Since the thrust of this work is exclusively philosophical, it may also be

appropriate, in the beginning, to say what this work does *not* pretend to be about. Though it is indeed a book on Europe, it does not deal with "Europe" simply as some past or present entity or as some geopolitical, legal, and cultural entity that is yet to be created. In spite of the fact that, at this precise historical juncture, Europe is seeking to become integrated—something that, notwithstanding the inevitable temporary setbacks, has not only yielded already, historically speaking, monumental results—the adoption of the euro, for instance—but has also created in response to the anxieties that it produces (in the United States for instance) the phenomenon called "Europhobia"—I do not intend to broach the intricate problems that this unification, and the establishment of a transnational European identity, pose in practice. There will be no discussion of the long and difficult history of Europe's inner and outer borders nor of all the trouble this history continues to represent today in a united Europe. I will not address the issue of what sort of legal and political unity a united Europe should have, that is, whether it can be modeled after a federal conception of the state, as is the case in the United States, or whether Europe's manifold cultures, languages, and histories (if not even contradictions) call for a different model of integration, one that would possibly be distinct from that of a state to begin with.[2] This book will also not be concerned with the Europe promoted by the current economical and financial Caesarian powers of the continent, in short, with the undoubtedly crucial question of whether the attempts to turn Europe into a primarily economic zone, or to shape it into a political construction on the basis of a still to be adopted (provisional or definite) European constitution, are sufficient to construct a Europe that would meet the various expectations at the heart of the project of a United Europe. Undoubtedly, the question of whether or not a Europe (understood as an economic power that is competitive among the world markets and that is politically united by a constitution whose prime goal is merely to further cement its economic clout) does justice to the expectations and dreams for Europe that are fostered by its cultural, political, and legal traditions is a highly significant one. But this issue will have to remain in the background here. Finally, this book will not inquire into the resistance that the unification of Europe actually encounters on a daily basis, at every step, in its inner or outer conflicts—whether merely ideological or violent and bloody—conflicts that have repeatedly bedeviled the establishment of a United Europe.