



## Introduction

When future historians chronicle the twentieth century, they will see phenomenology as one of the preeminent social and ethical philosophies of its age. The philosophical tradition not only produced systematic reflection on common moral concerns such as distinguishing right from wrong and explaining the nature of values; it also called on philosophy to renew European societies facing the crises of the twentieth century, from World War I and interwar totalitarianism to postwar communist dictatorships. Despite this legacy, historians today would find it strange to call phenomenology a social philosophy. In its Husserlian *Urform*, the school has long been discounted as esoteric or solipsistic, the last gasp of a Cartesian dream to base knowledge on the lonely rational mind. Intellectual histories often cite Edmund Husserl's methodological influence on philosophies such as existentialism and deconstruction without considering his school's social or ethical imprint. Even phenomenologists sometimes cast their tradition outside the usual realms of social thought.<sup>1</sup> While a few recent scholars have begun to explore phenomenology's wider social and ethical sway, its image as stubbornly academic still holds.<sup>2</sup>

Central to the tradition from the start, however, was a preoccupation with ethics and social renewal—at times overt, often implicit—that inspired not only second-generation phenomenologists *engagés*, but also the founders. Though phenomenological social and ethical thought took many forms, two broad itineraries can be identified. First, Franz Brentano, Husserl, and their followers used new methods of phenomenological

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analysis to address standard ethical topics such as how to assess conduct or explain our duty to others. Second—and more crucial to my story—advocates drew phenomenology beyond academic walls into an engagement with the social and political traumas of the century. Both Brentano and Husserl outlined a practical role for philosophy in lending significance to modern life. Their self-appointed mandate to lead a moral-cum-social renewal—a theme evident from the start of Brentano’s career and dominant at the end of Husserl’s—shaped the tradition’s wider arc. From Brentano and Husserl to Jan Patočka and Karol Wojtyła (the future Pope John Paul II), a similar message resounded: that an ethics based on phenomenological insight could spearhead Europe’s social and, at times, political rebirth.

Our limited appreciation of this story stems partly from Husserl himself. In early publications such as the *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901; *Logische Untersuchungen*) and *Ideas I* (1913; *Ideen I*), phenomenology’s founder heralded the largely theoretical pretensions of his effort to ground empirical science in the data of experience, and at times he even eschewed practical engagement as a second-order concern. Ethics remained in the margins here. Additionally, Husserl’s vast output, characteristically prolix and cryptonymic, seems written to repel outsiders and deny broad access. The tortured language of ‘phenomenologicales’ grew in part from the demands of a pioneering analysis that abjured ready formulae from past philosophies, but it still makes for extremely arduous reading.<sup>3</sup> Linguistically and philosophically, Husserl appears to shut himself off from the world.

In practice, however, he was not so austere: his courses included regular ethics seminars covering practical matters; he spoke and published on the themes of social crisis and cultural renewal; and he famously ended his career with a call for philosophy to rescue a ruined Europe. Scholars have inked reams of paper interpreting Husserl’s last and best-known work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936; *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*), but neglect of his long-standing social concerns misses a crucial impulse at the origin of phenomenology and allows historians to pigeonhole it as a philosophy of logic and consciousness. Husserl’s cohorts, largely forgotten outside specialist circles, were even more explicit in employing phenomenological categories for social and ethical

gain. Max Scheler built a name on studies of ethical personalism, absolute values, and philosophical anthropology. Before his death in World War I, Adolf Reinach applied phenomenology to the study of social acts. And Edith Stein developed phenomenological theories of intersubjective empathy and the role of the state. Polish and Czechoslovak dissidents such as Patočka, Wojtyła, and Václav Havel saw in phenomenology a tocsin for depersonalized modern societies, calling their fellow citizens toward fuller humanity. It was in the hands of East European thinkers and activists, the subject of this book's second half, that phenomenology emerged as a full-fledged social philosophy, ranged against both Soviet Bloc communism and Western liberalism. But the critique of modern society was present already at phenomenology's start in fin-de-siècle and interwar Germany, and post-World War II dissidents saw themselves as furthering a tradition that retained the best of modern European culture and thought.

Despite these preoccupations, few histories of contemporary ethics or social theory mention German phenomenology, and those that do tend to echo Jacques Maritain's 1960 dismissal of its contribution as unoriginal.<sup>4</sup> While many scholars have noted the pervasive sense of crisis in interwar Germany and Austria, few have surveyed phenomenological critiques of modernity or proposals for ethical and social renewal. Omens of crisis and programs of reform were, of course, prevalent across interwar Europe, and the omission of phenomenologists from the typical roll call is striking.<sup>5</sup> German phenomenology is a mainspring of twentieth-century Continental thought, and its ethical concerns, both explicit and implicit, helped to define several generations of European philosophers living through the midcentury catastrophe. Those that do consider phenomenology's social impact tend to conclude with the sad tales of Heidegger's Nazism or Sartre's Stalinism. The message is clear: phenomenology was ill-suited to ethical or political judgment.

This book tells a different story, one that is not restricted to interbellum emergencies, but reaches back to Brentano's nineteenth-century pleas for a philosophical renewal of modernity and forward to the momentous struggles of anti-communist dissidents. It focuses on Central Europe, moving from the German and Austrian birthlands of phenomenology to postwar Czechoslovakia and Poland, where the philosophy's social and ethical dividends came to the fore.<sup>6</sup> East European phenomenologists help

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us to challenge two common charges against the philosophy—one typically lodged against Husserl, the other against Heidegger. The first, made for example by Theodor Adorno, dismisses phenomenology as solely epistemological, even solipsistic.<sup>7</sup> The second contends that as a result of this aloofness, phenomenology was unable to resist the radical politics of being and authenticity embodied in Nazism. Because of its worldly dereliction, in other words, phenomenology led to either meek apoliticism or, worse, the uncritical acceptance of raw power.<sup>8</sup> Patočka and Wojtyła show the philosophy in a very different light. That phenomenology could have such a tremendous impact on the dissident movements of Eastern Europe is a profound challenge to prevailing presentations of it as an abstract epistemological exercise. As we will see in ensuing chapters, the foundations of this social concern were there from the philosophy's start.

Outside of specialist circles, phenomenology's program of social renewal was largely forgotten after World War II. German phenomenological dominance waned after most of its leaders either died or fled the country. In the West, the Paris of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévinas became the new hub of phenomenology; and in the United States, exiled phenomenologists trained in Central Europe either adopted new research programs shaped by the midcentury cataclysm (e.g., Arendt) or continued with Husserlian research in a specialist vein. Furthermore, like other prewar monuments of German thought, phenomenology yielded up fascist tendencies to those bent on cleansing Teutonic culture *tout court*. Adorno, as we have noted, condemned Husserl's intuitionism and essentialism for disengaging rational thought. Husserlians Marvin Farber and V. J. McGill attacked Scheler's work as quasi-fascist, demoting him in the ranks of phenomenology and with him the interwar movement's social and ethical profile, which Scheler had done so much to burnish.<sup>9</sup> And of course, phenomenology's political credentials suffered terribly by association with Heidegger. Western phenomenology also lost its initial exuberance as second- and third-generation scions embarked on new programs—structuralist and poststructuralist—that took their phenomenological elders as foils. Though a harbinger of later philosophies, phenomenology came to be seen as a brilliant failure whose Cartesian epistemology and exaggerated subjectivity had been surpassed. The slow but steady publication of Husserl's enormous manuscript

library through the Husserliana series has undermined this view among specialists, but beyond a tight circle the scope of his thought remains largely unknown. Still today, he appears as a philosopher's philosopher, the preserve of initiates. Lesser-known phenomenologists, many of them discussed in this book, languish in even greater obscurity. As a result we lack a clear picture of phenomenology's engagement with the mid-twentieth-century world.

I should note at the outset that Heidegger, perhaps the most famous phenomenologist, plays a much smaller part in this book than is typically assigned to him in histories of Husserl's school. While he exercised considerable sway in Central and East European phenomenological circles, his legacy there never overshadowed Husserl's as it did in Paris. Czechoslovak and Polish phenomenologists retained the founder's moral and intellectual stress on responsibility and his calls for social and ethical renewal. Conversely, they worried over Heidegger's dismissal of public engagement and ethical analysis from the ontological realm. As a result, Heidegger plays a secondary role in this book's primary story: the narrative of social and ethical thought within phenomenology. These topics simply were not the focus of his writing. Furthermore, for all the ink spilled over his infamous Nazi foray, it did little to affect the course of Hitler's rule; by contrast, phenomenology had direct political impact through its East European votaries, whose dissident activities weakened their tottering regimes. *The Far Reaches* highlights these lesser-known but more politically consequential trends within Central European phenomenology. Similarly, for reasons of geographic constraint and overexposure, I do not follow those German Heidegger students—Arendt, Marcuse—whose careers flourished in the West, except to note their return influence on the Central European story. Nor is French phenomenological thought, widely examined in other works, canvassed in these pages. Instead, *The Far Reaches* privileges unfamiliar discourses within the movement's Central European pale—thinkers who, unlike in France, guarded the movement's orientation toward essential truth as the latest gem of a besieged European heritage.

## Reflections on Phenomenological Social and Ethical Thought

*The Far Reaches* is not a survey of phenomenology in the manner of Herbert Spiegelberg or Dermot Moran.<sup>10</sup> Instead, it tells the history of Central European phenomenology as a social and ethical philosophy, what I call ‘worldly phenomenology’ for short. It examines not only the pervasive concern for social and ethical themes in the phenomenological tradition, but also the recourse to phenomenological motifs among non-phenomenologists, especially in late communist Eastern Europe—what we can term, with Peter E. Gordon, the cultural “ramifications” of the philosophy.<sup>11</sup> It is sometimes said that phenomenology is a philosophy of mind shadowed by the threat of solipsism, that thinkers adopting phenomenology’s descriptive analytic of consciousness had to turn elsewhere—to socialism, liberalism, or Catholic social thought—for the tools to make it worldly and practical. This was not the case in Central Europe, where phenomenology captured imaginations in great part *because* of its social and ethical vision, not *despite* its purported lack of one. Indeed, the ethical and social—and often the political—were aspects of the same concern for most phenomenologists. Starting with Brentano and Husserl and proceeding through the anti-Soviet dissidents of the 1970s and 1980s, social and political reform was consistently understood to require ethical renewal—achieved by reorientation toward fixed moral values—as a prerequisite. Indeed, the rooting of the social and political in the ethical is one of phenomenology’s distinctive features, a source of both its appeal and, as we will see, its weakness.

In arguing the case for phenomenology’s worldly outlook, I do not mean to deny its consuming interest in human consciousness. Particularly in Husserl, worldliness was never unambiguous, and it often hid behind other emphases; his oeuvre goes in many directions, enabling critics to find worldless idealism and egological solipsism in some manuscripts, social theses and analyses of human community in others. If the growing body of posthumous publications makes the solipsistic critique less tenable, it is still true that even when phenomenology broached social topics, it tended to do so from an egological or experiential entry point, an angle that was

at once a strength—phenomenology offered extraordinarily rich analyses of experience—and a millstone—even at its most worldly, it never broke free of the inward pull. In some sense, we might see in phenomenology an almost desperate quest, taken under the sign of crisis, to connect human beings to the surrounding world, a quest that pulled it in two contradictory directions: on the one hand, it sought a reality beyond the claustrophobia of mind, an assurance of the existence of a world beyond human fabrication; on the other, it celebrated human dignity by elevating man as a transcendent being over other objects and beings. It was, then, both a kind of humanism and a critique of humanist aggrandizement—and the ardor of its claims to essential insight and absolute truth was the converse of persistent doubts about external nature. Indeed, typical of phenomenology was the merger of internal and external, subject and object, person and world—a fusion captured in the original Brentanian seed of intentionality, the reaching forth of all cognition toward objects and beings on the far side of consciousness. Thus, even as phenomenologists defended a non-relative reality, they characteristically turned to analyses of how that reality was humanly encountered and perceived. Yet for all of their focus on experience, they insisted that ‘the real’ extended beyond human sensory awareness to encompass essential formal and material structures; to believe otherwise was to fall prey to subjectivism and relativism. The crisis of modernity, from Brentano and Husserl forward, lay in the tendency to reduce the world to elemental clay for human molding—to treat it, in other words, as nothing more than a species of experiential irreality. The phenomenological discernment of absolute essences—what Husserl called eidetic intuition, from the Greek term *eidōs*, which meant form or essence—was designed in part to rescue this real world from human domination.

But eidetic analysis had a second and inverse payoff as well: the analysis of essences secured human spiritual autonomy by freeing men from the prison house of the factual. Here, Husserl’s eidetic method—the imaginative variation of real things undertaken to identify their essential character—was of seismic importance. By systematically imagining the various possible forms of a phenomenon—empathy, for example, to take the case of an early phenomenological preoccupation—a trained phenomenologist claimed to identify its inbuilt characteristics unconstrained by

any particular worldly example, to understand the essence of empathetic behavior without being bound to any observed instance of it; we might say he tried educe the ideal type, although for Husserl ideal reality was as real as empirical reality. But one could also take the process in reverse, moving from the *eidōs* or essence of empathy to its many possible forms and styles of instantiation. Doing so demonstrates that factual reality (a failed attempt at empathy, for example) is only one worldly possibility, one instance of real being—and that phenomenological reality is vaster than mere circumstance. This recognition constitutes a kind of human freedom over against brute fact, and it had important implications in a century when war and dictatorship estranged men from themselves and enslaved them to technologies of force and power. Against these impersonal dominions, phenomenologists heralded their most cherished ethical aim: the protection and cultivation of man's unique potential.

This aim was not simply a phenomenological paragon, the incidental slough of a chiefly epistemological itinerary. Cultural and ethical renewal was part of phenomenology's original and enduring mandate. As man was an experiential being embedded in the world, phenomenology, in the view of its earliest adepts, was first and foremost an attitude of worldly engagement that Husserl congealed into a descriptive philosophical method. It challenged the neutral and disengaged stance of modern scientific observation, which treated the subject-object division as normative, transformed the earth into a stone, and distanced man from his terrestrial home. Phenomenology, we might say, attempted a kind of reenchantment or resignification of the world.

Husserl did not, I hasten to add, reject empirical science, though he did dispute its epistemological primacy. As he and his followers never tired of saying, science grew from the soil of an original experience in which subject and object, human and world, were already mutually invested. And the phenomenological elaboration of this primordial experience, they believed, would ultimately further the aims of natural science by securing its epistemological foundation and rehumanizing it. Indeed, it was this claim that Brentano introduced with his intentionality thesis, put forth as an epistemological pediment for empiricism. Husserl took it further, contending that intentionality not only stabilized empirical science by rooting its objects in acts of experience, but also—and more



fundamentally—opened forth the prospect of examining man's own original world. For despite its claim to the seemingly familiar mantle of science (*Wissenschaft*), Husserl's phenomenological method did not propose a straightforward form of empirical observation but something much more basic: a set of intuitive procedures for uncovering the essential structures and possibilities of man's prescientific experience. This aim was implicit from the start of his career, although, befitting his early mathematical training, Husserl first treated man's engagement with non-sentient ideal objects such as logical forms before turning, later in life, to this-worldly phenomena such as other people, community bonds, and everyday experience. Nonetheless, the latter—the chief focus of this book—was always a pending concern: the epistemological problem of how we know presumed the gnosiological question of where knowledge came from. The world, in its fecundity, was ever-present.

Another striking feature in the history of worldly phenomenology is the steadfastness of certain core themes across radically different social and political milieux. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Central European phenomenologists from the nineteenth-century Franz Brentano to late twentieth-century dissidents shared a personalist anthropology, a commitment to communal solidarity, a belief in moral absolutes, and a staunch critique of both liberal and totalitarian modernity. These tenets took various forms, and they were stronger in some thinkers than others. Yet they lasted as a set of shared convictions throughout a century of social, cultural, and political turmoil—from the crises of relativism in the fin-de-siècle through the destruction of World War I and the postwar German collapse, from Nazi barbarism and the hecatombs of World War II to the desolation of communist East Central Europe. What linked all of these contexts in the minds of phenomenologists—and what underwrote their repeated calls for renewal—was the belief that technocratic modernity had deprived man of purpose and meaning, reducing him to an object of manipulation and force. Each of the century's cataclysms expressed the larger crisis of modern dehumanization, mechanization, and anomie. And while phenomenologists transferred their program from academic print to public exhortation or even political action primarily in the face of disaster—Dietrich von Hildebrand and Aurel Kolnai in the shadow of Nazism, the East European dissidents under communist diktat—their

engagements drew explicitly on the tradition's long-standing fears of a pervasive modern nihilism. Central and East European totalitarianism, they warned, was an extreme symptom of a general Western decay.

The metaphorical leitmotif of this book—the human orientational references of distance and closeness, far and near—highlights the focus on modern loss and renewal. Starting with Husserl, phenomenological researchers undertook descriptive investigations of these basic experiential coordinates. As Husserl's assistant Ludwig Landgrebe noted, the categories structured Husserl's latent sociology as well. "The difference between near and far," Landgrebe wrote, is

important for the elaboration of the fundamental types of life-worlds, as worlds surrounding typical human communities. It is this difference that originally delimits the circle of other people from whose communications and instructions each of us derives his knowledge of the world, so far as they are not immediately accessible to him in his own experience. First of all, in the most immediate sense, this circle is made up of others as fellow-members of the community in which one was born and grew up. These 'others' are marked off from the 'strangers,' the members of a strange and alien community. . . . Thus, the all-pervading difference between near and far, a difference relative to the absolute 'here' of our bodily existence, functions as the basis for a difference between near and far in a transferred sense, namely as a difference relative to our community and its particular surrounding world, which is marked off from the world surrounding any other community. This difference is the ground for a differentiation of the concept of 'world' according to the essential distinction between home-world and alien or foreign world.<sup>12</sup>

The experience of 'far' and 'near' structured political conceptions as well. From Scheler onward, phenomenologists deplored equally the lonely atoms of liberal individualism, distanced from one another, and the totalitarian impulse to fuse anonymous men into a pulsing mass filled with a false sense of intimacy and oneness. Indeed, the former led inexorably to the latter, as people sought escape into the crowd from the meaninglessness of isolation. Accordingly, the phenomenological concern for modern crisis treated the century's many and varied catastrophes as expressions of a single Western anomie furthered by narrow technocratic rationalism. Personalism, community, and morality: for phenomenologists, these antidotes addressed essential human needs unmet in modern times—needs that bound men to their fellows, their world, and, in many cases, their God.

## What Is Phenomenology?

That ‘phenomenology’ is a vexed term is not surprising.<sup>13</sup> The most straightforward definition is that phenomenology is a philosophy focused on the contents of experience. Whether those contents, or *phenomena*, are products of consciousness, as Husserl’s transcendental phase suggested, or direct reflections of external reality, as realists believed, is subject to debate; but what they clearly are not is the empirical objects of modern science. Measuring, dissecting, quantifying—these operations turn original experiences, or evidence (*Evidenz*), into objectified data that can be analyzed causally (or genetically, to use the common synonym). Phenomenologists, by contrast, approach experience through fine-grained description, articulating the minute textures of an encounter in order to fathom its essential contours. Accordingly, phenomenology can also be described as a philosophy of essences, understood as the innate necessities of real or ideal things. It reaches beyond the realm of sensory experience to identify phenomena that can only be discerned through rigorous intuitive methods. It was this expansion of reality beyond the confines of empiricism that first made Husserl a philosophical star. Piqued by his defense of essential reality in the *Logical Investigations*, the first phenomenologists sought essences in many domains of the world around them: law, politics, community, art, anthropology, sociology. Unsurprisingly, the temptation to posit an ideal Platonic realm of essences was too much for some to resist: Scheler’s and Hartmann’s value theory, Reinach’s a priori right—these theories revived an ancient pedigree. But phenomenological essentialism did not require such heights. Essences could be seen as worldly objectivities that infused and informed empirical reality, indiscernible to the untrained senses but inseparable from empirical reality all the same. Some interpreters go even further by seeing in phenomenological essentialism primarily a philosophy of meaning and signification.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Husserl’s and Heidegger’s extended discussions of language underscored the importance of signification and set the stage for the deconstructive appropriations that followed.

These basic definitions of phenomenology lead readily to its common construal as an anthropology, not in the sense of an empirical study of cultures, but as a descriptive science of human experience. If all conscious encounter, extrapolating from Brentano’s and Husserl’s cornerstone doctrine, is characterized by the intentional relation to an object or world,

then phenomenology, far from locking humans in an experiential cage, reveals an innate human self-transcendence or openness to the surrounding world. As Max Scheler put it, “[t]ranscendence in general is a peculiarity of every conscious intention, for in every one there is present an intending-above-and-beyond its own empirical standpoint, together with the simultaneous awareness that the being of the object reaches out beyond the empirical content of the intention.”<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on human openness has two implications: First, it casts phenomenology as a philosophy of human freedom, a philosophy that expands possibilities by recovering the openness of original human encounters. And second, if transcendence leads from the human interior to the ambient world, it can also point further still, beyond terra firma to the divine.

Given this latter implication, it is unsurprising that many Central European phenomenologists inclined toward expressions of faith: Brentano, Wojtyła, and Tischner were Catholic priests; Stein, Scheler, von Hildebrand, and Kolnai, Catholic converts; Reinach and Husserl baptized Protestant; Patočka and Havel, according to several sources, approaching the brink of religious declaration.<sup>16</sup> Attraction could flow in the other direction as well: Wojtyła and Tischner broached phenomenology from Catholic philosophy, not the reverse. Phenomenology shares numerous characteristics with religious belief, including an ethical orientation to fixed values, an emphasis on the nonrelativity of truth, a concern about modern moral and cultural decay, and a desire to embed anomic individuals in communities of purpose. Even the central phenomenological concepts of intention, fulfillment, and transcendence afford ample room for a religious interpretation that finds glimmers of the eternal in the experiences of man, “something transcending the medium of presentation, yet nevertheless apprehended in it.”<sup>17</sup> As Hedwig Conrad-Martius put it, citing Peter Wust, a Christian existentialist and follower of Max Scheler, phenomenology tilted its followers toward the “habitus of Catholic men.” The “yearning to return to the objective, to the sanctity of being, to the purity and chastity of things, to the things themselves”—the yen to “take the measure [*Mafsnahmen*] . . . of authentic [*mafsgibenden*] things”—meant that “all phenomenologists could be called ‘catholic,’” whether they professed the faith or not.<sup>18</sup>

Kolnai, Stein, and, later, Karol Wojtyła also sought to link phenomenology with Catholic neo-Thomism. The two schools offered each

other reciprocal services: Thomism fortified Husserl's school with a realist ontology and a Church-sanctioned dignification of man, both of which appealed to Schelerian personalists; and phenomenology provided a rich account of human awareness and experience that Thomism lacked, enabling it to engage with modern life and attitudes. Thus, East European phenomenologies of transcendence, such as those of Patočka or Wojtyła, did not have to explode a mind-bound philosophy so much as expand the spiritual scope of a tradition that was "world-open" from the start.<sup>19</sup> While French existential atheism is one of phenomenology's best-known offshoots, loss of faith was by no means inevitable within the movement; the opposite occurred more frequently in Central Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Also noteworthy is that a striking number of phenomenologists—among them Husserl, Reinach, Scheler, Stein, and Kolnai—were originally Jewish. Hildebrand too, though raised Catholic, had a Jewish grandmother. Hildebrand and Kolnai, as we will see, drew on both their religious and philosophical convictions to denounce Nazism and anti-Semitism from neighboring Austria, helping to make pre-*Anschluss* Vienna a center of Catholic anti-fascist activism. Edith Stein as well, herself one of the Nazis' famous victims, called on Pope Pius XI to condemn the Nazi "war of destruction against the Jews." Phenomenology thus contributed to a novel Christian resistance to Nazi rule and to the gradual Catholic acceptance of Jews recently chronicled by John Connelly.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, we can in some sense define phenomenology as a philosophy of Europe and Europeanism. From Brentano onward, its proponents celebrated the ancient Greek bequest of philosophical self-questioning as Europe's defining innovation, and they decried European modernity as an era of perpetual crisis induced by scientific fragmentation, relativism, and subjectivism. The loss of absolute truth and a clear moral beacon left men driftless and alone, unable to find meaning in existence. In the place of ethical purpose, creature comforts and raw power became ends in themselves, with the mass of men sated by consumption while elites competed to dominate the globe and control its resources. The renewal proposed by phenomenologists entailed a return to Europe's Hellenic and Christian inheritance—phenomenologists generally ignored Hebraic and Islamic roots—to an age when philosophy helped to orient humans toward the truth, experience stood as a source of value and insight, and men approached the world

with broad humility. Although a few phenomenologists also expressed openness to non-European cultures and insights, most touted Europe's primal heritage—in contrast to its despoiled present—and at times, Eurocentrically, offered it as a model for humanity as a whole.

Since my aim is to trace phenomenology's social and ethical ramifications, I avoid restricting its meaning too narrowly along philosophical lines. Instead, I adopt a broadly historical definition of phenomenology as the movement associated with Husserl's turn "to the things themselves," the rallying cry that won generations of adherents.<sup>22</sup> A narrower denotation would not only fail to account for the variety of phenomenological commitments but would also blind us to the movement's wider precursors and influences. It would, in other words, perpetuate the tendency to restrict phenomenology to initiates. The phenomenological credentials of Max Scheler's final philosophical anthropology, for example, can be disputed according to strict methodological criteria; but that his late work was part of a career-long desire to return to things (and values and persons) themselves—and hence marks a chapter in the ramification of phenomenology—is indisputable. The work of philosophical anthropologists like Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen affirmed this connection. Similarly, Václav Havel, Jacek Kuroń, and Milan Kundera (in the opening of *The Art of the Novel* [*L'Art du roman*])—none of them self-described philosophers—employed phenomenology only fragmentarily. But the tendency to jerry-build, to simplify, even to misconstrue, does not cancel the highly significant fact that phenomenology, however understood, galvanized thinkers and activists concerned with their modern age. That said, all of the figures to whom I devote extended treatment (as opposed to those whom I mention in passing) either considered themselves phenomenologists or claimed to tap the legacy of phenomenology in some significant way. For this reason, Havel receives greater attention than either Kuroń or Kundera. Historically, these self-definitions are important, for they show that phenomenology was not just an insider affair. In addition to the methodological technicalities that primarily engaged savants, phenomenology engendered a new philosophical zeal that mobilized thinkers to take seriously the social reality they confronted and to justify new ethical and political commitments. As Plessner put it, "the age of open experience had received its philosophy."<sup>23</sup>