

Christoph Durt

## Subjectivity and World: The Roots of the Crisis in Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*

Durt, Christoph. 2023. Subjectivity and World: The Roots of the Crisis in Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In *Crisis and lifeworld: new phenomenological perspectives, Phänomenologie*, Hrsg. Hernán Gabriel Inverso und Alexander Schnell. Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber.

### 1. Introduction

Husserl's concept of crisis has evoked much discussion even though he uses it only at the beginning of the Vienna and Prague lectures and in two more instances in the posthumously published *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (*Crisis*<sup>1</sup>). The concept appears in a number of combinations, such as the crisis of European culture and humanity, meaning, philosophy, society, and science. While most interpreters agree that the concept of the crisis of the European<sup>2</sup> sciences is pivotal, they disagree about its exact nature and its relations to the other uses of "crisis" in Husserl.

According to the "traditional interpretation",<sup>3</sup> which Trizio ascribes to Gurwitsch, Paci, Carr, Boehm, Ströker, Bernet, Kern, and Marbach, as well as Dodd, the crisis of the European sciences consists in a loss of meaning of science. Husserl expressively uses the description "[t]he 'crisis' of science as the loss of its meaning for life".<sup>4</sup> Trizio himself challenges the traditional interpretation and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Crisis" in this paper refers to the English translation by David Carr Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston, 1970). The German original includes a few more texts and was first published in 1954. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. by Walter Biemel, Husserliana, 6 (Dordrecht, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Husserl's use of the adjective "European" highlights several ideas. Husserl suggests that an "absolute idea" and "meaning" (*Crisis*, 16), which he desires for all of humanity, developed in a particular manner in European culture. Another motivation to speak of "European sciences" was Husserl's opposition against the radical nationalism and racism of his time, which had already stripped him of his speaking rights in Germany. Since Husserl includes also north America in the development of the "European" sciences, one may as well speak of "Western Sciences", as Trizio (2016) does. The concepts of "European" and "Western sciences", however, both convey an ethnocentric and imperialistic undertone, which makes both concepts problematic.

<sup>3</sup> Emiliano Trizio, Emiliano Trizio, 'Crisis', in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, edited by Daniele De Santis, Burt C. Hopkins, and Claudio Majolino, 1st ed. Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084013>, 159, fn. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, 5.

instead proposes that the crisis “can only be a crisis of scientificity”.<sup>5</sup> “Scientificity” is Trizio’s preferred translation for *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, which Husserl explicates as the task (*Aufgabe*) and method (*Methodik*) of science.<sup>6</sup> Trizio furthermore holds that the loss of significance for life is a “further, inevitable consequence of the uprooting of the sciences from the soil of a universal philosophy culminating in metaphysics”.<sup>7</sup> Against Trizio, Heffernan argues for an “inclusive approach”, according to which the crisis of the European sciences is “both a crisis of their scientificity and a crisis of their meaningfulness for life”.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he distinguishes seven different but “inextricably linked” crises in Husserl’s book, and holds that the six other crises are caused by the crisis of the European sciences:

(1) There is a *Krisis* of the European sciences in so far as the natural and mathematical sciences have become purely positivistic. (2) There is a *Krisis* of the European sciences in so far as the human sciences have lost their way by modeling themselves on the natural and mathematical sciences. (3) There is a *Krisis* of European psychology, the supposed science of the human spirit, in so far as it cannot clarify its own subject matter. (4) There is a *Krisis* of European culture in so far as it has lost its faith in rationality. (5) There is a *Krisis* of European humanity in so far as it has become questionable whether it any longer possesses the capacity to achieve the entelechy with which all humanity was conceived. (6) There is a *Krisis* of European existence in so far as human beings have lost their sense of a meaningful life. (7) There is a *Krisis* of European philosophy in so far as it no longer addresses the metaphysical questions, the meaning questions. Etiologically speaking, *Krisen* (1)–(6) are traceable to *Krisis* (7).<sup>9</sup>

Heffernan’s list neatly shows that Husserl uses the concept of crisis in multiple intertwined ways. Since the different uses of crisis are connected, I suggest understanding them as ramifications of a common issue. Seen in this way, it does not really matter whether the loss of the meaningfulness of modern science to life is a consequence, or a part of, the crisis of the European sciences. Either way, the crucial point for understanding Husserl’s concept of crisis is, and here Trizio and Heffernan agree, that the crisis of the European sciences is due to a crisis of philosophy. In Trizio’s term, the crisis of science is a “repercussion”<sup>10</sup> of the crisis of philosophy. Husserl writes that the “crisis of philosophy” implies (*bedeutet*) the crisis of the European sciences in modernity,<sup>11</sup> i.e., “in the first centuries of the modern period”,<sup>12</sup> from about Galileo Galilei onward.

---

<sup>5</sup> Trizio, ‘What Is the Crisis of Western Sciences?’, *Husserl Studies*, 32/3 (2016), 206 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-016-9194-8>> [accessed 6 November 2017], 192.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Trizio, ‘What Is the Crisis of Western Sciences?’, 191.

<sup>8</sup> George Heffernan, ‘The Concept of *Krisis* in Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*’, *Husserl Studies*, 33/3 (2017), <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-017-9209-0> [accessed 6 November 2017], 229.

<sup>9</sup> Heffernan, ‘The Concept of *Krisis* in Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*’, 253–254.

<sup>10</sup> Trizio, ‘What Is the Crisis of Western Sciences?’, 191.

<sup>11</sup> *Crisis*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Crisis*, 7.

This chapter does not go up to the ramifications of the crisis, it does not discuss further the wider implications and impact of the crisis. Instead, it takes the opposite direction and goes down to the roots of the crisis of the European sciences. This approach shows that the different senses of crisis do not only share their origin in a philosophical problem, but also that this problem consists of misunderstandings of the relation between the world of subjective experience and the objective world. In addition, this approach connects the crisis talk in the *Crisis* to Husserl's earlier works. Whereas "crisis" is a new concept for Husserl, the problem it expresses is at the core of Husserl's philosophical life.

Furthermore, this approach connects the beginning of the *Crisis* to its later parts, which elaborate the roots rather than the ramifications of the crisis. After admitting that he had "advanced too quickly, in order to make felt the incomparable significance attaching to the clarification of the deepest motives of this crisis",<sup>13</sup> Husserl does not further elaborate the concept of crisis. In the first of the two instances in the continuous text of the *Crisis* where he uses the word crisis, he says that there are "always new crises" of natural sciences, and in the other that there is a "crisis of psychology".<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, the elaboration of the concept of crisis is restricted to the Vienna and Prague lectures and the very beginning of the *Crisis*. The concept of crisis serves as an introduction to the underlying problem that Husserl unfolds after the introduction, namely the development that led to the state of science and philosophy of his – and by extension our – time. This underlying problem needs to be understood to fathom the full depth of what Husserl means by the crisis of the European sciences.

As one may expect, Husserl follows the roots far into their depth. He extensively analyses the development of the European sciences, mathematics, and philosophy, and here, in contrast to the rather loose use of "crisis", he very much attempts to make careful distinctions. He spends much effort fathoming the genesis of European science, in particular from Galileo onwards, and the changes to the understanding of subjectivity. Husserl thoroughly investigates, on the one hand, the relation between the subjectively experienced lifeworld and the world of modern science. On the other hand, he carefully reconsiders the possibilities and difficulties of the phenomenological method.

The next section will look at the genesis of the European sciences and the "mathematisation of nature" rather briefly, which I have investigated in detail in my dissertation.<sup>15</sup> For Husserl, the development involves crucial philosophical misunderstandings, and overcoming them is an important step to tackling the problem of the relation of subjectivity and the world. I contend, however, that this does not eliminate the wider problem. In other words, uncovering the lifeworld beneath the sedimentations of science enables a better view of subjectivity, but it does not solve the underlying issue of the interrelationships between subjectivity

---

<sup>13</sup> *Crisis*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Crisis*, 216, cf. *Crisis*, 212.

<sup>15</sup> Christoph Durt, 'The Paradox of the Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction and Husserl's Genealogy of the Mathematisation of Nature. Dissertation'. (eScholarship University of California, 2012) <<http://www.durt.de/publications/dissertation/>>.

and the objective world. Section 3 then investigates the fundamental problems of subjectivity and, in particular, the famous (and infamous) “paradox of subjectivity”.<sup>16</sup> It concludes that the crisis would only be completely resolved once those interrelationships are completely understood, or it is at least clear that phenomenology can lead to such an understanding. The difficulties delineating the exact borders of Husserl’s different uses of “crisis”, as well as the rather particular meaning of the concept, motivate another question at the end (section 4), namely whether the concept of crisis is really appropriate for the problems investigated by Husserl.

## 2. The Paradoxical Interrelationships between the World of Science and the Lifeworld

Although Husserl speaks of a crisis of the sciences, he clearly is not attempting to tell the sciences how to conduct their investigations and, on the contrary, recognises their enormous successes.<sup>17</sup> The successes do only pertain to a limited concept of science, however, a “residual concept” (*Restbegriff*).<sup>18</sup> On the way to success, the wider idea of science got lost, that of “one all-encompassing science, the science of the totality of what is”. The wider problems of reason and the meaning of science for life were dismissed from scientific investigation and became a matter of ideology. They are the bone of contention of divergent schools and indeed, in the case of “ideological positivism”,<sup>19</sup> are not only dismissed from science but also from philosophy.

This may suggest that the simple solution to the loss is that science needs to regain the wider sense it had in antiquity. But the loss of that wider sense was not a simple forgetfulness but the result of the very concept that founds the success of modern science, namely the modern concept of the world. More precisely, Husserl holds that the connection between the modern concept of the world and the world of subjective experience, the lifeworld, has become enigmatic. The paradox of subjectivity on the level of basic subjectivity is important, but it is only part of the story, and I will come back to it in section 3.

Husserl also speaks of a paradox on the higher level of the interrelationships between the world of modern science and the lifeworld: “The paradoxical interrelationships of the ‘objectively true world’ and the ‘lifeworld’ make enigmatic the manner of being of both”.<sup>20</sup> The interrelationships seem paradoxical because, on the one side, the world of modern science is framed in ideal and formal numerical terms. Numbers cannot directly be experienced but only their manifestations such as a printed “1”, or the intuitive distinction between one and two objects. The lifeworld, in contrast, is the world as experienced. The direct comparison of the mathematised world and the lifeworld leads to the paradox that empirical reality is described as non-experiential, yet it is the very world that we

---

<sup>16</sup> *Crisis*, 178.

<sup>17</sup> *Crisis*, 3–4.

<sup>18</sup> *Crisis*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> (Husserl 1970; *weltanschaulicher Positivismus*, 1962, 5)

<sup>20</sup> *Crisis*, 131.

experience. Husserl also gives reasons why there is usually some sense of a paradox on this level and why already on this level, the true nature of the paradox does not become clear.

Husserl's account of the "mathematisation of nature" (Husserl 1970, 23) shows that *this* paradox is due to the overlooking of an intricate method applied to experience that starts with measurements and ends in a formal concept of reality. The mathematisation of nature consists of several consecutive yet interwoven steps that start with measurements through which ideal numbers are assigned to empirical objects, which are transformed into ideal and formal objects, which then can be operated on with the formal methods of mathematical-natural science. The "'objectively true' world" (Husserl 1970, 131) is induced from the lifeworld. The resulting description is of purely formal objects and, in principle, not experienceable, and reality appears to be disconnected from the original experience. Yet, the paradoxical interrelationships usually remain unclear because the mathematised physical description is fitted onto the lifeworld like a tailor-made "garb of ideas" (Husserl 1970, 51). The precise fit of the ideal objectivities of science makes it seem as if nature conceived in ideal mathematical terms would be just a more precise description of the same world. The radical difference between the two descriptions is covered up by seemingly frictionless methods of measurements, and the possibility of calculation of new data that can be used to predict future measurements.

If the mathematised world of nature is taken to be reality in itself, the way objects and their properties and relations in the lifeworld are given to experience seems dismissible. Nevertheless, the mathematisation of nature does not directly affect ordinary experience and the "general thesis of the natural attitude".<sup>21</sup> The general thesis takes for granted that the world exists and the objects in it and their properties and relations exist in the way they appear in ordinary experience. Such assumptions do not have to be made an explicit topic of thought or predication; they can also be a non-reflective part of experience.<sup>22</sup> The mathematisation of nature radicalises the general thesis by giving a radically objective description that is further removed from subjective experience. Scientists ostensibly replace the general thesis of the constitution of the world under the natural attitude, the lifeworld, with a more objective description. Yet, in doing so, they presuppose that very lifeworld. For the scientist, the lifeworld is not functioning as "something irrelevant that must be passed through but as that which ultimately grounds the theoretical-logical ontic validity for all objective verification, i.e., as the source of self-evidence, the source of verification".<sup>23</sup>

For instance, modern physical science does not need a concept of colour to explain the changes of light rays due to surface reflectance properties. Since ordinary colour concepts often do not correspond straightforwardly to simple light wave or surface reflectance properties, there is a temptation to disregard ordinary

---

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie; Buch 1, Band 1: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by Karl Schuhmann, Husserliana, III/1 (Den Haag, 1976), 60.

<sup>22</sup> Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie; Buch 1, Band 1: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Crisis*, 126.

concepts as confused, erroneous, and eliminable. This may cause a sense of incompatibility between the physical description of the world with the ordinary description of colours. But, even for the eliminativist, the physical description must be compatible with the ordinary view of colours in that it must be able to explain the changes in the physical world that are ordinarily perceived as changes in colours. Of course, this is exactly what physics does: it provides a scientific explanation of the physical processes that cause ordinary phenomena such as colours. Despite the high level of theoretical reflection, empirical science cannot completely leave behind ordinary experience in the lifeworld. Science exhibits “an elasticity that, however radical the reflection, leaves untouched an immediate acceptance of the pre-given ‘world of things’, one that underscores the validity of a theoretical engagement”.<sup>24</sup> The experience of objects in the lifeworld is not suspended but presupposed in the “substruction”<sup>25</sup> of ordinary experience with mathematical-physical objects.

By itself, the scientific description does not necessarily contradict the lifeworld. A true contradiction arises only when the ideal world of mathematical-natural science is supposed to replace the lifeworld, as is implied by the naturalistic reduction. The mathematisation of nature is, first of all, a core part of the scientific method. It may seem like a metaphysical endeavour since it is concerned with existence, and it operates with the very objects that metaphysical naturalism recognises as real. Yet, this does not need to involve the claim that the description of nature in mathematical-physical science is the only true description of the whole world. Making such a claim requires an additional, metaphysical, step. That step is taken by the naturalistic reduction, which reduces the apparent plurality of things and properties in the lifeworld to the allegedly only true austere reality of mathematical-natural science. Here, the paradoxical interrelationships between the mathematised world and subjectivity appears. The naturalistic reduction must show that everything in the lifeworld can be completely reduced to the naturalistic description, including subjective experience. But since subjective experience was excluded from the reductive description in the first place, it seems impossible to reduce conscious experience to the reductive description. The paradox here consists of the juxtaposition of that apparent impossibility and the assertion that nevertheless the reduction must be done.

These considerations can contribute to making sense of Husserl’s seemingly strange claim that, when we think that mathematical-natural science can explain reality in itself, “we take for true being what is actually a method”.<sup>26</sup> “True being” is Husserl’s expression for real and possible cognition of the world.<sup>27</sup> The experienced world is, of course, the lifeworld, rather than some alleged reality

---

<sup>24</sup> James Dodd, ‘Inner Life and Transcendental Philosophy’, *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 66/4 (2004), 480.

<sup>25</sup> *Crisis*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> *Crisis*, 51.

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. by Walter Biemel, *Husserliana*, 9, Photomech. Repr. of 1962 (Dordrecht, 1995), 329; Edmund Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, ed. by Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, 1997), 236 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-90-481-9923-5>> [accessed 28 January 2022].

behind experience, or some pure mental substance.<sup>28</sup> Husserl is not an “idealist” in the latter sense, he does not believe that reality is purely mental. Neither is he a naturalist who postulates some reality behind experience, which may then be confused with the lifeworld. The confusion is not a simple mistake that could easily be undone, but it results from applying a sophisticated method to the lifeworld, which becomes represented in a mathematical-physical description. The method replaces experiential reality in several steps, each of which can be related back to the previous step, so that the qualitative difference does not become obvious.<sup>29</sup> Measurement techniques allow for abstract representations of extended qualities with always more precision. It seems obvious that these correctly represent reality, and they are hence regarded as the only real (“primary”) qualities of the world. Other, “secondary”, qualities cannot directly be measured and are disregarded as vague appearances that somehow must be produced by the subject out of constellations of primary qualities. The precise fit to the lifeworld makes it seem as if the representations represent the world in itself, while in fact they are put over the lifeworld like a “garb of ideas”.<sup>30</sup>

Since the world of mathematical-natural science cannot be experienced in its ideal form, its relation to experience, in particular experiences of secondary qualities, seems enigmatic. By elaborating how the world of modern science is derived from the experiential lifeworld by the application of the method of the mathematisation of nature, Husserl’s account of the mathematisation explains that the apparent paradox of their interrelationships can be understood as the consequence of an overzealous naturalism rather than the actual work of natural science itself. But this does not get to the bottom of the crisis. Beneath the layer of naturalistic misinterpretations, further sedimentations inhibit the view on the subjectivity that, according to Husserl, underlies objective science. Overcoming naturalistic misunderstandings is only a first step toward a resolution of the crisis.

### **3. The Paradox of Subjectivity and why it needs to be Resolved to Overcome the Crisis**

When the naturalistic misunderstandings are left behind, the problem of the relation of objective science to subjective experience of the lifeworld presents itself on a very different level. The problem is no longer the irreconcilability of the lifeworld as the world of experience and the mathematised world as a non-experiential world. Instead, the phenomenological method of approaching the lifeworld, the *epochē* and phenomenological reduction, leads to a very different kind of irreconcilability.

Whereas the purpose of the mathematisation of nature is to come to an objective description of reality, a description of the world before subjective experience, the purpose of the *epochē* is to prepare the investigation of experience in the way it is

---

<sup>28</sup> Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, 330; Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, 237.

<sup>29</sup> Durt, ‘The Paradox of the Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction and Husserl’s Genealogy of the Mathematization of Nature.’ Dissertation.

<sup>30</sup> *Crisis*, 51.

given to the subject of experience, without presupposing whether and how the experienced things exist in any sense that goes beyond experience. The *epochē* thus “brackets” or “suspends” the general thesis. Husserl gives the example of seeing a house, which in the natural attitude involves believing that there is a house.<sup>31</sup> When the belief in the existence of everything is bracketed, the belief is still there, but it is not affirmed. Of course, the belief may be veritable or not, it is compatible with both the existence and the non-existence of the house.

Clearly, the *epochē* is not a form of scepticism. If the *epochē* were a sceptical move that would doubt the existence of what is posited by the general thesis, it would contradict the general thesis. Suspending is not questioning, however, but rendering inoperative. When the *epochē* suspends the ordinary belief in the existence of objects, it leaves intact everything as it is given to ordinary experience, just without the positing element of *doxa* or belief in the existence of things. The general thesis is neither affirmed nor contradicted.

In contrast, the naturalistic interpretation of the mathematisation of nature, replaces one kind of existence – the experiential lifeworld – with another kind of existence – the objective mathematised world. The concern with objective existence in the natural attitude and in the mathematisation of nature overlooks the constitutive accomplishments of subjectivity. Bracketing the general thesis, in contrast, allows focusing on the constitutive accomplishments of subjectivity. While both the mathematisation and the *epochē* are preliminary steps that prepare the further step of reduction, the naturalistic and the phenomenological reduction are opposed methods. The naturalistic reduction reduces experiential reality to the austere world of natural science. In contrast, the phenomenological reduction, in addition to the *epochē*, and as suggested by its Latin roots (*re-* + *ducere*), leads back the experience from the natural attitude to its subjective constituents. Unlike the naturalistic reduction, the phenomenological reduction does not render a description that would be detached from subjective experience and contradict the general thesis.

By bringing the constitutive achievements of subjectivity into the focus, however, the phenomenological reduction brings to the fore other enigmatic problems regarding objectivity and subjectivity. Crucially, subjectivity concerns all experiences of the world of a subject, yet it also pertains to humans, which are obviously a part of the world. This dual characteristic leads to an apparent contradiction, the “paradox of subjectivity”<sup>32</sup>:

Universal intersubjectivity, into which all objectivity, everything that exists at all, is resolved, can obviously be nothing other than mankind; and the latter is undeniably a component part of the world. How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world [...]?<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24): zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. by Rudolf Boehm, Husserliana, VIII, Photomech. Repr. of 1959 (Dordrecht, 1996), 92.

<sup>32</sup> *Crisis*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> *Crisis*, 179.



Husserl devotes much attention to the paradox of subjectivity, and whereas he quickly suggests a “resolution of the paradox”,<sup>34</sup> he admits that the first attempt at that resolution is not sufficient<sup>35</sup> and leaves a second attempt at a resolution unfinished.<sup>36</sup> His different formulations of the paradox and the incomplete attempts at a resolution raise more questions than they answer. Only after the naturalistic distortions of the problem of subjectivity are removed, the really hard problems of subjectivity come into view.

The nature of the paradox of subjectivity and the possibility of its resolution is controversial among Husserl scholars. Some have claimed that there is a solution if the paradox of subjectivity is interpreted epistemically<sup>37</sup> or if it is understood that it is due to two different viewpoints.<sup>38</sup> David Carr, in his book *The Paradox of Subjectivity*, in contrast, contends that “[t]hese two descriptions of the subject – subject for the world and object in the world – are equally necessary and essentially incompatible”.<sup>39</sup> He concludes that “Husserl held onto this distinction, and believed that it could not be bridged, no matter how closely the two sides approached each other. I agree with him, and I think that the distinction can be shown to be both unbridgeable and paradoxical”.<sup>40</sup> Others have claimed that the paradox does not express an incompatibility,<sup>41</sup> or that phenomenological reflection does not “eliminate the difference between the transcendental and the empirical perspective, but perhaps it makes their coexistence less paradoxical”.<sup>42</sup> Another view is that “[t]he paradox cannot be resolved but only (‘subjectively’) be re-enacted”.<sup>43</sup>

Here, there is not enough space to investigate Husserl’s different formulations of the paradox and those of others, or to assess the possibility of a resolution of the paradox of subjectivity. I have spent a whole paper on this topic, which may interest those who want to think about it more.<sup>44</sup> But already from the different formulations it is clear that, while Husserl was convinced that phenomenology is the right method to tackle the problems of subjectivity, he neither ignored the

---

<sup>34</sup> *Crisis*, 182.

<sup>35</sup> *Crisis*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> *Crisis*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas M. Seebohm, *History as a Science and the System of the Sciences*, Contributions To Phenomenology 77 (Cham, 2015), 39 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-13587-8>> [accessed 27 June 2018].

<sup>38</sup> Sebastian Luft, ‘Husserl’s Method of Reduction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. by Søren Overgaard and Sebastian Luft, Routledge Philosophy Companions (London, 2012), 249.

<sup>39</sup> David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition* (1999), 135.

<sup>40</sup> David Carr, ‘Response to Drummond and Zahavi’, 2002, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Carr, ‘Response to Drummond and Zahavi’, 123.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Zahavi, ‘Transcendental Subjectivity and Metaphysics A Discussion of David Carr’s Paradox of Subjectivity’, *Human Studies*, 25/1 (2002), 109.

<sup>43</sup> Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl, ‘Transzendente oder hermeneutische Phänomenologie der Lebenswelt? Über Chancen und Gefahren einer reflexiven Analyse’, in *Lebenswelten: Ludwig Landgrebe—Eugen Fink—Jan Patočka. Wiener Tagungen zur Phänomenologie 2002*, ed. by Helmuth Vetter (Frankfurt a.M, 2003), 131; my translation.

<sup>44</sup> Christoph Durt, ‘The Embodied Self and the Paradox of Subjectivity’, *Husserl Studies*, 36/1 (2020), 69–85 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-019-09256-4>> [accessed 27 March 2020].

problems on the way to a solution, nor did he think that he had reached a completely satisfying resolution. His work can show the problems underlying the crisis and while it avoids some of them, it does not complete the way to a resolution.

As stated in section 2, it may seem that the crisis of the European sciences, whether defined as a lack of scientificity or as a disconnection from meaningfulness for life, could be overcome just by understanding how the misinterpretation of the mathematisation of nature by naturalistic reductionism diverted science away from its course toward truly objective knowledge. But this section argued that such an understanding would not be complete if the relation of subjectivity to the lifeworld remains enigmatic. The paradox of subjectivity is in the way of such an understanding. Husserl clearly recognises this and even writes that “[i]f the paradox just developed were insoluble, it would mean that an actually universal and radical *epochē* could not be carried out at all”.<sup>45</sup> It would remain fundamentally unclear how philosophy could arrive at “its horizon of apodictic forward movement”.<sup>46</sup> Philosophy itself would remain in a state of crisis, and with it, a deeper understanding of science and its meaning for life. Since “the crisis of philosophy implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe”,<sup>47</sup> the crisis of the modern sciences would not be overcome.

Understanding the misinterpretations of the objective world thus does not overcome the crisis of the European sciences as long as the paradox of subjectivity is not resolved. Resolving the layers of naturalistic misunderstanding is an important first step, but it also brings to the fore the deeper problems of subjectivity. Even if the paradox of subjectivity can be solved in principle, it is clear that Husserl himself did not reach an ultimate solution, despite his repeated and serious attempts. Although he provides important tools and insights, he did not eradicate the deeper roots of the crisis.

#### 4. Beyond the Concept of Crisis

After Husserl, there has been a massive inflation of “crisis” talk,<sup>48</sup> and the depth of Husserl’s concept of crisis is easily overlooked. On the one hand, the concept of crisis is applied to so many relatively minor problems that it becomes overused and blunt. On the other hand, there are so many huge, and indeed global, problems for which the concept of crisis is repetitively used that we have become numb to the existential implications of the concept. Husserl’s thought can contribute to better understanding the philosophical roots of the development of reason, science, and technology, to disentangle the conditions of apparent enigmas arising

---

<sup>45</sup> *Crisis*, 180.

<sup>46</sup> *Crisis*, 72.

<sup>47</sup> *Crisis*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> See the graphs in the Google corpus of books:

[https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=krisis&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2022&case\\_insensitive=on](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=krisis&year_start=1800&year_end=2022&case_insensitive=on). Also cf. Durt, ‘The Paradox of the Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction and Husserl’s Genealogy of the Mathematisation of Nature. Dissertation’, 194.

from that development, and to conceive of alternatives to its only apparently necessary course.

To reflect on the concept of crisis, it is useful to go beyond what Husserl wrote about the crisis of the European sciences and to think about what he would have said on later “crisis”. What would he have said about the development, deployment, massive accumulation, and proliferation of the atomic bomb, which makes human self-destruction an immediate possibility (nuclear crisis)? Or on the environmental crisis, which gives rise to the suspicion that human self-destruction is not only a possibility but a necessary consequence of the unchecked use of the very technology that was enabled by the progress of modern science? What would Husserl have said on the increasing guiding, nudging, and manipulating of human thought by means of automated algorithms, uses that are so powerful that they contribute to other “crisis”, such as that of democracy? Or what would he have said to the possibilities of almost total algorithmic control of human experience and behaviour in Augmented and Virtual Realities?

These questions name problems that cannot be reduced to mere theoretical problems, but Husserl would surely hold that they are deeply intertwined with philosophical issues such as the meaning of science for human life, the rationality of science, and the connection between the objectivity of science and subjectivity. The last two and other questions on digital technology concern not only Husserl’s thought on the mathematisation of nature but also, inversely, how experience itself can be produced by means of digital technology.<sup>49</sup> Obviously, the problems arising from the use of these technologies are not caused by a lack of progress of science in a narrow sense. Husserl would surely point out where technical thinking has lost its connection with ordinary meaning, and where mere technological progress has replaced real scientific progress. Moreover, his analysis of the relation of calculation to experience and the lifeworld concerns not only the mathematisation of nature in modern science but also the foundations of the digitalisation. Regarding these issues, Husserl’s considerations in the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy* are very topical.

I would like to raise the question, however, of whether the concept of crisis is appropriate for the problems Husserl was alerting to by using this concept. In its original medical context, the concept suggests that there is a critical point, which is all-decisive, and after which there are only two options: the death or recovery of the patient. It suggests that, to use another concept that is worn-out today, it is “five to twelve”, that there is a certain number of minutes, days, or years to avert catastrophe and save everything. The claim that right here and now is the all-decisive moment is itself a ubiquitous rhetorical cliché. The “crisis” of the modern sciences as well as the other “crises” mentioned in the questions have proven to be perpetual, and they do not have simple either-or outcomes.

A perpetual crisis, however, is not a crisis but a round square. It is a *contradictio in adjecto* because the adjective ‘perpetual’ contradicts the concept of crisis. The

---

<sup>49</sup> Christoph Durt, ‘The Computation of Bodily, Embodied, and Virtual Reality: Winner of the Essay Prize “What Can Corporality as a Constitutive Condition of Experience (Still) Mean in the Digital Age?”’, *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, 2, 2020, 25–39.

idea of crisis as a critical state that results either in re-coalescence or death is furthermore inapt to account for more-or-less outcomes. While, in the concrete context of Husserl's talks, the concept of "crisis" was "in the air" and useful to introduce his profound genealogical analysis of the unresolved philosophical issues at its root, the concept of crisis needs to be reconsidered in the wider context referred to by Husserl. He may have wished to find a solution that would solve the "crisis" in a final one-time effort. But the above investigation has shown that the problems at the root of the "crisis" require perpetual attention. The concept of crisis is not apt to capture the complexity of the discussed issues and may lead to misunderstandings of their nature and possible solutions. Rather than becoming too entangled in "crisis" talk, philosophers need to come up with new metaphors that take heed of the complexity of the problems and possible solutions.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to George Heffernan and Emiliano Trizio for their comments on a draft of this paper. Work on this paper was supported by funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 754340.

### **Bibliography**

Carr, David, 'Response to Drummond and Zahavi', *Human Studies* 25: 117–123, 2002.

———, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition* (1999).

Dodd, James, 'Inner Life and Transcendental Philosophy', *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 66/4 (2004), 473–97.

Durt, Christoph, 'The Computation of Bodily, Embodied, and Virtual Reality: Winner of the Essay Prize "What Can Corporality as a Constitutive Condition of Experience (Still) Mean in the Digital Age?"', *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, 2, 2020, 25–39.

———, 'The Embodied Self and the Paradox of Subjectivity', *Husserl Studies*, 36/1 (2020), 69–85 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-019-09256-4>> [accessed 27 March 2020].

———, 'The Paradox of the Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction and Husserl's Genealogy of the Mathematization of Nature'. Dissertation. (eScholarship University of California, 2012)  
<http://www.durt.de/publications/dissertation/>.

Heffernan, George, 'The Concept of *Krisis* in Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*', *Husserl Studies*,

33/3 (2017), 229–57 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-017-9209-0>> [accessed 6 November 2017].

- Husserl, Edmund, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. by Walter Biemel, Husserliana, 6 (Dordrecht, 1962).
- , *Erste Philosophie (1923/24): zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. by Rudolf Boehm, Husserliana, VIII, Photomech. Repr. of 1959 (Dordrecht, 1996).
- , *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie; Buch I, Band 1: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by Karl Schuhmann, Husserliana, III/1 (Den Haag, 1976).
- , *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. by Walter Biemel, Husserliana, 9, Photomech. Repr. of 1962 (Dordrecht, 1995).
- , *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, ed. by Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, 1997)  
<<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-90-481-9923-5>> [accessed 28 January 2022].
- , *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston, 1970)
- Luft, Sebastian, ‘Husserl’s Method of Reduction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. by Søren Overgaard and Sebastian Luft, Routledge Philosophy Companions (London, 2012), 243–53
- Rinofner-Kreidl, Sonja, ‘Transzendente oder hermeneutische Phänomenologie der Lebenswelt? Über Chancen und Gefahren einer reflexiven Analyse’, in *Lebenswelten: Ludwig Landgrebe—Eugen Fink—Jan Patočka. Wiener Tagungen zur Phänomenologie 2002*, ed. by Helmuth Vetter (Frankfurt a.M., 2003), 115–30.
- Seebohm, Thomas M., *History as a Science and the System of the Sciences*, Contributions to Phenomenology 77 (Cham, 2015)  
<<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-13587-8>> [accessed 27 June 2018].
- Trizio, Emiliano, ‘What Is the Crisis of Western Sciences?’, *Husserl Studies*, 32/3 (2016), 191–211 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10743-016-9194-8>> [accessed 6 November 2017].
- , ‘Crisis’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, edited by Daniele De Santis, Burt C.

Hopkins, and Claudio Majolino, 1st ed. Routledge, 2020.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084013>.

Zahavi, Dan, 'Transcendental Subjectivity and Metaphysics A Discussion of David Carr's Paradox of Subjectivity', *Human Studies*, 25/1 (2002), 103–16.