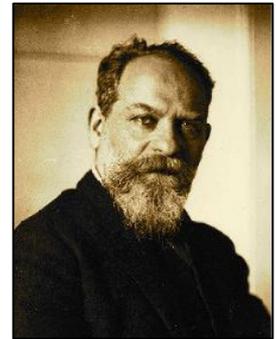




Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938)

Edmund Husserl was born in 1859, in the town of Prossnitz in Moravia. He began German classical studies at the Realgymnasium in Vienna at the age of 10, and in the following year transferred to the Staatsgymnasium in Olmütz. He attended university in Leipzig, concentrating on mathematics, physics and philosophy, with particular interests in astronomy and optics. After two years Husserl moved to Berlin to further his interest in mathematics, returning once again to Vienna, and completing his doctorate in 1883.



His dissertation was on the theory of the calculus of variations. He taught for a short period in Berlin but his interest in the lectures of Franz Brentano inspired him to return to Vienna in 1884. These lectures had a great impact on Husserl, moving him to further his studies in psychology and philosophy. Brentano's concept of intention as applied to the philosophy of consciousness as *consciousness of something* was a key influence on Husserl.

1886 was a pivotal year for Husserl. He moved to Halle, and studied psychology, writing his Habilitationsschrift, entitled, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*. He converted to Christianity along with his fiancé (a member of the Prossnitz Jewish community), Malvine Charlotte Steinschneider. They had three children together. He became the Privatdozent at Halle, and remained there until 1901. During this period he wrote the most important of his earlier works, *Logische Untersuchungen (Logical Investigations (1900-01))* which was published in two parts, and is an introduction to his concept of phenomenology.

In 1901 Husserl received tenure at the University of Göttingen, where he held a teaching position for 16 years. It was here that he developed his theories on phenomenology, which became a distinct school of thought that attracted many students. In 1913 he published the quintessential piece, *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, introducing his phenomenological reduction - an intuitive method of contemplating objects while observing the meanings and reflections the mind deploys to describe them. Owing to the nature of such reflection, the object of contemplation need not be physically present; for Husserl the method involves the setting aside of real existence and concerning oneself with the "bracketing of existence," or the observing of what it means that something appears as a true phenomenon within "the Objective world". These studies led Husserl to analyze detailed descriptions of mental structures involved in the perception of objects. Husserl came to the conclusion that consciousness requires an object for contemplation; that one should strive for the description of "things in themselves," as opposed to the invention of theories. (In this regard, Husserl regarded himself as working akin to the philosophy of Kant.)

The universal depriving of acceptance, this 'inhibiting' or 'putting out of play' of all positions taken toward the already-given Objective world and, in the first place, all existential positions (those concerning being, illusion, possible being, being likely, probable, etc.), - or, as it is also called, this "phenomenological epoché and 'parenthesizing' of the Objective world - therefore does not leave us confronting nothing. On the contrary we gain possession of something by it;



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and what we (or, to speak more precisely, what I, the one who is meditating) acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything in them, purely as meant in them: the universe of 'phenomena' in the ...phenomenological sense.

— from *The ego cogito as transcendental subjectivity, in Cartesian Meditations*.

In 1916, Husserl lost his son Wolfgang to WWI. He observed his son's death with a year of mourning and kept silent professionally. The war disrupted Husserl's teaching and involvement with his younger colleagues.

Later the same year, however, Husserl accepted a professorship at Freiburg in Breisgau. The manuscripts he produced while there were published after his death as volumes two and three of *Ideas*, although there were also many other projects. Critics of the time pointed to the subjective nature of the results of Husserl's methods, prompting his response in the publication of *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), in which Husserl demonstrates how individual consciousness can be directed toward other philosophers, society, and history.

Husserl continued to work throughout his retirement from teaching at Freiburg in 1928 until his death from pleurisy in 1938. His later works continued to influence his followers: *Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness* (1928; Eng. trans., 1964); *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929; Eng. trans., 1969), *Experience and Judgment* (1939; Eng. trans., 1973).

The one difficulty Husserl had was that of oneness, metaphysics, which began to occupy a greater concern in his later works, giving way to a new school of thinking, *Existentialism*, headed by Husserl's greatest pupil, Martin Heidegger.

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