

# Husserl's Letter to Lévy-Bruhl: Introduction

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Throughout his working life, Edmund Husserl corresponded with many of the leading scientists of his day (including mathematicians, physicists and other natural scientists, as well as those working in the human sciences). His letter to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, the French philosopher, ethnologist, and anthropologist, is one of his most interesting.<sup>1</sup> Husserl wrote it in March 1935, around the time when he received an invitation from the Vienna Cultural Society to deliver a lecture in Vienna, which he would do some two months later, on May 7–10, 1935.

In preparation for this letter, Husserl made some notes on Lévy-Bruhl that are now preserved in the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium, as the unpublished convolute K III 7, 1–9. Karl Schuhmann has suggested that Husserl drew on these notes when composing his letter.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Husserl himself mentions in his letter that he had tried to draft several earlier versions but abandoned them, as he would have been led to write a larger treatise. No response to the letter by Lévy-Bruhl is extant, but Schuhmann documented that Lévy-Bruhl remarked to Aron Gurwitsch: “explain it to me; I understand nothing of it” (*expliquez-moi, je n'en comprends rien*).<sup>3</sup> Husserl, on the other hand, as his letter attests, was considering Lévy-Bruhl's ideas with great interest. Indeed, Gurwitsch recalled, independently, that he discussed

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1. Edmund Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Karl Schuhmann with Elisabeth Schuhmann, *Husserliana Documenta III*, 10 vols. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 161–64; henceforth cited as *BW* with volume number and page reference. Volumes of *Husserliana* are cited, following the initial full reference, as *Hua* with roman volume number and Arabic page references. Titles of works are cited in English in the body of the text; they are rendered literally where they differ from the title used for published English translations.

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2. Karl Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik. Denk- und Lebensweg Edmund Husserls* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), 459.

3. *Ibid.* This remark was originally recorded by Herbert Spiegelberg.

Lévy-Bruhl (together with the work of the psychologists Adh mar Gelb and Kurt Goldstein) with Husserl over a period of eight hours at one sitting.<sup>4</sup>

In his letter Husserl says that he had interrupted his own work in order to consult the whole series of works that L vy-Bruhl had produced. In fact, Husserl's library, as preserved in the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium, contains the following texts by L vy-Bruhl: the 1927 German edition of *Primitive Mentality* (1922), as well as a later French edition of that French text from 1931;<sup>5</sup> *The Supernatural and Nature in the Primitive Mentality* (1931);<sup>6</sup> and *Primitive Mythology* (1935),<sup>7</sup> the book which is the explicit subject of Husserl's letter, and which also contains the author's dedication.<sup>8</sup> The German text in particular contains some annotations by Husserl.

Before discussing Husserl's letter in more detail, let us say something about L vy-Bruhl. Lucien L vy-Bruhl (1857–1939), an almost exact contemporary of Husserl's, was a prominent French intellectual of the time, a philosopher, sociologist, ethnologist, and theoretical anthropologist who exerted considerable influence on philosophers such as Ernst Cassirer, psychologists such as Jean Piaget and

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4. Similarly, Alexandre Koyr  had reviewed one of L vy-Bruhl's books in 1930. L vy-Bruhl himself, however, seems to have been unaware of the parallel interest in anthropology in Germany. Indeed, according to L vi-Strauss, the term 'social anthropology' itself was introduced into French by Marcel Mauss in 1938, see Claude L vi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," in his *Structural Anthropology* 2, trans. Monique Layton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 5.

5. Lucien L vy-Bruhl, *La Mentalit  primitive* (Paris: Alcan, 1922); English translation: *Primitive Mentality*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Macmillan, 1923); German translation: *Die geistige Welt der Primitiven*, trans. Margarethe Hamburger (Munich: Bruckmann, 1927). The later French edition, *La Mentalit  primitive* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931) includes a dedication from the author which reads: *  mon cher coll ge et ami Ed. Husserl – souvenir affectueux, L. L vy-Bruhl* (To my dear colleague and friend Ed. Husserl – fond memory, L. L vy-Bruhl)

6. Lucien L vy-Bruhl, *Le Surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalit  primitive* (Paris: Alcan, 1931); English translation: *Primitives and the Supernatural*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936). The French edition bears a dedication that reads: *  mon cher Coll ge et ami Ed. Husserl – souvenir amical, L. L vy-Bruhl* (To my dear colleague and friend Ed. Husserl – friendly memory).

7. Lucien L vy-Bruhl, *La Mythologie primitive. Le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous* (Paris: Alcan, 1935); English translation: *Primitive Mythology: The Mythic World of the Australian and Papuan Natives*, trans. Brian Elliott (St. Lucia: University of Queensland, 1983); henceforth cited as *PM* with French page reference.

8. According to Schuhmann, in his *Briefwechsel* edition of the letter, Husserl is commenting on *La Mythologie primitive*; Bernard Waldenfels and Sebastian Luft, however, claim that the text under discussion is *Die geistige Welt der Primitiven*. It is entirely likely that Husserl, though he could read French, consulted the German text of L vy-Bruhl more closely than the French texts at his disposal.

Carl Jung,<sup>9</sup> theologians such as Gerardus van der Leeuw,<sup>10</sup> and anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and E. E. Evans-Pritchard.<sup>11</sup> Trained in philosophy, he achieved his *agrégation* from the École Normale Supérieure in 1879 and subsequently taught philosophy in Poitiers (1879–1882) and Amiens (1882–1883) before moving to Paris, where he completed his doctorate at the University of Paris in 1884 with a thesis on *The Idea of Responsibility*.<sup>12</sup> He then taught at the École Normale from 1886 on and was appointed to the Sorbonne in 1904 as professor of the history of modern philosophy. He initially published purely philosophical works, including a history of modern French philosophy (1889),<sup>13</sup> a book on German thought after Leibniz (1899),<sup>14</sup> and a study on Comtean philosophy (1900).<sup>15</sup> He had a strong interest in empiricism (especially Hume) and positivism (Comte). Under the influence of another contemporary *normalien*, the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), however, he began to develop a strong interest in sociology and theoretical anthropology (he never conducted fieldwork). His interest in other cultures was first marked in print in his *Ethics and Moral Science* (1903),<sup>16</sup> where he argues for the study of morality based on a scientific sociology of different moral systems (including those found in primitive societies), and rejects the possibility of an absolute universal ethics. In this work, Lévy-Bruhl acknowledged the incommensurability of the thought systems in different cultures. From then on, he embarked on a number of studies on the mentality of the primitive (*la mentalité primitive*, a phrase he coined), concentrating on the differences between so-called “primitive” or preliterate, pre-technological societies and mod-

9. See Robert A. Segal, “Jung and Lévy-Bruhl,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 52 (2007), 635–58.

10. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2d ed., 1956); English translation: *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. J. E. Turner, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

11. See Roy d'Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), and Kaori Sugishita, “Transgression for Transcendence: On the Anthropologist's (Dis)engagement in the Politics of Meaning,” in Ursula Rao and John Hutnyk, eds., *Celebrating Transgression: Method and Politics in Anthropological Discussions of Culture* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 53–71.

12. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *L'idée de responsabilité* (Paris: Hachette, 1884).

13. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *L'Allemagne depuis Leibnitz. Essai sur le développement de la conscience nationale en Allemagne* (Paris: Hachette, 1890).

14. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *History of Modern Philosophy in France*, trans. G. Constance (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1899).

15. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La philosophie d'Auguste Comte* (Paris: Alcan, 1900); English translation: *The Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. Kathleen Mary de Braumont-Klein (London: Sonnenschein, 1903).

16. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La morale et la science des moeurs* (Paris: Alcan, 1903; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 16th ed., 1971); English translation: *Ethics and Moral Science*, trans. Elizabeth Lee (London: Constable, 1905).

ern European cultures. The first of these works was *Mental Functions in Inferior Societies* (1910).<sup>17</sup> It was followed in 1922 by *Primitive Mentality*.

In 1925 Lévy-Bruhl, together with Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet, founded the Institute of Ethnology at the Sorbonne, which was dedicated to the memory of Émile Durkheim, who had died prematurely in 1917. Although Lévy-Bruhl was influenced by Durkheim's Comtean positivism, he disagreed with aspects of Durkheim's methodology, particularly concerning the supposed universal rationality of all humans. He eventually resigned from the Institute and the Sorbonne in 1927 to devote himself to writing and travel. He subsequently lectured at Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California. He died in Paris on March 13, 1939.<sup>18</sup>

Lévy-Bruhl was particularly interested in the question whether there is a universal mentality for all humans and whether this mentality undergoes stages of development or evolution. He published a series of influential books over 30 years on the nature of the primitive mentality, each one gradually refining his original claims, from *Mental Functions in Inferior Societies* (1910), through *The Soul of the Primitive* (1928),<sup>19</sup> and *Primitive Mythology* (1935), to his last book, *Mystic Experience and Primitive Symbolism* (1938).<sup>20</sup> After his death a notebook surfaced, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* (1949), that is very instructive in elucidating his ongoing refinement of his position in his last years.<sup>21</sup> Although Lévy-Bruhl never conducted anthropological fieldwork, he did draw heavily on the existing anthropological literature (including studies by Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, and other seminal anthropologists), as well as on accounts by missionaries and travelers, in order to illustrate his claims. In later works, he revised some of his more brash assertions and his *Notebooks* especially show his willingness to compromise, even renouncing his use of the term 'prelogical' (*NB*, 48–49). Thus, in his *Notebooks*, Lévy-Bruhl acknowledged that in his early work he emphasized the special nature of the abstraction, generalization, and classification carried out by primitives: "What I have said about it was not wrong—but the negative part, the

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17. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1910); English translation: *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926); henceforth cited as *HNT* with English page reference.

18. See Jean Cazeneuve, *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl: sa vie, son oeuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963)

19. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *L'âme primitive* (Paris: Alcan, 1927); English translation: *The "Soul" of the Primitive*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928); henceforth cited as *AP* with French page reference.

20. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *L'Expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs* (Paris: Alcan, 1938).

21. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Carnets de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949); English translation: *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, trans. Pierre Rivière (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975); henceforth cited as *NB* with English page reference.

operations which the primitive mentality uses little or not at all—the easiest—is the only one I have stressed and employed with some precision” (64).

Lévy-Bruhl began to recognize that he had overemphasized the mystical dimension in the lives of primitives; in ordinary everyday matters, their mode of behaving is much the same as that of Europeans. However, he continued to insist that primitive mentality is different; but rather than being blind to contradictions, as he had earlier put it, he came to see that that mentality has a certain indifference to “incompatibilities” and a “lack of curiosity” about manifest improbabilities, hence leaving room for the mysterious and the mythical (*NB*, 50). In *Primitive Mythology* (1935), for instance, Lévy-Bruhl pointed out that, where primitives do recognize contradictions, they reject them “with the same force” as moderns do; however—and this Lévy-Bruhl regarded as distinctive of their mentality—there are contradictions that we recognize but to which they are insensitive and consequently indifferent (*PM*, xi).

Lévy-Bruhl is best known for his proposal that pre-literate or “primitive” peoples exhibited their own kind of “prelogical” rationality. The primitive way of thinking, with its mythical outlook, different conception of causation, reliance on memory rather than reasoning, lack of conceptualization, and so on, is, he maintained, quite alien to contemporary European cultural forms and exhibited a different logic and a different understanding of the world and its objects. Following Durkheim, he thought of the primitive mind as governed by “collective representations.” Furthermore, in primitive culture, the individual is not differentiated from the collectivity and identifies himself or herself wholly with the group. In the case of myth, the natives of Papua New Guinea and Australia possess tribal myths, for which our understanding of the classical myths of Greece and Rome are not particularly helpful models. The fact that modern European thinking cannot accommodate their outlook does not mean that primitive thinking does not have its own inner richness and consistency. Indeed their world appears richer than ours. Whereas, for example, the European mind assumes an order of causality, the primitive mind ascribes everything to more or less spiritual powers. Primitive thought is essentially “mystical”—there is a felt *participation* and unity with all things; objects are never merely natural, but there is a life-force running through the universe, neither completely material nor completely spiritual, a unifying power running through diverse things (*AP*, 3). Primitives do not perceive the objects of the natural world in the same way as modern Europeans do. Europeans experience nature as ordered and reject entities that are incompatible with that order (*PM*, 41). By contrast, primitives experience nature as including what is supernatural. They experience the world holistically, for example, if one animal is wounded then the whole species feels its pain. “To be is to participate,” as he puts it in the *Notebooks*. If a primitive feels unity with a particular totem, then the primitive thinks naturally that he or she is that totem. There is a single unity to all things, though it

can be transmuted into many different things. Thus, primitives can identify many different species of trees and plants, but also believe in the most incredible metamorphoses between different entities (*AP*, 8). Primitives attribute spiritual powers to animals and entities in nature such that nature itself belongs within a “supernature” (*surnature*) which is primarily spiritual (*PM*, 80). Lévy-Bruhl famously hypothesized that primitive thought obeyed a “law of mutual participation” whereby the primitives felt a unity with the world around them. This amounts to a panpsychism or universal animism. Similarly, as noted above, Lévy-Bruhl held that the primitive mind is untroubled by certain contradictions (at least, as modern Europeans would perceive them) and that mythical thinking follows a kind of dream logic, not a typical subject-predicate logic. Indeed, the requirements of strict contradiction can only arise when literacy is achieved.<sup>22</sup> Lévy-Bruhl believed that the primitive mind attached equal value to dream experience and to waking experience and made no distinction between them (xxv). Of particular relevance to Husserl is the manner in which primitives relate to temporality and history. Lévy-Bruhl claims that primitives do not have a sense of “historical evolution” (42); they have a sense of the tribal past which goes back only as far as living memory (four or five generations). He recognizes that many studies have compared primitives in other cultures (Bushmen, Papuans, etc.) to prehistorical cultures as discovered in Europe, and, while acknowledging that analogies are deceptive, Lévy-Bruhl does note that both Neolithic cultures in Europe and contemporary primitive cultures elsewhere may share an inherently mystical attitude towards the world (146). For Lévy-Bruhl, the primitive world attests to a kind of “pre-religion” (217) that differs structurally from more organized religion, and on this point he indicates his departure from Durkheim’s view in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, against Durkheim who regarded the sacred and profane as mutually opposed categories, Lévy-Bruhl regarded the pre-logical, mystical dimension of primitive culture as continuing to persist as a sedimented layer in so-called “civilized” society. In *Mental Functions in Inferior Societies*, he states that the participatory aspect of the primitive mind

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22. Consider Husserl’s views on the fixing of ideal concepts by written signs in his 1936 essay “Origin of Geometry.” See Edmund Husserl, “Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentionale-historisches Problem,” in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel, Husserliana VI (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), 365–86; English translation: “Origin of Geometry,” in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1970), 353–78. The main text is henceforth cited as *Crisis* with German and English page references, respectively.

23. Émile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Paris: Alcan, 1912); English translation: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

leads us to recognize that the rational unity of the thinking being . . . is a desideratum, not a fact. Even among [Europeans], ideas and relations between ideas governed by the law of participation are far from having disappeared. They exist, more or less independently, more or less impaired, but yet ineradicable, side by side with those subject to the [conventional] laws of reasoning. . . . The prelogical and the mystic are coexistent with the logical. (*HNT*, 386)

This view strongly influenced Husserl's understanding of what belongs to the "natural, primordial attitude."

Lévy-Bruhl was hugely influential internationally, and his work was translated into many languages. For instance, he influenced Jean Piaget's analysis of the development of the categories used by children.<sup>24</sup> Henri Bergson, too, discussed Lévy-Bruhl's views on the nature of the primitive mind and its perception of causality, chance, and so on, in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Ernst Cassirer quotes Lévy-Bruhl appreciatively in his *Mythical Thought*,<sup>26</sup> which outlines a view of European society slowly divesting itself of the all-encompassing cloak of myth, more or less endorsing Lévy-Bruhl's own views on the primitive outlook on causation. Cassirer accepts Lévy-Bruhl's view that primitive thinking is governed by a conception of causality, but one different from ours, one that interprets "every contact in space and time as an immediate relation of cause and effect."<sup>27</sup> In a 1957 essay, Emmanuel Levinas locates Lévy-Bruhl's philosophical import in his challenge to the Kantian categories that govern cognition in describing a mentality that "makes light of causality, substance, reciprocity—of space and time—of those conditions of 'every possible object.'"<sup>28</sup> For Levinas, Lévy-Bruhl (following Bergson) opposes the understanding of human experience as *representation* rather than as feeling.

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24. See G. Jahoda, "Piaget and Levy-Bruhl," *History of Psychology* 3 (2000), 218–38.

25. Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1932), esp. 56 ff. and 77 ff.; English translation: *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudsley Brereton (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1977).

26. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Zweiter Teil: Das mythische Denken* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1925); 63–64; English translation: *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms II: Mythical Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1955), esp. 45 ff. Here Cassirer cites the German translation of Lévy-Bruhl's 1910 work, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*.

27. *Ibid.*, 45.

28. Emmanuel Levinas, "Lévy-Bruhl et la philosophie contemporaine," *Revue de de la France et l'Étranger* 147 (1957), 556–69 (reprinted in E. L., *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* [Paris: Grasset, 1991], 49–63); English translation: "Levy-Bruhl and Contemporary Philosophy," trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, in *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other* (New York: Columbia University, 2000), 39–51, here 40–41.

Despite his popularity and influence on a generation of European intellectuals, Lévy-Bruhl's views on primitive mentality were severely criticized by other sociologists and ethnologists as maintaining that primitives were essentially "irrational." In general, his ideas were rejected by anthropologists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski,<sup>29</sup> for dwelling too much on the religious and mystical side of the lives of preliterate peoples as opposed to their mundane concerns.<sup>30</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, who himself wanted to uncover the inherently rational rule-systems governing symbol-use in the "savage mind," wrote that Lévy-Bruhl had gone too far in revising his thought such that the primitive mentality was treated primarily as belonging to affectivity rather than as having the cognitive character he had originally accorded it.<sup>31</sup> Lévy-Bruhl's work fell into neglect as anthropology became more scientific. In recent years, however, there has been a more positive reassessment of Lévy-Bruhl's contribution to thinking about different logics and translating between cultures.<sup>32</sup>

Turning now to Husserl, he wrote his letter to Lévy-Bruhl at the beginning of what would prove to be Husserl's final intellectually productive period, the period that led to the partial publication of the *Crisis* in Belgrade in 1936 and to Husserl's efforts to complete that envisaged project. However, Husserl fell ill in late 1937 and eventually passed away on April 27, 1938. This last period (1934–1937) was not just an intellectually active period for Husserl, it was also a frenetic and anxious time (as the opening and concluding paragraphs of the letter attest). The National Socialist "reforms" were in full swing and new prohibitions against Jews were being enacted daily. Husserl's own son Gerhart had been forced to resign from his professorship in 1933 and would eventually emigrate to the United States in 1936. Husserl, having retired from the University of Freiburg in 1928, became increasingly restricted and isolated due to the National Socialist laws. He himself contemplated leaving Germany and was, as the letter to Lévy-Bruhl attests, assisting several people, including his son Gerhart, to leave also.

After his official retirement in 1928, Husserl had immediately embarked on a frantic period of work that included his lectures in Amsterdam and Paris and the

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29. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

30. See, e.g., Olivier Leroy, *La raison primitive. Essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme* (Paris: Geuthner, 1927) and Émile Cailliet, "Mysticisme et 'mentalité mystique'" in his *Étude d'un problème posé par les travaux de M. Lévy-Bruhl sur la mentalité primitive* (Paris: Alcan, 1938). For a balanced assessment, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, University of Egypt* II (1934), 1–36.

31. Lévi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," 25.

32. See, e.g., Pascal Engel, "Interpretation, charité et mentalité prélogique. Quine, Davidson et la charité bien ordonnée," in *Autour de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl* (10 avril 1857–12 mars 1939), *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 4 (1989), 543–58.



publication of his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929)<sup>33</sup> and the French translation of his Paris lectures of 1929 under the title of the *Méditations cartésiennes* (1931).<sup>34</sup> It is believed that Lévy-Bruhl attended Husserl's opening lecture at the Sorbonne on February 23, 1929 and met with him afterwards at the reception.<sup>35</sup>

In the early 1930s, Husserl, now working with a brilliant and energetic young assistant, Eugen Fink, was attempting to bring his life-work into some kind of systematic order. At the same time, he was endeavoring to renew and revitalize the mission of transcendental phenomenology. Husserl had been deeply wounded by what he had perceived as the "betrayal" of his project of transcendental phenomenology by his erstwhile protégé, Martin Heidegger, whom he had helped to gain the very professorship that Husserl himself had vacated. In a self-reflective letter to Alexander Pfänder, dated January 6, 1931, Husserl wrote:

Certainly when *Being and Time* appeared in 1927 I was surprised by the newfangled language and style of thinking. Initially, I trusted his [Heidegger's] emphatic declaration: It was the continuation of my own research. I got the impression of an exceptional, albeit unclarified, intellectual energy, and I worked hard and honestly to penetrate and appreciate it. Faced with theories so inaccessible to my way of thinking, I did not want to admit to myself that he would surrender both the method of my phenomenological research and its scientific character in general. Somehow or other the fault had to lie with me; it would lie with Heidegger only insofar as he was too quick to jump into problems of a higher level. He himself constantly denied that he would abandon my transcendental phenomenology, and he referred me to his forthcoming Volume Two. Given my low self-confidence at the time, I preferred to doubt myself, my capacity to follow and to appreciate another's movement of thought, rather than to doubt him.<sup>36</sup>

Husserl saw Heidegger's *Daseinsanalytik* in *Being and Time* as a kind of anthropology of human existence and he underlines Heidegger's use of the term 'philosophical anthropology' wherever it occurs.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Husserl had regarded

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33. Edmund Husserl, *Formale and transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*, ed. Paul Janssen, Husserliana XVII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); English translation: *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969).

34. Edmund Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes: introduction à la phénoménologie*, trans. G. Peiffer and E. Levinas (Paris: Colin, 1931).

35. See Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 341.

36. Edmund Husserl, "Husserl an Pfänder, 6.I.1931," *BW* 2, 180–84; English translation: "\_\_\_," trans. Burt C. Hopkins, in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931): The Encyclopaedia Britannica Article, the Amsterdam Lectures, "Phenomenology and Anthropology," and Husserl's Marginal Notes in Being and Time and Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 479–83, here 480–81.

37. See Thomas Sheehan, "Husserl's Marginal Remarks in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*," in Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 287 and 301.

“anthropologism” as a particular form of relativism as early as in the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* (1900);<sup>38</sup> he now addressed it as part of a general kind of historicism, such as it was to be found in Wilhelm Dilthey’s work.

Thus in June 1931 Husserl delivered a talk entitled “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” in which he discussed Dilthey’s work as a “new form of anthropology,” that is, a philosophy that takes its start from human existence. For Husserl, every such philosophy, since it presupposes the world as existent, will be naive in its approach. Hence, the need for a transcendental phenomenology:

For it is immediately clear that any doctrine at all of human being, whether empirical or apriori, presupposes the existing world or a world that could be in being. A philosophy that takes its start from human existence falls back into that naiveté the overcoming of which has, in our opinion, been the whole meaning of modernity. Once this naiveté has finally been unmasked for what it is, once the genuine transcendental problem has been arrived at in its apodictic necessity, there can be no going back. I cannot help seeing the decision for a transcendental phenomenology as definitive. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Despite Husserl’s negative attitude towards what he called “anthropologism” and his belief that all forms of social anthropology were naive due to their acceptance of the world, he nevertheless was growing increasingly interested in issues of human culture and history and what he called “generativity,” that is, the process of cultural development and change across history, especially with regard to inter-generational transmission.<sup>40</sup> He was also attempting to explicate the relation between his transcendental phenomenology and historical studies of human culture, and even, as this letter attests, delving into ethnological literature. An interesting and relatively self-contained text from 1932, entitled “Universal Human Science as Anthropology: The Sense of an Anthropology,” is an attempt to develop a positive

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38. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Teil: Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, ed. Elmar Holenstein, Husserliana XVIII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975); English translation: *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970). See esp. §§ 36, 39, and 40.

39. Edmund Husserl, “Phänomenologie und Anthropologie,” in *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, Husserliana XVII (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 164–81, here 179; English translation: “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” trans. Thomas Sheehan, in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931): The Encyclopaedia Britannica Article, the Amsterdam Lectures, “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” and Husserl’s Marginal Notes in Being and Time and Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), ■, here 499.

40. See Anthony Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1995), 3. For Husserl’s use of the term, see, e.g., *Hua* XXIX, 10 and 13 ff.

anthropology.<sup>41</sup> In this text, as in his 1935 letter to Lévy-Bruhl, anthropology is treated as a kind of *pure psychology*. Here he reiterates his view that anthropology treats humans as persons acting in a spiritual world (*Hua* XV, 481):

Anthropology encompasses all experiencing of nature, all intending of nature [*Naturmeinen*], all cognition of nature [*Naturerkennen*] . . . In this way, it encompasses from the perspective of the natural-scientific personalities [*von den naturwissenschaftlichen Personalitäten her*] all scientific formations that have become and persist, the natural-scientific theories. Thereby precisely these humans are being thematic in the universal theme humanity . . . — and so their forms of achievement [*Leistungsgebilde*]. (482)

This leads Husserl to reflect on the difference between the anthropological (human scientific) attitude and the naturalistic attitude, in a way that corresponds to a supplementary text entitled “The Attitude of Natural Science and the Attitude of Human Science: Naturalism, Dualism and Psychophysical Psychology.”<sup>42</sup> The natural scientist is interested only in nature and not in the human *per se*. Husserl’s meditations here on the manner in which humans are also “functioning subjectivities” correlated to a world that can become visible through self-conscious thematization prefigure similar discussion in the *Crisis* (especially §§ 56–58).

By early 1933 the social and political climate in Germany began to change radically with the coming to power of the National Socialist Party, and legal restrictions on Jews began to be put in place. Around the end of July or the beginning of August 1934, Husserl was invited to the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy, to be held in Prague on September 2–7, 1934. Because he could not attend, he was invited to send a letter on the topic of “the contemporary task of philosophy.”<sup>43</sup> In late August 1934, while on his summer vacation in Kappel, he wrote his “Prague letter” (*BW* 8, 91–95; also *Hua* XXVII, 240–44), addressed to the Professor Emanuel Rádl, President of the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy and a former student of Thomas Masaryk, which was read at the conference and subsequently published in the conference proceedings in 1936. In the letter, Husserl wrote:

Philosophy is the organ of a modern, historical existence of humanity, existence from out of the spirit of autonomy. The primordial form [*Urgestalt*] of autonomy is that of the scientific self-responsibility. . . . Philosophical self-responsibility necessarily gets itself involved in philosophizing community. . . . Herewith the specific sense of European humanity and culture is designated. (*BW* 8, 91; *Hua* XXVII, 240).

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41. Edmund Husserl, “Universale Geisteswissenschaft als Anthropologie. Sinn einer Anthropologie,” in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlaß. Dritter Teil: 1929–35*, ed. Iso Kern, Husserliana XV (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 480–508.

42. ■ now collected in the *Crisis* Husserliana volume (*Crisis*, 294–313/315–34).

43. Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 449.

And again: “Autonomy is not a matter of isolated individuals but, on the way beyond its nation, of humanity” (*BW* 8, 92; *Hua* XXVII, 241).

In this letter Husserl is already mulling over many of the themes that become prominent in the *Crisis* and indeed underlie his thinking about the nature of historical and non-historical cultures in his letter to Lévy-Bruhl. In the Prague letter, his subject is the breakthrough to the theoretical attitude. The theoretical interest is a universal interest.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, philosophical wonder (*thaumazein*) is not curiosity (*Neugier*). The Greeks’ theoretical breakthrough allowed them to discover the relativity of their national worldview (*Weltanschauung*) in relation to other, foreign worldviews. Husserl believes that the traditional outlook is shot through with animism. Gradually, a difference emerges between a people’s “world-representation” (*Weltvorstellung*) and what they conceive as the “world in itself.” This leads philosophy to “a radical demythification of the world” and to take a stand against traditional values. Here arises the differentiation between *doxa* and *episteme*. With the demythification of experience, “theoretical experience” arises.

Thus Husserl was already writing about the difference between a historical world and the world of a non-historical people, one enclosed in myth. Human beings living in mythic outlook have a relation to the “near world” (*Nahwelt*; 228). Overall, the letter is a reflection on the shift from the mythic to the theoretical outlook and hence on the importance of philosophy for leading a people from a closed to a universal outlook.

In autumn 1934 Husserl wrote a text on the “naiveté of science,”<sup>45</sup> in which he reflects on the different levels of historicity and the manner in which human beings live in history with a sense of past, present and future. Humans live in groups, nations, and other supra-national unities (such as “Europe,” “China,” and so on). Strictly speaking, Husserl writes, there are no “first” human beings (*Hua* XXIX, 37); rather families give rise to families, generations to generations. Nations live in a “homeland” (*Heimat*; 9) or “home world” (*Heimwelt*) with a sense of what is familiar and what is strange and foreign (each nation has its opposing nation; 38–39 and 41). Already in these musings, Husserl is thinking about the lack of history in the “stagnant” world of the primitive (39) and how a kind of mythical reasoning that naturally belongs to it—which places its people on Earth, in the middle kingdom between Heaven and Earth: “The first surrounding world is the in-between-realm between Earth and Heaven” (38). Already nations have their own different senses of myth and their place on Earth, yet each myth conceives its people in rela-

44. Edmund Husserl, “■,” *Hua* XXVII, ■. Of relevance here are esp. 187–89.

45. Edmund Husserl, “Die Naivität der Wissenschaft,” in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlaß 1934–1937*, ed. Reinhold N. Smid, Husserliana XXIX (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), 27–36.

tion to what is for them Earth as a whole and there is a kind of shared universality (44). There is a natural “animism” (4 and 38) whereby nature itself is experienced as a living person. The mythic perception of the world is animistic. Things are not experienced as pure things; the dead, for instance, are considered to continue to inhabit the world (Husserl is echoing similar claims to be found in Lévy-Bruhl). However, a second stage of historicity is arrived at with the breakthrough to science enabled by the theoretical attitude (41). In this text from November 1934, Husserl speaks of the differences between the French, German, and other nations with their specific senses of history and indeed the manner in which they form “higher order persons,” and the Papuan, who has strictly speaking no biography, life-history (*Lebensgeschichte*) or “history of the people” (*Volksgeschichte*): “A Papuan has in the genuine (pregnant) sense no biography and a Papuan tribe has no life-history, no history of the people” (57).

Husserl appears to have been quite worn out in late 1934 and early 1935, and he wrote very little at the time. However, by spring 1935 he was once again working at fever pitch. He was preparing lectures to be given outside Germany. On the invitation of the Wiener Kulturbund, on May 7, 1935, Husserl delivered a lecture entitled “Philosophy in the Crisis of European Humanity” at the Austrian Museum in Vienna.<sup>46</sup> Due to its overwhelming success, he was asked to repeat the lecture on May 10, 1935. Somewhat surprisingly given its cultural theme but perhaps precisely to provide balance, Husserl had considered using this lecture—which has since come to be referred to as his “Vienna lecture”—as an introduction to the German edition of the *Cartesian Meditations*.<sup>47</sup>

The letter to Lévy-Bruhl of March 1935 should be read in connection with the 1934 Prague letter and the 1935 Vienna lecture. These works contain reflections on the emergence of the historical sense of a culture, on the relation to other cultures, and on the relation between societies that live immersed in myth and those that belong to history. As in the Vienna lecture, in his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, Husserl comments on the “teleological sense” of European “humanity” (*Menschentum*).<sup>48</sup> Husserl has begun to think about how cultural life evolves and how personal life is essentially cultural.

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46. Edmund Husserl, “Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie,” in *Hua* VI, 314–48; English translation: “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity,” in *Crisis*, trans. Carr, 269–99; henceforth cited as *VL* with German and English page references, respectively.

47. See his letter from June 19, 1935 to Dorion Cairns and from June 20, 1935 to Alfred Schütz (*BW* 4, 49–52 and 491, respectively).

48. *VL*, 314/269. Besides the word *Menschentum*, Husserl also uses the term *Menschheit*, sometimes in the plural (*Menschheiten*), to indicate that he thinks there are different forms of “humanity” or “humanness.” For instance, he sometimes speaks of “specific humanities” (*Sondermenschheiten*; *Hua* XXIX, 56). As in the *Crisis*, Husserl uses the term

In his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, Husserl writes:

Over a large and particularly important domain the possibility and unconditioned necessity of a pure human-scientific anthropology [*eine rein geisteswissenschaftliche Anthropologie*] has become obvious—that means, as I could also say, pure psychology, which treats human beings not as objects belonging to nature . . . but as persons, considered as conscious subjects, as they concretely find themselves and call themselves with the personal pronouns. Saying “I” and “we,” they find themselves as members of families, of associations, of social units [*Sozialitäten*], as living “together,” exerting an influence on and suffering from their world—the world, which has sense and reality for them, through their intentional life, their experiencing, thinking, <and> valuing. Naturally, we have known for a long time that every human has his “world-representation,” that every nation, that every supranational cultural grouping lives, so to speak, in a distinct world as its own enviroing world [*in einer anderen Welt als seiner Umwelt lebt*], and so again every historical time in its <world>. (*BW* 4, ■)

This is close to what is said in the Vienna lecture, when Husserl explicates ‘personal life’: “Personal life means living communalized as an ‘I’ and ‘we’ [*als Ich und Wir*] within community horizon, and this in communities of various simple or stratified forms such as family, nation, supranational community [*Übernation*]” (*VL*, 314/270).

But Husserl does not just expound his views here to Lévy-Bruhl. He also praises the anthropologist for bringing home to him something completely new and important, namely the need to empathize with the primitive human community and come to an understanding of their world:

it is a possible, and highly important, and great task to “empathize” with a humankind [*Menschheit*], living self-contained in living generative sociality [*lebendiger generativer Sozialität*] and to understand this humankind as having, in and through its socially unified life, the world, which is for them not a “world-representation” but rather the actually real world [*wirklich seiende Welt*].

In the Vienna lecture and in other writings from the period, Husserl is specifically focused on the nature of the Greek experience of being in the world. He emphasizes that the historical world of the Greeks is not to be understood as the physical world that surrounds them but rather in terms of their world-representation (*VL*, 317/272). His reflection on the Greeks and the Europe that arose from

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*Menschheit* here to mean both particular (cultural) groups of humankind and humanity in general. In his translation of *Crisis*, David Carr suggests rendering the term *Menschheit* as ‘civilization’ in contexts such as the above; see *Crisis*, 15 n. 2. Carr also claims that Husserl does not distinguish between the terms *Menschheit* and *Menschentum* but uses them interchangeably. In our translation of Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl, we have used only one term: ‘humanity’ (in both singular and plural forms).

the experience also leads him to reflect on cultural worlds generally and on the contrasting “world of the primitive.” Husserl contends that there are different forms of humanity, different societies or social groupings (“socialities”) that are living in a more or less isolated, or “self-enclosed” or “self-encapsulated” (*abgeschlossen*) manner (*in Abgeschlossenheit lebende Menschheiten*).<sup>49</sup> This is true not only of specific historical societies but also of primitive ones. Husserl asserts in the letter that this self-enclosed isolation actually assists us in understanding the own peculiar logic and ontology of a self-enclosed group in contradistinction to others. This is the basis of Husserl's initially somewhat odd claim that the lack of documents, information on wars, and so on, actually helps to make their world visible to us, and the relation between human being and world, and exploring these issues in a scientific manner. Husserl believes that the phenomenological task is to immerse oneself, through empathy, in the internal logics of these cultures and to study them. The fact that primitive societies lack history is not a hindrance to research but instead allows us to isolate and understand their own logic, precisely because they cannot be linked to other societies in an Hegelian-style teleology.

Interestingly, Husserl acknowledges that historical relativism has “undisputed justification” (*zweifellofes Recht*) as a kind of surface fact that emerges from comparative anthropological studies. But he is not content to remain with this apparent relativism or irreducible pluralism. Husserl wants to uncover the necessary eidetic laws that govern the very nature of social acculturation and even historicity. This is the “universal a priori of history” about which Husserl will speak in 1936 in “The Origin of Geometry” (*Crisis*, 380/371).

As Sebastian Luft has pointed out, Husserl does not speak in many places of the non-European experience of the world, but where he does, it is in a characteristic manner. In the *Crisis*, § 36, for instance, he mentions the “Negroes in the Congo,” “Chinese peasants,” and so on. In the Vienna lecture, he also raises the issue of the life-forms of primitive peoples. Husserl's reference to the “Papuan man” (who “is a man and not a beast”; *VL*, 337/290, see also *Crisis*, 304/325) is surely a resonance from his reading of Lévy-Bruhl, the subtitle of whose *Primitive Mythology* specifically refers to the natives of Papua New Guinea. Similarly, in his annotation to Eugen Fink's *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, § 11,<sup>50</sup> Husserl considers the possibility of a child from a primitive culture being translated into our culture, and vice versa. A primitive can be inserted into our world and our school system and take on our po-

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49. We are grateful to Sebastian Luft for help in clarifying this point.

50. See Eugen Fink, *VI. Cartesianische Meditation. Teil I: Die Idee einer transzendentalen Methodelehre*, ed. Hans Ebeling, Jann Holl, and Guy van Kerckhoven (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 131 n. 408; English translation: *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method. With Textual Notations by Edmund Husserl*, trans. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1995), 119 n. 408.

tentialities. This can be done as a thought experiment—our doctors would correspond to their “medicine men,” and so on, but the transposition is not just of self but of the whole world:

But every self-modification changes the whole world, and in putting myself in the place of the other I am an I transformed in phantasy, transformed in thought into the other, into the other of his surroundings, of his generative origin, of his experiences, feelings, etc.<sup>51</sup>

Husserl emphasizes here how sense of self and sense of social role are intimately bound up with a whole cultural sense of the world. For this he frequently uses the term ‘world-representation’ (*Weltvorstellung*).

Husserl explains the term in a fragment from June 1936 entitled “Strata of World Consciousness” (*Schichten des Weltbewußtseins*; *Hua* XXIX, 268):

World representation is not one representation among my representations. It is a universal movement and synthesis in the movement of all my representations in such a way that everything presented in it goes together towards a unity of a world as validating one another, the correlate of the ever becoming and become unity of all my presentations—presentations that I had, have, and will have.

He prefers the term *Weltvorstellung* to the more usual *Weltanschauung* (world-view), which also occurs in Husserl but sometimes with somewhat negative connotations, as can be seen in his 1910–1911 *Logos* essay, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,”<sup>52</sup> which specifically criticizes the philosophy of worldviews and regards world-views as essentially individual perspectives on the world, as well as in his use of “new worldview” (*neue Weltanschauung*; *BW* 4, 313) to refer to the National Socialist outlook and program. World-representation, on the other hand, is a much more global and holistic notion. Husserl’s overarching subject is the relationship between persons, their social intersubjective communal lives and what they understand as their world (with its categories of familiar and foreign, friend and foe, and so on). In the Vienna lecture, he explains that the concept of ‘environing world’ (*Umwelt*) has a specifically spiritual meaning: “Our environing world is a spiritual structure in us and in our historical life” (*VL*, 317/272).

Particularly important in that lecture is Husserl’s insistence that, while other cultures have produced “types” of humanness, only European culture has produced the idea of a universal humanity set on *infinite* tasks. “Extrascientific culture, cul-

51. Fink, *VI. Cartesianische Meditation*, 131 n. 408/119 n. 408.

52. Edmund Husserl, “Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft,” in *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911–1921)*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* XXV (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1987), 289–341; English translation: “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” trans. Marcus Brainard, *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* II (2001), 249–95.



ture not yet touched by science” knows only finite tasks (324/279). In this connection, Husserl speaks of “natural man” in the “prephilosophical period” (339/292) whose outlook might be characterized as the natural primordial attitude, an attitude that has lasted for millennia in different cultures:

We speak in this connection of the natural primordial attitude [*von der natürlichen, urwüchsigen Einstellung*], of the attitude of original natural life, of the first originally natural form of cultures, whether higher or lower, whether developed uninhibitedly or stagnating. All other attitudes are accordingly related back to this natural attitude as reorientations [of it]. (*VL*, 326–27/281)

In the Vienna lecture, and in associated writings from the period,<sup>53</sup> Husserl is interested in how a “mythical-religious” outlook enables a way of thinking about the world of that society and their relation to the whole. Natural life knows religious-mythic motifs (*VL*, 330/283). This mythical-religious attitude is “universal” insofar as it makes the world as a totality become visible in a unified way; but it is also a practical attitude, not a theoretical one. Self-enclosed cultures are finite and cut off from one another; European (Greek) culture, by contrast, has an openness not found in other societies.

In the unpublished convolute on Lévy-Bruhl (K III 7), Husserl recognizes that humans necessarily live in communities and that “culture” is a correlate of the “human.” Primitive life, however, is life lived without history: “The existence of primitive humanity is history-less, is ‘timeless.’ It is lived always in the present; past and future have no teleological sense” (7a).<sup>54</sup>

In his letter to Lévy-Bruhl Husserl also emphasizes the peculiar “lack of history” (*Geschichtlosigkeit*) of primitive peoples who live in the flowing present. The concept of primitive peoples without a means of recording history (i.e. preliterate peoples) themselves having no experience of history but living in a natural cycle is not original to Husserl or Lévy-Bruhl. Hegel, for instance, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, similarly speaks of lack of history in African culture, which is characterized by enclosedness and lack of self-consciousness. Hegel is very derogatory in his view of African culture, with which he claims the European cannot empathize and which can rather only be conceptualized:

Thus man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made the distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion and is

53. See the late 1934 piece “Different Forms of Historicity” in *Hua* XXIX, 37–46.

54. This is a translation of the passage quoted in Sebastian Luft, “Europa am Kongo. Zu Husserls kulturphilosophischen Meditationen,” *Journal Phänomenologie* 10 (1998), 15–22.

nothing more than a savage. . . . The negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes.<sup>55</sup>

Hegel's remarks are focused particularly on Africa, which he believes has been cut off from the rest of world history. Lévy-Bruhl's views, by contrast, contain no moral evaluation or condescension. Rather, he appreciatively recognizes the complexity of primitive mentality and seeks simply to document it and to relate it to the now dominant European scientific mentality.

As Husserl's letter attests, he thought Lévy-Bruhl had achieved genuine insight into other cultures in a way that provided a challenge to his own purely phenomenological approach. The question is: how does the evidence of anthropology assist in the process of generating essential insights? His letter is full of optimism about the prospect of a new approach to the understanding of society, of supra-national collections of humanity, and of the overall project of universal humanity as such. Both in the letter to Lévy-Bruhl and in the Vienna lecture, Husserl promises to discover and found through transcendental phenomenology a new kind of "super-rationalism" (*Überrationalismus*) that supersedes the old insufficient rationalism, yet somehow justifies its inner intention. Husserl is a rationalist to the last, but this time he is trying to separate out rationality from nationhood.

It is clear that Lévy-Bruhl's conception of the primitive mentality had an enormous imaginative influence on Husserl's thinking concerning the development of cultural forms. He obviously has Lévy-Bruhl in mind when he writes the following in "The Origin of Geometry":

One will object: what naiveté to seek to display, and to claim to have displayed, a historical a priori, an absolute, supertemporal validity, after we have obtained such abundant testimony for the relativity of everything historical, of all historically developed world-apperceptions, right back to those of "primitive" tribes. Every people, large or small, has its world in which, for that people, everything fits well together, whether in mythical-magical or in European-rational terms, and in which everything can be explained perfectly. Every people has its "logic" and, accordingly, if this logic is explicated in propositions, "its" a priori. (*Crisis*, 381–82/373)

Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl has had a strong impact, initially in France, and more recently in Germany (where it has attracted the attention of, e.g., Klaus Held, Bernard Waldenfels, and Ernst Wolfgang Orth<sup>56</sup>), and most recently in Asia (Che-

55. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte I: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955), ■; English translation: *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), 176–77.

56. Ernst Wolfgang Orth, *Edmund Husserl's "Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie". Vernunft und Kultur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 143–44.

ung Chan-Fai and Lui Ping-Keung).<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the most famous philosophical interpreter of the letter, however, has been Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who comments on it in several of his works. According to the first Director of the Husserl Archives, Hermann Van Breda, when he met with Merleau-Ponty in Paris in 1942, he gave the French philosopher a copy of his own doctoral dissertation (defended in 1941), which included an appendix of 90 pages of Husserl's own texts, among which was the German text of Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl.<sup>58</sup> Merleau-Ponty subsequently discussed Husserl's letter in two essays: "The Philosopher and Sociology" and "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man."<sup>59</sup> In the latter, Merleau-Ponty writes:

It is important to note the extraordinary interest aroused in Husserl by his reading of Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mythology* (*La Mythologie primitive*) which seems rather remote from his ordinary concerns. What interested him here was the contact with an alien culture, or the impulse given by this contact to what we may call his philosophical imagination. Before this, Husserl had maintained that a mere imaginative variation of the facts would enable us to conceive of every possible experience we might have. In a letter to Lévy-Bruhl which has been preserved, he seems to admit that the facts go beyond what we imagine and that this point bears a real significance. It is as if the imagination, left to itself, is unable to represent the possibilities of existence which are realized in different cultures.

Merleau-Ponty reads the text as Husserl's realization that imaginative variation is not enough for us to get at the variations in types of humanity. What Lévy-Bruhl has done here is to acquaint Husserl with new real possibilities for human existence, not reachable by imaginative variation. Merleau-Ponty is re-iterating his claim of the impossibility of the complete reduction. How can someone who lives within historical time understand the life of the flowing present which has neither future nor past? Merleau-Ponty goes on to summarize some of the main points of Husserl's letter but concentrates on the manner in which people belonging to historical societies (regardless of whether they feel themselves in continuity with the past) are capable of envisaging "stagnant," self-enclosed societies that are history-

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57. See Lui Ping-Keung, "The Sociological Gaze and its Time Structure: A Sociologist's Belated Encounter with Merleau-Ponty," in David Carr and Chan-Fai Cheung, eds., *Space, Time and Culture* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004), 73–87, esp. 82–85.

58. See Hermann L. Van Breda, "Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archives at Louvain," trans. Stephen Michelman, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Text and Dialogues: On Philosophy, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Hugh Silverman and James Barry (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1992), 150–61, here 156.

59. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and Sociology," in his *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1964), 106–8, and "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," in his *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1964), 90–92. The quotations in the remainder of this paragraph, including the long quote, stem from the latter essay.

less. For Merleau-Ponty, this requires “a joining of effort between anthropology as a mere inventory of actual facts and phenomenology as a mere thinking through of possible societies.” He continues: “the eidetic of history cannot dispense with factual investigation.” He notes that Husserl acknowledges that in actual practice anthropological research does support a certain kind of relativism about diverse cultural practices, but this masks a deeper scientific truth. Understanding must begin by living through the concrete experience of others’ lived environments, and, Merleau-Ponty concludes: “at this point phenomenology, in Husserl’s sense, rejoins phenomenology in the Hegelian sense, which consists in following man through his experiences without substituting oneself for him but rather in working through them in such a way as to reveal their sense.”

Continuing the debate in France, Jacques Derrida contests Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl’s letter in his *Introduction to Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry.”*<sup>60</sup> According to Derrida, Husserl is seeking to “wrest from historical relativism” the “apriori of historical science itself.” The alleged facts that support a kind of ethnological relativism of different cultures are in fact determined as historical facts only based on a presupposed conception of historical truth in general. In other words, Derrida argues, to understand something as “history,” one must already understand what history is and under what conditions it is possible. Similarly, ethnological groupings can appear only within the horizon of universal humanity. Derrida argues, against Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation, that Husserl never renounced the historical a priori discoverable by eidetic variation in favor of what can be learned from empirical studies. Although Husserl defends a historical a priori, he never dreamed to be able to deduce all historical facts from it, which Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation seems to imply. Rather, Derrida writes: “The purpose of the variation technique in eidetic reading has never been to exhaust the multiplicity of possible facts: on the contrary, the technique even has the privilege of being able to work on only one of those possibles in an exemplary consciousness.” Derrida goes on to quote passages from the “Origin of Geometry” that explicitly endorse the method of free variation.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the use of empathy to understand other cultures is possible only within the “apriori universal structures of historicity and sociality.” Derrida’s appears to be the correct interpretation of Husserl’s view of the relationship between the phenomenological investigation of essences and empirical fact, even if Derrida may possibly misrepresent Merleau-Ponty’s intention.

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60. Jacques Derrida, *Introduction à “L’Origine de la géométrie” de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), ■; English translation: *Edmund Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry”: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska, 1989), 109–17. The passages cited in this paragraph stem from 109, 110, 112, and 114, respectively.

61. Derrida cites a passage from near the end of the “Origin of Geometry” which is to be found in *Crisis*, 383/364–65.

Finally Husserl's letter (and the associated convolute) also had a strong impact on the Italian phenomenologist Enzo Paci (1911–1976), who discusses its problematic at length in his *Phenomenological Diary* (1961).<sup>62</sup> In his entry for May 22, 1957, Paci writes penetratingly on the text (and it is worth quoting substantial sections here because the text is so little known):

Is black man primitive? And what does “primitive” mean? Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl. Husserl's unpublished K III 7 and his interest in Lévy-Bruhl. From a certain point of view (but it is only one of the many points of view), what is “primitive” is “precategorical,” and in this sense it is not made obsolete or negated by “civilization,” but continues in “civilization.” I put “civilization” between quotation marks. In fact it is precisely to the extent that our categorical civilization is abstract that it is in a crisis. It has “concealed” its own origins, because it no longer knows how its concepts have been formed, it no longer knows what their purpose is, their meaning. Our concepts are valid in this or that field, but we no longer know if they are valid for man, for the subject who operates in all fields.

Paci recognizes that Husserl conceives of the primitive as a layer of experience that still inhabits our world:

There is a rational entelechy of humanity, as Husserl puts it, which is yet to be established. There is therefore no distinction between the barbarous, primitive man and the civilized European. Despite the accomplishments of science and technology, European man must recognize his own barbarity, sometimes tamed, but often erupting (Freud). Primitive man discovers that his own world, the precategorical, non-abstract world, is more than ever necessary to European man, who has lost it, because he has lost what Lévy-Bruhl called participation, that is the universal correlation, the relational life, the connection of our thought with the body, with lived nature, with the “secret art of nature” (the inexhaustible fecundity of “transcendental schematism”). Thus the valorization of the primitive is not the return to the barbaric and the irrational. That is what European man, who considers himself definitely civilized, thinks.

Paci sees that for Husserl it is imperative to discover the essence of human nature, and in part this requires grasping the specific difference between the nature of historical existence and that lived in the flowing present without a sense of history:

Both, European man and primitive man, must find a deeper rational essence of man. To discover the “primitive world” is to discover the rooting of *logos* in matter, in nature, in corporeity, in the concrete precategorical operations from which scientific categories originate (the value of rhythm: all that we indicate abstractly, primitive man lives). It means to discover the

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62. *Diario Fenomenologico* (Milan: Bompiani, 1961); English translation: *Phenomenological Diary*, trans. Luigi M. Bianchi (1998). See [http://www.yorku.ca/lbianchi/paci/diary\\_ver\\_02.html](http://www.yorku.ca/lbianchi/paci/diary_ver_02.html).

life of reason, relational reason rooted in concrete relationships, constituted by concrete operations. It means to keep life concretely lived in logic and to understand logic as the expression of real operations. European man is in a crisis because he no longer knows how to find in himself what is valid in primitive man, in the “total” world in which primitive man lives. And, in turn, primitive man must arrive at logic, at science, not fetishized science, but that science of sciences according to which mankind must realize itself (the science of history? phenomenology?). We must teach primitive man our science, if we do not fetishize it, and our technology, if we free ourselves from our barbarism, from our irrationality. Primitive man can teach us his own way of feeling and of living in participation, in relationship, in communion, if he frees himself from his barbarism, from his irrationality. But it is a question of mere reciprocity. Primitive man has become aware that his view of life is necessary to European man, much as in Hegel the servant becomes aware that without his own labor the master can not live (“servile consciousness” [?]). To the extent that European man does not understand primitive man, he does not understand himself, and the revolt of primitive man is the self-alienation of European man, the self-destruction of European “civilization.”

Paci reflects on Durkheim’s concern with the social, intersubjective origin of categories that are taken for granted in mature thought:

Remember in Durkheim the “social” origin of categories, that is, in phenomenological language, the origin of categories from intersubjective, pre-categorical life. It is because they derive from intersubjective perception that for Durkheim categories are founded on “the nature of things.” Durkheim’s idea that the *totem* is the presence of the specific in the individual. The *totem*, in phenomenological language, is the *eidōs* of a group, of a *clan*. And it is true that it is the projection of the links which unite the clan, namely [the projection] of the operations of the same type, of the typical-social operations immanent in each individual. The relationship, in Husserl, between *eidōs* and the operations, *Leistungen*, typical of the subject and of the subjects.

For Paci, Husserl’s attempt to understand contemporary civilization through relating it to the primitive is a kind of genetic phenomenology which is also a kind of anthropology. Paci reflects on the experience of temporality involved in the primitive world:

Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl (March 11, 1935). *Einführung* of our society with another society. To comprehend its world in ours and to feel ours in its world. Can we presentify Lévy-Bruhl’s primitive life? Is it a life which is only pure flowing presence, *nur strömende Gegenwart*? In us too there is sometimes a pure flow of life which does not retain anything (absence of retention; in a certain sense: unconsciousness). Pause of consciousness in the time of our life. These pauses (like sleep) divide us into many I’s: we ourselves, unique, are intersubjectivity. That is why intersubjectivity is possible

in time, and in time we find ourselves, as actual humanity, with another humanity divided from us by the pauses of awareness. I believe this is one of the most important aspects of Husserl's thought. We must meet ourselves—for [?] the sense of concordance [?] of our life—and [but?] we have forgotten ourselves, this and that time of our life and of our history. Thus mankind must find itself by feeling that it is also primitive mankind or black mankind. Otherwise it loses its own sense of concordance [?], its own meaning. Did Husserl really think this way? I am reconstructing [it?] using my intuition and attempting a new development . . . . But the problem is the very same one which in *Krisis* presents itself as the problem of the encounter between men of different eras (history, historiography).

Inspired by Husserl's lapidary discussion, Paci raises deep questions concerning the relationship between transcendental phenomenology and cultural diversity. Unfortunately, we cannot pursue these further here. But we cite them to show that Husserl's scattered but intense reflections on these issues have had a major impact on philosophy and indeed deserve much more sustained study today. We hope that making Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl available in English will help to stimulate this study and continue the debate.

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