

P A R T I

The Crisis of the  
Sciences as Expression  
of the Radical Life-Crisis  
of European Humanity

§ 1. *Is there, in view of their constant successes,  
really a crisis of the sciences?*

I EXPECT THAT AT THIS PLACE, dedicated as it is to the sciences, the very title of these lectures, "The Crisis of European Sciences and Psychology,"<sup>1</sup> will incite controversy. A crisis of our sciences as such: can we seriously speak of it? Is not this talk, heard so often these days, an exaggeration? After all, the crisis of a science indicates nothing less than that its genuine scientific character, the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable. This may be true of philosophy, which in our time threatens to succumb to skepticism, irrationalism, and mysticism. The same may hold for psychology, insofar as it still makes philosophical claims rather than merely wanting a place among the positive sciences. But how could we speak straightforwardly and quite seriously of a crisis of the sciences in general—that is, also of the positive sciences, including pure mathematics and the exact natural sciences, which we can never cease to admire as models

1. This was the original title of the lecture series before the "Cercle philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain." In *Philosophia*, Vol. I, where Parts I and II of the *Crisis* were published, Husserl prefaced the text with the following remarks:

"The work that I am beginning with the present essay, and shall complete in a series of further articles in *Philosophia*, makes the attempt, by way of a teleological-historical reflection upon the origins of our critical scientific and philosophical situation, to establish the unavoidable necessity of a transcendental-phenomenological reorientation of philosophy. Accordingly, it becomes, in its own right, an introduction to transcendental phenomenology.

"The work has grown from the development of ideas that made up the basic content of a series of lectures I gave in November, 1935, in Prague (half in the hospitable rooms of the German university, half in those of the Czech university), following a kind invitation by the 'Cercle philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain.'"

The German text of this preface is given in *Krisis*, p. XIV, note 3. (In these footnotes, references to *Krisis* are to the German edition edited by Walter Biemel. See Translator's Introduction, note 4.)

of rigorous and highly successful scientific discipline? To be sure, they have proved to be changeable in the total style of their systematic theory-building and methodology. Only recently they overcame, in this respect, a threatening paralysis, under the title of classical physics—threatening, that is, as the supposed classical consummation of the confirmed style of centuries. But does the victorious struggle against the ideal of classical physics, as well as the continuing conflict over the appropriate and genuine form of construction for pure mathematics, mean that previous physics and mathematics were not yet scientific or that they did not, even though affected with certain unclarities or blind spots, obtain convincing insights within their own field of endeavor? Are these insights not compelling even for us who are freed from such blind spots? Can we not thus, placing ourselves back into the attitude of the classical theorists, understand completely how it gave rise to all the great and forever valid discoveries, together with the array of technical inventions which so deserved the admiration of earlier generations? Physics, whether represented by a Newton or a Planck or an Einstein, or whomever else in the future, was always and remains exact science. It remains such even if, as some think, an absolutely final form of total theory-construction is never to be expected or striven for.

The situation is clearly similar in regard to another large group of sciences customarily counted among the positive sciences,<sup>2</sup> namely, the concrete humanistic sciences, however it may stand with their controversial reference back to the ideal of exactness in the natural sciences—a difficulty, incidentally, which concerns even the relation of the biophysical (“concrete” natural-scientific) disciplines to those of the mathematically exact natural sciences. The scientific rigor of all these disciplines, the convincingness of their theoretical accomplishments, and their enduringly compelling successes are unquestionable. Only of psychology must we perhaps be less sure, in spite of its claim to be the abstract, ultimately explanatory, basic science of the concrete humanistic disciplines. But generally we let psychology stand, attributing its obvious retardation of method and accomplishment to a naturally slower development. At any rate, the contrast between the “scientific” character of this group of sciences and the “unscientific” character of philosophy is unmis-

2. As is usual in German, the term *Wissenschaften* is applied to the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences. The term “science” will be used in this inclusive sense, though I have sometimes translated *Geisteswissenschaften* as “humanistic disciplines.”

takable. Thus we concede in advance some justification to the first inner protest against the title of these lectures from scientists who are sure of their method.

§ 2. *The positivistic reduction of the idea of science to mere factual science. The "crisis" of science as the loss of its meaning for life.*

IT MAY BE, HOWEVER, that motives arise from another direction of inquiry—that of the general lament about the crisis of our culture and the role here ascribed to the sciences—for subjecting the scientific character of all sciences to a serious and quite necessary critique without sacrificing their primary sense of scientific discipline, so unimpeachable within the legitimacy of their methodic accomplishments.

The indicated change in the whole direction of inquiry is what we wish, in fact, to undertake. In doing this we shall soon become aware that the difficulty which has plagued psychology, not just in our time but for centuries—its own peculiar "crisis"—has a central significance both for the appearance of puzzling, insoluble obscurities in modern, even mathematical sciences and, in connection with that, for the emergence of a set of world-enigmas which were unknown to earlier times. They all lead back to the *enigma of subjectivity* and are thus inseparably bound to the *enigma of psychological subject matter and method*. This much, then, as a first indication of the deeper meaning of our project in these lectures.

We make our beginning with a change which set in at the turn of the past century in the general evaluation of the sciences. It concerns not the scientific character of the sciences but rather what they, or what science in general, had meant and could mean for human existence.<sup>1</sup> The exclusiveness with which

1. *menschliches Dasein*. Husserl makes rather extensive use in this work of the word *Dasein* as applied specifically to man's existence. This is probably a conscious or unconscious concession to the popularity of Heidegger's work. His use of the term *Existenz* will be noted below (§ 5, note 1).

the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the "prosperity" <sup>2</sup> they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity.<sup>3</sup> Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people. The change in public evaluation was unavoidable, especially after the war, and we know that it has gradually become a feeling of hostility among the younger generation. In our vital need—so we are told—this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over in our unhappy times to the most portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence. Do not these questions, universal and necessary for all men, demand universal reflections and answers based on rational insight? In the final analysis they concern man as a free, self-determining being in his behavior toward the human and extrahuman surrounding world <sup>4</sup> and free in regard to his capacities for rationally shaping himself and his surrounding world. What does science have to say about reason and unreason or about us men as subjects of this freedom? The mere science of bodies clearly has nothing to say; it abstracts from everything subjective. As for the humanistic sciences, on the other hand, all the special and general disciplines of which treat of man's spiritual <sup>5</sup> existence, that is, within the horizon of his historicity: their rigorous scientific character requires, we are told, that the scholar carefully exclude all valuative positions, all questions of the reason or unreason of their human subject matter and its cultural configurations. Scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical as well as the spiritual world, is in fact. But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as

2. Husserl uses the English word.

3. *Menschentum*. Husserl uses this term and *Menschheit* indistinguishably. The distinction made by Paul Ricoeur (*Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967], p. 159) seems to me to be unfounded, though I have generally translated the latter as "mankind." Difficulty arises when Husserl begins using *Menschheit* in the plural. See below, § 6, note 1.

4. *Umwelt*. "Surrounding world" will be used throughout.

5. *geistig*. The translating difficulties with *Geist* and its derivatives are too well known to require comment. I have usually opted for "spirit" as the least of several evils. Sometimes "mental" is used for the adjectival form.

true only what is objectively established in this fashion, and if history has nothing more to teach us than that all the shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, ideals, norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense, and well-being into misery? <sup>6</sup> Can we console ourselves with that? Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation of illusory progress and bitter disappointment?

### § 3. *The founding of the autonomy of European humanity through the new formulation of the idea of philosophy in the Renaissance.*

IT WAS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE that science understood its demand for rigorously grounded truth in the sense of that sort of objectivity which dominates our positive sciences in respect to method and which, having its effect far beyond the sciences themselves, is the basis for the support and widespread acceptance of a philosophical and ideological positivism. The specifically human questions were not always banned from the realm of science; their intrinsic relationship to all the sciences—even to those of which man is not the subject matter, such as the natural sciences—was not left unconsidered. As long as this had not yet happened, science could claim significance—indeed, as we know, the major role—in the completely new shaping of European humanity which began with the Renaissance. Why science lost this leadership, why there occurred an essential change, a positivistic restriction of the idea of science—to understand this, according to its *deeper motives*,<sup>1</sup> is of great importance for the purpose of these lectures.

6. A paraphrase from *Faust*, Part I, line 1976: "Vernunft wird Unsinn, Wohltat Plage."

1. Husserl's use of *Motif*, *motivieren*, and *Motivation* is so important in this work that I have simply used "motive," "motivate," "motivation," etc., to translate them, even though Husserl's use often exceeds the bounds of standard English usage of these terms. It is hoped that Husserl's sense will emerge from the context.