

The Ideal of Humanity versus Worldly Powers: Kant, Fichte, and Husserl*

El ideal de humanidad contra los poderes mundanos: Kant, Fichte and Husserl

Rosemary Rizo-Patrón
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú
rosemary.rizopatron@pucp.edu.pe

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Abstract

Challenged by worldly powers, philosophy and the human sciences have traditionally proposed «ideals of humanity» as guides towards spiritual values in times of crises. By the end of the 18th century, Kant defended the rational ideas fostered by the Faculty of Philosophy, as opposed to the dogmatic teachings of Theology, Jurisprudence and Medicine. At the beginning of the 19th century, Fichte's reflections inspired the values brandished by German Idealism after Germany's defeat by the Napoleonic armies. A century later, after First World War, Husserl believed that «Fichte's Ideal of Humanity»

Resumen

Desafiados por los poderes mundanos, la filosofía y las ciencias humanas han propuesto tradicionalmente los «ideales de la humanidad» como guías hacia los valores espirituales en tiempos de crisis. A finales del siglo XVIII, Kant defendió las ideas racionales promovidas por la Facultad de Filosofía, en oposición a las enseñanzas dogmáticas de las Facultades de Teología, Jurisprudencia y Medicina. A comienzos del siglo XIX, las reflexiones de Fichte inspiraron los valores marcados por el idealismo alemán después de la derrota de Alemania por los ejércitos napoleónicos. Un siglo más tarde, después de la Primera Guerra Mundial, Husserl

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offered a hope of renewal, by fostering the emergence of a global moral order. After another century, Husserl's reflections and those of his predecessors in times of crises, reveal their enduring relevance.

Keywords: Crises Rational Values, Fichte, Husserl, Ideal of Humanity, Kant, Philosophy.

creyó que el «Ideal de la humanidad de Fichte» podía ofrecer una esperanza de renovación, al fomentar el surgimiento de un orden moral global. Un siglo más tarde, las reflexiones de Husserl y las de sus predecesores en tiempos de crisis revelan su perdurable relevancia.

Palabras clave: crisis de valores racionales, Fichte, filosofía, Husserl, ideal de humanidad, Kant.

True greatness, resting on itself, finds no pleasure in monuments erected by contemporaries, or in being called «The Great», or in the shrieking applause and praises of the mob; rather, it rejects these things with fitting contempt, and awaits first the verdict on itself from its own indwelling judge, and then the public verdict from the judgment of posterity. True greatness has always had this further characteristic: it is filled with awe and reverence in the face of dark and mysterious fate, it is mindful of the ever-rolling wheel of destiny, and never allows itself to be counted great or happy before its end (Fichte, 1922: 246).

Socrates at odds with the earnest man

We don't have to wait for the foundation of European universities in the 13th century, or for the radical turn that seems to glide into the course of European history ever since the so-called Age of Enlightenment, in order to confirm the difficult relations that philosophers have always maintained "with the Gods of the city, namely, with other men and with the fixed absolute, the image of whom they lend to him" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960: 42). In his 1953 *In Praise of Philosophy*, Merleau-Ponty points out—referring to Socrates' life and death—that it would not be much of a problem "if the philosopher were a rebel", for "rebellion" as such "does not annoy". On the contrary, Socrates offers sacrifices to the gods, points out that his religion is the true one, and compels the citizens to "obey the City". Furthermore, he is the first to set an example: "Athenians", he says in the Apology, "I believe as none of those that accuse me". Thus they condemn him to death, not so much for *what* he does, but for *how* he does it and *why* he does it (Merleau-Ponty, 1960: 43). Unlike ideological-political humanisms that are inspired by the myth of Prometheus and openly rebel against the gods (along with violently rejecting the associated theologies), the philosopher does not propose alternative truths, nor is he capable of assuring future perfect

societies inhabited by some unprecedented, entirely fulfilled *homo absconditus*. He proposes another discourse and another humanism, one that causes discomfort and disappointment. He offers neither certainties nor established truths; he refuses to inhabit them, and is continually retracing his steps: “The most resolute philosophers always wish the opposite: to carry out, while destroying; to annihilate, while preserving. They always have a second intention. Perhaps the philosopher pays attention to the earnest man —the man of action, of religion, of passion— more acutely than anyone. But precisely, one remarks, none of that concerns him” (Merleau-Ponty, 1960: 68). In sum, the philosopher —Merleau-Ponty warns— is not an earnest man. “The earnest man, if he exists, has a one-track mind and assents to only one thing”. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty adds, “the Manicheans that clash in action understand each other better than they understand the philosopher: there is complicity between them, one is the other’s *raison d’être*. The philosopher is a stranger in this fraternal mess. Although he may have never betrayed, one feels, in his manner of being loyal, that he could betray; he does not participate as others, his assent lacks something solid and carnal [...] he is not entirely a real being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1960: 69).

Kant and philosophy at odds with worldly powers

The established powers take on different forms throughout history. Rational and voluntary thinking has clashed, again and again, against all of them. For instance, in 1788 Frederick William II of Prussia had enacted a royal edict incited by a clergyman of the Department of Worship, so when Kant publishes his *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason* in 1793, the sovereign censors it. He writes Kant that he has “abused of his philosophy” in order to “disfigure and debase several major and fundamental dogmas of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity”, ordering him not to “commit such mistakes” again (Kant, 1977: 268–269). In his defense, Kant replies to the king that in his role as “master of youth” and “master of the people”, his book does not contain any pronouncement that refers to the Holy Scriptures, to the

Bible, or to Christianity in particular, and that it “only contains a judgment concerning natural religion”, declaring himself “the most loyal of subjects” (Kant, 1977: 269–273). Some years later, in 1798, Kant publishes *The Contest of Faculties* where he laments the “permanent drive toward a faith that increasingly drifts away from reason” (Kant, 1977: 273). He there tries to explain not only the direct role that the Faculty of Philosophy (which was ranked as “inferior”) plays in “serving” the so-called “superior” university faculties, but also the indirect role it plays in “guiding” the sovereign power with the “torch” of reason.

If the faculties of Theology, Jurisprudence, and Medicine are considered “superior” within the German university system, Kant explains, it is because by educating the public about theoretical syntheses and legal statutes, they help both the State and the sovereign ruler to exert their authority and power over the people and demand obedience from them, offering in return to their subjects the needed guarantees of gaining access to the *eternal good* (everlasting life), the *civil good* (social order), and the *bodily good* (physical health) (Kant, 1977: 282–285). None of these faculties draw their knowledge from the rational proof of their interpretations and rules, nor are they required to do so. On the contrary, the Faculty of Philosophy is considered “inferior” precisely because it does not help the sovereign ruler to impose social order and exert political power. Its goal is merely to wield the power of judgment in conformity with reason, to demonstrate in an autonomous and free manner the truths it attains, and to protect the latter against the meddling and control of external forces. Furthermore, it is expected to abstain from damaging the civil power by communicating directly to the people its criticisms and reservations regarding the lack of rational bases for civil and ecclesiastical legislation.

It should be added that the Faculty of Philosophy is not a Faculty of Human Sciences as currently understood, since it “embraces all the branches of human knowledge”, including those of the “superior faculties”. Consequently, it embraces the *historical* human sciences in connection with the *empirical* natural sciences, along with the purely *rational* sciences such as pure mathematics, the metaphysics of nature, and the metaphysics of morals (Kant, 1977: 291).

His own reflections lead Kant to discover that the main aim of the Faculty of Philosophy is to be “a science of man”, “such as he is and such as he should be, both according to his natural dispositions as also according to the conditions of his morality and freedom” (Kant, 1977: 340). Basically, Kant ascribes to human beings in the world an eminently *active* existence, with each human being understood as “originally creator of his representations and concepts”, and as “author of all of his actions” (Kant, 1977: 341). Thanks to his sensibility and understanding he determines what *is*, and thanks to his reason and will (which tends toward the supernatural) he determines what *should be*. He, therefore, dwells between two worlds: the sensible and the intelligible. His practical, autonomous, and free reason is what distinguishes him from the animal, whereas the *creative activity of understanding* in relation to the objects of knowledge is tied to the *passive affection* of sensibility, and thus in a certain sense —Kant remarks— it depends on the body and its brain activity, as physiology teaches. However, this is not the case with the *practical faculty of free will and reason*, which are the sources of the moral law that elevates us above nature.

Fichte and the education of mankind

The recoil of time was needed, history’s verdict was needed for justice to be done to his memory, so that the grandeur of the work he had accomplished would appear, his immense political and social repercussion, [...] to verify finally Rahel’s words saying that at the philosopher’s deathbed it was Germany’s unique eye that had just been closed
(Léon, 1922–1927: vol. 2, 286).

After his contact with Spinoza’s *Theological–Political Treatise* and his *Ethics*, Johann-Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) discovers with amazement Kant’s practical philosophy as the first one that —in his view— succeeds in reconciling a *rational* system with human *freedom* (Julia, 1964: 3). When in 1793 the royal edict censors Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, Fichte becomes a revolutionary;

he rebels against the State and decides that forthwith he will fight for the freedom of speech (Julia, 1964: 3-4). His subsequent intellectual itinerary seems to develop in discontinuous stages, initially exploiting the *active* principle of Kantian philosophy on the basis of his *idealist philosophy of the I* (between 1794 and 1799), followed by a *philosophy of being or absolute realism* (between 1800 and 1802) and concluding with a *philosophy of the absolute* that reconciles the first two stages (between 1804 and his death in 1814) (Julia, 1964: 6-13).

At the beginning, Fichte's 1794/95 *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*)—a work that expounds the rights of a new metaphysics—claims to provide a *unitary* foundation to philosophy from the point of view of an “exhaustive theory of mankind”. Its object is to establish the human spirit as the *source* of “every science and every action”. Fichte believes that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* had not succeeded in determining a common foundation both for spirit and nature. Thus he resolves to accomplish this with his concept of *original action* (*Tathandlung*) as action that emanates from the “transcendental I” both as the *ideal* principle of knowledge and as the *real* principle of *action*. The self-splitting of the *I* in a creative *thetic activity* (the spontaneity of thought), on the one hand, and the *passivity* of intuition (of the *given*), on the other, describes the deep intertwining of both elements in the knowledge of the universe. Yet Fichte's initial texts are rejected, and he is accused of atheism and of conspiring against the State (Julia, 1964: 7-8, 14-20).

The second stage of Fichte's development, corresponding to his “philosophy of being”, is expounded in a popular format in his 1800 *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*—alternatively translated as *The Vocation of Man* and *The Destination of Man*—and in an 1801 systematic reformulation of his former *Wissenschaftslehre*. At this stage Fichte renews his attempt to reconcile the demands of reason and the demands of the heart, especially in the first work cited. *The Destination of Man's* three parts—Doubt (*Zweifel*) (Fichte, 1974: 7-43), Knowledge (*Wissen*) (Fichte, 1974: 45-103), and Belief (*Glauben*) (Fichte, 1974: 105–192)—successively tackle the dialectics between our intellect and feelings: we *think* determinism *objectively* (which is within

reach of our power) and we *feel* freedom *subjectively* (which is within reach of our will). “Knowledge” cannot satisfy our “doubt” regarding the subjective freedom that we feel, for it remains at the level of a conceptual possibility it cannot prove, so “belief” comes to the rescue, fulfilling our spiritual needs. At this stage, there is a shift in the weight Fichte formerly conferred upon the *subject* (the *I*): from this point on, he bestows it on the “absolute *being* of knowledge” in the context of an “absolute *realism*”. “Absolute *being*” not only precedes and lies deeper than the “*I*” and its “absolute *idealism*”, but is its origin, only revealing itself to itself (in different strata of perceptual and moral consciousness) in its successive unfolding as determinations of absolute being. His 1801 work, the reformulation of his *Theory of Science*, renders this discovery of “absolute *being*” in a systematic form comprising two parts: an *analysis* of the foundation of philosophical knowledge, and a *phenomenology* of perceptual and moral consciousness (Julia, 1964: 21-22).

Finally, in 1804, when reformulating the previous versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte throws himself into reconciling his *ideal* philosophy of consciousness (of the absolute and free *I*) on the one hand and his *real* philosophy of absolute *being* on the other, moving beyond the *perceptual* subject-object dualism and beyond the merely relative unity of determinism and freedom involved in every individual worldly moral *action*. At that moment he realizes that in order to reach a resolution of the “*metaphysical problem of absolute freedom and of absolute being*”, his previous theory of action must be recast, since it is incomplete and does not yet succeed in solving the problem. He undertakes this recasting in his 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* wherein he develops his renewed “theory of philosophical knowledge” or “philosophical science” in two stages: a theory of reason or of truth, and a phenomenology of philosophical consciousness in a reflective form (Julia, 1964: 23-25). It should be noted that since his rebellion against the censorship of Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason* in 1793, Fichte’s main concern was consistently the *freedom of action* as the center of his “real philosophical science” in the “real world” in which we live, based upon *natural law*, and this principle of reason is itself at the center of his *Theory of Science*. Thus in spite

of the fact that he recognizes that he must recast his early theory of action, Fichte believes that it had already advanced beyond Kant's and Rousseau's theories, for even in his 1797 *Foundations of Natural Right* (*Grundlagen des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre*) he considers that

the concept of *individuality* is that of *reciprocity*, for the individual—in order to awaken to humanity—needs an *external incitement* or *education*. “Man is not man except among men”. Social life is not possible except if “each individual limits its freedom by the idea of the possibility of the freedom of others”. (Julia, 1964: 28)

Thus for Fichte, the goal of morals is not the individual, but humanity. His fundamental notion is accordingly not formal law, but human progress guaranteed by *concrete pedagogical laws* that aim at improving the civil constitution of the State and of a confederation of States, founded on international rights capable of preserving peace and enabling the realization of humanity as a real community. In consequence, and regarding the latter, it must be added that later on, in his 1812 *The Science of Rights* (*Das System der Rechtslehre*), Fichte warns against two harmful extremes to which the economic conditions of the State could eventually succumb: economic *liberalism* (for it provokes wars of individuals and nations) and *mercantilism* (for it causes monopolies to the detriment of consumers). Instead, he stands for a state economic socialism, beyond all particular interests, since he believes it will be able to orient economic production according to the needs and interests of producers, merchants, and consumers alike (cf. also his 1798 *Das System der Sittenlehre* reprinted in 1812, referred to by Julia, 1964: 27-36).

In sum, during the three stages of his work, there is a progressive deepening and articulation of the two central axes of his system: the absolute *I* and absolute *being*. Finally, in his third and final stage, both elements lead—in a dialectical unity—to Fichte's metaphysics of the *absolute Verb* under the influence of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1780 blueprint of *The Education of the Human Race* (*Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*) (see Julia, 1964: 40-53). These traits

are manifest in his 1806 lecture *The Way Toward the Blessed Life* (*Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre*)—which renders his fullest thoughts on religion and is a later source of inspiration for Husserl—as well as in the new edition of his 1798 *The Science of Ethics as Based on the Science of Knowledge* (*Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre*, 1812), among other texts.

Husserl's ideal of humanity and philosophy

According to Fichte, man is indeed a *subject*, yet he is engaged in the world. The ultimate harmony between subjects and real being is pre-established by *divine providence*. Thus his increasingly deepened concept of the “absolute” slowly appears as *being, subject, action, providence, and science*, topics that Husserl will retrieve in 1917—a little more than a century later—in his three lectures on the “Ideal of Humanity in Fichte” (*Hua XXV*: 267-293). If according to Husserl the *principle* that sustains Fichte’s entire writings is phenomenological (here understood as dialectics or as a *living genesis* that determines all of our worldviews and our freedom, including our *lived experience* of absolute knowledge), it is because for Fichte (unlike Hegel), the *ethical* element, insofar as it is phenomenological or *lived*, is irreducible to any conceptual knowledge. The foundation and end of his *metaphysics* is thus ultimately *moral*, expressed in the longing for and acquisition of a blessedness that lies beyond the life of men and consists in participating in divine life. *The Destination of Man* (of humanity), which is at the core of Fichte’s anthropology, is thus to carry out the *Aufhebung* (in the sense of suppressing, overcoming, and preserving) of every dualistic ontology: namely, the *Aufhebung* of the abyss between the *I* and the *non-I*, between reason and matter, and finally between freedom and nature.

Husserl starts reading Fichte’s popular works intensely, and in 1903, 1915, and 1918 he offers seminars on Fichte’s 1800 *The Destination of Man* (*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*)—at first critically, and later with increasing appreciation. After his initial rejection of “German idealism” and of Fichte’s theory of the “pure I”, he concedes to

Heinrich Rickert in 1915 that “he feels at home” in that tradition and that “Fichte attracts me in increasing measure” (*Hua Dok III/5*: 178). This evolution is based precisely on his reading of Fichte’s popular texts *The Destination of Man* and *The Way to a Blessed Life* (*Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, 1806), but not on Fichte’s theoretical texts (the diverse versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, especially the 1804 one), which in Husserl’s opinion contain too many argumentative “stunts” and logical transgressions that seem to him almost unbearable (*Hua XXV*: 269). Husserl’s 1919, 1920/21, and 1924 offerings on ethics (*Hua XXXVII*), as well as his 1922–1924 *Kaizo* articles (*Hua XXVII*: 3–94), also reveal Fichte’s very strong influence, although the latter’s name is not mentioned in them. Moreover, toward the end of his 1924 course on ethics, in a footnote (*Hua XXXVII*: 255), Husserl regrets that during that course he has not had the opportunity to develop the kinship between his phenomenological-scientific foundation of ethics and Fichte’s ethics. Notwithstanding, in “The Ideal of Humanity in Fichte” he makes clear his admiration for Fichte’s ethics and humanistic passion, which he recognizes as being continuously referred to its theoretical foundations. He agrees with Fichte that “one can do some things for secondary or egotistical reasons, but the philosopher can only be an ethical personality; if he is not, he is nothing” (*Hua Dok III/3*: 294; Hart, 1995: 138).

Husserl first reads his three lectures on “The Ideal of Humanity in Fichte” (*Fichtes Menschheitsideal*) in November 1917 to soldiers who had returned from the front and repeats them twice in 1918 for students and faculty members of the University of Freiburg (see *Hua XXV*: xxviii–xxxiii). Their framework is the ravages of war and the despondency of defeat. He wonders whether the values that gave their thrust to German idealism and to modern men’s spiritual life, are now crushed by the advancement of the exact sciences and their technologically determined culture, are exhausted. He also wonders whether philosophy has no more to say. In Fichte’s time, at the beginning of the 19th century, Germany was fighting for its existence after the Prussian defeat at Jena by the Napoleonic armies. In 1917, a century later, death spreads all over Europe, having snatched

Husserl's youngest son at Verdun the previous year. But nevertheless he believes that German idealism can regain its original, sacred right and should be revalued. The fundamentally "practical" course of Fichte's thought—as an ethical-religious reformer, an educator of mankind, a prophet, and a seer—accordingly encourages Husserl to reconsider what Fichte's work offers for the ongoing development of philosophy (*Hua XXV*: 270).

Meanwhile, although the situation has somewhat changed since Fichte's time, it is still a consequence of previous problems that remain prevalent and widespread. After the "downfall" of German idealism with Hegel's death, August Comte's "positivistic naturalism" triumphs, deepening (as Husserl later points out) the consequences that modern "physicalism" and Cartesian dualism have inflicted upon the nascent psychology and study of subjectivity. Since according to Husserl naturalism and scientism overpower Western culture, are not only rebuttals of metaphysics renewed, but critiques are directed at any philosophical discourse whatsoever. However, these critiques forget that the development and creation of the epistemological tools and techniques that have enabled the triumphs of the rigorous sciences, with their mastery of nature since modern times, is the upshot of centuries of huge efforts that emerge precisely from philosophical and scientific spirits guided by brilliant intuitions. But above all, Husserl highlights that the philosophical premonitions of the past have offered "decisive stances for the dignity of an authentic humanity" with the rigor of theoretical ideals (*Hua XXV*: 270).

Several of Fichte's writings inspire Husserl,¹ and his lectures begin with an exposition of the initial Fichtean theses, characterized as being influenced by Kant (*Hua XXV*: 274). But he admires the audacity with which Fichte interprets the world in a wholly different way—unlike the worldview assumed by natural sciences—and erases all mention of the Kantian *noumenon* and of passive affection.

¹ He mentions as essential readings *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800), *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1806), *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben* (1806), *Die Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (1808), the Erlanger lectures *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten* (1805), and the five Berlin lectures on *Die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (1811)—see *Hua XXV*: 271.

The *practical* orientation of his thought shapes his concept of an *acting* and *productive* subjectivity. “The subject is thoroughly, and nothing else than, what acts. And whatever the subject has in its presence, as substrate of action, as object of its activity, that must be something immanent in it, something already enacted. Therefore there both coincide on being a subject and being one who acts; but also being-an-object-for-the-subject and being a product of acting. Prior to the acting, when we go to the origin, there lies nothing” (*Hua XXV*: 275). Thus at the beginning, there “is not a fact (*Tatsache*) but an ‘action’ (*Tathandlung*)” that progressively unfolds in history, in a productive development of continuous tasks “in infinite succession”. The goal of each task is teleologically connected to a higher goal—to “the highest moral end” (*Hua XXV*: 275). This is the Fichtean “I” or “Intelligence” that Husserl so much admires, and that is not a mere *object* of experience, but a metaphysical force capable of *splitting itself* and reconstructing the teleological process of its experiences whereby the meaning that we confer upon the world and upon ourselves is produced or constituted (*Hua XXV*: 276). Husserl wonders with Fichte: where is this teleology heading, a teleology “pervaded by an infinite drive longing for satisfaction”? And what is its ultimate meaning? His answer is that it is heading “toward that which alone can guarantee pure satisfaction, what alone can be an end in itself, what alone contains absolute value in itself” (*Hua XXV*: 277). And that end in itself, that absolute value and foundation that humanity strives for, is the teleological production of a human world, of a *moral world order* by the ethical action of free spirits (*Hua XXV*: 277). Mere natural causality is incapable of discovering—within our experience—the teleological-practical drive that longs for satisfaction.

This is what Fichte’s idealism accomplishes in Husserl’s 1917 reading of his work: it is a summons “for an inner transformation of the human through a manifestation of the ends to which humanity is devoted”. Husserl quotes Fichte as saying: “Nothing has unconditional value and meaning except life; all the rest of thinking, poeticizing, and knowing has value only in so far as it, in some way, is related to life, proceeds from it, and intends to return to it” (Fichte

1908ff.: III, 557ff.; *Hua* XXV: 278). Fichte's philosophy propounds a "completely new and genuine Ideal of humanity" that requires — in Husserl's words that recall Nietzsche— a "reversal of all values" (*Umwertung aller Werte*) (*Hua* XXV: 279), an expression that further recalls how Husserl himself has previously described his "transcendental reduction" (*Hua* III/1: §76).² This new philosophy and this new ideal of humanity lie in and emanate from pure immanence, and from the value of *personality* as a moral agent and a free citizen. *True philosophy* thus teaches the way to salvation and to the genuine ideal of a humanity that lives in ethical freedom.

Referring to the first period of Fichte's thought, Husserl states: "In this stage of development of the Fichtean philosophy the ethical human coincides completely with the religious human" (*Hua* XXV: 280). In Fichte's words, "Morality and religion are absolutely one" (Fichte, 1908ff.: III, 169). But even here, Fichte's views are a reversal of ordinary Christian religious views. What he is proposing at this stage is a "genuine Christian" view of morality. God is not to be seen as a mere infinite *substance* "over against the finite substances". It is to "denigrate God in a moral respect" to present him "as substance, as reality, yes, even as personality", as a "giver of all enjoyments, as a distributor of the always sensibly envisaged 'happiness' or unhappiness of finite beings", and as a God "whose heaven is a welfare institute for voluptuaries", with whom the believer "makes a contract, whose document is the Bible". Husserl comments: "how pitiful!" to envisage morality as buying for oneself "earthly and other worldly delights" purchased "through obedience toward God" (*Hua* XXV: 281). Instead, according to Husserl's reading of Fichte, "The truly religious person wants nothing to do with this idolatry. He needs no Elysium in the other world; he possesses already in this world all conceivable blessedness in his free ethical agency. The infinity of the moral task thereby includes in itself immortality" (*Hua* XXV: 281).

2 Husserl, 1995: 133 (translator's footnote 12). James Hart's note adds "Husserl avails himself of this Nietzschean phrase for elucidating the transcendental reduction" and cites Boehm 1969: 223, 237–241.

Husserl's third and last lecture on the "Ideal of Humanity in Fichte" refers to the final mature reformulation of the relationship between human beings and God in Fichte's 1806 work, *The Way to a Blessed Life (Anweisung zum seligen Leben)* (Hua XXV: 284). In this period, "religious life now no longer coincides with moral life, but rather the moral is a lower level which fulfills itself first of all in religious life as a higher level" (Hua XXV: 282–283). Fichte presents a view inspired by Neoplatonism whereby the eternal and immutable God, "the *Hen*, The One or the Good" —which should not be confused with the creative *I* or subjectivity, but is "the eternal unchanging unique Being (*Sein*)"— reveals itself in infinite degrees and "in an eternal irradiation as a gradation of an increasing estranging formative process from the primal light down to the completely God-alienated physical world". Fichte understands this self-revelation as a continuous self-mirroring "in the form of consciousness", whereby the divine must simultaneously and increasingly "*conceal itself*" (Hua XXV: 283). Consequently, human beings must reverse this downward gradation of Being by elevating themselves in an upward movement toward the Ideal, passing through "five levels of world-perspectives, five levels of remoteness or approximation of humanity to the divinity", moving from darkness to light (Hua XXV: 283). Thus in different modes of self-consciousness, individuals first obscurely and then in continuous ascent can freely choose to strive toward pure self-consciousness. For "our freedom" —Husserl adds— "is a ray of the divine freedom, our will a ray of the divine will" (Hua XXV: 284). "To choose the higher humanity is to decide for God" (Hua XXV: 284–285).

The five stages mentioned of divine self-revelation within human immanence (*Wissen*) thereby correspond to four different anthropologies and worldviews, if one excludes the first level, since it is purely negative and corresponds to the search for and the hope of finding happiness in mere sensual pleasure. The latter attitude — that of hedonistic dogmatism— is "the lowest level of revelation of God in the human soul" (in the *Da* of the *Dasein*); it corresponds to God's "complete concealment", whereby the human soul deceives

itself by confusing the longing for ultimate blessedness —which alone can satisfy— with happiness (*Hua* XXV: 285). The next stages, in increasing ascent but always *freely chosen*, characterize four human ideal types. 1) The first type, *ethicality* (*Sittlichkeit*), corresponds to the Kantian and Stoic rigorous legality and submission to the voice of duty, when the soul has managed to free itself from the “sensible ‘affect of Being’”. Nevertheless, for Fichte and Husserl, this Kantian and Stoic type is also a merely negative one, for it lacks content, being merely formal and mirroring the “cold and empty autonomy in Stoic *apathie*” (*Hua* XXV: 287). 2) The second type corresponds to “*the higher and proper morality* (*Moralität*)” (*Hua* XXV: 286), that of positive and pure love of something “for the sake of itself (and no way as a mere means)”, namely, for the sake of the loved object’s value (e.g., ideal beauty) as such. This human type is expressed in the creation of the artistic genius giving form to something other than him- or herself (*Hua* 25: 288); in the genuine scientific researcher, whereby the divine idea put forth is a different one, namely, “that of the theoretical or practical truth”; in the “noble technologist whose love aims at creating domination of nature for humans (and not for lower sensuous goals)”; and in the “noble politician, who finds his blessedness working on the preservation and formation of the order of an ideal community in accord with the particular Ideas which are normative for this community” (*Hua* XXV: 289). They all aspire to shape higher Ideas and deeds in the empirical world, although they may not be entirely aware that their work and love is ultimately inspired by a higher yearning (a yearning for ultimate blessedness). 3) The third stage corresponds to one who loves his neighbor insofar as this love emanates from God’s infinite love, and who —as a member of an ideal world of spirits— yearns to establish *the kingdom of God on earth*. This higher level corresponds to the morality of the *religious person* who “knows himself as a sanctified vessel of the divinity”³ and “sees also that God lives in each human in a unique guise, even if also very much concealed” (*Hua* XXV: 290-291). How is the religious person able to see God, or find him? Husserl quotes

3 James Hart’s footnote refers the reader to a similar view in *Hua* XXVII: 65–66.

Fichte's answer: "Do you want to see God as He is in Himself, face to face? Do not seek him on the other side of the clouds. You can find Him everywhere *where you are*. Look at the life of those devoted to Him and you are looking at Him. Dedicate yourself to Him and you will find Him in your breast" (Fichte, 1908ff.: V, 184, cited in *Hua XXV*: 291). This "knowledge of God" that has been granted to the religious person satisfies him or her, but the *explanation* is given at a final, fourth level. 4) This *highest* level for Fichte—in Husserl's rendering—is the ideal of a *scientific humanity* that elevates "simple faith" to the philosophical knowledge of a "seeing", a "seeing" of the "Why and How". Nevertheless, this "scientific clarity" lacks "proper brilliance and inner warmth". For as Husserl immediately warns, it is a *merely indirect inkling* that the "all-encompassing knowledge of God", which "includes an all-encompassing knowledge of the world" and the "boundless joy" that it brings with it, cannot be merely "the satisfaction of a theoretical interest". Instead—when intertwined with religious blessedness (*Hua XXV*: 292)—this "scientific clarity" consists of the *practical realization* of infinite tasks.

Thus the role of philosophy and the human sciences in forging an "ideal of humanity" is not merely a matter of resolving the tensions that they have had with worldly powers, as in Socrates' life and death and in Kant's defense of the rational ideas fostered by the Faculty of Philosophy as opposed to the alleged "higher" university faculties. They also have the task of guiding humankind toward an ideal of humanity and spiritual values in times of crises. As Husserl points out toward the end of his lectures, in dire times of crises, "in the exigency of our times, there is only one thing that can give support, strengthen, yes, make us insurmountably 'blessed' in all our misery: It is the divine spirit of the Idea; it is the reflection on the pure Ideals, for the sake of whose realization we exist" (*Hua XXV*: 292). When the German people were fighting for their survival after their defeat by the Napoleonic armies at the beginning of the 19th century, Fichte's reflections gave a decisive impulse to the values brandished by German idealism. A century later, neither the empirical-deductive sciences nor their technologically oriented culture are able to alleviate Germany's afflictions after being newly defeated in

World War I. But Husserl believes that “Fichte’s Ideal of Humanity” does offer a hope of renewal. He thinks this can be found by stressing the teleological production of a human world in which humanity’s sole goal, foundation, and absolute value is oriented toward the emergence of a *global moral order*.

Conclusion

Another century has gone by since Husserl’s three lectures on “Fichte’s Ideal of Humanity”, and humankind is experiencing another period of manifold crises: social, economic, political, ecological, ideological, ethnic, medical, etc. And our current globalized technological world ruled by global corporate networks with the connivance of worldly powers is slowly succeeding in erasing all humanistic, historic, and value-oriented education, both in high schools and higher education. Likewise, the advantages of speedy worldwide communication, which enables us to share vast amounts of information and valuable contents in real time, are being buried by the disadvantage of the instantaneous dissemination of unverifiable and anonymous data. All human affairs seem to succumb to objective, technological, and economic approaches in which they are merely measurable, quantifiable commodities. The expansion of technology also causes unemployment and impacts what is expected of education under the law of supply and demand. Individuals and members of communities are increasingly regarded as mere objects in a world of things, losing their personal and spiritual density. In fact, the values assumed by the globalized culture of our age are those that belonged to Fichte’s first stage worldview and were thus excluded both by him and by Husserl: namely, the search for happiness in hedonistic pleasures by means of wealth and power. Furthermore, only a privileged few control the world stage, while the afflictions, fear, and bewilderment of the many are throwing them back to the lowest, pre-ethical stages of human life-forms, losing all contact, awareness, and even appreciation for the possibility of an individual, let alone communal, ethical renewal “born out of the express will to

configure themselves as an authentic humanity in the sense of practical reason” (*Hua XXVII: 22*).

In my view, all these crises are further upshots of Descartes’ dualism and the Galilean mathematization of nature, of the long reign of a physicalistic, objectivistic, and technicist cultural paradigm (even if between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the cultural and human sciences did temporarily resist positivism’s attempt to displace them). What can philosophy contribute toward reawakening an ideal of humanity guided by a genuine scientific vocation for the search for truth, for practical action, and for the noble production of goods toward the highest ends of humanity? Kant —and later Husserl— believed that such an ideal was not to be forged solely from within the humanities and philosophy, but also —in the wider sense of the 18th century Faculty of Philosophy— in dialogue with pure and applied sciences. Indeed, for Husserl, philosophy in times of crises is called to renew the faith that realizing the ideal of an authentic, *rational* humanity —and thereby bringing about the ethical-political renewal of humankind as a whole— is still possible. And philosophy crucially reminds us that we must have the *will* to carry it through, in an incessant moral *struggle*. Furthermore, due to the fact that philosophy concerns *practical reason* and thus lacks preestablished norms, it has the possibility of carrying out its task thanks to the rigorous method of intuitive eidetic descriptions whereby the general concepts pertaining to the ideal of an ethical human being and “the form of life of an authentic humanity” (*Hua XXVII: 33f.*) can be established (*Hua XXVII: 3–13*). Finally, these tasks assigned to philosophy concern “an art of the universal education of humankind, supported by clearly fixed highest ethical ideals” (*Hua III/3: 12*) that should allow humanity to ascend to the “form of life” that lives in reason (*Hua XXVII: 33*).

Thus the current global threat to a humanistic education should be courageously withstood; the human sciences and philosophical faculties, and their most genuine research, should not lose their leading moral role, and should continue raising their critical voices facing the increasing attempts to silence them.

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