



The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy

By Jacques Derrida

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For Derrida, the problem of genesis in Husserl's philosophy is that both temporality and meaning must be generated by prior acts of the transcendental subject, but transcendental subjectivity must itself be constituted by an act of genesis. Hence, the notion of genesis in the phenomenological sense underlies both temporality and atemporality, history and philosophy, resulting in a tension that Derrida sees as ultimately unresolvable yet central to the practice of phenomenology.

Ten years later, Derrida moved away from phenomenology entirely, arguing in his introduction to Husserl's posthumously published *Origin of Geometry* and his own *Speech and Phenomena* that the phenomenological project has neither resolved this tension nor expressly worked with it. *The Problem of Genesis* complements these other works, showing the development of Derrida's approach to phenomenology as well as documenting the state of phenomenological thought in France during a particularly fertile period, when Levinas, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and Tran-Duc-Thao, as well as Derrida, were all working through it. But the book is most important in allowing us to follow Derrida's own development as a philosopher by tracing the roots of his later work in deconstruction to these early critical reflections on Husserl's phenomenology.

"A dissertation is not merely a prerequisite for an academic job. It may set the stage for a scholar's life project. So, the doctoral dissertations of Max Weber and Jacques Derrida, never before available in English, may be of more than passing interest. In June, the University of Chicago Press will publish Mr. Derrida's dissertation, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, which the French

philosopher wrote in 1953-54 as a doctoral student, and which did not appear in French until 1990. From the start, Mr Derrida displayed his inventive linguistic style and flouting of convention."—Danny Postel, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This translation of a 1990 reprinting of Derrida's 1953-54 dissertation for his *diplôme d'études supérieures* by its nature contains a certain deconstructive vibration, voices impacted within voices and language pried open for close inspection. Even the juxtaposition of annotations-the translator's notes, nested beside the editor's notes, nested inside the author's translations-produces a certain Derridean experience of intertextuality. Adding to the complication, the subject matter here is "genesis" in the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, a perfect template for circular locutions on the unplaceable origins of thought and identity. "Just when I am getting to the end and when everything is finished for me, I know that I must start everything again from the beginning," Husserl is quoted to say. For those enamored of Derrida's often mind-blowing writing style, part philosophy and part Talmudic incantation, this manuscript will prove fascinating material. Chided by instructor Louis Althusser to show a certain level of professionalism in his academic prose, the young Derrida moves relatively methodically over the body of Husserl's work, treating the twin themes of the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history. In this nascent effort, we glimpse a singular mind as it dwells on its own formation.

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From the Inside Flap

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