In the early 1920s, Edmund Husserl published a series of essays on renewal (Erneuerung) in the Japanese journal *Kaizo*, discussing human life, its goal-directed, teleological nature and its possibilities for self-regulation. Husserl focused on the problems of individual transformation and social-cultural development and argued that human life should not be modelled on biological life. There is a crucial difference between human action and animal behaviour, according to Husserl, but this difference is not material, it is structural and based on the reflective potentials of human beings. In other words, human life and animal life include similar elements, such as drives, needs and feelings, but these moments can become objects of reflection and critical inspection only within human life, and can thus receive a rational justification.¹

In the *Kaizo* essays, Husserl argues that to reach the highest form of life requires that we learn to reflect critically on our lives as wholes and all the elements included in them: our volitions and actions, but also our acts of thinking and valuing, desiring and feeling (Hua 37: 247–253). He sees all types of intentional acts as objects of ethical reflection and cultivation, so not just practical actions and volitions, but also all axiological acts of feeling and desiring and our theoretical acts of believing and thinking, and in this respect he is nearer to Aristotle than to Kant. On the other hand, Husserl’s ethics is part of his transcendental phenomenology, parallel with logic and epistemology. Thus, a comparison to Kant’s approach is illuminative and helps us to see the special strength of Husserl’s approach among late modern philosophies of the good life.

My aims are twofold. First, I will explicate Husserl’s idea of ethical life in distinction from the other possible types of human life. Second, I want to discuss the personalistic emphasis of Husserl’s approach and the secondary role that the other person has in it. My claim is that even if Husserl gives the other person a central place in all the human forms of life that he discusses,

¹ For a detailed discussion on the biological and organic models of human life, see Miettinen 2013.
his concept of ethics is personalistic in the sense that it defines ethical life by self-responsibility and personal happiness (Glückseligkeit, eudaimonia) and not by reference to any duties or obligations that we have to others. But even more interestingly, Husserl’s mature reflections on the human good parallel with late Stoic ethics in an important respects: both share a strong emphasis on the human person and her exceptional relation to her own life as a whole. Richard Sorabji’s investigations into the Stoic tradition are especially illuminative in this respect. In Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death (2007), Sorabji argues that with Panaetius, Epictetus and Cicero the Stoic tradition developed a new emphasis on the unique individual and her veridical relation to herself. What was debated and rethought by these later Stoics was not merely the sense and role of rules (regula) in ethics or the relation between the particular and the universal but more innovatively the special relation that a rational being has to herself and to her own life as a whole: “the Stoics differ from Kantians in the restrictions on their reliance on the rules and in their interest in exceptions that do not always fall under rules. But the particular need to be true to your self, and in cases where the self is unique, is a special case of this attitude” (Sorabji 2006: 165, cf. 2–3, 7–8).

My aim in this essay is to clarify Husserl’s understanding of ethical self-awareness. I do this in the interest in preparing for a detailed comparison between Husserl and the late Stoics and thereby opening broader perspectives for post-Kantian philosophy of good life.

The personalistic emphasis of Husserl’s mature ethics does not mean that topical questions concerning the self-other relation or intersubjective life would be external or marginal to his approach; on the contrary, the Kaizo-essays demonstrate that Husserl saw intersubjective life as a central topic in ethics. Moreover, as all objectivity is based on transcendental intersubjectivity (e.g. Hua 1:149ff.), also objective values and objective goods rest on this foundation. However, despite this multidimensional importance of intersubjectivity I want to argue that Husserl’s approach is personalistic in that he defines ethical life by reference to the spiritual activity of the person, by reference to the concepts of self-responsibility and self-shaping (Selbstgestaltung), and not by reference to any concepts of the other.

What proves to be crucial to Husserl’s mature understanding of ethics is the openness and incompleteness of a person’s spiritual life. For him, ethical

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2 Cf. Melle 2007. Husserl personalistic approach is most often associated with that of Fichte (see, e.g., Peucker 2008). My interest here is not to take a stand on the historical relations of influence but to prepare for a systematic comparison between Husserl and the late Stoics.