Identities: The Strategies of Deep Ecologists”) that “rather than concerning ourselves with the precise origins of ecological identities, we might do better to focus on the ways that current social structures and social meanings prevent ecological identities from becoming more important and more salient identities in a wider range of individuals.” I believe that efforts by phenomenologists to characterize the modern lifeworld, such as Albert Borgmann’s Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, could prove invaluable here. With no consideration of the historical horizons within which human and more-than-human reality is currently revealed, the discussion will indeed be constricted. I think of Fredric Jameson’s claim that what characterizes postmodernity is a certain depthlessness, including a “waning of affect” in the individual and a distinct flattening of the built environment. I would add that this epochal flattening includes an extreme disentwining of the “human” and “natural” worlds, for the sense of depth comes from a density of self-world interinvolvement or interpresencing of regions of experience. If we live in times structured for shallowness, then psychologists may well need to ask about our current ability to form deep ecological identities. Indeed, many practical matters may open up from doing so.


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This book covers the last 10 years of Husserl’s life and his cooperation with his assistant at the time, Eugen Fink, as well as Fink’s independent line of thinking with respect to phenomenological philosophy. Fink had followed several of Heidegger’s lectures in Freiburg while at the same time working closely with Husserl on several of his manuscripts, but he was also an independent philosophical thinker who saw certain problems in a different light from his two masters. This is a very important book for the phenomenological movement because it records how phenomenology became a philosophical mode of thinking detached from its two most famous innovators, Husserl and Heidegger.

Ron Bruzina does an excellent job of recording and documenting the struggles Husserl went through in his last years in trying to come up with a satisfactory systematic statement about the nature of phenomenology. One has often read in the literature how Husserl proclaimed that he was an “eternal beginner” and Bruzina’s book gives full meaning to that statement. At the end of his life Husserl was still trying to express
in an adequate way his mature understanding of phenomenology. It seems that two factors were primarily responsible for Husserl’s perception that he failed to communicate his philosophy adequately. The first is that Husserl was excellent in working out concrete detailed analyses of various phenomena, such as perception, space, time, body, etc., but these analyses, however admirable and fruitful they were (and they are!), did not present as well a systematic overview of the true nature of phenomenology. So Husserl was still left, at the end of his life, with the desire to present a coherent, general “introduction” to phenomenology that would capture its far-reaching potentialities as well as exhibit its detailed work on specific phenomena. Unfortunately, this presentation was never accomplished by him even though the Crisis gave indications of how his thinking was developing.

Secondly, Husserl discovered slowly throughout the course of his life’s work that there was an iterative process to phenomenological work. Thus after Husserl worked out specific analyses on a phenomenon he would review his work and notice that deeper analyses could be conducted on the basis of the analysis just completed. One could not go directly to the deeper analysis because the new problem could only show up on the basis of the first analysis. Consequently, Husserl realized that there was always more work to be done after a critical appraisal of the first labor, at least until he reached the absolutely deepest levels such as the “living present” or temporality. This fact made Fink aware that the way that phenomenological philosophy was being expressed during his time, by either Husserl or Heidegger, was merely a preliminary articulation. Husserl, the founder, was learning as he was working on problem after problem and his articulation of phenomenology could not keep up with his developing insights. And even though Heidegger in some ways was complementing Husserl, even though eventually oppositional, Fink saw that he too was expressing certain ontological insights in a preliminary way. So Fink realized that what was needed were some “post-preliminary” articulations of phenomenology, especially systematic and general expressions rather than detailed ones, however necessary and critical the latter were. That is the effort that Fink started and that Bruzina records in this important book.

Given the position that Fink was in, i.e., a student of both Husserl and Heidegger, it is noteworthy that he could be generous to both philosophers, as well as critical of each of them, as he slowly began to articulate an approach to phenomenological issues that was not so intimately tied to the names of his teachers. He wanted phenomenology to be a general philosophical perspective that transcended the work of specific individuals. His careful reading of both of his teachers allowed him to begin this effort.

That Fink ultimately came to his own position with respect to phenomenology can be seen from one of his notes that is critical of both of his teachers. He writes: “Husserl