The complex of problems suggested by the term life-world pervades contemporary thought, even though such a complex is rarely called by this name. In that the problem of the life-world is connected with the problem of history and historicity, it stands in the background of methodological problems in American and German sociology (especially systems theory) as well as efforts to construct a philosophical anthropology. Each of these disciplines is concerned with the concrete behavior and activity of people. Accordingly, the problem of the life-world is a central problem for practical philosophy with its quest for the basic principles of human action.

Husserl undertakes a discussion of these issues in his last work, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy. In this text the many issues surrounding the concept of the life-world are discussed with a view toward the history of European science. His analysis has been the object of much discussion. Time does not allow us, however, to perform an extensive review of the secondary literature on the Crisis. I will only suggest that a survey of this literature, especially the works of Brand, Merleau-Ponty and Habermas, presents us with a dilemma. It seems that there is a difficulty in Husserl’s characterization of the life-world. On the one hand, it is understood as the plurality of individually different socio-cultural environments and thus the result of an historical development; on the other hand, it is interpreted as a single structural basis common to all environments and thus an a priori for that history through which they become different. This
dilemma concerning the content of Husserl's theory is coupled with a problem having to do with the method of his analysis: how is Husserl's procedure of phenomenological reflection upon a transcendental ego or "monad" able to account for the intersubjective life-world in either of the senses just sketched? Putting the question in this fashion is usually the first step on the way to abandoning a transcendental account of historicity, or, as is the case with Habermas, replacing the transcendental ego with a community of language users.

What I want to propose in this essay is precisely what current thinkers seem unanimous in rejecting. I want to argue for a transcendental theory of the life-world and of historicity, and I want to do so by suggesting that a phenomenological reflection upon the transcendental ego—once correctly understood—is the proper procedure for constructing such a theory.

In this paper I will discuss such a theory by undertaking a brief study of Husserl's concept of the life-world and by isolating several difficulties which I detect (Part I). I will then introduce a theory of the transcendental reduction as the key to resolving the difficulties I discover (Part II). Finally, I will undertake my own systematic analysis of the a priori of the life-world and will suggest a way of integrating such an analysis with what I will call a transcendental history of the experience of consciousness (Part III).

I. Husserl's Introduction of the Concept of the Life-World and its Aporiae.

Let me attempt a brief review of Husserl's Crisis as a way of introducing the concept of the life-world. As with his other works published after the Logical Investigations—Ideas I, The Cartesian Meditations, and The Formal and Transcendental Logic—Husserl regarded the Crisis as an introduction to transcendental phenomenology. This new introduction was meant to prove the historical necessity of phenomenology within the situation of the contemporary world. The task of philosophy itself was to be treated only in light of this situation, which Husserl labelled "the epoch of the crisis of the European spirit and its sciences." At the same time the crisis is more than this. It is the crisis of the modern world in general, for the transformation and unification of the world into the one interdependent world we experience today begins