

# Husserl's Sense of Wonder

The experience of astonishment before the world – ‘wonder’ – demands serious investigation. That investigation may be hampered by vagueness, disagreement, or obscurity; and no final illumination may prove possible. But these difficulties have not deterred previous wonderers. Indeed, it is perhaps *because* of its lack of ultimate success that the investigation of wonder is so long-standing – at least as old as Plato and Aristotle, who held *thaumazein*; wonder at the fact of the world, to be the beginning of philosophy.

It is important for my present purposes, purposes that will emerge as we go along, that Edmund Husserl was occupied with wonder. Husserl believed he had found an enduring answer to the question of wonder in a return to ‘the Greeks.’ I want to examine that claim in what follows. Within Husserl’s larger phenomenological project, there lies an illuminating but not final analysis of wonder as a threefold structure: the wonderer, the wonderful, and wondering as the relation between them. For Husserl, as for many others, wonder is the experience that prompts philosophy, a doorway to pure theory. But also like many others, Husserl’s account of wonder faces difficulties of specificity and exactness. Because he failed to make much of his sense of wonder, we may frequently feel as though we are grasping at straws. And if we are to say what a phe-