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**HEIDEGGER AND THE PROBLEM
OF PHENOMENALITY**

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Abstract

This PhD thesis is an extended critical investigation of Martin Heidegger's influential account of the problem of phenomenality, i.e., of how things show up as meaningful phenomena in our experience. As such, it is also a study of his effort to develop and probe the question of phenomenology, i.e., what it means to see, understand, and articulate such phenomena. The aim of the thesis is both historical and systematic. On the one hand, it offers a unified interpretation of how Heidegger's struggle with the problem of phenomenality unfolds during the main stages of his philosophical development, from the early Freiburg lecture courses 1919-1923, over the Marburg years and the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, up to his later thinking stretching from the mid 1930s to the early 1970s. It is argued that the problem of phenomenality constitutes one of the core problems that Heidegger is concerned with from beginning to end, and that focusing on this problem allows us to shed new light on the philosophical logic and motives behind the main changes that his thinking undergoes along the way. On the other hand, the thesis examines both the philosophical power and the problems and ambiguities of Heidegger's consecutive attempts to account for the structure and dynamics of phenomenality. In particular, it critically interrogates Heidegger's basic idea that our experience of meaningful phenomena is determined by our prior understanding of the historical contexts of meaning in which we always already live. A central argument of the thesis is that Heidegger's conception of the historical structure of phenomenality raises the decisive question of how to distinguish between historical prejudice and primordial understanding, and that Heidegger's inability to answer this question in *Being and Time* generates a deep ambiguity between his program of historical-destructive thinking and his employment of a Husserlian intuition-based phenomenological method in his concrete investigation. Moreover, it is argued that Heidegger's later thinking of the clearing/event of being is centrally motivated by the effort to answer precisely this question by showing how a historical world can arise and give itself as a binding destiny. Ultimately, however, the thesis suggests – elaborating on the criticisms previously presented by, e.g., Ernst Tugendhat and Emmanuel Levinas – that Heidegger's radical historicization of phenomenality makes him unable to account either for the truth of our understanding or for the ethical-existential significance of other persons.

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Introduction

Heidegger and the Problem of Phenomenality

For about a century it seems that the question of phenomenality – of givenness – has haunted philosophy as a central problem. What does it mean that something shows itself or gives itself as a meaningful phenomenon in our experience? What does it mean to see, understand and give expression to such phenomena? Can our direct intuitive experience of the phenomenally given serve as a ground and measure for our understanding? Or is this experience essentially determined by the historical contexts of meaning – languages, concepts, norms, values, practices, vocabularies – in which we live, in such a way that our critical understanding of these contexts cannot ground itself on any phenomenological description of the experientially given, but will need to take the form of another kind of conceptual, hermeneutical or deconstructive analysis?

At the beginning of the 20th century Edmund Husserl launched his immense attempt at transforming philosophy into a rigorous phenomenological science. In order for philosophy not to collapse into empty and prejudiced theoretical speculation on the basis of received concepts and theories, Husserl argued, it must concentrate on strictly seeing and describing what is concretely given in our experience. At the same time, Husserl widened the notion of experiential givenness to include not only sense perceptions or empirical data but everything that may show itself as identifiable unities of meaning for our consciousness. Phenomenology is born and lives on the promise that phenomenal givenness may serve as an ultimate ground for our understanding of meaningful reality.

But is this possible?

The fact is that since the middle of the last century philosophy has centrally been characterized by the tendency to dismiss the very idea of direct phenomenal givenness – the “myth of the given,” as Wilfrid Sellars called it.¹ The variations of the critique of the given are of course multiple:

¹ Cf. Sellars 1956.

on the continental side we have, e.g., the hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, the post structuralist and deconstructivist thought of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, and the critical theory of Theodore Adorno and Jürgen Habermas; on the analytical side we have, e.g., the Neo-Kantianism-cum-Hegelianism of Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell and Robert Brandom, the everyday language philosophy of John Austin, the holistic naturalism of Willard Van Orman Quine and Donald Davidson, the thinking of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein and much of the philosophy that it has inspired, the philosophy of science developed by Thomas Kuhn, and the Neo-Pragmatism of Richard Rorty. Notwithstanding the immense differences between these philosophers, one of the vital effects of their combined efforts has been to establish one of the leading paradigms of thought pervading contemporary philosophy: the general and more or less vague idea that our experiential access to reality is essentially mediated by the historical contexts of meaning – languages, concepts, norms – in which we live, and which determine in advance what we may see and identify as meaningful phenomena. Whereas this paradigm largely dominates the field of continental philosophy it has never achieved a governing role in the analytic tradition, where it lives in a tense relation to the fundamental inclination towards naturalist thought. In so far as the above paradigm currently tends to link our philosophical thinking and imagination in a habitual and unquestioned manner, granting to our basic concepts and distinctions – conceptual, empirical, meaning, object, context, tradition, historicity, value, norm, groundless, incommensurability, horizon, otherness, etc. – what appears to be their ready understandability and weight, I suggest calling it the metaphysics of historical meaning.²

Martin Heidegger stands at the very center of the historical development sketched above. As Heidegger emerges as an autonomous philosopher in the beginning of the 1920s, he adopts Husserl's basic phenomenological demand to return to the experientially given while at the same time critically pursuing the question concerning the nature of phenomenal givenness. In contrast to Husserl, who according to

² In the epilogue of the thesis I will outline my view of the "metaphysics of historical meaning" in a little more detail.

Heidegger had largely built on the model of theoretical observation, he insists that our primary access to meaningful reality lies in our pre-theoretical experience of the world. In the course of laying bare the rootedness of this experience in the historical contexts of meaning into which we always already find ourselves thrown, Heidegger gradually moves away from the intuition-based phenomenology of Husserl towards a radicalized hermeneutical reflection on how our contexts of meaning arise and concern us as a finite and groundless historical destiny. Hence, while Heidegger takes his starting point in Husserl's phenomenology, he – through a long critical reflection on that phenomenology – eventually becomes the philosopher who more than anyone else contributes to establishing the dominance of the metaphysics of historical meaning in the continental tradition.

This thesis is a study of Heidegger's struggle to come to terms with the question of *phenomenality*, i.e. what it means for something to show or give itself as a meaningful phenomenon; as such, it is also a study of his effort to critically develop and probe the question of *phenomenology*, i.e. of what it means to see, understand, and articulate such phenomena. However, to the extent that Heidegger's struggle with these questions constitutes one of the exemplary trajectories instituting our present situation, I also hope that my study will help to open up and illuminate some of the philosophical problems, ambiguities and blindnesses marking our present.

The Heidegger Discussion

By now the scholarly literature on Heidegger has already grown into an enormous mass encompassing hundreds of books and thousands of articles – and it is still rapidly growing.

This discursive situation – whose closest contemporary counterpart is to be found in the research on Wittgenstein – certainly brings with it some obvious advantages. We are now in possession of a large amount of careful historical research covering most parts of Heidegger's production and including detailed studies of the key philosophers and traditions influencing or providing background for his thought. However, there are also grounds for interpreting the discursive situation as the symptom of a philosophical crisis, a crisis which the situation is itself contributing to. On the one hand, the greater part of the literature on Heidegger is primarily

philological in character, exhibiting little or no independent and systematic philosophical work. On the other hand, the circumstance that Heidegger's thought constitutes a paradigm for our own thinking makes it possible to feel that in charting the internal conceptual networks of Heidegger's texts one is indeed trailing the highest perimeters of our contemporary horizon of understanding. Yet this is a delusion – for the simple reason that a philological interpretation of a philosophical text, however philosophically powerful that text might be, can never of itself effect a genuine philosophical understanding. Hence, to the extent that we go on tracing the conceptual connections of Heidegger's thinking, repeating his criticisms of philosophical positions that we strictly speaking do not take seriously anymore, all the while believing that we are engaged in philosophy proper, his work has started to function as an invisible wall for our thinking. The sheer mass of literature supports this state of affairs by making it virtually impossible to confront the basic thoughts of Heidegger in a systematic fashion without failing the academic demand to anchor the interpretation in the relevant literature and the elaborate picture of Heidegger's thought that it sustains.

Let me try to specify the distinction between philological and philosophical interpretations a little. By *philological* – or historical – interpretations I do not only denote interpretations that deliberately or unambiguously realize a philological purpose. I mean all interpretations that essentially move – trace, connect, map concepts and ideas – within the conceptual horizon of the interpreted text and possible intertexts, without critically probing and accounting for the philosophical force of these concepts. By *philosophical* – or systematic, or problem-oriented – interpretations I mean all interpretations that explicate a text through providing some kind of independent articulation of what the text shows or fails to show. One reason why this distinction has tended to grow dim in the current discussion may be found in the sharp and widely recognized critique that Heidegger himself levels against any attempt to draw a simple distinction between historical and systematic investigations. Heidegger's central argument is that every systematic investigation is always already guided by some historical pre-understanding of the matter in question; hence, it becomes an integral part of the systematic task to engage in a critical reflection on the historical conditions determining the focus of our questioning. But the reverse is also the case, as Heidegger himself was well

aware: in order for an interpretation to bring the sense of a text to life and to bring it to view in its philosophical claim on us, it must itself be able to confront and give voice to that claim.³ Given that the sense of a philosophical text ultimately resides in its capacity to teach us something about ourselves and the world, our understanding and interpretation of such a text must essentially involve an understanding of what the text teaches us about these matters: to understand the text *means* understanding what the text tells us about the world such as we are now – with and independently of the text – able to see and understand it. If the interpretation does not do this, it is philosophically empty. This, however, does not in any way rule out the possibility that philological interpretations may have a great value and function of their own, providing crucial guidance for philosophical interpretations.

In so far as our research on Heidegger is still motivated by a genuine philosophical will to learn I believe it is imperative that we elevate the philosophical capacity to independently open up and articulate the matters themselves as our highest criterion for judging the secondary literature on Heidegger. Such a systematically oriented interpretation may of course take many shapes: it may expand, rearticulate, critically delimit or deconstruct Heidegger's concepts and analyses; it may apply Heideggerian figures of thought to new questions and situations; or it may use Heidegger's thinking as a critical starting point for philosophical inquiries in quite other directions. Of course, there is a risk that such a program might be exploited as an apology for producing texts that renounce serious interpretation and translate Heidegger into a strawman for the interpreter's own purposes. But this is a risk I think we have to take today; otherwise, we hazard a greater danger: that Heidegger's work is transformed into a prison and a sanctuary instead of being freed up, critically delimited and overcome – in short, teach us what it can teach us – as the powerful, finite and deeply problematic work that it is.

Previous Literature

To the best of my knowledge, this thesis is the first extended study focusing on what I suggest is Heidegger's life-long effort to come to terms

³ Cf. SZ, pp. 150-153; GA 62, pp. 354-348.

with the problem of phenomenality, examining how this effort to explore the structure and dynamics of phenomenality motivates the development of his thinking in general and his critical transformation of phenomenology in particular.

However, there are certainly a host of works potentially relevant for a study of the problem of phenomenality – and phenomenology – in Heidegger. To begin with, there are numerous books and articles focusing on the fate of phenomenology in Heidegger’s thinking, including more or less indirect accounts of the theme of phenomenality, and many of these will be referred to or discussed in the course of my thesis.⁴ Besides, since the problem of phenomenality – as I will argue – constitutes a fundamental problem in Heidegger’s thought, which is linked to almost all other central concepts in his philosophical corpus, every general interpretation of his philosophy, whether or not it has phenomenality/phenomenology as its explicit theme, will *eo ipso* involve an interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of phenomenality.

In my thesis I am mainly going to stake out my own interpretation in relation to what I believe are the two philosophically most powerful interpretations of what constitutes the systematic heart of Heidegger’s thinking and, by implication, the sense of phenomenality/phenomenology in his thought. On the one hand, we have the *transcendental phenomenological interpretation* defended by, e.g., Steven Crowell, Daniel Dahlstrom, Søren Overgaard, Burt Hopkins and Dermot Moran.⁵ This interpretation basically reads Heidegger’s philosophy as a critical yet fundamentally faithful elaboration of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, which is conceived of as providing the key to rigorous philosophizing. Even though Heidegger criticizes Husserl for having neglected the pre-theoretical and historically conditioned nature of our experience the systematic promise of his own philosophy lies precisely in a hermeneutically sharpened intuitive reflection on the basic – necessary and universal – structures characterizing our primary experience of the

⁴ The major works in this field include Tugendhat 1970; Gethmann 1974; von Herrmann 1981; 1990; 2000; Stapleton 1983; Held 1988; Hopkins 1993; Marion 1998; Crowell 2001; Dahlstrom 2001; Overgaard 2004; Figal 2009, pp. 43-54; Rese [ed.] 2010; Figal & Gander [eds.] 2013.

⁵ For some of the central texts defending this interpretation, see Gethmann 1974; Hopkins 1993; Crowell 2001; 2003; Dahlstrom 2001; Overgaard 2004; Moran 2007; Zahavi 2003b.

meaningful world. On the other hand, we have the *hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation* defended by, e.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer, Charles Guignon, Françoise Dastur, Günter Figal, John Sallis, John van Buren, David Farrell Krell, and Hans Ruin.⁶ This interpretation explicates and hails Heidegger as one of the most severe critics of the idea, still held by Husserl, that our reflective seeing of intuitively given structures of meaning could serve as a measure for our understanding. According to this interpretation, Heidegger provides a groundbreaking analysis of the radical historicity of all experience of meaning: it is only on account of our thrownness into groundless and finite historical contexts of meaning that we are able to experience objects as meaningful. Hence, philosophy cannot hope to ground itself on any direct experience of the phenomenally given, but needs to take the form of a critical explication of its own historical predicament. There have been two basic ways of developing this line of interpretation, which cannot always be kept strictly apart. The hermeneutic interpretation – represented by e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Françoise Dastur, and Günter Figal – tends to highlight our fundamental rootedness in our own finite tradition and inquires into the possibilities of remaining faithful to that tradition while at the same time critically reflecting upon it and opening ourselves up to other people and histories. The deconstructive interpretation – represented by e.g. John Sallis, David Farrell Krell and Hans Ruin – tends to stress the primary task of tracing and answering to the groundless differential logic at the basis of every possible formation of meaning.

It is no surprise that the two systematic visions outlined above tend to favor different sorts of descriptions of the role of phenomenology in the history of Heidegger's thought. From the point of view of the transcendental phenomenological interpretation, Heidegger's early thinking from the early 1920s up to *Being and Time* naturally emerges as the philosophical summit of his path of thought. The general picture is this: In

⁶ For some of the central texts defending this interpretation, see Gadamer 1986; 1987, pp. 175-430; 1990; Guignon 1983; Bernasconi 1984; Sallis 1978; 1990; Figal 1992; 2010; van Buren 1990; 1994; Krell 1986; 1992; Theodore Kisiel 1993; Ruin 1994; Dastur 1999; Sheehan 1998; 2001. In addition to the works listed so far, which basically affirm Heidegger's hermeneutic-deconstructivist thinking, there are also works that explicate Heidegger as a representative of a hermeneutic-deconstructivist approach but are more or less critical of this approach. Cf., e.g., Tugendhat 1970; 1984; Apel 1973; 1989; Lafont 2000.

the early twenties Heidegger develops his hermeneutical phenomenology as a critical elaboration of Husserl's phenomenology. Even though Heidegger emphasizes the historical conditions of thinking and focuses his attention on the temporal and projective structure of our pre-theoretical experience of the world, he nevertheless essentially remains faithful to Husserl's method of phenomenological reflection. Consequently, the turn that Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the middle of the 1930s is viewed as a transition from the hermeneutical phenomenology of *Being and Time* towards a historical thinking, which, although in practice containing important pieces of rigorous phenomenological description, is more prone to give rise to speculation and metaphysical construction. From the point of view of the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation the story is almost the reverse: Heidegger's exploration of his main theme – the opening up of groundless, finite being – is bound to appear as a more continuous journey from his groping and ambivalent phenomenological origins towards a historical thinking which is able to answer more consistently to its own finitude and historicity. Moreover, John van Buren has recently brought forth a tripartite narrative, which views Heidegger's early Freiburg-lectures – with their strong emphasis on the elusive, theoretically ungraspable event-character of our primary experience of the world – as a promising beginning, which gets lost in the more traditional, transcendental phenomenological project of fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*, and which is then rehabilitated and radicalized in Heidegger's later thinking.⁷

As will become clear I think that both of the above interpretations are able to capture and illuminate basic aspects of Heidegger's thinking and of its development. This is because they correspond to and explicate, each in its own way, two of Heidegger's basic philosophical convictions: on the one hand, his phenomenological conviction that the experientially given constitutes the measure of our understanding; on the other hand, his radical historicization of phenomenal givenness. However, I also believe that both interpretations suffer from a one-sidedness that cannot be easily overcome since it is connected with problems in both their exegetical and their philosophical force. Indeed, none of the interpretations is able to see clearly how throughout his life Heidegger is struggling with the problem

⁷ Cf. van Buren 1994. Cf. Kisiel 1993, pp. 3, 16.

of phenomenality in the tension between his basic convictions, and why it is so difficult – philosophically – for him to give up either of them.

In their readings of Heidegger's philosophical journey both the transcendental phenomenological and the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation tend to set out from a given idea of the systematical core of Heidegger's thought, from the point of view of which Heidegger's relation to phenomenology appears as a temporary – more or less central and promising – commitment to a basically Husserlian stance, which from the middle of the 1930s gives way to another kind of historical reflection on the destinal event of being. This way of writing the history of phenomenology in Heidegger's thinking has deep roots and goes back to William J. Richardson's pioneering book from 1963: *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*. Richardson originally intended to use the formula "From Phenomenology to thought" but changed the "from" to "through" on Heidegger's own suggestion.⁸ Nevertheless, Richardson portrays Heidegger's philosophical development as a trajectory which starts from a phenomenology of the human being and develops into a thinking of the primary event of being itself. More recently Theodore Kisiel has called the years 1919-1927 Heidegger's "phenomenological decade,"⁹ a description later echoed by, e.g., Dermot Moran, Steven Crowell and Edgar C. Boedeker Jr.¹⁰ Still, in reproducing this story of Heidegger's development – which is not in itself incorrect – the commentators systematically tend to overlook the extent to which Heidegger himself from beginning to end was engaged in a continuous battle to think and articulate the problem of phenomenality, and, by implication, the problem of phenomenology, as an issue which never ceased to challenge his previous strategies to come to terms with it.

Moreover, this neglect is liable to go hand in hand with a neglect for the philosophical challenge that the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology itself poses. Hence, in pursuing the transcendental phenomenological interpretation one will be apt to downplay the force with which Heidegger's explication of the historical as-

⁸ Heidegger's comments on the title are found in a letter that he sent to Richardson in April 1962, and which was published as the "Preface" of Richardson's book. Cf. Richardson 1963, pp. ix-xxiii; GA 11, pp. 145-152.

⁹ Kisiel 1993, p. 59.

¹⁰ Moran 2000, p. 194; Crowell 2001, pp. 115, 225; Boedeker 2005, p. 156.

structure of understanding from the early 1920s onwards upsets the very possibility of using intuitive reflection on the structures of experience as the central means for any such explication. Or else, in following the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation, one will be inclined to disregard the deep difficulties arising from any serious attempt to dispense with intuitive experience as an irreducible measure for our understanding of the meaningful world. To Heidegger, however, the critical questions issuing from his pursuit of the historicity of thought always remained awake and pressing: Granted that all our phenomenal experience is determined by our factual historical understanding, what is it that allows us to uphold the critical difference between historical prejudice and originary understanding? What is it that guides and measures our understanding of the matters themselves? How can the finite historical contexts of meaning in which we live address us as a binding destiny, if, that is to say, they can do it all? In the course of the thesis, the above interpretational tendencies will be specified according to how individual commentators interpret the different periods and aspects of Heidegger's thinking.

The interpretations above are of course not the only distinct systematic approaches to Heidegger's thought available. An interpretation which especially deserves mentioning is the one developed by Hubert L. Dreyfus in his seminal work *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* from 1991. Having his main background in pragmatism and the later Wittgenstein Dreyfus reads Heidegger as primarily concerned with emphasizing and expounding the primacy of our practical pre-theoretical ability to handle and cope with things in our social-historical context, so that this coping functions as the background condition for all theoretical knowledge and understanding. Although ultimately quite limited as an explication of Heidegger's philosophical project, Dreyfus's interpretation certainly contains many important analyses and insights, and it has also given rise to a vital tradition of Heidegger research. In addition to this, Heidegger has also been read in terms of many other philosophical frameworks, e.g., as a pragmatist, as a Sartrean existentialist, and as a Kantian transcendentalist. However, as I see it, the basic problem of all these strategies of interpretation is that even if they may provide limited clarifications and insights into Heidegger they remain too blind to the basic concerns of his thinking, taking their cue

from some particular aspect of his thought which cannot account for the main thrust of his philosophical project.

Objective

The overall objective of this thesis is to provide a unified and critical explication of Heidegger's continuous effort to understand and articulate the problem of phenomenality during his path of thinking.

As mentioned above, the secondary literature has been characterized by a basic tendency to portray Heidegger's relationship to phenomenology in terms of a temporary commitment to a basically Husserlian stance during his early years which then, in the mid 1930s, gives way to a more historical mode of thinking. In my study, I shift the focus from the theme of phenomenology to the theme of phenomenality. And I do this for particular reasons. What I hope to show is that the question concerning the nature and structure of phenomenal self-showing indeed constitutes one of the core problems that Heidegger's thinking revolves around from his earliest Freiburg lecture courses of the early 1920s up to his last writings from the early 1970s – i.e. even in the long period of Heidegger's later thinking during which he largely refrains from employing the word “phenomenology” as an appropriate term for his own thinking. The thesis aims to demonstrate that the problem of phenomenality plays a very basic role as a problem which constantly motivates Heidegger and moves his thinking forward, not only regulating his effort to critically develop and eventually abandon the phenomenological method of inquiry, but also informing his central analyses of the pre-theoretical experience, the historical structure of understanding, the ontological difference, the clearing/event of being, etc. By thus focusing on the problem of phenomenality I also think it is possible to shed new light on some of the central aspects of Heidegger's philosophical development, for example: on what I believe is the shift that Heidegger's earliest Freiburg phenomenology of factual life undergoes in 1921 when in Aristotle he discovers the historical as-structure of understanding; on the ambivalences in his conception of phenomenality/phenomenology that underlie his abandonment of the project of fundamental ontology launched in *Being and Time*; and on the so called “turn” of Heidegger's thinking in the mid 1930s, which I interpret as a turn in his interrogation of phenomenality

towards the question concerning the dynamics which let a binding historical world shine forth and prevail.

The historical explication carried out in the thesis is not primarily a conceptual history. I have no ambition to chart Heidegger's use of the words phenomenon, phenomenology, givenness and so forth in any exhaustive manner. Although I will certainly be paying close attention to the rhetoric of phenomenality in Heidegger's work, it will essentially serve as so many indications of the philosophical problems that Heidegger is dealing with and articulating in terms of his whole central conceptuality. As concerns the historical sources of Heidegger's conception of phenomenality, I will deal in more detail only with Husserl's phenomenology. In addition to providing a short exposition of Husserl's general phenomenological program as the starting point of Heidegger's thinking, the thesis also examines the basic critical confrontations with Husserl that Heidegger undertakes during his *Denkweg*. Although I cannot hope to do anything like full justice to Husserl's massive and complex philosophical work, I nevertheless try, with some independence, to indicate the force and limits of Heidegger's criticisms. By contrast, the other central sources informing Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality – e.g., Aristotle, Dilthey, Hölderlin, the Pre-Socratics – are only mentioned briefly, and they will only figure in the roles that Heidegger accords to them in his own interpretations.

In and beyond explicating the history of Heidegger's struggle with the problem of phenomenality the thesis also has a critical-systematic ambition. To begin with, it attempts to articulate the philosophical content of Heidegger's thought in a jargon-free manner, and account for the force of his thinking in relation to various other philosophical standpoints. Moreover, my thesis continually pursues a kind of internal critique of Heidegger, exposing the inner problems and ambiguities that motivate and drive his thinking of phenomenality forward. Finally, towards the end of the thesis – in the last chapter and in the epilogue – I also make an attempt to interrogate more independently what I believe are some of the basic problems and unclaritys arising resulting from Heidegger's radical historicization of phenomenality, and to suggest a provisional positive vision of how these problems could be better understood.

In this thesis I will provide no extended treatment of the difficult and inflammatory question of Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism –

although I will briefly touch upon the issue in the third part of the thesis. There are two main reasons for my decision: first, it is not possible within the framework of the present study to open up the systematic space – constituted by the relations between philosophy, ethics, politics, and psychology – in which it would be possible to raise sharp questions and present nuanced arguments about Heidegger, philosophy, and Nazism; second, it is not possible to take into account the massive scholarly controversies about this question.¹¹ However, there should be no doubt about the importance of this question for our efforts to understand and assess Heidegger's life as well as his thinking.

The basic facts of the story are today in plain view:¹² Heidegger enthusiastically embraced National Socialism, which he viewed as a counterforce against the destructive and leveling tendencies of modernity and as a possible beginning of the ontological revolution that his own thinking was aiming at. As rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933-1934, he supervised the enactment of the Nazi university reform, including the implementation of the *Führer* principle and the application of the Nazi laws of racial cleansing to the student body of the university. He secretly denounced colleagues and students, and he undeniably had a leaning towards Anti-Semitism (although he never endorsed the biological racism of the Nazi regime). Although, following the debacle of the rectorate, he began to lose faith in the philosophical capacity of the official ideology and politics of National Socialism – which he gradually began to

¹¹ For some of the basic works dealing with Heidegger's relationship to politics and Nazism see, e.g., Krockow 1958; Schwann 1965; Farias 1989; Sheehan 1988; Ott 1992; Gethmann-Siefert & Pöggeler [eds.] 1988; Derrida 1989; Pöggeler 1990; Altweg [ed.] 1988; Sheehan 1988a; Zimmermann 1990; Wolin 1990; Brainard [ed.] 1991; Rockmore & Margolis [eds.] 1992; Sluga 1993; de Beistegui 1998; Bambach 2003.

¹² The most comprehensive and reliable biographical accounts of Heidegger's life and politics available today are Ott 1992 and Safranski 1997. My remarks on Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism in this thesis were written before the publication in February 2014 of Heidegger's "Black notebooks" (*schwarze Hefte*) from the years 1931-1941 (cf. GA 94, GA 95, GA 96). The notebooks contain a lot of new and troubling material, exhibiting the depth, duration and ambivalence of Heidegger's Nazi engagement and, above all, demonstrating the extent of his Anti-Semitism and its connection to his account of the history of being. Nevertheless, my impression is that the notebooks do not significantly alter the basic picture of Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism which my remarks build on, and which has already for some time been discernable in its central features – for those who have been willing to see.

interpret critically as a manifestation of the nihilistic subjectivist-technical metaphysics to which he first thought it would be an antidote – for many years he continued to express support for Hitler and the Nazi party, and to uphold his belief in the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism according to his idealized vision of the forfeited potential of the movement.¹³ He remained a member of the NSDAP until the end of the war, and never showed any remorse, never apologized for his actions, never seriously acknowledged and confronted the moral catastrophe of Nazism in his later thinking, and never published a single word on the Holocaust. Although he refers to the death camps in two unpublished lectures and in a least one letter, these minimal mentions are either extremely unsatisfactory or terribly reductive.¹⁴

It is clear, I think, that Heidegger’s engagement in National Socialism and his later failure to respond to it are connected with some of his central – and most problematic – philosophical convictions, and it remains an important responsibility to investigate the nature and depth of this connection. However, this does not in any way remove the philosophical task of explicating the sense of Heidegger’s thinking, and critically interrogating its truth and untruth as well as its moral problems independently of the role it played in his relationship to Nazism.

Structure

The thesis proceeds chronologically. It is divided into three main parts successively investigating what I suggest are the three main phases in Heidegger’s struggle with the problem of phenomenality. These parts are then followed by an epilogue in which I offer a critical discussion of Heidegger’s notion of the ontological difference at the root of his

¹³ GA 40, p. 208: “innere Wahrheit und Größe.” To facilitate the reading, quotations in German have been moved from the main text to the footnotes. In translating Heidegger, Husserl and others I have followed the strategy of consulting the available English translations, sometimes using them as such, sometimes modifying them. However, I will only refer to the original German texts in the footnotes and will not separately mention if my translation deviates from the published translation. The English translations are listed in the bibliography.

¹⁴ Cf. GA 17, p. 27; GA 17, p. 56. Heidegger’s letter to Herbert Marcuse – in which he compares the Holocaust to the Soviet Union’s treatment of Germans in Eastern Europe – is cited, e.g., in Farias 1989, p. 285, and in Sheehan 1988a.

conception of phenomenality, and provisionally sketch an alternative account of the problems at stake here.

Part One focuses on Heidegger's earliest Freiburg lectures 1919-1921, in which he critically elaborates Husserl's phenomenology into an "originary science" (*Urwissenschaft*) of factual life.¹⁵ It analyses Heidegger's decisive notion that what is primarily given is what we encounter in our pre-theoretical experience of a significant world. It is argued that while Heidegger accentuates the temporality and historical familiarity of the pre-theoretical experience, he still understands his "originary science" as basically Husserlian phenomenology reflectively describing the fundamental structures of factual life. Nevertheless, Heidegger's emphasis on the primacy of our pre-theoretical experience in its temporality eventually gives rise to acute problems and ambivalences both in his conception of phenomenology as intuition-based reflection, as well as in his effort to account for the role of philosophy in pre-theoretical life.

Part Two focuses on the period commencing with Heidegger's groundbreaking confrontation with Aristotle in 1921 and culminating with the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927. Whereas the earliest Freiburg lectures had only provided a rudimentary analysis of the historical nature of phenomenality, Heidegger now, by way of an explication of Aristotle, elaborates his paradigmatic analysis of the structure of phenomenal understanding in terms of what he will call the "ontological difference":¹⁶ it is only on the basis of our prior understanding of the historical contexts of meaning/being we live in that we can experience particular beings as meaningful phenomena. This analysis in turn motivates Heidegger's idea that philosophy cannot transpire as intuition-based phenomenology anymore but needs to take the form of a hermeneutic-destructive reflection on the historical origins of our understanding. However, the project of fundamental ontology launched in *Being and Time* is still beset with deep ambivalences, which – it is argued – stem from Heidegger's inability to account for how historical meanings can address us as something originary and binding, and be distinguished from mere prejudices. Firstly, this lacuna in Heidegger's vision of a historical thinking prompts him – contrary to his belief in the historical structure of phenomenality and his program of historical destruction – to have

¹⁵ GA 56/57, p. 12.

¹⁶ GA 24, pp. 22, 102.

recourse to a Husserlian method of phenomenological reflection in concrete investigations. As a result, the radical historicity of understanding is investigated as a universal and ahistorical structure of the human being, Dasein. Secondly, Heidegger's failure to depict the binding power of historical meaning undercuts his analysis of authenticity – i.e., of Dasein's transparent choice of its historical possibilities – in a way that ultimately gives rise to an uncontrolled vacillation between collectivism and subjectivism.

Part Three focuses on Heidegger's later philosophy. It commences with the years 1928-1933 after the publication of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger gradually abandons the project of fundamental ontology. It then analyses the so-called "turn" that Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the mid 1930s as a turn in his questioning of phenomenality, and traces how the problem of phenomenality is developed in his later writings. I argue that Heidegger's later thinking of the clearing/event of being is centrally motivated by the effort to show how a historical world can shine forth and prevail as a groundless but binding destiny. Along the way I explicate Heidegger's conception of the phenomenal dynamics that make a world shine forth as binding, as well as his rearticulation of phenomenology in terms of a historical mode of thinking whose rigor lies in its capacity to attend and answer to the hidden origin of our received understanding of being. In the last chapter I undertake a critical delimitation of the clarificatory force of Heidegger's late historical thinking of phenomenality, with the aim of distinguishing what it wants to but cannot account for in contrast to what it actually can account for. Here I suggest – elaborating on criticisms previously presented by, e.g., Ernst Tugendhat, Cristina Lafont, and Emmanuel Levinas – that Heidegger's radical anchoring of phenomenality in our prior understanding of historical meaning ultimately makes him unable to account either for the truth of our understanding or for the ethical-existential significance of the human beings we encounter.

The thesis ends with an epilogue in which I sketch a critique of the ontological difference, which, I argue, is not only the foundation stone of Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality but which is also at the basis of the metaphysics of historical meaning dominating large parts of contemporary philosophy. The critique starts out from a late commentary that Heidegger wrote on Cézanne in 1974, in which Heidegger suggests an "overcoming

of the ontological difference between being and beings.”¹⁷ Following Heidegger’s suggestion I here attempt to open up and develop, in a provisional fashion, the central question that Heidegger’s self-criticism gives rise to: How should we understand the relationship between our factual understanding of the historical meaning-contexts in which we live and our direct experience of beings? Ultimately, I suggest that we need to conceive of our openness towards the particular beings we experience both as our source of truth and as our source of ethical-existential significance.

¹⁷ Heidegger’s original German text is found in Figal [ed.] 2007a, p. 342: “Überwindung der ontologischen Differenz zwischen Sein und Seiendem.”

Part One: A Phenomenology of Factual Life

1.1 Introduction

Martin Heidegger's breakthrough as an independent philosopher takes place a few months after the end of World War One. In the lecture course "The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview,"¹⁸ delivered at the University of Freiburg in the extraordinary war emergency semester (*Kriegsnotsemester*) in the beginning of 1919, Heidegger launches the idea that phenomenology, in order to realize its true philosophical potential, needs to develop into an "originary science" (*Urwissenschaft*) of life:¹⁹ a science that leaves the traditional philosophical effort to find theoretical foundations for our naive everyday experience behind, and takes on the task of explicating and salvaging our factual pre-theoretical experience as our primary and irreducible access to meaningful reality.

It seems no exaggeration to highlight "The Idea of Philosophy" as the decisive opening of Heidegger's philosophical authorship.²⁰ In his pre-war writings – including his PhD thesis from 1913 and his *Habilitationsschrift* from 1915 – Heidegger still basically appears as a capable yet unexceptional philosopher on the contemporary academic scene taking his main philosophical cues from Husserlian phenomenology and neo-Kantianism. Had this been all he wrote he would today at most be remembered as a typical figure of the philosophical debate of that time. In "The Idea of Philosophy," by contrast, Heidegger for the first time emerges as a distinct and autonomous philosophical voice provisionally opening up many of the basic philosophical questions and motifs that will henceforth guide his thinking. This marks the beginning of a period of lecture courses in which he develops the idea of phenomenology as an originary science.

¹⁸ "Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem," in GA 56/57 (henceforth referred to as "The Idea of Philosophy" in the main text).

¹⁹ GA 56/57, p. 12.

²⁰ For an account of the pioneering role of this lecture course in Heidegger's philosophical authorship, see Kisiel 1993, pp. 15-20; Kisiel 1992.

However, Heidegger's way into phenomenology starts earlier than the war emergency semester of 1919. It is clear that already in his student years from 1909 to 1915 Heidegger became electrified by Husserl's phenomenological impulse without as yet being able to achieve an independent philosophical opening. Let me give a brief overview of the phenomenological motifs entering his thinking during these years, before I turn the attention to his early Freiburg lectures.²¹

In one of his first philosophical publications, "Recent Research in Logic"²² from 1912, Heidegger endorses Husserl's and the neo-Kantians' critique of psychologism on account of Lotze's well-known distinction between the psychological act, which "is" (*ist*), and the logical sense, which "holds" (*gilt*).²³ According to Heidegger, it is a crucial task for philosophy, so far not fully realized, to bring to light "the realm of validity (*Geltung*)" in its "pure own essentiality" as something distinct both from "the sensorially being" and from "the suprasensorially metaphysical."²⁴ In regard to the question how this realm of sense should be investigated, he introduces a distinctly Husserlian outlook. Although the "validity-value" (*Geltungswert*) of logical sense cannot be founded on psychology, he maintains that the logical is "embedded in the psychic."²⁵ For an investigation of the psychic to be logically relevant, however, it must take the form of a "*phenomenology* of consciousness" focusing on "the *significances*, the *sense* of the acts."²⁶ Finally, he insists, with Husserl, that our knowledge of the realm of logical sense must ultimately be grounded on

²¹ Cf. Heidegger's late autobiographical sketch "My Way into Phenomenology" (*Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie*) from 1963, GA 14, pp. 81-86, for a depiction of his early efforts to read and come to terms with Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. For more detailed treatments of Heidegger's pre-war philosophical writings, see Crowell 2001, pp. 76-111; van Buren 1994a, pp. 51-129; Sheehan 1981; 1988; Denker 2004. See also Kisiel 1993, pp. 25-38.

²² "Neue Forschungen über Logik," in GA 1.

²³ GA 1, p. 22.

²⁴ GA 1, p. 24: "Dieses Reich des Geltenden muß jetzt seinem Umfang nach prinzipiell gegenüber dem Sinnlich-Seienden ebenso wie gegenüber dem Übersinnlich-Metaphysischen in seiner reinen eigenen Wesenhaftigkeit herausgehoben werden."

²⁵ GA 1, pp. 29ff.

²⁶ GA 1, p. 30: "Die Untersuchung geht auf die *Bedeutungen*, den *Sinn* der Akte und wird so zur Bedeutungslehre, zur *Phänomenologie* des Bewußtseins."

“insight into the objective states of affair.”²⁷ What is needed is, in short, an intuitive phenomenological investigation of the categorial sense-structures of intentional consciousness along Husserlian lines. In his 1913 dissertation, *The Theory of Judgment in Psychologism: Critical and Positive Contributions to Logic*,²⁸ Heidegger echoes the same phenomenological motifs in his extended critical investigation of some of the key figures of contemporary psychologism (Wilhelm Wundt, Heinrich Maier, Franz Brentano, Anton Marty, Theodor Lipps). He repeats his notions of the irreducibility of sense and the need to exhibit it phenomenologically while at the same time sharpening the question concerning the ontological sense of this domain of sense: “What is the sense of sense? [...] Perhaps we stand here at something ultimate and irreducible, concerning which a further elucidation is ruled out, and every further question necessarily falters.”²⁹ Up to this point one could say that Heidegger moves within the horizon of Husserl’s phenomenology as a promising philosophical possibility without, however, as yet being able to engage it in an independent questioning of the philosophical matters themselves.

Heidegger’s *Habilitationschrift, The Theory of Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus*³⁰ from 1915 exhibits a somewhat bolder effort to push phenomenology in new independent directions of questioning. The main part of the work is devoted to an investigation of the scholastic treatise *De modi significandi* – a work that was actually written by Duns Scotus’s pupil Thomas von Erfurt in the 13th century, but which at the time of Heidegger’s *habilitation* was commonly ascribed to Scotus himself. Here Heidegger for the first time displays his extraordinary talent for historical explication by reading Erfurt’s treatise as an essentially phenomenological analysis of how different logical senses are given in correlation with particular intentional acts of judgment and expression. However, although the main work proceeds within Husserl’s phenomenological framework it is clear that Heidegger wants more than a translation of the scholastic *grammatica speculativa* into a Husserlian vocabulary. In a footnote to the introduction he highlights Husserl’s decisive importance for the

²⁷ GA 1, p. 39: “Einsicht in den objektiven Sachverhalt.”

²⁸ *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus. Ein kritisch-positiver Beitrag zur Logik*, in GA 1.

²⁹ GA 1, p. 171. “Was ist der Sinn des Sinnes? [...] Vielleicht stehen wir hier bei einem Letzten, Unreduzierbaren, darüber eine weiter Aufhellung ausgeschlossen ist, und jede weitere Frage notwendig ins Stocken gerät.”

³⁰ *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*, in GA 1.

development of the idea of a “pure logic,” but adds the critical proviso that the “object domain” of this logic “must nevertheless be further problematized,” moreover, that this can only be effected “with the systematic means of a *principally worldview-oriented* philosophy.”³¹ In the programmatic epilogue, which was later appended to the main text, he returns to the same problem:

But the *problem* is precisely *what kind of objectivity this can be*, when one considers that objectivity makes sense only for a judging subject. Without this subject, one could never succeed in bringing out the full sense of what is meant by “*validity*” (*Geltung*). The question, whether it [validity] refers to a special “being” or to an “ought,” or to *neither of these, so that it can be comprehended only by means of more profound constellations of problems, which are contained in the concept of the living spirit, and which are unquestionably connected with the problem of value – this will not be decided here.*³²

In short, Heidegger claims that there are two basic tasks that phenomenology must face up to: on the one hand, phenomenology needs to address the basic question concerning the ontological sense and givenness of the primordial realm of sense; on the other hand, this questioning must be executed through a “worldview-oriented” investigation of what he, using a Hegelian term, names the “living spirit.” Against Husserl and the neo-Kantians, he now argues that the “epistemological subject” is inadequate to account for the “metaphysically most significant sense of spirit, to say nothing of its full content,”³³ and that, for this purpose, we have to carry out an interpretation of the spirit as “meaningful and sense-realizing living deed.”³⁴ Whereas the first task

³¹ GA 1, p. 205: “mit den systematischen Mitteln einer *prinzipiell weltanschaulich orientierten* Philosophie.”

³² GA 1, pp. 404f.: “nur ist eben *Problem, welcher Art die Gegenständlichkeit nur sein kann*, wenn man beachtet, daß Gegenständlichkeit nur Sinn hat für ein urteilendes Subjekt, ohne welches Subjekt es auch nie gelingen wird, den vollen Sinn dessen herauszustellen, was man mit *Geltung* bezeichnet. Ob sie ein eigentümliches ‘Sein’ oder ein ‘Sollen’ oder *keines von beiden bedeutet, sondern erst durch tiefer liegende, im Begriff des lebendigen Geistes beschlossene und fraglos mit dem Wertproblem eng verknüpfte Problemgruppen zu begreifen ist, soll hier nicht entschieden werden.*”

³³ GA 1, p. 407: “Das erkenntnistheoretische Subjekt deutet nicht den metaphysisch bedeutsamsten Sinn des Geistes, geschweige denn seinen Vollgehalt.”

³⁴ GA 1, p. 406: “sinnvolle und sinnverwirklichende lebendige Tat.”

prefigures Heidegger's subsequent projection of the "origin of life" or the "sense of being" as the guiding questions of philosophy, the second task anticipates his unremitting effort to seek the origin and structure of phenomenal meaning in our pre-theoretical experience of the world. If our philosophical interest in the end concerns nothing but the sense that beings primarily have for us, we can only hope to explicate this sense from within our pre-theoretical everyday experience of them as significant: as precious, demanding, useful, fearful, etc.

In the last pages of the book Heidegger voices the basic Hegelian thought that the "living spirit" is essentially a "historical spirit":³⁵ "The spirit can be comprehended only when the full abundance of its accomplishments, i.e., *its history*, is taken up within it (*in ihm aufgehoben wird*). This ever-growing abundance, in its philosophical comprehendedness, provides a continually increasing means for a living conception of the absolute spirit of God."³⁶ He then ends the book by insisting that the way to a philosophy of the living spirit must proceed through a principal confrontation with Hegel.³⁷ As we shall see shortly, Heidegger's programmatic intention to turn from Husserl to Hegel will not be realized in the following years. However, his remark introduces the basic double impetus that lies at the bottom of and animates his whole philosophical enterprise: the ambivalence between his belief in phenomenal givenness as an ultimate measure for all understanding, and his conviction that the given is always already mediated by historical categories of understanding. For the time being Heidegger provides no concrete analysis whatsoever of how the historicity of thought would enter into and determine the pre-theoretical givenness of sense, and his early Freiburg lecture courses will primarily be devoted to a radicalization of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology into a phenomenology of pre-theoretical life.³⁸ Still, the idea concerning the fundamental historicity of human experience and

³⁵ GA 1, p. 407.

³⁶ GA 1, p. 408: "Der Geist ist nur zu begreifen, wenn die ganze Fülle seiner Leistungen, d.h. *seine Geschichte*, in ihm aufgehoben wird, mit welcher stets wachsenden Fülle in ihrer philosophischen Begriffenheit ein sich fortwährend steigendes Mittel der lebendigen Begreifung des absoluten Geistes Gottes gegeben ist."

³⁷ GA 1, p. 410.

³⁸ Cf. Figal 1992, pp. 11-22, for an interesting reading of Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift* as an attempt to negotiate between Hegel's notion of the basic historicity of thought and Kierkegaard's insistence on the individuality of all human experience.

thinking is an embryo that will gradually develop through Heidegger's phenomenological investigations of the structure of experience, and reach its full consequence and expression in Heidegger's later thinking of the historical event of being.

Being, givenness, pre-theoretical life, historicity – although Heidegger's *Habilitationschrift* provisionally opens up all the central questions guiding his subsequent thinking it also leaves them almost completely open and undetermined, as urgent directions of questioning still to be travelled and explored.

It is only after the war, in “The Idea of Philosophy,” that Heidegger launches his idea of phenomenology as an originary science of life. This signals the beginning of an intensive period of lecture courses, which Heidegger gives as a *Privatdozent* at the University of Freiburg. The time in Freiburg continues until the autumn of 1923 when he moves away to become Professor of Philosophy in Marburg. However, in this part I am going to focus only on Heidegger's *earliest* Freiburg lectures courses 1919-1921. My reason for this periodization is that – as I hope to show – the lecture courses of 1919-21 exhibit a quite distinct philosophical approach, which lasts until 1921. Although Heidegger's lectures are often wild and groping in character, unrelentingly probing new directions of questioning and description without establishing a fixed general conceptuality, they still constitute a relatively unified philosophical project guided by the idea of phenomenology as an originary science of life. This period reaches its end with the two courses on the phenomenology of religion that Heidegger delivers in 1920-1921, “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion” from the winter term 1920-21³⁹ and “Augustine and Neo-Platonism” from the summer of 1921.⁴⁰ After that, Heidegger – sparked by the inner problems of his originary science – begins a period of intensive study of Aristotle, which eventually results in a new analysis of the structure of phenomenality and a rearticulation of the task of philosophy in terms of the question of the sense of being. These events, which initiate the project of *Being and Time*, will be examined in the next part.⁴¹

³⁹ “Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion,” in GA 60.

⁴⁰ “Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus,” in GA 60.

⁴¹ As a result of my suggested periodization, some of the texts that have been central to previous interpretations of Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures courses – e.g. the

Heidegger's chief source of influence in this early period is undoubtedly to be found in Husserl's phenomenology.⁴² His projection of phenomenology as an originary science from the outset proceeds through an affirmative-critical confrontation with Husserl's phenomenological program. From Husserl he adopts the basic phenomenological idea that philosophy must abandon its traditional tendency to rely on theoretical arguments or historical concepts and henceforth do nothing but describe what is concretely given in our experience. At the same time, however, he rejects what he takes to be the lingering theoretical bias of Husserl's phenomenology, setting off a series of questions concerning the meaning and consequences of the phenomenological impulse: What is phenomenal

lecture course "Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research" (*Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*) from the winter semester 1921-22 (GA 61), the important text "Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle (Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation)" (*Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)*) from 1922 (in GA 62), as well as the course "Ontologie (The Hermeneutics of Facticity)" (*Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*) (GA 63) from the summer semester of 1923 – are irrelevant for my interpretation of Heidegger's earliest Freiburg lectures. Moreover, from the perspective of my explication many of the interpretations of Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses – especially the ones written before all the lectures were published in the early 1990s – prove to be more or less anachronistic. To begin with, the earliest lectures courses 1919-1921 are almost without exception lumped together with the later ones 1921-1923, in such a way that the Freiburg lectures courses emerge as a uniform period of thinking. Moreover, the Freiburg courses are regularly interpreted as the beginning of – and, hence, as belonging to – Heidegger's early thinking, which continues practically uninterrupted through the Marburg years and reaches its climax in *Being and Time*. The presupposition of such interpretations is that the periods thus posited – Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures, the early Heidegger – would display a more or less uniform philosophical approach, so that it becomes possible to use texts from the entire period to illuminate the same philosophical stance. Hence, it is not uncommon that texts written after 1921 are used to substantiate claims about the historical character of Heidegger's thinking 1919-1921 or texts from these earliest years are used to substantiate claims about his commitment to phenomenology throughout the Marburg period and in *Being and Time*. My own suggestion is, however, that Heidegger's earliest Freiburg lecture courses 1919-1921 display a relatively distinct philosophical approach, which is very much a critical continuation of Husserl's phenomenology. This approach undergoes a shift in 1921-22 when Heidegger, through his reading of Aristotle, opens up the paradigm of thinking – which sketches out the historical structure of understanding and stresses the necessity of a destruction of the tradition – that will receive its classic formulation in *Being and Time*.

⁴² For some historical accounts of the start and development of Heidegger's relationship to Husserl, see Sheehan 1997; Kisiel 1997; Figal 2009, pp. 31-39.

givenness and what does it mean to phenomenologically describe matters? What is primarily given if not our pre-theoretical experience of significances? Are these significances given as objects of direct intuitive seeing or are they rather determined by the historical contexts of meaning in which we live? Moreover, how is our understanding of the problems and tasks of philosophy transformed in the light of these insights into the primacy of factual pre-theoretical life? Husserl – like Aristotle later – thus plays a double role for Heidegger: on the one hand, Husserl’s emphasis on givenness as the ultimate measure of understanding in Heidegger’s view opens up the need to radically question the task of philosophy and to return to pre-theoretical life as our primary access to phenomenal meaning; on the other hand, he holds that Husserl’s own transcendental phenomenology remained trapped within the paradigm of theoretical philosophy. Thus, the goal of realizing the revolutionary philosophical implications of phenomenology must essentially be achieved through a critical delimitation of Husserl.

Next to Husserl’s phenomenology, the most palpable historical background to Heidegger’s early thought is Wilhelm Dilthey and the hermeneutic tradition in general. Dilthey’s influence is profoundly discernable in Heidegger’s emphasis on the pre-theoretical experience and in his effort to explicate its temporal-historical character.⁴³ In his attempt to press phenomenology towards the pre-theoretical sphere of dynamic individual life, Heidegger also takes his inspiration, first, from modern life-philosophers such as Nietzsche, Bergson and Jaspers; second, from Christian thinkers such as St. Paul, Augustine and Meister Eckhart, and Kierkegaard.⁴⁴ What is more, Heidegger’s lectures courses unfold in a continuous critical dialogue with some of the main representatives of the neo-Kantian philosophy that dominated the German academic philosophy at the time. Whereas Heinrich Rickert and Paul Natorp mostly function as

⁴³ Gadamer has emphasized that Dilthey already played an important formative role for Heidegger in his early Freiburg lecture courses. Cf. Gadamer 1987, pp. 420ff. For works examining Dilthey’s influence on Heidegger, cf. Guignon 1983, pp. 44-63, 110-115; Kisiel 1993, pp. 315-361; Bambach 1995; Maakreel 2004. See also Ruin 1994, pp. 9, 15f., 41f., 112f.

⁴⁴ For an investigation of the impact of contemporary life-philosophy on Heidegger’s early thought, see, e.g., Krell 1992. Cf. also Fehér 1994. For studies of the influence of Christian thinkers on Heidegger’s thought, see, e.g., van Buren 1994a, pp. 113-129, 157-202; 1994b; Kisiel 1993, pp. 69-115; Sommer 2005.

exemplary manifestations of the theoretical philosophy to be overcome, the writings of the younger Emil Lask – killed during the war in 1918 – play an important role in Heidegger’s attempts to articulate the way categorial meaning is given in the pre-theoretical experience of life.⁴⁵

In what follows I will concentrate on what, given the theme of this thesis, I take to be the philosophically most powerful and relevant courses of this period, above all “The Idea of Philosophy” from 1919 and “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” from the winter term 1919/20.⁴⁶ Whereas “The Idea of Philosophy” constitutes Heidegger’s philosophical breakthrough, offering a first sweep through the problems that will occupy him, it is in “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” that he for the first time develops a more unified program for a phenomenological philosophy, conceived as an originary science. It is thus no coincidence that this course also contains Heidegger’s first critique of Husserl’s phenomenology. Other important courses from this period are “Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression” from the summer term 1920⁴⁷ and “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion” from the winter term 1920-21.

The philosophical reception of the early Freiburg lectures has been shaped by the remarkable fact that Heidegger publishes nothing during these decisive formative years. Indeed, the entire period between the publication of his *Habilitationsschrift* in 1916 and of *Being and Time* in 1927 is one of silence in the public domain. Hence, as *Being and Time* is finally published and captivates the contemporary philosophical scene it is as if it had appeared out of nowhere, leaving its readers to struggle with this pioneering and difficult text with no opportunity to consult the early Freiburg and Marburg lecture courses in which this thinking evolved. Moreover, the bulk of Heidegger’s early Freiburg courses were only published in the *Gesamtausgabe* in the 1990s. The upshot of this textual situation is that for a long time Heidegger scholars have lacked access to the material necessary for explicating his early development, and largely

⁴⁵ The Neo-Kantian context of Heidegger’s early philosophy has been examined in, e.g., Crowell 2001, pp. 23-36; Friedmann 2000; Steinmann 2004. For studies dealing with Emil Lask’s influence on Heidegger’s early thinking, see, e.g., Kisiel 1995; Crowell 2000, pp. 37-55, 76-92.

⁴⁶ “Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie,” GA 58 .

⁴⁷ “Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks,” GA 59.

had to contend with the testimony and hearsay of his former students and colleagues.

However, the lack of publications did not mean that Heidegger would have been totally unknown to his contemporaries. From the moment of his first post-war lecture course in 1919 his novel philosophical approach and charismatic lecturing style soon gave rise to a growing reputation, which made philosophy students from all over Germany – among them Hanna Arendt, Oskar Becker, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Karl Löwith, and Hans Jonas – travel first to Freiburg, then to Marburg, to attend his lectures. Let me quote Arendt’s well-known account:

The beginning in Heidegger’s case is neither the date of his birth [...] nor the publication of his first book, but the lecture courses and seminars which he held as a mere Privatdozent (instructor) and assistant to Husserl at the University of Freiburg in 1919. For Heidegger’s “fame” predates by about eight years the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927; indeed it is open to question whether the unusual success of this book [...] would have been possible if it had not been preceded by the teacher’s reputation among the students in whose opinion, at any rate, the book’s success merely confirmed what they had known for many years. [...] In Heidegger’s case there is nothing on which his fame could have been based, nothing written, save for notes taken at his lectures which circulated among students everywhere. The lectures dealt with texts that were generally familiar; they contained no doctrine that could have been learned, reproduced, and handed on. There was hardly more than a name, but the name traveled all over Germany like the rumor of the hidden king.⁴⁸

Apart from the fact that Heidegger’s early lecture courses were famous from the beginning, there was also from early on a sense that these lectures, in their intense tentative explorations of the dynamics of pre-theoretical life, might contain a philosophical thinking which was to some extent distinct and unique, and which might transform the standard picture of Heidegger formed by *Being and Time*. Oskar Becker, who began attending Heidegger’s lecture courses in 1919, gives expression to the above expectation when he writes: “*Sein und Zeit* is no longer the original

⁴⁸ Arendt 1969, p. 893.

Heidegger, but rather repeats his original breakthrough in a scholastically hardened form.”⁴⁹

Then, as Heidegger’s early courses were successively published from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, a feverish and ambitious effort of research by scholars took off, driven by many ambitions: to philologically map his early development, to shed light on the problematic and conceptuality of *Being and Time*, to come across original and strong philosophical thoughts, and perhaps above all, to detect in these early lecture courses primordial problems and motifs which could confirm or substantiate one or another claim about what constitutes Heidegger’s basic philosophical concern.

In this discussion, the question of phenomenality/phenomenology has been present as a central and controversial theme. Indeed, it is possible to divide up the chief interpretations into two divergent groups depending on how they relate to this question. On the one hand, both of the major chronicles of Heidegger’s early thought – Theodore Kisiel’s *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* from 1993 and John van Buren’s *The Young Heidegger* from 1994 – portray his thinking in these years as a radical departure from the ambitions of traditional transcendental philosophy, including Husserl’s phenomenology. Abandoning Husserl’s belief in the possibility of describing phenomenally given universal structures of sense, they claim, Heidegger here launches a drastically hermeneutical-deconstructivist mode of thinking tracing the finite historical sense of factual life.⁵⁰ On the other hand, interpreters such as Steven Crowell and Dan Zahavi have read these lectures as a critical yet basically faithful elaboration of Husserl’s phenomenological program, claiming that Heidegger’s originary science of life essentially unfolds as a phenomenological reflection on the constitutive structures of our first-person experience.

The central and controversial character of the theme of phenomenality in the recent reception should come as no surprise. For one thing, Heidegger’s early lectures basically unfold as a critical elaboration of

⁴⁹ The quotation is found in Pöggeler 1983, p. 351. Gadamer has for decades emphasized the importance and philosophical productivity of Heidegger’s early Freiburg lecture courses. See, e.g., Gadamer 1987, pp. 250, 418ff. Cf. also van Buren 1994a, pp. 3-5.

⁵⁰ This kind of hermeneutic-deconstructivist reading of Heidegger’s early Freiburg lectures is also developed by Hans Ruin in Ruin 1994, pp. 35-70.

Husserl's phenomenology, suggesting that they are likely to contain important keys for understanding his relationship to phenomenology. For another, already at a quick glance it is evident that these lectures exhibit what seems like opposing tendencies concerning the question of phenomenality. While we have Heidegger's guiding aim to elaborate Husserl's phenomenology into an originary science of the structures of factual life we also have his insistence on the need to abandon all the traditional theoretical ambitions of philosophy in favor of a thinking answering to the finite temporal-historical movement of factual life.

But what is the sense of this tension in Heidegger's early attempt to come to terms with the problem of phenomenality? How should we understand and delimit the relative truth of the opposing interpretations mentioned above? The aim of the following pages is to shed light on questions such as these by examining in some detail Heidegger's effort to critically transform Husserl's phenomenology into an originary science of factual life. In so doing I also try to critically indicate some of the philosophical possibilities that Heidegger's early lecture courses at Freiburg open up as well as the basic limits and unclaritys that impede them.

The second part is divided into the following chapters: (1.2) Phenomenology as Originary Science of Life, (1.3) Pre-theoretical Life and Theoretical Philosophy, (1.4) Heidegger's Phenomenology of Factual Life, and (1.5) Life and the Task of Philosophy.

1.2 Phenomenology as Originary Science of Life

Husserl and the Promise of Phenomenology

Before turning to Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures, I will give a brief outline of Husserl's phenomenological program as the critical starting point of Heidegger's philosophical endeavor. Given that Husserl is a complex thinker whose philosophical development manifests itself in a huge mass of published works and unpublished manuscript, I cannot offer anything like a comprehensive account of his phenomenology here. My aim is thus not to provide a contribution to the vast field of exegetical research on Husserl but to lay out what I take to be his guiding general

understanding of the transcendental philosophical task and method of his phenomenology.⁵¹

Husserl's phenomenological breakthrough took place in his *Logical Investigations*, published in two volumes in 1900 and 1901,⁵² and his conception of phenomenology as transcendental philosophy gradually matured in the following decade. In 1911, this conception was provisionally announced in the article "Philosophy as Rigorous Science"⁵³ and it received its first standard formulation in Husserl's key work *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* from 1913.⁵⁴ The transcendental philosophical program consolidated in this period largely remained in force in Husserl's later thinking even though he never tired of rearticulating and complementing it. It should also be kept in mind that the general philosophical program which I will try to outline here is incessantly modified and specified, even to some extent exceeded and contradicted, in Husserl's prolific work of concrete phenomenological description.

The heart of Husserl's phenomenology comes to expression in the famous motto "To the matters themselves!" Against what he conceives as the age-old tendency of philosophy to resort to theoretical constructions or historical prejudices in its effort to achieve basic epistemological-ontological knowledge Husserl insists that philosophy must go to the matters themselves as they are concretely given as phenomena in our experience. It is precisely this demand to abide by the phenomenally given that receives its classic formulation in "the principle of all principles" in *Ideas I*:

But enough now of absurd theories. No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the principle of all principles: *that every originally giving intuition (Anschauung) is a legitimizing source of knowledge, that everything originally (in its tangible actuality, so to speak) offered to us in "intuition" (Intuition), is simply to be received as what it gives itself, but*

⁵¹ For an excellent general introduction to Husserl's phenomenology, see Zahavi 2003a. See also Bernet & Kern & Marbach 1993; Held 1985; 1986; Moran 2005; Welton 2000; Sokolowski 1974; 2000.

⁵² *Logische Untersuchungen*, Hua XVIII and Hua XIX.

⁵³ "Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft," in Hua XXV.

⁵⁴ *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Hua III (henceforth referred to as *Ideas I* in the main text).

also *only within the limits in which it gives itself there*. [...] Every statement which does no more than confer expression on such givens by simple explication and by means of significations precisely conforming to them is [...] really an *absolute beginning*, called upon to serve as a foundation in a genuine sense, a *principium*.⁵⁵

Hence, Husserl claims, the only way to rigorously grounded knowledge consists not in arguing or inferring anything but in strictly seeing and describing what is concretely given and discernible in our de facto experiences while avoiding all conceptual and theoretical prejudices.

However, what is the philosophical import of this principle? What does it mean that something is given as a phenomenon in our experience, and how do we see and describe such phenomena?

According to Husserl, it has been the decisive characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition to disregard and pass over the full phenomenal content of our de facto experiences – in which the world is concretely given to us as meaningful – instead it has dogmatically limited the scope of experiential givenness to include only particular empirical objects and sense data. With momentous results. As the phenomenal content of our experience is denied as a measure of understanding, philosophy sets itself the task of accounting for the ontological meaning of the world and the possibility of knowledge by relying on theoretical arguments of different sorts, e.g., on deductions from first principles, on inductive inferences, or on analyses of our received historical concepts. However, Husserl claims, every attempt to account for the meaning of things and the structure of our experience and knowledge with reference to any other, supposedly more secure and deep-seated ground of knowledge, than their self-presentation in our experience, is bound to result in prejudiced belief and theoretical construction.

Husserl's diagnosis of this state of affairs is seductively simple: our tendency to limit the sphere of true phenomenality to our experience of

⁵⁵ Hua III, p. 51: "Doch genug der verkehrten Theorien. *Am Prinzip aller Prinzipien: daß jede originär gebende Anschauung eine Rechtsquelle der Erkenntnis sei, daß alles, was sich uns in der 'Intuition' originär, (sozusagen in seiner leibhaften Wirklichkeit) darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt, aber auch nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt, kann uns keine erdenkliche Theorie irre machen. [...] Jede Aussage, die nichts weiter tut, als solche Gegebenheiten durch bloße Explikation und genau sich anmessende Bedeutungen Ausdruck zu verleihen, ist also wirklich [...] ein absoluter Anfang, im echten Sinne zur Grundlegung berufen, principium.*"

empirical objects is rooted in the “natural attitude.”⁵⁶ According to Husserl, our natural manner of experience is centrally characterized by its strong and exclusive directedness towards its objects. In seeing a tree, we are primarily directed towards the tree itself; in remembering a landscape, our attention dwells on the landscape itself. It is, Husserl claims, part of the intentionality of our natural experience that it presents its objects independently of our acts of experiencing them: the objects appear to us as objectual identities in the manifold of perspectival experiences without our being aware of the experiences themselves in their potential meaning-constituting function.⁵⁷ Hence, what Husserl calls the “general thesis of the natural attitude” emerges with a certain necessity:⁵⁸ the conviction that reality is essentially made up of individual objects that exist and are what they are independently of every human subject and experience. The natural attitude thus of itself tends to divert us from and induce speculative theoretical accounts of all the phenomena which happen to fall outside the scope of our natural object-directed experience.

With regard to what Husserl takes to be the central problems of philosophy, the confinement of traditional philosophy to the natural attitude fatally hampers its ability; first, to explain how our subjective acts of knowledge may arrive at act-transcendent objects at all; second, to account for the full ontological sense which different types of objects take on in our experiences. The metaphysical thesis of the natural attitude strictly speaking amounts to a prejudiced generalization of a certain kind of experience which, because of its narrow focus on particular objects, cannot provide an adequate phenomenal basis for a philosophical clarification of the epistemic experienceability or ontological sense of the objects experienced. As the philosopher of the natural attitude tries to account for the relationship between our experiences and their objects, he is forced to construe this relation in terms of an interaction between different kinds of objects, thereby inescapably giving way to incoherence and reductionism.

It is with the aim of breaking free from the naturalistic impasse of traditional philosophy that Husserl stakes out the decisive methodological maneuver of his transcendental phenomenology: the *phenomenological*

⁵⁶ Cf. Hua III, pp. 56-60.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hua III, pp. 86ff.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hua III, pp. 60f.

reduction. The reduction comprises two central components, which are described in the following way in the later postscript to *Ideas I*, published in 1930:

On the one hand, all judgments are excluded, which, resting on the natural attitude, are about this world constantly and altogether unquestionably pregiven as existing [...] On the other hand, by means of this epoché the regard becomes free for the universal phenomenon, “the world of consciousness purely as such,” the world purely *as* given in the manifold flux of conscious life.⁵⁹

That is to say: On the one hand, the phenomenologist suspends the general thesis of the natural attitude concerning the metaphysical status of reality, seeing that every such thesis based on the natural direction of experience necessarily lacks a sufficient phenomenal basis and is thus prejudiced; on the other hand, the phenomenologist frees himself from the object-directed movement of our natural experience, and instead carries out a reflective turn, which allows him to observe the objects of experience strictly as they are given in corresponding acts of consciousness.

How should this be understood?

Husserl describes the phenomenological reduction as a reflective turn in which we free ourselves from our normal directedness at the objects of our experience and instead reflect on these objects as they are given in our experiences. This does not – as, e.g., Dan Zahavi has pointed out⁶⁰ – imply that we turn our attention from the objects of the outer world towards the inner acts of the experiencing subject, but rather it means that we expand our attention so that we shift from the one-sided object-directedness of our natural attitude toward a synoptic reflection on the objects in correlation with the specific acts of consciousness in which they are given. Husserl makes it very clear that the reduction does not entail a “restriction of the investigation to the sphere of real immanence,” but

⁵⁹ Hua V, p. 145: “Einerseits sind alle auf natürlicher Erfahrung beruhende Urteile über diese Welt, die uns beständig und ganz fraglos als seiend vorgegebene, ausgeschlossen [...]. Andererseits wird durch diese Epoché der Blick frei für das universale Phänomen: ‘Bewußtseinswelt rein als solche’, rein *als* in mannigfaltigen, ‘zusammenstimmenden’ Erfahrungen ‘originaliter’ erscheinende.”

⁶⁰ Cf. Zahavi 2003b, pp. 44ff.

signifies a “limitation to the sphere of *pure self-givenness*, to the sphere of that [...] which is given in precisely the same sense in which it is meant, self-given in the strictest sense, in such a way that nothing that is meant fails to be given.”⁶¹

Indeed, Husserl claims, the reflective study opened by the reduction reveals precisely that our human consciousness essentially exhibits an intentional structure:⁶² our seeing is always a seeing of something, our brooding is always a brooding over something. It belongs to the very sense of our acts of consciousness that they are directed, not at inner representations or sense data that would mediate our relation to outer reality, but at the things themselves that they intend. Conversely, the world is only available as concretely given unities of meaning in correlation with particular acts of experience. Husserl’s concept of intentionality thus effects a dissolution both of the traditional idea of consciousness as an inner sphere that has to be transcended in order to attain true knowledge of the outer world and of the idea of reality as basically mind-independent. Just as it is impossible to understand the meaning of things in isolation from the experiences in which they are given as meaningful, it is impossible to understand the acts of the subject in abstraction from the matters and things with which they are concerned. As a result, Husserl states that the word “phenomenon” is itself “ambiguous by virtue of the essential correlation between appearance (*Erscheinen*) and that which appears (*Erscheinendem*).”⁶³

Hence, the reflective turn of the phenomenological reduction should not be understood as a turn to a self-contained subject, but to our experience as a whole in its intentional correlation between our acts of consciousness and the objects as they are given in these acts, between *noesis* and *noema*. Whereas in the natural attitude we pass through our intentional experiences as in a tunnel, directed straightly and exclusively at

⁶¹ Hua II, pp. 60f.: “Demnach bedeutet die phänomenologische Reduktion nicht etwa die Einschränkung der Untersuchung auf die Sphäre der reellen Immanenz [...] sondern die Beschränkung auf die Sphäre der *reinen Selbstgegebenheiten*, auf die Sphäre dessen, über das nicht nur geredet und das nicht nur gemeint wird [...] sondern dessen, was genau in dem Sinn, in dem es gemeint ist, auch gegeben ist und selbstgegeben im strengsten Sinn, derart, daß nichts von dem Gemeinten nicht gegeben ist.”

⁶² Husserl himself takes up the concept of intentionality from his teacher Franz Brentano who, in turn, rediscovered and revived this scholastic concept.

⁶³ Hua II, p. 14: “Das Wort Phänomen ist doppelsinnig vermöge der wesentlichen Korrelation zwischen *Erscheinen* und *Erscheinendem*.”

the particular objects of these experiences, in the reduction we reflect on the pure and full sphere of experiential givenness, in which the objects appear in their concretion as noematic identities in correlative noetic acts of consciousness.

However, the phenomenological reduction is not enough to access the proper field of transcendental phenomenology but needs to be supplemented by the “eidetic reduction” (*eidetische Reduktion*).⁶⁴ For Husserl the task of phenomenology is not to study the empirical particularities of different experiences but to explicate the basic essential structures characterizing these experiences and their correlative objects. In *Ideas I* he defines his notion of “essence” as follows: “*it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos that can be apprehended purely. [...] An individual object [...] has [...] its own specific character, its stock of essential predicables which must belong to it (as ‘an existent such as it is in itself’) if other, secondary, relative determinations can belong to it.*”⁶⁵ An essential structure is thus a general structure of sense necessarily and universally constituting a particular kind of being. According to Husserl, it is possible to phenomenologically access and describe essences through what he calls “eidetic variation” and which he basically characterizes as follows: in order to explicate the essence of a thing we perform an imaginative variation of a manifold of particular cases, so that we become able to distinguish what constitutes the essential features of the being in question without which it would cease to be what it is.⁶⁶

In the end, the phenomenological and the eidetic reductions open up the possibility of implementing Husserl’s guiding idea of the philosophical

⁶⁴ Hua III, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Hua III, pp. 12f.: “[Es gehört] zum Sinn jedes Zufälligen, eben ein Wesen, und somit ein rein zu fassendes Eidos zu haben [...]. Ein individueller Gegenstand [...] hat als ‘in sich selbst’ so und so beschaffener *Eigenart*, seinen Bestand an *wesentlichen* Prädikabilien, die ihm zukommen müssen (als ‘Seiendem, wie er in sich selbst ist’), damit ihm andere sekundäre, relative Bestimmungen zukommen können.”

⁶⁶ Cf. Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil* (henceforth referred to as E&U in the footnotes), §§86-93; Hua IX, pp. 72-87. Let this brief depiction of Husserl’s notion of eidetic variation suffice here. I will return to the sense and problems of this notion in the next part in my discussion of Heidegger’s critique of Husserl in his Marburg lecture courses “Introduction to Phenomenological Research” (*Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*) (1923-24) and “History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena” (*Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*) (1925), where this idea plays a central role.

task of phenomenology as transcendental constitutional research: to investigate, through strict phenomenological reflection, how different kinds of objects are given and constituted in different kinds of acts and to detect, in these act-systems of transcendental consciousness, the transcendental structures a priori determining the possible experienceability and givenness of different objects and, hence, their basic senses of being. Led by this idea Husserl is during his whole career ceaselessly occupied with carrying out concrete phenomenological descriptions of different experiences with a view to their constitutive structures and features, his themes including, e.g., time-consciousness, the difference between signitive and fulfilled intentions, the unthematic horizons of intentional experience, eidetic variation, the lived body, passive synthesis, the life-world, and intersubjectivity.

The Question of the Problem of Philosophy

Heidegger opens his 1919 breakthrough course “The Idea of Philosophy” by radically questioning what he claims to be the traditional conception of the task of philosophy that has tended to guide philosophy in a more or less habitual and inarticulate way.⁶⁷ It has, he suggests, always been the implicit aim of philosophy to establish a philosophical “worldview” (*Weltanschauung*), by which he means “a basic conception of the world” on the basis of which it should become possible to achieve well-founded knowledge of the “sense and purpose of human life.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ It is important to note at the outset that any interpretation of Heidegger’s early Freiburg lecture courses is faced with an awkward text-critical situation given that parts of these lectures are only available in the *Gesamtausgabe* in the form of students’ transcripts of his courses. In my explication I have as a rule chosen to quote such transcripts as sufficiently trustworthy sources to what Heidegger said in his lectures at the time without explicitly discussing or marking out their status as transcripts. Although the notes taken by students cannot enjoy the same reliability as Heidegger’s first-hand writing I think that, on the whole, the wording attributed to Heidegger in these transcripts seems quite authentic and consistent with his own manuscripts. Moreover, the basic trust of my interpretation is not dependent on any exact formulations in the transcripts, which might have been inaccurately rendered.

⁶⁸ GA 56/57, p. 8. Cf. also GA 58, p. 37. It seems clear that Heidegger has picked up the term “worldview” from Husserl, who in his article “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” famously distinguishes between “worldview-philosophy” and “scientific philosophy.” However, as we shall see shortly, Heidegger does not simply reproduce

And yet, Heidegger asks, what if “there is no connection at all” between philosophy and worldview? What if the traditional self-understanding of philosophy as worldview-formation is essentially misleading?

There remains only the empty possibility that no connection exists between the two, in which case worldview would be an utterly heterogeneous figure to philosophy. Such a radical separation would contradict all previous conceptions of philosophy, for it would imply a demand to discover an entirely new concept of philosophy which would be totally unrelated to all the ultimate questions of humankind. Philosophy would thus be deprived of its most ancestral entitlements – of its regal, superior calling. What value at all could it have if it should lose this role?⁶⁹

Heidegger’s drastic questioning of the traditional idea of philosophy has a clear purpose: to awaken our attention to the common conceptions of the idea of philosophy that tend to guide our philosophical investigations in an unnoticed manner, and open up the question of philosophy itself – its problem and its task – as a primary and decisive question for every possible philosophy: “Worldview becomes a *problem of philosophy* in a quite new sense. But the core of the problem lies in philosophy itself – it is itself a problem. The cardinal question concerns the essence, the concept of philosophy. The topic is, however, formulated: ‘*The Idea of Philosophy...*,’ more precisely ‘*The Idea of Philosophy as Originary Science (Urwissenschaft)*.’”⁷⁰ However, what is it that motivates Heidegger’s questioning of the problem of philosophy and where does it lead him?

Husserl’s sense of the term “worldview” but transforms its meaning in such a way that Husserl’s scientific phenomenology is interpreted as a species of worldview-philosophy.

⁶⁹ GA 56/57, p. 11: “Es bleibt nur noch die leere Möglichkeit, daß zwischen beiden kein Zusammenhang besteht. Weltanschauung wäre dann ein der Philosophie gegenüber völlig heterogenes Gebilde. Diese radikale Trennung widerspräche aller bisherigen Auffassung der Philosophie; denn sie schlosse die Forderung in sich, einen ganz neuen Begriff der Philosophie zu entdecken, und zwar einen solchen, der sie außerhalb jeder Beziehung mit den letzten Menschheitsfragen stellen müßte. Die Philosophie käme so um ihre angestammtesten Vorrechte, um ihren königlichen, überlegenen Beruf. Was sollte ihr, ginge dieser verlustig, überhaupt noch Wert verleihen.”

⁷⁰ GA 56/57, p. 12: “Die Weltanschauung wird zum *Problem der Philosophie* in einem ganz neuen Sinne. Aber der Kern des Problems liegt in dieser Selbst – sie selbst ist ja

As we shall see, Heidegger's early Freiburg philosophy is very much driven by the urge to make good Husserl's phenomenological demand to resist prejudices and strictly abide by what is concretely given in our experience. For Heidegger, however, this demand centrally involves the need to interrogate the basic problems and tasks of philosophy which ultimately guide our philosophical investigations. Hence, he begins his important lecture course "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" with the following statement of purpose:

"Basic problems of phenomenology" – the most urgent and ineffaceable, the most originary and ultimate basic problem of phenomenology is *itself* for itself. Phenomenology is *the* originary science, the science of the absolute *origin* of the spirit in and for itself – "life in and for itself." [...] The challenge now is to bring to "life," in an originary and radical way, out of a new basic situation, the innermost, living vocation, the fate of philosophy, its idea, the manifestations of which are known to us under the names of Plato, Kant, Hegel.⁷¹

That is, the basic problem of phenomenology is phenomenology itself. In so far as phenomenology is called to realize the vocation and idea of philosophy as originary science, the first task must be to question and bring to life the basic problem and idea of such a science. A few pages later, he raises the question "What is a problem?"⁷² whereupon he characterizes phenomenology as "genuine, originary, living [...] indefatigable problem-consciousness (*Problembewußtsein*)."⁷³

This statement of purpose should be understood against the backdrop of Heidegger's belief that Husserl, while opening up the ideal of

Problem. Die Kardinalfrage geht auf das Wesen, den Begriff der Philosophie. Das Thema ist aber formuliert: 'Die Idee der Philosophie...', und näherhin: 'Die Idee der Philosophie als Urwissenschaft'."

⁷¹ GA 58, pp. 1f.: "Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie' – das brennendste und nie austilgbare, das ursprünglichste und endgültigste Grundproblem der Phänomenologie ist *sie selbst* für sich selbst. Sie ist *die* Urwissenschaft, die Wissenschaft vom absoluten *Ursprung* des Geistes an und für sich – 'Leben an und für sich'. [...] Die innerste, lebendige Berufung, das Schicksal der Philosophie, ihre Idee, deren größte Manifestationen wir kennen unter den Namen: Plato, Kant, Hegel, gilt es ursprünglich und radikal aus einer neuen Grundsituation heraus zum 'Leben' zu bringen."

⁷² GA 58, p. 4.

⁷³ GA 58, p. 5.

phenomenal givenness as the ultimate measure of understanding, never allowed his demand for phenomenological accountability to extend to a critical questioning of the guiding problems of philosophy. Hence, in “Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression” Heidegger writes that “the basic phenomenological attitude, provided that one understands it in the widest sense as descriptive essential analysis of the phenomena of consciousness that are not psychologically apperceived, is not sufficient for a fundamental philosophical problematic as long as it is not itself explicated in a genuinely philosophically originary way.”⁷⁴ It is, he continues, inappropriate to put forward phenomenology as the “fundamental science for philosophy” without having a “radical concept of philosophy.”⁷⁵ As long as phenomenology does not commence with a basic phenomenological explication of the guiding problems of philosophy, it may only assert itself as a superior philosophical method by uncritically submitting itself to some traditional notion of the problematic of philosophy.

I believe Heidegger’s critical assessment of Husserl on this point is basically correct. To be sure, Husserl’s phenomenological call to keep to what is given in intentional experience implies a break with the old philosophical tendency to provide theoretically constructive grounds for our understanding of things; it also brings with it an ability to overcome and dissolve a series of traditional problem-constellations, most importantly the dualism between inner consciousness and outer reality; it even, as we shall see, leads Husserl to state in principle the need to start out from questioning the problems of philosophy. Still, it also seems clear to me that Husserl largely lacked the basic sense for radically interrogating the philosophical-existential meaning and motivation of the problems of philosophy. Hence, apart from a continuous reflection on the relation between philosophy and the natural sciences, we look in vain in Husserl’s massive work for a radical engagement with such questions as the following: How do philosophical problems meet us in life? What role does philosophy play in our ethical-existential understanding of life? How is it

⁷⁴ GA 59, p. 7: “Die phänomenologische Grundhaltung, sofern man sie im weitesten Sinne versteht als deskriptive Analyse der nicht psychologisch apperzierten Bewußtseinsphänomene, genügt aber nicht, solange sie nicht selbst genuin philosophisch ursprünglich expliziert ist, für eine prinzipielle philosophische Problematik.”

⁷⁵ GA 59, p. 31.

that philosophy has always been drawn into the ambivalence between our will to flee from and explain away our personal existential problems, and our will and effort to relate openly and clearly to the challenges of life? I would seem that this inability on Husserl's part to radically question the problems of philosophy is linked to the fact that his thinking on ethical, existential, and political matters on the whole remains quite weak and commonplace, often reproducing the prejudices of his age.

The tension between the principal possibility and concrete failure of Husserl's phenomenology to interrogate the problems of philosophy manifests itself sharply in his programmatic article "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," which also functions as a chief point of reference for Heidegger's critical engagement with Husserl during these early years. The article opens grandly: "From its earliest beginnings philosophy has claimed to be a rigorous science, indeed a science that satisfies our highest theoretical needs and renders possible from an ethical-religious point of view a life regulated by pure norms of reason."⁷⁶ Moreover, to realize this ideal of a rigorous science philosophy must take the form of a "philosophical system of doctrine (*Lehrsystem*) that, after the gigantic preparatory work of generations, really begins from the ground up with a foundation free of doubt and rises up like every skillful construction, wherein stone is set upon stone, each as solid as the other, in accord with guiding insights."⁷⁷

Now, although Husserl's opening statement should be read as quite a formal and provisional determination of the purpose of phenomenology it leaves no doubt concerning the extent to which Husserl assumes the old ambition of philosophy to achieve a rigorously grounded universal epistemologico-ontological knowledge granting ultimate justification to our understanding. Indeed, it could be taken as an exemplary illustration of Heidegger's definition of the traditional task of philosophy as worldview-formation. The paradox is that Heidegger picks up his notion

⁷⁶ Hua XXV, p. 3: "Seit den ersten Anfängen hat die Philosophie den Anspruch erhoben, strenge Wissenschaft zu sein, und zwar die Wissenschaft, die den höchsten theoretischen Bedürfnissen Genüge leiste und in ethisch-religiöser Hinsicht ein von reinen Vernunftnormen geregeltes Leben ermögliche."

⁷⁷ Hua XXV, p. 6: "ein philosophisches Lehrsystem, das nach gewaltigen Vorarbeit von Generationen, von unten her mit zweifelssicherem Fundament wirklich anfängt und wie jeder tüchtige Bau in die Höhe wächst, indem Baustein um Baustein gemäß leitenden Einsichten als feste Gestalt dem Festen angefügt wird."

of worldview precisely from Husserl's article. Here Husserl famously distinguishes between "worldview-philosophy," which is content with producing practice-guiding overviews of the preeminent opinions of a particular historical time, and "scientific philosophy," which aims at achieving evident and universal knowledge. However, as Heidegger claims that the tacit aim of previous philosophy has been worldview-formation he transforms the concept, so that Husserl's phenomenology now also falls under this heading.⁷⁸ According to Heidegger, Husserl's phenomenology is thus guided by the aim to establish a philosophical worldview: an ultimate knowledge of the basic structures of being capable of founding and critically justifying our otherwise naive understanding of life and the world.

However, while "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" contains some of the most striking expressions of Husserl's confinement to a traditional ideal of philosophy, it also includes what Heidegger considered to be Husserl's most radical formulation of the phenomenological impulse itself in its open potentiality. Reaching the end of his article Husserl writes, as if explicating his own dictum "To the matters themselves!":

*The impulse to research must proceed not from philosophies but from the matters and problems. Philosophy is essentially a science of the true beginnings, of the origins, of the *ῥιζώματα πάντων*. The science of the radical must also in every respect be radical in its own procedure. Above all it must not rest until it has attained *its* absolutely clear beginnings, i.e., its absolutely clear problems, the methods preindicated by the proper sense of these problems, and the most basic field of work wherein matters are given with absolute clarity.⁷⁹*

⁷⁸ Cf. GA 59, p. 11, where Heidegger writes, referring to Husserl: "The separation between scientific philosophy and worldview philosophy can be easily overcome in a scientific worldview philosophy" (*Die Trennung von wissenschaftlicher Philosophie und Weltanschauungsphilosophie läßt sich leicht überwinden in einer wissenschaftlichen Weltanschauungsphilosophie*).

⁷⁹ Hua XXV, p. 61: "Nicht von den Philosophien sondern von den Sachen und Problemen muß der Antrieb zur Forschung ausgehen. Philosophie ist aber ihrem Wesen nach Wissenschaft von den Wahren Anfängen, von den Ursprüngen, von den *ῥιζώματα πάντων*. Die Wissenschaft vom Radikalen muß auch in ihrem Verfahren radikal sein und das in jeder Hinsicht. Vor allem darf sie nicht ruhen, bis sie *ihre* absolut klaren Anfänge, d.i. ihre absolut klaren Probleme, die im eigenen Sinn dieser Probleme vorgezeichneten Methoden und das unterste Arbeitsfeld absolut klar gegebener Sachen gewonnen hat."

Not only does Husserl here insist that philosophy should commence with a clarification of the sense of the philosophical problems themselves as they elicit research in the first place and prescribe the method of investigation; he also suggests that philosophy is essentially a “science of the true beginnings, of the origins.” In the margin of his own copy, Heidegger remarks: “We take Husserl at his word!” (*Wir nehmen Husserl beim Wort*).⁸⁰ Indeed, Heidegger’s entire project to transform phenomenology into an originary science of life could be read as an attempt to liberate this passage from Husserl’s transcendental framework in order to realize and develop its revolutionary philosophical potential.

Heidegger’s expansion of the demand for phenomenological accountability to include the question concerning the problem of philosophy is thus nothing but a radicalization of Husserl’s own teaching about the need always to start from the problems and to adjust our method of investigation according to them. Hence, before any other conceptual or methodological decision is taken, philosophy needs to attend to the philosophical problems – resisting and critically clearing the pseudo-problems – which call for thinking and prescribe the way to understand them.

Phenomenology as a Science of Origin

However, even though Heidegger insists on the question of the problem of philosophy in an uncommonly sharp manner, the fact is that he never lets this question unfold concretely in a truly radical way. As we have already seen, Heidegger, before any investigation has even begun, has taken one fundamental decision: that philosophy is essentially an “originary science” or a “science of origin.”

What does this mean?

Even though Heidegger’s idea at this stage is still extremely formal, still waiting to be given concrete phenomenal meaning, the formal structure of the question can already be specified. Heidegger employs two terms to indicate his vision of the task of philosophy: “originary science” (*Urwissenschaft*) and “science of origin” (*Ursprungswissenschaft*). Heidegger defines the science he has in mind as a science concerned with the

⁸⁰ The quotation is found in Sheehan 1988b, p. 96: “Wir nehmen Husserl beim Wort!”

“origin” of “life.” The science of origin is, he writes, “the science of the absolute *origin* of the spirit in and for itself – ‘life in and for itself.’”⁸¹ Moreover: “The phenomenological comprehension of life: toward life as life = the manifestation of life out of its origin.”⁸² Later, as the investigations advance he rearticulates the question of origin as a question of the “originary structure” (*Urstruktur*), “originary articulation” (*ursprüngliche Artikulation*), or “originary sense” (*Ursprungssinn*) of life.⁸³ Hence, the task of the phenomenological science of origin projected by Heidegger is none other than to explicate the basic structure and sense of life as the fundamental ontological being-sense constituting our understanding of all other provinces of reality: “From here [the basic sense of ‘existence’] the sense of *reality* in all its layers becomes understandable.”⁸⁴ Heidegger is thus from the outset convinced that it has always been the guiding task of philosophy to come to know something like the origin of life and reality, and that the fate of philosophy depends on whether we will rediscover this problem in life as an essential task.

Let us, before we go on, briefly pause to assess Heidegger’s basic decision to project phenomenology as a science of origin.

It seems clear to me that this decision – which is taken dogmatically, and which Heidegger will never seriously question – is deeply problematic and fateful in so far as it determines the shape and trajectory of his path of thinking. Heidegger is, I believe, basically right in claiming – although the range and precise meaning of this claim is open to question – that at least since Plato and Aristotle, philosophy has to a great extent been motivated by the ambition to seek and establish an understanding of the ground – *archē*, *principium* – of being-knowledge, ultimately intended to serve as a basis for all our other knowledge of different beings: human beings, artifacts, natural things. However, by promptly opting for the problem of origin as the single guiding motive of philosophy Heidegger a priori forfeits the opportunity to listen to and account for all the other questions and concerns that have moved, or could have moved, philosophy apart from the question of ground. To take what I consider the perhaps most

⁸¹ GA 58, p. 1.

⁸² GA 58, p. 145: “Die phänomenologische Erfassung des Lebens: auf das Leben als Leben = Manifestation seiner aus seinem Ursprung.”

⁸³ GA 58, pp. 259, 158, 167.

⁸⁴ GA 58, p. 261: “Von hier [der Grundsinn von ‘Existenz’] wird der Sinn der Wirklichkeit in allen Schichten des Lebens verständlich. – ” Cf. also GA 58, p. 167.

crucial example: at least since Socrates it seems that philosophers have also pursued and reflected on ethical, existential and political questions concerning human life and the good – happiness, justice, love, wisdom, beauty, courage, honor, etc. – as immediately pressing questions exhibiting a more or less autonomous relationship to the question of the ground of being-knowledge. But this is not all. When Heidegger takes up the question of origin as the primary question of philosophy he not only fails to consider other possible questions, but also dogmatically adopts the idea that the question of origin is hierarchically basic in relation to every other question, so that our understanding of the origin of life or being somehow regulates our understanding of all other matters. The effects of this problematic idea on the development of Heidegger's thinking are thorough and wide-ranging: after the Freiburg years it will guide, first, his projection of the question of the "sense of being" as his basic question, and then, later, his reformulation of this question as a question of the "openness" or "truth" of being.

However, these critical reflections do not – even if ultimately true – by themselves imply that Heidegger's quest for the basic structure and sense of life would be thoroughly false or confused. Far from it. As Heidegger raises the question of origin, he does it with an unprecedented demand on phenomenological accountability, projecting the notion of origin as a strictly formal and open notion whose sense and motivation in life remain to be clarified by concrete phenomenological investigation. Hence, while uncritically endorsing the idea of philosophy as a science of origin he also carries out a critical formalization and phenomenological trial of the concept of origin, which means that it again opens up as a question: What is an origin? How does it show up in life? What role does it play in our effort to understand the world and ourselves? Indeed, I believe Heidegger's phenomenological pursuit of this question offers one of the most qualified opportunities to clarify and delimit the sense and problems of this question, which in different shapes has been such a dominant concern in the history of Western philosophy. It is also essential to note that although the question of origin opens up Heidegger's life-long path of philosophical investigations, the meaning and clarificatory force of these investigations is not necessarily dependent on the legitimacy of the guiding question of origin.

In any case, for Heidegger the task of his early Freiburg lectures courses is clear: to cultivate Husserl's phenomenological impulse into a phenomenological philosophy conceived as a science of origin: "The phenomenologico-philosophical understanding is an understanding of origin, which takes its departure from the concrete figures of life."⁸⁵

The Question of Origin as the Question of Givenness

Having projected phenomenology as a science of origin Heidegger goes on to specify the question of origin in terms of the question of givenness.

In the beginning of "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" he sets forth a series of questions concerning how the science of origin should get started in the first place. Provided that in phenomenology the method should correspond to the problem in question, how are the problems of philosophy given? Do they simply lie dispersed in different object-domains for us to take up and study? Or do they on the contrary arise only as we, from some particular methodological point of view, send in questions among the objects? And how are these objects given? Heidegger's array of ironic questions culminates in the question concerning the notion of givenness itself: "Is it [the domain of objects] simply given, pre-given? What does 'given' mean, 'givenness' – this magic word of phenomenology and the 'stumbling block' for others?"⁸⁶ Here, the question of givenness materializes as the central problem on which the entire originary science turns. As Hans Ruin aptly notes: "the nature of the given is here addressed as a problem in its own right. [...] givenness is precisely the problem."⁸⁷

In "The Idea of Philosophy" Heidegger offers an even more pointed articulation of the intimate connection between the question of origin and the question of givenness. As we shall see, Heidegger maintains that the traditional idea of philosophy as worldview-formation is rooted in the

⁸⁵ GA 58, p. 240: "Das phänomenologisch-philosophische Verstehen ist ein Ursprungsverstehen, das seinen Ausgang nimmt von den konkreten Gestalten des Lebens."

⁸⁶ GA 58, p. 5: "Ist es [das Gegenstandsgebiet] schlecht und recht gegeben, vorgegeben? Was heißt 'gegeben', 'Gegebenheit' – dieses Zauberwort der Phänomenologie und der 'Stein des Anstoßes' bei den anderen."

⁸⁷ Ruin 1994, p. 55.

“general domination (*Generalherrschaft*) of the theoretical” within philosophy,⁸⁸ i.e., in the conviction that theoretical knowledge constitutes our primary way of knowing reality. Denying the phenomenal substance of our pre-theoretical experience, theoretical philosophy thus sets itself the task of grounding and critically justifying our pre-theoretical experience by examining the theoretical structures which normally guide our naive experience of things in a blind and prejudiced way. However, in “The Idea of Philosophy” Heidegger, as a thought experiment, probes what it would mean if our basic understanding of the world actually had the character of a theoretical knowledge of objectified things. Hence, he writes: “Is even a single thing given if only things are given (*Gibt es überhaupt eine einzige Sache, wenn es nur Sachen gibt*)? In that case nothing would be given; not even *nothing*, because with the sole supremacy of the sphere of things not even the ‘is given’ would be given (*weil bei einer Allherrschaft der Sachspähre auch kein ‘es gibt’ gibt*). Is the ‘is given’ given?”⁸⁹ And he immediately answers:

Already in the opening question “is something given...?” something is given. Our *entire* problematic has arrived at a decisive point, which, however, makes a meager impression. [...] We are standing at the methodical crossroads which decides on the very life or death of philosophy. We stand at an abyss: either into the nothing, that is, the nothing of absolute thingness, or we manage for the first time to make the leap into another world, or, more precisely, into the world as such.⁹⁰

That is to say: if there were only theoretical matters, there would strictly speaking be nothing at all – not even the nothing – since there would be no experiential givenness in which any matters would be there and concretely present for us as intelligible phenomena. What Heidegger does here is nothing less than elevate givenness into the ultimate condition

⁸⁸ GA 56/57, p. 87.

⁸⁹ GA 56/57, p. 62: “Gibt es überhaupt eine einzige Sache, wenn es nur Sachen gibt? Dann gibt es überhaupt keine Sachen; es gibt nicht einmal *nichts*, weil es bei einer Allherrschaft der Sachspähre auch kein ‘es gibt’ gibt. Gibt es das ‘es gibt’?”

⁹⁰ GA 56/57, pp. 62f.: “Schon bei dem Frage-ansatz ‘Gibt es...?’ gibt es etwas. Unsere *ganze* Problematik ist an eine entscheidende Stelle gekommen, die in ihrer Kümmerlichkeit gar nicht diesen Anschein macht. Wir stehen an der methodischen Wegkreuzung, die über Leben oder Tod der Philosophie überhaupt entscheidet, an einem Abgrund: entweder ins Nichts, d.h., der absoluten Sachlichkeit, oder es gelingt der Sprung in eine andere Welt, oder genauer: überhaupt erst in die Welt.”

determining what it means to be rather than not be. As a result, the question of givenness – “Is the ‘is given’ given?” – emerges as the decisive question determining and specifying the meaning of the question of origin: to understand the origin *is* to understand the basic structure and sense of phenomenal givenness.⁹¹

To sum up then: Heidegger is convinced that the question of givenness has always constituted the central issue which philosophy has revolved around. Whereas it is the suppression and misinterpretation of what is primarily given that gives rise to traditional theoretical philosophy, the task of the phenomenological science of origin is precisely to explicate what givenness is all about.

1.3 Pre-Theoretical Life and Theoretical Philosophy

The Primacy of Pre-Theoretical Experience

Heidegger’s early Freiburg lecture courses acquire their concrete direction from the effort to rehabilitate our pre-theoretical experience as the primary irreducible domain where things are given as meaningful for us. As we shall see, this effort illuminates the sense in which the traditional quest for theoretical grounds is misguided and opens the prospects and problems of a phenomenological science of origin.

In “The Idea of Philosophy” Heidegger, in response to the theoretical conception of the immediately given as sense data, exclaims: “*What is immediately given!* Every word here is significant. What does ‘immediate’ mean?”⁹² So what is immediately given? Heidegger offers the following, by now classic, phenomenological description of what happens as he enters the lecture hall and sees the lectern at which he is to speak: “What do ‘I’ see? Brown surfaces, at right angles to one another? [...] A large box with another smaller one set upon it? Not at all. I see the lectern at which I am

⁹¹ In his early Freiburg lectures Heidegger uses the word “givenness” as his general designation of the problem of givenness or phenomenality.

⁹² GA 56/57, p. 85: “Was unmittelbar gegeben ist! Jedes Wort ist hier von Bedeutung. Was besagt unmittelbar?”

to speak.”⁹³ There is, Heidegger writes, no “order of foundation” (*Fundierungszusammenhang*) in the pure experience, so that he would first see brown surfaces, which would then present themselves as a wooden box, in order then, finally, to come forth as a lectern in the university lecture hall. Not at all, he sees the lectern “in one strike, as it were” (*gleichsam in einem Schlag*) as it appears as significant within the context of the academic world and the present situation of lecturing:

In the experience of seeing the lectern something is given *to me* from out of my immediate environment (*Umwelt*). This environmental milieu (lectern, book, blackboard, notebook, fountain pen, caretaker, student fraternity, tram car, motor car, etc.) does not consist of things with a certain character of significance, of objects, which are then conceived as signifying this and that; rather, the significant is primary and immediately given to me without any mental detours across an apprehension of things. Living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, everything is worldly; “it worlds,” which is something different from “it values.”⁹⁴

In short, what is primarily given in our pre-theoretical experience is not sense data but significances that immediately appear to us and engage us without any active effort of interpretation or judgment. Moreover, these primary significances do not have the character of isolated objects parading before our theoretical gaze. On the one hand, the significances essentially appear as moments belonging to and having their place within the surrounding world of significances. On the other hand, the pre-theoretical experience of significance constitutes a unitary “appropriating event” (*Ereignis*) in which the experiencing self “swings along” (*schwingt*)

⁹³ GA 56/57, p. 71: “Was sehe ‘ich’? Braune Flächen, die sich rechtwinklig schneiden? [...] Eine Kiste, und zwar eine größere, mit einer kleineren daraufgebaut? Keineswegs, ich sehe das Katheder an dem ich sprechen soll.”

⁹⁴ GA 56/57, pp. 72f.: “In dem Erlebnis des Kathedersehens gibt sich *mir* etwas aus meiner unmittelbarer Umwelt. Dieses umweltliche (Katheder, Buch, Tafel, Kollegheft, Füllfeder, Pedell, Korpsstudent, Straßenbahn, Automobil usf. usf.) sind nicht Sachen mit einem bestimmten Bedeutungscharakter, Gegenstände, und dazu noch aufgefaßt als das und das bedeutend, sondern das Bedeutsame ist das Primäre, gibt sich mir unmittelbar, ohne jeden gedanklichen Umweg über ein Sacherfassen. In einer Umwelt lebend, bedeutet es mir überall und immer, es ist alles welthaft, ‘es weltet.’”

mit),⁹⁵ which means that it cannot be understood in terms of a distanced theoretical experience of observation in which the perceiving subject looks at the perceived object: “The lived experience does not pass in front of me like a thing, which I position, like an object; instead I appropriate it to myself (*ich selbst er-eigne es mir*), and it occurs (*es er-eignet sich*) according to its essence.”⁹⁶

In “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” Heidegger expands his analysis of our primary pre-theoretical experience – which he from now on calls “factual life” (*das faktische Leben*),⁹⁷ or simply “life”⁹⁸ – by highlighting three of its central features.

First, Heidegger claims, it is a central feature of factual life that we primarily experience and live in a world of significances: “Factically I always live ensnared in significances, so that every significance has its surrounding of new significances: horizons of engagement, involvement, utilization, destiny.”⁹⁹ Taken together these “contexts of significances”¹⁰⁰ make up our “world.”¹⁰¹ We do not first perceive some kind of sense data or meaningless objects, which we would then be required to actively interpret and furnish with sense. What we primarily experience – whether trivial, worthless, strange, meaningless – essentially presents itself as significant against the backdrop of our world of significances. Hence, there is no meaningful reality to be posited or interrogated beyond the significant world we experience: “The experience of existence terminates and satisfies itself with the characterization of significances.”¹⁰²

Second, it belongs to the significances of the world that they always express or present themselves in particular ways: “That, which concerns life, in which it absorbs itself, always presents itself, gives itself

⁹⁵ GA 56/57, p. 75.

⁹⁶ GA 56/57, p. 75: “Das Er-leben geht nicht von mir vorbei, wie eine Sache, die ich hinstelle, als Objekt, sondern ich selbst er-eigne es mir, und es er-eignet sich seinem Wesen nach.”

⁹⁷ GA 58, p. 37.

⁹⁸ GA 58, p. 29.

⁹⁹ GA 58, p. 104: “Ich lebe faktisch immer Bedeutsamkeitsbefangen, und jede Bedeutsamkeit hat ihren Umring von neuen Bedeutsamkeiten: Beschäftigungs-, Beteiligungs-, Verwertungs-, Schicksalshorizonte.”

¹⁰⁰ GA 58, p. 105: “Zusammenhang von Bedeutsamkeiten.”

¹⁰¹ GA 58, p. 34.

¹⁰² GA 58, p. 106: “die Existenzenerfahrung endigt und genügt sich in der Bedeutsamkeitscharakteristik.”

‘somehow.’¹⁰³ At this point Heidegger introduces the term “phenomenon” as an alternative expression for the fact that the world always expresses itself in correlation with the way in which we experience it: “We can also formulate the fact that something, something experienced, always gives itself *somehow* [...] by saying that it *appears*, that it is a *phenomenon*.”¹⁰⁴ He has not yet taken up the word phenomenon into his central conceptuality and only uses it to name a particular aspect of the structure of life. It is rather the term “givenness” that still functions as the main operative concept guiding his investigation of the phenomenality of factual life. Ultimately, Heidegger claims, the way in which the significances of the world present themselves is rooted in the situation of the experiencing self or “self-world” (*Selbstwelt*),¹⁰⁵ which constitutes the particular temporal-historical setting and rhythm of every experience.¹⁰⁶

I will later return to Heidegger’s analysis of the structure of factual life. So far, the characterization of pre-theoretical life in terms of the unitary interplay between the significances we experience and the way we experience them is basically an elaboration of Husserl’s conception of the intentional correlation between *noema* and *noesis*. However, we may already note two points on which Heidegger’s accentuations anticipate a critical divergence from Husserl: first, he heavily emphasizes the character or the pre-theoretical experience as a unitary happening preceding the dualism between subject and object which, he believes, still haunts Husserl’s concept of intentionality; second; by anchoring the pre-theoretical experience in the particular situation of the self-world he opens the gate towards a historicization of the pre-theoretical given.

The third aspect of factual life highlighted by Heidegger is its “self-sufficiency” (*Selbstgenügsamkeit*). The notion is important since it conditions both his critique of theoretical philosophy as well as his vision of the task of phenomenology. But what is “self-sufficiency”? He writes:

It [the sense of self-sufficiency] touches a *structural character* of life, which places it on itself: *that it is an “in itself” for itself*. It bears within

¹⁰³ GA 58, p. 49: “Das, was das Leben angeht, worin es aufgeht, stellt sich immer dar, gibt sich ‘irgendwie.’”

¹⁰⁴ GA 58, p. 50: “Daß sich irgendetwas, etwas Erlebtes, immer *irgendwie* gibt [...] können wir auch so formulieren, daß es *erscheint*, *Phänomen* ist.”

¹⁰⁵ GA 58, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. GA 58, p. 62.

itself as a matter of structure (which fundamentally governs every substantial How and What) the availabilities that it needs as possibilities of fulfilling the tendencies that it itself engenders.¹⁰⁷

That is, life is self-sufficient in the sense that the world of experience in which we always already live supplies all the significances and motives which guide our understanding of life. Life does not, as Heidegger puts it, need to “twist itself out of itself” (*sich aus sich selbst herausdrehen*) in order to understand and accomplish its own possibilities:¹⁰⁸ the “reign of factual experience” is “boundless” given that “all and everything can become accessible to it, since it is not modeled on anything else.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, to say that life is self-sufficient is to say that the factual context of significance experienced in pre-theoretical life constitutes a basic irreducible domain of givenness, that the phenomena encountered here cannot be grounded on anything else – some deeper or more secure ground – but must be understood on the basis of the pre-theoretical experiences in which they occur.

What is more, Heidegger claims that pre-theoretical life also possesses its own possibilities of judging, clarifying and communicating its experience of the world, which he sums up under the title “consideration” (*Kenntnisnahme*):¹¹⁰ “We explicate factually experienced contexts of significance but, in so doing, let them be in their living facticity. The explication is of a considering-narrating kind, in the basic style of the factual experience.”¹¹¹ The pre-theoretical consideration that he has in mind is prior to every theoretical effort at knowledge, which detaches the objects from the primary context of significance in which they are given and reduces them to instances of general theoretical principles and

¹⁰⁷ GA 58, p. 42: “Er [Der Sinn von ‘Selbstgenügsamkeit’] trifft einen *Strukturcharakter* des Lebens, der es auf sich selbst stellt: *daß es sich selbst ein ‘an sich’ ist*. Es trägt in sich selbst strukturhaft (das alles inhaltliche Wie und Was im Innersten durchherrscht) die von ihm selbst benötigten Verfügbarkeiten als Möglichkeiten der Erfüllung der ihm selbst entwachsenden Tendenzen.”

¹⁰⁸ GA 58, pp. 31, 42.

¹⁰⁹ GA 58, p. 217: “Damit zeigt sich wieder die Schrankenlosigkeit der Herrschaft des faktischen Lebens, dem deshalb, weil es auf nichts ‘zugeschnitten’ ist, alles und jedes zugänglich werden kann.”

¹¹⁰ GA 58, p. 112.

¹¹¹ GA 58, p. 111: “Es werden faktisch erlebte Bedeutungszusammenhänge zwar expliziert, aber doch in ihrer lebendigen Faktizität dabei belassen. Die Explikation ist die kenntnisnehmend erzählende, aber im Grundstil des faktischen Erfahrens.”

structures. By contrast, the pre-theoretical consideration essentially relies on the “experiential certainty” (*Erfahrungsgewißheit*) of our experience, attending to and articulating the particular significances given here.¹¹² Still, in pre-theoretically considering something our “attitude” to what we experience undergoes a certain “modification”:¹¹³ we to some extent detach ourselves from our primary immediate absorption in the experience in order to overview and articulate its different aspects from the point of view of the “guiding idea” or interest of the current situation.¹¹⁴ According to Heidegger, the pre-theoretical consideration can take many forms – deliberation, recollection, narration, report, discussion – and it makes use of the factual everyday language at our disposal. However, even though its linguistic expressions are often incomplete and conceptually floating this in no way implies that they could not be clear and fully adequate.

Heidegger thus ends up with a conception of factual pre-theoretical life as our primary self-sufficient domain of phenomenal givenness, characterizing it in terms of the unitary interplay between the experienced significances and our way of experiencing them, which is ultimately centered in the particular self-world. This conception not only provides the basis for his critique of theoretical philosophy as a project of constructive grounding but also sharpens the question of the task and motivation of the projected science of origin: if our pre-theoretical life is self-sufficient and contains its own full possibilities of understanding and passing judgment on its world – what, then, could the function and motivation of a philosophical science of origin be?

The Problem of Theoretical Philosophy

According to the diagnosis offered in Heidegger’s early Freiburg lectures, the tradition of Western philosophy has been determined by the effort to establish a theoretical ground – a worldview – for our pre-theoretical life. As such, theoretical philosophy is essentially unphenomenological: it lives on a denial and misinterpretation of the phenomenal substance of pre-

¹¹² GA 58, p. 113.

¹¹³ GA 58, p. 116.

¹¹⁴ GA 58, p.112.

theoretical life and a dream of critically delimiting the truth of this supposedly naive experience by reducing it to a theoretical ground.

Let us take a look at how Heidegger depicts the makeup of theoretical philosophy and at what he takes to be its central problems. As he sees it, the whole traditional idea of philosophy as worldview-formation is rooted in the “general domination of the *theoretical*” within philosophy,¹¹⁵ i.e., in the “conviction that it [the theoretical] comprises the basic level which grounds all other spheres in a specific way.”¹¹⁶ But what is the motivation and meaning of this conviction?

Ultimately, Heidegger believes there are strong ethical-existential motivations behind the ideal of theoretical philosophy, above all the impulse to flee from and cover up the weight and finitude of factual life by fostering the dream of attaining the kind of secure and universal theoretical knowledge that would allow us to overview and control life without having to actually live it. Spurred by such motives and others – e.g. by its impressedness by the knowledge of mathematics and natural science – philosophy sets up theoretical object-knowledge as its paradigmatic ideal of rigorous knowledge. Basically, what is aimed at is a knowledge which is independent of any factual life-world, and which is able to establish a “pure [...] in itself solidified and explicit objectual context,”¹¹⁷ whose conceptual order admits of being traversed and confirmed in the same way by anyone at any time.¹¹⁸ Of course, the more specific notions of the qualified method of philosophy, and of the fundamental domain of being-knowledge, have varied a lot through the history of philosophy, e.g., deduction from first axioms or principles, generalization and abstraction from empirical data, transcendental deduction of the basic features of the transcendental subject, dialectical analysis of the ultimate historical concepts always already determining our factual understanding of the world.

The idealization of theoretical knowledge goes hand in hand with a denial and misrepresentation of the phenomenality of pre-theoretical life. According to the standard picture of theoretical philosophy, what is

¹¹⁵ GA 56/57, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ GA 56/57, p. 59: “die Überzeugung, daß es [das Theoretische] die fundamentale Schicht darstellt, alle übrigen Sphären [...] fundiert.”

¹¹⁷ GA 58, p. 126: “die Idee eines reinen, abgehobenen, in sich selbst verfestigten, expliziten gegenständlichen Zusammenhangs.”

¹¹⁸ GA 58, pp. 141-144, 234-236.

strictly speaking given in our pre-theoretical experience is more or less chaotic sense data. If so, however, then this sensory data, in order to emerge as identifiable units of meaning and to become objects of knowledge, must necessarily receive its meaning and organization from somewhere else, namely from the conceptual-logical structures constitutive of theoretical knowledge. Hence, our pre-theoretical experience is essentially naive and prejudiced. Since in directly enacting this experience we only have access to sense data and lack every measure for examining the truth of the concepts that determine our sight we are necessarily guided by these concepts in a blind and prejudiced manner. As a consequence, the task of theoretical philosophy ensues: “The justification of naive consciousness and its elevation to the scientific and critical level.”¹¹⁹

Heidegger uses – as he often does in his earliest lecture courses – the neo-Kantians Paul Natorp and Heinrich Rickert as exemplary cases of the theoretical denial of pre-theoretical givenness. According to Natorp, we are never in a position to speak of an object being given to us. Since the sensory content of our sense perception can only be experienced as a given object in so far as it is determined by the conceptual laws and structures of objectifying thought, it strictly speaking amounts to no more than a pure undetermined *x*. As Heidegger puts it: “The sensation is [...] only the *x* of the equation, and only receives its sense in and *through* the context of theoretical objectivation.”¹²⁰ In contrast to Natorp, Rickert emphasizes that the sensory content of our perceptions constitutes an ultimate given which cannot be dissolved into conceptual determinations but which has to be received as an irreducible fact. However, Rickert from the outset equals the given with the immanent sensory content of consciousness, which means that in order for these contents to become true objects of knowledge they need to be qualified by a theoretical judgment, which grants them the “form of givenness.” “What is

¹¹⁹ GA 56/57, p. 84: “Die Rechtfertigung des naiven Bewußtseins bzw. seine Erhebung auf das wissenschaftliche, kritische Niveau.”

¹²⁰ GA 56/57, p. 87: “Die Empfindung ist [...] nur das *X* der Gleichung, bekommt ihren Sinn überhaupt erst im Zusammenhang der theoretischen Objektivierung und durch diese.” Cf. GA 58, pp. 132f.

perceived” (*das Wahrgenommene*) is thus for Rickert “always already what is taken as true” (*das für wahr Genommene*).¹²¹

According to Heidegger, this denial of the pre-theoretical gives rise to the violently oscillating thought-movement of traditional transcendental philosophy. The first step consists in an *objectification* which detaches the objects from the factual context of life in which they are primarily given as significant, so that what is left is “scattered remnants from the breakdown of a world.”¹²² The second step consists in a *subjectification*. Since the remnants produced by the objectification do not exhibit any structures of significance anymore, amounting only to rudimentary sense data, the meaning-structure of the objects is accounted for by way of a return to the transcendental subject as the ultimate source of these structures. The third step is a *logification* of the experiencing subject, which transforms it into a logical-conceptual framework capable of determining the a priori structures of the objects.¹²³

It could perhaps seem that Heidegger by using two key figures of Neo-Kantianism as his primary examples would limit the range of his critique to affect only a doomed and long-forgotten philosophical species. But this, I believe, is an overhasty judgment. On the one hand, it fails to appreciate the extent to which the neo-Kantian questioning of the given anticipates and resembles the paradigmatic critique of the given later developed by philosophers such as Sellars, McDowell, Quine, Gadamer, Derrida and Rorty – and, as we shall see, by Heidegger himself. On the other hand, it underestimates the degree to which Neo-Kantianism for Heidegger functions as an example of a more general effort to ground our pre-theoretical experience which, he claims, has characterized the philosophical tradition ever since its Greek inception.

It is of course impossible to relate the long and complex history of the problem of phenomenality in Western philosophy here. Still, I think it is no exaggeration to claim that philosophy since its Greek beginning has been characterized by a strong inclination to deny and downgrade the phenomena given in our everyday pre-theoretical experience as a source of knowledge. Indeed, the philosophical tradition has to a more or less great degree been characterized by the following formal scheme: denying the

¹²¹ GA 58, p. 134.

¹²² GA 58, p. 121: “Trümmer aus dem Zusammenbruch einer Welt.”

¹²³ GA 58, pp. 131-141, 223-227.

epistemic value of our pre-theoretical experience philosophy takes on the task of discovering and elaborating a qualified theoretical method which could lead us out of our everyday imprisonment in the world of mere appearances, and allow us to establish a deeper and more secure ground with reference to which it would become possible to achieve absolute knowledge of the things themselves in their true being.¹²⁴

According to Heidegger, however, the traditional aim of philosophy to theoretically ground and justify our factual pre-theoretical experience is necessarily bound to fail. Why so? The theoretical attitude, he argues, essentially emerges as an estrangement from the pre-theoretical experience. Adopting a theoretical attitude we no longer enact our primary unified experience of the given world as significant, but rather observe things at a distance as a set of theoretical objects or sense data devoid of phenomenal meaning: “The object-being as such does not touch *me*. I am not the I that ascertains. The ascertaining as an experience is still only a rudiment of lived experience (*Er-leben*); it is a de-living (*Ent-leben*).”¹²⁵ Hence, in so far as philosophy dogmatically prioritizes the theoretical, granting unqualified authority to whatever counts as theoretical forms of knowledge and argument, it blinds itself to the pre-theoretical domain of experience where things are primarily and concretely given as meaningful:

I cannot explain these meaningful phenomena of the experience of the environmental world by destroying their essential character, by abolishing their sense, and advancing a theory. Explanation through dismemberment, i.e., destruction: one wants to explain something which one no longer has as such, which one will not and cannot recognize in its validity.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Cf. Figal 2006, pp. 145-147, for a brief account of how Plato and Aristotle already exhibit a basic tendency to interpret the phenomena encountered in everyday experience in terms of the way things for the most part merely seem to us.

¹²⁵ GA 56/57, pp. 73f.: “Das Gegenstand- oder Objektsein als solches berührt *mich* nicht. Das ich, das fest-stellt, bin *ich* gar nicht. Das Feststellen als Erlebnis ist nur noch ein Rudiment von Er-leben; es ist ein Entlebnis.”

¹²⁶ GA 56/57, p. 86: “Diese sinnhaften Phänomene der Umwelterlebnisse kann ich nicht in der Weise erklären, daß ich ihren wesentlichen Charakter zerstöre, sie in ihrem Sinne aufhebe und eine Theorie entwerfe. Erklärung durch Zerstückelung, d.h. hier Zerstörung: Man will etwas erklären, das man gar nicht mehr als solches hat und als solches gelten lassen will und kann.”

I think the central point of Heidegger's argument could be explicated as follows. In so far as philosophy sets out to seek a theoretical foundation for the significances primarily given in our pre-theoretical life philosophy, it loses sight of the very experience in which the significances are given and understandable for us. In order to understand or analyze the meanings that things have in our lives the only possible way is to look at the situations in which we experience these meanings. If, given a certain question or problem, we want to understand what "love," "knowledge," "greed," or "car" is, we need to attend to the different situations in which these phenomena manifest themselves and try to describe and explicate their meaning. If, on the contrary, we turn away from the situations in which we de facto experience such significances, and instead attempt to infer their meaning from some other source – e.g. other more fundamental concepts or principles, sense data, historical origins or perhaps neurological events in the brain – we will inevitably be examining *something else* than the significances in question. These other things may, of course, by way of likeness or contrast or supplementary information, shed light on the significances that we wanted to understand, yet in order to pursue this comparison we need, again, to turn back to the primary experiences that we had left behind. However, the trust of the argument is not that the theoretical perspective would be intrinsically illusionary or blind; rather, it contains and opens up specific possibilities of investigation and knowledge which may play an important role, e.g., in the natural sciences. It is thus only when philosophy attempts to reduce the pre-theoretical to the theoretical that the theoretical starts functioning as an illusionary false ground.

The consequence of this is, Heidegger claims, that to the extent that theoretical philosophy neglects the primary pre-theoretical givenness of significances it is bound to give rise to construction. For the most part, to be sure, theoretical philosophy is not purely theoretical in that it unwittingly tends to develop its thinking with reference to pre-theoretical experiences that it ostensibly denies. However, should philosophy realize itself as pure theory it would necessarily materialize as an endless circular construction. In order to make one single motivated conceptual move theoretical philosophy would need to rely on earlier concepts and principles that would themselves remain unaccounted for: "Precisely that

which first is to be *posited* (*gesetzt*) must be *presupposed* (*vorausgesetzt*).”¹²⁷ To establish the validity of its presupposed concepts with any logical force philosophy would, again, need to presuppose new more basic concepts, and so on ad infinitum. It is worth noting how strongly Heidegger in these early lectures courses emphasizes the concrete experiential givenness of meaning as the sole possible source of non-constructive understanding. Hence, the problem with theoretical thinking not only lies in its objectifying and distortive character but in its principal powerlessness to account for how understanding transpires at all: “If there were a *theoretical* originary science, then the circularity would be irresolvable. Knowledge would be unable to get outside of itself.”¹²⁸

However, even though I think Heidegger’s distinction between the pre-theoretical and the theoretical contains genuine insight, it is important to recognize that his articulation of the distinction in terms of a general ontological hierarchy also harbors the risk of turning it into a dogma potentially covering up and distorting the matters to which it is supposed to apply. For example: Does not Heidegger’s idea of the pre-theoretical encompass a manifold of different experiences and situations, some of which fit and some of which are not captured by his characterization of the pre-theoretical? Is it not misleading to ascribe priority to the pre-theoretical as such? Does not the primacy depend on both the questions and problems concerned and is it not the case that, given the problem-situation at hand, some pre-theoretical experiences may come up as more primary than others? And could we not say that just as it is possible to repress a pre-theoretical experience by reducing it to a theoretical it is equally possible to distort a pre-theoretical experience by interpreting it in terms of another pre-theoretical experience, which it is not? Is not Heidegger’s concept of the theoretical far too vague to capture the different sorts of theoretical thinking and reflection out there, along with their complex relationships to our pre-theoretical forms of understanding? Is there not also a reversed order of constructive grounding, such as when we offer magical explanations for the causal relationships in nature in

¹²⁷ GA 56/57, p. 95: “*Vorausgesetzt* wird gerade das, und muß *das* werden, war erst *gesetzt* werden soll.”

¹²⁸ GA 56/57, p. 96: “Gibt es aber die *theoretische* Urwissenschaft, dann ist der Zirkel unaufhebbar. Das Erkennen kommt nicht aus sich selbst heraus.”

terms of meaningful happenings dependent on quasi-divine or human purposes and actions? And so on.

Consequently, I propose that we understand Heidegger's conception of the pre-theoretical and the theoretical as an open and undetermined general paradigm or model of meaning whose range and clarificatory force is determined by its de facto capacity to shed light on particular cases. Ultimately, it seems to me that the main insight articulated by Heidegger's argument is not dependent on the distinction between the pre-theoretical and the theoretical but lies in the formal idea that to understand a matter we need to attend to the concrete experiences and situations in which it has the meaning it has for us.

To sum up Heidegger's diagnosis then: The tradition of theoretical philosophy arises out of a failure to account for the experience of factual life. As soon as the primary unity of life's experience-of-significance is destroyed, the central task of theoretical philosophy ensues: to reconstruct the lost domain of experienced phenomenal significance by grounding it at a level of logico-conceptual formation which *a priori* determines the sense of every possible experience and object, without being given as significant in these experiences themselves. Hence, it is the destiny of every theoretical philosophy to remain constructive and prejudiced in its positive claims and reductionist in its ambition to reconstruct and compensate the lost significance of life.

Heidegger's First Critique of Husserl

Towards the end of "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" Heidegger interrupts the earlier path of his lecture course to take up the central "problem of givenness."¹²⁹ Guided by this problem the final part of the course discharges a concentrated attempt to push forward and articulate the question of the sense and method of his phenomenological science of origin. In so doing, Heidegger also formulates his first critique of what he conceives as the basic theoretical bias of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

Broaching the problem of givenness Heidegger declares that in contrast to the neo-Kantian versions of transcendental philosophy

¹²⁹ GA 58, p. 127.

Husserl's phenomenology has been able to open up this problem anew, especially with regard to a possible experience of the self-world. In fact, his own explication of factual life as somehow centered in the self-world seems to come extremely close to Husserl's central figure of thought. To execute an intuitive explication of the basic structures of the primary first-person experience of the self, taken as the originary domain in which significances present themselves in correlation with specific ways of experiencing – what could this be if not a faithful repetition of Husserl's phenomenological program? It is precisely this undeniable proximity to Husserl which impels Heidegger to carry out a critical delimitation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology in a series of comments, sketchy and at the same time overburdened, thereby giving himself the opportunity to try to specify his own phenomenological science of origin in the supreme light of this closest of differences.

To the best of my knowledge, this first attempt of Heidegger's to articulate a critique of Husserl's phenomenology has received almost no attention in the secondary literature on the relation between Heidegger and Husserl.¹³⁰ Still, although Heidegger's comments on Husserl may at first seem fragmentary and disjointed, I hope to show that they indeed fashion a unified and distinct critique of the theoretical tendency of Husserl's phenomenology.¹³¹ But what about the systematic interest of this

¹³⁰ In fact, none of the major studies of Heidegger's critical relationship to Husserl's phenomenology – e.g. Crowell 2001; Dahlstrom 2001; von Herrmann 2000; Overgaard 2004 – contain any explication of this early Freiburg critique. It is perhaps symptomatic of the situation that in a recent article, "Heidegger's Early Critique of Husserl," Søren Overgaard points out that it is a common feature of many commentaries on the relation between Husserl and Heidegger that they neglect "Heidegger's first formulations of his critique of Husserl, as found in the lecture courses *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)* and *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, respectively from 1923 and 1923-4" (2003, p. 158). However, even though it is true that these courses are also often neglected they do not strictly speaking constitute Heidegger's first formulation of his critique of Husserl, which is rather to be found in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* from 1919-20.

¹³¹ In volume 58 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* the final part of *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* is rendered in two versions. The first version is a reconstruction based on Heidegger's own manuscripts, such that the available papers and fragments have been arranged according to the chronological order of the lectures as testified by student notes. The second version consists of Oskar Becker's – Heidegger's student at the time – transcript of the course. Since the majority of Heidegger's comments on Husserl are found in Becker's transcription the reliability of my interpretation is to some extent dependent on the reliability of this transcription. Nevertheless, it seems to

critique? What might this early attempt have to offer that does not receive a sharper and more elaborate articulation in Heidegger's major confrontations with Husserl in the Marburg lecture courses "Introduction to Phenomenological Research" (1923-24)¹³² and "History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena" (1925),¹³³ or in the late essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (1964)?¹³⁴ This, I believe: Since Heidegger's approach is not yet determined by his later question of being and his conception of the historical as-structure of understanding, his critique still essentially unfolds as an inner critical elaboration of Husserl's reflective-intuitive method of investigation. From this perspective he is able to offer an original criticism of how Husserl's phenomenological reduction is rooted in the paradigm of distanced theoretical observation, so that it is drawn into the ambivalent effort to ground the significances of the world in the act-structures of transcendental subjectivity.

Given the framework of this thesis, the main purpose of explicating Heidegger's critique of Husserl is to present the former's view of the latter as the backdrop in relation to which Heidegger develops his own thought – regardless of the truth and accuracy of this critique. Still, it seems to me that in order to clarify the philosophical sense of Heidegger's critique it is also motivated to try to assess, with some independence, the systematic force of his criticisms. As pointed out above, however, the Husserl presented in this thesis is of necessity an abridged one: a Husserl made up of his main published attempts to articulate his program of transcendental phenomenology. Hence, although I think my presentation indeed captures basic tendencies in Husserl's phenomenology it is also clear that the view here ascribed to Husserl is to some extent – the magnitude of which remains open for the reader to judge – specified, modified and even superseded in his widespread concrete work of phenomenological description and analysis.

me that this transcription provides a trustworthy enough basis for an explication of Heidegger's critique of Husserl. In this, it is possible for the reader to determine the source of the quotes by looking at pages numbers given in the footnotes. Heidegger's manuscript version is found on pp. 131-168 while the transcript of Oskar Becker is found on pp. 223-263 in GA 58.

¹³² "Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung," GA 17.

¹³³ "Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs," GA 20 (henceforth referred to as "Prolegomena" in the main text).

¹³⁴ "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens," in GA 14.

Heidegger's basic assessment is that Husserl, despite the revolutionary potential of his call to return to the given, was never able to radically question the basic theoretical self-understanding of traditional philosophy, and so remained captivated by the task of providing a theoretical ground for our otherwise naive pre-theoretical experience. In Husserl's case, however, the theoretical attitude does not take the form of a rejection of the given in favor of theoretico-dialectical construction but is instead manifest in the way he articulates the task and method of his phenomenology. Heidegger's critique focuses on two main aspects of Husserl's thought: first, on his alleged tendency to construe the phenomenological reduction as an attempt to ground pre-theoretical life through a reflection on the basic structures of transcendental subjectivity; second, on the alleged theoretical bias of his basic notions of intuitive reflection and description. Since I find the first-mentioned criticism more original and philosophically interesting I will begin by dealing with it at some length before turning to the second critique.

According to Heidegger, it is only on the basis of a "prior taking of a transcendental standpoint" that the phenomenological reduction may suggest itself as the necessary methodical maneuver of phenomenology at all. Designed to open up the very sphere of relevant transcendental phenomenality, the reduction cannot of itself account for its philosophical motivation and purpose: "*Phenomenological reduction*: after its accomplishment [...] the true problem would only first arise: *what now?*"¹³⁵ Husserl's failure to question the guiding problem of philosophy arguably goes hand in hand with his inability to account for the phenomenality of our primary pre-theoretical experience. Misinterpreting this primal givenness in terms of the object-directed experience of the natural attitude, Heidegger claims, Husserl is led to construe the task of his phenomenology as a reflection on the basic structures of transcendental subjectivity constructively grounding our otherwise naive natural experience.

How is this accusation to be understood and judged?

Heidegger's critical comments are centered on Husserl's failure to account for the primacy of factual life. Hence, he claims that Husserl's

¹³⁵ GA 58, p. 151: "*Phänomenologische Reduktion*: nach ihrem Vollzug, sondern man ihn überhaupt für notwendig hält (was nur auf transzendentaler Vorstandpunktnahme der Fall ist), entstünde erst das eigentliche Problem: *was nun?*"

insensitivity to our primary experience of significance already determines his decisive analysis of the natural attitude as an objectifying mode of experience in which objects have been detached from their original context of experience and appear isolated as the limited phenomenal range of naive life: “It is said: in the ‘natural attitude,’ I do not reach experiences. Only in the acts of reflection on my experience do I direct myself towards my experiences.”¹³⁶ Since in our natural experience we are supposedly directed exclusively towards intentional objects, it seems that we need to take a reflective stance in order to behold the experiences themselves as the total domain of givenness in which the full sense-structure of the objects may present itself at all. In so doing, however, the reduction is bound to repeat the subjectifying thought-movement typical of transcendental philosophy:

One must observe [...] all the contents of intuition and comprehension, all the *presentative contents* (*darstellenden Gehalte*); these are governed by specific *forms* of comprehension [...] Now, if the idea of constitution of objectivities through contents is transferred to *all* sciences, then a noetic-noematic content goes along, which one may observe *reflectively*; in a certain sense in the direction of “subjectification” as opposed to that of “objectification.” This outlook is provided by “*transcendental phenomenology*.”¹³⁷

Yet how should this subjectification be understood? As noted above, Husserl’s reduction does not amount to a reflection on our inner experiences in contrast to our natural perception of the world itself. Nor is this Heidegger’s claim. The central argument of the dense passage cited above should rather be articulated as follows. Because Husserl is unable to account for our primary experience of significance, he is forced to refer the rudimentary objectified content of the natural attitude back to those

¹³⁶ GA 58, p. 251: “Man sagt [d.i. Husserl]: in der ‘natürlichen Einstellung’ komme ich nie zu Erlebnissen. Erst in dem Akte der Reflexion auf mein Erleben richt ich mich auf meine Erlebnisse.”

¹³⁷ GA 58, pp. 229f.: “Man muß [...] alle *darstellenden Gehalte* betrachten; diese sind von bestimmten *Auffassungsformen* durchherrscht [...]. Überträgt man nun die Idee der Konstitution von Objektivitäten durch Gehalte auf *alle* Wissenschaften, – so geht ein noetisch-noematischer Gehalt mit, den man *reflexiv* betrachten kann; gewissermaßen in der Richtung der ‘Subjektivierung’ im Gegensatz zu der der ‘Objektivierung’. Diese Betrachtungsweise liefert die ‘*transzendente Phänomenologie*’.”

structures of experience in which the objects appear. The reflective turn to the experiential structures of the naturally perceived world thus acquires all its transcendental force from the assumption that these structures somehow “govern” (*durchherrschen*) the sense of the objects experienced, in such a way that the full *noematic* sense of the objects only becomes accessible through a reflective investigation of the correlative *noetic* act-structures without being discernible in the objects themselves such as they appear in our immediate naive experience. According to Heidegger, Husserl’s reduction would essentially involve a phenomenologically unsubstantiated inference of the full sense of the objects experienced in the natural attitude from the acts of experience in which these objects occur.

To clarify the import of Heidegger’s critique a little, we need to move beyond the scope of his sparse remarks. To begin with, it is important to note that Husserl is aware of, and in fact anticipates, exactly the kind of criticism here put forward by Heidegger. In his *Ideas I* Husserl insists that the “noematic characters” of the object may not be understood as mere “determinations of reflection” (*Reflexionsbestimmtheiten*), i.e., as “determinations which are ascribed to the intentional objects on account of these objects being referred back to the modes of consciousness in which they are precisely objects of consciousness.”¹³⁸ Far from it. We can, Husserl claims, only grasp “what concerns the correlate as such through the glance being turned directly on the correlate itself.”¹³⁹

However, Husserl’s clear insight on this particular point does not really do away with the problems; rather it points forward towards a fundamental ambivalence that seems to characterize the transcendental reduction as a whole, and which is linked to the question concerning its phenomenal purity and surplus in relation to the natural attitude. In short: if it is the case that the noematic sense of the object can only present itself to an immediate, straightforward experience of this object, then it becomes unclear *in what precise way* a reflective investigation may complement the inherent potential of the natural attitude to see and

¹³⁸ Hua III, p. 246: “Bestimmtheiten, welche den intentionalen Objekten dadurch zuwachsen, daß diese auf die Bewußtseinsweisen zurückbezogen werden, in denen sie eben Bewußtseinsobjekte sind.”

¹³⁹ Hua III, p. 246: “Wir erfassen, was eigene Sache des Korrelats ist, direkt in der Blickrichtung eben auf das Korrelat.”

describe its objects with a view to their essential structures. While Husserl seems to run the risk of deriving the full sense of the objects against his own best insights from the experiences in which they occur, to the extent that he denies the viability of such a maneuver, he seems to be jeopardizing the basic transcendental claim of his phenomenology.

At one point, Heidegger makes the suggestion that Husserl's characterization of the phenomenological reduction as a reflective suspension of the original direction of our natural experience is conditioned by the fact that Husserl "regards all experiences as intentional beforehand, and, what's more, starts out from object-comprehending experiences (e.g., perceptions)."¹⁴⁰ Even though Heidegger does not develop this any further on this occasion, it seems to indicate a productive line of questioning.

Why? Because, what at the end of the day makes it possible for Husserl to describe the phenomenological reduction as a shift from our natural enactment of the intentional acts straight at their objects to a reflection on the acts themselves in their full phenomenal range – from the what to the what-cum-how – is that he takes his starting point in an experiential paradigm in which these correlata have been detached from each other in a peculiar way. As Husserl himself has shown so well, it is indeed a distinctive feature of our sense perceptions of relatively insignificant objects that the objects so experienced primarily present themselves as to an exceptionally high degree cut off from, and essentially capable of preserving their self-identity through our manifold acts of different perspectival perceptions. To invoke a contrast, it would obviously be awkward to maintain that, in riding a bicycle or listening to a concert, we are *only* directed towards the objects in question to the exclusion of the experiential modes in which they appear: our practical coping and interests, our moods and fantasies. It is, then, by way of a violent generalization of the paradigmatic experience of object-perception that Husserl is able to advance his description of the natural attitude as exclusively directed towards the intended object: "When we engage straightforwardly in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the present

¹⁴⁰ GA 58, p. 254: "Man kann die phänomenologische Reduktion nur dann so charakterisieren, wenn man von vornherein die Erlebnisse sämtlich als *intentionale* ansieht und außerdem noch von dingerfassenden Erlebnissen (z.B. Wahrnehmungen) ausgeht."

things, thoughts, values, goals, means; but not on the psychic experiencing itself, in which these things are recognized as such. Only reflection reveals this to us.”¹⁴¹ In consequence, the phenomenological reduction takes on the character of a complementary reflective extension of the narrow object-directedness of the natural attitude, which first allows the phenomenologist to *see* the noematic objects *together* with the noetic acts in which they essentially appear.

It is precisely this scheme, which also organizes Husserl’s general phenomenological program of transcendental constitution. As Husserl articulates it in his *Paris Lectures* of 1929, the central methodological procedure of constitutional research consists in taking the objectual types and ontologies available in the natural attitude as transcendental “guidelines,” in order to investigate, then, by way of reflective analysis, the “systematic totality of real and possible conscious experiences, which are prescribed in my ego as relatable to it [the object].”¹⁴² However, even though Husserl stresses that the constitutional analysis must take its guiding clues from the object-types whose correlative act-types it wants to examine, this very procedure presupposes a separation and hierarchization of the correlata. It assumes, first, that the object-types can be accessed as clues on the basis of the natural attitude; second, that it is possible to carry out a largely separable analysis of the act-systems of transcendental subjectivity as the hidden basic dimension constituting the givenness and being-senses of the objects.

His inability to account for the unity of our primary experience-of-significance compels Husserl to describe the reduction as a reflective complementation of our natural experience, which first allows us to survey the phenomenal field in its pure noetic-noematic totality. Yet to the extent that the reflective turn from the experienced object to its experiencedness as a whole is conditioned by a prior destruction of the originary unity of

¹⁴¹ Hua IX, p. 279: “So, geradehin uns bewußt betätigend, sind in unserem Blick ausschließlich die jeweiligen Sachen, Gedanken, Werte, Ziele, Hilfsmittel, nicht aber das psychische Erleben selbst, in dem sie als solche uns bewußt sind. Erst die Reflexion macht es offenbar.”

¹⁴² Hua I, p. 24: “Phänomenologische Konstitution eines Gegenstandes, das besagt: Betrachtung der Universalität des ego unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Identität dieses Gegenstandes, nämlich in der Frage nach der systematischen Allheit von wirklichen und möglichen Bewußtseinserebnissen, die als auf ihn beziehbare in meinem ego vorgezeichnet sind und für mein ego eine feste Regel möglicher Synthesen bedeuten.”

these correlata, the projected reflective restoration will not be able to avoid exhibiting some degree of constructive grounding. As Heidegger writes: “ontology and the research into consciousness ‘correlative’ to it, do not form a true unity.”¹⁴³ The reflective constitutional analysis will of necessity attempt to bind the intentional correlata, which the elementary analysis of intentionality has always already permitted to slide apart.

The result of this is that Husserl’s phenomenological analyses are destined always to grant either too much or too little to the object to be constituted: *too much* in so far as the reflective analysis of the intentional experiences correlative to a certain objectivity threatens to become constructive in relation to the objectual phenomenality of our natural experience, by claiming to supply the full sense of the natural phenomenality without this sense manifesting itself in this phenomenality itself; *too little* in so far as Husserl’s phenomenological analyses risk amounting to no more than general descriptions of various structures of consciousness without sufficient transcendental force to determine the primary sense of the correlative objects of experience. The first of these tendencies seems to be decisive for, e.g., Husserl’s formal-ontological effort to provide a constitutive analysis of the noetic-noematic structures, which a priori determine the basic sense of what it means to be an object at all. The second tendency makes itself felt in many of Husserl’s analyses of consciousness (such as perception and time-consciousness), in so far as the analytical focus is placed on a background dimension of perceptual operations which necessarily accompany and structure different kinds of conscious acts without however possessing the transcendental authority required to constitute the basic sense-structure of our primary experiences of e.g. cars, friends, and concerts.

But these are limit cases. In general, Husserl’s description of the phenomenological reduction as a complementary shift from the *what* to the *what-cum-how* of intentionality, puts itself to work as a deep and unyielding ambivalence which cuts across every central concept in the Husserlian corpus, and lets every phenomenological analysis, however pertinent, float out in a fundamental ambiguity concerning its transcendental status. Although Husserl’s groundbreaking analysis of the

¹⁴³ GA 58, p. 240: “Die Ontologie und die ihr ‘koorelative’ Bewußtseinsforschung bilden keine wahre Einheit.”

intentionality of consciousness dissolves the traditional question concerning the relation between mind and world and firmly anchors the sense of the world in the experiences in which it appears, he is never able to achieve a clear conception of the intentional correlation itself.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the ambivalence characterized above already seems to haunt Husserl's concept of the intentional correlation itself: whereas the notion of the correlation, taken seriously, prescribes that all phenomenological descriptions must unfold as descriptions of particular unified experiences in which the correlative aspects remain to be specified, the correlation itself is determined as a universal feature of transcendental subjectivity.

Here we have exceeded the limits of Heidegger's analysis, however. For him, the verdict is clear: Husserl's phenomenological reduction replicates the guiding effort of traditional transcendental philosophy to provide a theoretical foundation for factual life; this time, however, in the peculiar form of a reflective return from the limited – and therefore prejudice-generating – phenomenality of the natural attitude, to the pure and full phenomenality of consciousness, which is supposed to grant our natural phenomenality its ultimate sense-structure without this sense being accessible in this phenomenality itself. Should the reduction not amount to a constructive grounding of factual life, it would have to be possible to show that the sense-structures exhibited by the transcendental experience of pure consciousness already manifest themselves in our primary factual experience as its very own sense. If this could not be shown, the reduction would emerge as a theoretical construct; if it could be shown, however, the reduction would not be needed at all. Hence, the phenomenological reduction would be able to avoid constructive grounding to the precise extent that it would be superfluous.

Heidegger's second line of critique first surfaces in "The Idea of Philosophy" when he considers two criticisms voiced by Paul Natorp concerning Husserl's notion that phenomenology essentially proceeds through intuitive reflection and description. Against this Natorp objects: First, in reflectively observing our pre-theoretical experience we make the experience into an object of theoretical observation. Hence, as Natorp puts it, we "still and interrupt the continuous stream of becoming," so that we "detach [the finding] from the experienced, from the subjective" and

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Figal 2006, pp. 149ff., for a similar critique of Husserl.

“make it into an object.”¹⁴⁵ Second, in describing the experience we necessarily make use of generalizing and subsuming concepts, which transform the factual temporal movement of pre-theoretical life into examples of general and universal concepts and categories.¹⁴⁶

Now, at least on the face of it, it seems that Heidegger to some extent accepts Natorp’s criticisms. Noting that Husserl himself has not yet responded to Natorp’s objections he writes: “In the reflective turn of our gaze we make something which was previously unobserved, something simply unreflectively experienced, into something ‘*observed*’. We look at it. In reflection it stands there before us, we are directed towards it and make it into an object in general.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, he goes as far as to suggest that already our grasping the experiences as “given” involves a “theoretical reflection on it.”¹⁴⁸ However, despite the seeming agreement with Natorp’s critique, Heidegger dismisses Natorp’s own attempt to account for our subjective experience by way of an indirect theoretical reconstruction, claiming that Natorp’s objections have not “exhausted all possibilities.”¹⁴⁹ For Heidegger, then, Natorp’s critique is no reason to give up the phenomenological pursuit of the given, but rather presents us with the challenge of investigating and conceptualizing our pre-theoretical experience without objectifying it.¹⁵⁰

Still, how exactly does Heidegger think Natorp’s criticisms affect Husserl’s phenomenology and what is his own response to them? As soon as one tries to pinpoint the philosophical content of the critique as

¹⁴⁵ Natorp 1912, pp. 102f.: “bliebe man nicht dennoch immer genötigt, [den Befund] irgendwie abzugrenzen, ihn aus dem ganzen Geflecht des Erlebens irgendwie, und wäre es bloß mit dem Finger zeigend, mit den Augen winkend, herauszuheben, also den kontinuierlichen Strom des Werdens, als der alles innere Leben sich unzweifelhaft darstellt, gleichsam zu unterbrechen, künstlich für die Betrachtung stillzustellen, den Einzelbefund zu isolieren und, zum Zweck der Isolierung, zu fixieren, gleichsam zu sterilisieren, wie der Anatom sein Präparat?”

¹⁴⁶ Natorp 1912, pp. 91f., 190.

¹⁴⁷ GA 56/57, p. 100: “In der reflektiven Blickwendung machen wir ein vordem nicht erblicktes, sondern nur schlicht, reflexionslos Erlebtes zu einem ‘*erblickten*’. Wir sehen auf es hin. In der Reflexion haben wir es dastehen, sind auf es gerichtet, machen es zum Objekt, Gegenstand überhaupt.”

¹⁴⁸ GA 56/57, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ GA 56/57, p. 109. Cf. GA 56/57, pp. 107, 111.

¹⁵⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Heidegger’s response to Natorp’s criticisms and their bearing on the idea of phenomenological reflection, see Zahavi 2003b.

accepted by Heidegger it emerges that his attitude on this point is ambiguous and far from crystal clear. To begin with, it is important to note that Heidegger does not reject the notions of intuitive reflection and description as such. This becomes clear as he restates the same criticism in “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” – this time without referring to Natorp by name:

*A decisive step for phenomenology: emphasis on the originary intuition (originäre Anschauung) – evidence! – the idea of accurate description (adäquate Beschreibung). However, both intuitions (Intuitionen) – absolutely concrete in their original vitality – easily fall prey to an unnoticed degrading deformation, so that they are deprived of their true possibilities to perform. Intuition not as understanding – the problem of description as a phenomenological problem not raised at all.*¹⁵¹

What Heidegger basically claims here is that Husserl’s notions of intuition and description have been “decisive” and indeed, in their “original vitality,” point to central aspects of the phenomenological method, yet that they have not been sufficiently clarified by Husserl and thus run the risk of theoretical deformation. Hence, the task Heidegger sets himself is precisely to demonstrate what sense the notions of intuition, reflection, and description take on in his originary science of factual life, in the course of which intuitive reflection will be renamed “hermeneutic intuition” or “understanding,” and “description” will be rearticulated as “formal indication.”

But in what way are Husserl’s notions theoretically biased? In fact, taken as they stand the criticisms presented by Natorp – and echoed by Heidegger – do not suffice to articulate a sharp and penetrating critique of Husserl. As we shall see, it is only by following Heidegger’s own elaboration of his originary science that it becomes possible to determine in what precise way his phenomenological method critically differs from Husserl. This is the task of the next chapter. Here let me only reject some

¹⁵¹ GA 58, p. 146: “Ein entscheidender Schritt der Phänomenologie: Betonung der originären Anschauung – Evidenz! – Idee der adäquaten Beschreibung. Aber beide Intuitionen – absolut konkret in ihrer ursprünglichen Lebendigkeit – verfallen leicht der Degradierung einer unbemerkten Deformation, so daß sie um ihre eigentlichen Leistungsmöglichkeiten gebracht sind. Anschauung nicht als *Verstehen* – Problem der Beschreibung als *phänomenologische überhaupt nicht gestellt.*”

misleading versions of the critique and provisionally indicate the problems at stake.

As concerns the first criticism – that Husserl’s concept of intuitive reflection is theoretically objectifying – we need to see that the two arguments explicitly voiced by Natorp and Heidegger to support the criticism are misguided. The first argument is that in reflecting on our pre-theoretical experience we break off and detach ourselves from the experience in order to observe it. However, even though this is true, it is hard to see why it would be a problem. Even if reflection requires that we are not totally immersed in the experience we reflect upon, this detachment in itself in no way seems to hinder us from accessing and explicating the sense of the experience in question. Indeed – as we shall see – Heidegger himself will argue that phenomenological understanding always involves such a moment of reflective disengagement. The second argument is that in reflecting on our experience we inevitably observe it as a set of objects. But neither is this argument convincing. While it is true that in reflecting on our experience it will stand before us as an object of explication – in the unproblematic sense mentioned above – there seems to be no ground for claiming that reflection is inherently reifying and conceives whatever it reflects upon as objects or entities. In fact, Husserl never tires of stressing that the phenomenological reflection explicates subjectivity as the transcendental domain of sense, which conditions every experience of objects. Moreover, on this point Heidegger would agree.

However, if I am right in suggesting that the above criticisms are philosophically weak and build on blatant misconceptions of phenomenology – both Husserl’s and Heidegger’s own – is it really plausible that Heidegger endorsed them? I think not. Rather, it seems that this would be a more convincing account of Heidegger’s stance: He ostensibly accepts the criticisms of Natorp, first for the vain rhetorical reason of casting doubt upon and outshining his teacher, yet, second, for the reason that he truly believes that the criticisms – although misguided in their present form – indirectly point to basic problems in Husserl’s phenomenology that he will attempt to overcome.

As concerns the second criticism – that phenomenological description in Husserl’s sense employs subsuming and generalizing concepts – the philosophical edge of the critique is not readily discernible. While Heidegger claims that Natorp’s criticism presupposes a narrow theoretical

conception of language, he suggests that Husserl too would have shared such a conception. But in what sense? In “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” he specifies his critique by claiming that Husserl’s idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science led him to conceive of the concepts of phenomenology on the model of theoretical “concepts of order” (*Ordnungsbegriffe*),¹⁵² i.e., general concepts which serve to determine objects and which gain their sense on account of their place in the conceptual order. By contrast, Heidegger claims that the concepts of phenomenology must be “concepts of expression” (*Ausdrucksbegriffe*), i.e., concepts that express the sense displayed by our experience. However, the point of the critique is not that Husserl would have taken over a totally unphenomenological theoretical view of concepts – which would be plainly false – but that Husserl’s basic idea that phenomenology transpires as an intuitive explication and description of essences is modeled on the paradigm of general theoretical concepts:

One thinks [...] of the correlate of the phenomenological intuition as something object-like. The “essence” (*eidos*) is thought to be divided into genera, species, individual essences, etc. This leads to the danger of equating the phenomenological intuition with the comprehension of relations of order.¹⁵³

What Heidegger suggests is that Husserl dogmatically presupposes that the structures of sense articulated by phenomenology basically have the character of general essences determined by their necessary defining features. This raises the critical questions: Is it not a dogmatic presupposition on Husserl’s part that our experiences exhibit general essences, which it is possible for us to detect and conceptualize? Given that the phenomenological description always proceeds as a description of particular factual experiences and situations – how can we ever claim that we have come upon general and universal essences without yielding to theoretical prejudice and construction?

¹⁵² GA 58, p. 238.

¹⁵³ GA 58, p. 237: “Man denkt sich [...] das Korrelat der phänomenologischen Anschauung als etwas Objektartiges. Das ‘Wesen’ (*εἶδος*) denkt man sich gegliedert in Gattungswesen, Artwesen, individuelle Wesen etc. Das führt zu der Gefahr der Gleichsetzung der phänomeologischen Anschauung mit dem Erfassen von Ordnungsbeziehungen.” Cf. also GA 58, pp. 240f.

In the next chapter, as we follow Heidegger's own attempt to develop phenomenology as a science of factual life, it will become clearer on which points he critically develops Husserl's notions of intuitive reflection and description. Anticipating this explication I want to indicate the three main points of critique: 1. By insisting that the phenomenological understanding be guided by a "love" or "sympathy" for life, Heidegger will try to account for the sensibility which allows us to access and understand what is important and meaningful in our experience, something that no pure intuition seems able to do. 2. By accentuating the way in which understanding must "go along with" the primary unitary movement of our pre-theoretical experience, he will try to rearticulate the reflective moment of phenomenology as a pure shift to explicating the sense-structure of experience, and so avoid Husserl's tendency to conceive of reflection as a subjectifying turn to transcendental subjectivity as the basic constitutive dimension of experience. 3. By rethinking the concepts of phenomenology as "formal indications", he will try to account for the way in which the general descriptions of phenomenology remain anchored in and referred to the particular situations of factual life, and so avoid the essentialism which he believes haunts Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a science of essences.

1.4 Heidegger's Phenomenology of Factual Life

The driving ambition of Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses is, as we have seen, to critically elaborate Husserl's phenomenological imperative into an originary science of factual life. But how is this non-theoretical phenomenological science of life to be effected? What kind of origin can it hope to find and articulate?

The purpose of the following chapter is to explicate Heidegger's response to these questions. As a background for my explication, I will begin by sketching what I suggest to be the two main competing interpretations of Heidegger's conception of the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology in his early lectures. After that I go on to investigate, first, Heidegger's *phenomenology* of factual life, i.e. his methodical way of explicating the origin of life, and, second, his conception of the basic structure of factual life, i.e., the structure of the primary domain of *phenomenality* or givenness.

Two Interpretations

Since the publication of Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses was completed in the first half of the 1990s, the inspection and discussion of this textual territory has been intense. As regards the theme of phenomenality/phenomenology – which has been at the center of the discussion – the debate has been dominated by two almost diametrically opposing lines of interpretation: the transcendental phenomenological interpretation versus the hermeneutic-deconstructivist interpretation.

Let me now attempt to account for these interpretations in some more detail by depicting the arguments of some of their main defenders. I will let John van Buren and Theodore Kisiel, the foremost chroniclers of Heidegger's early work, represent the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation, and let Steven Crowell, whose book *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning* provides the most elaborated transcendental phenomenological reading of Heidegger's early lectures, represent that reading.

In his massive study, *The Young Heidegger* van Buren tells the following story: in his early Freiburg lectures courses Heidegger accomplishes his decisive breakthrough to his life-long topic, which is not being, but rather the “differentiated temporal giving of being in factual life.”¹⁵⁴ However, during the mid 1920s this promising beginning gets curbed and diluted as Heidegger gives way to the influence of the “transcendental thought of Husserl and Kant,” which results in the “plodding scientific treatise called *Sein und Zeit*.”¹⁵⁵ As Heidegger then, in the middle of the 1930s, radicalizes his questioning of the basic historical happening of being, which he from now on calls the “event” (*Ereignis*), this famous turn in his thinking should, van Buren claims, essentially be understood as “a return to and creative reinscription of his youthful thought.”¹⁵⁶

In his book, van Buren continuously highlights Heidegger's criticism of the traditional metaphysical effort to found our factual historical life-experience by determining the basic features of being through an immediate theoretical intuition. According to van Buren, Heidegger

¹⁵⁴ van Buren 1994a, p. 239.

¹⁵⁵ van Buren 1994a, p. 136.

¹⁵⁶ van Buren 1994a, p. 137.

essentially considered Husserl to be an exemplary representative of modern “ego-metaphysics.”¹⁵⁷ Although Husserl’s concept of the categorial intuition paved the way for Heidegger’s question concerning the historical givenness of being, Husserl remained a prisoner to the metaphysical hope of accessing and describing “a universal, transtemporal, eidetic kingdom of transcendental subjectivity.”¹⁵⁸ Far from taking over Husserl’s central method of intuitive reflection on the transcendental structures of subjectivity, Heidegger, according to van Buren, carries out a “hermeneutical intuition” which “interpretatively explicates the factual preconception of being that belongs to factual life.”¹⁵⁹ Hence, the fact that Heidegger still calls his thinking phenomenological does not imply any reliance whatsoever on a reflective intuition, but only signifies that he studies “being as it *appears* historically.”¹⁶⁰ Ultimately, van Buren claims, Heidegger’s hermeneutic explication of our prior unthematic historical pre-understanding leads him back to the origin of all such understanding, which is “the anarchic temporalizing of being out of an original concealment and impropriety.”¹⁶¹ This groundless origin of being essentially withdraws from all seeing and determination, and only intimates itself in and through the differentiated manifold of finite historical epochs and worlds that it produces as its effect. The infinite task of Heideggerian post-metaphysical philosophy would, according to van Buren, consist in tracing and formally indicating, again and again, out of ever new historical situations, the groundless event of being, thus opening up the possibility of a relativist “ecumenical” ethics affirming and answering to the differentiation of being into a manifold of finite equivalent worlds.

Like van Buren, Theodore Kisiel in his vast chronicle *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* maintains that Heidegger’s main theme is the self-withdrawing source of temporal-historical being: “the primary but mystical ‘something’”¹⁶² which “contextualizes (*Es weltet*) and temporalizes (*Es ereignet sich*) each of us.”¹⁶³ According to Kisiel, Heidegger’s first post-war lecture course, “The Idea of Philosophy,” constitutes a breakthrough in

¹⁵⁷ van Buren 1994a, p. 203.

¹⁵⁸ van Buren 1994a, p. 203.

¹⁵⁹ van Buren 1994a, p. 211; cf. also p. 216.

¹⁶⁰ van Buren 1994a, p. 245.

¹⁶¹ van Buren 1994a, p. 39.

¹⁶² Kisiel 1993, p. 24.

¹⁶³ Kisiel 1993, p. 9.

that Heidegger here comes up with an answer to the critical questions – posed by Natorp – of how it is possible to access and articulate the pre-theoretical and seemingly ineffable something that grants being. To begin with, Kisiel claims that Heidegger in the place of Husserl's objectifying intuitive reflection makes use of a “non-intuitive form of access which hermeneutics calls understanding, a certain familiarity which life already has of itself and which phenomenology needs only to repeat. This spontaneous experience of experience, this streaming return of experiencing life upon already experienced life, is the immanent historicity of life.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Heidegger is said to articulate the findings of this hermeneutic understanding, which goes along with and repeats the historical self-understanding of factual life, with the aid of “formal indications” which “at once retrieve and forerun life's course without intrusion.”¹⁶⁵

In contrast to both van Buren and Kisiel Steven, Crowell defends the view that Heidegger's early thinking essentially unfolds within the horizon of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Though conceding that Heidegger's philosophy contains “two voices,”¹⁶⁶ one of which succumbs to the anti-philosophical temptation of trying to appropriate being as an “ultimately mystical ‘sending’,”¹⁶⁷ Crowell insists that the “philosophical relevance” of Heidegger's thinking “depends largely on our being able to recollect the Husserlian infrastructure of his work and to carry out new constitutional analyses within the framework Heidegger provides.”¹⁶⁸ According to Crowell, Heidegger's idea of phenomenology as an originary science is nothing but an elaboration of Husserl's effort to investigate the transcendental conditions and sense-structures of our experience. This, Crowell writes, can only be achieved by way of intuitive reflection: while we are normally oriented “towards entities *through* meaning,” the reflection allows us to focus on “meaning (being) *as* meaning” without reifying it into a new set of entities.¹⁶⁹ If we sacrifice the reflective method, we lose our only way of rigorously accounting for the space of meaning and end up, like van Buren and Kisiel, constructing it as a product of a mystical

¹⁶⁴ Kisiel 1993, p. 48. Cf. also p. 55.

¹⁶⁵ Kisiel 1993, p. 376.

¹⁶⁶ Crowell 2001, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ Crowell 2001, p. 7.

¹⁶⁸ Crowell 2001, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Crowell 2001, p. 146.

metaphysical happening. Though Heidegger disapproves of Husserl's concept of reflection and does not make use of this term, Crowell argues that Heidegger's own method contains a decisive "moment of reflection": "The method of formal indication [...] is an explicitly cognitive-illuminative self-recollection (reflection)" which moves along with life explicating its structures of meaning.¹⁷⁰ According to Crowell, Heidegger's critical elaboration of Husserl's phenomenology involves two basic aspects: "Heidegger's achievement would thus consist in his systematic effort to respect the difference between straightforward (positive) and reflective (critical) inquiries – the difference between entities and the meaning of entities – while simultaneously doing justice to the demand that philosophy demonstrate the grounds of its own possibility as an inquiry into meaning."¹⁷¹ That is, first, Heidegger gives up Husserl's concept of reflection because it threatens to objectify the space of meaning and lead it back to transcendental subjectivity as a constitutive ground;¹⁷² second, he radicalizes the question of the concrete existential possibilities of the human being to get access to meaning as meaning. However, these criticisms of Husserl should not be taken as a rejection of transcendental phenomenology but rather as an effort to accomplish this project more clearly and unambiguously.¹⁷³

To sum up then: whereas van Buren and Kisiel both claim that Heidegger in his early lecture courses rejects Husserlian phenomenology in favor of a hermeneutic explication of the historical self-understanding of life in order to indicate its groundless self-withdrawing origin, Crowell argues that his originary science is basically a faithful elaboration of Husserl's attempt to investigate, by way of intuitive reflection, the necessary transcendental structures of our experience.

There is, I think, no doubt that both the interpretations related above contain truth and highlight existing aspects or tendencies in Heidegger's

¹⁷⁰ Crowell 2001, p. 127.

¹⁷¹ Crowell 2001, p. 5.

¹⁷² Cf. Crowell 2001, p. 130.

¹⁷³ In Zahavi 2003b Dan Zahavi provides an interpretation of Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses which is very much akin to Crowell's. Thus Zahavi maintains, first, that Heidegger does not give up Husserl's reflective method but elaborates it in the direction of a "non-objectifying and merely accentuating type" of reflection (p. 170); second, that Heidegger's goal is to examine the "transcendental structures of life" (p. 160) that we "normally live through but fail to notice due to our absorption in the surrounding world" (p. 170).

early philosophy and that these seem to stand in a strained relationship to each other. Yet what should we do about this tension? Should we, as Crowell suggests, acknowledge the existence of two conflicting voices in Heidegger, and opt for what we consider to be the philosophically stronger alternative: “the best lesson to draw.”¹⁷⁴ Certainly, at the end of the day the philosophical aim of these investigations is to critically appropriate whatever is clarifying or true in Heidegger and discard the rest. However, the only way to this goal goes through a clarification of what is at stake in his thinking, giving rise to the above interpretations. If we simply chose between the alternatives above we dogmatically presuppose that Heidegger’s project can be reduced to an inconsistent vacillation between the two standard philosophical standpoints that it is intended to leave behind: rigorous scientific philosophy versus worldview philosophy. Hence, in order to clarify and delimit the truth of the two interpretations we need to examine more closely the precise sense of the above tension in Heidegger’s concrete effort to realize an originary science of life.

Phenomenology and History

For Heidegger the question of the relationship between phenomenology and history is from the outset an explicit and central theme.

During the preceding decades the dichotomy between systematic philosophy and historicism had surfaced as an acute philosophical problem in the philosophical debate, where prominent philosophers such as Rickert¹⁷⁵ and Husserl had stood up and defended the systematic ambition of philosophy to attain true and universal knowledge against the threat of “historicism,” a term largely constructed by the defenders of systematic philosophy to designate the perceived contemporary inclination to relativize the epistemic knowledge-claims of philosophy or reduce the systematic investigations of philosophy to historical surveys of existent philosophical standpoints. In his *Logos* essay from 1911, Husserl thus famously argues that philosophy must reject historicism and worldview philosophy in order to accomplish its calling as a rigorous science, and

¹⁷⁴ Crowell 2001, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Rickert 1907.

that this can only be done by means of phenomenology, i.e., by means of a direct intuition of the essential structures characterizing our experience of the world.¹⁷⁶

Whereas Heidegger emphatically embraces Husserl's phenomenological demand to abide by the given, he does not follow Husserl in opposing the systematic ambition of phenomenology to historicism. Instead, he proclaims that the very distinction between systematics and history is misleading and needs to be overcome. Here is how he puts it in the lecture course "Phenomenology and Transcendental Philosophy of Value" from the summer of 1919: "For our purposes, however, it suffices to refer to the close connection between historical and 'systematic' examination – both are to be overcome!"¹⁷⁷ By this, however, Heidegger in no way means to collapse the distinction between philosophical investigations directed at problems or matters themselves and historical investigations only concerned with detecting and mapping historical standpoints. His central claim is rather that the systematic investigations of phenomenology are themselves intrinsically historical: "*Phenomenology and historical method*; their absolute unity in the purity of the understanding of life in and for itself."¹⁷⁸ Or, to quote "Basic Problems of Phenomenology": "*History* is the true *organon of the understanding of life*."¹⁷⁹ Ultimately, Heidegger suggests that the historical character of phenomenological understanding is constituted by the fact that "life in and for itself" is "historical [...] in an absolute sense."¹⁸⁰

Yet how should we understand the philosophical implications of the idea that the phenomenological understanding deployed by the originary science is essentially a historical understanding? So far, the idea is no more than a programmatic declaration, a declaration which opens up a set of questions. At least on the face of it, the proposed unity of

¹⁷⁶ For a concise and illuminating account of how the dichotomy of history and systematics surfaces and is played out in Dilthey, Rickert, and Husserl, thus setting the stage for Heidegger's early thinking, see Ruin 1994, pp. 37-42.

¹⁷⁷ "Phänomenologie und Transzendente Wertphilosophie," in GA 56/57, p. 132: "Für unsere Zwecke genügt aber der Hinweis auf einen engen Zusammenhang zwischen geschichtlicher und 'systematischer' Betrachtung: beide sind aufzuheben!"

¹⁷⁸ GA 56/57, p. 125: "*Phänomenologie und historische Methode*; ihre absolute Einheit in der Reinheit des Verstehens des Lebens an und für sich."

¹⁷⁹ GA 58, p. 256: "Das eigentliche *Organon des Lebensverstehens* ist die *Geschichte*." Cf. also GA 58, p. 252.

¹⁸⁰ GA 56/57, p. 21.

phenomenological and historical thinking emerges as a deep and challenging tension between, on the one hand, Heidegger's guiding belief in intuitive givenness as the ultimate measure of understanding which transcends theoretical and historical prejudices, and, on the other hand, his proclamation that this intuitive access is itself in some sense rooted in and mediated by history. Will Heidegger be able to overcome the tension by elaborating a radically hermeneutic thinking, without losing every possibility of accounting for the difference between truth and prejudice? Or will the tension in the end haunt his thinking as an uncontrolled ambivalence? Or something else?

In fact, Heidegger's proclamation of a radical historicization of the intuitive method of phenomenology opens up the basic problematic which his thinking of phenomenality will henceforth try to address in different ways. Let us now turn to examining how this problematic is played out in his early lectures.

Heidegger's Pre-Theoretical Phenomenology

Heidegger's challenge is to show how an originary science of factual life is possible. Such a science, he claims, must in some sense be "pre-theoretical" or "over-theoretical":¹⁸¹ it must avoid the traditional tendency to theoretically deny, objectify and ground life, and instead, prior to any theory, go along with life in its primary pre-theoretical givenness in order to articulate its originary structure and sense.

In "The Idea of Philosophy" Heidegger confronts the question concerning the methodical character of the science of origin through a reinterpretation of Husserl's "principle of all principle," i.e., his basic articulation of the phenomenological demand to purely receive and describe "everything that originally offers itself in the intuition."¹⁸² According to Heidegger, the very name of the principle – the *principle* of all principles – indicates that it cannot be understood as a theoretical principle among others, but rather needs to be conceived as the "originary habitus" (*Urbaitus*) of phenomenology, which precedes all such principles. Hence, he writes:

¹⁸¹ GA 56/57, p. 96.

¹⁸² Hua III, p. 51: "alles, was sich uns in der 'Intuition' originär [...] darbietet."

It is the originary intention of genuine life, the originary attitude of experience and life as such, the absolute *sympathy with life* that is identical with the experience. [...] The “*rigor*” of the scientificity awakened in phenomenology gains its originary sense from this basic attitude and is incomparable with the “*rigor*” of derivative non-originary sciences.¹⁸³

In the next winter Heidegger rearticulates the same theme by stating that the basic attitude of philosophy consists in “*erōs*” or a “love of life and wisdom”:¹⁸⁴ “*Erōs* is not only a motivational basis for philosophy; the philosophical pursuit itself requires that one lets oneself loose into the ultimate tendencies of life and returns to its ultimate motives.”¹⁸⁵ What happens here?

Whereas Husserl’s “principle of all principles” strictly speaking focuses exclusively on the epistemic rigor of seeing as such – on the necessity of strictly seeing what is given and abide by the given – Heidegger inscribes a certain “love” or “sympathy” into the core of the phenomenological attitude itself, effecting both the motivation and method of philosophy. Although he does not specify what he means by “love” and “sympathy,” the basic thrust of his move is clear enough.

To begin with, the idea that the motivation of philosophy must be sought in a love of life suggests that the philosophical problems we encounter are not purely intellectual problems that can be clarified or answered by way of strict seeing and thinking. Rather, what is at stake in the task of understanding the sense of life and reality is from the very beginning our ethical-existential will and ability to encounter and face up to the demands and difficulties of life. According to Heidegger, the failure of theoretical philosophy to account for factual life was thus never just a cognitive mistake but rather had the character of flight and denial. As for

¹⁸³ GA 56/57, p. 110: “Es ist die Urintention des wahrhaften Lebens überhaupt, die Urhaltung des Erlebens und Lebens als solchen, die absolute, mit dem Erleben selbst identische *Lebensympathie*. [...] Die ‘*Strenge*’ der in der Phänomenologie erwachten Wissenschaftlichkeit gewinnt aus dieser Grundhaltung ihren originären Sinn und ist mit der ‘*Strenge*’ abgeleiteter, nicht-ursprünglicher Wissenschaften nicht vergleichbar.”

¹⁸⁴ GA 58, p. 23.

¹⁸⁵ GA 58, p. 263: “Der ἔρωϝ ist nicht nur ein *Motivgrund* der Philosophie, sonder die philosophische Betätigung selbst verlangt ein sich Loslassen in die letzten Tendenzen des Lebens und ein Zurückgehen in seine letzten Motive.” Cf. also GA 58, p. 23.

Husserl, the fact that the principle of all principles ultimately amounts to a demand for rigorous seeing makes it insufficient to account for the sense and motivations of philosophical problems, thus indicating why Husserl is bound to submit too easily to the traditional theoretical problematic of philosophy.

Moreover, Heidegger claims that something like love or sympathy is involved in the motivations of philosophy but also in its methodical mode of understanding life. This comes to clear expression in his reinterpretation of the term “rigor” (*Strenge*) – Husserl’s key attribute for designating the presuppositionless carefulness of seeing and thinking – to mean: “intense (*angestrengt*): purely abandoned to (*hingegen*) the genuine situations of life.”¹⁸⁶ By installing an element of love into the very eye of understanding Heidegger claims that the understanding of phenomenology must essentially be guided by a sensibility for what is significant and important in our primary pre-theoretical experiences, in order, then, to trace out and explicate the basic sense-structures of these experiences. Conversely, he suggests that no pure intuition of the kind proposed by Husserl can ever gain access to and account for what is given as important and meaningful in life.

Indeed, although I cannot argue it here, I think Heidegger’s points constitute important – perhaps the most important – criticisms of Husserl, and ultimately help to account for the peculiar way in which his insistence on concrete phenomenological description goes hand in hand with a certain insensibility to the ethical-existential sense of philosophical problems and matters, thus often making his meticulous descriptions of the transcendentalia of our intentional experiences powerless to account for the truly significance-constituting origins of these experiences.

But how is the originary science to proceed concretely? According to Heidegger, we primarily live immersed in the specific situations and contexts we experience and lack any phenomenal understanding of the origin of life. How, then, is it possible to gain access to and articulate the originary structure of life? At the end of “The Idea of Philosophy” Heidegger suggests that the phenomenological science must take the form of an “understanding, *hermeneutic intuition*” which is able to explicate life

¹⁸⁶ GA 58, p. 137: “angestrengt: rein hingegen den echten Lebenssituationen.”

without objectifying it. But what is this hermeneutic intuition and how is it executed?

It is only in “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” that Heidegger offers a more detailed account of the concrete methodical route of phenomenological understanding. Here he divides the “phenomenological method” employed by the originary science into six main steps: (1) The first step consists simply in a preliminary “pointing to” (*Hinweisen*) a particular sphere of factual life.¹⁸⁷ (2) The second step consists in “gaining a foothold in” (*Fußfassen*) and “going along with” (*Mitgehen*) the primary movement of life “with the utmost vitality and ardor,”¹⁸⁸ in order to see what we always already experience and understand “without any reflection whatsoever.”¹⁸⁹ (3) Then follows what Heidegger describes as the “*seeing ahead, leaping ahead* (*Vorschauen, Vorausspringen*) of the phenomenological intuition into the horizons that are given in the life experience itself, into the tendencies and motives that lie in the life experience.”¹⁹⁰ (4-5) The fourth and fifth steps consist in an articulation and interpretation of the dominant structural moments of the experience. (6) Finally follows what Heidegger calls a “*Gestaltgebung*,” which articulates the basic structural moments of the experience in their unity and reciprocity.¹⁹¹ Moreover, Heidegger maintains that during the whole course of phenomenological explications the phenomenologist needs to carry out a continuous “critical destruction (*Destruktion*) of the objectivations, which are always ready to attach themselves to the phenomena.”¹⁹² In so far as we live in a historical context of seemingly self-evident theoretical concepts threatening to distort our factual experience, it becomes an essential part of the phenomenological method to destruct, i.e., attend to and critically delimit common theoretical conceptualizations.

It seems quite clear to me that Heidegger’s hermeneutic intuition basically – as Crowell and Zahavi have claimed – constitutes an

¹⁸⁷ GA 58, p. 254.

¹⁸⁸ GA 58, p. 254.

¹⁸⁹ GA 58, p. 255.

¹⁹⁰ GA 58, pp. 254f.: “Es folgt das *Vorschauen, Vorausspringen* der phänomenologischen Intuition in die Horizonte, die in der Lebenserfahrung selbst gegeben sind, in die Tendenzen und Motive, die in der Lebenserfahrung liegen.”

¹⁹¹ GA 58, p. 255.

¹⁹² GA 58, p. 255. See also GA 59, pp. 34-38, 182-186.

affirmation and continuation of Husserl's method of intuitive reflection, albeit with some critical qualifications.

On the one hand, the phenomenological method of understanding, as presented and practiced by Heidegger in his early Freiburg lectures, essentially relies on *intuition*. Hence, the decisive third step of the method is described as a "seeing ahead" of the "phenomenological intuition" into the tendencies and horizons of the experience in question," i.e., as an intuitive grasp of the basic structures of the experience which it only thus becomes possible to describe and articulate. There is – as opposed to what van Buren and Kisiel maintain – nothing that indicates that Heidegger would as yet envisage the phenomenological understanding as an explication of the historical pre-understanding we always already live in, so that the structures he describes – e.g. significance, self-world, historicity – would amount to so many manifestations of that specific historical understanding. On the contrary, he explicitly rejects the idea that "everything immediate is mediated" as a Hegelian "absolutization of the theoretical," which can only generate logical or historical constructions. Also, the central methodical role ascribed by Heidegger to the "critical destruction" in no way threatens the primacy of intuition. The point of the destruction is not, as it will be in *Being and Time*, to lead us back to the historical origins of our traditional concepts as an ultimate source of understanding, but rather to hold off the theoretical concepts that obstruct and distort the possibility of directly seeing and describing our pre-theoretical experience.

Indeed, during these years Heidegger does not hesitate to describe his mode of understanding using the central phenomenological terminology of "intuition," "seeing," "givenness," and "evidence."¹⁹³ Although he stresses that the phenomenological intuition cannot be understood as a pure intellectual seeing but centrally involves a love or sympathy which allows it to sense and understand the significances of life, he maintains the idea of a direct intuitive access to the experientially given which is not mediated by, but rather provides our ultimate measure for critically examining, our historical preconceptions and prejudices. It is, moreover, precisely the notion of a transhistorical intuition which makes it possible

¹⁹³ See, e.g., the following passages: evident/evidence (GA 56/57, pp. 113f., 126); intuition/intuitive (GA 56/57, pp. 217-220; GA 58, pp. 240, 255), and seeing (GA 56/57, p. 218; GA 58, p. 254).

for him to retain the claim to explicate the basic universal structures of our pre-experience irrespective of our historical preconceptions. In “The Idea of Philosophy” Heidegger, having just described his experience of seeing the lectern in the lecture hall, considers the possibility of a Senegalese – he uses the racially prejudiced word “Senegalneger” – entering the hall. Coming from a non-scientific culture, and not being familiar with universities and lecterns, the Senegalese would probably first experience the lectern as “a something, ‘which he does not know what to make of.’”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Heidegger claims, the experience of the Senegalese would be characterized by exactly the same sense-structure as his own experience: “The significant character of the “equipmental strangeness” and the significant character of the “lectern” are absolutely identical in their essence.”¹⁹⁵ That is to say, the aim of Heidegger’s phenomenological descriptions is not to explicate the sense manifested by some specific historical context of understanding but to describe, on the basis of intuition, the basic structures of pre-theoretical life as such.

On the other hand, the phenomenological understanding projected and practiced by Heidegger is *reflective*. To be sure, Heidegger levels hard criticism at Husserl’s conception of the phenomenological reduction as a reflective turn from the objects of our natural experience to the correlative acts of consciousness conceived as the transcendental domain constitutive of the sense of the objects. Nonetheless, his own phenomenological method retains an essential element of reflection. Holding off the temptation to deny and objectify the pre-theoretically given, Heidegger insists that the phenomenological understanding must “go along with” the primary movement of our pre-theoretical experience in order to explicate what we here experience without any reflection. However, the aim of the explication is not just to plunge into and repeat this experience. Since, as Heidegger argues, we normally tend to be immersed in the particular situations we experience,¹⁹⁶ the point of the explication is precisely to distance ourselves from the particular situation at hand in order to “see ahead” into, and explicate the tendencies and structures of, the experiences under consideration: “The phenomenological reduction is a

¹⁹⁴ GA 56/57, p. 72: “mit dem er nichts anzufangen weiß.”

¹⁹⁵ GA 56/57, p. 72: “Das Bedeutungshafte des ‘zeuglichen Fremdseins’ und das Bedeutungshafte ‘Katheders’ sind ihrem Wesenskern nach absolut identisch.”

¹⁹⁶ Cf. GA 58, p. 117.

going along – such a one in which I am not absorbed.”¹⁹⁷ Hence, while rejecting Husserl's notion of reflection as a turn from the *what* to the *what-cum-how* of intentional experience, Heidegger critically appropriates the idea of reflection as a pure shift of attention from the particular situations experienced to the sense-structures constituting these experiences. The point of phenomenological understanding is thus to go along with the pre-theoretical experience in its primary unity in order to see and articulate how such things as world, act, self, history are given as more or less basic complementary aspects of the experience in question.¹⁹⁸

The methodological self-understanding of Heidegger outlined here also answers well to the methodical mode of the concrete phenomenological descriptions offered throughout his earliest Freiburg period. Taking his starting point in our de facto pre-theoretical experiences, he persistently attempts to point to and describe the basic structures which manifest themselves as constitutive of the experiences in question.

Formal Indication

But how should the sense-structures of life grasped by the hermeneutic intuition be described and articulated? According to Heidegger, the phenomenological descriptions of the originary science must make use of non-objectifying indicatory expressions which he calls “formal

¹⁹⁷ GA 58, p. 162: “Die Phänomenologische Reduktion ein Mitmachen – als ein solches, in dem ich nicht aufgehe.”

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Bernet 1990 where Rudolf Bernet articulates Heidegger's phenomenological approach to intentionality as follows “[Heidegger] insists on the fact that the sense of phenomenological reduction does not consist in the separation of the ‘*intentio*’ and the ‘*intentum*’, but rather on the contrary, in the letting-be-seen of the being of their belonging together. Though it is true that this demands that man tears himself away from the entangled involvement in things, this does not mean that he [like Husserl] has to take flight in the direction of transcendental subjectivity” (p. 147). Though Bernet's statement is intended as an analysis of Heidegger's later critique of Husserl in “Prolegomena” from 1925, it is more apt as an expression of Heidegger's early Freiburg phenomenology centering on the primary correlation of life and world. Indeed, it seems to me that Bernet's formulation is partly distortive as a description of Heidegger's phenomenology at the time of “Prolegomena” and *Sein und Zeit* since it does not sufficiently take into account the extent to which Heidegger here anchors the intentional correlation in the Dasein's preceding historical understanding of being.

indications” (*formale Anzeigen*). The term is first presented in “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” to account for the special character of phenomenological concepts. There, and in the lectures courses of the following semesters, we find a handful of scattered and fragmentary remarks on the sense of this term.¹⁹⁹

In recent years Heidegger’s notion of “formal indication” has received a lot of attention in the secondary literature.²⁰⁰ It has also been a central theme of the discussion of the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology. Thus, John van Buren, defending a hermeneutic-deconstructive reading, has argued that Heidegger’s formal indication is part of his rejection of Husserlian phenomenology. Provided that Heidegger’s matter of thinking – which, according to van Buren, is the historical *Ereignis* of being – cannot be intuited as a universal essential structure, but is always differentiated into different historical epochs and contexts, the function of formal indication is to indicate, always from a certain epoch, the non-present differential logic determining all such epochs. Hence: “formal indication [...] indicates the matter of thinking in its non-presence und unsurveyable difference,” so that it “remains open for being kairologically fulfilled and differentiated into an alterity of worldviews, principles, historical ages, philosophies, societies, institutions, and personal selfworlds.”²⁰¹ Against this, representatives of the

¹⁹⁹ My treatment of Heidegger’s notion of “formal indication” will be limited to the texts from the period under consideration here, i.e., the period starting at the beginning of 1919 and ending in the summer term of 1921. In fact, Heidegger provides his most detailed account of this notion in the lecture course “Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle. Initiation into Phenomenological Research” from the winter semester of 1921-22. However, since I believe this course is already part of Heidegger’s attempt to reorient his thinking through an interpretation of Aristotle – a reorientation that centrally involves a new analysis of the historical as-structure of understanding as well as of the question of being, and which, accordingly, to some extent modifies the sense of “formal indication” – I will refrain from using it as a source here. After that, during his Marburg years and in *Being and Time*, Heidegger continues to make use of the term “formal indication” without however explicitly reflecting on its sense anymore. It seems that the last time he uses the term is in the lecture course “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics” (*Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*) from the winter term 1929-30. Cf. GA 29/30, pp. 421-435. Cf. also Kisiel 1993, p. 497.

²⁰⁰ Heidegger’s notion of “formal indication” has been discussed by, e.g., Dahlstrom 1994; 2001, pp. 242-252, 436-445; Inkipin 2010; Kisiel 1993; 2010; van Buren 1994a; 1995; Oudemans 1990; Pöggeler 1989; van Dijk 1991.

²⁰¹ van Buren 1995, pp. 158, 165.

transcendental phenomenological reading have argued that Heidegger's notion of formal indication does not upset but continues and presupposes his commitment to reflective phenomenology.²⁰²

Let me try to outline the basic aspects of Heidegger's "formal indication" on the basis of his sparse remarks. In "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" he introduces the term to account for the special character of phenomenological expressions: "The meanings of the words are all still completely formal, *prejudicing nothing*, only suggesting a direction – without any definite commitment to it. Perhaps they only serve the purpose of letting us return on their path to the originary motives of life."²⁰³ In contrast to theoretical concepts, whose meaning is determined by certain defining features and by their place in a conceptual network, the formal indications of phenomenology function by pointing to the concrete experiences and situations in which that which they express is experienceable and given. It belongs to their very way of signifying that we cannot understand them with reference to some pre-conceived theoretical or historical concepts, but rather need to follow in the direction they indicate in order to experience and see for ourselves the phenomena thus expressed. Formal indications could thus be said to involve both a negative and a positive aspect: on the one hand, to call attention to the formally indicative character of the concepts employed means to ward off any attempts to determine their meaning in a premature and dogmatic way, instead leaving it open and undetermined – "held in abeyance" (*in der Schwebe gehalten*) – until we access the experiences whose sense is at stake;²⁰⁴ on the other hand, to make use of formal indications means pointing to the concrete experiences in which the signified meaning is given and evident.²⁰⁵ As Daniel Dahlstrom lucidly puts it: "[Heidegger] regards the 'formal indication' as a revisable way of pointing to some phenomenon, fixing its preliminary sense and the corresponding manner of unpacking it, while at the same time deflecting any 'uncritical lapse' into

²⁰² For some phenomenological readings of "formal indication," see Dahlstrom 1994; Crowell 2001, pp. 137-144.

²⁰³ GA 58, p. 3: "Die Wortbedeutungen sind alle noch ganz formal, *nichts präjudizierend*, lassen nur eine Direktion anklingen – ohne Festlegung auf sie –, vielleicht, daß sie nur dazu dient, auf ihrem Weg zurückzugehen zu ursprünglichen Motiven des Lebens."

²⁰⁴ GA 60, p. 64.

²⁰⁵ Cf. GA 58, p. 248; GA 59, p. 85; GA 60, pp. 3, 55; GA 9, pp. 9-11. Cf. also GA 61, pp. 17-20, 32-34, 141-142.

some specific conception that would foreclose pursuit of ‘a genuine sense’ of the phenomenon.”²⁰⁶

Heidegger’s designation of the expressions of phenomenology as “formal” indications is meant to convey not only that they remain open and revisable until we experience for ourselves the meaning indicated, but also that they do not say anything about the content of the specific significances we experience, but exclusively articulate the basic structure and sense of the experience *qua experience*, what Heidegger calls “the pre-worldly something of life in itself.”²⁰⁷ Moreover, given Heidegger’s view that our pre-theoretical experience of the world is always rooted in the particular historical situation of the self, the formal indications of the sense-structures of life must ultimately call attention to the personal experiences of the individual as “the absolute – primordially factual” where these structures are given: “*The function of calling-attention – from out of personal existence and for it – co-determines the structure of the concept.*”²⁰⁸

Heidegger attempts to specify the way in which formal indications are able to indicate phenomena by arguing that in contrast to theoretical concepts, whose content is defined by their place in a pre-given conceptual order, the indicative force of formal indications arises by way of negative contrasts with other received concepts. Hence, the fact that the phenomenologist continuously says “no” to different alternative concepts should not just be understood as a purely negative gesture, since “negation” constitutes the “creative force” of expressive concepts.²⁰⁹ Heidegger calls this peculiar negatively dialectical logic of formal indications “*diabermeneutics*”: “the philosophical dialectic is ‘*diabermeneutics*’. Through the overturnings of the understanding and the intuition (use of negation) the phenomena are brought to expression.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Dahlstrom 1994, p. 780.

²⁰⁷ GA 56/57, p. 116: “das vorweltliche Etwas des Lebens an sich.” Cf. also GA 60, pp. 63f.; GA 61, pp. 20, 23.

²⁰⁸ GA 59, p. 197: “Die *Funktion des Aufmerksam-machens – von personaler Existenz aus und für sie – ist für die Struktur des Begriffs mitbestimmend.*”

²⁰⁹ GA 58, p. 240.

²¹⁰ GA 58, p. 263: “die philosophische Dialektik ist ‘*Diabermeneutik*’. Durch die Umkippungen des Verstehens and Anschauens (Verwendung der Negation) kommen die Phänomene zum Ausdruck.”

Now on the basis of the above explication it seems clear to me that Heidegger's notion of formal indication does *not* in any way unsettle the absolute primacy he ascribes to direct intuition in his phenomenological method. To begin with, he emphatically underscores that the phenomenological intuition precedes and conditions every description and linguistic expression of the given: "I can indeed only describe, when I have already seen."²¹¹ Furthermore, his concrete articulation of the central aspects of formal indications all build on the fact that the meaning of these indications is not determinable with reference to any theoretical or historical preconceptions we might have, but resides solely in their ability to point to concrete phenomenal experiences. Neither is the primacy of intuition threatened by Heidegger's idea that the expressive force of formal indications arises out of negative dialectical contrasts. The central point of the argument is not that the meaning of formal indications would be determined by such dialectical contrasts but, rather, that this dialectics makes it possible for the expressions to point to our concrete experiences as the ultimate autonomous source of meaning which specifies and revises our preconceptions. Indeed, having just stressed the central role of negation in phenomenological expressions Heidegger adds: "All understanding is enacted in the *intuition*. From this fact originates the *descriptive* character of phenomenological work."²¹²

This said, however, there is also a sense in which Heidegger's reflections on formal indication raise some fundamental questions about the character of phenomenological intuition, more precisely about the central phenomenological idea that it is possible to intuit universal and necessary structures of meaning.

To see this it is crucial to note that Heidegger's remarks on the indicative concepts of phenomenology are from the outset stirred by his critique of Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a science of "essences."²¹³ As mentioned above, Heidegger believes Husserl's notion of essential intuition is modeled on the paradigm of general theoretical concepts in such a way that Husserl dogmatically presupposes that our experiences

²¹¹ GA 56/57, p. 217: "ich kann doch erst beschreiben, wenn ich bereits gesehen habe."

²¹² GA 58, p. 240: "Alles Verstehen vollzieht sich in der *Anschauung*. Daher rührt der *deskriptive* Character des phänomenologischen Arbeitens."

²¹³ Cf. GA 58, pp. 237, 240.

exhibit necessary and universal structures of meaning which can be articulated and defined by the concepts of phenomenology. By stressing that the concepts employed by phenomenology are referred to our factual particular experiences as their ultimate source of meaning, Heidegger raises the question of how the explication of these experiences – in their historical facticity and particularity – can ever grant an understanding of necessary and universal structures of meaning. However, as far as I can see, Heidegger’s remarks on formal indication are quite insufficient to account for the tension between the idea of factual historical life as the source of phenomenological understanding, and the idea of phenomenology as a science of essential structures. Although Heidegger stresses the need to return to our concrete factual experiences as the primary domain of givenness, it seems that these experiences are still basically conceived of as the particular site or place where the originary universal structures of life manifest themselves – without the structures themselves becoming historicized or relativized.

In the following years, Heidegger will develop a new analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality, according to which all our experience and understanding of meaning is anchored in the historical pre-understanding of being in which we always already live. As a result, Heidegger’s early attempt to reflect on how it is possible to intuitively explicate the basic structures of life through attending to our particular factual experiences gives way to a reconception of the method of phenomenology in terms of a destructive explication of our historical pre-understanding of being.

The Originary Structure of Life

The aim of Heidegger’s originary science is to explicate the origin of factual life – its originary structure and sense. What does he find?

Heidegger ends “The Idea of Philosophy” by articulating the theme of his originary science as the “originary something” (*Ur-etwas*) of life: the “basic character” of pre-theoretical life as such, prior to and irrespective of the specific world we happen to live in.²¹⁴ He articulates the sense of the originary something as follows: “Life is in itself motivated and tendential;

²¹⁴ GA 56/57, pp. 218f. Cf. also GA 56/57, pp. 115f.

motivating tendency, tending motivation. The basic character of life is to live *toward* something, to world out (*auswelten*) into particular experiential worlds."²¹⁵ Hence, the basic character of life is said to consist precisely in the fact that it is fundamentally referred to and “worlds out into” particular historical worlds. As such, Heidegger maintains, the originary something constitutes an “index of the highest potentiality of life” since to understand it in the end amounts to transparently taking over the factual world we live in as the groundless self-sufficient predicament that it is.²¹⁶

However, how should this preliminary dense projection of the originary sense of life be understood concretely?

In “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” Heidegger works out a more detailed description of the basic structure of phenomenal life. Here – as we saw above – he explicates pre-theoretical life in terms of three main aspects: first, we always experience and live into a worldly context of significances; second, these significances are expressed and manifest in accordance with the ways in which we experience them; third this experience of significance is ultimately anchored in the “self-world,” i.e., in the particular historical situation of the experiencing self. Towards the end of the course, the originary structure of factual life is then rearticulated in terms of three sense-directions: “content-sense” (*Gebaltssinn*), “relation-sense” (*Bezugssinn*) and “enactment-sense” (*Vollzugssinn*).²¹⁷ This scheme is developed during the following terms and constitutes Heidegger’s basic conception of the structure of phenomenality up to the winter of 1921-22. Let me quote a passage from the lecture course “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion” in which Heidegger spells out this structure as the totality of sense constituting every “phenomenon”:

What is phenomenology? What is phenomenon? Here this can be itself indicated only formally. Each experience – as *experiencing* and as *experienced* – can “be taken in the phenomenon,” that is to say, one can ask: 1. After the originary “*what*,” that is experienced therein (*content*). 2. After the originary “*how*,” in which it is experienced (*relation*). 3. After the originary “*how*,” in which the

²¹⁵ GA 56/57, p. 218: “das Leben [ist] in sich motiviert und [hat] Tendenz; motivierende Tendenz, tendierende Motivation: Grundcharakter des Lebens, zu etwas *hin* zu leben, in bestimmte Erlebniswelten auszuwelten.”

²¹⁶ GA 56/57, p. 115: “Index für die höchste Potentialität des Lebens.”

²¹⁷ GA 58, p. 261.

relation-sense is *enacted* (*enactment*). But these three directions of sense (content-, relation-, enactment-sense) do not simply coexist. “Phenomenon” is the totality of sense in these three directions. “Phenomenology” is the explication of this totality of sense; it gives the “*logos*” of the phenomena.²¹⁸

That is to say, “content-sense” denotes the significances that show up as parts of our world, “relation-sense” denotes our ways of experiencing and relating to these significances, and “enactment-sense” refers to the way in which the individual self enacts these unitary experiences of significance. The first two sense-directions – content-sense and relation-sense – can be understood as rephrasings of Husserl’s concepts of *noema* and *noesis*, with special emphasis laid on their irreducible unity in our pre-theoretical experience. However, the crucial addendum of Heidegger’s analysis is his thesis that the content- and relational-sense of the experience is centered in the enactment-sense, in the way the particular self enacts the experiences: “The relation-sense is [...] itself already the sense of an enactment, in which a self is present.”²¹⁹

What might this mean, however? The critical engagement with Husserl makes it necessary for Heidegger to reject the impending misreading of this thesis in terms of a turn to transcendental subjectivity, and to reopen the question of what “*special*, yet not transcendently deflectable and absolutizable role”²²⁰ the self may be said to play in our factual life-experience. It no longer seems possible to postulate transcendental subjectivity as the basic experiential domain in which the significances of life appear, determining their basic sense as “significance for a subject.”²²¹

²¹⁸ GA 60, p. 63: “Was ist Phänomenologie? Was ist Phänomen? Dies kann hier nur selbst formal angezeigt werden. – Jede Erfahrung – als *Erfahren* wie als *Erfahrenes* – kann ‘ins Phänomen genommen werden’, d.h. es kann gefragt werden: 1. nach dem ursprünglichen *Was*, das in ihm erfahren wird (*Gehalt*), 2. nach dem ursprünglichen *Wie*, in dem es erfahren wird (*Bezug*), 3. nach dem ursprünglichen *Wie* in dem der Bezugssinn *vollzogen* wird (*Vollzug*). Diese drei Sinnrichtungen (Gehalts-, Bezugs-, Vollzugssinn) stehen aber nicht einfach nebeneinander. ‘Phänomen’ ist Sinn Ganzheit nach diesen drei Richtungen. ‘Phänomenologie’ ist Explikation dieser Sinn Ganzheit, sie gibt den ‘λόγος’ der Phänomene.”

²¹⁹ GA 58, p. 260: “Der Bezugssinn ist [...] selbst schon Sinn eines Vollzugs, eines Dabeiseins des Selbst.”

²²⁰ GA 58, p. 136: “*besondere*, aber nicht transzendentalphilosophisch umbiegbare und verabsolutisierbare Rolle.”

²²¹ GA 58, p. 232.

How should we then understand Heidegger's claim that the pre-theoretical experience is centered in the self who enacts the experience – a self which is said to be always particular and historical?

In the last hours of “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” Heidegger makes a final attempt to explicate how the experiencing self “has” or “enacts” its life: “We try to understand how life experiences itself, [...] how it takes itself, has itself, and fulfills itself in this having.”²²² Eventually he manages to outline what he calls an “originary articulation (*ursprüngliche Artikulation*) of life”²²³ in which our life-experience is supposed to be centered. As we go along with our pre-theoretical experience, he claims, we find that we primarily enact our experiences without any awareness of an I-subject. Still, before any reflection on the subject of the experiences, we already “have ourselves” in a peculiar way. What Heidegger discovers here is the “character of familiarity” (*Charakter des Vertrautsein*) in which the significances experienced always and essentially present themselves to us:²²⁴

I live in contexts of significance, which are self-sufficient in scope. What is experienced addresses us (*spricht an*), but in a way that is always familiar to us in some way. It is itself such that it also always concerns me somehow, that I am present there (*daß ich dabei bin*). Somehow, I have myself there.²²⁵

According to Heidegger, a basic structural feature of our primary factual experience is that the significances address and concern us *as familiar*. When something shows up as significant for us, this always involves its being familiar in a double sense: first, the significant matter is something that we recognize as always already familiar and intelligible; second, it is something that addresses us as belonging to us as our own matter (or, as Heidegger puts it, what the self experiences as significant “expresses” the I

²²² GA 58, p. 156: “Wir versuchen zu verstehen wie Leben sich selbst erfährt, [...] sich lebendig nimmt, hat und in diesem haben sich erfüllt.”

²²³ GA 58, p. 158.

²²⁴ GA 58, p. 157.

²²⁵ GA 58, p. 157: “Ich lebe in Bedeutsamkeitszusammenhänge selbstgenügsamen Ausmaßes; das Erfahrene spricht an, aber in einer Weise, die uns simmer irgendwie vertraut ist. Es selbst ist so, daß es auch immer irgendwie angeht, daß ich dabei bin. Ich habe mich dabei selbst irgendwie.”

(*drückt mich aus*).²²⁶ This original familiarity cannot be understood as the result of a particular subject's having acquainted itself with chosen parts of the surrounding world, which now, as a consequence, appear as familiar; rather, the fundamental character of familiarity which Heidegger has in mind determines and delimits in advance what may address the self as significant at all. Since our world always encounters us as our own familiar context of significance, it also functions as an expression of who we are. Hence, it becomes possible to clarify the non-subjectifying sense of Heidegger's initial thesis that life is centered in the enactment of the individual self: the life-world is, to be sure, always the world of a particular self; this self, however, is nothing before or beside the factual context of significance which has always already addressed it as its own world: "I myself am a context of significance, in which I live."²²⁷

According to Heidegger, this basic character of familiarity becomes conspicuous precisely in such situations where we become distanced from it. He gives two examples: the experience of remembering something and the experience of encountering something new or alien. Thus, Heidegger argues, when I remember some event or experience from my past this past experience essentially meets me as something familiar that belongs to me and expresses me.²²⁸ Likewise, when I am surprised by something new or unknown I experience an inhibition of my habitual everyday familiarity with my world, whereby this familiarity becomes striking to me in its very removal.²²⁹

The ultimate upshot of Heidegger's explication of the familiarity of every experienced significance is that factual life takes on the basic character of historical "destiny" (*Schicksal*). Granted that the world always already addresses me as the familiar context of significance that determines me – before and as a condition for my being able to experience something as intelligible and important at all – this implies that it addresses me as a destiny: "an originary circle of familiarity [grace, calling, destiny]."²³⁰ As noticed earlier Heidegger from the very beginning

²²⁶ GA 58, pp. 158f.

²²⁷ GA 58, p. 248: "Ich selbst' bin ein Bedeutsamkeitszusammenhang, in dem ich selbst lebe."

²²⁸ GA 58, pp. 158f., 252.

²²⁹ GA 58, p. 251.

²³⁰ GA 58, p. 167: "ursprünglicher Vertrautheitskreis [Gnade, Berufung, Schicksal]." Cf. also GA 58, p. 259.

of the Freiburg years had insisted on the historical character of life and on the “absolute unity” of the phenomenological and historical method.²³¹ Still, up to this point this idea had amounted to nothing more than a programmatic declaration of intent. The analysis of the character of familiarity constitutes nothing less than his first and last attempt during these years to offer a concrete determination of the basic “historicity” or “facticity” of life.²³² “History,” he says, “is here [...] understood [...] in terms of the familiarity of life with itself and its abundance”:²³³

These characters of familiarity, which are expressive of myself [...] also designate the unaccented place of motivation (*Motivstelle*) in factual life, which motivates how all comprehension of the relations of life must let itself be addressed by life itself and its abundance, by its *history*.²³⁴

To sum up, then: to say that life is essentially “historical” or “factual” is to say that the world we primarily experience does not have the character of an ahistorical reality that could be objectively and universally registered and described. Instead, it amounts to a specific finite historically transmitted context of significance, which constitutes an absolute and self-sufficient sphere that cannot be founded on some supposedly deeper or more secure theoretical ground. In the end, Heidegger claims that his analysis of the originary structure of life as historical determines the “basic sense of ‘existence’” (*Grundsinn von ‘Existenz’*). Granted that the primary givenness of pre-theoretical factual life constitutes the basis for all understanding of the meaning of entities, then the explication of the originary structure of this givenness amount to an explication of sense of

²³¹ GA 56/57, pp. 21, 125, 258.

²³² Cf. Kisiel 1986-87 for an account of the historical roots and development of the concept of facticity in Heidegger's early thinking.

²³³ GA 58, p. 252: “Geschichte ist hier [...] verstanden [...] als Vertrautsein des Lebens mit sich selbst und seiner Fülle.”

²³⁴ GA 58, p. 159: “Diese Charaktere des mich selbst ausdrückenden Vertrautseins [...] bezeichnen zugleich die unabgehobene, im faktischen Leben selbst liegende Motivstelle dafür, wie alle Erfassung der Lebensbezüge des Lebens sich ansprechen lassen muß aus dem Leben selbst und seiner Fülle, seiner *Geschichte*.”

being as such: “From here the sense of reality of all the strata of life becomes understandable.”²³⁵

An Intuitive Phenomenology of Historical Life?

Heidegger’s analysis of the historicity of our pre-theoretical experience obviously complicates the question of the relationship between intuition and history in his early Freiburg lecture courses. Above I stated that Crowell and Zahavi were right in claiming that Heidegger’s phenomenological method of understanding basically amounts to an intuitive reflection on the basic structures of experience. Now, using this method, Heidegger claims that the fundamental structural aspect of life consists in the fact that the experienced world is always already given as a particular historical destiny – which seems to confirm the interpretation presented by van Buren and Kisiel.

How should this peculiar tension between intuition and history be understood?

Ultimately, I think it cannot be understood at all within the framework of Heidegger’s early Freiburg lectures, but cuts right through this frame as a fundamental and uncontrolled ambivalence running between his conception of the structure of the phenomenality of factual life and his phenomenological explication of that very structure. On the one hand, the entire project of an originary science of life starts from and critically elaborates Husserl’s phenomenological method, retaining as a decisive methodical moment the idea of direct intuitive reflection. In his explications of the origin of life, Heidegger from first to last makes use of intuitive descriptions of different experiences in order to bring out the basic structural elements constitutive of these experiences. Hence, everything Heidegger has to say about the historical and factual character of life emerges as universal features of life as such. On the other hand, his analyses of the basic structures of life lead him to the result that our pre-theoretical experience is fundamentally historical, in as much as the phenomenal significances we experience are essentially given as a finite historical destiny. All the way through his earliest lectures, these divergent

²³⁵ GA 58, p. 261: “Von hier wird der Sinn der Wirklichkeit in allen Schichten des Lebens verständlich.”

viewpoints collide with each other, engendering questions that Heidegger cannot answer. If we take the idea of the radical historicity of pre-theoretical phenomenality seriously, it clearly challenges Heidegger's trust in the method of intuitive reflection: If the basic condition for experiencing something as meaningful is that it presents itself as historically familiar, how could philosophical understanding itself be exempt from that condition? How could it claim, always basing itself on particular historical contexts of factual experiences, to access and describe the universal structures characterizing factual experience as such? At the same time, Heidegger holds on to the idea of intuition as the critical methodical moment that sustains his own explications and hinders them from collapsing into historico-theoretical constructions. Indeed, if the phenomenological intuition would be nothing but an explication of the historical world we happen to live in – how should the critical moment of evident givenness then be understood, and what would grant this understanding its force and its hold over and above our received historical prejudices?

Heidegger cannot answer these questions.

In the end, it seems to me that the ambivalence between intuition and history disrupting Heidegger's early lectures derives from the basic insufficiency of his attempt to account for the historical structure of experience. Although Heidegger, as if driven by a strong yet unclear impulse, both wills and programmatically declares the historicity of life – and, eventually, meaningful being as such – he is still unable to articulate how history works at the center of our phenomenal understanding.²³⁶

²³⁶ In *Ruin* 1994 Hans Ruin argues that Heidegger in his early Freiburg lectures is already engaged in an attempt to reflect on the way in which our access to the given is historically mediated and self-reflective in a fundamental way. Heidegger, Ruin claims, gives up Husserl's trust in an "original intuition" (p. 48), instead bringing out and elaborating the historicity inherent in the very movement of phenomenological explication: "there is a circular temporality inscribed in the method itself, in that the phenomenological reflection establishes an origin through a recapitulating enactment of previous intentional accomplishments" (p. 51). Ultimately, Heidegger is said to open the thought that "history, as that which is past, and thus non-present, is incorporated into a supposedly present givenness" (p. 48). However, it seems to me that Ruin is downplaying Heidegger's fundamental problems with actually accounting for the historicity of thinking beyond his programmatic declarations. In fact, it could perhaps be seen as a symptom of this that Ruin's interpretation appears to vacillate between a weaker and a bolder claim. On the one hand, he claims that Heidegger

Heidegger explicates the structure of phenomenality in terms of the unity of the significances we experience – the *content-sense* – and our ways of experiencing them – the *relation-sense* – whereby the experience-of-significance is always centered in the situation of the particular historical self that *enacts* it. Above we saw how Heidegger’s emphasis on the unity of the content- and relation-sense of our pre-theoretical experience was meant to overcome Husserl’s tendency to detach and hierarchize the noematic and noetic correlata of intentional experience. It is only by radically commencing from the pre-theoretical experience in its unity that we may detect such aspects as object, act, subject as more or less basic and interrelated features of that experience. Thus far, however, the analysis says nothing about the historicity of experience.

Heidegger then introduces the theme of historicity in terms of the particular self’s enactment of the experience-of-significance. However, this move comes so late in the argument that it becomes hard for it to substantiate the radical concept of historicity that he is aiming at. As long

conceives of the phenomenological explication as a thematizing enactment of previous experiences.

This is clearly correct, yet as far as I can see it does not imply any radical historicization of thought. The fact that our experiences are always already there as the factual ground of every explication does not mean that they are historical in the strong sense of constituting the particular historical tradition in which we are situated; rather, it only implies that they are the contingent experiences that we humans happen to have, such as love, memory, pain, anxiety. This does not shut out the possibility – exploited by Heidegger himself – of intuitively reflecting on their necessary and universal structures. On the other hand, Ruin advances the bolder claim that “[the subject] understands its history by being that history, and it is that history in understanding it” (p. 64). However, this claim does not follow from the first, and Heidegger does not yet open up the notion of thinking as a retrieval of previous historically transmitted meanings. Rather, whereas the significances encountered in our experiences are considered historical, the phenomenological explication essentially unfolds as an intuitive reflection on the universal features of the pre-theoretical experiences as such. Still, although I think Ruin exaggerates the degree to which Heidegger historicizes phenomenology in his early Freiburg lectures, he is clearly more aware than van Buren and Kisiel of the gap between Heidegger’s historical program and his concrete work: “The conceptual transformation is obvious; from the strict subordination of historical matters to a philosophical systematic, to the ‘historical’ characterization of the very aim of the systematic approach. But if we turn to the level of the actual philosophical content the development is much more difficult to assess” (p. 69f.). For an illuminating discussion of the distinction between the factual as a designation of the contingent character of our experiences and the factual as a designation of their historically situated and changeable nature, see Crowell 2002.

as the historicity of life transpires at the level of the individual self's enactment of meanings it is hard to see how this figure of thought could overcome the traditional division between universal ahistorical possibilities of meaning and the individual self's historically situated actualization of these meanings. To break with this scheme Heidegger would have to show that the content- and relation-sense of our experience are fundamentally determined by their historical enactment-sense, so that there would strictly speaking be no possible senses to enact prior to the particular historical enactment. Pursuing this line of thought, however, would mean dethroning enactment as the master concept for thinking historicity, and opening the question of how the individual self is situated in and addressed by a historical context of meaning which always already guides its possibilities of understanding both itself and its world.

Heidegger's only concrete attempt to account for the historicity of phenomenal meaning – his analysis of the character of familiarity supposedly pertaining to all experienceable significances – appears quite inadequate to its task. To be sure, there is a sense in which the matters we experience appear meaningful and intelligible precisely owing to their being familiar parts of the historical context we live in. However, Heidegger offers no analysis of why – no account of the structure due to which – such familiarity would constitute a necessary condition for experiencing things as meaningful. For example, he does not yet claim – as van Buren and Kisiel erroneously do – that our experience of something as a meaningful phenomenon is always already determined by our historical pre-understanding of being. Hence, although the analysis of familiarity points in the direction of Heidegger's later conception of the historical as-structure of experience, taken on its own it remains weak and incapable of answering the objections it gives rise to. For example, why would familiarity be a necessary criterion for experiencing something as meaningful? Is not our normal familiar understanding often prejudiced and distortive? What is it that allows me to distinguish the prejudices from the truths of our familiar understanding if not some sort of direct seeing of the matters in question, which transcends the familiar? In encountering new and unfamiliar things – do we really experience these as essentially unintelligible? Even if such encounters, for example with a person from an alien culture, might at first be bewildering in so far as parts of the behavior of the other person are not readily explained by my familiar understanding

of things, might they not also offer an occasion for transcending and critically questioning the prejudices of that understanding?

Let me try to sum up the constellation then.

In his early Freiburg lecture courses, Heidegger remains trapped in the ambivalence between his effort to elaborate Husserl's reflective intuitive phenomenological method and his will to open up a radically historical conception of phenomenality. Lacking a viable account of the nature and place of historicity in our phenomenal experience he is unable to show in what sense the world is given as fundamentally historical, to say nothing of how the philosophical understanding itself could be conceived as an explication of such a historical understanding. The transcendental phenomenological interpretation developed by Crowell and Zahavi correctly highlights the intuitive-reflective character of Heidegger's phenomenological method. In so doing, however, it downplays his driving desire to explicate the radical historicity of life, and the potential challenges this venture poses to the idea of an intuition-based phenomenology. The hermeneutic-deconstructive reading of van Buren and Kisiel does the reverse. While emphasizing Heidegger's programmatic declaration of the historicity of life it is blind to his basic and concrete commitment to a Husserlian phenomenological method. Although both interpretations are one-sided, overlooking the ambivalence of Heidegger's thought, I think it is fair to say that the phenomenological interpretation of this period is more rewarding since it captures more of the concrete philosophical work he is doing.

1.5 Life and the Task of Philosophy

I will end this part by reflecting on Heidegger's effort – so central to his early Freiburg lectures – to articulate the task of philosophy in life. Having hitherto focused on the epistemic method and results of his originary science, the question I now want to raise concerns the existential motivation and purpose of such a science. What role can a philosophical science of life play in our lives?

The question of the existential task of philosophy is for Heidegger from the outset intimately linked to the question of phenomenality, and will continue to be so doing his entire path of thought. In the early

Freiburg years, the question arises in the following form. If, as Heidegger claims, our factual pre-theoretical experience constitutes our primary open and self-sufficient access to the realm of significance – and neither need be nor can be theoretically grounded by philosophy – what task, if any, remains for philosophy as an originary science of life?

Two Interpretations

In view of the challenge that, I think, Heidegger's radical emphasis on the self-sufficiency of our pre-theoretical life poses to the long-standing ambition of philosophy to overcome the naivety of everyday life by clarifying the basic structures of life and being, it is striking that most commentators tend to see his originary science as a straightforward continuation and radicalization of precisely that tradition. For example, although offering almost diametrically opposed interpretations of the theme and method of Heidegger's early Freiburg thinking, Steven Crowell and John van Buren basically agree that he carries on the traditional quest for the basic structures of meaningful being – be it in the form of a phenomenological explication of the transcendental structures of experience or in the form of a thinking of the historical event of being.

According to Crowell, Heidegger is wholeheartedly guided by the traditional goal of philosophy to carry out “categorical research.”²³⁷ Giving no weight to Heidegger's accentuation of the self-sufficiency of pre-theoretical life or to his questioning of the existential motives of philosophy, he argues that the “‘existential’ issues” surfacing in Heidegger's lecture courses gain their “systematic sense” from his methodological notion that only phenomenological reflection on our concrete experiences can provide access to the space of meaning.²³⁸ Instead, Crowell claims that Heidegger, just like Husserl, discovers the motivation of philosophy in life's orientation toward “genuine seeing”: “in Husserl's terms, the orientation toward fulfillment adumbrated in every intention.”²³⁹ The task of philosophy is, then, none other than to realize our aspiration to ultimate and evidently grounded self-understanding by

²³⁷ Crowell 2001, p. 125.

²³⁸ Crowell 2001, p. 131; cf. also p. 136.

²³⁹ Crowell 2001, p. 136.

overcoming the limited perspective of “naive life”²⁴⁰ – in which we are oriented “towards entities *through* meaning” – and reflectively clarifying the structures of meaning that always already organize our primarily naive experience. Thus, Crowell states, reformulating the dream that has always tended to set philosophy in motion: “philosophy is [...] life’s own homecoming.”²⁴¹ Although van Buren’s hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation of the early Heidegger is opposed to Crowell’s phenomenological reading he shares the latter’s view of the existential motivation and task of philosophy. Hence, in van Buren’s story the young Heidegger is presented as an “heir to the Greek *prote philosophia*,” an heir which radicalizes the traditional quest for the ground or *arche* of being in the direction of its “anarchic *arche*”:²⁴² the “a priori of temporality, difference, finitude.”²⁴³ Even if van Buren never tires of stressing the groundlessness and finitude of being he endorses, without further question, the view that the task of philosophy is to reach a qualified – though finite, differential – understanding of the anarchic event of being, an understanding capable of guiding our lives in the form a “post-metaphysical ethics of ecumenism.”²⁴⁴

In contrast to Crowell and van Buren, Theodore Kisiel appears more attentive to Heidegger’s incessant questioning of the existential roots of philosophy in factual life. Highlighting Heidegger’s constant emphasis on the primacy of our pre-theoretical experience and his critique of the traditional effort of philosophy to ground and articulate it theoretically, Kisiel argues that Heidegger’s sense of philosophy is essentially “phronetic.”²⁴⁵ Since the goal of the philosophical science of origin is none other than to “serve life,”²⁴⁶ the purpose of its understanding and formal indications is not to achieve a science of life for its own sake, but to “smooth the way toward intensifying the sense of the immediate in which we find ourselves.”²⁴⁷ Hence, what Kisiel seems to suggest is that Heidegger’s rejection of the possibility of philosophy to ground or deepen

²⁴⁰ Crowell 2001, p. 146; cf. also p. 136.

²⁴¹ Crowell 2001, p. 145.

²⁴² van Buren 1994a, p. 243.

²⁴³ van Buren 1994a, p.219.

²⁴⁴ van Buren 1994a, p. 41.

²⁴⁵ Kisiel 1993, p. 270.

²⁴⁶ Kisiel 1993, p. 59.

²⁴⁷ Kisiel 1993, p. 59.

our factual pre-theoretical understanding of life makes him think that the existential function of philosophical understanding ultimately consists in its phronetic ability to lead the individual self back from its theoretical alienation to its self-sufficient context of life.

So what is the truth of these interpretations? Is the first interpretation wrong and the other right? Or should they rather – as I will suggest – be conceived as partial, not fully clarified truths, arising from the interpreter's one-sided focus on either side of an ambivalence at the center of Heidegger's early thought?

The Question of the Motivation of Philosophy

Heidegger from the outset launches his early Freiburg philosophy as a science of the origin of life. In so doing, he uncritically and without further question adopts the traditional idea that the task of philosophy is, in some sense, to learn to know the basic structure and sense of meaningful reality. This hasty jump to the idea of an originary science can, in retrospect, be seen as an indication of the fact that during these years he will be unable to offer a convincing account of how the problem of origin is encountered in life as a decisive existential problem. Nevertheless, as the originary science unfolds, the question of the motivation of philosophy soon emerges as an urgent and uncircumventable question – a question that will prove hard to answer.

As we have seen, Heidegger develops his originary science as a phenomenological explication of the basic structures of our pre-theoretical experience-of-significance, anchoring it in the historical situation of the particular self. In opposition to theoretical philosophy, which promises to offer a theoretical ground for our seemingly naive and prejudiced pre-theoretical experience, he claims that it is precisely this experience that constitutes our primary and self-sufficient access to the realm of significance. However, as Heidegger rejects the theoretical self-understanding of philosophy he also deprives it of its traditional motivation. From the viewpoint of theoretical philosophy, pre-theoretical life appears as a naive form of theoretical knowledge dominated by concepts that it lacks the means to verify. Hence, theoretical philosophy emerges as the much-needed task of grounding the concepts that normally guide our understanding in a prejudiced way. If, however, our pre-

theoretical experience provides access to the realm of significance and contains its own measures for understanding and judging the significances we experience, then philosophy can no longer uphold its central promise of critically questioning and justifying factual life on the basis of a privileged understanding of its ground or origin. Provided that every meaningful question “receives its answer *within* the structural form of life in itself,”²⁴⁸ the motivation of philosophy becomes doubtful. What could a philosophical science of origin possibly hope to find that would not amount to “primordial grounds and unrealities, from which I [...] derive factual life as such”?²⁴⁹

Heidegger’s radical emphasis on the self-sufficiency of factual life and his critique of theoretical philosophy thus makes the question of the motivation of philosophy urgent: “For philosophy, the philosophical experience of life is motivated out of life itself. One must take seriously the motivation of the philosophical method of understanding out of life itself.”²⁵⁰ The challenge facing Heidegger is, then, to show how the task of understanding the origin is motivated by our factual life itself.

One thing is clear; philosophy cannot hope to attain a better – deeper and more secure – understanding of the significances of our life-world than that which is given within our factual experience itself. However, Heidegger claims, there is one crucial matter concerning which life is not self-sufficient: “The phenomenon of ‘self-sufficiency’ cannot itself be seen within life as such, as long as we remain therein.”²⁵¹ That is, as long as we enact the primary movement of factual life in a straightforward way the significances we encounter are given in a self-evident way; yet in so doing we lack any experience of the basic character of life as self-sufficient, as our originary factual domain of significance. In so far as life is confronted with the philosophical question concerning its own ontological sense, it

²⁴⁸ GA 58, p. 43: “Jede Fraglichkeit also (nicht nur theoretisch-wissenschaftliche) erhält ihre Antwort *in* der Strukturform des Lebens an sich.”

²⁴⁹ GA 58, p. 37: “Urgründe und Irrealitäten, aus denen ich [...] das faktisch Leben an sich ableite.”

²⁵⁰ GA 58, pp. 253f.: “Die philosophische Erfahrung des Lebens selbst ist für die Philosophie aus dem Leben selbst motiviert. Es ist Ernst zu machen mit der Motivierung der philosophischen Methode des Verstehens überhaupt aus dem Leben selbst.” Cf. also GA 59, p. 149.

²⁵¹ GA 58, p. 41: “Das Phänomen der ‘Selbst-genügsamkeit’ selbst kann innerhalb des Lebens an sich, im Verbleiben innerhalb seiner, nicht gesehen werden.”

lacks the phenomenal ground for answering this question. Confronted with the question of origin, life is thus in the first place forced either to retreat into a naive absolutization of its own life-world as a kind of unquestionable universal reality,²⁵² or succumb to the traditional philosophical demand for theoretical grounding. As a result of this phenomenal deficit of factual life, an originary science is called for.

According to Heidegger, the existential aim of the originary science is to free us from all prejudiced attempts to ground factual life – either by absolutizing our historical world or by founding it theoretically – and make possible a transparent enactment of life as the finite self-sufficient destiny it is. The goal is the “achievement of a pure objectification-free life out of significances.”²⁵³ Or, to quote “Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression”: “The task of philosophy is to preserve and strengthen the facticity of life.”²⁵⁴ Hence, Heidegger’s notion of the aim of his originary science both continues and critically transforms the traditional theoretical conception of the task of philosophy. While rejecting the ambition of philosophy to theoretically ground life Heidegger holds on to the idea that the task of philosophy is to offer an ultimate understanding of life *qua* life, which is not given in our pre-theoretical experience but which conditions a clear-sighted enactment of this experience. As Heidegger puts it in a key passage in “The Idea of Philosophy”: “But genuine naivety – this is the paradox – can only be achieved through the innermost philosophical intuition!!”²⁵⁵

Such is the paradox of Heidegger’s early articulation of the task of philosophy: whereas he explicates our pre-theoretical experience as essentially self-sufficient, he claims that philosophy is needed precisely to effect a genuinely naive and self-sufficient life. Is Heidegger able to bear out this paradox as a clear track of thinking or are we rather faced with an ambivalence that he cannot account for?

It seems that Heidegger’s entire description of the existential task of philosophy rests on the presupposition that our everyday pre-theoretical

²⁵² GA 58, pp. 31, 113.

²⁵³ GA 58, p. 156: “Gewinnung des reinen verdinglichungsfreien Leben aus Bedeutsamkeiten.” Cf. also GA 58, pp. 86, 250.

²⁵⁴ GA 59, p. 174: “Die Philosophie hat die Aufgabe, die Faktizität des Lebens zu erhalten und die Faktizität des Daseins zu stärken.”

²⁵⁵ GA 56/57, p. 92: “Aber die echte Naivität, das ist das Paradoxe, läßt sich erst in der höchst inneren philosophischen Intuition gewinnen!!”

experience is centrally concerned with the problem of the origin of life and being – as a problem which in some sense conditions and determines our possibilities of transparently experiencing and grasping the factual significances we encounter in their ultimate sense, but which we normally lack the phenomenal means of accounting for. It is only if we are from the outset concerned with the problem of origin as a decisive problem that it becomes possible to explain how theoretical interpretations of the ground of reality are able to address us as meaningful and convincing in the first place, why they are supposedly blinding and devastating to our understanding of the significances of life, and why a philosophical science of the origin is necessary to make possible a fully clarified and genuine life.

However, the fact of the matter is that Heidegger in his early Freiburg lecture courses provides no substantial account of how the question of origin would meet us in life as an essential question determining our understanding of things. In his phenomenological descriptions, Heidegger normally depicts life in terms of our pre-theoretical experiences of different contexts of significance, experiences we enact without being touched by – understanding or misunderstanding – any question of origin. On a few occasions he mentions the possibility that life may become dominated by worldviews or life forms which take on a governing function: “These life-relations can be pervaded – in quite different ways – by a genuine form of accomplishment and life, e.g. scientific, religious, artistic, political.”²⁵⁶ However, he never specifies how the problem of the origin is there for us as a central question, which the different worldviews and philosophies attempt to answer. Instead, he tends to picture the way in which philosophy addresses life as pure seduction. It is only, as he ironically puts it in “The Idea of Philosophy,” theoretical philosophy that “awakens” life from its “slumber” and “reveals problems.” To see these problems “the naive individual, who knows nothing about philosophical critique” must free herself from her pre-theoretical experience and heave herself up to the theoretical perspective: “One thereby enters a new dimension, the philosophical.”²⁵⁷ Hence, it is only in so far as theoretical

²⁵⁶ GA 56/57, p. 4: “Diese Lebensbezüge können durchherrscht sein – und zwar in ganz verschiedenen Weisen der Durchherrschtung – von einer genuinen Leistungs- und Lebensform, z.B. der wissenschaftlichen, religiösen, künstlerischen, politischen.” Cf. also GA 58, pp. 39f.

²⁵⁷ GA 56/57, pp. 79f.

philosophy presents its promise of a theoretical grounding of life that the problem of origin starts to address us, that is, address us as a seduction.

An Unsettling Suggestion

So far, I have argued that Heidegger's picture of the task of philosophy presupposes that we are essentially engaged by the problem of origin as a decisive problem that we initially enact in a naive way, that theoretical philosophy provides a powerful yet false account of, and that his own originary science is able to clarify. However, not only does Heidegger provide no satisfying account of how the problem of origin addresses us in life; his description of the self-sufficiency of factual life also contains elements which are deeply unsettling to his picture of the task and motivation of philosophy.

Explicating our capacity for pre-theoretical "consideration,"²⁵⁸ i.e., for thinking over and critically reviewing our pre-theoretical experiences prior to any theoretical or philosophical question about the origin of life, Heidegger writes:

One may not speak of validity and validity-claims as long as the objects of our consideration have not abandoned the factual context of experience and formed a self-reliant objectivity standing in front of factual life. [...] On the other hand, however, the experiential character of the factual experiential certainty is of an absolute and unshakeable kind, often bracing and asserting itself stubbornly against every theoretical argumentation offered. This it does as a living conviction, springing from the factual experience, a conviction that does not simply stand there as a theoretical formation in general, but is real in the form of significance. *The conviction sustains my life.*²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ GA 58, p. 112.

²⁵⁹ GA 58, p. 113: "Sofern die Gegenständlichkeit der Kenntnisnahme überhaupt nicht aus dem faktischen Erfahrungszusammenhang heraustritt und eine dem faktischen Leben gegen-überstehende selbständige Objektivität nicht ausformt [...] darf von Gültigkeit und Geltungsanspruch gar nicht gesprochen werden, obwohl andererseits der Erlebnischarakter der faktischen Erfahrungsgewißheit ein absoluter ist, unerschütterlich ist und sich oft auch gegen jede herangebrachte theoretische Beweisführung hartnäckig versteift und behauptet und zwar als lebendige, in der faktischen Erfahrung erwachsene Überzeugung, die nicht lediglich und überhaupt als

What Heidegger suggests here is that our pre-theoretical consideration – relying on the “factual experiential certainty” of our experience – has the capacity of asserting itself against the theories and claims of theoretical philosophy. That is to say, even in want of any philosophical understanding of the originary sense of life, which would allow us to critically discuss and delimit the claims of theoretical philosophy, it is nevertheless possible for us to reject philosophical theories as unintelligible or distortive in relation to our primary experience of phenomenal significance. Such a rejection could, I suppose, take the following form: “I do not know what is wrong about Richard Dawkin’s thesis that we are ultimately selfish creatures, yet it cannot make me doubt that my friend is a generous and loving person.” Although such rejections, due to their lack of philosophical argument and clarity, might appear naive, unwarranted, and irresponsible from a theoretical perspective – and thus be socially and intellectually hard to abide by – they may in fact be entirely to the point in so far as they rely on our experience of the matters at issue.

Now it seems to me that, if pursued, Heidegger’s suggestion has radical consequences for how we should conceive of the task of philosophy, consequences which ultimately unsettle his own attempts to account for this task.

To begin with, Heidegger’s suggestion implies that our immediate pre-theoretical experiences give us open unlimited access to the particular significant matters we encounter, an access which is not hierarchically determined by any preceding understanding of the being or sense-structures of these matters. If so, however, philosophy would not be able to uphold its central promise to explicate the basic senses which normally determine our experience in a naive and prejudiced manner, thus allowing us to attain as basic and ultimate a clarification of life as is possible. Even if philosophical reflection were possible, it would not have the character of an *a priori* understanding of the basic conceptual schemes determining these experiences. Rather, we would have to think of philosophy as a certain kind of thematizing reflection on the structures and sense-relations characterizing the particular experiences and phenomena which we

theoretisches Gebilde dasteht, sondern wirklich ist in der Form der Bedeutsamkeit. Die *Überzeugung trägt* mein Leben.”

basically always already have access to. Hence, although possible and more or less helpful, philosophy would not constitute a necessary or privileged way to clarify life.

Moreover, the suggestion points to the way in which our tendency to be seduced by blinding and distorting philosophical theories is fundamentally a problem of the will rather than a purely cognitive problem. If, prior to any philosophizing, we have open access to what is significant in life, and, on this basis, have the possibility of rejecting philosophies and other worldviews that deny or distort what we experience, then our resorting to such theories is essentially a result of problems in our will. We could have dismissed the theory and held on to what we knew, but, due to the difficulties of facing the ethical-existential demands confronting us, we chose not to.

Heidegger, to be sure, is more awake than most philosophers to the problems of the will at the root of philosophy, claiming that traditional philosophy has been motivated by a propensity to flee from and cover up the difficulties of life, and insisting that philosophy must be led by an existential will and ability – love, sympathy, resolute acceptance of death – to face those difficulties. However, it seems to me that his conception of philosophy as originary science holds on to a certain intellectualism, which his description of the self-sufficiency of pre-theoretical life threatens to undermine. Granted, as Heidegger claims, that factual life has no understanding of its origin when it is seduced by theoretical philosophy – it is seduced in the dark, as it were – then an originary science is necessary in order to clarify, for the first time, the shortages of theoretical philosophy and the sense of life as a finite historical destiny. Hence, it is only through this philosophical understanding of the origin of life that it becomes possible to clearly see and face up to the problems of life – for Heidegger: its frightening groundlessness and finitude – that initially repelled us. Thus conceived, the understanding aimed at by philosophy is in a curious sense prior to and a condition for our experience of these problems. It is only by explicating the temporal-historical sense of life that it becomes fully experienceable as the challenge that it is. The philosophical challenge of understanding thus precedes and conditions the challenge of encountering in person the ethical-existential problems thereby understood.

Heidegger's suggestion unsettles this scheme since it implies that the philosophical understanding is from the very outset drawn into and does not condition our pre-theoretical experience of the ethical-existential problems of life. If we are essentially able to dismiss philosophical theories as distortive of our experience then our attraction to reductive theories basically has the character of a willful repression and covering up of matters that we could but do not want to see. We become convinced of the truth of such philosophical theories because we want to believe them, we do not believe them because we are convinced about their truth. Hence, no better or clearer philosophical understanding of the problems can of itself overcome our problems of will. As long as we lack the will and courage to face the ethical-existential problems of life there will always be ways of dismissing all efforts to clarify and describe these problems, and of finding new distortive theories and worldviews to obscure them. This has at least two consequences for how we should think of the task of philosophy. First, even if it is possible to critically delimit philosophical theories and other worldviews, such critique does not in itself touch the problems that motivated our need for such philosophies in the first place. To the extent that we appropriated the theories because we needed them – and because they were good enough for us – they are essentially replaceable by others as long as we want them and need them. Second, even though it is possible to provide illuminating philosophical descriptions and clarifications of our central existential experiences, such understanding cannot give us access to anything that we are not basically already open to, nor compensate for or overcome the personal ethical-existential challenges we are facing. Hence, philosophical understanding is in no way privileged or more basic in relation to our more immediate and philosophically unreflective ways of thinking about life, and it runs the same risk of being willfully misunderstood as long as we want and need to misunderstand it.

Heidegger, however, never radically pursues the directions of thought that his notion about the possibility of life to reject philosophical theories – with evidence yet without philosophical clarity – opens up. Indeed, I think this suggestion ultimately points toward insights that unsettle and undermine every attempt to conceive of the task of philosophy as that of achieving an understanding – of being, knowledge, language, concepts, experience – which somehow hierarchically determines our possibilities of

immediately experiencing and understanding particular phenomena. Hence, it not only unsettles much of the traditional self-understanding of philosophy, but also Heidegger's own subsequent attempt to rethink the task of philosophy, first, as fundamental ontology, and, later, as a thinking of the openness of historical being.

Philosophy as Phronetic Guidance and Self-Destruction

Heidegger, as said, does not pursue the consequences of his proposal that factual life harbors the phenomenal resources for rejecting philosophical theories. Nevertheless, his failure to account for how the philosophical problem of origin addresses us in life as a basic and decisive task of understanding drastically effects his conception of the existential function and task of philosophy.

Although Heidegger declares that an originary science is necessary for achieving a transparent enactment of factual life, and though he demonstrates the possibility of explicating the originary structures of life, the role of this philosophical understanding in life remains unclear and doubtful. All through his investigations, factual life preserves its primary rank as the absolute and self-sufficient stratum of experience where life lives and significances signify – in such a way that these significances cannot be critically justified or grounded by any understanding of their origin. The upshot of this is, however, that the philosophical understanding of the origin of life, since it cannot ground or fundamentally enhance our understanding of the significances of life, has no role to play in life except that of leading us back to our primary enactment of our factual life-worlds in so far as we have been alienated therefrom by theoretical philosophy.

Here is how Heidegger articulates the existential task of philosophy in terms of a kind of phronetic guidance:

Philosophical research is: *neither* a view and systematization of propositions of knowledge and general principles of being [...]; *nor* a teaching in the sense of a provision of practical clauses and norms [...]; but *rather* a researching-understanding guiding into the life-figures themselves, not with directives and rules, not in a historicist way as a historical understanding of the mere objectified past, but

rather a guiding that, at decisive points and in general, surrenders the living understanding to itself and to the genuineness of its originary understanding, from which genuine motives accrue for the (tasks) determinations assigned to it, to its generation, and to humanity.²⁶⁰

We see: the task of philosophy is ultimately to lead us back and surrender us to our individual pre-theoretical life-worlds, out of which our historical “tasks” and “determinations” grow forth and address us.

This view of the task of philosophy implies that the phronetically guiding capacity of philosophy becomes an essential part of philosophical understanding proper. Should philosophy only manage to develop a host of more or less accurate descriptions of the structures of life without thereby being able to direct the individual back to her concrete particular life it would not only remain existentially pointless and sterile, but would at worst be obstructive and misleading with regard to its edifying goal. Hence, it is no longer feasible to conceive of the originary science in terms of an external relationship between the philosophical understanding and its possible concrete existential effect. On the contrary, the philosophical understanding realizes and fulfills itself in its capacity to imbue the individual with a preparedness to take over and enact her own life. To quote Heidegger’s closing words in “The Idea of Philosophy”: “The genuine insights are only to be won through honest and unreserved immersion into the genuineness of life in itself, ultimately through the genuineness of *personal* life.”²⁶¹

However, in the end Heidegger’s projection of philosophy as an originary science with a purely edifying goal emerges as an unviable compromise. If the philosophical understanding of the origin has no role

²⁶⁰ GA 58, pp. 149f.: “*Philosophische Forschung* ist: *weder* Gesinnung und Systematisierung von Erkenntnissätzen und allgemeinen Gesetzen des Sein [...]; *noch* ein Lehren im Sinne der Beistellung von praktischen Sätzen und Normen [...]; *sondern* ein forschend-verstehendes Führen in die Lebensgestalten selbst, nicht mit Anweisungen und Regeln, nicht historizistisch als historisches Verstehen im Sinne des objektivierten bloß Vergangenen, sondern ein Führen, das das lebendige Verstehen in entscheidenden Stellen und überhaupt sich selbst und der Echtheit seines Ursprungsverstehens überläßt, aus dem ihm für seine, seiner Generation und der Menschheit zufallenden (Aufgaben) Bestimmungen echte Motive erwachsen.”

²⁶¹ GA 56/57, p. 220: “Die echten Einsichten aber sind zur zu gewinnen durch die ehrliche und rückhaltlose Versenkung in die Echtheit des Lebens an sich, letztlich durch die Echtheit *persönlichen* Lebens.”

to play in our struggle to understand and encounter the particular significances of life it is also unclear how such an understanding could ever guide us back to life. Does not this presuppose that the problem of origin concerns us as a problem that philosophy clarifies? If it does not, however, must we not conclude that the only task left for philosophy is purely negative, consisting in a negative dismantling of the constructions of theoretical philosophy?

In fact, in some passages in “Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression” Heidegger goes so far as to suggest that the edifying work of philosophy is realized through self-destruction. Having reviewed some of the contemporary strategies for salvaging an autonomous task for philosophy, Heidegger concludes that none of these strategies dares touch upon the possibility that the only task of philosophy would consist in “making itself look ridiculous with all rigor and of annihilating itself and furthermore of preventing itself from ever reoccurring.”²⁶² That this is exactly the purpose of his own originary science quickly becomes clear: “We do not philosophize in order to show that we need a philosophy but exactly in order to show that we do not need any.”²⁶³ If philosophy besets life as an empty distortive construction and life itself has no need of a positive understanding of the origin, then the only task that remains for philosophy is to dismantle traditional philosophical theories, and, through this destruction, let factual life be.²⁶⁴ However, would not this mean that all the positive phenomenological investigations carried out in his early Freiburg lectures would at the end of the day be existentially futile?

²⁶² GA 59, p. 189: “sich selbst in aller Strenge lächerlich zu machen und zu vernichten und weiterhin sich nicht mehr aufkommen lassen.”

²⁶³ GA 59, p. 191: “Wir philosophieren nicht, um zu zeigen, daß wir eine Philosophie brauchen, sondern um zu zeigen, daß wir keine brauchen.”

²⁶⁴ On this point, there is an obvious parallel to Wittgenstein’s therapeutic view of philosophy, which would deserve closer examination. Cf. § 6.54 of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly” (*Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er muss sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.) Er muss diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig*). Cf. also Wittgenstein’s remarks on the task of philosophy in his *Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 109-133.

We should now be equipped to critically review and delimit the truth of the diverging interpretations of Heidegger's view of the existential task of philosophy presented at the beginning of the chapter. Ultimately, I have argued, Heidegger's difficulties with thinking the task of philosophy spring from his fundamental inability to account for how the problem of origin concerns us in life as a determining problem, which the philosophical science of origin is called to clarify. This central lack gives rise to an uncontrolled vacillation between two disparate tendencies: on the one hand, Heidegger projects his originary science as a basic and necessary path to a transparent enactment of factual life; on the other hand, he insists that, since the originary science cannot ground our pre-theoretical experience of significance its sole existential function lies in its phronetic ability to guide the individual person back to her factual context of life. By exclusively focusing on either of these tendencies Heidegger's commentators have developed their opposite readings of his view of the task of philosophy. Hence, there is no doubt that Crowell and van Buren are right in claiming that Heidegger accepts and pursues the traditional ambition of philosophy to provide an understanding of the origin of life and meaningful being in general. This ambition is carried out concretely in Heidegger's phenomenologically reflexive analyses of the originary structure of factual life, which culminate in his articulation of the basic sense of life as a familiar historical destiny. Conversely, it is precisely Heidegger's explication of the self-sufficiency of factual life that results in an elimination of the possible existential place of philosophy in life, and, consequently, to the contention that the philosophical understanding of origin only accomplishes itself in and through its edifying ability to lead the individual back to her own pre-theoretical context of life. Kisiel's emphasis on the phronetic character of Heidegger's thought highlights this tendency in his early work.

However, even though both interpretations can be said to articulate limited truths about Heidegger's earliest thinking none of them seems to be able to address the philosophical problems at the heart of this thinking, which spark and organize the tendencies about which the interpretations are true. If, on the one hand, one focuses exclusively on Heidegger's pursuit of an originary science one inevitably foregoes his radical emphasis on the self-sufficiency of our factual pre-theoretical experience and his intensive questioning of the role of philosophy in life. Consequently, one

is apt to cling, without further question, to the vague and comfortable promise that philosophy will eventually achieve an understanding of the basic structures of life, which will then, in some way or other, shed a clarifying, critically measuring light on all the factual significances of life. If, on the other hand, one exclusively pursues the idea of the edifying task of philosophy, one loses all means to account for and probe the philosophical possibilities of understanding that Heidegger tries to develop in his concrete phenomenological work.

The End of Heidegger's First Beginning

Heidegger's problems with accounting for the role of philosophy in life in his earliest Freiburg lecture courses are mirrored in and to some extent reinforced by his historical orientation during that period.

In his early post-war lectures Heidegger is convinced that the entire tradition of Greek philosophy – from Plato and Aristotle up to Husserl and the Neo-Kantians – is essentially an outgrowth of the governing idea about the primacy of the theoretical attitude. Conversely, in his own effort to open up a science of pre-theoretical life he is influenced, first, by contemporary life-philosophers such as Dilthey, Nietzsche, Bergson, Simmel and James, and, second, by Christian thinkers such as St. Paul, Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Luther and Kierkegaard. According to Heidegger, it has indeed hitherto been the exclusive privilege of original Christianity – especially St. Paul – to emphasize and articulate factual life in its temporal and finite movement. However, none of these historical paradigms provides a model for a new understanding of the role of philosophy in life: whereas the life-philosophers tend to fluctuate between an urge to keep up the traditional task of philosophy and an impulse to dissolve it into psychology or historicism, the edifying Christian thinking of St. Paul et al essentially transpires in a pre-theoretical discourse on this side of every philosophical question concerning the basic structures of life. Thus, in instigating his originary science as a strict phenomenological realization of the traditional task of philosophy while denying the preceding philosophical tradition any experience of the origin of life, he loses every historical paradigm for understanding how the specific philosophical problematic is motivated in life itself.

Roughly speaking, Heidegger's effort to develop an originary science of life on the paradigmatic basis of original Christianity reaches its inner limit in the courses "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion" and "Augustine and Neo-Platonism" delivered in the winter and summer of 1920-21. Even though the first of these courses offers an innovative reading of St Paul's letters as an articulation of the basic temporality and finitude of life, it is incapable of shedding any new light on the nature of the philosophical explication itself and its relation to life. The lectures, indeed, are caught between two impossible tasks. On the one hand, Heidegger writes that the ambition of his lecture course is "only to open the access to the New Testament," yet abstain from an "ultimate understanding" of Christian life, which can "only be given in the genuine religious experience."²⁶⁵ Reaching the closing stages of his lectures Heidegger eventually complains that it is "almost hopeless to gain entry to such a context of enactment."²⁶⁶ On the other hand, the whole question concerning the relevance of religious experience for the philosophical understanding of origin remains unanswered. Heidegger ends his lecture course by stating that it is a "difficult question" why the Christian religiosity in particular "stands in the focus of our considerations," and that this question can only be answered through attaining an "originary relationship to history."²⁶⁷ However, *this* goal cannot be achieved by religious explication on its own. To be able to address critical questions concerning the role of philosophy and history in our pre-theoretical experience Heidegger would need to do nothing less than open up a new radical investigation of the basic structure of phenomenality.

In the end, Heidegger's basic analysis of the structure of our pre-theoretical experience of significant phenomena is unable to account either for the function of historicity in the phenomenal experience or for the role of philosophy in life. It is, then, precisely these questions – the question of history and the question of philosophy – that motivate Heidegger's further questioning and provoke the return to Aristotle, which will set the stage for all his subsequent thinking.

²⁶⁵ GA 60, p. 67.

²⁶⁶ GA 60, p. 121.

²⁶⁷ GA 60, p. 124.

Part Two: The Historical Structure of Phenomenality

2.1 Introduction

In the summer of 1921 Heidegger, still *Privatdozent* at the University of Freiburg and working as Husserl's assistant, decides to give a seminar on Aristotle's *On the Soul*. As it turns out this seminar signifies the beginning of a new phase in Heidegger's development. It initiates a period of intensive explication and lecturing on Aristotle that in important respects refurbishes his philosophical stance. Through an exceptionally productive reading of Aristotle – sensitive and violent at the same time – Heidegger carries out a new analysis of the basic historical structure of phenomenality, which also allows him to rethink the task of philosophy in terms of the question of being. It is now that Heidegger becomes *the Heidegger* that has exercised such a strong influence on the subsequent development of philosophy and that has functioned as the primal point of focus for later interpretations of his thinking. The development begun in 1921 culminates with the publication of Heidegger's early magnum opus, *Being and Time* in 1927.

Yet how should this return to Aristotle be understood? What is it that motivates it and what makes it philosophically crucial?

In fact, it seems that Heidegger was far from clearly anticipating what he would find in Aristotle as he decided to dedicate his seminar to *On the Soul*. Heidegger's historical orientation during the first post-war years 1919-1921 had been determined by his conviction that the entire tradition of Western philosophy was rooted in the theoretical attitude, and that the most qualified historical articulation of the dynamics of pre-theoretical life available to us was found in original Christianity. In this constellation Aristotle principally figured as the Greek originator of traditional theoretical philosophy. Given his view that since the Middle Ages both philosophy and theology had been steeped in the conceptuality of Aristotelian philosophy, covering up and distorting the original Christian

experience, Heidegger thought it is “one of the innermost tendencies of phenomenology” to “radically liberate itself” from the Aristotelian heritage, in order to retrieve a better understanding of pre-theoretical life.²⁶⁸ When Heidegger chose Aristotle as the theme of his seminar he was simultaneously lecturing on “Augustine and Neo-Platonism,” and it seems – as Theodore Kisiel has argued – that his choice to a large extent happened “almost casually and seemingly by way of default,” being motivated partly his frustration at the poor theological grounding of his students, partly by his interest in dismantling the Greekification of primitive Christianity by taking on the primal Greek influence in this process, Aristotle.²⁶⁹ However, even though Heidegger’s turn to Aristotle was to some extent the result of arbitrary circumstances, he very soon came to believe that Aristotle’s writings held decisive keys to the problems he was struggling with at the time.

Let me briefly recapitulate the background.

As we have seen, Heidegger’s first Freiburg lectures courses after the war were guided by the aim of critically elaborating Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology into an originary science of factual life. In

²⁶⁸ GA 58, p. 61. Cf. also GA 58, p. 205.

²⁶⁹ Kisiel 1993, pp. 227f. However, although Kisiel seems to be right in claiming that Heidegger’s turn to Aristotle was to some extent accidental, I also think it is reasonable to suppose that Heidegger did entertain *some* more or less unspecified hopes that Aristotle’s thinking might open up new perspectives on the problems and aporias into which his originary science of factual life had led him. Not only do we know from the old Heidegger’s testimony that ever since he received Franz Brentano’s dissertation *On the Manifold Meaning of Being in Aristotle* (*Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*) as a gift in his student years, he had been acquainted with Aristotle and intrigued by his question of being (cf. GA 14, p. 93). Moreover, although Heidegger is primarily dismissive of Aristotle during his earliest Freiburg years, his course “Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion” from the winter term 1920-21 already contains the following passage on Aristotle: “Already Aristotle says in his metaphysics: *to on pollakhōs legetai* (beings are multiply said). However, Aristotle meant something more than what one had theretofore seen. For Aristotle, at issue is not only an ontological consideration; rather, an entirely other, implicit consideration hovers therein. Aristotle’s metaphysics is perhaps already further than we ourselves are today in philosophy” (*Schon Aristoteles sagt in seiner Metaphysik: τὸ ὄν πολλαχῶς λέγεται* (*das Seiende wird vielfach gesagt*). *Doch meint Aristoteles wohl noch etwas anderes, als man bisher gesehen hat. Es handelt sich bei ihm nicht nur um ontologische Betrachtungen, sondern es schwebt eine ganz andere Betrachtung unabgehoben mit. Die aristotelische Metaphysik ist vielleicht schon weiter als wir selbst heute in der Philosophie sind*) (GA 60, p. 56). Clearly, this remark expresses at least a hunch that Aristotle’s texts might offer insights crucial to the originary science Heidegger was trying to develop.

contrast to Husserl, who, according to Heidegger, took over the traditional purpose of philosophy to provide a foundation for factual life and whose conception of the intentional structure of consciousness was modeled on the paradigm of theoretical observation, Heidegger insists that our basic phenomenal access to the domain of meaning lies in our pre-theoretical experience of the world. He articulates the structure of factual life in terms of a self-sufficient experience in which the experienced significances and our way of experiencing them form an indivisible unity, which is ultimately anchored in the historical situation of the particular self. However, Heidegger's advance towards factual life leads him into deep aporias that he is not able to answer. In the end, his analysis of the basic structure of factual life does not suffice for accounting either for the radically historical character of our experience of phenomena – on which Heidegger nevertheless insists – or for the motivation and role of philosophy in life.

It is in this situation that Heidegger turns to Aristotle. As I will argue in the following, Heidegger's explication of Aristotle, and the shift in his thinking that it occasions, very much revolves around the problem of phenomenality. Heidegger's systematically crucial discovery is that Aristotle's writings harbor a model for rethinking the basic structure of phenomenality with a view to how our direct intuitive experience of significant phenomena is always already determined by our preceding understanding of the historical contexts of meaning in which we live. This new conception of the structure of phenomenality makes it possible for Heidegger to account for the historical character of phenomenal appearing, and to rearticulate the phenomenological method in terms of a hermeneutic explication that centrally involves a critical destruction of the philosophical tradition and a retrieval of the historical sources of our understanding. Moreover, it allows him to account for the task of philosophy in terms of the question of being, conceived as the normally hidden horizon of all our experience and understanding.

As Heidegger returns to Aristotle, he sees a peculiar possibility precisely in Aristotle's role as *primus motor* of the philosophical tradition. Given his view that Aristotle shapes the basic philosophical concepts henceforth governing the tradition in an almost autistic manner, it is possible to assume that the basic experiences underlying these concepts are still conspicuously present and effective in his texts. By tracing the

origin of the tradition back to Aristotle, Heidegger thinks it is possible not only to critically delimit the concrete experiential basis of the traditional conceptuality, but also to access a more primordial understanding of the matters at stake. In the following years, Aristotle will thus play a highly ambivalent role for Heidegger.²⁷⁰ On the one hand, Heidegger believes that Aristotle's works harbor – in a still hidden and disfigured way – an unsurpassed explication of factual life in its historical structure; on the other he sees that Aristotle's ontology, which founds the philosophical tradition, is ultimately determined by the paradigm of theoretical knowledge and by an understanding of being as presence – *ousia* – which hampers, distorts and covers up his latent insights into the dynamics of life. Aristotle's ambivalent father-role makes him philosophically decisive: it is only by explicating Aristotle that we can hope to dismantle and critically delimit the traditional concepts of philosophy and open up a more primordial explication of the basic problems of philosophy.

Although the development of Heidegger's thinking in these years chiefly takes place through his explications of Aristotle, Husserl's phenomenology continues to exercise a basic influence on his thought. Heidegger's main rhetorical strategy consists in invoking Aristotle as the source of a more original analysis of the structure of phenomenality, in a way that allows him to free himself from Husserl's phenomenological framework and diagnose his erstwhile mentor as a late representative of the tradition of theoretical philosophy that is to be overcome. Nevertheless, Husserl's impact remains strong, perhaps stronger than Heidegger wants to admit. It is precisely Heidegger's phenomenological investigations of the structures of factual life – Husserlian at their core – which guide his explications of Aristotle and makes them so productive. Moreover, it is an open question – to be explored in the following pages – to what extent Heidegger, despite his effort to develop a radically historical thinking, remains committed to a Husserlian method of intuitive phenomenological reflection.

Heidegger's thinking during this period also continues to be heavily influenced by the hermeneutic tradition, especially by Dilthey. Indeed, Dilthey's presence in Heidegger's attempt to work out the temporality and

²⁷⁰ Günter Figal formulates the ambivalent role of Aristotle deftly when he states that "Heidegger's Aristotle is a Janus-headed thinker" (*Heideggers Aristoteles ist ein janusköpfiger Denker*) (Figal 2007b, p. 61).

historicity of Dasein is strong and constant, although it often remains hidden behind Heidegger's ambition to stage his new thinking as a reappropriation of Aristotle.²⁷¹ An important event in these years was Heidegger's reading of the correspondence between Dilthey and Count Yorck, which provided vital incentives for his thinking of historicity. Finally, I should mention Kierkegaard, whom Heidegger read intensively at the time, and whose influence is palpable in the analysis of authenticity and death in *Being and Time*.²⁷²

Heidegger's seminar on *On the Soul* in the summer of 1921 is the first of a series of courses and seminars on Aristotle's texts that will continue uninterrupted until the end of 1924. In the summer of 1922, he delivers his first full scale course on Aristotle, consisting of detailed translations and interpretations of selected parts of the *Metaphysics* and *Physics*. At the time, Heidegger is also planning a book on Aristotle. In the autumn of 1922, he composes an introduction to the book project, intended to serve as textual support for his twin applications for professorships in Marburg and Göttingen. The book was never written but the introduction to the project, named "Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle (Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation),"²⁷³ constitutes Heidegger's first compressed articulation of his new philosophical stance. Eventually "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation" also served its worldly purpose. First turned down in Göttingen, Heidegger is elected Professor of Philosophy in Marburg in the summer of 1923. In Marburg Heidegger continues and expands his conception of the structure of phenomenality by further developing his analyses of *Dasein* as being in the world and temporality. The period also contains two extensive critical engagements with Husserl's phenomenology. In his first Marburg lecture course "Introduction to Phenomenological Research" from the winter of 1923-24, he interprets Husserl's modern phenomenology as an alienation from Aristotle's originary phenomenology. After a few semesters of Aristotle-courses, he offers his most extensive treatment of Husserl ever in the

²⁷¹ Cf. Gadamer 1987, pp. 420ff.; Guignon 1983, pp. 44-63, 110-115; Kisiel 1993, pp. 315-361; Bambach 1995; Maakreel 2004; Ruin 1994, pp. 9, 15f., 41f., 112f.

²⁷² For some studies of Heidegger's relationship to Kierkegaard, see, e.g., Guignon 2011; McCarthy 2011; Magurshak 1985; van Buren 1994, pp. 157-202.

²⁷³ "Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)," in GA 62 (henceforth referred to as "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation" in the main text).

lecture course “History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena” from the summer of 1925. In these years, Heidegger thus works on two fronts simultaneously: while he lets his new conception of phenomenality grow forth in the rich and moldable soil of the Aristotelian corpus, he is at the same time eager to specify and sharpen his vision by critically contrasting it to Husserl’s phenomenological program.

The philosophical development initiated in 1921 culminates and receives its final systematic expression as Heidegger publishes *Being and Time* in 1927. The aim of the book is to carry out a fundamental ontology, that is to say, an investigation of the sense of being on the basis of an existential analytic of the human being, *Dasein*. Originally, the treatise was meant to consist of two main parts, each containing three divisions, but Heidegger never published more than the two first divisions of the first part. During the years following the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger continues probing new strategies for realizing his project of fundamental ontology but eventually gives up the idea on account of the deep inner problems of the project. In what follows, I will focus on Heidegger’s thinking from 1921 to 1927. I begin by offering an account of how Heidegger’s new conception of the structure of phenomenality grows forth through his readings of Aristotle, and how this leads him to rearticulate his critique of Husserl’s phenomenology. After that, I go on to investigate in detail how Heidegger’s struggle with the problem of phenomenality is played out in *Being and Time*.

When *Being and Time* was published in 1927, it rapidly brought Heidegger fame and massive attention on the larger philosophical scene. From that moment, the book for many decades functioned as the principal hermeneutic point of focus for interpreting and discussing Heidegger’s philosophical thinking in its entirety.

The reception of Heidegger’s magnum opus was centrally marked by the fact the publication of the book was preceded by a decade of silence. Since the publication of his *Habilitationsschrift* on Duns Scotus in 1916, Heidegger had not published anything. Instead, the thinking that comes to expression in *Being and Time* had been elaborated in the numerous lecture courses that Heidegger had held in Freiburg and Marburg after the First World War. The result of this was that, as Theodore Kisiel has put it, for many years “one was forced to regard this complex work as something

that sprang fullgrown, like Athena, from the head of Zeus.”²⁷⁴ This situation gradually began to change after Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* was launched in 1975. However, even though editions of important lecture courses were published in the 1970s and 1980s, it was only in the 1990s – when the bulk of the early Freiburg lecture courses were published – that it became possible to get a full picture of the philosophical path that culminated in *Being and Time*.

What made the lack of context particularly demanding for the readers of *Being and Time* was not only the notorious difficulty of the work, but its driving philosophical ambition to open up a new framework of philosophical questioning. In articulating his project of fundamental ontology Heidegger was palpably influenced by many philosophical sources (e.g. Aristotle, Husserl, Dilthey, Count Yorck, Kierkegaard, Kant and Hegel) yet at the same time the roles and senses accorded to these sources – all of them ultimately belonging to the tradition of *Seinsvergessenheit* that was to be overcome – within Heidegger’s project was far from obvious. This awkward hermeneutic situation to some extent accounts for the fact that over the years *Being and Time* has been the object of so many divergent interpretations, highlighting and exploiting different aspects of this complex work depending on the interpreter’s own philosophical orientation and interests. Hence, Heidegger has been interpreted and enlisted as a life-philosopher, as an existentialist, as a Christian mystic, as an Aristotelian, as a hermeneutic thinker, as a deconstructivist, as a Husserlian phenomenologist, as a Kantian transcendentalist, and so on. With the publication of Heidegger’s collected works, and with the ever-increasing amount of research undertaken into the historical contexts from which *Being and Time* evolves, the multitude of interpretations has been reduced somewhat as we have gained a better picture of the basic philosophical impulses and motives informing Heidegger’s early thinking.

Although the question of phenomenality/phenomenology has always been present in the discussion of *Being and Time*, it is only in last decades that it has surfaced as one of the most central and controversial themes of the Heidegger-discussion. The most obvious reason why this question remained in the background for so long is that for many years the

²⁷⁴ Kisiel 1993, p. 1.

reception was dominated by interpretations that largely ignored or downplayed the influence of Husserl's phenomenology on Heidegger's thinking. Instead, Heidegger was commonly regarded as the definitive critic of the supposed Cartesianism and belief in direct intuitive givenness still characterizing Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The interpretation presented by Gadamer in *Truth and Method* in 1960 set the agenda for the impending years. Hailing Heidegger as the decisive stimulus for his own attempt to develop a philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer describes how Heidegger abandons the idea of the "self-givenness of experience," which still functioned as the "methodological basis" of Husserl's phenomenology: "Under the rubric of a 'hermeneutics of facticity,' Heidegger confronted Husserl's eidetic phenomenology [...] with a paradoxical demand. Phenomenology should be ontologically based on the facticity of Dasein, existence, which cannot be based or derived from anything else, and not on the pure cogito as the essential constitution of typical universality – a bold idea, but difficult to carry through."²⁷⁵ This picture of Heidegger is basically reproduced – albeit in a critical vein – in the interpretations of Ernst Tugendhat, Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. Likewise, the first two full-scale philosophical biographies of Heidegger – *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking (Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers)* (1963) by Otto Pöggeler and *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (1963) by William J. Richardson – both largely play down the Husserlian origins and character of Heidegger's early thinking. Moreover, in his role as a major influence on the post-structuralist and deconstructivist thought of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and others, Heidegger is also greeted as a severe critic of the ideal of direct "presence" and "self-givenness," and as a thinker of the radical historicity and finitude of thought. The proponents of the pragmatist reading of Heidegger – which has been prominent on the Anglo-Saxon scene – have also tended to see Heidegger as a thinker who overcomes the theoretical-epistemological framework of Husserl's phenomenology as well as its supposed subjectivism and intuitionism.

²⁷⁵ Gadamer 1990, p. 259: "Unter dem Stichwort einer 'Hermeneutik der Faktizität' stellte Heidegger der eidetischen Phänomenologie Husserls [...] eine paradoxe Forderung entgegen. Die unbegründbare und unableitbare Faktizität des Daseins, die Existenz, und nicht das reine cogito als Wesensverfassung von typischer Allgemeinheit, sollte die ontologische Basis der phänomenologischen Fragestellung darstellen – ein ebenso kühner wie schwer zu einlösender Gedanke."

We have to wait until the 1990s for the emergence of a strong phenomenological interpretation – elaborated by, e.g., Steven Crowell, Daniel Dahlstrom and Søren Overgaard – of Heidegger’s work.²⁷⁶ There are many reasons for this delay. Although Heidegger pays homage to Husserl in *Being and Time*, and calls the method of his fundamental ontology “phenomenology,” the concrete influence of Husserl largely remains implicit. Instead, Heidegger’s explicit program for a hermeneutic-destructive explication of Dasein as being-in-the-world can easily be read as a rejection of Husserl’s phenomenology in favor of a radically historical thinking. When Heidegger’s early Freiburg and Marburg lecture courses – in which the strong influence of Husserl is much more conspicuous and is elaborated in more detail – were published in the 1980s and 1990s, it became easier to get a grip on the phenomenological character of Heidegger’s early thinking. Another reason – perhaps the philosophically most decisive reason – for the late birth of the phenomenological Heidegger is found in the fact that it is only in the 1990s that a new wave of intensive research on Husserl was able to bring about a more nuanced and philosophically potent picture of Husserl’s phenomenology. Indeed, only when we learn to see that Husserl cannot simply be dismissed as a traditional Cartesian epistemologist but opens up a powerful and open-ended idea of philosophy as strict intuitive description of the meaning-structures of our concrete experiences – only then does it become possible to interpret Heidegger’s thinking as an elaboration of Husserl’s phenomenological program.

For some years now, the discussion of the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology in *Being and Time* and in the Marburg-years has been characterized by the already familiar antagonism between the transcendental phenomenological reading and the hermeneutic-deconstructive reading of Heidegger. Whereas proponents of the first reading have primarily concentrated on bringing out what they believe is Heidegger’s basic phenomenological method of reflective description, defenders of the second reading have tended to focus on Heidegger’s analysis of the historical as-structure of understanding and on his explicit

²⁷⁶ There are of course some exceptions to this general scheme. See, e.g., Carl Friedrich Gehtmann’s important 1974 book *Verstehen und Auslegung* which presents an interpretation of Heidegger as a transcendental phenomenologist. Cf. also Stapleton 1983.

program for a hermeneutic-destructive mode of thinking. In what follows, I am going to develop by explication of the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology in Heidegger's Marburg-years against the backdrop of these opposed readings, with the aim of delimiting their relative truths. In due course, I will specify the general tendencies outlined above by discussing the viewpoints of particular commentators. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate the extent to which the conflict between the transcendental phenomenological and the hermeneutic-deconstructive reading mirrors the deep ambivalences that haunt Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology.

The second part is divided into the following chapters: (2.2) Towards a New Conception of Phenomenality, (2.3) The Project of Fundamental Ontology, (2.4) The Basic Structure of Phenomenality, (2.5) Heidegger's Method, and (2.5) Authenticity and the End of *Being and Time*.

2.2 Towards a New Conception of Phenomenality

So what did Heidegger find in Aristotle and how did it effect his conception of phenomenality and phenomenological philosophy?

The results of Heidegger's confrontation with Aristotle come to a first dense expression in "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation," the introduction Heidegger wrote to his planned book on Aristotle in 1922. In fact, the text is nothing less than Heidegger's first outline of the philosophical stance that receives its final systematic articulation in *Being and Time*. I will begin this chapter by examining how Heidegger, in "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation," carves out his new conception of the structure of phenomenality in the clay of Aristotle's writings, and how this conception allows him to reformulate the ontological task and the historical method of phenomenology. I then explicate how Heidegger, on this basis, appropriate and reinterprets the word "phenomenon" in his first Marburg lecture course "Introduction to phenomenological Research." Heidegger's new quasi-Aristotelian account of phenomenality also leads him to reformulate his critique of Husserl. In the remaining part of the chapter, I will examine this critique as it is developed in the lecture courses "Introduction to Phenomenological Research" and "Prolegomena."

In what follows I will provide no detailed historical account of how Heidegger's reading of Aristotle develops, nor will I offer any thorough critical comparison measuring this reading against an independent interpretation of Aristotle's texts. Generally speaking, Heidegger's explication of Aristotle is characterized by its curious blend of receptivity and violence. By reading Aristotle's texts as one long phenomenological explication of factual life, Heidegger is able to extract a series of phenomenological structures, which, in their original Aristotelian context, rarely have the emphasis, precision or ontological sense he ascribes them. However, here I will leave the question of the historical force and accuracy of Heidegger's reading aside and focus strictly on the systematic role that Aristotle's concepts acquire in Heidegger's own philosophical endeavor.²⁷⁷

The Confrontation with Aristotle

Heidegger begins "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation" by declaring that the capacity of a historical interpretation to open up and explicate its object is dependent on its ability to clarify its "hermeneutic situation,"²⁷⁸ i.e., the current situation of questioning on the basis of which the past may address and become intelligible to us. To secure the hermeneutic situation of his Aristotle-interpretation, he provides a preliminary outline of the philosophical problematic guiding the interpretation. This outline – which is in fact a first draft of the project of *Being and Time* – unfolds as follows:

Philosophy, Heidegger writes, is "fundamental ontology" (*prinzipielle Ontologie*), a questioning of the "being of factual life."²⁷⁹ The basic sense of life is "care" (*Sorge*) for its "world."²⁸⁰ This care is not blind but guided by a "circumspection" (*Umsicht*), which apprehends the object of concern "as signified in this or that way" (*als so und so bedeutendes*).²⁸¹ Moreover, life always already moves in a certain historical "interpretedness" (*Ausgelegttheit*)

²⁷⁷ Heidegger's relationship to Aristotle has been the subject of several studies. Cf., e.g., Sheehan 1978; 1988c; Volpi 1984a; 1984b; Sadler 1996; McNeill 1999; Weigelt 2002; Brogan 2005; Sommer 2005; Backman 2005; Rese 2007; Denker et al. [eds.] 2007; Figal 2007b.

²⁷⁸ GA 62, p. 346.

²⁷⁹ GA 62, p. 364.

²⁸⁰ GA 62, p. 352.

²⁸¹ GA 62, p. 353.

of itself and its world, which determines its circumspection.²⁸² Given the difficulty of facing and accepting the mortality and finitude of life, life has a basic tendency to “flee” and “fall away” (*abfallen*) from itself,²⁸³ such that the individual tends to renounce her responsibility and take over the received traditional interpretedness of life – what “They” (*man*) think, do, and appreciate²⁸⁴ – without independent critical questioning. In so doing, life forfeits the possibility of true “existence,”²⁸⁵ i.e., of confronting its own essential mortality and transparently grasping itself in its finite temporal and historical being. The task of philosophy, Heidegger states, is to explicitly and radically enact life’s basic concern with understanding its own being, in order thus to make possible genuine and clear-sighted existence.²⁸⁶

Such is, roughly, the scheme that Heidegger projects to articulate the structure of life and the task of philosophy. But why does he not go on elaborating his description, widening and deepening it, instead of conceiving of it as a provisional preparation for an interpretation of Aristotle? Or to quote Heidegger: “But it has still *not become understandable* what kind of role historical investigations are supposed to play” for a hermeneutic of factual life, and “why *Aristotle* is to be placed within the theme of the investigation, and further how the investigation is to be carried out”?²⁸⁷

According to Heidegger, the propensity of life to fall away from itself implies that it has always already slid into and taken over a certain traditional interpretation of its own being. As a result of the tendency to uncritically pass on the tradition, Heidegger maintains that the contemporary interpretation of life still basically operates within the Greek conceptuality that has been handed down to us, but which stems from experiences that are not available to us anymore: “For the most part the philosophy of the contemporary situation moves inauthentically within the

²⁸² GA 62, p. 354.

²⁸³ GA 62, pp. 356, 360.

²⁸⁴ GA 62, p. 358.

²⁸⁵ GA 62, p. 361.

²⁸⁶ Cf. GA 62, pp. 349, 351.

²⁸⁷ GA 62, p. 366: “Noch ist *aber nicht verständlich geworden*, was für eine solche Hermeneutik geschichtliche Untersuchungen sollen end warum gerade *Aristoteles* in das Thema der Untersuchung gestellt ist, wie ferner diese zu bewerkstelligen sein wird.”

Greek conceptuality – indeed one that has passed through a chain of diverse interpretations. The basic concepts have lost their original expressive functions, functions which were particularly tailored to fit particularly experienced regions of objects.”²⁸⁸ Ultimately, Heidegger claims that the Greco-Christian interpretation of life in which we live is rooted in Aristotle’s philosophy. It is Aristotle who shapes and conceptualizes the basic understanding of man and being that will henceforth – through a series of displacements and modifications – dominate the whole Western tradition: from St. Paul and Augustine, over the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, over Luther and Descartes, through Kant and German idealism up to today. Hence, in order to be able to critically explicate the traditional concepts governing our self-understanding we need to undertake a “destruction” (*Destruktion*) of these concepts in order to arrive at their origin in Aristotle’s philosophy:

Thus the phenomenological hermeneutic of facticity sees itself called upon to loosen up the handed-down and dominating interpretedness in its hidden motives, unexpressed tendencies, and ways of interpreting; and to push forward by way of a *dismantling return* toward the original motive sources of the explication. *The hermeneutic carries out its task only on the path of destruction.* So long as it has understood the kind of objectivity and being which belongs to its thematical toward-which (the facticity of life), philosophical research is “*historical*” knowing in the radical sense. For philosophical research, the destructive confrontation with philosophy’s history is not a mere appendix for the purposes of illustrating how things were earlier. [...] The destruction is rather the authentic path upon which the present must encounter itself in its own basic movements.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ GA 62, p. 367: “Die Philosophie der heutigen Situation bewegt sich zum großen Teil uneigentlich in der *griechischen* Begrifflichkeit, und zwar in einer solchen, die durch eine Kette von verschiedenartigen Interpretationen hindurchgegangen ist. Die Grundbegriffe haben ihre ursprünglichen, auf bestimmt erfahrene Gegenstandsregionen bestimmt zugeschnittenen Ausdrucksfunktionen eingebüßt.”

²⁸⁹ GA 62, p. 368. “Die phänomenologische Hermeneutik der Faktizität sieht sich demnach [...] darauf verwiesen, die überkommene und herrschende Auslegung nach ihren verdeckten Motiven, unausdrücklichen Tendenzen und Auslegungswegen aufzulockern und im *abbauenden Rückgang* zu den ursprünglichen Motivquellen der Explikation vorzudringen. *Die Hermeneutik bewerkstelligt ihre Aufgabe nur auf dem Wege der Destruktion.* Philosophische Forschung ist, sofern sie die Gegenstands- und Seinsart ihres thematischen Worauf (Faktizität des Lebens) verstanden hat, im radikalen Sinne

Heidegger's insistence on the necessity of destructing our received understanding is a clear mark of the transformation that his conception of phenomenality and phenomenology is undergoing at this time. Already in his earliest Freiburg lectures, he had emphasized the need to attend to and critically destruct the prejudiced concepts by which we normally live. At that time, however, he still believed that emancipation and originary understanding could be achieved through an intuitive phenomenological explication of the basic structures of life. Now he closes this possibility. Given that the phenomenological hermeneutic can gain access to its matter "only on the path of destruction," this implies two things: first, that our intuitive experience of meaning is so fundamentally determined by our historical pre-understanding that this pre-understanding cannot be critically examined through an intuition-based explication of the matters in question but only through a destructive return to its historical sources; second, that as long as the Western tradition of philosophy has never been able to retrieve its origin in Aristotle's philosophy it has necessarily unfolded as a virtually autistic sequence doomed to repeat and vary the basic concepts it has always already inherited as its point of departure.

For Heidegger the purpose of interpreting Aristotle is thus not to provide a historical foil for the illumination of his primary systematic description of life. Rather, the interpretation constitutes the central path of the systematic investigation itself. It is only by returning to Aristotle that it becomes possible to dismantle the prejudiced philosophical tradition and trace it back to the sources out of which its central conceptuality has grown forth. Moreover, by freely and critically delimiting the meaning of its traditional concepts philosophy is also opened up to the possibility of finding, in Aristotle's texts, a new and more originary explication of life. According to Heidegger, the preliminary explication of the structure of factual life, guiding his historical interpretation of Aristotle, is thus strictly speaking already a result of that very interpretation.

As mentioned above, Heidegger believes there are two ambivalent sides to Aristotle's thinking, which make him philosophically decisive. On the one hand, Aristotle ultimately determines being as *ousia* – as pure and

'historisches' Erkennen. Die destruktive Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer Geschichte ist für die philosophische Forschung kein bloßer Annex zu Zwecken der Illustration dessen, wie es früher gewesen ist. [...] Die Destruktion ist vielmehr der eigentliche Weg, auf dem sich die Gegenwart in ihren eigenen Grundbewegtheiten begegnen muß."

constant presence – on the basis of the experiential paradigm of theoretical observation, *sofia*. It is, Heidegger claims, this conception of being that constitutes the ultimate ontological horizon of all of Aristotle's thinking, and that will henceforth dominate the history of philosophy. On the other hand, Heidegger claims that Aristotle's thinking also contains a qualified and unsurpassed articulation of the structure of factual pre-theoretical life. Since this articulation is shadowed and hampered by Aristotle's conception of being as *ousia*, the task Heidegger sets himself is to spell it out and radicalize it as an articulation of the basic sense of factual life. Indeed, he also believes that Aristotle's conception of life sheds light on the existential roots of the traditional theoretical understanding of being as presence.

According to Heidegger, Aristotle's analysis of *phronēsis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a qualified model for thinking the structure of our pre-theoretical phenomenal understanding. *Phronēsis*, Heidegger maintains, signifies the circumspection that guides life's practical coping with its world. This circumspection is no simple sense perception but exhibits a synthetic structure: "a going-toward the being with 'regard' to another being-intended."²⁹⁰ It is only to the extent that we intend particular beings on the basis of a preceding concern and understanding that these beings may show up *as* something significant: as a tree, as a house, as a human being. This synthetic as-structure is the condition for both truth and untruth. I can only perceive a horse on a field or mistake a donkey for a horse on the backdrop of a certain understanding of horses. Aristotle calls the preceding understanding guiding all our phenomenal experience "*nous*": "*Nous* is perception pure and simple; it is that which in the first place enables and gives a whereupon (*Worauf*) for any and every 'coping' whatsoever. [...] The perceiving puts everything forth (*stellt alles her*) as something available. *Nous* gives sight, gives a something, gives a 'there'. [...] *Nous* is *aisthēsis tis*, an apprehending which in each case simply pre-gives the 'look' of the objects."²⁹¹ *Nous* thus has the character of an

²⁹⁰ GA 62, p. 378: "ein zugehen auf das Seiende in der 'Hinsicht' eines anderen Vermeintseins."

²⁹¹ GA 62, p. 381: "Der νοῦς ist das Vernehmen schelchthin, das heißt das, was ein Worauf für irgendwelchen gerichteten 'Umgang mit' überhaupt ermöglicht, vorgibt. [...] Das Vernehmen stellt *alles* her als ein Verfügenkönnen darüber, und zwar so wie das Licht. Der νοῦς gibt überhaupt Sicht, ein Etwas, ein 'Da'. [...] Der νοῦς ist

understanding that, prior to every possibility of truth or mistake, presents the *eidē* – the meaningful looks or essences, the “as-what-determinations” – in the light of which beings can show up as one thing or the other.²⁹² Given that *nous* constitutes the light conditioning all possible seeing and experience of beings, it cannot itself have the character of seeing, but must rather be understood as the primary unthematic “*doxa*” or “originary belief” (*Urglaube*) preceding all such seeing.²⁹³ Heidegger ultimately interprets *nous* in terms of the pre-understanding of historical meaning that we always already live in, and which determines our possibilities of apprehending particular entities as meaningful phenomena.

Nous, Heidegger continues, does not only present the meaningful looks or essences – *eidē* – that determine as what beings can show up. This understanding-of-*eidē* is, in its turn, guided by an understanding of the *archai*: the ultimate “from which” that we always already “keep in sight” and which determine the “domains of being” of different beings.²⁹⁴ This hierarchical stratification of *nous* provides the basis for Heidegger’s new conception of the task of philosophy as a questioning of being. If our experience of meaningful beings is from the outset organized by an understanding of the *archai* – the different senses of being and the sense of being as such – in an unthematic way, then the philosophical task of clarifying the sense of being emerges as the fundamental condition for achieving a transparent understanding of ourselves and the world.

According to Heidegger, Aristotle’s analysis of *phronēsis* thus amounts to a supreme explication of the circumspection that guides life in its pre-theoretical dealings with the surrounding world. In so far as *phronēsis* is truly disclosive – *alētheia praktikē* – life is there for us as the “full, unveiled, moment of factual life in the how of its decisive readiness to cope with itself,”²⁹⁵ i.e., as the finite temporal-historical situation in which we can live and act. However, Aristotle is never able to achieve a positive ontological characterization of the temporal being of factual life, but

αἴσθησις τις, ein Vernehmen, das das Aussehen der Gegenstände jeweils schlicht vorgibt.”

²⁹² GA 62, p. 379: “Als-Was-Bestimmtheiten.”

²⁹³ GA 62, p. 405.

²⁹⁴ GA 62, p. 382.

²⁹⁵ GA 62, p. 384. “Die ἀλήθεια πρακτική ist nichts anderes als der jeweils unverhüllte volle Augenblick des faktischen Lebens im Wie der entscheidenden Umgangs-bereitschaft mit ihm selbst.”

rather defines life negatively by contrasting it to his conception of the primordial sense of being as *ousia*.

Aristotle, Heidegger maintains, develops his basic conception of being as *ousia* as an explication not of *phronēsis* but of *sofia*. Terrified and repelled by its own finitude, life has a basic tendency to give up its pre-theoretical concern with the world, and instead engage in *sofia*: a pure perception of the *eidē* determining what particular beings are. However, by focusing strictly on the *eidē* the perception of *sofia* loses sight of the pre-theoretical movement of life in its temporality and historicity, thereby also covering up its own origin in factual life. As a result of this suppression, it becomes possible to enact *sofia* as a pure theoretical observation of the *eidē* as a steady and constant possession. For Aristotle, *sofia* constitutes the primordial being of life: “The authentic being of the human being manifests itself in the true in the pure enactment of *sofia* as the unconcerned leisurely (*scholē*) lingering with the *archai* of the beings that are always there.”²⁹⁶ Herein the experience of artisan production is exemplary. Just as the artisan takes his cue from ideal and stable models in order to be able to produce concrete particular artifacts, *sofia* is enacted as a pure observation of the readily available and constant *eidē* determining what we may experience as particular meaningful beings.

According to Heidegger, Aristotle’s suppression of *phronēsis* and his elevation of *sofia* as our primary access to being inaugurate the domination of the theoretical attitude as the experiential basis of Western philosophy. It is on this basis that Aristotle articulates the basic sense of being as *ousia*, which Heidegger two years later explicates as pure and constant “presence.”²⁹⁷ This understanding of being as presence, he claims, determines the horizon and course of the subsequent philosophical tradition.

In short: What Heidegger finds in Aristotle is nothing less than a qualified and unsurpassed analysis of the basic synthetic as-structure of phenomenal experience, to the effect that we can only experience particular beings as meaningful phenomena on the basis of a preceding understanding of our historical contexts of meaning. This historical

²⁹⁶ GA 62, p. 386: “Eigentliches Sein des Menschen zeitigt sich im reinen Vollzug der σοφία als dem unbekümmerten, zeithabenden (σχολή), rein vernehmenden Verweilen bei den ἀρχαί des immer Seienden.”

²⁹⁷ Cf. Kisiel 1993, p. 491.

understanding is, in its turn, guided by an understanding of the different modes of being and, ultimately, of the sense of being as such. It is precisely this hierarchical structure of phenomenal understanding – according to which our historical understanding of meaning/being determines our experience of beings – that Heidegger will five years later name the “ontological difference” (*ontologische Differenz*).²⁹⁸

As we shall see, Heidegger’s quasi-Aristotelian analysis of phenomenality constitutes the systematic center that sustains and opens up his new philosophical approach. First, through its account of the historical structure of phenomenality it induces a radical historicization of the phenomenological method of investigation. If our phenomenal access to beings is fundamentally determined by our prior understanding of historical meaning, then we cannot hope to critically examine this understanding by way of direct phenomenological intuition and description of the matters; rather, the only way to critically delimit our received understanding is through a destructive return to its historical origins. Second, it allows Heidegger to give a new account of the task of philosophy in terms of the question of being. If our understanding of beings is always already guided by an understanding of being, which is normally unthematic and prejudiced, then the philosophical task of clarifying the sense of being becomes decisive for our possibilities of understanding the world and ourselves.

Heidegger’s new quasi-Aristotelian conception of the structure of factual life also leads him to appropriate the word “phenomenon” as a key concept of his own thinking. In his earliest Freiburg lectures, he had primarily preferred to talk about the “givenness” or “manifestation” of the matters in our pre-theoretical experience. The term “phenomenon” surfaces in Heidegger’s last Freiburg lecture course “Ontologie – The Hermeneutics of Facticity” from the summer of 1923 soon after his

²⁹⁸ Cf. GA 24, pp. 22, 102, 109, 454. Heidegger introduces the term “ontological difference” in his 1927 lecture course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (*Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, GA 24). However, as many commentators have pointed out, this notion is already at the center of Heidegger’s thinking in *Being and Time* although he does not yet label it the “ontological difference.” Cf., e.g., Rosales (1970); Marion (1998), pp. 108-140; Overgaard, pp. 69-103. My suggestion here is that it is already in the context of his reading of Aristotle in 1922 that Heidegger articulates – at least in a rough and provisional way – the hierarchical structure of phenomenality that he will come to call the “ontological difference,” and which sets the stage for all his subsequent thinking.

rediscovery of Aristotle.²⁹⁹ In the autumn of 1923, he begins his first Marburg lecture course, “Introduction to Phenomenological Research,” by offering an explication of the word “phenomenology” by tracing it back to its Greek roots in Aristotle’s analysis of factual life.

In the last-mentioned course Heidegger notes that the expression “phenomenology” is composed of the two Greek words “*phainomenon*” and “*logos*.” *Phainomenon* means “something that shows itself” and constitutes a nominalization of the verbs “*phainomai*,” to show oneself, and “*phainō*,” to bring something to light.³⁰⁰ For Aristotle, Heidegger argues, the word *phainomenon* does not refer to the data of simple sense perceptions, but to the significant things we encounter in the world.³⁰¹ The possibility of experiencing entities as significant phenomena depends on the structural fact that our perception essentially involves a “*logos tis*,” a kind of speech. This *logos* does not primarily take the form of explicit utterances but rather has the character of an implicit speech which, like the light, illuminates and lets us see the beings we experience: “*Aisthēsis* is present in the sort of being that has *language*. Whether or not it is vocalized, it is always in some way speaking. Language speaks not only in the course of the perceiving, but even *guides* it; we see *through* language.”³⁰² *Logos* here shoulders the role that *nous* had in “Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation,” both terms designating the preceding understanding of the *eidē* – looks or “viewpoints” – which we do not obtain “purely from the thing,” but which we “already know,” and which allow us to identify and see particular beings as meaningful phenomena in the first place: this as a house, this as a tree, this as a human being.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Cf. “Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität),” GA 63, pp. 67ff. (the lecture course is henceforth referred to as “Ontology” in the main text).

³⁰⁰ GA 17, pp. 6f.

³⁰¹ Cf. GA 17, pp. 11, 13.

³⁰² GA 17, p. 30: “Die αἴσθησις ist in einem solchen Wesen, das die *Sprache* hat. Mit oder ohne Verlautbarung ist es immer in irgendeiner Weise Sprechen. Die Sprache spricht nicht nur mit beim Vernehmen, sondern *führt* es sogar, wir sehen *durch* die Sprache.”

³⁰³ GA 17: p. 33: “Solche λόγοι nun, bei denen ich eine Sache so anspreche, daß ich das, als was ich sie anspreche, nicht rein aus ihr selbst gewinne, sondern in Hinsicht auf ein anderes, was ich schon kenne, – diese Hinsichten selbst, in denen ich in vielfacher Weise eine Sache ansprechen kann, liegen außerhalb.” Cf. also GA 17, pp. 24, 28, 40f.

Heidegger's appropriation of the notion of "phenomenon" and his explication of the conceptual pair phenomenon-phenomenology by reference to its Greek roots is not philosophically innocent. On the one hand, it is a token of his belief that he has achieved a new understanding of phenomenality that fundamentally challenges Husserl's as well as his own earlier conception of the nature of self-showing; on the other hand, it opens up the strategic possibility of construing Husserl's phenomenology as a fall away from the more originary Greek understanding of phenomenality that Heidegger has taken upon himself to retrieve and radicalize.

Heidegger's Renewed Critique of Husserl

Heidegger, as we know, dedicates *Being and Time* to Husserl. In a footnote he also states that in so far as the investigations of his book are able to make some headway towards elucidating the "matters themselves," this is thanks to the "personal guidance" into phenomenology that he received from his former teacher.³⁰⁴ However, notwithstanding these gestures of thanks, there is no doubt that Heidegger's attitude to Husserl's phenomenology in *Being and Time* is extremely ambivalent. Towards the end of his introductory treatment of the phenomenological method of his investigations, in which Husserl's name is not mentioned at all, Heidegger sums up the ambivalence in the following dense passage:

The following investigations have become possible only on the basis prepared by Edmund Husserl, with whose *Logical Investigations* phenomenology achieved a breakthrough. Our elucidations of the preliminary concept of phenomenology show that what is essential in it does not lie in its *actuality* as a philosophical "movement" (*Richtung*). Higher than actuality stands *possibility*. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ SZ, p. 38.

³⁰⁵ SZ, p. 38: "Die folgenden Untersuchungen sind nur möglich geworden auf dem Boden, den *E. Husserl* gelegt, mit dessen 'Logischen Untersuchungen' die Phänomenologie zum Durchbruch kam. Die Erläuterungen des Vorbegriffes der Phänomenologie zeigen an, daß ihr Wesentliches nicht darin liegt, als philosophische 'Richtung' *wirklich* zu sein. Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die *Möglichkeit*. Das Verständnis der Phänomenologie liegt einzig im Ergreifen ihrer als Möglichkeit."

The passage contains two claims. First, it states that Heidegger's philosophical project has become possible only "on the basis" of Husserl's phenomenology. Second, it asserts that phenomenology here has to be understood not as an "actuality" but as a pure "possibility." That is to say, in so far as Husserl's phenomenology constitutes the basis of Heidegger's thinking it does so in the form of a possibility that Husserl opens up but which he, due to his basic theoretical orientation, fails to bring to fruition in a radical manner. Heidegger thus understands his own thinking as an attempt to seize upon and develop the latent and so far distorted potential of Husserl's phenomenology.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger's relationship to Husserl largely remains implicit, although it can to some extent be glimpsed indirectly through his discussions of other thinkers of the theoretical tradition, in particular Descartes and Kant. Hence, to be able to explicate his attitude to Husserl we need to turn to the preceding Marburg-lecture courses in which this attitude is elaborated in much greater detail.

It is plain from the biographical record that Heidegger's explication of Aristotle in the early 1920s goes hand in hand with a renewed effort to critically distance himself from Husserl. Having just completed a seminar on Husserl's *Ideas I* in the winter semester of 1922/23, Heidegger writes the following lines to his student Karl Löwith: "In the final hour of the seminar, I publicly burned and destroyed the *Ideas* to such an extent that I dare say that the essential foundations for the whole [of my work] are now cleanly laid out. Looking back from this vantage to the *Logical Investigations*, I am now convinced that Husserl was never a philosopher, not even for one second in his life. He becomes ever more ludicrous..." Then, in a subsequent letter to Löwith Heidegger again states that the lecture course he is currently delivering – i.e. *Ontology* from the summer of 1923 – "strikes the main blows against phenomenology. I now stand completely on my own feet. [...] There is no chance of getting an appointment. And after I have published, my prospects will be finished. The old man will then realize that I am wringing his neck – and then the question of succeeding him is out. But I can't help myself..."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ Both of the above quotes are from Kisiel & Sheehan [eds.] 2007, p. 372. They are also found, e.g., in Kisiel 1997, p. 335, and Sheehan & Palmer [eds.] 1997, p. 17.

Hard words indeed. Still, I think there is no reason to take Heidegger's harsh rhetoric as straightforward evidence of the philosophical depth of his critique of Husserl. Taken at face value, the quotations above hardly convey much more than Heidegger's profound ambition to dethrone his living philosophical mentor – whose influence is thus confirmed – and assert himself as an independent philosopher under the banner of the dead and, hence, liberating father figure of Aristotle. The only way to judge the systematic philosophical sense of Heidegger's renewed critique of Husserl is, needless to say, to closely attend to and analyze his concrete philosophical work itself.

I will begin by outlining the basic scheme of Heidegger's critique of Husserl as it is developed in the lecture courses "Introduction to Phenomenological Research" and "Prolegomena." I will then go on to explicate how Heidegger in "Prolegomena" articulates his own historicized phenomenological stance through a peculiar kind of critical-transformative appropriation of Husserl's concept of "categorical intuition."

So what is the "possibility" of phenomenology according to Heidegger? The philosophical potential of Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger claims, above all lies in his insistence on the need for philosophy to go to the matters themselves as they are concretely given in our experience, and in his fundamental discovery of intentionality:

The intentionality of consciousness is not some sort of condition of the ego; rather, in this "directing itself-at" (*Sichrichten-auf*) that at which it is directed (*das Worauf des Gerichtetsein*) is also given. Intentionality is not to be construed as a peculiarity of mental processes; instead it is to be given as a manner in which something is encountered, in such a way that what is encountered comes into view along with the encountering: the "directing itself-at" in unison with its specific at-which (*Worauf*). [...] *With this discovery of intentionality, for the first time in the entire history of philosophy, the way is explicitly given for a radical ontological research.*³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ GA 17, p. 260: "Die Intentionalität selbst des Bewußtseins ist nicht irgendein Zustand des ego, sondern in diesem 'Sichrichten-auf' ist das Worauf des Gerichtetseins mitgegeben. Die Intentionalität soll nicht als eine Eigenart psychischer Vorgänge betrachtet werden, sondern sie soll als eine Weise gegeben werden, in der etwas begegnet, so, daß das, was begegnet, mit dem Begegnen in den Blick kommt: das Sichrichten-auf in eins mit seinem spezifischen Worauf. [...] *Mit dieser Entdeckung*

According to Heidegger, Husserl's discovery of intentionality amounts to nothing less than the insight that our acts of consciousness are fundamentally directed towards the intended matters themselves – not toward some kind of inner representations or sense-data – and, conversely, that these matters are concretely given and intelligible as what they are only in our correlative experiences of them. Husserl's concept of intentionality thus for the first time opens the way to “radical ontological research”: it is only through strict reflexive explication of “the object in the manner of its being meant”³⁰⁸ that it becomes possible to phenomenologically investigate the being-senses that things really have and show up for us without falling back either into metaphysical idealism or realism.

So far, Heidegger's assessment of the possibility of Husserl's phenomenology is very much the same as it was in his earlier Freiburg lectures. Aside from the discovery of intentionality Heidegger also, in “Prolegomena,” hails Husserl's discoveries of, first, the “categorical intuition” and, second, the “a priori.” Still, as we shall see, the import Heidegger ascribes to the two latter discoveries is to a great extent based on his own critical-transformative elaboration of these Husserlian notions.

Heidegger's central critical thesis is that Husserl, despite his phenomenological breakthrough, repeats the basic theoretical orientation which has dominated the history of Western philosophy since Aristotle, something that leads him to squander and misconstrue the possibility of phenomenology that he opens up. Like his precursors, Husserl's thinking is said to be driven by an “anxiety in the face of existence.”³⁰⁹ In its anxious flight from the temporal-historical finitude of factual life, theoretical philosophy sets as its guiding motive “care about knowledge known,”³¹⁰ i.e., the hope of achieving an absolutely justified and universally binding knowledge of life. Turning away from life, Husserl never radically poses the question of the being of the human Dasein, nor, for that matter, the question of the sense of being as such, which, according to Heidegger, ultimately organizes our understanding of the

der Intentionalität ist zum ersten Mal in der ganzen Geschichte der Philosophie ausdrücklich der Weg für eine radikale ontologische Forschung gegeben.”

³⁰⁸ GA 17, p. 263: “den Gegenstand im Wie seines Gemeintseins.”

³⁰⁹ GA 17, p. 97: “Angst vor dem Dasein.”

³¹⁰ GA 17, p. 101: “Sorge um erkannte Erkenntnis.”

world and ourselves.³¹¹ Instead, Husserl unwittingly adopts the traditional understanding of being as *Vorhandenheit* – “presence-at-hand” for a theoretical seeing – and of the human being as a theoretically knowing subject, both of which are modeled on the paradigm of theoretical observation.

According to Heidegger, Husserl determines the basic character of phenomenal givenness as “bodily presence” (*Leibhaftigkeit*), which is nothing but a rearticulation of the traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand:

Bodily presence is a character of encounter of world-things, in so far as the world is still encountered solely in a pure apprehension, a pure perception. It is a character of encounter of reality to the degree the our preoccupation denies the world its full possibility of encounter; it is a specific environmental character which shows itself only when concern, concerned being-in-the-world, is a particularly conditioned mere looking at the world, only when the primarily given and experienced world is in a certain way excluded.³¹²

In short, to be phenomenally given is for Husserl to be present for pure theoretical observation. Hence, Heidegger insists, Husserl is bound to construe our primary intentional experience as a pure seeing of objects and conceive of the phenomenological reflection as an intuitive reflection on that primary intentionality.

Against this, Heidegger argues that Husserl’s basic notion of phenomenal givenness as bodily presence builds on a repression of what is primarily there and given in our pre-theoretical experience. The bodily presence of an object for our thematic seeing, he writes, is a “founded presence,”³¹³ such that our intuitive seeing of particular objects is always

³¹¹ Cf. GA 20, p. 140.

³¹² GA 20, p. 265: “Die Leibhaftigkeit ist ein Begegnischarakter von Welt-*dingen*, sofern die Welt lediglich noch einem *pu- ren Vernehmen*, einem *pu- ren Wahrnehmen* begegnet. Sie ist ein Begegnischarakter der *Realität*, sofern der *Umgang* der begegnenden Welt die volle Begegnismöglichkeit versagt – ein spezifischer *Umweltcharakter*, der sich nur dann zeigt, wenn das *Besorgen*, das besorgende *In-der- Welt-sein*, ein bestimmt geartetes *Nur-noch-hinsehen* auf die Welt ist, die primär gegebene und erfahrene Welt in gewisser Weise ausgesperrt ist.”

³¹³ GA 20, p. 264: “fundierte Präsenz.”

already determined by our preceding unthematic pre-understanding of the historical contexts of significance making up our world: “every worldly being, and precisely the very nearest real being, is taken ‘in itself’ on the basis of this primary presence, which, in its primacy, is a non-objective presence.”³¹⁴ Husserl’s blindness to the historical structure of our phenomenal experience in turn effects an inability to account for the historical character of the phenomenological explication itself:

Within phenomenology [it hardly suffices] to appeal to merely looking at and devoting oneself to the matters. It could be that all that is burdened with a plethora of prejudices. In order to get *at the matters themselves*, they must be freed up and the very process of freeing them up is not one of a momentary exuberance, but of fundamental research. *The seeing must be educated* and this is a task so difficult that it is hard for it to be overemphasized since we are, like no other time, saturated by history and are even aware of the manifoldness of history.³¹⁵

That is to say, in so far as Husserl conceives of phenomenal givenness in terms of intuitive seeing he becomes unable to recognize the way in which his own, supposedly direct phenomenological seeing, is mediated by the historical tradition of theoretical philosophy in a naive and prejudiced manner. However, Heidegger argues, given the historical structure of phenomenality, the method of phenomenology must itself become historical. Since our direct seeing is fundamentally determined by the historical patterns of meaning we live in, the only way for phenomenology to attain a free and unprejudiced grasp of the matters is through a destructive retrieval of the historical sources of our factual understanding:

³¹⁴ GA 20, p. 268: “alles weltlich Seiende und gerade das allernächste Reale [ist] von dieser primären und in ihrem Primat ungegenständlichen Präsenz ‘an sich’ genommen.”

³¹⁵ GA 17, p. 275: “[Es genügt nicht] innerhalb der Phänomenologie, wenn man sich auf ein bloßes Schauen und Sichhingeben an die Sachen beruft. Es könnte sein, daß das mit einer Unsumme von Vorurteilen belastet ist. Um *zu den Sachen selbst* zu kommen, müssen sie *freigegeben* werden, und die Freigabe selbst ist nicht die eines momentanen Aufschwunges, sondern fundamentaler Forschung. *Das Sehen muß ausgebildet werden*, und diese Aufgabe ist eine so schwierige, daß sie nicht leicht übersteigert werden kann, weil wir wie keine andere Zeit von der Geschichte durchsetzt sind und auch ein Bewußtsein von der Mannigfaltigkeit der Geschichte haben.”

“As research work, phenomenology is precisely the laying open and letting be seen, understood as the methodologically directed dismantling of concealments.”³¹⁶

Husserl’s theoretical orientation, Heidegger maintains, also in the end hampers and distorts his articulation of intentionality.³¹⁷ He sums up Husserl’s conception of the structure of intentional experience as “reciprocal belonging-together of *intentio* and *intentum*.”³¹⁸ However, although Husserl opens up the possibility of phenomenological research he is fundamentally unable to account for the correlation between *intentio* and *intentum* – or *noesis* and *noema* –, i.e., for how these aspects belong together in our primary experience of significant phenomena: “It must therefore be flatly stated that what the belonging of the *intentum* to the *intentio* implies is obscure. How the being-intended of an entity is related to that entity remains puzzling. It is even questionable whether one may question in this way at all.”³¹⁹ Taking his starting point in the paradigmatic experience of theoretical observation, Husserl – so Heidegger claims – is in the end led to ground the being-sense of the objects in the absolute region of pure transcendental consciousness: “Consciousness, immanent and absolutely

³¹⁶ GA 20, p. 118: “Die Phänomenologie ist gerade als Forschung die Arbeit des freilegenden Sehenslassens im Sinne des methodisch geleiteten Abbauens der Verdeckungen.”

³¹⁷ Cf. GA 62, p. 361: “mit der bekannten Intentionalität ist nur ein ‘Zunächst’ getroffen – in einem verfallenden Hinsehen auf und hinsehenden Mitgehen mit ‘Erlebnissen’.” Cf. also GA 17, p. 82; GA 20, p. 162.

³¹⁸ GA 20, p. 61: “gegenseitige Zugehörigkeit von *Intentio* und *Intentum*.”

³¹⁹ GA 20, p. 63: “Daher ist unumwunden zu sagen: was die Mitgehörigkeit des *Intentum* zur *Intentio* besagt, bleibt dunkel. Wie das Intendiertsein eines Seienden sich zu diesem Seienden verhält, bleibt rätselhaft; es bleibt auch fraglich, ob überhaupt so gefragt werden darf.” According to Heidegger, the theoretical bias of Husserl’s analysis of intentionality also gives rise to a peculiar layer-ontology on Husserl’s part: on the one hand, Husserl determines the basic layer of the intentional object as consisting in its perceptible material substance, whereby the material object may also, in addition, be – and is in fact for the most part – experienced as carrier of supplementary layers of meaning: values, purposes, aesthetic qualities, etc.; on the other hand, Husserl takes the theoretically signifying acts to constitute the basic way of intentional intending common to all intentional experiences, so that “each judgment, each instance of wanting, each instance of loving is founded upon a presenting that provides in advance what can be wanted, what is detestable and loveable” (*jeder Urteil, jedes Wollen, jedes Lieben auf ein Vorstellen fundiert ist, das überhaupt das Wollbare, das Haß- und Liebbare vorgibt*) (GA 17, p. 272). For an incisive treatment of Heidegger’s critique of Husserl’s layer-ontology, see Overgaard 2004, pp. 173-183.

given being, is that in which every other possible entity is constituted, in which it truly 'is' what it is."³²⁰

What has changed in Heidegger's attitude to Husserl since his earliest Freiburg lectures? On a formal level, both Heidegger's positive assessment and negative critique of Husserl appear to be roughly the same. Now as then he praises Husserl for opening up the possibility of reflectively describing the objects of our experience according to how they are given in particular acts; now as then he criticizes Husserl for neglecting and theoretically distorting the being of our pre-theoretical experience of the world, and for grounding the being-senses of beings in transcendental subjectivity. Nevertheless, the critical edge and positive direction of Heidegger's critique have changed significantly.

Heidegger's early Freiburg critique basically took the form of an immanent critical elaboration of Husserl's phenomenological project. While dismissing Husserl's theoretical conception of phenomenology Heidegger accepted the key idea that phenomenology must proceed by way of intuitive reflection. On this basis, he rearticulated phenomenology in terms of an explication – guided by love and sympathy, and expressing itself with the aid of formal indications – of the originary structures of our primary pre-theoretical experience. Against Husserl's tendency to infer the full sense of the experienced objects from the act-structures of transcendental subjectivity, he insisted on the unity of our pre-theoretical experience-of-significance, arguing that this experience was centered in the particular historical self. Now, by contrast, the main thrust of Heidegger's critique is directed precisely at the idea of direct intuitive givenness which he previously accepted. Hence, the basic problem of Husserl's phenomenology is not that it is unable to see and describe factual life in a primordial manner. Instead, Heidegger now maintains that the very idea of intuitive givenness governing Husserl's phenomenology is a symptom of his basic inability to account for the temporal-historical being of Dasein, and, hence, for the historical nature of phenomenology. Moreover, whereas Heidegger earlier tried to overcome Husserl's theoretical concept of intentionality by stressing the primary unity of our pre-theoretical

³²⁰ GA 20, p. 144: "Das Bewußtsein, das immanent, absolut gegebene Sein, ist das, in dem jedes mögliche andere Seiende sich konstituiert, in dem es eigentlich 'ist', was es ist."

experience, he now tries to account for that unity by anchoring it in our preceding understanding of our historical contexts of being.

In my treatment of Heidegger's early Freiburg critique of Husserl, I took some steps towards assessing and delimiting the systematic force of Heidegger's criticisms, such as these transpired within a basically shared phenomenological framework. However, as concerns Heidegger's new critique – which dismisses the crucial idea of intuitive givenness in favor of a radically historical thinking – we are not yet in a position to critically clarify and assess the philosophical sense and force of this critique. This would not only require a thorough explication of Heidegger's attempt to develop a historical thinking – and we are still at the beginning of this journey – but also, ultimately, a systematic philosophical clarification of the relationship between direct intuitive experience and history in our understanding of meaning. Hence, such an assessment must wait. In the next section I will turn to examining how Heidegger develops his historicized phenomenology through a critical appropriation of Husserl's notion of "categorical intuition." This will also allow us to pinpoint more sharply how Heidegger and Husserl part ways as regards the central issue of intuitive givenness.

The Categorical Intuition – in Heidegger

Heidegger's main strategy during these years is, as we have seen, to hail Husserl's phenomenology as a possibility that Husserl opens up but fails to realize in a radical manner, and which Heidegger undertakes to develop in a more primordial way by retrieving the insights he finds in Aristotle. However, in the lecture course "Prolegomena" Heidegger's critical engagement with Husserl follows a somewhat different route. Although his critique ultimately remains the same, he here tries to develop his own new conception of phenomenality through a kind of critical-transformative appropriation especially focusing on Husserl's notion of "categorical intuition."

As Heidegger several decades later, in the autobiographical sketch "My Way into Phenomenology" from 1963, accounts for the role of Husserl in his philosophical development, he highlights precisely Husserl's analysis of the categorical intuition in the *Logical Investigations* as crucial for his effort to

articulate his guiding question concerning the sense of being.³²¹ Similarly, in his last seminar, held in Zähringen in 1973, Heidegger writes: “Husserl touches slightly, brushes the question of being in the sixth chapter of the sixth logical investigation, with the concept of ‘categorical intuition.’”³²² Following Heidegger’s own retrospective remarks, many commentators have stressed Husserl’s notion of categorical intuition as the most important influence of Husserl on the development of Heidegger’s thought. As it happens, these same commentators generally tend to read Heidegger as a hermeneutic-deconstructive thinker of finitude and historicity, downplaying any possible reliance of his on Husserl’s phenomenological method of intuitive reflection. Conversely, those commentators favoring a phenomenological reading of Heidegger have tended to give little or no attention to Husserl’s idea of categorical intuition. Dismissing the importance often attributed to this notion, Søren Overgaard writes: “Husserl’s doctrine of categorical intuition might be a source of inspiration to Heidegger, but I find it hard to see how Heidegger could feel truly indebted to Husserl on this point.”³²³ As we shall see, this organization of the debate is no coincidence, since what is at stake in Heidegger’s explication of this notion is precisely the question to what extent our understanding of categorical meaning can be based on direct intuition and to what extent it is determined by our historical conceptuality.³²⁴

Heidegger’s explication of Husserl’s phenomenology is organized as a transition through Husserl’s three “fundamental discoveries”: intentionality, the categorical intuition, and the sense of the *a priori*. As compared with Heidegger’s normal mode of historical explication, in

³²¹ GA 14, pp. 93-98.

³²² GA 15, p. 373: “Und doch, darauf weist Heidegger hin, berührt oder streift Husserl die Frage nach dem Sein im sechsten Kapitel der sechsten ‘Logischen Untersuchung’ mit dem Begriff der ‘kategorialen Anschauung.’”

³²³ Overgaard 2004, p. 80.

³²⁴ For studies emphasizing the paramount importance of Husserl’s notion of categorical intuition for Heidegger’s philosophical development, cf. Taminiaux 1977; 1991, pp. 1-54; Wanatabe 1993; van Buren 1994, pp. 203-219; Critchley 2008. By contrast, Steven Crowell and Søren Overgaard – cf. Crowell 2001 and Overgaard 2004 – defend the view that Husserl’s main influence on Heidegger’s thinking is to be found in his basic phenomenological method of reflection on the structures of our intentional experience. In so doing, they largely downplay or ignore the importance of Husserl’s notion of categorical intuition.

which his driving systematic interest is palpable, his explication of Husserl at first gives a rather indefinite and ambiguous impression. Heidegger's strategy consists in explicating Husserl's discoveries in their original conceptual context and defend them against common misunderstandings, while simultaneously pushing Husserl's thinking in the direction of his own conception of phenomenology. Hence, his explication takes on a peculiar indeterminate status, pointing forward and backward at the same time: on the one hand, it is clear that Heidegger through his focus and personal accentuations bends Husserl's conceptuality towards its possibilities of expressing what he himself conceives as the primary structure of phenomenality; on the other hand, Heidegger is convinced that Husserl's concepts remain fatally bound up with the paradigm of theoretical observation as their limiting and distorting ground.³²⁵

Above I already dealt with Heidegger's explication of Husserl's discovery of intentionality. Now I will focus on his treatment of the notion of categorial intuition, and also, on that basis, on his explication of the *a priori*. Let us, however, begin by taking a look at Husserl's conception of the categorial intuition.

Husserl's treatment of the categorial intuition in the sixth investigation of the *Logical Investigations* takes its starting point in the distinction between "signifying" acts – primarily acts of linguistic expression – in which we merely signify or intend a matter, and "fulfilling" acts in which the matter is intuitively given in the way we intended it, and which thus constitute the source of truth of all our intentional compartments.³²⁶ Husserl's question is this: How can the categorial elements of our intentions be intuitively fulfilled?

According to Husserl, those parts of our signifying acts that merely signify sensory "material" can find evident fulfillment in simple sense perceptions. But what about the categorial "form" of these acts, what about the categorial elements that structure our expressions, e.g., the copula, the conjunctions and disjunctions, the articles, and the terms designating general classes or universals?³²⁷ These categorial forms cannot,

³²⁵ As regards the ambiguity of Heidegger explication of Husserl in *Prolegomena*, cf. Bernet 1990, pp. 136-137; von Herrmann 1981, p. 8; Dahlstrom 2001, p. 52.

³²⁶ Cf. Hua XIX, pp. 44ff.

³²⁷ Cf. Hua XIX, pp. 663f., 657ff.

Husserl claims, be given in sense perceptions: we can perceive, with our eyes, the color “green” but there is nothing in this perception corresponding to the different categorial elements of sentences such as “the tree is green” or “flamingos are pink birds.” Hence, as concerns the categorial elements of our intentions “a surplus (*Überschuß*) of meaning remains over, a form which finds nothing in the appearance itself to confirm it.”³²⁸ Husserl’s doctrine of the categorial intuition is an attempt to account for the kinds of fulfilling acts in which the excessive categorial meaning is evidently given.

As Heidegger notes in his commentary, Husserl’s notion of categorial intuition occupies a systematically crucial place in his phenomenology. It is this notion, Heidegger maintains, which gives “concretion” to the concept of intentionality, and makes it possible to “seize more sharply the apriori,” thus forming the center of Husserl’s three discoveries.³²⁹ As such, the discovery of the categorial intuition “for the first time” opens “the concrete way for a genuine categorial research proceeding by way of demonstration.”³³⁰ What Heidegger here indicates is that Husserl’s notion of categorial intuition is decisive for understanding the sense of intentionality and phenomenology. For one thing, although Husserl has indeed shown that our acts of consciousness – whether signitive or fulfilling – are essentially directed towards the matters they intend, the sense of this directedness remains unclear as long as we do not know what it means that our emptily signifying intentions are intuitively fulfilled. After all, these fulfilling acts determine what it means to truly see and experience the matters themselves. Given that all acts in which we intend meaningful matters are categorially structured, the answer to the question concerning the intuitive basis of our intentional experience lies in the notion of categorial intuition. Moreover, Husserl’s analysis of categorial intuition is decisive for what it means to phenomenologically see and describe the categorial forms and structures of our intentional experience.

What is more, the notion of categorial intuition also poses a fundamental challenge to Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl’s analysis of

³²⁸ Hua XIX, p. 660: “es bleibt ein Überschuss in der Bedeutung, die in der Erscheinung selbst nichts findet, sich darin zu bestätigen.”

³²⁹ GA 20, pp. 63, 98.

³³⁰ GA 20, pp. 97f.: “Mit der Entdeckung der kategorialen Anschauung ist zum erstenmal der konkrete Weg einer ausweisenden und echten Kategorienforschung gewonnen.”

the categorial intuition is sparked by the insight that the categorial elements of our intentions constitute a “surplus” that has no counterpart in our sense perception. Hence, the question of the possibility of a categorial intuition becomes acute: Are there categorial acts of fulfillment that in some sense give us direct intuitive access to categorial meanings, acts that thus transcend and provide the ground for our categorially formed intentions? Or does the categorial form of our signifying acts determine our intuitive experience of things to such a degree that our direct intuitions can do nothing more than confirm or not-confirm, but never ground and critically modify the categorial form of our intentions?

The aim of Husserl’s investigation is to show that there is a categorial intuition which constitutes “the analogon of the common sensuous intuition.”³³¹ Although the categorially fulfilling act is no simple sense perception, Husserl maintains that it nevertheless deserves the name “intuition,” since in it the categorial is given and appears as “real” (*wirklich*) and “self-given” (*selbst gegeben*).³³² But how?

According to Husserl, the object of a sensuous intuition is given “simply,” by which he means that it is given “at one level of act” (*in einer Aktstufe*): it appears directly as a unified object and is not in need of further higher level acts in order to appear as itself.³³³ The categorial intuition is founded on the sensuous intuition in such a way that it, through various “acts of relating and connecting” (*beziehende, verknüpfende Akte*), constitutes a new kind of categorial objectivity that was not previously given in the sensuous intuition:³³⁴ “[Acts arise] which, as we said, constitute new objects, acts in which something appears as *actual* and *self-given*, which was not given, and could not have been given, as what it now appears to be, in these foundational acts alone. *On the other hand, the new objects are based on the old ones, they are related to what appears in the basic acts.*”³³⁵

³³¹ Hua XIX, p. 670: “das Analogon der gemeinen sinnlichen Anschauung.”

³³² Hua XIX, p. 672.

³³³ Hua XIX, p. 674.

³³⁴ Hua XIX, p. 674.

³³⁵ HUA XIX, p. 675: “[Es erstehen] Akte, welche, wie wir sagten, neue Objektivitäten konstituieren; es erstehen Akte, in denen etwas als *wirklich* und als *selbst gegeben erscheint*, derart, daß dasselbe, als was es hier erscheint, in den fundierenden Akten allein noch nicht gegeben war und gegeben sein konnte. *Andererseits aber gründet die neue Gegenständlichkeit in der alten.*”

Yet how should we understand these acts of relating and connecting which, on the basis of sense perceptions, make categorial meanings appear?

Husserl distinguishes between two kinds of categorial intuition: “acts of synthesis” and “acts of ideation.” Of these two, the latter acts are of particular importance for Heidegger, who emphasizes the crucial role of “ideation” both for clarifying the “genuine sense of intentionality” and for grasping the “a priori” in terms of the question of the “being of beings.”³³⁶ The function of the “acts of synthesis” is to bring out and explicate the logical-semantic relations between different sensuously perceived objects – the relations corresponding to terms such as “is” (in the sense of the copula), “all,” “some,” “and,” “or,” “not,” “the,” and “if – so.” From a Heideggerian perspective, these acts do not seem decisive for how we primarily grasp the meaning of things; indeed, it seems that such an explication of the relations between different sensuous objects already presupposes an understanding of the conceptual contexts determining the possible meanings and relations of such objects. The function of the “ideation” or “general intuition” is, by contrast, precisely to grasp the general “ideas,” the essences or concepts, which the particular objects instantiate.³³⁷ As such, the question concerning the general intuition appears crucial for how we should understand both phenomenality and phenomenology: given that our intentional experience of phenomenal meaning is always already guided by our general ideas and concepts, the question of the general intuition concerns the very phenomenal basis of that experience; moreover, since phenomenology itself has the character of a science of essences the question is decisive for how we should conceive of phenomenology itself.

³³⁶ GA 20, pp. 102f.

³³⁷ HUA XIX, p. 690. Arguing that Husserl’s notion of categorial intuition is irrelevant for understanding Heidegger’s question of being, Søren Overgaard writes: “However, it would seem to me that Husserl’s problem of how, e.g., the ‘is’ in the claim ‘The paper is white’ can find intuitive fulfillment, given that it cannot be intuited through the senses like ‘paper’ and ‘white,’ is something quite different indeed from Heidegger’s inquiry into modes of being” (Overgaard 2004, p. 80). However, what Overgaard describes here is only one aspect of Husserl’s categorial intuition, namely the “acts of synthesis.” Although I agree with Overgaard that these acts could hardly have been of crucial importance to Heidegger, I think it is quite clear that Husserl’s “acts of ideation” play a central role for Heidegger as a kind of critical starting point for his articulation of the primacy of our understanding of historical meaning.

In *Logical Investigations* Husserl's conception of the general intuition still remains undeveloped, vague, and quite ambivalent. On the one hand, Husserl – as we have seen – stresses that there is a primary level of sensuous intuition at which the objects are given without the aid of higher-level categorial acts. The objects of the categorial intuition, e.g., the general essences, are said to be based on what appears in the primal sensuous intuition. On the other hand, Husserl's brief outline of the process of "ideation" does not bear out or clarify the idea that the general intuition would be based on – and receive its possible truth from – our direct intuitive experience of sensuous objects. On the contrary, in Husserl's description the "ideation" basically emerges as a kind of conceptual analysis. Characterizing the general intuition as an "ideational abstraction" (*ideierende Abstraktion*) through which the general categorial meaning "is brought to consciousness and achieves actual givenness," Husserl writes:³³⁸ "We must presuppose such an act in order that, as against the manifold single moments of one and the same kind, this very kind may come before us precisely *as one and the same*. For we become aware of the identity of the general through the repeated enactment of such acts on the basis of several individual intuitions, and we plainly do so in an overreaching act of identification which brings all such single acts of abstraction into one synthesis."³³⁹ That is, we enact the ideation by moving through a manifold of individual intuitions with the aim of identifying – in a way that still remains quite obscure – the identity of the general that the intuited objects exemplify. In this, the general idea does not seem to be grounded in our intuitive experience of particulars. Instead, the particular cases – intuited or imagined – merely figure as examples the only function of which is to allow us to bring out the essential features of the general idea or concept under investigation.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ HUA XIX, p. 690: "zum Bewußtsein, zum aktuellen Gegenbensein kommt."

³³⁹ HUA XIX, pp. 690f.: "Dieser Akt ist vorausgesetzt, damit uns gegenüber der Mannigfaltigkeit von einzelnen Momenten einer und derselben Art diese Art *selbst*, und zwar *als eine und dieselbe* vor Augen stehen kann. Denn wir werden uns im wiederholten Vollzuge eines solchen Aktes auf Grund mehrerer individueller Anschauungen der Identität des Allgemeinen bewußt, und dies offenbar in einem übergreifenden, alle einzelnen Abstraktionsakte zur Synthesis bringenden Akte der Identifizierung."

³⁴⁰ Cf. HUA XIX, p. 661: "The intuited individual is not, however, what we mean here; it serves at best only as an individual case, an example, or only as the rough analogue on an example, for the general which alone interests us" (*Aber das anschaulich*

This, however, implies that the ideation must be understood as a procedure which basically relies on and explicates – but is unable to transcend or question the truth of – the factual concepts we always already live by. It is precisely this tendency of Husserl’s analysis of ideation to unsettle the supposed primacy of sensuous intuition, which is seized upon by Heidegger in his effort to establish the historical structure of phenomenal understanding.

Later in his career Husserl goes on to develop his idea of a general intuition which he renames “essential intuition” or “eidetic variation” along the way. The theme is above all elaborated in Husserl’s 1925 lecture course *Phenomenological Psychology (Phänomenologische Psychologie)*, the relevant parts of which are included in the posthumously published volume *Experience and Judgment (Erfahrung und Urteil)*. However, his later account of the intuition of general essences basically repeats the ambivalences of *Logical Investigations*.

According to Husserl, our perception of individual entities is always already guided by our grasp of general “empirical types” that allow us to apprehend the entities we encounter in terms of these types.³⁴¹ We thus from the outset perceive entities as this or that: as dogs, mountains or cars with their typical characteristics. The empirical types, Husserl maintains, are formed on the basis of our actual sensuous experiences of particular entities, and our passive association of the similarities obtaining between them. This means that the general empirical types thus formed through “empirical induction” basically have the character of presumptive concepts that are open to further determination by our future experience: “Thus [...] a *presumptive idea* arises, the *idea of a universal*, to which belongs, in addition to the attributes already acquired, a horizon, indeterminate and open, of unknown attributes (conceptual determinations).”³⁴² Moreover, the empirical types are essentially fallible classifications and characterizations of the objects in question, and they are grounded in our

Einzelne ist hierbei nicht das Gemeinte, es fungiert bestenfalls als singulärer Fall, als Beispiel oder nur als rohes Analogon eines Beispiels, des Allgemeinen, auf das es allein abgesehen ist).

³⁴¹ Husserl, E&U, p. 386. Husserl’s concept of “type,” and its relation to his concept of “essence,” is treated in Schutz 1966. See also Kasmier 2010.

³⁴² Husserl, E&U, p. 401: “So erwächst [...] eine *präsumptive Idee*, die *Idee eines Allgemeinen*, zu welchem neben den schon gewonnenen Merkmalen noch ein unbestimmt offener Horizont unbekannter Merkmale (begrifflicher Bestimmungen) gehört.”

actual experiences of these objects. In so far as we classify entities in accordance with superficial characteristics, which cover up factual inner relations, Husserl speaks of “nonessential types” (*außerwesentliche Typen*). For example, the fact that the whale belongs to the class of mammals is hidden by the exterior analogy to the way of life the animal shares with the fishes. By contrast, in so far as the empirical types are formed in accordance with genuine empirical knowledge of the inner characteristics and relations of the objects Husserl uses the term “essential types” (*wesentliche Typen*).

The general empirical types just described are essentially dependent on our actual experience of particular entities. They are formed on the basis of this experience and their truth is rooted in the properties of the entities. In addition to such knowledge of empirical generalities, Husserl suggests that it is also possible to grasp pure essences, i.e., to grasp necessary structures that are not bound to particular cases, but which a priori determine “what must necessarily belong to an object in order that it can be an object of this kind.”³⁴³ Phenomenology itself strives to attain precisely such knowledge of essences.

According to Husserl, we can grasp essences by using the method of “free variation.” Let me quote a lengthier passage in which Husserl articulates how a free variation is carried out:

[The essential seeing] is based on the modification of an experienced or imagined objectivity, turning it into an arbitrary example which, at the same time, receives the character of a guiding model (*Vorbild*), a point of departure for the production of an infinitely open multiplicity of variants. It is based, therefore, on a *variation*. In other words, for its modification in pure imagination, we let ourselves be guided by the fact taken as a *model*. For this it is necessary that ever new similar images be obtained as replications, as images of the imagination, which are all concretely similar to the original image. Thus by an act of volition we produce free variants, each of which, just like the total process of variation itself, occurs in the subjective mode of the “arbitrary.” It then becomes evident that a unity runs through this multiplicity of successive figures, that in such free variations of an original image, e.g., of a thing an

³⁴³ Husserl, E&U, p. 426: “was einem Gegenstand notwendig zukommen muß, wenn er ein Gegenstand dieser Art soll sein können.”

invariant is necessarily retained as the *necessary general form*, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of its kind, would not be thinkable at all. While what differentiates the variants remains indifferent to us, this form stands out in the practice of voluntary variation, and as an absolutely identical content, an invariable What, according to which all the variants coincide: a *general essence*.³⁴⁴

In short, we start with an – actual or imagined – arbitrary example of the general type under investigation and let it serve as the guiding model. We then go on to produce, through imagination, an open multiplicity of variants which are similar to the original model. By enacting this variation it becomes possible to see and determine the invariant necessary form without which the arbitrarily chosen example would not be thinkable as an example of the sort under investigation. For example, we could grasp the essence of the concept of “animal” by imagining a multiplicity of arbitrary animals and related beings, thus assessing what must and what need not belong to an animal in order for it to remain an animal. In so doing, we are supposed to be able to grasp the general essence of “animal.”

Now, in Husserl’s description the eidetic variation basically emerges as a kind of conceptual analysis. The very possibility of producing variants of the general type under investigation, and of determining which variants count as examples of the type and which do not, presupposes that we already have an implicit grasp of the type. Whereas our factual pre-understanding of the type provides our sole measure for distinguishing

³⁴⁴ Husserl, E&U, pp. 410f.: “[Die Wesensschauung] beruht auf der Abwandlung einer erfahrenen oder phantasierten Gegenständlichkeit zum beliebigen Exempel, das zugleich den Charakter des leitenden ‘Vorbildes’ erhält, des Ausgangsgliedes für die Erzeugung einer offen endlosen Mannigfaltigkeit von Varianten, als auf einer *Variation*. M. a. W. wir lassen uns vom Faktum als *Vorbild* für seine Umgestaltung in reiner Phantasie leiten. Es sollen dabei immer neue ähnliche Bilder als Nachbilder, als Phantasiebilder gewonnen werden, die sämtlich konkrete Ähnlichkeiten des Urbildes sind. Wir erzeugen so frei willkürlich Varianten, deren jede ebenso wie der ganze Prozeß der *Variation* selbst im subjektiven Erlebnismodus des ‘beliebig’ auftritt. Es zeigt sich dann, daß durch diese Mannigfaltigkeit von Nachgestaltungen eine Einheit hindurchgeht, daß bei solchen freien Variationen eines Urbildes, z.B. eines Dinges, in Notwendigkeit eine *Invariante* erhalten bleibt als die *notwendige allgemeine Form*, ohne die ein derartiges wie dieses Ding, als Exempel seiner Art, überhaupt undenkbar wäre. Sie hebt sich in der Übung willkürlicher *Variation*, und während uns das Differierende der Varianten gleichgültig ist, als ein absolut identischer Gehalt, ein invariables Was heraus, nach dem hin sich alle Varianten decken: ein *allgemeines Wesen*.”

between proper and improper examples, the function of the examples is none other than to bring out the essential features of this pre-understanding. This, however, implies that the method of free variation is unable to account for the possibility of phenomenologically seeing and describing – independently of our factual concepts – necessary structures and traits of our experience. It provides no clue as to what it means to intuitively describe necessary structures as the source of truth of our factual concepts. Instead, the eidetic variation ultimately amounts to a method for explicating the factual conceptual pre-understanding we already happen to live.³⁴⁵

We can now see more clearly the ambivalence of Husserl's view of general intuition. On the one hand, he conceives of the empirical types linking our experience as open fallible concepts grounded in our experience and knowledge of particular entities. While this conception provides an account of the empirical-phenomenal basis of such concepts, it does not explain the possibility – crucial to phenomenology – of intuitively describing the necessary sense-structures of our experience. Moreover, it must be said that Husserl does not sufficiently address the question – and this would be Heidegger's challenge – to what extent our intuitive experience must always already be guided by our factual conceptual pre-understanding as that which allows us to see entities as meaningful phenomena and identify their relevant features and relations. On the other hand, Husserl offers a description of the method of eidetic variation, which depicts this method as a way of explicating the necessary features defining our factual concepts. However, this description does nothing to account for the phenomenal basis – and truth – of our understanding of general essences. As a result, the eidetic variation depicted by Husserl is doomed to confirm and explicate our factual concepts, thereby dogmatically postulating the basic traits of these concepts – with all their possible flaws and imperfections – as the necessary a priori framework organizing our experience of particular entities.

³⁴⁵ This criticism – that Husserl's method of free variation is circular in the sense that it can only explicate our prior factual understanding of the general types or ideas under investigation – has been voiced many times before. See, e.g., Levin 1968; Zaner 1973a; 1973b; Mohanty 1989, pp. 25-38. For a recent attempt to defend Husserl's notion of free variation, see Kasmier 2010.

As far as I can see, Husserl will always remain trapped in the ambivalence between his account of the knowledge of empirical types, and his account of the explication of pure essences through free variation – none of which is able to illuminate the method of his own phenomenology.³⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Husserl basically understands and practices his phenomenology as intuitive reflection on the essential and necessary structures of our *de facto* experiences. It is palpable that the bulk of Husserl’s phenomenological investigations are not thought to have – and do not have – the character of conceptual analyses, but rather aim to describe – independently of our factual concepts – the basic sense-structures characterizing our experiences. While these reflective descriptions furnish the phenomenological concepts with their concrete content, the sense-structures themselves constitute the ultimate source of their possible truth and clarificatory power.

Heidegger’s treatment of Husserl’s notion of categorial intuition might at first glance appear as a decidedly affirmative explication of this discovery. Still, Heidegger at crucial points chooses to stress and rearticulate aspects

³⁴⁶ In his later thinking Husserl increasingly stresses the historical character of our intentional experience by exploring the way in which this experience is always already guided by sedimented historical meanings and concepts that have been handed down through history. Ultimately, he claims, all historically sedimented meanings refer back to a *Urstiftung* – a “primal institution” – by which he means the event when a meaning is constituted for the first time as an “abiding possession” (Hua I, p. 95; cf. Hua IV, p. 311). However, notwithstanding Husserl’s deepened appreciation of the historical-genetic dimension of our experience of meaning, he is never willing to absolutize our factual sedimented meanings as the ungroundable ground determining our possibilities of intuiting the matters in question. Although the somewhat enigmatic notion of *Urstiftung* might seem to imply as much, there is no indication that Husserl would have wanted to give up his basic phenomenological impulse and conceive of the *Urstiftung* either in terms of a creative act on the part of subjectivity or in terms of an appropriation of a pre-given historical destiny. Even though the *Urstiftung* signifies the primal institution of historical meanings and types that will henceforth guide the experience of the historical community in question (and which over time might undergo various forms of *Nachstiftung*, *Neustiftung* and *Umstiftung*) these meanings and types are still conceived of as based on some sort of passive intuitive experience of the matters themselves – however this experience is to be understood. Husserl articulates his notion of *Urstiftung* in, e.g., Hua I, pp. 118, 143-146; Hua IV, p. 117; Hua XI, pp. 203-207; Hua XXXIX, pp. 1-6. Cf. also Steinbock 1995, p. 41f.; Miettinen 2013, pp. 162ff.

of Husserl's conception in a way that critically modifies its sense and points the way towards his own project. Here is how he articulates the import of Husserl's notion:

The discovery of the categorial intuition is the demonstration, first, that there is a simple apprehension (*Erfassen*) of the categorial, such constituents in entities which in traditional fashion are designated as categories and were seen in crude form quite early. Second, it is above all the demonstration that this apprehension is invested in the most everyday of perceptions and in every experience.³⁴⁷

To begin with, Heidegger underscores that Husserl's discovery that there is a "simple apprehension" of the categorial as the object of certain acts allows us to overcome the traditional tendency – which goes back at least to Locke and which is fundamental for Kant and German idealism – to deduce the categorial form of the objects of our experience through a reflection on the acts of the subject. Since the categorial form does not reside in the objects of our sense perception, such has been the standard argument, it must originate in the subject and its ways of perceiving the objects. Against this Heidegger – with Husserl – claims that we cannot grasp categorial forms either through sense perception or through reflection on our inner acts of consciousness; rather, the categorial is essentially given as the object of specific acts of categorial perception. He quotes Husserl: "Not in *reflection* upon judgments or even upon fulfillments of judgments, but in the *fulfillments of judgments themselves* lies the true source of the concepts 'state of affairs' and 'being' (in the copulative sense). Not in these *acts as objects*, but in the *objects of these acts*, do we have the abstractive basis which enables us to realize the concepts in question."³⁴⁸ The categorial intuition is thus the possibility of experiencing

³⁴⁷ GA 20, p. 64: "Die Entdeckung der kategorialen Anschauung ist der Nachweis, erstens daß es ein schlichtes Erfassen des Kategorialen gibt, solcher Bestände im Seienden, die man traditionellerweise als Kategorien bezeichnet und in roher Form sehr bald gesehen hat. Zweitens ist sie vor allem der Nachweis, daß dieses Erfassen in der alltäglichsten Wahrnehmung und jeder Erfahrung investiert ist."

³⁴⁸ HUA XIX, pp. 669f.: "Nicht in der *Reflexion* auf Urteile oder vielmehr auf Urteilserfüllungen, sondern in den *Urteilserfüllungen selbst* liegt wahrhaft der Ursprung der Begriffe Sachverhalt und Sein (im Sinne der Kopula); nicht in diesen *Akten als Gegenständen*, sondern in den *Gegenständen dieser Akte* finden wir das Abstraktionsfundament für die Realisierung der besagten Begriffe."

and grasping non-subjective categorial meanings as the ultimate ground for all categorial understanding.

So far, the presentation is basically affirmative. However, Heidegger's main thesis, that Husserl's discovery "above all" lies in the insight that the categorial intuition is "invested in the most everyday of perceptions and in every experience" already anticipates the basic path of his critical transformation of Husserl.

How runs this path?

Husserl would certainly agree with Heidegger that our everyday perceptions and experiences of the world contain and are intermingled with categorial acts that allow us to grasp the categorial elements of our intentions. However, as we have seen, he fundamentally describes the relationship between sense perceptions and categorial intuitions in terms of a strict hierarchy. Whereas sensuous perceptions grasp their object "simply" – on one level of acts and without the need for further higher level acts to constitute the object – categorial intuitions are conceived as a new level of acts, which, on the basis of sense perceptions, constitute a new kind of categorial objects. To account for how we perceive the sensuous object as a unified object – e.g. this house – through the manifold of single perceptive acts, Husserl employs the notion of "fusion" (*Verschmelzung*): "The unity of perception comes into being as a *simple* unity, as an *immediate fusion of the partial intentions, without the addition of new act-intentions.*"³⁴⁹ Still, Husserl in *Logical Investigations* leaves it quite unclear how such a fusion occurs. Must it not be guided by a categorial concept of what the object – e.g. a house – is? Yet if so, would not this unsettle the hierarchy between the sensuous and the categorial?³⁵⁰ As we have seen,

³⁴⁹ HUA XIX, p. 677: "Die Wahrnehmungseinheit kommt als schlichte Einheit, als unmittelbare Verschmelzung der Partialintentionen und ohne Hinzutritt neuer Aktintentionen zustande."

³⁵⁰ However, as Daniel Dahlstrom and others have pointed out – cf. Dahlstrom 2001, pp. 84-88; Dastur 1991, pp. 45-50; Mulligan 1995, pp. 183-191 – Husserl's conception of the founding relationship between sensuous and categorial intuition is not without ambivalence. For example, in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* Husserl writes: "It is part of perception that something appears in it, but the *interpretation makes out what we call appearance*, be it right or not [...]. The *house* appears to me – in no other manner than that I interpret actually perceived sense-contents in a certain fashion. I hear a *barrel-organ* – the sounds that I hear are interpreted by me precisely as *sounds of a barrel-organ*" (*Zur Wahrnehmung gehört, daß etwas in ihr erscheint; aber die Apperzeption macht aus, was wir Erscheinen nennen, mag sie unrichtig sein oder nicht [...]. Das Haus*

Husserl will later think that it is our prior grasp of general empirical types that allows us to perceive things as unified objects with their typical general characteristics. Even then, however, he continues to hold that these types are grounded in our sensuous experience of particular objects.

Heidegger for his part accounts for the unity of our everyday perceptual experience of meaningful things by firmly anchoring it in a preceding categorial understanding of general “ideas” or “*eide*”:

The acts of general intuition give what we first and simply see in the matters. When I perceive simply, moving about in my environmental world, when I see houses, for example, I do not first see houses primarily and expressly in their individuation, in their differentiation. Rather, I first see generally: this is a house. This as-what, the general character of house, is not expressly apprehended in what it is, but is already coapprehended in simple intuition as that which here, as it were, illuminates what is given.³⁵¹

In short, it is only because we always already live in an understanding of general ideas or meanings that we can experience particular objects as unified meaningful phenomena. Hereby Heidegger stresses the linguistic and unthematic character of this understanding. To begin with, the preceding general understanding is constituted by the way in which we always already – implicitly or explicitly – talk about things: “It is also a matter of fact that our simplest perceptions and constitutive states are already *expressed*, even more, are *interpreted* in a certain way. It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the

erscheint mir – wodurch anders, als daß ich die wirklich erlebten Sinnesinhalte in gewisser Weise interpretiere. Ich höre einen Leierkasten – die empfundenen Töne deute ich eben als Leierkastentöne (HUA XIX, p. 762). In the second edition of *Logical Investigations* the terms “interpretation” and “interpret” have been replaced with “apperception” (*Apperzeption*) and “apperceive” (*apperzipieren*).

³⁵¹ GA 20, p. 91: “Die Akte der allgemeinen Anschauung geben das, was man zunächst und schlicht an den Sachen sieht. Wenn ich schlicht wahrnehme, mich in meiner Umwelt bewege, so sehe ich, wenn ich Häuser sehe nicht Häuser zunächst und primär und ausdrücklich in ihrer Vereinzelung, Unterschiedenheit, sondern ich sehe zunächst allgemein: das ist ein Haus. Dieses Als-was, der allgemeine Charakter von Haus, ist selbst nicht ausdrücklich in dem, was er ist, erfaßt, aber schon in der schlichten Anschauung miterfaßt als das, was hier gewissermaßen das Vorgegebene aufklärt.”

reverse, we see what one says about the matter.”³⁵² What is more, the categorial understanding guides our primary experience of meaning in an unthematic manner:³⁵³ as we see a house, we see it appear as a house on the basis of our unthematic understanding of what a house is without being thematically conscious of the general essence of house.

What Heidegger does here is basically that he inverts Husserl’s hierarchy between sensuous and categorial intuition, submitting that our sensuous perception is fundamentally determined by our preceding unthematic categorial understanding of general meanings. Given that this categorial understanding is prior to and cannot be grounded on our sense perceptions, the passage is opened up to Heidegger’s own analysis of the historical as-structure of understanding: the view that it is our prior understanding of the historical contexts of meaning in which we live that grounds our intuitive experience of beings as meaningful phenomena.

Heidegger’s accentuation of the implicit character of the categorial intuition always already guiding our sight allows him to distinguish clearly – something that Husserl was unable to do in his *Logical Investigations* due to his basic definition of categorial acts as higher level thematizing acts – between this implicit understanding and the possibility of thematically explicating its contents and structure: “The ideal unity of the species is thus also already there in every concrete apprehending, although not expressly as that toward which the regard of comparative consideration looks. That toward which I look in comparing, the regard of the comparable, can in its own right be isolated in its pure state of affairs. I thus acquire the idea.”³⁵⁴ Our preceding unthematic understanding of our historical contexts of meaning thus constitutes the basis both for our immediate experience of meaningful phenomena as well as for the thematic investigations of philosophy. To carry out a phenomenological

³⁵² GA 20, p. 75: “Faktisch ist es auch so, daß unsere schlichten Wahrnehmungen und Verfassungen schon *ausgedrückte*, mehr noch, in bestimmter Weise *interpretiert* sind. Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber, genauer sprechen wir nicht das aus, was wir sehen, sondern umgekehrt, wir sehen was man über die Sache spricht.”

³⁵³ GA 20, p. 65.

³⁵⁴ GA 20, pp. 91f.: “Die ideale Einheit der Spezies ist so auch schon in jedem konkreten Erfassen da, obzwar nicht ausdrücklich als das, worauf die Hinsicht des vergleichenden Betrachtens sieht. Das, worauf ich im Vergleichen als die Hinsicht des Vergleichbar sehe, kann seinerseits in seinem reinen Sachverhalt isoliert genommen werden, damit gewinne ich die Idee.”

explication is according to Heidegger – thus transforming phenomenology into a radically historical endeavor – precisely to critically explicate and dismantle our implicit historical understanding of being.

On the basis of his treatment of the categorial intuition, Heidegger ends by briefly discussing Husserl's third discovery: the *a priori*. As concerns this discovery he maintains that Husserl's phenomenology, although it opens up the possibility of grasping the originary sense of the *a priori*, nevertheless remains unclear and beset with traditional prejudices regarding this issue. As a result, Heidegger's explication of the *a priori* is basically an articulation of his own conception. The following quote sums up his view: "The *a priori* is not only nothing immanent, belonging primarily to the sphere of the subject, it is also nothing transcendent, specifically bound up with reality. [...] Instead, the *a priori* is a *character of the structural progression in the being of beings, in the being-structure of being.*"³⁵⁵ That is, the *a priori* is located neither in the immanent – or otherwise prior and separable – sphere of our subjective experience nor in the particular objects of our experience. Rather, for Heidegger the *a priori* must be sought in our basic historical understanding of being which ultimately guides our understanding of our historical world and its beings. Hence, the fundamental task of philosophy, as he conceives it, is none other than to historically explicate the basic sense of being as such.

Although Heidegger's commentary basically presents itself as an affirmative reading of Husserl, it has, on crucial points, broken with and transcended Husserl's conception. How should we assess the distance between Heidegger and Husserl as concerns the question of the intuitive givenness of meaning?³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ GA 20, pp. 101f.: "Das Apriori ist nicht nur nichts Immanentes, primär der Subjektsphäre zugehörig, es ist auch nichts Transzendentes, spezifisch der Realität verhaftetes. [...] Das Apriori ist vielmehr *Charakter der Aufbaufolge im Sein des Seienden, in der Seinsstruktur des Seins.*"

³⁵⁶ In Dahlstrom 2001, pp. 48-174, Daniel Dahlstrom offers an extended and detailed treatment of Heidegger's explications of Husserl in the Marburg years, in which he also assesses – in a thorough and well-balanced manner – the force of Heidegger's criticisms, tracing the points where Heidegger simplifies or distorts Husserl's conception. However, although I mostly agree with Dahlstrom's comments it seems that his effort to do justice to both Heidegger and Husserl, emphasizing the continuity between them, makes him lose sight of the fact that Heidegger's appropriation of the

According to Heidegger, Husserl, although opening the gateway towards his own hermeneutic phenomenology, ultimately conceives of phenomenality as bodily presence for a theoretical observation and of phenomenology as a reflective categorial intuition of the structures of transcendental consciousness. Thereby, Heidegger argues, Husserl makes himself blind to the temporal-historical nature of life and to the true task of phenomenology: to destruct and critically appropriate the factual pre-understanding of being that we always already live in.

However, although I believe that Heidegger is in the end right in claiming that there is a decisive gap between him and Husserl as concerns their conceptions of phenomenality his critique clearly simplifies and covers up the complexity of Husserl's account. As regards Heidegger's thesis that Husserl understands phenomenality as presence for a direct thematic intuition, it is good to begin by noting that Husserl in fact does not picture our intuitive experience as a one-dimensional straight focusing on the sensuous object. On the contrary, Husserl maintains that even our simple sensations involve both an unthematic grasp of the typifications and historically sedimented meanings guiding our experience as well as an unthematic consciousness of the horizons of expectation belonging to the experience in question. Moreover, he ascribes a central role both to the body and to intersubjectivity in the constitution of our object-experience. However, even though Husserl's analysis of the categorial intuition of essences takes its starting point in the insight that our intentional acts of signifying the world are beset with categorial meanings that cannot find fulfillment in our sense perceptions, he never – like Heidegger – considers absolutizing the categorial content of our empty significations as the ungroundable understanding of historical meaning grounding all our intuitive experience. Although Husserl's account for what it means to grasp general meanings remains ambivalent and insufficient, he will always remain convinced that our understanding of such meanings is ultimately grounded in some sort of direct intuitive experience of the matters in question.

From the vantage point we have reached we can say that the commentators stressing the crucial importance of Husserl's concept of categorial intuition for Heidegger are right in the following respect:

"categorial intuition" opens a basic rift between the two philosophers as concerns the question about the nature of intuitive givenness.

Heidegger does in fact attempt to articulate his new conception of the historical nature of phenomenality/phenomenology as well as his question of being through a critically transformative appropriation of Husserl's doctrine of the categorial intuition. To neglect this – as the phenomenological commentators tend to do – is to neglect the historicization of phenomenality that Heidegger undertakes and the challenge that this poses to any idea of an intuitively reflective phenomenology. However, this is not the whole truth. As I have tried to show, Heidegger's early Freiburg thinking essentially develops as a faithful elaboration of Husserl's phenomenological method. Moreover – as I will argue in the following – even though Heidegger from 1922 onwards projects his program of hermeneutic-destructive phenomenology, he – in a deeply ambivalent manner – continues to make use of intuition-based phenomenological descriptions as the basic method of his concrete philosophical work. Hence, despite Heidegger's own later emphasis on the categorial intuition – which one-sidedly highlights those aspects which lead up to his late historical thinking – I think it is quite clear that it is Husserl's basic phenomenological impulse to reflect on and describe the experientially given that constitutes the decisive basis for Heidegger's thinking in these years.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ The fact that Heidegger in "Prolegomena" articulates his new philosophical program through an appropriation of Husserl's notion of categorial intuition still leaves open the question of the role of the categorial intuition in his philosophical development. Heidegger's later claims about the importance of the categorial intuition cannot be taken as indubitable evidence of the magnitude of this influence given that they are written from the perspective of his late historical thinking and depict Husserl's phenomenology in so far as it contributed to the development of this thinking. What we know for sure is that Heidegger showed a keen interest in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in the years 1921-1924, giving many seminars on the book and also discussing it in smaller study groups (Cf. Kisiel 1985, p. 196). However, it is also clear that Heidegger's first concrete attempts to explicitly elaborate his new historical conception of phenomenality/phenomenology take place in his lectures and texts on Aristotle. So, the question is: To what extent should we understand Heidegger's analysis of the categorial intuition in "Prolegomena" as an alternative articulation of the insights he had already achieved through his work with Aristotle? And to what extent were these insights already prepared or brought about by his reflections on Husserl's concept of categorial intuition? Moreover, to what extent are Heidegger's interpretations of both Husserl and Aristotle guided by his formative readings of Dilthey? This must remain an open question. However, since it primarily concerns the factual development of Heidegger's thinking rather than its philosophical sense I do not think it is so relevant for understanding the philosophical issues at stake here.

Above I have tried to encircle the philosophical crossroads at which Husserl and Heidegger part ways concerning the question of phenomenality/phenomenology. However, it might be good to emphasize at this point that this question, seen from the present stage of this investigation, is still far from settled – for example in favor of Heidegger’s historicism. Husserl, as we have seen, insists that our understanding of meaning – although primarily guided by historically sedimented types and meanings – ultimately receives its truth from some kind of transhistorical intuition as its source and ground. However, although he provides an account of the empirical-phenomenal ground of “empirical types,” his conception of the eidetic variation is unable to illuminate the phenomenal basis of the understanding of necessary essential structures that phenomenology itself is concerned with. Heidegger sees the problems of Husserl’s account and tries to overcome them by anchoring our intuition in our understanding of historical meaning. However, although the problems attaching to the idea of direct intuition are thus put aside, Heidegger’s historicization of phenomenal understanding will – as we shall see – give rise to new problems, problems that Heidegger’s later thinking will revolve around: What allows us to distinguish between prejudice and truth within our historical understanding? What is it, if anything, that grants to our historical destiny its right and its binding force?

Much of the remainder of this thesis will be devoted to following and critically questioning Heidegger’s struggle to articulate and implement his vision of a radically historical thinking. In the epilogue I will provide a more independent and systematic discussion of how I think we should conceive of the relation between direct intuition and historical pre-understanding in our experience and understanding of meaning.

2.3 The Project of Fundamental Ontology

Heidegger’s continuous effort during the 1920s to explore the temporal-historical structure of phenomenal experience within the framework of the question of being culminates in the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927. Heidegger had not published anything since his *Habilitationsschrift* in 1916, and his philosophical development since his breakthrough in 1919 had basically taken place in his lecture courses and seminars. Under acute

external pressure to publish something, he eventually pens down *Being and Time* in the winter of 1926 on the basis of his lecture notes. The book gained instant and lasting fame on the philosophical scene and has since been read as Heidegger's magnum opus and as the paradigmatic manifestation of his early thought.

There is no doubt that *Being and Time* in many ways constitutes the central point of Heidegger's philosophical production. It is here that his early thinking receives its final and most systematically elaborated expression. The book also forms the point of departure for Heidegger's later thought, which basically unfolds as an attempt to critically overcome the inner limits and ambiguities which made him renounce the project of fundamental ontology, and to develop a thinking which is able to answer more consistently to what he conceives as the radical historicity of being. Still, considering the central role of *Being and Time* in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* it bears noting that this powerful book is something of an anomaly in his production. In contrast to the provisionally searching style and open terminology of his earlier lecture courses, he here endeavors to carry out a massive and systematically unified ontological investigation into the sense of being, deploying a rigid and complex network of technical concepts to achieve this end. Moreover, the book is fraught with deep tensions and ambiguities stemming from his overall ambition to carry out an investigation of the temporal-historical sense of being by way of a phenomenological explication of the structures of *Dasein*.

In the end, these tensions made Heidegger abandon the project of fundamental ontology, leaving the published portion of *Being and Time* a torso. According to the plan sketched in the introduction, the book was to consist of two parts, each part comprising three divisions:

Part One: The Interpretation of *Dasein* in terms of temporality, and the explication of time as the transcendental horizon for the question of being.

1. The preparatory fundamental analysis of *Dasein*.
2. *Dasein* and temporality.
3. Time and being.

Part Two: Basic features of a phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology, on the guideline of the problem of Temporality.

1. Kant's doctrine of schematism and time, as a preliminary stage of the problem of Temporality.
2. The ontological foundation of Descartes' *cogito sum*, and how the medieval ontology has been taken over into the problematic of the *res cogitans*.
3. Aristotle's essay on time, as providing a way of discriminating the phenomenal basis and the limits of ancient ontology.³⁵⁸

However, the published book contains only the first two divisions of the first part. The first division, "The preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein," articulates the basic structure of Dasein as "being-in-the-world" and "care." The second division, "Dasein and temporality," has two main aims: first, it analyses Dasein's possibility of authentic self-understanding; second, it explicates temporality as the ultimate unifying structure of Dasein. Here the book ends and Heidegger never publishes the remaining divisions, the task of which would have been to explicate the sense of being as time on the basis of the preceding analysis of the temporality of Dasein, and to carry out a destruction of the history of ontology according to its three main stages: Kant, Descartes, and Aristotle. After the publication, Heidegger continues working on the project, attempting to pursue the crucial turn from the analytic of Dasein to an explication of the sense of being. However, after a few years he eventually gives up his plan to complete the book. The reason for this is that he becomes convinced

³⁵⁸ SZ, pp. 39f: "*Erster Teil:* Die Interpretation des Daseins auf die Zeitlichkeit und die Explikation der Zeit als des transzendentalen Horizontes der Frage nach dem Sein. *Zweiter Teil:* Grundzüge einer phänomenologischen Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie am Leitfaden der Problematik der Temporalität. Der erste Teil zerfällt in *drei Abschnitte:* 1. Die vorbereitende Fundamentalanalyse des Daseins. 2. Dasein und Zeitlichkeit. 3. Zeit und Sein. Der zweite Teil gliedert sich ebenso *dreifach:* 1. *Kants* Lehre vom Schematismus und der Zeit als Vorstufe einer Problematik der Temporalität. 2. Das ontologische Fundament des 'cogito sum' *Descartes'* und die Übernahme der mittelalterlichen Ontologie in die Problematik der 'res cogitans'. 3. Die Abhandlung des *Aristoteles* über die Zeit als Diskriminierung der phänomenalen Basis und der Grenzen der antiken Ontologie."

that the project of fundamental ontology contains deep inner problems that cannot be overcome but which demand a new approach.

The rest of this part of my thesis is devoted to an explication of *Being and Time*, especially focusing on how the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology is played out at the very center of this treatise. The aim of the present chapter is to present Heidegger's basic conception of the project of fundamental ontology.

The Question of the Sense of Being

Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by introducing its guiding question concerning the sense of being: What does it mean to be? How should we understand the modes of being characterizing different kinds of being – e.g. human beings, plants, artefacts – as well as basic sense of being characterizing all beings as beings?

According to Heidegger, the question of being is nothing but the basic question that originally put Greek philosophy into motion, only to fall into a deep, more than two thousand years long forgetfulness still dominating us today. As he sees it, the Greek philosophers became aware of the ontological difference between beings and their being, so that Aristotle was able to articulate the basic question of his *Metaphysics* as the question concerning beings *as* beings. However, although the Greeks thus opened up the principal possibility of investigating the ontological categories of all beings, they were never able to radically pose the question of the sense of being, a task which would have required an exploration of the temporal-historical structure of Dasein's understanding of being. Instead, Greek philosophy – paradigmatically Aristotle – basically determined being as presence-at-hand for a theoretical seeing. This determination was not only biased; it also made philosophy lose sight of and cover up the question of being as a thematic question. As a result, Heidegger argues, philosophy has henceforth been dominated by the Greek understanding of being as presence-at-hand in a prejudiced and nearly autistic manner. To reawaken and elaborate the question of the sense of being anew is the fundamental

task of *Being and Time*: “Our aim in in the following treatise is to work out the question of the sense of ‘being’ and to do so concretely.”³⁵⁹

Heidegger for the first time presents the question of the sense of being as the guiding question of his thought in the lecture course “Prolegomena” in 1925.³⁶⁰ Still, the question of being by no means introduces an altogether new theme for Heidegger, but rather amounts to a rearticulation of the basic direction of questioning characterizing his thinking from the outset. According to Heidegger’s own later testimony, his philosophical interest was originally sparked, in his student years, by Franz Brentano’s doctoral dissertation *On the Manifold Meaning of Being in Aristotle* (*Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*). Reading the dissertation, the question of being dawned upon him: what is the unifying sense of being?³⁶¹ Still, as Heidegger achieves his philosophical breakthrough in his early Freiburg lecture courses, the question of being is absent as an explicit theme. In fact, within the framework of his attempt to realize phenomenology as an originary science of life, the term “ontology” is primarily used as a pejorative designation of the traditional bent of philosophy to examine theoretical objects detached from our pre-theoretical experience. However, although avoiding the term “ontology” as a title for his own project, it is clear that Heidegger’s ambition, already in these years, is “ontological” in the broad sense that he later gives to this word. Ultimately, the aim of his originary science is none other than to discover “the basic sense of ‘existence’” on the basis of which “the sense of reality in all layers of life” becomes intelligible.³⁶² From this there is but a small step to articulating the task of thinking as fundamental ontology: to investigate, through an exploration of the human Dasein, the sense of being as such, constituting the foundation for all regional ontologies. It is around 1921-1922, as a result of his confrontation with Aristotle, that Heidegger starts designating his own thinking “ontology.” As he puts it in “Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation”: “The problematic of philosophy has to do with the *being* of factual life. In this regard, philosophy is *fundamental ontology* (*prinzipielle Ontologie*), in such a way that

³⁵⁹ SZ, p. 1: “Die konkrete Ausarbeitung der Frage nach dem Sinn von ‘*Sein*’ ist die Absicht der folgenden Abhandlung.”

³⁶⁰ Cf. GA 20, p. 184.

³⁶¹ Cf. GA 14, p. 93.

³⁶² GA 58, p. 261.

the determinate, particular, regional ontologies of the world receive the ground and sense of their own problems from the ontology of facticity.”³⁶³

Already in his earliest Freiburg lectures, Heidegger equated the question of being with the question of phenomenality or givenness. In *Being and Time*, this identification is carried on and underscored. Having just defined the phenomenon as “*that which shows itself in itself*,”³⁶⁴ Heidegger writes: “The *phainomena*, phenomena, are thus the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light – what the Greeks sometimes identified simply with *ta onta* (beings).”³⁶⁵ In fact, the Greek philosophers did not – as Günter Figal has rightly pointed out – equate *ta phainomena* with *ta onta* in any straightforward way, since they primarily used the word *phainomenon* to refer to how things merely appear to us in contrast to how they really are.³⁶⁶ However, the philological violence of the passage only underscores its importance for Heidegger himself. What the passage states is, in short: the phenomena that show – or can show – themselves as themselves are the beings themselves; hence, for something to show itself as itself is to be. For Heidegger, then, the question of being is essentially a question of phenomenality, of what it means to show up as a meaningful

³⁶³ GA 62, p. 364. “Die Problematik der Philosophie betrifft das *Sein* des faktischen Lebens. Philosophie ist in dieser Hinsicht *prinzipielle Ontologie*, so zwar, daß die bestimmten einzelnen welthaften regionalen Ontologien von der Ontologie der Faktizität her Problemgrund und Problemsinn empfangen.” Cf. also GA 63, pp. 2f.

³⁶⁴ SZ, p. 28: “das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende.”

³⁶⁵ SZ, p. 28: “Die φαίνόμενα, ‘Phänomene’, sind dann die Gesamtheit dessen, was am Tage liegt oder ans Licht gebracht werden kann, was die Griechen zuweilen einfach mit τὰ ὄντα (das Seiende) identifizierten.” Cf. also “Introduction to Phenomenological Research” where Heidegger articulates the parallelism between phenomena and beings in a little more detail. Here he writes that “*phainomenon*” signifies the “*first, and, as such, first legitimate (rechtmäßig) way*” in which something is encountered: “*Phainomenon* means the existing entity itself; it is a determination of being and is to be grasped in such a way that the character of showing itself is expressed. *Ta phainomena* can be represented by *ta onta*; it is what is always already here, what we encounter the moment we open our eyes. It does not need first to be disclosed, but is frequently covered up” (*Φαινόμενον bedeutet das Daseiende selbst und ist eine Seinsbestimmung und so zu fassen, daß der Charakter des Sichzeigens ausgedrückt wird. Τὰ φαίνόμενα kann durch τὰ ὄντα vertreten werden und ist dasjenige, das immer schon da ist, das im nächsten Augenaufschlag begegnet. Es braucht nicht erst erschlossen zu werden, ist aber häufig verdeckt*) (GA 17, p. 14).

³⁶⁶ See Figal 2006, pp. 145-147.

phenomenon at all.³⁶⁷ As a result, Heidegger's entire fundamental ontological investigation of the sense of being through an analytic of Dasein can be read as one long exploration of the basic structure and sense of phenomenal givenness.³⁶⁸

Although the ontological problematic is present in Heidegger's thinking right from the start, Heidegger's explicit elevation of the question of the sense of being as the guiding question of his thought is nevertheless philosophically vital. As argued in the first part of this thesis, Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures suffered from a deep inability to account for the existential motives of the philosophical understanding of origin: What role does the question of origin play in our pre-theoretical experience of the world? As Heidegger now projects the question of being as the long-forgotten fundamental question of philosophy, he is inevitably confronted with the task of describing how this dangerously general question addresses the human being as an essential and fundamental question.

According to Heidegger, we make use of an understanding of being in all our experience and knowledge of beings. In order to be able to relate to an entity we already need to have an understanding of what the entity "is": of the mode of being of the being in question and of the sense of being in general. However, our factual understanding of being, which always already orients our experience of beings, is first and foremost unthematic and nebulous: "in every relation and being towards beings as beings there

³⁶⁷ Heidegger's identification of being with phenomenality has been noted and discussed in Figal 2009, pp. 85-87, and Marion 1998, pp. 63-64.

³⁶⁸ Indeed, in his provisional presentation of the terms "phenomenon" and "phenomenology" in the introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to the results of the subsequent existential analytic as that which eventually gives concrete meaning to these terms. Hence, he writes that in order to understand the concept of phenomenon "everything depends on" our seeing the connection between the possibility of something showing itself as itself and the possibility of something deceptively showing itself as something that it is not (SZ, p. 29). Now, what in the end accounts for this connection is nothing else than Heidegger's basic analysis of the as-structure of understanding, which both forms the center of his conception of being-in-the-world and grounds his analysis of the temporality of Dasein: it is only because we primarily understand beings *as* something on the basis of our historical pre-understanding that we can experience them as something that they are not. Cf. also SZ, p. 357, where Heidegger states that the entire "preconception" of phenomenology outlined in the introduction only gets concretely elaborated in the course of the fundamental ontological investigations of the sense of being.

lies *a priori* an enigma.”³⁶⁹ Yet how should we understand this enigma supposedly conditioning our experience of beings?

Heidegger tries to lay bare the essential significance and necessity of the question of being by arguing for its “ontological” and “ontic” priority. By the “ontological priority” of the question of being, Heidegger means its systematically primary role in all our scientific knowledge. According to Heidegger, the totality of beings is organized into different domains of being – e.g. nature, history, human beings – which can be made objects of scientific research. To commence at all, he argues, a science must be guided by a conception of its domain of being, a conception which prescribes the central questions, concepts and methods of the science, thus delimiting its field of research. However, the understanding of a science’s domain of being cannot be achieved by the science itself that depends on it. Should this understanding not remain naive and prejudiced what is needed is an ontological investigation: a “productive logic” which “leaps ahead, so to speak, into a particular domain of being” and “discloses it for the first time in its constitutive being.”³⁷⁰ Still, this ontological understanding of the different regions of being needs, in its turn, to be guided by a fundamental ontological understanding of the sense of being as such:

Ontological inquiry is indeed more primordial, as over against the ontic inquiry of the positive sciences. [...] All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent, if it has not previously clarified the sense of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ SZ, p. 4: “in jedem Verhalten und Sein zu Seiendem als Seiendem [liegt] a priori ein Rätsel.”

³⁷⁰ SZ, p. 10: “Sie ist produktive Logik in dem Sinne, daß sie in ein bestimmtes Seinsgebiet gleichsam vorspringt, es in seiner Seinsverfassung allererst erschließt und die gewonnenen Strukturen den positiven Wissenschaften als durchsichtige Anweisungen des Fragens verfügbar macht.”

³⁷¹ SZ, p.11: “Ontologisches Fragen ist zwar gegenüber dem ontischen Fragen der positiven Wissenschaften ursprünglicher. Es bleibt aber selbst naiv und undurchsichtig, wenn seine Nachforschungen nach dem Sein des Seienden den Sinn von Sein überhaupt unerörtert lassen. [...] *Alle Ontologie, mag sie über ein noch so reiches und festverklammertes Kategoriensystem verfügen, bleibt im Grunde blind und eine Verkehrung ihrer eigensten Absicht, wenn sie nicht zuvor den Sinn von Sein zureichend geklärt und diese Klärung als ihre Fundamentalaufgabe begriffen hat.*”

By the “ontic priority” of the question of being, Heidegger means its basic existential role for the human being: “[Dasein] is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being. [...] *Understanding of being is itself a determination of the being of Dasein.* The ontic distinction of Dasein lies in the fact that it *is* ontological.”³⁷² According to Heidegger, our very basic relation to and understanding of ourselves and all the other beings of the world is guided by a pre-ontological understanding of being which initially remains vague and obscure. The question of being thus not only constitutes a theoretical question relevant for scientific research but in the end amounts to a “radicalization of an essential tendency of being that belongs to Dasein itself, namely, of the pre-ontological understanding of being.”³⁷³

Heidegger’s argument for the ontic-ontological priority of the question of being rests heavily on his quasi-Aristotelian picture of the basic hierarchical structure of phenomenal understanding delineated here. The picture is this. All our experience and understanding of particular beings as meaningful phenomena is determined by our prior understanding of the historical contexts of significance – our world – which we always already live in; this understanding of the world is, in its turn, guided by our understanding of the different kinds or modes of being; this understanding is finally guided by our understanding of the sense of being as such. Given that these hierarchical strata of understanding essentially determine our experience of beings, this means that everything that we may experience and identify as meaningful – from the existential possibilities of our life to objects of scientific research – is always already linked by our understanding of being. To take an example: in order to understand what a dog is, i.e. the meaning it has for us, we need to understand what animals and human beings are; in order to understand this we need to understand what it means to be in general. Should I, for instance, happen to live in an understanding of being as presence-at-hand objectivity this understanding would divert and hinder me from grasping

³⁷² SZ, p. 12: “[Das Dasein] ist [...] dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein *um* dieses Sein selbst geht. [...] *Seinsverständnis ist selbst eine Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins.* Die ontische Auszeichnung des Daseins liegt darin, daß es ontologisch *ist.*”

³⁷³ SZ, p. 15: “Radikalisierung einer zum Dasein selbst gehörigen wesenhaften Seinstendenz, des vorontologischen Seinsverständnisses.”

and encountering human beings and animals – but also plants, stones and artifacts – in their proper being.

We can now see that Heidegger's picture of the structure of phenomenal understanding assigns a basic and decisive role to the question of being in human life. Given that our understanding of ourselves and our world is essentially conducted by an understanding of being that in the first place remains obscure and prejudiced – a life determined by wide and dark ontological horizons – then it becomes a decisive task for the human being to ask the question of the sense of being: "The fact that we already live in an understanding of being and that the sense of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness, proves the fundamental necessity of repeating the question of the sense of 'being.'"³⁷⁴

At this point, it might be useful to pin down the meaning of Heidegger's central terminology. Whereas "ontological" (*ontologisch*) inquiry or understanding is concerned with the being of beings, "ontic" (*ontisch*) inquiry or understanding is directed at beings and their properties. Hereby Heidegger distinguishes between "ontological" understanding, which denotes our explicit research into being, and "pre-ontological" (*vorontologisch*) understanding, which denotes the factual unthematic understanding of being in which we always already live. In so far as the matter of concern is human existence, *Dasein*, he uses the term "existential" (*existenzial*) to designate an ontological understanding of the being of *Dasein* and the term "existentiell" (*existentiell*) to designate *Dasein*'s ontic understanding of its particular situation and possibilities.³⁷⁵ Moreover, whereas *Dasein*'s characters of being are called "existentials" (*Existenzialien*) the characters of being of non-human beings are called "categories" (*Kategorien*).³⁷⁶

Heidegger's rendering of the hierarchical structure of phenomenality is without doubt one of the most powerful modern attempts to show how our human experience and understanding must be constituted in order for philosophical ontology to play a necessary and decisive role in life. But is it true? Does Heidegger's picture simply disclose the structure of

³⁷⁴ SZ, p. 4: "Daß wir je schon in einem Seinsverständnis leben und der Sinn von Sein zugleich in Dunkel gehüllt ist, beweist die grundsätzliche Notwendigkeit, die Frage nach dem Sinn von 'Sein' zu wiederholen."

³⁷⁵ SZ, pp. 11ff.

³⁷⁶ SZ, p. 44.

understanding or does it involve generalizations and distortions that cover up and misrepresent important aspects of our understanding? I will not yet attempt to autonomously assess the truth and clarificatory power of Heidegger's question of being. At this point I am content with explicating its internal structure and role within Heidegger's thinking, and insist on its philosophical potential, which to some extent is independent of its ultimate truth or falsity.

To begin with, the question of being is an expression of – and goes hand in hand with – Heidegger's driving effort to radically question and examine the most basic structures of our experience and understanding without stopping at, and thus implicitly presupposing, our ostensibly self-evident traditional concepts concerning being, the human being, consciousness, the good, nature, etc. Secondly, the question of being harbors a great critical-deconstructive potential in providing Heidegger with a guideline for critically questioning the basic ontological concepts which tend to organize the systematic projections of philosophy in a hidden and prejudiced manner. Thirdly, the question of being constitutes the horizon for Heidegger's ambitious attempt to explicate the basic structures of human experience and understanding, the basic structural moments – perception, care, moods, understanding, language, history, etc. – which in different constellations organize our experience of meaningful phenomena. Even though Heidegger's guiding understanding of his thinking in terms of the question of being would prove misleading and obstructing, this does not hinder him from providing forceful phenomenological analyses and historical critiques within this framework.

Fundamental Ontology as Existential Analytic

The purpose of *Being and Time* is to work out and answer the fundamental philosophical question concerning the sense of being. But how is this to be done? According to Heidegger, the investigation of the sense of being must be prepared through an existential analytic of the being of the human being, Dasein. Why?

Heidegger's argument for the need to proceed through an analytic of Dasein is the following: in order for us to be able to pursue the question of being "with complete transparency" (*in voller Durchsichtigkeit*) it is first necessary to clarify what it means to *question* being: to look at being, to

understand and conceptually grasp it, to choose and get access to an exemplary being that may inform us about the sense of being. Here is the decisive passage:

Looking at, understanding and grasping, choosing, and gaining access to, are constitutive attitudes of questioning and are thus themselves modes of being of a particular being, of *the* being we questioners ourselves in each case are. Thus to work out the question of being means to make a being – the questioner – transparent in its being. [...] The explicit and transparent formulation of the question of the sense of being requires a prior suitable explication of a being (*Dasein*) with regard to its being.³⁷⁷

Hence, to be able to understand the sense of being we first need to investigate the nature of questioning and understanding, and, since questioning and understanding belong to the being of the human being, *Dasein*, the investigation of the sense of being requires a prior analytic of *Dasein*: “Therefore *fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the existential analytic of *Dasein*.”³⁷⁸

The central strand in Heidegger’s argument is that it is both possible and necessary to break down the question of being into its two components – question, being – and first investigate the structures of understanding as a preparation for an investigation of that which the question asks for, namely the sense of being.

However, how is it possible to explicate the being of *Dasein* without first having clarified the sense of being as such? Does not the suggested trajectory through the existential analytic imply a break with the basic notion that our understanding of different modes of being – e.g. the being of the human being – is always already guided by our understanding of the

³⁷⁷ SZ, p. 7: “Hinsehen auf, Verstehen und Begreifen von, Wählen, Zugang zu sind konstitutive Verhaltungen des Fragens und so selbst Seinsmodi eines bestimmten Seienden, *des* Seienden, das wir, die Fragenden, je selbst sind. Ausarbeitung der Seinsfrage besagt demnach: Durchsichtigmachen eines Seienden – des fragenden – in seinem Sein. [...] Die Ausdrückliche und durchsichtige Fragestellung nach dem Sinn von Sein verlangt eine vorgängige angemessene Explication eines Seienden (*Dasein*) hinsichtlich seines Seins.”

³⁷⁸ SZ, p. 13: “Daher muß die *Fundamentalontologie*, aus der alle andern erst entspringen können, in der *existenzialen Analytik des Daseins* gesucht werden.”

sense of being as such? Heidegger responds to this question by arguing that the question of the sense of being is characterized by a hermeneutically spiraling movement of thought: “a peculiar ‘relatedness backward or forward’ of what is asked about (being) to asking as a mode of being of a being.”³⁷⁹ In order to articulate the being of the human being, the existential analytic must first proceed on the basis of an “antecedent look at being”³⁸⁰ fetched from our factual pre-understanding of the sense of being. Hence, the initial analytic of Dasein is essentially “preliminary” (*vorläufig*) and intended to “prepare” the way for an explication of the sense of being. Once we have attained an answer to the question of the sense of being, “the preparatory analytic of Dasein will have to be repeated on a higher and properly ontological basis.”³⁸¹

Still, Heidegger’s articulation of the spiraling relation between the question of the sense of being and the question of the being of Dasein is far from crystal clear. Indeed, it hides a basic ambivalence. On the one hand, Heidegger wants to insist on the provisional and preparatory status of the existential analytic – thus heeding his thesis of the principal primacy of understanding the sense of being. On the other hand, the whole setup of the fundamental ontological project presupposes that the existential analytic does not only function as a preparation for the autonomous task of examining the sense of being, but rather aims to explicate the basic structures of Dasein that are constitutive of this sense. Though Heidegger frequently presents the existential analytic as a preparation for the question of the sense of being, his formulations often signal much higher ambitions. Not only does Heidegger write that fundamental ontology “must be sought in in the existential analytic of Dasein,”³⁸² he also significantly states that “the ontological analytic of Dasein in general is what makes up fundamental ontology.”³⁸³

³⁷⁹ SZ, p. 8: “eine merkwürdige ‘Rück- oder Vorbezogenheit’ des Gefragten (Sein) auf das Fragen als Seinsmodus eines Seienden.”

³⁸⁰ SZ, p. 8: “vorgängige Hinblicknahme of Sein.”

³⁸¹ SZ, p. 17: “dann verlangt die vorbereitende Analytik des Daseins ihre Wiederholung auf der höheren und eigentlichen ontologischen Basis.”

³⁸² SZ, p. 13: “Daher muß die *Fundamentalontologie* [...] in der *existenzialen Analytik des Daseins* gesucht werden.”

³⁸³ SZ, p. 14: “die ontologische Analytik des Daseins überhaupt die Fundamentalontologie ausmacht.”

In fact, the primary status of the analytic is inscribed into the very concept that organizes the whole fundamental ontological question. The purpose of fundamental ontology is to answer the question of the “sense of being.” But what is “sense”? According to Heidegger, “sense is that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself”.³⁸⁴

That which can be articulated in a disclosure that understands we call sense. The *concept of sense* comprises the formal framework (*Gerüst*) of what necessarily belongs to that which an understanding interpretation articulates. *Sense, structured by fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception, is the upon of which of the projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something.* In so far as understanding and interpretation make up the existential constitution of the being of the “there” (*Da*), sense must be conceived as the formal-existential framework of the disclosedness belonging to understanding. Sense is an existential of Dasein.³⁸⁵

That is to say, by “sense” Heidegger denotes the basic necessary “framework” of “structure” of Dasein’s understanding on the basis of which something can appear and become intelligible as something. However, if “sense” names the basic structure conditioning all intelligibility – including our understanding of being – and if this structure is found in the understanding of Dasein, then it is clear that the analytic of Dasein is not only a preparation for an autonomous investigation of the sense of being; rather, by explicating the basic structures of Dasein the existential analytic lays bare the ground on the basis of which the sense of being can be “read off” (*abgelesen*).³⁸⁶

According to Heidegger, the existential analytic will in the end explicate the being of Dasein as temporality, whereby he does not hesitate calling temporality the “transcendental horizon for the question of

³⁸⁴ SZ, p. 151: “Sinn ist das, worin sich Verständlichkeit von etwas hält.”

³⁸⁵ SZ, p. 151: “Was im verstehenden Erschließen artikulierbar ist, nennen wir Sinn. Der *Begriff des Sinnes* umfaßt das formale Gerüst dessen, was notwendig zu dem gehört, was verstehende Auslegung artikuliert. *Sinn ist das durch Vorbabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Woraufhin des Entwurfs, aus dem her etwas als etwas verständlich wird.* Sofern Verstehen und Auslegung die existenziale Verfassung des Seins des Da ausmachen, muß Sinn als das formal-existenziale Gerüst der dem Verstehen zugehörigen Erschlossenheit begriffen werden. Sinn ist ein Existential des Daseins.”

³⁸⁶ SZ, p. 7.

being.”³⁸⁷ “Sense,” “horizon” – the operative function of both concepts is to mark the ultimate transcendental structure which is laid down in the understanding of Dasein, and which a priori determine every possible understanding of being: “Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of being.”³⁸⁸ Heidegger, to be sure, distinguishes between the “temporality” (*Zeitlichkeit*) of Dasein and the “Temporality” (*Temporalität*) of being, stating that only an explication of the latter provides “the concrete answer to the question of the sense of being.”³⁸⁹ However, even though it is not the task of the existential analytic to carry out a thematic explication of the sense of being, it is all the same capable of providing the transcendental structure on the basis of which the sense of being will be thematized. If it is the case, as Heidegger tries to show, that the being of the human being is temporality, then we can be certain that the sense of being is time.

However, Heidegger’s crucial notion that the existential analytic of Dasein is to provide the ground for explicating the sense of being is not unproblematic but tears up deep ambivalences in his work. Firstly, this notion seems to unsettle his thesis about the hierarchical primacy of the question of the sense of being, which motivated the entire fundamental ontological endeavor. Secondly, the strategy of phenomenologically explicating the basic structures of Dasein seems to negate his methodological conviction that the investigation of being must take the form of a hermeneutic-destructive interpretation of our finite historical understanding of being. I will later return to these tensions and examine how they operate at the center of *Being and Time*.

The existential analytic of *Being and Time* falls into two divisions. The first division takes its starting point in Dasein’s everyday inauthentic existence, explicating the fundamental structure of Dasein as “being-in-the-world” and “care.” However, right at the start of the second division Heidegger raises the question whether the first division was able to offer a primordial analysis of the being of Dasein. His answer is no: “One thing has become unmistakable: *our existential analysis of Dasein up to now cannot lay claim to primordially*. Its fore-having never included more than the *inauthentic*

³⁸⁷ SZ, p. 39.

³⁸⁸ SZ, p. 17: “[die Zeit] muß als der Horizont alles Seinsverständnisses und jeder Seinsauslegung ans Licht gebracht und genuin begriffen werden.”

³⁸⁹ SZ, p. 19: “die konkrete Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Sinn des Seins.”

being of Dasein, and of Dasein as *not-whole*.”³⁹⁰ To achieve a primordial interpretation of the being of Dasein, Heidegger claims, the analytic cannot focus on inauthentic Dasein but must be grounded in Dasein’s authentic existence.

Heidegger’s thesis about the need to get access to Dasein’s possibilities of authentic existence as the proper phenomenal ground of the investigation is central to the motivation and ambition of the existential analytic. It is one of the basic assumptions of *Being and Time* that the traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand is based on a paradigmatic experience of inauthentic Dasein: the experience of objectifying theoretical observation. According to Heidegger, Dasein is essentially confronted with the choice between authentic and inauthentic existence: either face up to and transparently take over its existence in its mortality and finitude, or flee from this possibility and take refuge in such attitudes and interpretations in which it is effectively covered up. However, as long as we flee from the possibility of transparently taking over our finite existence, we lack the phenomenal ground for a primordial explication of the being of Dasein. The existential analytic can only articulate what we actually have access to in the explicated experiences, which means that it can only explicate the temporal-historical being of Dasein on the basis of our personal experiences of life in its finitude and temporality. Heidegger thus interprets the ontological struggle to explicate the sense of being as dependent on Dasein’s existentiell struggle to achieve authentic existence. As a result, the task of getting access to and explicating Dasein’s possibility of authentic existence becomes methodically crucial, given that it secures “the phenomenally adequate basis for a primordial interpretation of the sense of being of Dasein.”³⁹¹

The second division of the *Being and Time* thus commences with an analysis of “anxiety” and “conscience” as qualified experiences which bear witness of Dasein’s mortality and finitude, articulating the possibility of transparently taking over this predicament as “resoluteness.” On this basis,

³⁹⁰ SZ, p. 233: “Eines ist unverkennbar geworden: *die bisherige existenziale Analyse des Daseins kann den Anspruch auf Ursprünglichkeit nicht erheben*. In der Vorhabe stand immer nur das *uneigentliche* Sein des Daseins und dieses als *unganzes*.”

³⁹¹ SZ, p. 234: “der phänomenal zureichenden Boden für eine ursprüngliche Interpretation des Seinssinnes des Daseins.”

then, the primordial sense-structure of Dasein is explicated in terms of “temporality” and “historicity.”

2.4 The Basic Structure of Phenomenality

Heidegger’s existential analytic in *Being and Time* can be read as his most ambitious attempt to work out and articulate the basic structure of phenomenality. The analytic is meant to provide answers to the following questions: What structure allows beings to show up as meaningful phenomena? What does it mean to experience and understand such phenomena? What does it mean to understand and explicate their sense-structure and being?

The aim of this chapter is to offer an interpretation of the existential analytic as an attempt to account for the problem of phenomenality. I will begin by explicating Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s fundamental structure as “being-in-the-world” in the first division, and then proceed to an exposition of his analysis of “temporality” and “historicity” in the second division. Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world constitutes the hub of his entire account, and forms the basis for his analysis of temporality and historicity, which essentially unfold as specifications of the ontological sense of being-in-the world.

But what is “being-in-the world”?

To indicate what he has in mind, Heidegger sets up a contrast to the object-ontology, which has characterized Western philosophy since its inception, and which he believes has led it to pass by the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. According to him, philosophy has always tended to understand reality as a totality of thematically present, experience- and context-independent objects. On the basis of this understanding of being as “presence-at-hand,” philosophy has interpreted the relationship between the human being and the world as a spatial or quasi-causal relation between two kinds of object. Since Descartes, modern philosophy formulates this relation in terms of the epistemological question: “how does this knowing subject come out of its inner ‘sphere’ into one that is

‘other and external,’ how can knowledge have an object at all?’³⁹² Against the backdrop of this traditional theoretical understanding of being, Heidegger stakes out his analysis of being-in-the-world as an explication of our primary way of “living” and “dwelling” in the world as something that we “encounter” and that “concerns” us as meaningful.³⁹³ If we look closer at this pre-theoretical experience of the world, he argues, we will find that it belongs to the very constitution of Dasein that it is open towards its world. Dasein’s experience of the world does not arise as a result of an isolated inner subject’s being able to transcend itself and coincide with an outer object. Quite the opposite, Heidegger claims, it is only because Dasein from the outset lives in an open understanding of the meaning-context of its world that is able to experience beings as meaningful at all.

“Being-in-the-world” is Heidegger’s title for the basic structure of our primary experience of the world as meaningful. As such, it includes three moments: 1. “World” – designating the context towards which Dasein is open and on the basis of which it experiences things. 2. “Being-in” – designating the different ways in which Dasein is in and understands its world. 3. “Who” – signifying the being who understands itself and its world in a more or less authentic way.³⁹⁴ Heidegger strongly emphasizes that being-in-the-world should be understood as a unitary structure consisting of interdependent equiprimordial aspects, and that it cannot be split up into independently analyzable and later joinable parts. This, however, does not rule out the possibility of focusing on one aspect at a time as long as we remember to co-understand the other aspects. In the following, I will first expound Heidegger’s concept of “world,” then his concept of “being-in,” whereas I will postpone the treatment of the “who” to my analysis of Heidegger’s conception of authenticity and inauthenticity in the last chapter of this part of the thesis.

³⁹² SZ, p. 60: “wie kommt dieses erkennende Subjekt aus seiner inneren ‘Sphäre’ hinaus in eine ‘andere und äußere’, wie kann das Erkennen überhaupt einen Gegenstand haben?”

³⁹³ SZ, pp. 54f.

³⁹⁴ SZ, p. 53.

The World

The “world,” Heidegger writes in a preliminary formal definition, is “that ‘*in which*’ a factual Dasein as such ‘lives.’”³⁹⁵ However, the purpose of his analysis is not to describe the different contexts in which a human being might live, but to explicate the basic ontological structure characterizing all such worlds, i.e., what Heidegger calls the “worldliness” of the world.³⁹⁶

Heidegger’s analysis of the worldliness of the world takes its point of departure in Dasein’s everyday “concern” with its “envirning world,” by which he means our everyday concerned dealings with the different significant beings and tasks of our lives. He asks: What is it that is primarily given to us in our everyday concern? How should we understand the sense-structure of this given?

The philosophical tradition, Heidegger claims, has always tended to conceive of the primary given in terms of isolated context- and experience-independent objects parading for a theoretical gaze. However, he argues, when we turn to look at our everyday pre-theoretical experience we see that the phenomena we primarily encounter have the character of “equipment” or “tools” (*Zeug*):

Strictly speaking, there “is” no such thing as *an* equipment. To the being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially “something in order to...” The different ways of “in order to,” such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, handiness, constitute a totality of equipment. In the “in order to” as a structure there lies a *reference* of something to something. [...] Equipment – in accordance with its equipmentality – always is in terms of its belonging to other equipment: writing materials, pen, ink, paper, desk blotter, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ SZ, p. 65: “das, ‘*worin*’ ein faktisches Dasein als dieses ‘lebt.’”

³⁹⁶ SZ, p. 65.

³⁹⁷ SZ, p. 68: “*Ein Zeug* ‘ist’ strenggenommen nie. Zum Sein von Zeug gehört je immer ein Zeugganzes, darin es dieses Zeug sein kann, das es ist. Zeug ist wesentlich ‘etwas, um zu...’. Die verschiedenen Weisen des ‘Um-zu’ wie Dienlichkeit, Beiträglichkeit, Verwendbarkeit, Handlichkeit konstituieren eine Zeugganze. In der Struktur des ‘Um-zu’ liegt eine *Verweisung* von etwas als etwas. [...] Zeug ist seiner Zeughaftigkeit entsprechend immer *aus* der Zugehörigkeit zu anderem Zeug: Schreibzeug, Feder, Tinte, Papier, Unterlage, Tisch, Lampe, Möbel, Fenster, Türen, Zimmer.”

That is to say, to be given as a piece of equipment is to be given as part of a totality of equipment and equipmental relations in which the equipment in question plays a role. As such, a piece of equipment has the basic structure of “something in order to...”: it is essentially constituted by its role in the relational contexts on the backdrop of which it can appear as this piece of equipment. Hence, in our everyday concern we do not primarily experience isolated objects or some kind of sense data possessing these or those traits; rather, the phenomena we primarily encounter have the character of equipment which gain their identity and significance within the context of meaning we live in and which we must always already have understood in order to encounter a particular tool. As Heidegger puts it: all the “properties” of the equipment are “bound up in” the ways in which it is “appropriate or inappropriate” in relation to some task or purpose.³⁹⁸ He calls the mode of being of tools “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) in contrast to the “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*) of objects of theoretical observation.

In the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger identified “phenomena” (*ta phainomena*) with “beings” (*ta onta*) through a somewhat spurious philological reference to the Greeks. Now he claims that “the Greeks had an appropriate term for ‘things,’ *pragmata*, that is, that with which one has to do in one’s concerned dealings (*praxis*).”³⁹⁹ Whereas *ta onta* were first identified as *ta phainomena*, both are now – through this quasi-philological linkage – determined as *pragmata*. Heidegger’s analysis of the pragmatic character of being as readiness-to-hand should thus not only be read as a determination of the being of a certain sort of entities, namely tools and other kinds of artifacts, but rather concerns the primary being/phenomenality of non-human beings. According to Heidegger, even nature originally presents itself to us with reference to its instrumental relevance – usefulness, support, resistance – for the purposes of the human being: “The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a

³⁹⁸ SZ, p. 83: “Zuhandenes hat allenfalls Geeignetheiten und Ungeeignetheiten, und seine ‘Eigenschaften’ sind in diesen gleichsam noch gebunden.”

³⁹⁹ SZ, p. 68: “Die Griechen hatten einen angemessenen Terminus für die ‘Dinge’: *πράγματα*, d.i. das, womit man es im besorgenden Umgang (*πρᾶξις*) zu tun hat.”

quarry or rock, the river is water power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails.’”⁴⁰⁰ Hence, for Heidegger the readiness-to-hand of equipment constitutes the basic mode of being characterizing non-human entities such as they show themselves for the primary concern of the human being: “*Readiness-to-hand is the ontological categorial definition of beings as they are ‘in themselves.’*”⁴⁰¹

Whereas Heidegger maintains that the beings we primarily experience in our pre-theoretical concern have the character of equipment, he names the context of reference on the basis of which such concern takes place the “world.” So what is the world, and how should we understand its worldliness?

Heidegger begins his articulation of the ontological structure – the worldliness – of the world by introducing the term “relevance” (*Bewandtnis*) as a designation for the basic character of the references constituting the world: “The fact that the being of the ready-to-hand has the structure of reference means that it has in itself the character of *being referred*. Beings are discovered with regard to the fact that they are referred, as those beings which they are, to something. They are relevant *for* something. The character of being of the ready-to-hand is *relevance*.”⁴⁰² “Relevance” is thus nothing but Heidegger’s general term for designating the way in which equipment can appear as somehow relevant or important – useful, beneficial, suitable or perhaps useless and obstructive – on account of its role in the network of references we occupy. For example,

⁴⁰⁰ SZ, p. 70. “Der Wald ist Forst, der Berg Steinbruch, der Fluß Wasserkraft, der Wind ist Wind ‘in den Segeln.’”

⁴⁰¹ SZ, p. 71: “*Zuhandenheit ist die ontologisch-kategoriale Bestimmung von Seiendem, wie es ‘an sich’ ist.*” However, even though Heidegger here tends to conceive of nature as a sort of ready-to-hand equipment, there are also passages in *Being and Time* which suggest a concept of nature that does not fit into the dichotomy of presence-at-hand or readiness-to-hand. Hence, Heidegger writes: “‘Nature,’ which ‘surrounds’ us, is indeed an innerworldly being; but the kind of being which it shows belongs neither to the ready-to-hand nor to what is present-at-hand as ‘things of nature’” (*Die “Natur”, die uns “umfängt”, ist zwar innerweltliches Seiendes, zeigt aber weder die Seinsart des Zuhandenen noch des Vorhandenen in der Weise der “Naturdinglichkeit”*) (SZ, p. 211). This passage, which threatens to unsettle the ontological framework of *Being and Time*, points forward to Heidegger’s later attempts to reflect on the self-withdrawing material-sensuous aspect of the world, which in *The Origin of the Work of Art* he calls the “earth.” Cf. Overgaard 2004, pp. 123-126; Dahlstrom 2001, pp. 261-267.

⁴⁰² SZ, p. 83f.: “Das Sein des Zuhandenen hat die Struktur der Verweisung – heißt: es hat an ihm selbst den Charakter der *Vermiesenheit*. Seiendes ist daraufhin entdeckt, daß es als dieses Seiende, das es ist, auf etwas verwiesen ist. Es hat *mit ihm bei* etwas sein Bewenden. Der Seinscharakter des Zuhandenen ist die *Bewandtnis*.”

the hammer may be relevant for hammering, the hammering may be relevant for setting up a windshield, and the windshield may be relevant as protection against hard weather.

According to Heidegger, the instrumental references obtaining between different tools and moments of work – this in order to that – are ultimately anchored in the human *Dasein* and its possibilities to be:

The totality of relevance itself, however, ultimately goes back to a what-for, which *no longer* has relevance, which itself is not a being with the kind of being of the ready-to-hand within a world, but is a being whose being is defined as being-in-the-world, to whose constitution of being worldliness itself belongs. This primary what-for is not just another for-that as a possible factor in relevance. The primary “what-for” is a for-the-sake-of-which. But the for-the-sake-of-which always pertains to the being of *Dasein*, which, in its being, is essentially concerned *about* this being.⁴⁰³

Whereas tools always refer to other tasks and purposes in relation to which they are relevant, the possibilities of *Dasein* constitute the “for-the-sake-of-which” of all relevancies: the ultimate horizon of purposes which determines all instrumental references and which cannot be reduced to any further purpose.

Yet how, more precisely, should the structure of the world be understood? How is our understanding of tools and tool-relations determined by our understanding of our possibilities? What are these possibilities?

Heidegger, as we have seen, begins his analysis of the world by focusing on how the particular tool always appears as what it is within a totality of tools and their instrumental interrelations. As long as we concentrate on this analysis, it might seem as if Heidegger’s basic philosophical move would consist in replacing the traditional picture of our relation to the world as a theoretical seeing of isolated objects with the

⁴⁰³ SZ, p. 84: “Die Bewandtnisganzheit selbst aber geht letztlich auf ein Wozu zurück, bei dem es *keine* Bewandtnis mehr hat, was selbst nicht Seiendes ist in der Seinsart des Zuhandenen innerhalb einer Welt, sondern Seiendes, dessen Sein als In-der-Welt-sein bestimmt ist, zu dessen Seinsverfassung Weltlichkeit selbst gehört. Dieses primäre Wozu ist kein Dazu als mögliches Wobei einer Bewandtnis. Das primäre ‘Wozu’ ist ein Worum-willen. Das ‘Um-willen’ betrifft aber immer das Sein des *Daseins*, dem es in seinem Sein wesenhaft *um* dieses Sein selbst geht.”

notion that it rather has the character of a practical unthematic understanding of the totalities of tools and instrumental relations that we find around us. Instead of particular objects, the primarily given would be particular totalities of equipmental relations.⁴⁰⁴

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to interpret being-in-the-world in terms of a direct grasp of particular totalities of tools-relations. This becomes manifest as Heidegger anchors these totalities in the possibilities of Dasein. Dasein, Heidegger argues, discloses and chooses its “factual possibilities of authentic existence” from its “heritage” (*Erbe*),⁴⁰⁵ whereby these historically received “repeatable possibilities” constitute “the only authority a free existing can have.”⁴⁰⁶ It is clear that what Heidegger has in mind here are not our possibilities to engage in particular activities – such as walking, drinking beer, playing football or philosophizing – given his conception of Dasein’s historical possibilities as the ultimate horizon of purposes, which allows particular beings and activities to appear as significant in the first place. In a telling passage, he writes that Dasein’s “authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been” means that it “chooses its hero” (*sich seinen Helden wählt*).⁴⁰⁷ Hence, the

⁴⁰⁴ It is not uncommon that commentators explicating Heidegger’s concept of “being-in-the world” attach the greatest weight to Dasein’s unthematic grasp of totalities of tools and instrumental relations while largely downplaying the question of how these totalities are determined by and receive their significance from the historical possibilities of Dasein. Søren Overgaard, for example, argues that the world should not be understood as a “totality, or collection of entities” but as a “web of references” interconnecting different tools: “a whole web of references (e.g., hammers referring to nails referring to wooden boards, etc.) must be understood in order for Dasein to be able to interact with the individual entity (e.g., use the hammer for hammering. [...]) On Heidegger’s account, then, the world is a whole of references that, as such, allows for individual entities to present themselves” (Overgaard 2004, p. 123). Even though Overgaard points out that these webs of references are ultimately anchored in the possibilities and purposes of Dasein he nevertheless refrains from explicitly dealing with the question of Dasein’s understanding of these possibilities. However, in so doing it becomes possible for him to pass over the question of the radical historicity of understanding implied by Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s possibilities as historical heroes and paradigms – a question that would surely be unsettling to his interpretation of Heidegger as a transcendental phenomenologist.

⁴⁰⁵ SZ, p. 383.

⁴⁰⁶ SZ, p. 391: “Die Entschlossenheit konstituiert die *Treue* der Existenz zum eigenen Selbst. Als *angst*bereitete Entschlossenheit ist die Treue zugleich mögliche Ehrfurcht vor der einzigen Autorität, die ein freies Existieren haben kann, vor den wiederholbaren Möglichkeiten der Existenz.”

⁴⁰⁷ SZ, p. 385. Cf. also SZ, p. 371.

possibilities of Dasein have the character of “heroes.” But what does this mean? Bearing in mind their systematic place in Heidegger’s thought, I think the most compelling and illuminating way to conceive of the heroes is to interpret them as concrete historical paradigms of a good and meaningful life: as concrete more or less mythical figures (such as Ulysses, Jesus or Gandhi) harboring and giving expression to our historically received norms and values. These historical paradigms of life constitute the horizon of purposes of the world, which organizes and grants significance to all its instrumental networks.

Since Dasein’s understanding of its paradigmatic historical possibilities and of the being of beings determines the whole context of references in which it lives – and cannot itself be grounded on any direct grasp of particular entities or references – the fundamental layer of Dasein’s understanding of the world has a radically historical and quasi-conceptual character. That is to say, it has the character of a prior grasp of general patterns of meaning which are historical and which determine our possibilities of experiencing particular entities as meaningful. This also means that our grasp and handling of particular tools always already involves and presupposes an understanding of their purposes and being: to understand a hammer involves understanding its relevance and being within our purposeful lives. If we would only be able to handle a hammer more or less skillfully without having a grasp of the possibilities for the sake of which we are doing it, we would not understand what we are doing or what a hammer is.

To sum up then: the “world” is Heidegger’s name for the total context of references which Dasein always already understands, and on the basis of which beings can show up as relevant and significant phenomena. As he puts in a condensed formula: “*The within-which of an understanding that refers itself – as the upon-which that lets beings be encountered in the kind of being of relevance – is the phenomenon of the world.*”⁴⁰⁸ In the end, our understanding of the world encompasses all the moments organizing our concern with beings: the tools and works, the networks of instrumental references, and the horizon of human possibilities for the sake of which all of this is relevant.

⁴⁰⁸ SZ, p. 86: “*Das Worin des sichverweisenden Verstehens als Woraufhin des Begegnenlassens von Seiendem in der Seinsart des Bewandtnis ist das Phänomen der Welt.*”

I will end this section by discussing what I think is a basic ambiguity in Heidegger's account of the unthematic circumspection guiding Dasein's everyday coping – an ambiguity which has given rise to some misinterpretations.

According to Heidegger, our primary coping does not transpire as a thematic seeing of tools or tool-relations. Our concern is rather guided by what Heidegger calls “circumspection” (*Umsicht*), an unthematic understanding which remains absorbed in the contexts of equipment and essentially has the character of a practical skillfulness which is sensitive to the instrumental relations of the context and answers to the specific function and handiness of the tools. As Heidegger explains:

The hammering does not just have a knowledge of the hammer's character as equipment; rather, it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the in-order-to which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific “handiness” of the hammer. The kind of being which equipment possesses – in which it reveals itself by itself – we call *readiness-to-hand*.⁴⁰⁹

Dasein's “unthematic, circumspective absorption” thus constitutes the primordial way in which the tools are there for us as that what they are.⁴¹⁰ The unthematic absorbed character of our concern, Heidegger claims, is even a condition for our being able to handle tools in a smooth and skillful way.

⁴⁰⁹ SZ, p. 69: “Das Hämmern hat nicht lediglich noch ein Wissen um den Zeugcharakter des Hammers, sondern es hat sich dieses Zeug so zugeeignet, wie es angemessener nicht möglich ist. In solchem gebrauchenden Umgang unterstellt sich das Besorgen dem für das jeweilige Zeug konstitutive Um-zu; je weniger das Hammerding nur begafft wird, je zugreifender es gebraucht wird, um so ursprünglicher wird das Verhältnis zu ihm, um so unverhüllter begegnet es als das, was es ist, als Zeug. Das Hämmern selbst entdeckt die spezifische ‘Handlichkeit’ des Hammers. Die Seinsart von Zeug, in der es sich von ihm selbst her offenbart, nennen wir die *Zubandenheit*.”

⁴¹⁰ SZ, p. 76: “un-thematische, umsichtige Aufgehen.”

Yet how should this circumspection be understood?

Let me begin by taking a look at what Heidegger believes is a central methodical difficulty in explicating the world. If Dasein for the most part remains absorbed in its unthematic coping with equipment, how shall we then be able to detect the world and explicate its structure? To answer this question, Heidegger claims that we need to find some basic experience in which the world somehow shines forth and becomes discernible. He finds such an experience in the different kinds of disturbance that may affect our everyday concern: a piece of equipment might be broken, it might be lacking or it might just be in the way. In all such cases, Heidegger argues, the equipment becomes “conspicuous” in a new way. Through the “*disturbance of the reference*” constituting the tool in question the reference becomes explicit in such a way that the equipmental whole also shines forth as the familiar context in which the unthematically absorbed circumspective concern has been orienting itself all along:⁴¹¹ “The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself.”⁴¹²

Heidegger’s argument has ordinarily been accepted by his interpreters as a basically accurate and trenchant phenomenological description.⁴¹³ However, I for my part do not find it very convincing. It seems to me that his analysis of the experience of disturbance, conceived as a prerequisite for getting the world in view, springs from a confused picture of the unthematical, absorbed character of our primary practical concern. Although Heidegger is right in claiming that our handling of tools generally presupposes a kind of habituated unreflective practical skill in order to be performed in a smooth and optimal manner, it is not at all clear why this unreflective handling would not allow us to simultaneously survey or reflect on our situation. Indeed, it seems that the acquisition of habituated skills tend to free up our attention. We do not need to think about what we are doing but are free to let our attention wander: survey the context of work, reflect on its goals, think about the structure of the

⁴¹¹ SZ, p. 74.

⁴¹² SZ, p. 75: “Der Zeugzusammenhang leuchtet auf nicht als ein noch nie gesehenes, sondern in der Umsicht ständig im vorhinein schon gesichtetes Ganzes. Mit diesem Ganzem aber meldet sich die Welt.”

⁴¹³ Cf., e.g., Overgaard 2004, pp. 121-123; Gerner 2007, pp. 45-46; Mulhall 1996, pp. 48-50.

world – or perhaps about something else. Hence, the unthematic practical handiness described by Heidegger does not in any way cancel out – but rather facilitates – the possibility of thematically attending to different things. Moreover, it seems to me that we are in any case free to disrupt our practical coping and reflect on the context of relations and purposes we are moving in – if that is what we want to. As a result, the experience of disturbance becomes methodically superfluous. In fact, it could even be argued that such experiences counteract the purpose ascribed to them by Heidegger. To be sure, in encountering a broken or missing tool the tool in question – as well as the immediate context of coping – may become conspicuous in a certain sense. However, in disrupting our current activity the disturbance does not by itself disrupt our interest in the activity, which means that in so far as the interest persists the disturbance – just like a demanding task – will rather tend to intensify our absorption in the work.

My suggestion is that the problems of Heidegger's analysis stem from his tendency to confuse two different kinds of ability in his conception of Dasein's "circumspection." On the one hand, I think it is clear that Heidegger's conceives of the basic layer of circumspection in terms of Dasein's unthematic "understanding" (this concept will be treated in the next section) of the world and its purposes, which guides its grasp of tools and allows them to appear as relevant phenomena. On the other hand, it seems that Heidegger in his analysis of Dasein's circumspective handling of tools tacitly brings in another kind of unthematic ability, namely the kind of habituated practical skillfulness that allows us to carry out different activities and tasks in an assured and qualified manner without thinking about what we are doing, e.g., walk down the street, drive a car, or read the letters on the page in a smooth and unreflective way.

These two abilities, however, are not the same even though both of them are generally characterized by a strong element of unreflective habituatedness, and often interact with each other in intricate ways in the same experiences. One basic difference concerns how they relate to the problem of truth. As regards the ability of practical coping, this does not in itself involve any claim to be true; rather, its point resides in its functional capacity to carry out the task or activity in question: ride a bicycle, hammer, turn a doorknob. In addition to this, there is no meaningful question to be asked whether the skill in question is true or false. By contrast, our understanding of the meaning-relations and

purposes of the world essentially seems to involve a claim to truth, a claim to exhibit the matters as what they are. Clearly, this understanding cannot be true or false in the same sense as empirical propositions – i.e. by somehow corresponding to the facts put forward in the proposition – given that it conditions all such empirical truth. Nevertheless, it centrally belongs to our quasi-conceptual understanding of such different matters as cars, dogs, human beings, or being-characters that it can either disclose and illuminate it or dissimulate and distort its matter in various ways. It can be more or less clear, rich, sharp, wide-ranging or unclear, meager, limited, ambivalent. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's basic tendency to slide into prejudices that cover up the phenomena – a tendency which ultimately motivates the task of disclosing the phenomena: Dasein's possibilities, the sense of being – shows that he is very much awake to the claim to truth inherent in our understanding and in no way wants to reduce it to a practical coping-skill.

The problems in Heidegger's account arise when he tacitly fuses these different abilities in his analysis of Dasein's circumspection. We then get the confused picture according to which our understanding of the world would lie in our practical coping-skill, in such a way that we would primarily be absorbed in this coping to be able to encounter and handle the ready-to-hand tools properly. As a result, it might seem as if we would need special experiences of disturbance to get the world into view.

Here it bears noting that the Heidegger-interpretation put forward by Hubert Dreyfus in his highly influential book *Being-in-the-World* to a great extent lives on the ambiguities analyzed above. Dreyfus's basic approach to Heidegger is to highlight Dasein's practical unthematic handling-skills – which he calls “background coping”⁴¹⁴ – as the fundamental dimension of our understanding of the world, which conditions and constitutes the background for all thematic understanding and knowledge. As we have seen, this interpretation finds some support in Heidegger's texts and it has led Dreyfus into systematically interesting investigations of the important role of unreflective practical coping-skills in different activities and context. Still, the problem of Dreyfus' interpretation is that it neglects Heidegger's central claim that our experience and understanding of significant phenomena – including our practical coping – is always already

⁴¹⁴ Dreyfus 1991, p. 105.

guided by our basic historical understanding of the being and the possibilities of Dasein, an understanding that claims to present the matters as what they are, and that can be either disclosive and illuminating or dissimulating and distortive. As a result, Dreyfus loses the ability to account for Heidegger's philosophically basic notion of understanding and for all the issues it is meant to address: for Dasein's understanding of being and the possibilities of Dasein as the ground for all its relations to particular tools and beings; for the truth or untruth of such understanding; for its historical character.

Moreover, Dreyfus interpretation gives rise to deep philosophical difficulties. To the extent that he attempts to reduce Dasein's understanding to practical coping, he is led into a highly problematic conception of the collective understanding of the good and meaningful that we happen to live in – what Heidegger calls “the They” (*das Man*) – as the “source of significance and intelligibility” of the world.⁴¹⁵ If, as Dreyfus argues, our understanding of the world basically transpires as an appropriation and skillful handling of the norms, roles, and practices of the historical society we live, then the very possibility of questioning the truth or goodness of these norms by appeal to some sources transcending these norms is cancelled out. As a result, Dreyfus cannot but define the collective norms and concepts of our society as the ungroundable ground of all significance.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Dreyfus 1991, p. 161.

⁴¹⁶ Dreyfus 1991, pp. 151-162. For some criticisms of Dreyfus' interpretation, see Olafson 1994a and Overgaard 2004, pp. 178f. Cf. also the debate between Frederick Olafson and Taylor Carman (Olafson 1994b; Carman 1994). It seems to me that the pragmatic reading of Heidegger – chiefly developed by Carl-Friedrich Gethmann and Mark Okrent – suffers from problems very much akin to those of Dreyfus. The pragmatic interpretation basically construes Dasein's understanding in terms of our practical skills in handling tools and carrying out tasks within the purposeful contexts we are involved in. Hereby, the truth of our understanding is ultimately defined in terms of its success or failure in allowing us to carry out these tasks and activities. As Okrent puts it: “For Heidegger the fundamental notion of evidence is tied to the way in which purposeful, practical activity must be recognizable as successful or unsuccessful if the activity is to count as purposeful at all. From this basic pragmatism follow his idiosyncratic notions of truth and meaning” (Okrent 1988, p. 128; cf. also pp. 4f., 100). Cf. also Gethmann 1989, pp. 115-118. However, even though this reading, as we have seen, captures an important aspect of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's circumspective concern it ignores and thus misconstrues what for Heidegger constitutes the basic and philosophically decisive stratum of understanding: our understanding of the being and the purposes of Dasein, which allows particular tool-

Being-in: Disposition, Understanding, Discourse

Heidegger names “being-in” the “sustaining structural moment” of being-in-the-world.⁴¹⁷ Whereas “world” signified the overarching context of meaning in which Dasein lives, “being-in” functions as an umbrella term for the different aspects of Dasein’s openness towards the world. Indeed, Heidegger’s term for the human being, “Dasein,” designates precisely its essential openness:

The being which is essentially constituted by being-in-the-world *is* itself always its “there” (*Da*) [...]. This being carries in its ownmost being the character of not being closed. The expression “there” means this essential disclosedness. Through this disclosedness this being (*Dasein*), together with the being-there of the world, is “there” for itself.⁴¹⁸

The fact that Heidegger calls “being-in” the “sustaining” moment of being-in-the-world mirrors the guiding ambition of the existential analytic, namely to find in the openness of Dasein the basic structure characterizing all understanding and thus eventually determining the sense of being itself. Hence, it is through an analysis of being-in that Heidegger hopes to pave the way for an explication of the being of Dasein as concern and temporality. According to Heidegger, the openness of Dasein is constituted by three equiprimordial aspect: disposition, understanding and discourse.

Disposition. Heidegger introduces the term “disposition” (*Befindlichkeit*) to articulate the basic ontological character and role of what we normally call moods. It is, he maintains, a central feature of our lives that we always

contexts and activities to appear as relevant and useful in the first place, and the truth or untruth of which cannot be determined with reference to any pragmatic criteria. For a more detailed critique of the pragmatist reading of Heidegger, see Dahlstrom 2001, pp. 199-200, 305-306, 423-433.

⁴¹⁷ SZ, p. 131.

⁴¹⁸ SZ, p. 132: “Das Seiende, das wesentlich durch das In-der-Welt-sein konstituiert wird, *ist* selbst je sein ‘Da’. [...] Dieses Seiende trägt in seinem eigensten Sein den Charakter der Unverschlossenheit. Der Ausdruck ‘Da’ meint diese wesenhafte Erschlossenheit. Durch sie ist dieses Seiende (das Dasein) in eins mit dem Da-sein von Welt für es selbst ‘da.’”

find ourselves living in certain moods. We are not only occasionally overcome by distinct and strong moods such as terror, joy, anticipation, shame or anxiety. Even the seemingly passionless dullness of everyday life or the distanced tranquility of scientific investigation constitutes specific moods. Heidegger maintains that the moods permeating our lives do not – as philosophy has traditionally tended to believe – amount to some kind of emotional epiphenomena merely adding subjective coloring to and at worst distorting our otherwise neutral and objective perceptual access to the world. On the contrary, he claims, Dasein’s moods constitute its primary passive openness towards itself as being-in-the-world: “In being in a mood, Dasein is always already disclosed in accordance with its mood as *that* being to Dasein has been delivered over in its being as the being which it, existing, has to be.”⁴¹⁹

According to Heidegger, Dasein’s moods – especially, as we shall see, the mood of anxiety – attests to its essential predicament as “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) or “facticity” (*Faktizität*). Through its moods Dasein has always already, prior to and as a condition for any act of understanding or interpretation, been opened up to its historical context of possibilities and meaning-relations. Given that this passively disclosed context of meaning determines and delimits Dasein’s possibilities of understanding itself and its world, it ultimately constitutes the ungroundable historical destiny which Dasein has been thrown into. As Heidegger puts it: “The mood [brings] Dasein before the that-it-is of its there, which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma.”⁴²⁰ In sum, then: Dasein’s disposition discloses the world as the ungroundable factual context of meaning into which Dasein always already finds itself thrown.

Understanding and interpretation. According to Heidegger, disposition and understanding constitute two equiprimordial moments of our openness to the world. “Understanding” designates Dasein’s basic ability to see and enact its possibilities in a more or less transparent manner. He describes the character of understanding as “projection” (*Entwurf*).

⁴¹⁹ SZ, p. 134: “In der Gestimmtheit ist immer schon stimmungsmäßig das Dasein als *das* Seiende erschlossen, dem das Dasein in seinem Sein überantwortet wurde als dem Sein, das es existierend zu sein hat.”

⁴²⁰ SZ, p. 136: “Die Stimmung [bringt] das Dasein vor das Daß seines Da [...], als welches es ihm in unerbittlicher Rätselhaftigkeit entgegenstarrt.”

Whereas Dasein's disposition has always already opened it up to the factual possibilities into which it has been thrown, understanding is Dasein's way of projecting itself towards – seeing and being – these possibilities: “As projecting, understanding is the mode of being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities.”⁴²¹ Here we have to keep in mind that by understanding Heidegger always has in mind Dasein's basic orientation towards the ultimate ideal possibilities determining what it can be and organizing the referential network of its world. Thus conceived, understanding essentially precedes and conditions all our possibilities of understanding and attaining knowledge or different kinds of particular entities.

According to Heidegger, it is an essential feature of Dasein's understanding that it can be either “authentic” or “inauthentic.” On account of its mood of anxiety, Dasein has always already been opened up to its factual possibilities as its groundless and finite historical lot. This means that it is from the outset confronted with the following basic existentiell choice: it can either transparently and responsibly choose its factual possibilities as what they are, or it can flee from and cover up its predicament by lapsing into the customary prejudiced understanding of Dasein as a steadily present object.

Having presented “understanding” as Dasein's projective disclosure of its possibilities, Heidegger goes on to describe how understanding is developed in “interpretation” (*Auslegung*). By “interpretation,” he does not primarily have in mind any specific linguistic – oral or written – activity of explicating texts or human actions, but the very basic way in which Dasein explicitly appropriates what it understands: “Circumspection discovers, that is, the world which has already been understood is interpreted. The ready-to-hand comes *explicitly* into the sight that understands.”⁴²² According to Heidegger, “that which is *explicitly* understood” has the structure of “*something as something*”:⁴²³

⁴²¹ SZ, p. 145: “Das Verstehen ist, als Entwerfen, die Seinsart des Daseins, in der es seine Möglichkeiten als Möglichkeiten *ist*.”

⁴²² SZ, p. 148: “Die Umsicht entdeckt, das bedeutet, die schon verstandene Welt wird ausgelegt. Das Zuhandene kommt *ausdrücklich* in die verstehende Sicht.”

⁴²³ SZ, p. 149: “das *ausdrücklich* Verstandene hat die Struktur des *Etwas als Etwas*.”

The circumspectively interpretative answer to the circumspensive question of what this particular being that is ready-to-hand is runs: it is for... Saying what it is for is not simply naming something, but what is named is understood *as* that *as* which what is in question is to be taken. What is disclosed in understanding, what is understood is always already accessible in such a way that its “as what” can be explicitly delineated. The “as” constitutes the structure of the explicitness of what is understood; it constitutes the interpretation.⁴²⁴

Heidegger’s thesis is that the synthetic as-structure articulated here from the outset determines all understanding and explication. Our experience of particular beings as significant phenomena is from the outset based on our understanding of the world and its horizon of historical possibilities. Interpretation is founded on this understanding, which means that it does not change or add anything but only thematically articulates what is already there. On the basis of our understanding of particular beings in terms of their roles and functions within our historical world, the interpretation thematically explicates the beings *as* the relevant phenomena thus understood: this *as* a car, this *as* a tree, this *as* a human being.

Heidegger especially emphasizes two basic aspects of Dasein’s primary understanding interpretation. To begin with, he maintains that “any simple pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is in itself already understanding and interpreting.”⁴²⁵ That is, our experience of beings does not primarily transpire without as-structure, so that we would first experience pure sense perceptions, which we would then actively interpret and furnish with sense and value. Such a description, he claims, does not capture the phenomenal content of our experience. From the outset, we see this as a tree and that as a door, just as we hear this as a car starting and that as the wind blowing. Our perception is thus from the very

⁴²⁴ SZ, p. 149: “Auf die umsichtige Frage, was dieses bestimmte Zuhandene sei, lautet die umsichtig auslegende Antwort: es ist zum... Die Angabe des Wozu ist nicht einfach die Nennung von etwas, sondern das Genannte ist verstanden *als* das, *als* welches das in Frage stehende zu nehmen ist. Das im Verstehen Erschlossene, das Verstandene ist immer schon so zugänglich, daß an ihm sein ‘als was’ ausdrücklich abgehoben werden kann. Das ‘Als’ macht die Struktur der Ausdrücklichkeit eines Verstandenen aus; es konstituiert die Auslegung.”

⁴²⁵ SZ, p. 149: “Alles vorprädikative schlichte Sehen des Zuhandenen ist an ihm selbst schon verstehend-auslegend.”

beginning guided by an unthematic understanding of the world which allows us to identify particular beings as unities of meaning and which our interpretation thematizes and articulates. Experiencing something like a pure as-free perception would require that our understanding would somehow be put out of play with the result that we would not be able to make sense of the experience at all: “When we just stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us *as a failure to understand it anymore*.”⁴²⁶ Moreover, Heidegger stresses that Dasein’s interpretation is primarily implicit and does not need to take the form of explicit statements: “The articulation of what is understood [...] lies *before* the thematic statement about it. The ‘as’ does not first show up in the statement, but is only first stated, which is possible only because it already there as something expressible.”⁴²⁷ Hence, in order to be able to utter explicit statements about things, the world already has to be there and open for us as a context of significance which allows of being expressed: we already have to have understanding access to chairs, trees, dogs and churches in order to be able to speak and write meaningfully about such matters. The explicit utterance is “no free-floating compartment which could of itself disclose beings in general in a primary way,”⁴²⁸ but rather has to be understood as a “*derivative mode*” of interpretation which rests on our primary implicit interpretation and modifies it in a certain sense.⁴²⁹

Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between the “existential-hermeneutic as” (*existenzial-hermeneutische Als*) characterizing Dasein’s primary concerned interpretation of the world and the “apophantic as” (*apophantische Als*) characterizing theoretical statements. Whereas Dasein’s primary interpretation articulates the experienced tools with reference to their roles in the referential context of the world, the theoretical statement implies that we screen off the present context and focus exclusively on the tool as a present-at-hand object with the purpose of determining it through a predication of its objective traits:

⁴²⁶ SZ, p. 149: “Das Nur-noch-vor-sich-Haben von etwas liegt vor im reinen Anstarren *als Nicht-mehr-verstehen*.”

⁴²⁷ SZ, p. 149: “Die Artikulation des Verstandenen [...] liegt *vor* der thematischen Aussage darüber. In dieser taucht das ‘Als’ nicht zuerst auf, sondern wird nur erst ausgesprochen, was allein so möglich ist, daß es als Aussprechbares vorliegt.”

⁴²⁸ SZ, p. 156: “kein freischwebendes Verhalten, das von sich aus primär Seiendes überhaupt erschließen könnte.”

⁴²⁹ SZ, p. 157: “abkünftige Modus.”

That *as* which the statement determines what is present-at-hand is drawn *from* that which is present-at-hand as such. The *as*-structure of interpretation has undergone a modification. In its function of appropriating what is understood, the “*as*” no longer reaches out into a totality of relevance. As regards its possibilities for articulating reference-relations, it has been cut off from that significance which, as such, constitutes the character of the surrounding world.⁴³⁰

In short, the theoretical statement aims to determine its objects by obtaining its predicates purely from the sphere of present-at-hand objects with the result that the historical context of significance which ultimately determines and gives significance to all beings is passed over and neglected.

Heidegger’s analysis of the basic “*as*-structure” of interpretation is seconded by an account of what he calls its “*fore*-structure” (*Vorstruktur*).⁴³¹ The structural fact that we primarily experience beings *as* meaningful phenomena on the basis of a preceding understanding of the world implies, he claims, that all interpretation is also essentially characterized by a *fore*-structure. The *fore*-structure includes three aspects: firstly, the interpretation is always grounded in a “*fore*-having” (*Vorhabe*), i.e., in the unthematic factual understanding of the world in which *Dasein* always already lives; secondly, the interpretation is grounded in a “*fore*-sight” (*Vorsicht*), i.e., in a preceding grasp of the guiding “*regard*” (*Hinsicht*) – the problem- and being-horizon – in terms of which the phenomenon in question is to be interpreted; thirdly, the interpretation is always grounded in a “*fore*-conception” (*Vorgriff*), which is to say that it always moves within a certain conceptuality which links its articulation of the matter.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ SZ, p. 158: “Das Was, *als* welches die Aussage das Vorhandene bestimmt, wird *aus* dem Vorhandenen als solchem geschöpft. Die Als-Struktur der Auslegung hat eine Modifikation erfahren. Das ‘Als’ greift in seiner Funktion der Zueignung des Verstandenen nicht mehr aus in eine Bewandnisganzheit. Es ist bezüglich seiner Möglichkeiten der Artikulation von Verweisungsbezügen von der Bedeutsamkeit, als welche die Umweltlichkeit konstituiert, abgeschnitten.”

⁴³¹ SZ, p. 151.

⁴³² SZ, p. 150.

Heidegger's account of the fore-structure is intended to specify the hermeneutical situation regulating all interpretation. As we attempt to interpret some phenomenon we always do this on the basis of a certain understanding of the world, a certain grasp of the problem- and being-horizon of the phenomenon in question, and a certain conceptuality – all of which we have primarily slid into and uncritically taken over as our factual historical tradition. This means that interpretation is never a “presuppositionless grasping of something pre-given”;⁴³³ rather, what we directly see is first and foremost “nothing else than the self-evident, undiscussed assumption of the interpreter.”⁴³⁴ However, if our interpretation is always already determined by our preceding historical understanding of being and the world, then we need to give up the idea of a direct intuitive access to the matters themselves and recognize that the decisive task of interpretation consists in a critical explication of the historical pre-understanding we live in: “the first, constant, and last task [of interpretation] is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be given to us by whims and popular conceptions, but to secure the scientific theme by working out these fore-structures from out of the matters themselves.”⁴³⁵

But how? According to Heidegger, basic analysis we cannot hope to free ourselves from the factual prejudiced understanding in which we first and foremost live by appealing to some kind of direct seeing of the matters in question – for the simple reason that all seeing of something as something has to be grounded in a historical understanding of being and the world. Hence, interpretation must essentially take the form of an explication of the possibilities inherent in our historical understanding. To begin with, the interpretation can proceed as a thematic explication of the factual understanding we happen to live in. However, this understanding, Heidegger maintain, first and foremost has the character of prejudices handed down by the tradition. As a result, he comes to believe that the only way to a free and primordial understanding of the matters themselves

⁴³³ SZ, p. 150: “voraussetzungsloses Erfassen eines Vorgegebenen.”

⁴³⁴ SZ, p. 150: “nichts anderes als die selbstverständliche, undiskutierte Vormeinung des Auslegers“.

⁴³⁵ SZ, p. 153: “[die] erste, ständige und letzte Aufgabe [der Auslegung] bleibt, sich jeweils Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff nicht durch Einfälle und Volksbegriffe vorgeben zu lassen, sondern in deren Ausarbeitung aus den Sachen selbst her das wissenschaftliche Thema zu sichern.”

goes through a destruction of the prejudiced tradition: a dismantling which exposes the historical sources of the tradition and thereby opens up the possibility of retrieving the most originary possibilities of understanding harbored by our heritage.

Heidegger's investigation of the as- and fore-structure of interpretation thus lies at the basis of his conviction that phenomenology must give up its belief in direct seeing as our primary access to the matters themselves and instead take the form of a radically historical, hermeneutic-destructive interpretation.

Discourse, language, idle talk. Heidegger's account of discourse and language in *Being and Time* remains quite rudimentary and it is marked by vagueness and unclarity on many points. In what follows I will try to explicate the basic features of the account in so far as they are relevant for the problematic of phenomenality.

Heidegger's discussion takes its starting point in his somewhat puzzling distinction between "discourse" (*Rede*) and "language" (*Sprache*). "Discourse" is Heidegger's name for the third equiprimordial aspect – alongside disposition and understanding – of being-in, of Dasein's openness. As such, it constitutes the "existential-ontological foundation" of "language."⁴³⁶ How should this be understood?

Heidegger defines "discourse" as the "articulation" (*Artikulation*) or "arrangement" (*Gliederung*) of the "intelligibility" (*Verständlichkeit*) of being-in-the-world.⁴³⁷ By this he means the way in which the context we live in is always already articulated as a "totality of significations" (*Bedeutungsganze*), a structured whole of distinguishable significances and significance-relations.⁴³⁸ This discursive articulation of intelligibility pertains to Dasein's primary disclosure of the world in disposition and understanding, so that it precedes and conditions all active explicit explication of the world. Heidegger spells out five basic aspects of discourse: first, discourse is always about something – it has an "about-which" (*Worüber*), a subject matter that it refers to and is concerned with; second, in discourse what is talked about is always "addressed" (*angere-det*) in a particular regard and within certain limits; third, in discourse something is said – discourse has a

⁴³⁶ SZ, p. 160.

⁴³⁷ SZ, p. 161f.

⁴³⁸ SZ, p. 161.

“what-is-said” (*Geredetes*), the concrete words we utter or write; fourth, discourse involves “communication” (*Mitteilung*) – in discourse the intelligibility of the world is shared with and communicated to others; fifth, in discourse Dasein’s expresses itself (*Sichausprechen*) – not as a primarily self-contained subject but as the open existence that it is.⁴³⁹

If Heidegger by “discourse” tries to encircle the basic communicative character of being-in-the-world, “language” by contrast designates the factual “totality of words” (*Wortganzzheit*) in and through which discourse expresses itself: “The intelligibility of being-in-the-world – an intelligibility which goes with a disposition – *expresses itself as discourse*. The totality of significations of intelligibility is *put into words*. To significations, words accrue. But word-things do not get supplied with significations. The expressedness of discourse is language.”⁴⁴⁰ That is, language – conceived as the factual words and grammatical rules and conventions we live in – is grounded in discourse, in our primary articulation of being-in-the-world into a structured totality of significances. The words do not shape or create their significances out of nothing but rather “accrue to” – that is, express and mediate – significances that we are always already open to.

Heidegger’s distinction between discourse and language in *Being and Time* remains undeveloped and to some extent confusing. As far as I can see, what he is basically attempting to do is to distinguish between, on the one hand, the basic communicative, mediated, and intersubjectively shared character of our primary openness towards the world and, on the other hand, the factual words and linguistic conventions that are used to communicate the significances we live in.

Although Heidegger himself offers almost no argument on this point, I think there are in fact good philosophical reasons for making a distinction between the meaning and concepts we live in and our linguistic means of communicating them. Take, for example, such concepts as football, love, promise, dog, or philosophy. Even though we may often use corresponding words – “football,” “love,” “dog,” etc. – to communicate the matters in question, these concepts are not in

⁴³⁹ SZ, p. 161f.

⁴⁴⁰ SZ, p. 161: “Die befindliche Verständlichkeit des In-der-Welt-seins *spricht sich als Rede aus*. Das Bedeutungsganze der Verständlichkeit *kommt zu Wort*. Den Bedeutungen wachsen Worte zu. Nicht aber werden Wörterdinge mit Bedeutungen versehen. Die Hinausgesprochenheit der Rede ist die Sprache.”

themselves linguistic. It is clearly possible to identify and communicate different meanings and concepts without using words of one-to-one correspondence (“football” for football, “love” for love, “dog” for dog, etc.). On the one hand, it is possible to identify and talk about the same matters in many ways; on the other hand, our words can have many different meanings and functions which are specified only on account of the contexts in which we use them and on account of the other words we employ. It also seems clear that we may understand and communicate concepts and meanings for which we have no particular linguistic expression. Consider, for example, the situation of entering a bus and looking around for a free seat. In modern urban societies, this is a typical situation for many people, involving typical features and possibilities, a situation of which we have a general conception that can be identified and communicated. Yet we have no word for it – although we could have one. In fact, it seems that our understanding of the world is permeated by such pre-linguistic general concepts and typifications that orient our lives. Still, the basic point of this argument is not that in addition to our linguistic concepts we also have pre-linguistic concepts. Rather, it is that our understanding of concepts and meanings is primarily a-linguistic in character although it is always already to linguistically codified and mediated to greater or smaller extent.

Furthermore, I think it is phenomenologically right to assert that our understanding of a-linguistic meanings and concepts grounds our possibilities of meaningful linguistic expression and communications. If we would not have an understanding of football, love or of what it means to make a promise – an understanding which is not equal to the linguistic ability to talk about these matters – it is hard to see how we could ever talk about or give expression to these meanings. Indeed, it seems that the basic difference between our grasp of a-linguistic meaning and our ability to use language conditions the possibility of accounting for how languages arise and develop, and of distinguishing between language use that is opening, clarifying, or genuinely communicate and language use that is dissimulating, distortive, or amounts to empty jargon.

According to Heidegger, the analysis of discourse and language in *Being and Time* is “above all” intended as a preparation for his subsequent explication of “idle talk” (*Gerede*) as Dasein’s inauthentic mode of

discourse.⁴⁴¹ What makes this analysis important for our enquiry into phenomenality is that idle talk for Heidegger constitutes the possibility for our understanding to become “uprooted” and “cover up” the phenomena that it pretends to exhibit, i.e., the possibility of phenomena converting into mere appearances: “Only beings, whose disclosedness is constituted by disposed and understanding discourse [...] have the possibility of being of such uprooting.”⁴⁴²

It is, Heidegger claims, a central feature of discourse that it has always already expressed itself in a given factual language, which essentially harbors a certain understanding and interpretation of the world. Dasein is thus from the outset “delivered over” to an “interpretedness” (*Ausgelegtheit*) which “regulates and distributes the possibilities of the average understanding and of the disposition belonging to it.”⁴⁴³ This factual interpretedness always encompasses Dasein’s understanding of being-in-the-world in its entirety as well as of being as such. The problematic thing about this interpretedness is, however, that it first and foremost takes the form of a prejudiced interpretation which is taken over from the tradition and regulates public discourse without any independent disclosure of the matters in question. How is this possible?

According to Heidegger, our discourse essentially involves a tendency to exhibit and communicate the phenomena talked about as what they are. However, due to the average intelligibility of language it is to a certain degree possible to understand and make use of language regardless of whether we have independently seen and understood the matters we are talking about. This possibility is easily exploitable if we, as is often the case, do not want to achieve an independent understanding of ourselves but rather desire to confirm to and excel with regard to the collective norms regulating how one ought to think, talk, feel and act. Idle talk is born to the extent that Dasein only says and repeats what “one says,” that is, what is considered normal and collectively authorized in a given historical situation: “Things are so because one says so. Idle talk is constituted by such gossiping and passing the word along, a process by

⁴⁴¹ SZ, p. 166.

⁴⁴² SZ, p. 170: “Nur Seiendes, dessen Erschlossenheit durch die befindlich-verstehende Rede konstituiert ist [...] hat die Seinsmöglichkeit solcher Entwurzelung.”

⁴⁴³ SZ, p. 167f.: “regelt und verteilt die Möglichkeiten des durchschnittlichen Verstehens und der zugehörigen Befindlichkeit.”

which its initial lack of grounds to stand on increases to complete groundlessness. [...] Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter.”⁴⁴⁴

According to Heidegger, the possibility of discourse to convert into idle talk is nothing else than the possibility of phenomena to convert into mere appearances. If in our discourse – to whose essence it belongs to pretend to exhibit the matters talked about as what they are – we just repeat and alternate the common ways of speaking and thinking without independently disclosing the matters in question, then “disclosing” changes into a “closing off.”⁴⁴⁵ As a result, our discourse exhibits the matters we talk about not as what they are but as mere appearances.⁴⁴⁶

For Heidegger, idle talk signifies the inauthentic mode of speech and understanding in which Dasein’s first and foremost lives, and on account of which it has always already been thrown into a particular factual interpretedness, a prejudiced tradition that subsists and carries the weight of custom and self-evidence even though it has been uprooted from its phenomenal sources. It is precisely this captivity in the traditional interpretedness – which encompasses both Dasein’s understanding of itself and its understanding of being – which motivates the task of phenomenology, and on the backdrop of which all phenomenological explication has to be carried through:

Dasein can never escape this everyday interpretedness into which Dasein has grown initially. All genuine understanding, interpreting and communication, rediscovery and new appropriation come about in it and out of it and against it. In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this interpretedness, set before the free land of a “world” in itself, so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the public interpretedness has already decided upon even the possibilities of being disposed, that is, about the basic way in which Dasein lets the world matter to it.

⁴⁴⁴ SZ, p. 168f.: “Die Sache ist so, weil man es sagt. In solchem Nach- und Weiterreden, dadurch sich das schon anfängliche Fehlen der Bodenständigkeit zur völligen Bodenlosigkeit steigert, konstituiert sich das Gerede. [...] Das Gerede ist die Möglichkeit, alles zu verstehen ohne vorgängige Zueignung der Sache.”

⁴⁴⁵ SZ, p. 169: “Das bodenlose Gesagtsein und Weitergesagtwerden reicht hin, daß sich das Erschließen verkehrt zu einem Verschließen.”

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. SZ, p. 173.

The They prescribes one's disposition, and determines what and how one "sees."⁴⁴⁷

There is – as Heidegger maintains – no hope of freeing ourselves from the traditional interpretedness in which we live through an appeal to some kind of direct seeing of the phenomena, for the reason that all our direct feeling and seeing is initially determined by the tradition. Hence, to emancipate ourselves from the tradition and access an originary understanding of the matters themselves we need to carry out a destruction of the tradition and a retrieval of the most primordial possibilities of understanding contained by our history. Moreover, every expression of existentiell or philosophical insights essentially runs the risk of converting into uprooted jargon, which means that the task of opening up and keeping open the access to the matters themselves always has the character a continuous and infinite struggle.

As the explication above has made clear, Heidegger in *Being and Time* ascribes a rather diminutive and mainly negative to language within the overall structure of Dasein's phenomenal understanding. To begin with, he maintains that Dasein's implicit discourse and understanding precedes all explicit language and opens up the context of significance which language, on this basis, expresses and communicates. Moreover, he emphasizes the distortive nature of language: on the one hand, he stresses the way in which the theoretical statements modifies our originary concerned understanding into determinations of present-at-hand objects; on the other hand, he stresses the tendency of all discourse to transpire as uprooted and distortive idle talk.

Heidegger's tendency to downplay the import of language in *Being and Time* might seem surprising considering the important role played by language in the elaboration of his new concept of phenomenality in the previous years. In his 1923-4 lecture course "Introduction to

⁴⁴⁷ SZ, p. 169f.: "Dieser alltäglichen Ausgelegtheit, in die das Dasein zunächst hineinwächst, vermag es sich nie zu entziehen. In ihr und aus ihr und gegen sie vollzieht sich alles echte Verstehen, Auslegen und Mitteilen, Wiederentdecken und neu Zueignen. Es ist nicht so, daß je ein Dasein unberührt und unverführt durch diese Ausgelegtheit vor das freie Land einer 'Welt' an sich gestellt würde, um nur zu schauen, was ihm begegnet. Die Herrschaft der öffentlichen Ausgelegtheit hat sogar schon über die Möglichkeiten des Gestimmtseins entschieden, das heißt über die Grundart, in der sich das Dasein von der Welt angehen läßt. Das Man zeichnet die Befindlichkeit vor, es bestimmt, was man und wie man 'sieht'."

Phenomenological Research,” Heidegger – through a reading of Aristotle – articulated the basic understanding of the human being in terms of “a kind of *logos*”: an implicit speech preceding all seeing and providing the light through which it becomes possible to perceive and identify entities as meaningful phenomena. This thought is followed up and restated in his critical engagement with Husserl in “Prolegomena” where he writes: “It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter.”⁴⁴⁸ What Heidegger then does in *Being and Time* is that he elaborates this conception of phenomenality – which was originally modeled on the paradigm of language – in his analysis of being-in-the-world, only that he now largely effaces its linguistic character. His main reason for this is, it seems, that he wants to emphasize that our primary phenomenal understanding of historical meaning and being is not a function of but rather grounds and conditions the possibility of meaningful language use. Nevertheless, although Heidegger in *Being and Time* pictures Dasein’s understanding as primarily pre-linguistic it still exhibits the basic traits that were decisive for his earlier appropriation of language as a paradigm for his new conception of phenomenality: first, it presents the general patterns of meaning that determine what we can conceive as meaningful phenomena; second, it is historically mediated and publicly shared. Heidegger’s analysis of “discourse” – conceived as the implicit shared articulation of the world that grounds language – indeed does nothing but spell out explicitly these proto-linguistic features of Dasein’s understanding.

It seems that Heidegger’s historical trajectory in part explains his awkward relationship to language in *Being and Time*. By first using language as a paradigmatic basis for his explication of understanding and then cleansing understanding of its linguisticity, he initially lacks every ready account of how our primary understanding expresses itself in language. As it happens, Heidegger’s general strategy will consist in dodging the question of language and focusing almost exclusively on the tendency of language to deteriorate into theory and idle talk. By contrast, he says very little about the positively disclosive possibilities of language.

⁴⁴⁸ GA 20, p. 75: “Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber, genauer sprechen wir nicht das aus, was wir sehen, sondern umgekehrt, wir sehen was man über die Sache spricht.”

Heidegger's silence encompasses both the speech of pre-theoretical life and the discourse of philosophy itself. Concerning the former he only mentions the possibility of a "circumspectively *expressed* interpretation" (*umsichtig ausgesprochene Auslegung*) which is "not necessarily" already a theoretical statement, and which may, e.g., take the form of "statements about events in the surrounding world, accounts of the ready-to-hand, 'reports on situations,' recording and fixing the 'facts of the case,' describing a state of affairs, telling about what has happened."⁴⁴⁹ But this is all he says. As regards the question of the language of philosophy, Heidegger is certainly very much aware of the challenges and problems facing philosophical discourse. Yet his positive comments concerning this question are scanty. He stresses that the philosophical discourse, like every form of explicit speech, always runs the basic risk of losing its footing in the matters and so distort and cover up what it pretends to lay bare: "It is possible for every phenomenological concept and proposition drawn from genuine origins to degenerate when communicated as a statement. It gets circulated in a vacuous fashion, loses its autochthony, and becomes a free-floating thesis."⁴⁵⁰ Heidegger also points out that fundamental ontology has to face up to the task of articulating structures of being, which both our everyday ontic vocabulary and the traditional philosophical conceptuality are prone to deform, and which therefore requires not only new words but above all a new grammar.⁴⁵¹ Still, apart from these negative indications he says almost nothing about the distinctive character of the discourse of phenomenological philosophy.

In his early Freiburg lecture courses Heidegger characterized philosophical concepts as "formal indications": their meaning cannot be inferred from our factual normal concepts; instead, they operate by pointing to the particular experiences that constitute their phenomenal source of meaning. In *Being and Time* the term "formal indication" is still used on a few occasions, something that has led some commentators to

⁴⁴⁹ SZ, p. 158: "Aussagen über Geschehnisse in der Umwelt, Schilderungen des Zuhandenen, 'Situationsberichte', Aufnahme und Fixierung eines 'Tatbestandes', Beschreibung einer Sachlage, Erzählung des Vorgefallenen."

⁴⁵⁰ SZ, p. 36: "Jeder ursprünglich geschöpfte phänomenologische Begriff und Satz steht als mitgeteilte Aussage in der Möglichkeit der Entartung. Er wird in einem leeren Verständnis weitergegeben, verliert seine Bodenständigkeit und wird zur freischwebenden These."

⁴⁵¹ SZ, p. 39.

suggest that Heidegger here continues to conceive of philosophical concepts as formal indications in the same sense as in his earlier lectures.⁴⁵² However, I think this suggestion is misguided. In *Being and Time* Heidegger never thematizes or explicates “formal indication” as a central concept, and there is no hint that it would function as a basic yet implicit operative concept in his account of the nature of philosophical language. The philosophical reason for why the concept of formal indication has become obsolete is, I think, that Heidegger’s earlier account of this concept rested firmly on the idea that philosophical concepts are grounded on direct intuitive reflection on experiences. As Heidegger in *Being and Time* grounds our phenomenal experience in Dasein’s prior historical understanding of world and being, the notion of formal indication becomes insufficient. Given that our phenomenal experience is determined by a historical understanding which first and foremost dominates us in the form of an uprooted tradition, the phenomenological task now consists in carrying out a hermeneutic-destructive retrieval of a

⁴⁵² Cf., e.g., Overgaard 2004, pp. 89-90; Dahlstrom 2001, pp. 242-252. In defending the claim that Heidegger in *Being and Time* basically conceived of philosophical concepts as “formal indications” the commentators have invariably been forced to resort to the strategy of inferring the sense of this concept from Heidegger’s elaboration of it in his early Freiburg lectures. However, if I am right that Heidegger’s development from his early Freiburg lectures to *Being and Time* entails a basic systematic shift from an intuition-based phenomenology towards a radically hermeneutic phenomenology, and that his early notion of “formal indication” essentially rested on the former, then the stratagem of inferring the sense of “formal indication” in *Being and Time* from earlier texts becomes anachronistic. In so far as Heidegger continues to employ the term “formal indication” in and beyond *Being and Time* (cf., e.g., SZ, pp. 114, 116f., 313; GA 29/30, pp. 421-435) I think it is clear that its meaning has changed, in such a way that it has been neutralized with respects to the question of the meaning-sources of philosophical concepts. The most informative passage referring to “formal indication” in *Being and Time* reads: “The word ‘I’ is to be understood only in the sense of a non-committal *formal indication*, indicating something which may perhaps reveal itself as its ‘opposite’ in some particular phenomenal context of being” (*Das ‘ich’ darf nur verstanden werden im Sinne einer unverbindlichen formalen Anzeige von etwas, das im jeweiligen phänomenalen Seinszusammenhang vielleicht sich als sein ‘Gegenteil’ erweist*) (SZ, p. 116). The way the term “formal indication” is used here and elsewhere in the book is basically as a reminder that the concepts used in the project of fundamental ontology are “non-committal” – cannot be inferred in advance from our standard ontic or pre-ontological understanding without prejudice – and ultimately refer to and receive their meaning from the concrete investigations of the matters that they indicate, whereby the nature of these investigations – transcendental phenomenological or hermeneutic-destructive – is left undetermined.

more originary understanding of being. This task calls for a language that does not point toward some supposedly direct intuitions as its ground, but which is somehow able to carry and disclose the originary historical patterns of meaning in their finitude and groundlessness prior to their deterioration into idle talk. What kind of language? Heidegger cannot answer this question in *Being and Time*. Ultimately, it seems, Heidegger's problems with accounting for the nature of philosophical language are rooted in his problems with accounting for how the destructive retrieval of originary historical meanings is to be pursued, and the deep ambivalences in the project of fundamental ontology that this failure gives rise to.

It is perhaps symptomatic that Heidegger ends his analysis of discourse and language in *Being and Time* by pushing the question of language further ahead of himself: "In the end, philosophical research must for once decide to ask what mode of being belongs to language in general."⁴⁵³

Groundlessness, Finitude, Historicity

Having reviewed Heidegger's basic conception of Dasein as being-in-the-world in the first division of *Being and Time* we now proceed to examine his analysis of temporality and historicity which is developed in the second division.

In turning from the first to the second division, Heidegger argues that the analysis conducted so far has been insufficient since it has only focused on everyday inauthentic Dasein, and that we need to get access to Dasein's possibility of authentic existence and self-understanding in order to explicate its primordial temporal-historical structure of sense. Given that inauthenticity consists in shying away from and covering up the temporal-historical character of our guiding possibilities – revealed by anxiety and the call of conscience – and that authenticity consists precisely in opening up to and transparently taking over this predicament, access to the latter becomes a crucial condition for explicating the temporal-historical sense of Dasein. However, Heidegger's claim about the

⁴⁵³ SZ, p. 166: "Am Ende muß sich die philosophische Forschung einmal entschließen zu fragen, welche Seinsart der Sprache überhaupt zukommt."

insufficiency of the first division does not imply that its analysis would be false and in need of revision. On the contrary, it is clear that the analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world – and of the as- and fore-structure of understanding – constitutes the systematic basis for all the analyses in the second division, which basically transpire as an explication of the historical and temporal aspects of Dasein's understanding.⁴⁵⁴

In what follows, I begin by explicating Heidegger's view of the groundless, finite and historical character of Dasein's possibilities as this is elaborated in his analyses of anxiety, the call of conscience and historicity. After that, in the next section, I will briefly examine his articulation of Dasein's basic structure of temporality. I will return to discuss Heidegger's account of Dasein's authentic self-understanding – which is indicated and anticipated here – in the last chapter of this part.

Whereas Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world focused on how Dasein's primary experience of beings as significant tools is determined by its preceding understanding of the world, he now turns to investigating Dasein's understanding of its own possibilities conceived as the ultimate horizon of purposes organizing the significance-relations of the world. Here it is also good to point out – and we shall come back to this – that although Heidegger in the introduction to *Being and Time* insists that our ontic understanding of beings and of the world is guided by a historical understanding of being, he almost completely bypasses the question of the nature of this understanding in his concrete analyses. As a result, Heidegger's investigation of the historical character of Dasein's understanding of its own possibilities constitutes nothing less than his paradigmatic account of what it means to understand and retrieve historical meaning in general – including the modes and unifying sense of being.

⁴⁵⁴ In fact – given Heidegger's argument about access to authenticity as a condition for explicating of the primordial temporal-historical sense of Dasein – it is hard to see how the analysis of being-in-the-world in division one could have been carried out without already having the possibility of authentic existence more or less in view. After all, the analysis of being-in-the-world opens up and articulates the basic notion that our experience of significant phenomena – whether ready-to-hand tools or present-at-hand objects – is determined by our preceding unthematic understanding of the world as a historical context of significance. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say – and I think Heidegger would agree – that the analysis of being-in-the-world already anticipates and refers to but does not yet spell out the experience of authenticity as its hidden phenomenal ground.

Heidegger's finds in anxiety and conscience the basic experiences which expose Dasein to the groundlessness and finitude of its possibilities, and confronts it with the task of facing this predicament in an authentic manner. According to Heidegger, *anxiety* differs from other forms of fear and dread in that in anxiety we do not fear anything particular – other human beings, animals, natural disasters, diseases etc. – that would threaten us. Rather, in anxiety we experience that our entire familiar world with all its beings is “of no consequence” and “collapses into itself”: “the world has the character of completely lacking significance.”⁴⁵⁵ As such, anxiety robs Dasein of the possibility of understanding itself, in an inauthentic and prejudiced manner, on the basis of the received collective interpretedness of the world. The “uncanniness” (*Unheimlichkeit*, which literally means “unhomelike”) of anxiety exposes the individual Dasein to the basic fact that it is “not-at-home” (*Un-zuhause*) within the familiar world of the one that it has slid into, and confronts it with the task of personally facing up to and clear-sightedly choosing its own possibilities.

Ultimately, Heidegger claims, that in the face of which Dasein experiences anxiety is itself in its essential mortality. Anxiety exposes Dasein to its death as its “ownmost, non-relational, unsurpassable possibility.”⁴⁵⁶ That death is Dasein's *ownmost* possibility means that Dasein is referred to its *own* possibilities as that which it can be; that death is *non-relational* means that it is the individual Dasein *itself*, and no one else, that responsibly has to take over its own possibility of being; finally, that death is *unsurpassable* means that it constitutes the ultimate possible that Dasein can never move beyond and which delimits all its finite possibilities to be: “This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-being – that is to say, to existence – limits and determines in every case the possible totality of Dasein.”⁴⁵⁷ The existential fact that Dasein is on the way towards its own death as its unsurpassable possibility implies that it is faced with task of choosing its own *finite* possibilities from those factual historical possibilities available to it.

Heidegger supplements his account of anxiety with an analysis of what he calls the *call of conscience*. What does he mean by this?

⁴⁵⁵ SZ, p. 186: “Die Welt hat den Charakter völliger Unbedeutsamkeit.”

⁴⁵⁶ SZ, p. 250: “eigenste, unbezügliche, unüberholbare Möglichkeit.”

⁴⁵⁷ SZ, p. 234: “Dieses Ende, zum Seinkönnen, das heißt zum Existenz gehörig, begrenzt und bestimmt die je mögliche Ganzheit des Daseins.”

According to Heidegger, Dasein has first and foremost lost itself in an inauthentic listening to and complying with what the They – the normative collective voice – says about things. In order to break this listening what is needed is a call that is somehow capable of awaking Dasein to its authentic self. This call is the “call of conscience.” The call of conscience, as Heidegger depicts it, has nothing new or substantial to tell Dasein about how it ought to live its life in accordance with the available collective norms and paradigms of value. Instead, the call of conscience speaks solely “in the mode of keeping silent”:⁴⁵⁸ it completely “passes over” the interpretedness of the They in terms of which Dasein tends to understand itself, whereby it “pushes” the They into “insignificance.”⁴⁵⁹ However, although the call of conscience is wordless it is far from undetermined. The call of conscience addresses Dasein’s inauthentic self as an alien voice that, neither planned nor anticipated, comes at once “from me” and “over me.”⁴⁶⁰ The one calling is Dasein itself in its originary uncanny thrownness into the world prior to any possible refuge in the They: “It is Dasein in its uncanniness, the primordial thrown being-in-the-world as not-at-home.”⁴⁶¹ In conscience, it is Dasein itself that summons itself to authentic existence.

But what does the call of conscience give to understand? According to Heidegger, the call of conscience says that Dasein is “guilty.” What he has in mind here is not a moral guilt that Dasein could incur through its way of relating and acting towards others, but a guilt that belongs to Dasein prior to and regardless of all its ontic attitudes and actions. Dasein is essentially guilty in two respects. Firstly, Dasein is characterized by the fact that it is always already thrown into its being. This means that Dasein is from the outset delivered over to a possibility to be that it has never been in a position to ground or instigate but which it is nevertheless referred to as its “thrown ground”: “It [Dasein] is never existent *before* its ground, but only *from it* and *as this ground*. Thus being-a-ground means *never* to have

⁴⁵⁸ SZ, p. 273: “im Modus des Schweigens.”

⁴⁵⁹ SZ, p. 273: “Gerade *im Übergeben* stößt er das auf öffentliches Ansehen erpichte Man in die Bedeutungslosigkeit.”

⁴⁶⁰ SZ, p. 275.

⁴⁶¹ SZ, p. 276: “Er ist das Dasein in seiner Unheimlichkeit, das ursprüngliche geworfene In-der-Welt-sein als Un-zuhause.”

power over one's ownmost being from the ground up."⁴⁶² In short, it belongs to the being of Dasein that it is always already thrown into a field of factual historical possibilities which conditions all meaningful experience and understanding, and which constitutes the ungroundable ground that it can be. Secondly, in so far as Dasein chooses certain possibilities of being it thereby chooses *not* to be all the possibilities that it passes over. Hence, in order for Dasein to be able to choose its own finite possibilities it must also be capable of enduring the negativity of letting go of all the alternative possibilities of life. Heidegger sums up Dasein's essential being-guilty, implied by its thrownness, in the following condensed formula: "Being the (null) ground of a nullity."⁴⁶³

In short: both anxiety and the call of conscience unsettle the collective interpretedness that Dasein has normally slid into, thereby confronting it with the task of independently grasping and choosing its own possibilities. At the same time, anxiety and conscience reveal the basic character of Dasein's possibilities: whereas conscience discloses the *groundlessness* of the historical possibilities into which Dasein is always already thrown and has to choose from, anxiety in the face of death exposes the *finitude* essentially characterizing Dasein's choice of its own possibilities. Authenticity for Heidegger names precisely the possibility of transparently answering to the predicament revealed by anxiety and the call of conscience: the possibility of Dasein to open up to the groundless factual possibilities that it is thrown into and, by anticipating its own death as its ultimate delimiting possibility, choose its own possibilities as its finite historical lot.

In his analysis of *historicity* (*Geschichtlichkeit*) – which is developed as a part of his analysis of temporality – Heidegger further accentuates and specifies the historical character of Dasein's factual possibilities.

Heidegger begins his reflection of historicity by noting that all the tools we encounter in our world are historical in the sense that they belong to a world that is historical. If the world in which the tools play a role disappears, the tools will remain as entities belonging to a bygone world.⁴⁶⁴ Hence, by world Heidegger essentially refers to specific historical contexts

⁴⁶² SZ, p. 284: "Es [das Dasein] ist nie existent *vor* seinem Grunde, sondern je nur *aus ihm* und *als dieser*. Grundsein besagt demnach, des eigensten Seins von Grund auf *nie* mächtig sein."

⁴⁶³ SZ, p. 285: "Das (nichtige) Grund-sein einer Nichtigkeit."

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. SZ, p. 380.

of significance which arise, persist and vanish. But how should we more exactly understand the historical character of the world? As we know, Heidegger conceives of the world as a network of instrumental relations that are ultimately anchored in Dasein's possibilities – the concrete paradigms of value or heroes organizing and granting purpose to the world. The question he now poses is “whence, *in general*, Dasein can fetch those possibilities upon which it factually projects itself”?⁴⁶⁵ And he answers:

The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses the current factual possibilities of authentic existing *out of the heritage* (*Erbe*) that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*. In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down* (*Sichüberliefern*) to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily *as* having thus come down. If everything “good” is a heritage, and the character of “goodness” lies in making authentic existence possible, then the handing down of a heritage constitutes itself in resoluteness.⁴⁶⁶

According to Heidegger, Dasein thus essentially draws its factual possibilities from the historical heritage into which it has always already been thrown, so that choosing one's own possibilities in resoluteness always means handing down to oneself and taking over some historically inherited possibilities. In this, the possibilities of the individual Dasein always belong to the “destiny” (*Geschick*) of the “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) or the “people” (*Volk*), which “guides” all individual “fates” (*Schicksal*).⁴⁶⁷

Heidegger's basic analysis of being-in-the-world aimed to show that our experience of particular beings as meaningful phenomena is conditioned and determined by our preceding understanding of the world,

⁴⁶⁵ SZ, p. 383: “Trotzdem muß gefragt werden, woher *überhaupt* die Möglichkeiten geschöpft werden können, auf die sich das Dasein faktisch entwirft.”

⁴⁶⁶ SZ, p. 383f.: “Die Entschlossenheit, in der das Dasein auf sich selbst zurückkommt, erschließt die jeweiligen faktischen Möglichkeiten eigentlichen Existierens *aus dem Erbe*, das sie als geworfene *übernimmt*. Das entschlossene Zurückkommen auf die Geworfenheit birgt ein *Sich überliefern* überkommener Möglichkeiten in sich, obzwar nicht notwendig *als* überkommener. Wenn alles ‘Gute’ Erbschaft ist und der Charakter der ‘Güt’ in der Ermöglichung eigentlicher Existenz liegt, dann konstituiert sich in der Entschlossenheit je das Überliefern eines Erbes.”

⁴⁶⁷ SZ, p. 384.

the organizing stratum of which consists in our understanding of Dasein's possibilities. Now it has become clear that he believes these possibilities are radically historical in nature. Although it is the task of the individual Dasein to choose its own possibilities, it cannot of its own accord create or give meaning to its possibilities. Rather, as Heidegger puts it: the "repeatable possibilities" provided by the heritage constitute the "sole authority (*einzigste Autorität*) which a free existing can have."⁴⁶⁸ Dasein is thus essentially referred to the collectively inherited historical paradigms of value and purpose into which it has been thrown as the basic ungroundable possibilities which determine and delimit what it can experience and understand as meaningful. Whereas Dasein's inherited factual possibilities constitutes the groundless ground on the basis of which it must choose itself, it is the anticipation of its own death as its ultimate insurmountable possibility that allows it to choose its own most finite possibilities.

Temporality

As we know, Heidegger's fundamental ontology ultimately aims to clarify the sense of being as the basic structure organizing our understanding of beings in their being, and he hopes to do this through an explication of Dasein's temporality.

However, although the analysis of temporality in division two of *Being and Time* is intended to be the highpoint of the existential analytic it is, I believe, strictly speaking unable to contribute as much to the philosophical substance of the preceding analyses as Heidegger and many commentators want to believe. In fact, it is Heidegger's basic analysis of being-in-the-world – including the groundless, finite, and historical nature of Dasein's possibilities – that opens up and provides the systematic basis for his account of temporality, so that the thematic analysis of temporality basically takes the form of a schematic articulation of the temporal aspect of Dasein's understanding.⁴⁶⁹ Still, it is important to briefly recount the

⁴⁶⁸ SZ, p. 391.

⁴⁶⁹ Heidegger, of course, explicitly denies this, claiming that the "temporal interpretation" – i.e. the repetition of the existential analysis conducted so far with the aim to disclosing the temporality of the basic structures of Dasein – "will not lead to a running through our analyses again superficially and schematically" (SZ, p. 331f.).

basic argument of Heidegger's analysis of temporality given that he tends to articulate his entire critical struggle with the traditional understanding of being and phenomenality as a struggle with a certain understanding of time.

What gives Heidegger's account of temporality its central role in the project of fundamental ontology is his conviction that, beginning with the Greeks, Western philosophy has understood being in terms of time. The basic conception of being as presence – *ousia* – implies that being is determined with reference to a certain dimension of time: to be is to be present in the now for an observing subject. According to Heidegger, however, this traditional understanding of time as now-time is nothing but an articulation of the temporality of inauthentic Dasein, a temporality that stems from a fall from the primordial temporality of authentic existence.

Heidegger describes the temporality characterizing the resoluteness of authentic existence in the following way. In order for Dasein to be able to project itself towards its ownmost possibilities, it must be possible for these possibilities to “come towards” it; in order for Dasein to be able to take over its factual possibilities, it must be possible for it to “come back” to itself as that which it always already is; finally, in order for Dasein to be able to cope with the tasks and tools of its surrounding world, it must be possible for it to “make” the ready-to-hand tools “present” in the current situation.⁴⁷⁰ The interplay between these three dimensions – which Heidegger calls the “future” (*Zukunft*), the “having-been” (*Gewesenheit*), and the “present” (*Gegenwart*) – constitutes the dynamic unity of primordial temporality.⁴⁷¹ In this temporality, the future and the past are not defined as coming or bygone now-points. On the contrary, it is only Dasein's projection towards its future possibilities as always already having-been that determines its present situation: “Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself into the situation by making present. The character of having-been arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which has-been (or better, which is-in-the-process-of-having-been) releases from itself the present. This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having-been: we designate it

⁴⁷⁰ SZ, pp. 325f.

⁴⁷¹ SZ, p. 328.

as *temporality*.”⁴⁷² Hence, Dasein is not from the outset encapsulated in a punctual now; rather the now is “discharged” from and remains “embedded” in the primary interplay between the future and the having been.⁴⁷³ Heidegger ascribes a certain priority to the future within the unitary dynamics of primordial temporality: it is only by resolutely anticipating its own death as its ultimate possibility that it becomes possible for Dasein to come back to and choose its ownmost finite possibilities.

According to Heidegger, the traditional conception of time as now-time that has dominated philosophy for so long is rooted in and has its phenomenal ground in inauthentic existence. In fleeing from the possibility of transparently choosing its own groundless and finite possibilities to be, Dasein adopts the collective interpretedness of the They and becomes submerged in coping with its surrounding world. Instead of understanding itself on the basis of the interplay between the future and the having-been, inauthentic Dasein turns to focusing on the present entities of the world within the contemporary collective horizon of understanding. As a result, the originary temporality of existence is covered up and the present is privileged as the basis for understanding the future and the past: whereas the future is conceived as a “then, when...” (*dann, wann*) – i.e. as a now which is still to come – the past is conceived as an “on that former occasion, when...” (*damals, als*) – i.e. as a now which has already passed. The traditional concept of time arises through a theoretical interpretation of Dasein’s inauthentic experience of time in terms of coming and past now-points, whereby time is in the end understood as a “sequence of nows which are constantly present-at-hand, simultaneously passing away and coming along.”⁴⁷⁴ It is, Heidegger claims, precisely this conception of time as now-time which since Aristotle determines the traditional understanding of being as presence.

⁴⁷² SZ, p. 326: “Zukünftig auf sich zurückkommend, bringt sich die Entschlossenheit gegenwärtig in die Situation. Die Gewesenheit entspringt der Zukunft, so zwar, daß die gewesene (besser gewesende) Zukunft die Gegenwart aus sich entläßt. Dies dergestalt als gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft einheitliche Phänomen nennen wir die *Zeitlichkeit*.”

⁴⁷³ SZ, pp. 326, 328.

⁴⁷⁴ SZ, p. 422: “eine Folge von ständig ’vorhandenen’, zugleich vergehenden und ankommenden Jetzt.”

Heidegger's analysis of temporality allows him to articulate the difference between the traditional understanding of being – and phenomenality – and his own in terms of a critical transformation of the guiding concept of time. In contrast to the customary understanding of being as thematic presence in the now for an perceiving subject, Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world aims to show that the very possibility of thematically perceiving entities is conditioned by Dasein's preceding understanding of the meaning-context of the world. Dasein's understanding of the world transpires unthematically, and it is ultimately organized by its grasp of its own possibilities. Hence, the possibility of Dasein's to experience beings as present in the now is essentially determined by its being projected towards its non-present future and having been – towards the possibility of its own death and towards the groundless historical heritage that it always already is.

Reality and Truth

We have now run through Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's constitution as temporal-historical being-in-the-world in *Being and Time*. Taken together, the structures thus explicated constitute the basic structure of phenomenality. Let us now attempt to summarize the results of Heidegger's analysis and specify its systematic gist by looking at how it informs his conception of reality and truth.

The basic thrust of Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world is to ground the possibility of intuitively experiencing entities as meaningful phenomena in Dasein's preceding understanding of the world. For us to be able to see and identify an entity as one thing or the other we first need to hold an understanding of the historical context of significance in which we live and which prescribes the possible as-whats on the basis of which particular entities can show up as significant unities of meaning. There is thus a strict hierarchy pertaining between Dasein's understanding of the world and its experience of particular entities: our prior historical understanding of the world cannot be grounded in any experience of particular entities but determines the possible significances in terms of which such entities can show up as meaningful. Moreover, our preceding historical understanding of the world is also hierarchically ordered. Dasein's grasp of the instrumental references of the world is determined

by its understanding of its own possibilities, conceived as the groundless and finite historical paradigms of valuable life – heroes - constituting the horizon of purposes of the world. Dasein’s understanding of its world and possibilities is in its turn guided by its basic historical understanding of being, that is, of the different modes of being and, ultimately, of the sense of being as such.

In his lecture course “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology”⁴⁷⁵ – delivered in the summer of 1927 and continuing the project of *Being and Time* – Heidegger introduces the “ontological difference” (*ontologische Differenz*)⁴⁷⁶ between being and beings as his name for the basic hierarchical structure of phenomenal understanding: “A being can be discovered, whether by way of perception or some other mode of access, only if the being of this being is already disclosed – only if I already understand it.”⁴⁷⁷ As Heidegger launches the ontological difference as his central philosopheme he is above all focusing on the difference between our experience of particular entities and our preceding understanding of historical meaning, whereas he tends to assimilate the different strata of that preceding understanding – the instrumental references of the world, the possibilities of Dasein, and the being of beings - and simply talk about understanding of being. The “ontological difference” thus for Heidegger names the basic hierarchical difference between our understanding of particular beings and our understanding of the quasi-conceptual relations of meaning and purpose determining as what particular beings can show up for us.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ “Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie,” GA 24.

⁴⁷⁶ GA 24, pp. 22, 102, 109, 454.

⁴⁷⁷ GA 24, p. 102: “Seiendes kann nur entdeckt werden, sei es auf dem Wege der Wahrnehmung oder sonst einer Zugangsart, wenn das Sein des Seienden schon erschlossen ist, - wenn ich es verstehe.”

⁴⁷⁸ The question of the sense of the “ontological difference” in Heidegger’s thinking is a complex one for many reasons – not least because from the mid 1920s to the end of the 1930s (and even to some extent beyond that) he is constantly elaborating and revising his conception of the structure of understanding and questioning to which this notion refers. What remains the same is his idea of a basic hierarchical difference between our understanding of particular beings and our understanding of historical meaning. What changes is Heidegger’s analysis of how the latter is built up and which questions and what kind of thinking it calls for. Here is a very schematic overview: 1. In *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguishes between the instrumental relations of the world and Dasein’s possibilities as its horizon of purposes. These, in turn, are said to be guided by an understanding of being – modes of being, the sense of being as such

Toward the end of the first division of *Being and Time* – in §§ 43 and 44 – Heidegger makes an attempt to spell out the consequences of his analysis for two of the central notions guiding traditional philosophy: *reality* and *truth*. Let us briefly examine his explications of these two key concepts one at a time.

The question of reality. According to Heidegger, philosophy has from its very beginning understood reality as presence-at-hand: to be is to be a steadily present, experience- and context-independent object for a distanced theoretical gaze. Since Descartes, the question of the reality has taken the form of a question concerning the existence of the outer world: How is it possible for the inner acts of subjective consciousness to reach out and establish knowledge of outer reality? The standard strategies of modern philosophy to answer this question have been those of realism and idealism. Whereas realism attempts to prove that the world really exists by demonstrating some causal connection between our inner sensations and their outer causes, idealism maintains that “being and reality are only ‘in consciousness.’”⁴⁷⁹ According to Heidegger, however,

– which it is the task of fundamental ontology to investigate. Hereby Heidegger’s account of the mode of the investigation remains deeply ambivalent: on the one hand, he proclaims – in line with his analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality – that thinking must proceed as a destructive retrieval of historical being-senses; on the other hand, his existential analytic basically unfolds as an attempt to clarify the sense and modes of being through a reflective phenomenological investigation of the universal structures of Dasein. 2. In the years 1928-1933, following the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger stops discriminating between the instrumental purposes of the world, the possibilities of Dasein, and the modes of being, instead calling our understanding of this whole complex of meaning our “understanding of being,” and calling the totality of such being the “world.” Hereby – as long as he holds on to the project of fundamental ontology – he distinguishes between our understanding of being in the first sense – that is, the historical networks of meaning determining as what beings can show up – and our understanding of the sense of being, that is, the basic structure of Dasein which is investigated by fundamental ontology. 3. From the mid 1930s onwards Heidegger continues to think of the ontological difference as a difference between our knowledge of beings and our understanding of being as the historical contexts of meaning determining beings. However, the so called “turn” his thinking undergoes in these years implies a change in his central question, which from now on concerns not the “sense” of being but the “truth” or “openness” of being. This means that he gives up his former effort to find the sense of being in the structures of Dasein, and instead embarks on a historical questioning of the basic event or happening which opens up and sustains historical being, historical worlds.

⁴⁷⁹ SZ, p. 207: “Sein und Realität sei nur ‘im Bewußtsein’.”

the very effort to prove how the subject can achieve knowledge of the outside world is essentially confused and misguided: “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.*”⁴⁸⁰ The traditional epistemological question, he claims, is founded on the ontological notion of a primarily self-contained subject that needs to transcend its closed inner sphere and make contact with outer reality – a notion that totally overlooks Dasein’s fundamental openness to the world. Nevertheless, Heidegger holds that idealism has a basic superiority over realism while, as he argues, the basic idea of idealism, namely that being resides in consciousness, expresses an implicit understanding that “being cannot be explained through beings.”⁴⁸¹ According to Heidegger, however, all traditional versions of idealism have squandered this latent insight by their effort to ground being in subjectivity.

To understand how Heidegger’s own conception grows forth as an elaboration of the dormant insight of idealism means to understand how being determines beings and in what sense being is connected to Dasein itself. Heidegger articulates the essential relations in the following dense passage:

The fact that reality is ontologically grounded in the being of Dasein cannot mean that something real can only be what it is in itself when and as long as Dasein exists. Of course only as long as Dasein *is* – that is, only as long as an understanding of being is ontically possible – does “it give” being (*gibt es sein*). When Dasein does not exist, “independence” “is” not either, nor “is” the “in-itself.” In such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood. In such a case even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. *In such a case* it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. But *now*, as long as there is an understanding of being and therefore an understanding of presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that *in this case* entities will continue to be. [...] Only if the understanding of being is, do beings as beings become accessible; only if there are

⁴⁸⁰ SZ, p. 205: “Der ‘Skandal der Philosophie’ besteht nicht darin, daß dieser Beweis noch aussteht, sondern darin, daß solche Beweise immer wieder erwartet und versucht werden.”

⁴⁸¹ SZ, p. 207: “Sein nicht durch Seiendes erklärt werden kann.”

beings of Dasein's kind of being is the understanding of being possible as a being.⁴⁸²

Let us take hold of the three main points of Heidegger's argument:

1. Although the being of beings is grounded in Dasein, this does not mean that particular real beings "can only be" what they are in themselves "when and as long as Dasein exists." That is to say, even provided that the human race would become extinct this would not imply that the particular entities populating the universe would vanish or that their material traits would change.

2. Then again, "beings as beings" are only "accessible" as long as there is "understanding of being." Hence, particular beings can only show up as meaningful phenomena on the basis of Dasein's prior understanding of world and being, in such a way that this understanding is not grounded in any knowledge of beings but rather determines in advance the possible significances that individual beings can take on. The upshot of the second point is that it reduces the first point to a statement of a minimal empirical realism: even though the material subsistence and setup of individual entities is independent of Dasein's understanding, these entities receive their whole unity and significance from Dasein's prior understanding of being, so that all their material traits gain their possible relevance on the basis of this understanding.

3. The third point concerns the relationship between Dasein and being: "only as long as Dasein *is* – that is, only as long as an understanding of being is ontically possible – does 'it give' being (*'gibt es' Sein*)." How should this be understood? As concerns the *dependence* of being on Dasein, Heidegger states that being is given only to the extent that Dasein exists.

⁴⁸² SZ, p. 211f.: "Daß Realität ontologisch im Sein des Dasein gründet, kann nicht bedeuten, daß Reales nur sein könnte als das, was es an ihm selbst ist, wenn und solange Dasein existiert. Allerdings nur solange Dasein *ist*, das heißt die ontische Möglichkeit von Seinsverständnis, 'gibt es' Sein. Wenn Dasein nicht existiert, dann 'ist' auch nicht 'Unabhängigkeit' und 'ist' auch nicht 'An-sich'. Dergleichen ist dann weder verstehbar noch unverstehbar. Dann ist auch innerweltliches Seiendes weder entdeckbar, noch kann es in Verborgenheit liegen. *Dann* kann weder gesagt werden, daß Seiendes sei, noch daß es nicht sei. Es kann *jetzt* wohl, solange Seinsverständnis ist und damit Verständnis von Vorhandenheit, gesagt werden, daß *dann* Seiendes noch weiterhin sein wird. [...] [N]ur wenn Seinsverständnis *ist*, wird Seiendes als Seiendes zugänglich; nur wenn Seiendes ist von der Seinsart des Daseins, ist Seinsverständnis als Seiendes möglich."

Taken out of context, this statement could be interpreted as making the trivial point that in order for being to be understandable there must be a human being possessing the ontological optics required for catching sight of being. The relation between Dasein's understanding and being could, then, easily be taken to resemble the relation between the human capacity for perception and the visible world: our understanding would give access to being as a Dasein-independent dimension of meaning existing on its own regardless of whether we understand it or not. In fact, however, Heidegger's argument indicates a much stronger and more intimate dependence of being on Dasein: since being determines what beings can be, and does not exist as a sphere of ideal objects, it has to be something that Dasein, in some sense, brings with itself to beings. At the same time, however, Heidegger again and again stresses that being is *independent* of Dasein and is not a product of the human subject. To grasp the double relation of dependence and independence pertaining between being and Dasein, we need to pay close attention to Heidegger's exact wording and read it against the backdrop of his basic account of the structure of phenomenal understanding. When Heidegger writes that it is only as long as Dasein exists that "es gibt Sein" – i.e., that "it gives being" or "being is given" – this should be taken literally: being is thus nothing that Dasein produces, but, as soon as Dasein exists, being is given to Dasein as the groundless dimension of historical meaning into which Dasein has always already been thrown and which determines the possibilities of experiencing beings as meaningful phenomena.

In short: Dasein from the outset lives in a historical understanding of world and being which always already gives itself as its groundless heritage on the basis of which particular beings can show up as meaningful phenomena. This does not mean that Dasein's understanding of being would create or uphold the material traits of beings, which persist and are what they are regardless of our understanding. What it does mean, however, is that our historical understanding of world and being determines the possible significances that particular beings can have for us: when we experience an entity as something we experience it as an instantiation of a moment in a pre-understood context of meaning, so that the context of meaning prescribes the possible significance of the entity;⁴⁸³

⁴⁸³ SZ, p. 83.

conversely, the empirical traits of the entity can only confirm or not-confirm the pre-understood meaning but not change or add anything to its core content. According to Heidegger, our primary experience meaning is thus not established on the basis of a more basic level of sense-perceptions of material objects: it does not have the character of *our* interpretation of *these* objects but rather prescribes what can show up as objects in the first place. Hence, what we experience as meaningful phenomena on the basis of our historical understanding of world and being is nothing but the beings in themselves – the beings in the sense they have for us, behind which there is nothing at all.

The question of truth. According to Heidegger, the traditional conception of truth dominating the history of philosophy can be condensed in the formula: *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. That is to say, truth is conceived in terms of the agreement or correspondence of our propositions with the objects that they are about.

The point of Heidegger's discussion of truth in §44 of *Being and Time* is not simply to dismiss the traditional conception of truth; it is rather to show how truth as agreement or correspondence is possible only on the basis of Dasein's constitution as being-in-the-world and, in so doing, clarify and delimit the sense of this conception. As long as we remain within the framework of the traditional notion of truth, Heidegger claims, it is impossible to account for the sense and possibility of truth. Given that truth is understood as a relation of agreement between two kinds of presence-at-hand object – the proposition and its object – it remains totally unclear how the agreement between these objects should be understood.⁴⁸⁴

In order to clarify the possibility of truth as agreement, Heidegger begins by phenomenologically explicating what happens when our knowing demonstrates itself as true. His example is the following. Someone with his back turned to the wall makes the true assertion "the picture on the wall is hanging askew."⁴⁸⁵ The assertion demonstrates itself as true when the person in question turns around and perceives the picture hanging askew on the wall. What happens here? To begin with, Heidegger claims, it is essential to note that in making such an assertion

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. SZ, pp. 214ff.

⁴⁸⁵ SZ, p. 217: "Das Bild an der Wand hängt schief."

we are not primarily directed towards the content of the assertion or towards some inner representation of the picture, but towards the picture itself as being so and so. What then happens as we face the picture is that we see that the picture shows up precisely in the way that our assertion presented it – as hanging askew. In this, the assertion demonstrates itself as true, that is, as “being-uncovering”: “To say that an assertion *is true* signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, exhibits, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness. The *being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *being-uncovering*.”⁴⁸⁶

So far, Heidegger has basically recapitulated in his own words Husserl’s account of truth in terms of the interplay between signifying and intuitively fulfilling intentional acts: first, it belongs to our intentional experiences that we are directed at the matters themselves; second, an intention is proved true when the matter intended is intuitively self-given in the way we intended it. Significantly, however, Heidegger goes on to claim that “the uncoveredness of beings within the world is *grounded* in the disclosedness of the world.”⁴⁸⁷ That is, it is only on the basis of its prior disclosure of its world that Dasein can intend and apprehend particular beings as this or that, and, hence, make true or false statements about them. As a result, Heidegger names the “disclosedness of Dasein” – conceived as the condition of truth of all ontic statements about beings – the “most primordial phenomenon of truth.”⁴⁸⁸ However, Heidegger’s grounding of the possibility of true statements in Dasein’s prior understanding of the world raises the crucial question how to understand the possible truth or untruth of Dasein’s primary world-disclosure? This question will, as we shall see, prove a hard one for Heidegger to answer.

The viability of Heidegger’s conception of truth has been the subject of fierce debate ever since Ernst Tugendhat delivered his classical critique

⁴⁸⁶ SZ, p. 218: “Die Aussage *ist wahr*, bedeutet: sie entdeckt das Seiende an ihm selbst. Sie sagt aus, sie zeigt auf, sie ‘läßt sehen’ (*ἀπόφανσις*) das Seiende in seiner Entdecktheit. *Wahrsein (Wahrheit)* der Aussage muß verstanden werden als *entdeckend-sein*.”

⁴⁸⁷ SZ, p. 220: “Die Entdecktheit des innerweltlichen Seienden *gründet* in der Erschlossenheit der Welt.”

⁴⁸⁸ SZ, p. 220: “das ursprünglichste Phänomen der Wahrheit.”

of this conception in the 1960s.⁴⁸⁹ The critique was first articulated in a lecture entitled “Heidegger’s Idea of truth” (*Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit*), which Tugendhat gave in February 1964 at the University of Heidelberg, and it was later elaborated at length in his book *The Concept of Truth in Husserl and Heidegger* (*Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger*).

Let me briefly recount Tugendhat’s central argument.

As Tugendhat sees it, the philosophical novelty and potential of Heidegger’s thinking in relation to Husserl primarily lies in its effort to interrogate the disclosedness of Dasein – its openness for its historical world – as the dimension which conditions the possibility of encountering beings as this or that, and, also, the possibility of our assertions about beings demonstrating themselves as true or false.⁴⁹⁰ However, Tugendhat claims that “Heidegger’s equation of ‘truth’ and ‘disclosedness’ (unconcealment) is untenable and even leads to obfuscating the problem of truth.”⁴⁹¹ According to Tugendhat, Heidegger’s analysis of truth unfolds in two basic steps.

1. Heidegger, Tugendhat notes, takes his starting point in an analysis of propositional truth with the aim of elucidating its ontological conditions. Heidegger’s explication of propositional truth as “being-

⁴⁸⁹ Tugendhat’s critique has been the subject of controversy up to this day. Among Heidegger-scholars, there has from the beginning been a dominating tendency to dismiss Tugendhat’s critique. For some examples of this reaction, see, e.g., Gethmann 1989; Pöggeler 1989; Richter 1989; Wrathall 1999; Dahlstrom 2001; Carman 2003. By contrast, some critics have hailed Tugendhat’s critique as pointing to an essential problem in Heidegger’s thought. Cf., e.g., Habermas 1985 and Apel 1973. Recently, Cristina Lafont has taken up and offered a substantial elaboration of Tugendhat’s critique in her book *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure* from 2000, a book which I will deal with in more detail in the epilogue of this thesis. For a helpful overview of the latest developments in the discussion of Tugendhat and Heidegger, see Smith 2007. As will become evident, I believe that Tugendhat’s critique, notwithstanding some problems and unclarity in his articulation, is basically on target. Hence, I also think that the standard dismissals of Tugendhat listed above turn a blind eye and are unable to respond to the central thrust of his critique, namely that Heidegger without justification cancels out the possibility of questioning the truth or untruth of our historical meaning-horizons, and instead sanctions a dogmatic acceptance of these horizons as a groundless destiny. For an acute critical diagnosis of the standard way of dismissing Tugendhat, cf. Lafont 2000, pp. 115-118.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Tugendhat 1970, pp. 259-271; Tugendhat 1984, pp. 286f.

⁴⁹¹ Tugendhat 1970, p. 260: “Es wird sich zeigen, daß Heideggers Gleichsetzung von ‘Wahrheit’ und ‘Erschlossenheit’ (Unverborgenheit) nicht haltbar ist und sogar dazu führt, das Wahrheitsproblem zu verdecken.”

uncovering” first seems to unfold as a faithful repetition of Husserl’s conception of truth, according to which a proposition is true if it intends the matter precisely as the matter itself is and shows up, and false if it intends the matter in a way that does not comply with how the matter itself is. In this spirit, Heidegger writes: “To say that an assertion is *true* signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself.”⁴⁹² However, as Tugendhat points out, Heidegger also uses formulations where the “in itself” is left out, so that the truth of propositions is said to consist simply in their being “uncovering”: “The *being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *being-uncovering*.”⁴⁹³ Only with this crucial reformulation of the notion of truth, Tugendhat claims, “does Heidegger explicitly distance himself from Husserl and reach his own conception of truth which, from now on, he upholds in this formulation alone.”⁴⁹⁴

Heidegger, Tugendhat goes on, uses the word “uncover” in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, he uses it in a broad sense to signify “showing up” or “exhibiting” in general. “In this sense,” Tugendhat writes, “every assertion uncovers, the false just as well as the true.”⁴⁹⁵ On the other hand, Heidegger uses “uncover” in a narrow sense, according to which only true assertions are “uncovering” while false assertions merely “cover up.” The problem is that Heidegger “does not explicitly distinguish” between the two senses of “uncover.”⁴⁹⁶ While it is only the narrow sense that preserves the possibility of accounting for the truth of propositions, Tugendhat claims that Heidegger primarily exploits the broad sense in his further analyses. This allows Heidegger to describe both true and false assertions as “uncovering”: “Heidegger now says that, in the false assertion, the entity is ‘in a certain sense already uncovered and still not represented.’”⁴⁹⁷ However, Tugendhat claims, Heidegger’s definition of truth as uncovering in the broad sense is unjustified and implies that he

⁴⁹² SZ, p. 218: “Die Aussage *ist wahr*, bedeutet: sie entdeckt das Seiende an ihm selbst.”

⁴⁹³ SZ, p. 218: “*Wahrsein (Wahrheit)* der Aussage muß verstanden werden als *entdeckend-sein*.”

⁴⁹⁴ Tugendhat 1984, p. 289: “Erst mit dieser Wendung hat Heidegger sich deutlich von Husserl abgesetzt und seinen eigenen Wahrheitsbegriff gewonnen, den er fortan nur in dieser Formulierung festhält.”

⁴⁹⁵ Tugendhat 1984, p. 290: “In diesem Sinne ist jede Aussage entdeckend, die falsche so gut wie die wahre.”

⁴⁹⁶ Tugendhat 1984, p. 291: “nicht ausdrücklich unterscheidet.”

⁴⁹⁷ Tugendhat 1984, p. 291: “Statt dessen sagt nun Heidegger, in der falschen Aussage sei das Seiende ‘in gewisser Weise schon entdeckt und doch noch verstellt.’”

loses the capacity to distinguish between the truth and falsity of assertions. In Husserl, the truth or falsity of a proposition essentially depended on *how* it uncovers the matter in question. Hence, a proposition is true if it uncovers the matter as it itself is, and false if it uncovers it as something that it itself is not. As Heidegger defines truth as “being-uncovering” he cannot account for difference between truth and untruth anymore, since the fact that a proposition is uncovering in the broad sense is quite compatible with its being false, namely in so far as it uncovers the matter in a way that does not correspond with how the matter itself is. “It is,” Tugendhat writes, “simply not possible to get around the supplement ‘as it is itself’ in the course of characterizing the true assertion.”⁴⁹⁸

According to Tugendhat, this first step of Heidegger’s argument is decisive. Having defined truth as “uncovering” it is no problem to extend the notion of truth to include all Dasein’s comportments towards beings as well as its basic understanding of the world. Once it has been conceded that the truth of an assertion lies in its being-uncovering “everything else follows almost deductively.”⁴⁹⁹

2. Tugendhat then turns to examining how Heidegger extends his concept of truth, applying it not only to theoretical propositions about present-at-hand entities but also to Dasein’s circumspective concern with ready-to-hand tools. Given Heidegger’s basic thesis that Dasein’s possibility of relating itself to particular beings is grounded in Dasein’s disclosure – its openness to its historical world – Heidegger calls Dasein’s disclosure “the most primordial phenomenon of truth.”⁵⁰⁰ Now, according to Tugendhat, Heidegger’s notion of the primacy of Dasein’s disclosive understanding of world and being gives rise to the central question concerning in what way – if any – we can speak about the truth or untruth of this primary understanding itself. However, he argues, by defining the disclosedness of the world as primordial “truth,” Heidegger covers up and dodges precisely this question:

⁴⁹⁸ Tugendhat 1984, p. 291: “Um den Zusatz ‘so wie es selbst ist’ ist also bei der Charakteristik des wahren Aussagens nicht herumzukommen.” Cf. Tugendhat 1970, p. 334.

⁴⁹⁹ Tugendhat 1984, p. 287: “Ist das einmal zugestanden, so ergibt sich alles weitere dann fast deduktiv.” Cf. also Tugendhat 1970, p. 350.

⁵⁰⁰ SZ, p. 220: “das ursprünglichste Phänomen der Wahrheit.”

If, namely, every propositional truth about intraworldly beings is relative to the historical horizons of our understanding, then the entire truth problem is now concentrated upon these horizons, and the decisive question would have to be: In what way can one also ask about the truth of these horizons, or is it rather the case that the question of truth can no longer be applied to the horizons themselves? For Heidegger, this question becomes invalid through the fact that he already gives the name of truth to the respective understanding as a disclosedness in and for itself. Thus, on the one hand, this makes it possible for us to still talk of truth in connection with understanding and its horizons. On the other hand, it is realized that we do not need to ask about the truth of these horizons, since that would only mean asking about the truth of a truth.⁵⁰¹

Heidegger's equation of disclosedness and truth, Tugendhat claims, not only covers up the question of the truth of our historical horizons. By calling Dasein's disclosedness "primordial truth" Heidegger in the end also sanctions the dogmatic acceptance of our factual historical horizons in their arbitrariness and relativity, thereby renouncing the crucial task of critically interrogating these horizons.⁵⁰² Tugendhat then goes on to argue that the problem of Heidegger's account of truth is solidified and aggravated in his later writings, where the clearing of historical being is conceived as the primary ungroundable event of truth, which conditions the possibility of all ontic truth and untruth.

What should we make of this severe critique?

As I will argue, I believe Tugendhat is right in what I conceive of as the central charge of his critique, namely that Heidegger unjustifiably cancels out the possibility of interrogating the truth of our historical

⁵⁰¹ Tugendhat 1984, p. 295: "wenn nämlich jede Aussagewahrheit über innerweltlich Seiendes relativ ist auf die geschichtlichen Horizonten unseres Verstehens, dann konzentriert sich jetzt das ganze Wahrheitsproblem auf diese Horizonte, und die entscheidende Frage müßte doch nun sein: in welcher Weise kann man auch nach der Wahrheit dieser Horizonte fragen, oder aber läßt sich die Wahrheitsfrage auf die Horizonte selbst nicht mer anwenden? Diese Frage wird für Heidegger dadurch hinfällig, daß er das jeweilige Verstehen als Erschlossenheit schon an und für sich eine Wahrheit nennt; so wird einerseits erreicht, daß wir auch beim Verstehen und seinen Horizonten noch von Wahrheit sprechen können, andererseits daß wir dessen unbedürftig werden, nach der Wahrheit dieser Horizonte zu fragen, denn das hieße ja, nach der Wahrheit einer Wahrheit fragen."

⁵⁰² Cf. Tugendhat 1984, pp. 296f.

meaning-horizons, and that this leads him to dogmatically postulate our historical world as a groundless destiny. Still, it seems to me that Tugendhat's conception of the first step of Heidegger's analysis and his way of articulating the second, central step involve some misconceptions.

To begin with, I think it is clear that Heidegger in his basic argumentation unequivocally accepts the traditional view that the truth of our assertions about beings consists in their agreement or correspondence with the beings in question.⁵⁰³ As the example of the assertion about the picture on the wall showed, it is quite possible for Heidegger to distinguish between true and untrue assertions: whereas the former present the entities as something that they themselves are, the latter present them as something that they are not. However, what he claims is that it is precisely Dasein's prior understanding of the world that makes both truth and falsity possible: it is only in so far as we already possess a pre-understanding of the meanings in terms of which beings can show up as what they are that we can take a being as something that is or mistake it for something that it is not.⁵⁰⁴ Since Heidegger's systematic argument is

⁵⁰³ On this point I agree with Wrathall 1999 and Carman 2003 who both argue – against Tugendhat – that Heidegger does not replace the traditional concept of propositional truth as correspondence, but rather offers an account of the ontological conditions of such correspondence. However, it seems to me that neither of them is able to offer a persuasive response to Tugendhat's central charge that Heidegger unjustifiably forfeits the question of the truth/ untruth of Dasein's primary world-disclosure. Whereas Wrathall does not recognize the challenge but is satisfied with pointing to Dasein's disclosedness as the condition of propositional truth, Carman attempts to articulate the normativity of Dasein's world-disclosure in terms of what he calls "hermeneutic salience," i.e., "the way in which what we say and think is always organized and articulated according to some dominant interpretation of things that holds sway in our local discursive community" (Carman 2003, p. 261). However, in so writing it seems to me that Carman simply restates Heidegger's idea that the normativity of our open world consists in its factual subsistence as our historical context and destiny, and that the truth or untruth of this understanding cannot be conceived in terms of a transhistorical relation to the matters themselves. It is precisely this idea that Tugendhat – quite rightly – objects to.

⁵⁰⁴ This point is accentuated in Heidegger's lecture course "Logic: The Question of Truth" (*Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*), delivered in the winter term 1925-26, where he develops his analysis of the as-structure of understanding precisely in order to account for the possibility of falsity as well as truth: "What makes *logos* able to be false, i.e., able to cover-over at all? The indirect outcome of our explanation so far is that *logos* is not through-and-through true, i.e., uncovering. Rather, it uncovers only in so far as it can also cover-over. In a somewhat exaggerated formulation: The statement can be true (can uncover) at all, only because it can also cover-over – only because, as

perfectly clear on this point is, Tugendhat's critique of the ambiguity of Heidegger's idea of truth as "being-uncovering" gives us no reason to doubt Heidegger's acceptance of the correspondence theory of truth as concerns ontic propositions. In fact, as we shall see, the ambiguity that Tugendhat detects stems from another source.

This also implies that Heidegger's rejection of the question of the truth of Dasein's disclosure of the world is not, as Tugendhat claims, the result of Heidegger's supposedly ambiguous definition of propositional truth as "being-uncovering," which would have concealed the decisive problematic of truth in advance. Rather, Heidegger's cancelling out of the question of the truth of Dasein's disclosure stems directly and deliberately from his central argument: since Dasein's prior understanding of its historical world determines what it can experience as meaningful beings it is no longer possible to conceive of the truth of this understanding in terms of a correspondence with beings. Moreover, Heidegger does not call Dasein's disclosure "primordial truth" as a result of a transposition of his prior ambiguous notion of truth as "being-uncovering" to Dasein's disclosure. Instead, I think it is much more plausible to assume that Heidegger is tempted to call Dasein's disclosure "truth" precisely to accentuate its immunity to the question of truth: it is the primordial truth which conditions all ontic truth and untruth.⁵⁰⁵

a statement, it operates *a priori* in the 'as'" (*Was macht es, daß der λόγος falsch sein kann, d.h. überhaupt verdecken kann? Aus dem bisher Erörterten geht indirekt hervor: Der λόγος ist nicht von Hause aus wahr, d.h. entdeckend, sondern er kann entdecken als etwas, das auch verdecken kann. Extrem gormuliert: Die Aussage kann nur überhaupt wahr sein, entdecken, weil sie auch verdecken kann, d.h. weil sie qua Aussage a priori im 'als' sich bewegt*) (GA 21, p. 135).

⁵⁰⁵ Later, in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (*Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens*) from 1964 Heidegger retracts from his equation of "truth" with the "unconcealment" or "clearing" of being. Here he writes: "Insofar as truth is understood in the traditional 'natural' sense as the correspondence of knowledge with beings, demonstrated in beings; but also insofar as truth is interpreted as the certainty of the knowledge of being; *alētheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the clearing, may not be equated with truth. Rather, *alētheia*, unconcealment thought as clearing, first grants the possibility of truth. For truth itself, like being and thinking, can be what it is only in the element of the clearing. [...] *Alētheia*, unconcealment thought as the clearing of presence, is not yet truth" (*Sofern man Wahrheit im überlieferten 'natürlichen' Sinn als die am Seienden ausgewiesene Übereinstimmung der Erkenntnis mit dem Seienden versteht, aber auch, sofern die Wahrheit als die Gewißheit des Wissens vom Sein ausgelegt wird, darf die Αλήθεια, die Unverborgenheit im Sinne der Lichtung, nicht mit der Wahrheit gleichgesetzt werden. Vielmehr gewährt die Αλήθεια, die Unverborgenheit als Lichtung gedacht, erst die Möglichkeit von Wahrheit. Denn die Wahrheit kann selbst ebenso wie Sein und Denken nur im*

Against the backdrop of these reflections we can also see that the ambivalence in Heidegger's articulation of truth as "being-uncovering" is not really an ambivalence in his notion of propositional truth. What Tugendhat interprets as an ambiguity is, I think, better seen as a certain unclarity in Heidegger's way of referring to the different levels – ontological/ontical – interacting in every truth-relation to beings. According to Heidegger, whether our beliefs or assertions about beings are true or false they are always already guided by an understanding which presents the possible meanings in terms of which entities can show up, and which makes true or false assertions possible. This is why Heidegger can say – in a somewhat unclear manner – that even our false propositions about beings are always in a certain sense uncovering although they misrepresent the particular beings in question.

All that said, I agree completely with Tugendhat's main thesis that Heidegger cancels out the possibility of asking about the truth or untruth of the historical meaning-horizons into which we are always already thrown. Tugendhat's diagnosis ends with the thesis that Heidegger erroneously excludes the question of the truth of our historical world and advocates an affirmation of our factual world as a groundless destiny. However, although this thesis does contain a lot of truth, it seems to me that Tugendhat does not recognize the extent to which the question of the "truth" or "bindingness" of historical being remains a decisive philosophical problem for Heidegger. Although Heidegger cancels out the possibility of conceiving of the truth or untruth of our historical world in terms of a correspondence with how the entities themselves are, he nevertheless continues to uphold a difference between the prejudiced understanding of being in which we first and foremost live, and the possibility of attaining a primordial understanding of being through a destructive appropriation of the originary meanings harbored by the origin

Element der Lichtung das sein, was sie ist. [...] Αλήθεια, Unverborgenheit als Lichtung von Anwesenheit gedacht, ist noch nicht Wahrheit) (GA 14, pp. 85f.). However, Heidegger's late retraction from his earlier equation of "truth" with Dasein's "disclosedness" or with the "unconcealment" of being, which he now considers misleading, does not imply any radical transformation of the substance of his thinking on this point. Indeed, Heidegger continues to conceive of the clearing/unconcealment of being – which cannot itself be true or false – as the condition of possibility of all ontic truth in the sense of correspondence. Cf. Dahlstrom 2007, pp. 72f.; cf. also Lafont 2000, pp. 116n9, 169-175.

of our history. In so doing, he cannot sidestep the question of how to distinguish between a prejudiced and a primordial understanding of historical being. In what follows, I will try to show how Heidegger's difficulties with addressing this question in *Being and Time* undercuts both his program of historical destruction and his account of authentic existence, and gives rise to deep ambiguities in the project of fundamental ontology. I will also argue that his later thinking is to a very large extent an attempt to address precisely the question of how historical being can be given as an ultimate binding destiny beyond our mere prejudices.

2.5 Heidegger's Method

The question of Heidegger's method in *Being and Time* is at bottom the question of the fate of phenomenology during this central period of his thinking. It is a complex question involving many different aspects: How should we understand Heidegger's explicit appropriation of phenomenology as the method of *Being and Time*? What about his reinterpretation of phenomenology as historical interpretation and destruction? Does his program for a historical thinking imply a total break with Husserl's method of intuitive reflection and description? What is the relation between Heidegger's methodological self-understanding and the concrete manner in which he pursues his investigations?

The aim of this chapter is to unfold and answer these questions. After a review of the long-standing debate over the issue of Heidegger's phenomenology in the secondary literature, I will begin my treatment by looking at Heidegger's explicit articulation of his method in the introduction to *Being and Time*. I then go on to explicate what I take to be the basic ambiguity between, on the one hand, Heidegger's program of a radically historical thinking and, on the other hand, his de facto employment of a phenomenological method of intuitive reflection in his concrete investigations. Hereby, I trace the roots of this ambiguity to Heidegger's inability to account for the givenness of originary or true historical meanings as something distinct from the prejudices handed down by the tradition.

Two Interpretations

Since the beginning of Heidegger-research, the question of the method of *Being and Time* has constituted the central stage where the discussion about Heidegger's relation to phenomenology has been played out. The discussion has for a long time been characterized by a basic tension between two opposed tendencies of interpretations – both of which we are by now familiar with. On the one hand, we have the *transcendental-phenomenological interpretation*, which holds that Heidegger's methodological approach in the Marburg years and in *Being and Time* is at bottom a faithful continuation of Husserl's phenomenological method, so that the existential analytic basically transpires as an intuitive reflection which describes and explicates the essential – universal and necessary – structures of Dasein's experience. On the other hand, we have the *hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation*, the central claim of which is that Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology implies a break with the Husserlian belief in intuitive access to the essential structures of experience. Instead – such is the thesis – Heidegger develops a radically historical mode of thinking, which proceeds through a hermeneutical explication of the historical pre-understanding always already guiding our experience, and through a destruction of the prejudiced tradition, which allows us to access its historical sources and origins. In this, the structures and meanings exposed by the hermeneutic-deconstructive approach will always be historically situated and finite in character.

In what follows, I am going to develop my own explication on the backdrop of the above interpretations. Not only do they dominate the debate about Heidegger's phenomenology. They are also – regardless of our final assessment of their relative merits – qualified in the sense that they answer to and articulate the two basic impulses informing and shaping Heidegger's understanding of his philosophical method. Of course, there are also other interpretations available, depicting Heidegger argumentative strategy in terms of, e.g., Kantian transcendental arguments⁵⁰⁶ or pragmatist interventions.⁵⁰⁷ Still, such interpretations generally tend to pass over or misinterpret both Heidegger's

⁵⁰⁶ Cf., e.g., Okrent 1988, pp. 4-9, 242-253; Philipse 1998, pp. 121-144.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf., e.g., Rorty 1991, pp. 9-84.

methodological self-understanding as well as his concrete way of doing philosophy in *Being and Time*.

I will present two representative examples of the opposing interpretational tendencies named above. As a qualified example of the transcendental-phenomenological reading, I choose Søren Overgaard's recent study *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* which offers a careful examination of Heidegger method in *Being and Time*.⁵⁰⁸ As a good example of the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation, I present Charles Guignon's clear and thorough account – more hermeneutic than deconstructive – of Heidegger's method in his book *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*.⁵⁰⁹

Søren Overgaard's basic thesis is that “Heidegger (at least the Heidegger of *SZ*) is a transcendental phenomenologist.”⁵¹⁰

According to Overgaard, the guiding concern of Husserl's phenomenology is not epistemological – to prove that our subjective acts of consciousness can reach outer reality – but ontological: to understand the being of the world through investigating how it manifests itself in our concrete experiences. Such an investigation becomes possible via the *epoché* and the *phenomenological reduction*. Overgaard argues that the function of Husserl's *epoché* is to “lock up” or “bracket”⁵¹¹ – not exclude or ignore – our natural unquestioning belief in the existence of the world in order to thematize how the world is given in our experience.⁵¹² Whereas the *epoché* opens up the possibility of studying the world as *noema* – as it is experienced – the *reduction* means enquiring back into the structures of transcendental subjectivity as the place where the world manifests itself. The reduction, Overgaard maintains, does not take the form of a direct reflection on the experiences in which the world is given but rather proceeds by way of an indirect regressive argumentation, which, taking the bracketed object as its “transcendental guiding clue” asks “*what* [...]”

⁵⁰⁸ For other representatives of the transcendental phenomenological reading, cf., e.g., Gethmann 1974; Crowell 2001; Dahlstrom 2001.

⁵⁰⁹ For other texts defending the hermeneutic-deconstructive reading, cf., e.g., Sallis 1978; Bernasconi 1989; Figal 1992; Ruin 1994; Lafont 2000.

⁵¹⁰ Overgaard 2004, p. 108; cf. also p. 5.

⁵¹¹ Overgaard 2004, p. 43.

⁵¹² Cf. Overgaard 2004, p. 56.

subjectivity must, so to speak, 'look like' in order to be the experiencing subjectivity of such an object."⁵¹³

Overgaard goes on to argue that Heidegger's fundamental ontology rests firmly on Husserl's phenomenological method. Heidegger's question of being involves two parts: first, the question concerning being – the different modes of being as well as the unitary sense of being – of all beings; second, the question concerning the nature of our understanding of being. As concerns the first question, Overgaard argues that Heidegger essentially makes use of Husserl's *epoché* to gain access to the modes of being. It is only by locking up our natural understanding of beings as present-at-hand objects that it becomes possible to thematize beings such as they manifest themselves in our experience. And, to intuitively explicate the modes of "manifestations of beings" of different entities is, for Heidegger, precisely to explicate their "modes of being."⁵¹⁴ As to the second question, Overgaard maintains that Heidegger investigates the conditions for understanding being "*in and through a phenomenological*

⁵¹³ Overgaard 2004, p. 52. Here I want to note that I find Overgaard's account of the phenomenological reduction as a form of regressive argumentation – *not* as a direct reflection on our experiences – problematic, both exegetically and philosophically. What motivates Overgaard's account is clearly his fear that accentuating the reflective character of the reduction would easily lead one to reduce the being of the world to the subjective acts of consciousness as something that could be studied directly in separation from the objects of these acts. However, although Overgaard's fear is not unfounded, and ultimately springs from the deep ambiguity that we have seen characterizing Husserl's own conception of the correlation between noema and noesis, his solution is not very convincing: if the experienced world – the noema – really is the sole phenomenal content of our experience, then it is totally unclear how a regressive construction of the structures of subjectivity could transpire without any reflective seeing. To escape Husserl's uncontrolled oscillation between the noema and noesis – conceived as the overly detached poles of the phenomenal correlation – it does not help to insist on the phenomenal primacy of the noema. Instead, I believe we can steer clear of the danger of subjectivism if we radically set out from our concrete experiences – without any preconception of the general structure of experience in terms of subject and object – in order to investigate, through direct reflection, how such features as "object," "act," and "subject" interact as more or less basic aspects of this experience. Here, there seems to be nothing that prevents us from grasping subjectivity directly as long as we only attend to it in so far as it shows itself as a relevant aspect of the intentional experience under investigation. To call such an investigation reflective is no problem if what is meant thereby is merely an explication of the structures of our experience – with no claims involved concerning the primacy or autonomy of transcendental subjectivity.

⁵¹⁴ Overgaard 2004, p. 82.

reduction."⁵¹⁵ Heidegger thus takes his point of departure in an intuitive explication of the modes of being of entities, and, taking these as transcendental guidelines, carries out a regressive investigation of the structures of Dasein that make understanding of being possible.

Against this background it is not surprising that Overgaard attributes only a secondary role to Heidegger's program of destruction. According to Overgaard, the task of the destruction consists in dismantling our traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand by returning to the "original motives and experiences" constituting the experiential basis for this understanding.⁵¹⁶ However, although it is an important task to critically appropriate and delimit the insights of the prevailing tradition, Overgaard claims that the destruction does not belong to the "methodological core" of Heidegger's method.⁵¹⁷ "The 'destruction' is *not* an *indispensable* methodological component in any investigation of being, at least the way the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* understood such an investigation."⁵¹⁸ To be able to commence at all, Overgaard argues, the destruction presupposes a "phenomenological basic experience" of the being of beings as readiness-to-hand as well as a grasp of the traditional understanding of being – otherwise it could never even identify the tradition as an interpretation of *being* to be destructed. That is, the destruction presupposes that we already have direct phenomenological access to the being of beings, such that this access is prior to and independent of any historical destruction of the prejudiced tradition we live in.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁵ Overgaard 2004, p. 94.

⁵¹⁶ Overgaard 2004, p. 97.

⁵¹⁷ Overgaard 2004, p. 100.

⁵¹⁸ Overgaard 2004, p. 98.

⁵¹⁹ In the introduction to his book Overgaard takes up the possible objection that his study largely ignores the question of historicity, which according to many commentators – including Heidegger himself – constitutes *the* main theme in regard to which Heidegger and Husserl part ways. Overgaard states that he "fully recognizes" the importance of the "problems of temporality and historicity" but that the importance of the problem in fact constitutes "a reason for setting it apart for discrete study, rather than giving it what is bound to be inadequate treatment" (Overgaard 2004, p. 8). However, although Overgaard claims to endorse the "crucial importance" of the problem of historicity, we already know that history and destruction will only play a secondary and complementary role in Overgaard's conception of Heidegger's phenomenological method, and will never enter the independent core of phenomenological seeing. Overgaard's decision to postpone the treatment of history

Although Heidegger basically remains faithful to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, Overgaard also claims that he critically develops it in two respects. First, Overgaard claims, Heidegger – as opposed to Husserl – critically interrogates our natural understanding of beings as self-subsisting objects and radically asks the question concerning the modes of being of beings. This allows him to make a clean sweep of Husserl's layer ontology and maintain that the experienced meaningful object does not consist in an additional layer of meaning and value added on to a basic layer of sense perception. Instead, the experienced meaning constitutes the object in itself, so that all the sensory or material traits of the object appear as what they are only as aspects of this primary meaning. Second, Heidegger supplements Husserl's method with a "terminological epoché." By this Overgaard means that Heidegger, to a much larger extent than Husserl, attends to the relevance of linguistic expression for our phenomenological understanding. More specifically, Overgaard argues that Heidegger's method of "formal indication" is designed to shape expressions which are able to keep focus on the ontological matter of phenomenology and fend off possible misconceptions of the structures of being in terms of ontic relations between beings.

In contrast to Overgaard, Charles Guignon presents Heidegger's approach in *Being and Time* as an essentially historical mode of thinking determined by and explicating the finite historical contexts of meaning we live in. In accord with this, he largely ignores the role of Husserl – whom he interprets as engaged in a Cartesian effort to ground our knowledge of the world in the "apodictic evidence found in transcendental subjectivity"⁵²⁰ – in Heidegger's development, instead highlighting Dilthey and the nineteenth century historical school (Ranke and Droysen) as seminal influences on Heidegger.

According to Guignon, Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world implies a radical break with the traditional picture of the human being as an isolated contemplative subject faced with the task of correctly representing reality. Against this, Heidegger argues that Dasein is from the

and temporality thus rests firmly on the basic systematic tendency of his interpretation. Were Overgaard to take seriously Heidegger's basic conviction that historical being essentially determines all phenomenological intuition, it would be impossible to keep the problem of phenomenology and the problem of history apart.

⁵²⁰ Guignon 1983, p. 43.

outset – and as a condition for all purely theoretical observation and knowledge – a being acting with implicit practical competence in a familiar world. The historical networks of meaning constituting the world open up the possibilities in terms of which Dasein can understand itself and other beings: “Dasein is always ‘thrown’ into a world of cultural and historical meanings which make up the horizon in which anything is intelligible, but which cannot itself be grounded by something beyond that horizon.”⁵²¹ Given that all understanding is determined by the historical contexts we occupy, Heidegger gives up the Husserlian idea of a direct “intuition of meanings and essences presented to consciousness”: “Our understanding is always discursive, never intuitive.”⁵²²

Heidegger’s method in *Being and Time*, Guignon maintains, involves four stages: (1) a *descriptive* stage in which Dasein’s everyday factual understanding of itself and of being is exhibited; (2) a *hermeneutic* stage in which this factual self-understanding, which is first and foremost characterized by traditional prejudices and distortions, is interpreted in order to find the normally hidden background of practical competence and historical understanding that conditions our experience of entities as given; (3) a *dialectical* stage in which we are led back to retrieve the ultimate historical origins and sources of our understanding of being which constitute the bedrock of all interpretation; (4) a recurrent *diagnosis* of our seemingly self-evident traditional understanding, which exposes its historical roots and thereby helps to dissolve the pseudo-problems that arise from it.⁵²³

For Heidegger, Guignon argues, the historical nature of understanding implies that the task of destructing the history of ontology takes on a primary role in executing the project of fundamental ontology. Since the investigation of *Being and Time* is “embedded in the history of ontology and dependent on it for its findings, it must be seen as an unfolding of possibilities already implicit in the tradition.”⁵²⁴ The destruction has both a diagnostic and a dialectical function: on the one hand, it diagnoses the prejudices of the tradition by tracing their roots in Greek ontology; on the other hand, it retrieves the most primordial possibilities harbored by our

⁵²¹ Guignon 1983, p. 60.

⁵²² Guignon 1983, pp. 67, 221; cf. also p. 70.

⁵²³ Guignon 1983, p. 68.

⁵²⁴ Guignon 1983, p. 225.

heritage, which the tradition has forgotten and covered up.⁵²⁵ Whereas the transcendental analysis of the temporal structure of Dasein undertaken in part one of *Being and Time* provides the “guideline” for destructing the history of ontology, the aim of the destruction – to be undertaken in part two – is to “authenticate the finding of the transcendental stage by showing their historical origins.” Only thus can we be sure that the results of our interpretation really capture the most primordial possibilities of our heritage. Hence, Guignon claims, “far from being a historical appendix [...] the destruction contains the concrete ontological research that makes up fundamental ontology.”⁵²⁶

In the end, Guignon believes that *Being and Time* is doomed to failure for the reason that Heidegger is still unable or unwilling to apply – in a fully consistent manner – his radical insights into the historical nature of understanding to his own project of fundamental ontology. Although Heidegger sharply criticizes the traditional aim of philosophy to attain universal and ahistorical knowledge, he nevertheless holds on to the hope of attaining what Guignon calls a “transhistorical” understanding of the essential structures of Dasein and the sense of being.⁵²⁷ This is supposed to be possible not through a direct seeing but through a retrieval of “*the* underlying meaning of history” found at the Greek origin of Western history and conditioning every subsequent understanding of being.⁵²⁸ However, Guignon claims, this “transcendental historicism” is unviable – as Heidegger himself also later comes to realize. Once we appropriate the results of Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s historical being-in-the-world, we see that every interpretation is a product of and relative to the specific historical context of meanings, values, and interests that it springs from.⁵²⁹ As a result, it becomes impossible to uphold the guiding ambition of *Being and Time* to uncover once and for all *the* transhistorical structures of Dasein and *the* sense of being as such. Instead, Guignon suggests, we should understand the positive achievements of Heidegger’s magnum opus as follows: on the one hand, the analysis of Dasein – situated as it is within a specific historical context – offers “an impressive and forceful

⁵²⁵ Cf. Guignon 1983, p. 225.

⁵²⁶ Guignon 1983, pp. 223, 231, 225.

⁵²⁷ Guignon 1983, p. 215.

⁵²⁸ Guignon 1983, p. 232.

⁵²⁹ Cf. Guignon 1983, pp. 217, 233-234.

interpretation of our current modes of self-understanding”; on the other hand, the account of historicity and of the task of destruction allow us to liberate ourselves from the self-evident assumptions of the present, and opens us to the range of alternative possibilities contained by our history for reinterpreting our current situation.⁵³⁰

Heidegger’s Methodological Self-Understanding

In the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger presents the method of the book as phenomenological, whereby he traces the meaning of the expression “phenomenology” back to its Greek roots. Whereas *phainomenon* means “that which shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest,”⁵³¹ *logos* signifies a discourse the function of which is to *apophainesthai*, to “let see” or “make manifest” what the discourse it about.⁵³² Hence, he presents the following formal definition of phenomenology:

Thus phenomenology means *apophainesthai ta phainomena* – to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. This is the formal meaning of that branch of research which calls itself “phenomenology.” But here we are expressing nothing else than the maxim formulated above: “To the things themselves!”⁵³³

For Heidegger, phenomenology thus signifies a discourse which does nothing but attempt to exhibit that which shows itself as the phenomena of our concrete experiences. To study the phenomena is to study the matters themselves as they are given to us as meaningful and intelligible. In reverse, to ask about matters beyond or irrespectively or their phenomenal givenness is to resort to groundless construction and

⁵³⁰ Guignon 1983, p. 244; cf. also p. 246.

⁵³¹ SZ, p. 28: “das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare.”

⁵³² SZ, p. 32.

⁵³³ SZ, p. 34: “Phänomenologie sagt dann: ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα: Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen. Das ist der formale Sinn der Forschung, die sich den Namen Phänomenologie gibt. So kommt aber nichts anderes zum Ausdruck als die oben formulierte Maxime: ‘Zu den Sachen selbst!’”

speculation: “‘Behind’ the phenomena of phenomenology there is essentially nothing else; on the other hand, what is to become a phenomenon can be hidden.”⁵³⁴

Yet how should we understand Heidegger's proclamation of himself as a phenomenologist?

We already know that Heidegger's appropriation of the term “phenomenology” in the early 1920s, invoking its Greek etymology, goes hand in hand with a critical dismissal of Husserl's belief in intuitive givenness, and with the development of a hermeneutic phenomenology which understands itself as historical in a radical sense. Indeed, Heidegger's formal definition of phenomenology in *Being and Time* does not imply any recourse to the idea of a direct seeing as he is careful to point out: “In giving an existential significance to ‘sight,’ we have merely drawn upon *the* peculiar feature of seeing, that it lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves.”⁵³⁵ Hence, as Heidegger presents his method as “phenomenology,” this word must be taken formally as signifying a mode of investigation which exhibits its matters such as these are concretely given in our experience – whereby the nature of this givenness it still left undetermined.

Heidegger begins to deformalize his formal concept of phenomenology by specifying what constitutes the specific phenomena of phenomenology:

What is it that by its very essence is *necessarily* the theme whenever we exhibit something *explicitly*? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground. Yet that which remains *hidden* in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets *covered up* again, or which shows itself only “*in disguise*,” is not

⁵³⁴ SZ, p. 36: “‘Hinter’ den Phänomenen der Phänomenologie steht wesentlich nichts anderes, wohl aber kann das, was Phänomen werden soll, verborgen sein.”

⁵³⁵ SZ, p. 147: “Für die existentielle Bedeutung von Sicht ist nur *die* Eigenschaft des Sehens in Anspruch genommen, daß es das ihm zugänglich Seiende an ihm selbst unverdeckt begegnen läßt.”

just this entity or that, but rather the *being* of beings, as our previous observations have shown.⁵³⁶

In short, the task of Heidegger's phenomenology is to exhibit being as the hidden ground of beings. Since our experience of beings is always already guided by an understanding of being, and since this understanding is first and foremost unthematic and prejudiced, the task of explicating being becomes an essential prerequisite for attaining a transparent understanding of ourselves and the world. This implies an intimate relationship between phenomenology and ontology: whereas "phenomenology" is "the science of the being of beings – ontology," "ontology is only possible as phenomenology."⁵³⁷ Hence, Heidegger's claim is not only that phenomenology is the qualified method of ontology but also that being is essentially the phenomenon of phenomenology. If all our phenomenal understanding of beings is ultimately organized by our understanding of being, then being constitutes the ultimate stratum of every phenomenon. This is why Heidegger can state that "phenomenological questioning in its innermost tendency itself leads to the question of the being of the intentional and before anything else to the question of the sense of being as such."⁵³⁸ This is also why he maintains that Husserl's neglect of the

⁵³⁶ SZ, p. 35: "Was ist seinem Wesen nach *notwendig* Thema einer *ausdrücklichen* Aufweisung? Offenbar solches, was sich zunächst und zumeist gerade *nicht* zeigt, was gegenüber dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, *verborgen* ist, aber zugleich etwas ist, was wesenhaft zu dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, gehört, so zwar, daß es seinen Sinn und Grund ausmacht. Was aber in einem ausnehmenden Sinne *verborgen* bleibt oder wieder in die *Verdeckung* zurückfällt oder nur '*verstellt*' sich zeigt, ist nichts dieses oder jenes Seiende, sondern, wie die voranstehenden Betrachtungen gezeigt haben, das *Sein* des Seienden."

⁵³⁷ SZ, pp. 37, 35.

⁵³⁸ GA 20, p. 184: "Das phänomenologische Fragen führt seinem innersten Zuge nach selbst zur Frage nach dem Sein des Intentionalen und vor allem vor die Frage nach dem Sinn des Seins als solchem." Beginning with his early Freiburg conception of phenomenology as *Ursprungswissenschaft* – a science of origins – Heidegger understands phenomenology as essentially concerned with that which is basic and determining in our experience of phenomenal meaning. On account of his explication of Aristotle, Heidegger starts to conceive of this basic determinant in terms of our understanding of being. Since this understanding determines all our phenomenal experience, Heidegger calls being – or the "*archai*" as he says in the context of interpreting Aristotle – "the primordially evident" (*originär evidente*) (GA 62, p. 382). In "Prolegomena" he explicitly suggests that the question of being grows out of the effort to "question to the end" (*Zu-Ende-fragen*) that belongs to the very sense of the principle of phenomenology: "But we come to the question of being as such only if

question of being makes his transcendental phenomenology “unphenomenological.”⁵³⁹ Provided that our factual understanding of being always already links all our seeing of phenomena, we cannot skip the question of being without our investigation falling into prejudice. Whatever pains we take to look clearly at the matters themselves, our prior factual understanding of being will always already have determined what we will be able to see and comprehend.

But what does the phenomenological exhibition and articulation of the being of Dasein and the sense of being amount to more precisely? According to Heidegger, the phenomenology of *Being and Time* is a “hermeneutics,” which it to say that it transpires by way of “interpretation”: “the meaning of phenomenological description as a method is *interpretation*. [...] The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutics* in the primordial sense of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting.”⁵⁴⁰ What does this mean?

As we have already seen, “interpretation” for Heidegger signifies the thematic explication of what we “understand.” In elaborating this notion he strongly emphasizes that all direct intuitive seeing is grounded in understanding: “By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding [...] we have deprived pure intuition of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. ‘Intuition’ and ‘thinking’ are both derivatives of understanding, and already rather remote ones. Even the phenomenological ‘intuition of essences’ is grounded in existential understanding.”⁵⁴¹ In order to be able to see something as a meaningful phenomenon we already need to have a preceding understanding of the world and of being that contains the

our inquiry is guided by the drive to *question to the end* or to *inquiry into the beginning*, that is, if it is determined by the sense of the phenomenological principle radically understood” (*Die Frage nach dem Sein als solchem ist aber nur zu gewinnen, wenn das Fragen geleitet ist von einem Zu-Ende-fragen, bzw. in den Anfang Hineinfragen, d.h. wenn es bestimmt ist von dem radikal ergriffenen Sinn des phänomenologischen Prinzips*) (GA 20, p. 186).

⁵³⁹ GA 20, p. 178.

⁵⁴⁰ SZ, p. 37: “der methodische Sinn der phänomenologischen Deskription ist *Auslegung*. [...] Phänomenologie des Daseins ist *Hermeneutik* in der ursprünglichen Bedeutung des Wortes, wonach es das Geschäft der Auslegung bezeichnet.”

⁵⁴¹ SZ, p. 147: “Dadurch, daß gezeigt wird, wie alle Sicht primär im Verstehen gründet [...] ist dem puren Anschauen sein Vorrang genommen, der noëtisch dem traditionellen ontologischen Vorrang des Vorhandenen entspricht. ‘Anschauung’ und ‘Denken’ sind beide schon entfernte Derivate des Verstehens. Auch die phänomenologische ‘Wesensschau’ gründet im existentialen Verstehen.”

meaning-possibilities in terms of which beings can show up as this or that. “Interpretation” signifies the activity of thematically explicating this preceding understanding – which is first and foremost unthematic – and articulate as what beings are understood: “That which is disclosed in understanding – that which is understood – is already accessible in such a way that its ‘as which’ can be made to stand out explicitly.”⁵⁴² As such, interpretation is also characterized by a “fore-structure.” Given that all our phenomenal experience is guided by the factual pre-understanding that we live in, and which cannot itself be intuitively grounded, the interpretation must take the form of an explication of our factual historical pre-understanding. For Heidegger’s project this means that it must take its starting point in an explication of the normally hidden and vague factual understanding of being – the being of Dasein and the sense of being – that we always already live in. It must lay bare and spell out the understanding of being guiding us when we experience and talk about ourselves and other beings in the world.

According to Heidegger, however, our factual understanding of being is not only unthematic and hidden; it is also pervaded by the prejudices and concealments of the tradition which we primarily tend to grow up into and take over in a blind and unquestioning manner. The tradition, he writes, “takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn.”⁵⁴³ The upshot of this tendency to take over the tradition as self-evident without questioning its sources, is that the tradition of philosophy has been dominated by the original Greek ontology in a nearly autistic fashion, so that our whole contemporary conceptuality is still determined by the Aristotelian understanding of being as presence-at-hand. It is not, then, enough to explicate our factual understanding of being since this is fraught with the prejudices of the tradition. Hence, Heidegger argues that in order to liberate ourselves from the tradition and get access to a more primordial understanding of being –

⁵⁴² SZ, p. 149: “Das im Verstehen Erschlossene, das Verstandene ist immer schon so zugänglich, daß an ihm sein ‘als was’ ausdrücklich abgehoben werden kann.”

⁵⁴³ SZ, p. 21. “Sie [die Tradition] überantwortet das Überkommene der Selbstverständlichkeit und verlegt den Zugang zu den ursprünglichen ‘Quellen’, daraus die überlieferten Kategorien und Begriffe z.T. in echter Weise geschöpft wurden.”

since we cannot rely on any direct seeing of the matters – we need to carry out a destruction of the history of ontology:

If the question of being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking *the question of being as our clue*, we are to *deconstruct* the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of being – the ways that have guided us ever since.⁵⁴⁴

In short, the aim of the destruction is to trace our factual traditional understanding of being back through the history of ontology to its historical sources or origins at the Greek beginning of Western philosophy. The destruction has a twofold task. First, the task is to dismantle our traditional conception of being as presence-at-hand until we arrive at its origin in Aristotle's thinking. In so doing, we become able to grasp the primordial experiences at the basis of this conception and, hence, achieve a concrete understanding of it in its limited validity. Second, by delimiting the traditional understanding of being it becomes possible to "bring ourselves into full possession of our ownmost possibilities of questioning."⁵⁴⁵ In the end, the decisive methodological step of Heidegger's fundamental ontological investigation consists in a "retrieval" or "repetition" (*Wiederholung*) of the most primordial historical possibilities of understanding being harbored by the Greek beginning of our heritage.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ SZ, p. 22: "Soll für die Seinsfrage selbst die Durchsichtigkeit ihrer eigenen Geschichte gewonnen werden, dann bedarf es der Auflockerung der verhärteten Tradition und der Ablösung der durch sie gezeitigten Verdeckungen. Diese Aufgabe verstehen wir als die *am Leitfaden der Seinsfrage* sich vollziehende *Destruktion* des überlieferten Bestandes der antiken Ontologie auf die ursprünglichen Erfahrungen, in denen die ersten und fortan leitenden Bestimmungen des Seins gewonnen wurden."

⁵⁴⁵ SZ, p. 21: "sich in der positiven Aneignung der Vergangenheit in den vollen Besitz der eigensten Fragemöglichkeiten zu bringen."

⁵⁴⁶ SZ, p. 26. Here my explication of the role of the destruction in Heidegger's project differs from Guignon's account, which articulates the relation between "interpretation" and "destruction" as follows: whereas the interpretation of our factual understanding of being explicates – through a kind of transcendental argumentation – the more basic understanding of being as ready-to-hand and

According to Heidegger's original plan – presented in the introduction – the destruction of the history of ontology was to be undertaken in the second division of *Being and Time*. It was to take its “guideline” from the preliminary analysis of the temporal structure of Dasein and the temporality of being in division one, and proceed backwards through the main stages of the history of ontology: Kant, Descartes, and Aristotle. Given Heidegger's thesis that the destruction constitutes our basic way of access to an originary understanding of the sense of being, he insists that it is “only in the carrying out of the destruction of the ontological tradition that the question of being achieves its true concreteness.”⁵⁴⁷ This also means that in so far as the existential analytic of Dasein carried out in division one is able to articulate the originary structure of Dasein and being it is because it already draws on and anticipates the results of the destruction as that which makes it possible.

Fundamentally, then, phenomenological ontology of *Being and Time* is supposed to have the character of a “‘historical’ interpretation.”⁵⁴⁸

Between Phenomenology and Historical Thinking

As we have seen, Heidegger's basic analysis of the historical as-structure of phenomenal understanding prescribes a transformation of phenomenology into a radically historical mode of thinking. Given that our intuitive experience of beings as meaningful phenomena is always already determined by our preceding historical understanding of world and being, then the investigation of being cannot rely on any direct intuition but instead needs to take the form of an explication of historically received

temporality underlying the traditional conception, the destruction “authenticates the findings of the transcendental stage” by showing that they indeed constitute the most primordial understanding of being contained by the Western tradition (Guignon 1983, p. 231). However, I believe Guignon's notion that interpretation of our factual understanding could by itself achieve a primordial understanding of being is not supported by Heidegger's text. Given that our factual understanding is laden with prejudice and at most contains traces of the historical sources which give it its sense, I think it is clear that Heidegger believes the function of the destruction is not only to authenticate the interpretation but to open up our basic access to the primordial sources of understanding.

⁵⁴⁷ SZ, p. 26: “Erst in der Durchführung der Destruktion der ontologischen Überlieferung gewinnt die Seinsfrage ihre wahrhafte Konkreteion.”

⁵⁴⁸ SZ, p. 39: “‘historische’ Interpretation.”

meanings. In the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger programmatically lays down the hermeneutic-destructive method of his historical thinking: first, a thematizing interpretation of our factual traditional understanding of being; second a destruction of this understanding in order to access its historical origin. However, as I shall argue, Heidegger's program for a historical thinking is beset with basic problems, which hinder him from implementing it and which force him – in an ambivalent way – to have recourse to an intuition-based phenomenological method in his concrete positive investigations.

To get a grasp of the problems of Heidegger's hermeneutic-destructive program, it is crucial to see that his radical historicization of understanding makes the question of the "primordially" of understanding burning.

As noted above, in his well-known critique Ernst Tugendhat argues that Heidegger cancels out the possibility of questioning the truth or untruth of Dasein's historical understanding of being. However, although it is true that Heidegger claims that we cannot conceive of the truth of this understanding in terms of its correspondence with beings, Tugendhat fails to recognize the extent to which the question of how to distinguish between prejudiced and primordial understanding of historical being remains decisive for Heidegger's whole philosophical endeavor. Hence, Tugendhat does not analyze the way in which Heidegger's difficulties with addressing this question in *Being and Time* gives rise to deep ambivalences in Heidegger's fundamental ontological program. First, Heidegger's inability to account for the primordially of historical being forces him to abandon his program of philosophical destruction and instead have recourse to the method of direct phenomenological description in his concrete investigations; second, it drives his analysis of authentic existence into an unviable oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism.

If we, as Heidegger insists, first and foremost live in a prejudiced and distortive understanding of being administered by the 'They, and if the truth of this understanding cannot be measured and delimited by way of a direct intuitive explication of the matters in question, then the question arises: what is it that allows us to distinguish between historical prejudices and a primordial historical understanding? How can our historical understanding of being demonstrate itself as true or primordial? Now, Heidegger's ability to answer this question ultimately hinges on his account of the ultimate positive stage of the destruction, i.e., for what it

means to “appropriate” and “repeat” the primordial meaning-possibilities harbored by the historical origin of our heritage.⁵⁴⁹ So the crucial question is: how does historical being give itself as primordial – not just amounting to a new set of historical prejudices – and how do we access, understand and repeat it as such?

The fact of the matter is that Heidegger is unable to answer or even clearly raise this question in *Being and Time*. After his projection of the hermeneutic-destructive program, he never returns to the issue what it could mean to achieve a primordial explication of the sense of being through a repetition of primordial historical meanings. The closest he comes to addressing this question is his account of authentic Dasein’s resolute choice of its own historical possibilities or heroes, the explicit modality of which he calls “repetition.” However, this account is far from sufficient. To begin with, Heidegger’s analysis of resoluteness and repetition comes far too late in the philosophical systematics. The focus of the analysis is not on Dasein’s understanding of being but on its transparent choice of its own possibilities, which means that Dasein’s resoluteness from the outset appears as the object of an ontological analysis of Dasein’s being that cannot account for its own historicity. However, could not Heidegger’s analysis of repetition nevertheless provide a model for understanding what it means to retrieve primordial historical meanings? It could, in principle, yet it does not do it.

Heidegger’s defines “repetition” as the explicit enactment of “resoluteness,” that is, of authentic Dasein’s transparent choice and handing down to itself of its historically inherited possibilities: “repetition is explicit handing down.”⁵⁵⁰ Now, the reason why Heidegger’s analysis of resoluteness and repetition cannot shed any light on the understanding of primordial historical meanings is that the entire analysis from beginning to end focuses on how the particular Dasein chooses its own finite possibilities from its historical heritage by anticipating its own death as its ultimate possibility. However, in so doing Heidegger totally bypasses the question concerning the givenness and accessibility of originary possibilities as distinguishable from the prejudiced interpretedness that we first and foremost live in. Nothing is said about how Dasein, to become authentic, is to break free from and dismantle the traditional

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. SZ, pp. 21, 26.

⁵⁵⁰ SZ, p. 385: “Die Wiederholung ist die ausdrückliche Überlieferung.”

interpretedness, or about how it is to access and grasp originary and binding possibilities of existence distinct from the prejudices upheld by the 'They'.⁵⁵¹ Instead, the heritage is treated as the unproblematically available factual reservoir of historical possibilities from which Dasein has to choose its own possibilities.

In short, Heidegger's analysis of resolute repetition cannot account for what it means to retrieve primordial historical meanings – be it being-senses or ideal possibilities of existence – in contrast to the prejudices of the tradition.

Heidegger's basic inability to account for the givenness and accessibility of primordial historical being ultimately gives rise to a deep ambivalence as concerns the method of *Being and Time*.⁵⁵² The lacuna depicted above implies that Heidegger lacks a clear vision of the means to radically implement his hermeneutic-destructive program as an appropriation and repetition of the originary meanings harbored by our historical heritage. This, in turn, means that in order to be able to lay claim to a primordial explication of the being of Dasein and the sense of being, which transcends and delimits the traditional prejudiced conception of being as presence-at-hand, Heidegger in his concrete investigations has recourse to a method of intuitive phenomenological reflection of the sort that his analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality has strictly speaking cancelled out.

When we take a closer look at Heidegger's actual approach in *Being and Time* we see that his hermeneutic-destructive program stands in a much looser and more ambivalent relation to his concrete analyses than he wants to believe. It is true, to be sure, that his investigations are characterized by a sharpened critical attentiveness to the traditional pre-understandings and concepts which tend to guide our questioning in a

⁵⁵¹ Charles Guignon has also pointed out this basic deficit in Heidegger's analysis of resoluteness: "Heidegger says that authenticity will lead us into a 'sober understanding' of the 'basic possibilities for Dasein'. [...] But there is no clue as to what these 'basic possibilities' are. Although resoluteness might bring us face to face with our unique responsibility for making something of our lives, it does not seem to provide us with any indication as to which of the concrete possibilities circulating in the Anyone are the ultimate or basic sources for our understanding of being" (Guignon 1983, p. 218).

⁵⁵² Heidegger's inability to account for the givenness of primordial historical possibilities also affects his analysis of Dasein's resolute choice of its own possibilities, where – as we shall see in the next chapter – it gives rise to a problematic oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism.

prejudiced way, and by an ambition to historically dismantle these preconceptions in order to access the primordial experiences from which they issue. However, it belongs to this ongoing hermeneutic-destructive reflection that it constantly converts into the effort to achieve a positive understanding of the phenomena through intuitive phenomenological reflection on the sense-structures of our experience. Indeed, this work of phenomenological reflection is decisive both for delimiting the positive meaning of our common prejudices and for achieving a new and better understanding of the phenomena in question. Heidegger's analysis of readiness-to-hand is typical. It begins by disclosing our traditional conception of beings as present-at-hand objects. Then follows a phenomenological description of how we primarily encounter beings as ready-to-hand tools against the backdrop of the significance-relations of the world. This also allows Heidegger to dismantle and delimit the traditional conception by showing that the understanding of being as presence-at-hand is expressive of a theoretical attitude in which we observe beings as context-independent objectivities. The same methodological scheme manifests itself in all of his central analyses, e.g., of wordliness, care, disposition, understanding, anxiety, conscience, temporality and historicity.

There is, I think, no doubt that the concrete positive analyses doing the central philosophical work in *Being and Time* essentially transpire as reflective phenomenological descriptions of the basic sense structures of Dasein's factual experiences. These analyses do not have the form of interpretations that would merely explicate our implicit historical pre-understanding, and they do not base their clarificatory force on their historical primordality. Instead, what Heidegger continuously tries to do is to describe – through direct intuitive reflection and independently of our more or less prejudiced historical pre-understanding – the basic structural moments that constitute the meaning of our experiences. Fundamentally, the validity and clarificatory force of the phenomenological descriptions does not rest on their relation – e.g. dialectical superiority – to the historical pre-understanding and heritage we live in, but lies solely in their

ability to exhibit and illuminate what is there and reflectively discernible for us as the basic structure of our experiences.⁵⁵³

Heidegger's method of direct phenomenological description also implies that the structures described in *Being and Time* essentially have the status of universal necessary structures characterizing the human being as such. As Heidegger himself writes: "being-in-the-world is an *a priori* necessary constitution of Dasein."⁵⁵⁴ Since the positive analyses of the existential analytic do not have the character of explications of our historical pre-understanding, their validity and scope is not relative to any historically and culturally specific pre-understanding. Roughly speaking, the analyses focus on two kinds of experience: first, experiences – such as anxiety, fear, and conscience – that are common to all human beings although their cultural role and interpretedness may vary; second, experiences – such as hammering, opening a door, hearing a car – that belong to a specific historical-cultural context. However, in both cases the aim of Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions is to explicate necessary universal structures that are constitutive of general kinds of experience shared by all human beings. Even though the worlds we live in vary historically – and thus the ontic content of the experiences determined by the significances of such worlds – Heidegger's approach presupposes that it is possible to describe basic structures that are constitutive of all such worldly and historically situated experiences: readiness-to-hand, being-in-the-world, care, mortality, temporality, and historicity.

⁵⁵³ It is quite common to characterize Heidegger's method in *Being and Time* by saying that it explicates what is normally implicit and hidden in our understanding. However, it is important to see that this formulation can have – and often vacillates between – two quite different meanings. On the one hand, it can mean that the analysis spells out and explicates the historical pre-understanding that we always already live in, so that its validity and scope remains relative to that finite pre-understanding. On the other hand, it can mean that the analysis describes and explicates what is there and discernible – although normally unnoticed – in our experiences, in which case the description does not rest on our factual historical pre-understandings. What I am arguing is that whereas Heidegger proclaims – in his methodological reflections – that the existential analytic must proceed by way of the first mentioned approach of historical interpretation, his concrete analysis instead makes use of the last mentioned approach of phenomenological reflection.

⁵⁵⁴ SZ, p. 53: "Das In-der-Welt-sein ist [...] eine a priori notwendige Verfassung des Daseins."

It is important to recognize here that phenomenological descriptions of the kind employed by Heidegger ultimately rest on our concrete experiences as their factual arbitrary ground. That is, it belongs to the sense of phenomenological descriptions that they explicate the structures of experiences that are not in themselves necessary but that we, as human beings, happen to have (which is not the same as saying that they are culturally and historically specific). As Steven Crowell has put it: “The hermeneutic exploration of our factual situation suffices for insight into necessary connections.”⁵⁵⁵ Phenomenology is in no position to say that we must have certain kinds of experience. For all we know, our experiences could have been different or they could change in the future. Phenomenology thus accepts our factual experiences as its arbitrary ground in order to explicate the necessary and universal structures that constitute them.

The gap between Heidegger’s hermeneutic-destructive program and the phenomenological approach of his concrete investigations is also signaled by the original arrangement of *Being and Time*. According to the plan presented in the introduction, the first division of the book was to provide “the interpretation of Dasein in terms of temporality, and the explication of time as the transcendental horizon for the question of being,” whereas the second division was to offer “basic features of a phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology on the guideline of the problematic of temporality.”⁵⁵⁶ Here Heidegger argued that it is “only when we carry out the destruction” that the question of being “achieves its true concreteness,” such that the “ownmost ontological elucidation” of Dasein “necessarily becomes an ‘historical’ interpretation.”⁵⁵⁷ That is, the destruction would belong to fundamental ontology as the central methodical vehicle that would open access to the primordial understanding of being in such a way that the descriptive analyses of the first division would already draw upon and anticipate the destruction of the second division as their condition of possibility. In this, Heidegger postpones the destruction to the second division with the argument that it can only be carried out on the basis of the preliminary explication of the temporality of being, which provides the destruction

⁵⁵⁵ Crowell 2002, p. 110.

⁵⁵⁶ SZ, p. 39.

⁵⁵⁷ SZ, pp. 26, 39.

with its “guideline.” However, this argument and arrangement indicate that the phenomenological descriptions of the first division are in fact independent of and methodologically primary in relation to the destruction of the tradition. Not only are the positive analyses of the first division carried out as direct descriptions whose force and validity does not rely on any hermeneutic-destructive appropriation of our heritage. It also seems clear – as Søren Overgaard has noted⁵⁵⁸ – that the destruction is dependent on such descriptions. It is only to the extent that we already have phenomenological access to the temporal structure of being that it becomes possible to destruct the tradition as a series of interpretations of being, and to identify certain historical paradigms as prejudices and insights regarding being. Even though Heidegger’s hermeneutic-destructive reflection certainly can be of help in freeing us from prejudices and in appropriating the insights of the tradition, it remains – as concerns its systematic function– a secondary aid in relation to the method of phenomenological reflection.

In short, Heidegger’s magnum opus is characterized by a deep ambivalence between, on the one hand, his analysis of the historical as-structure of phenomenality and his program of a hermeneutic-destructive thinking, and, on the other hand, the intuition-based reflective phenomenological method of his concrete investigations. Ultimately, this ambivalence is elicited by Heidegger’s inability to account for the givenness and accessibility of originary historical meanings, which hinders his implementation of the hermeneutic-destructive program and occasions him to have recourse to reflective phenomenology. Hence, the positive analyses making up the bulk of the existential analytic basically transpire as intuition-based phenomenological descriptions of the basic structures of experience that are exempt from the radical historicity of understanding that these analyses claim to uncover. What we get, then, is a reflective phenomenological description of temporality and historicity as the necessary and universal structures of Dasein. Günter Figal formulates the tension at the heart of *Being and Time* as follows: “[Philosophy] frees itself [...] from the tradition in order to exhibit a structure, which, in spite of its

⁵⁵⁸ Overgaard 2004, p. 98.

temporality, is not temporal and historical anymore. The structure of Dasein persists as long as there is Dasein.”⁵⁵⁹

We should now be able to critically judge and delimit the truth of the dominating interpretations of the fate of phenomenology in *Being and Time*: the transcendental-phenomenological interpretation and the hermeneutic-deconstructivist interpretation. On the backdrop of the explication above, we can see that each of the interpretations focuses on one side of the ambivalence of the book to the exclusion of the other, accentuating the chosen side as Heidegger’s basic methodological stance.

The hermeneutic-deconstructivist reading represented by Charles Guignon clearly captures the gist of Heidegger’s own methodological self-understanding. Given that our phenomenal understanding is determined by the historical meanings we are thrown into, and given that we first and foremost live in a prejudiced tradition, philosophy must take the form a hermeneutic-destructive repetition of the most primordial meanings harbored by the origin of our history. However, Guignon does not see that Heidegger in his concrete investigations essentially makes use of a Husserlian method of reflective phenomenological description of the basic and necessary structures of Dasein’s experience. This blindness also indicates that he does not recognize the systematic motives that pull Heidegger back from his program of historical thinking to the practice of intuitive phenomenology. The transcendental phenomenological reading represented by Søren Overgaard is, by contrast, on the whole a convincing interpretation of the concrete methodical approach employed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. He is thus right in claiming that the destructive program does not play an essential methodical role in the existential analytic, but instead realizes itself as a heightened readiness to critically dismantle and appropriate historical pre-understandings, which complements but never breaks with the primary phenomenological method of investigation. Still, it has also become clear that Overgaard bypasses and plays down Heidegger’s explication of the radically historical as-structure of phenomenal understanding as well as his explicit articulation of his method in terms of the hermeneutic-destructive program. This also means that he turns a blind eye to the philosophical

⁵⁵⁹ Figal 1992, p. 94: “[Die Philosophie] macht sich [...] von der Überlieferung frei, um eine Struktur aufzuweisen, die trotz ihrer Zeitlichkeit nicht mehr zeitlich und geschichtlich ist; die Struktur des Daseins besteht solange es Dasein gibt.”

challenge that Heidegger's conception of the as-structure poses to the phenomenological idea of intuitive reflection.

The ambivalence of *Being and Time* has been noted before.⁵⁶⁰ But what to make of this tension? How should we understand and relate to it?

At a first glance it might seem as if we were faced with the task of choosing the philosophically stronger alternative: either we insist that we have intuitive reflective access to the basic structures of our experience; or we insist that our intuitive understanding is radically determined by the historical pre-understanding and heritage we always already live in. However, as Heidegger's struggle with this ambivalence indicates, the alternatives sketched above do not lie there before us as clear possibilities to choose between. Hence, our primary task cannot be to argue for or against, and then choose or compromise, but must rather be to further clarify the sense of the tension: intuitive givenness versus historical determination. What is this tension? How should we account for its basic opposing moments, which both, in some sense, seem irreducible? Are we perhaps here faced with a tension that not only Heidegger struggled with all his life but which we still today have serious philosophical difficulties in coming to terms with?

If we – as I believe we ultimately must – hold on to the ideal that we, in some sense, have direct intuitive access to meaning as the basic source of truth and significance of our concepts, then we must try to account for the nature of this access and for its relation to the historical pre-understanding and concepts that always already tend to guide our intuition. However, as far as I can see, neither the representatives of the transcendental-phenomenological reading of Heidegger, nor other phenomenologists, have been able to provide a satisfactory response to the challenge that Heidegger's conception of the historical as-structure of understanding poses to every notion of intuitive givenness. If we, on the contrary, insist that all intuitive experience is radically determined by the

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. Figal 1992, p. 94. Indeed, it seems that the hermeneutic-destructive reading is better positioned to recognize the ambivalence of *Being and Time* and, thereby, to account for why Heidegger later abandons the project of fundamental ontology in favor of a more radically historical thinking. Once we see how the basic analysis of the historicity of understanding motivates Heidegger's hermeneutic-destructive program we will also be able to see that the ambition of *Being and Time* to establish the necessary and universal sense-structures of Dasein contravenes what the results of the existential analytic prescribe as the necessary historical direction of thinking.

historical quasi-conceptual contexts of meaning we live, then we are faced with the basic question how such contexts address as true or primordial beyond historical prejudice, and as significant and binding beyond mere collective pressure. I do not believe that the philosophers representing the paradigm of hermeneutic-destructive thinking have as yet taken on this challenge. However, as we shall see, Heidegger's later thinking is nothing but an attempt to do just that.

2.6 Authenticity and the End of *Being and Time*

Heidegger's analysis of authenticity is in many ways central to the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology as this is played out in *Being and Time*. As we have seen, Heidegger believes it is only by getting access to Dasein's authentic self-understanding that it becomes possible to explicate the basic temporal-historical sense of existence. The analysis of authenticity constitutes Heidegger's basic attempt to describe how Dasein discloses and chooses its own possibilities, conceived as the historical paradigms of value that guide our lives and grants significance to the beings we encounter.

Above I argued that *Being and Time* suffers from a basic inability to account for the givenness of historical meaning, which holds Heidegger back from implementing his program of a hermeneutic-destructive historical thinking and leads him to carry out the existential analytic as an intuitive reflection on the structures of Dasein. Now I will examine how this same lacuna affects the analysis of authenticity. Here, my basic thesis is that Heidegger's failure to account for the givenness of primordial historical possibilities transcending the collective prejudices of the They pushes his account of Dasein's authentic choice of its possibilities into an uncontrolled oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism. I also argue that Heidegger's picture of Dasein's ethical-existential motives is basically egoistic-collectivist. I end the chapter by summing up and complementing my diagnosis of the philosophical problems that eventually lead Heidegger to abandon the project of fundamental ontology.

The Challenge of Authenticity

According to Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world, Dasein always already lives in an understanding of its world, which allows it to experience particular beings as meaningful phenomena. The world is ultimately anchored in Dasein's possibilities to be, that is, in the historically received paradigms of a meaningful life – the heroes – which constitute the horizon of purposes organizing the world.

For Heidegger the challenge of authenticity is the challenge of the individual Dasein to become itself, to transparently take over its own possibilities to be. This, however, is a hard task. Through anxiety and conscience, Heidegger argues, Dasein is exposed to the groundlessness and finitude of its historical possibilities, and to the possibility of independently and responsibly choosing its own possibilities. However, Dasein has a basic tendency to flee from and cover up the possibility of authentic existence and let itself be governed by the collective prejudices of the They in a blind and irresponsible manner. Instead of openly choosing itself, inauthentic Dasein thinks and does what "they" do, what "they" think, what "they" say.

To grasp the philosophical stakes of Heidegger's analysis of authenticity, it is important to see that Dasein's paradigmatic historical possibilities constitute nothing less than the ultimate source of ethical-existential purpose, which grants significance to our lives and to the beings we encounter. However, does not Heidegger's analysis of what he calls "solicitude" (*Fürsorge*) towards others entail that he also recognizes the possibility of a care for other human beings for their own sakes? And does not this imply that he recognizes a source of significance that is independent of what our historical paradigms of value prescribe as important and valuable? Although I cannot argue this exhaustively here, I briefly want to indicate why I do not think this is the case.⁵⁶¹

The chapter of *Being and Time* thematizing Dasein as being-with others – chapter four of division one – no doubt belongs to the weakest parts of

⁵⁶¹ The critique suggested here – namely that Heidegger fundamentally fails to account for the ethical-existential primacy of our relation to the other human being as a you that addresses me and claims me as such – was of course originally developed by Emmanuel Levinas. I will return to this issue and to Levinas's critique in the epilogue of the thesis.

the book. With the exception of Heidegger's incisive reflections on Dasein's everyday tendency to succumb to the collective They, the analyses conducted here on the whole remain philosophically undeveloped and ambiguous, having the character of a halfhearted supplement to the main description of Dasein as engaged in coping with tools in the world. The aim of the chapter is to argue that it belongs to Dasein's being that it is essentially being-with others. Dasein is from the outset open towards and has an understanding of other human beings, who do not show up as present-at-hand or ready-to-hand entities, but, precisely, as other human beings who also have the character of Dasein. Although Heidegger mainly focuses on Dasein's everyday inauthentic being-with others, dominated by collective power relations, he also takes up the possibility of a positive mode of solicitude towards others. Hereby he states that Dasein as being-with is "essentially for the sake of others":⁵⁶² "This [...] disclosedness of the others thus also constitutes significance, i.e., worldliness. As this worldliness, disclosedness is anchored in the existential for-the-sake-of-which."⁵⁶³ That is, the significance networks of the world are not only anchored in Dasein's own possibilities but also in others and their possibilities. However, does this formal definition of Dasein as being for the sake of others really imply that Heidegger would introduce the possibility of a care for the other individual human being for her own sake as a primary source of ethical-existential demand and significance? I do not think so.

According to Heidegger's analysis, Dasein primarily encounters others "out of the *world*" with which it is concerned in its everyday coping:⁵⁶⁴ "In what we concern ourselves with in the surrounding the world, the others are encountered as what they are; they *are* what they do."⁵⁶⁵ In coping with different tools, these tools by themselves refer to other Daseins as their users, owners, producers, consumers, etcetera. Also when we face or address others directly, they chiefly show up in terms of what they do and

⁵⁶² SZ, p. 123: "Als Mitsein 'ist' daher das Dasein wesentlich umwillen Anderer."

⁵⁶³ SZ, p. 123: "Diese mit dem Mitsein vorgängig konstituierte Erschlossenheit der Anderen macht demnach auch die Bedeutsamkeit, d.h. die Weltlichkeit mit aus, als welche sie im existenzialen Worum-willen festgemacht ist."

⁵⁶⁴ SZ, p. 119: "Sie begegnen aus der *Welt* her, in der das besorgend-umsichtige Dasein sich wesentlich aufhält." Cf. SZ, p. 121.

⁵⁶⁵ SZ, p. 126: "Im umweltlich Besorgten begegnen die Anderen als das, was sie sind; sie *sind* das, was sie betreiben."

work with, that is, in terms of their social roles within the significance networks of the world: “we meet them ‘at work,’ that is, primarily in their being-in-the-world.”⁵⁶⁶ However, in so far as we understand and relate to others primarily in terms of their social roles and tasks, we do *not* care for them as individual persons for their own sakes; instead the others get whatever import we ascribe to them from their roles within the world and its horizon of purposes.

There are, Heidegger claims, two “extreme possibilities” of a positive care for the other. On the one hand, we have the care which “leaps in” (*einspringen*) for the other and “takes away his care” by performing the tasks that originally belong to him: “This kind of solicitude takes over for the other that which is to be taken care of. The other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can take it over as something finished and at his disposal or disburden himself of it completely. In such caring the other can become someone who is dependent and dominated, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him.”⁵⁶⁷ On the other hand, we have the possibility of a positive care which does not “leap in” for the other, but which “leaps ahead (*vorausspringen*) of him [...] not in order to take his ‘care’ away from him but rather to give it back to him authentically”:⁵⁶⁸ “This kind of caring for (*Fürsorge*) pertains essentially to authentic care (*Sorge*) – that is, to the existence of the other, not to a ‘what’ with which he is concerned; it helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free* for it.”⁵⁶⁹

As concerns the first kind of care “which leaps in and dominates,” the very fact that Heidegger describes the possibility of helping the other with

⁵⁶⁶ SZ, p. 120: “wir treffen sie ‘bei der Arbeit’, das heißt primär in ihrem In-der-Welt-sein.”

⁵⁶⁷ SZ, p. 122: “Diese Fürsorge übernimmt das, was zu besorgen ist, für den Anderen. Dieser wird dabei aus seiner Stelle geworfen, er tritt zurück, um nachträglich das Besorgte als fertig Verfügbares zu übernehmen, bzw. sich ganz davon zu entlasten. In solcher Fürsorge kann der Andere zum Abhängigen und Beherrschten werden, mag diese Herrschaft auch eine stillschweigende sein und dem Beherrschten verborgen bleiben.”

⁵⁶⁸ SZ, p. 122: “*vorausspringt*, nicht um ihm die ‘Sorge’ abzunehmen, sondern erst eigentlich als solche zurückzugeben.”

⁵⁶⁹ SZ, p. 122: “Diese Fürsorge, die wesentlich die eigentliche Sorge – das heißt die Existenz des Anderen betrifft und nicht ein *Was*, das er besorgt, verhilft dem Anderen dazu, *in* seiner Sorge sich durchsichtig und *für* sie *frei* zu werden.”

her concrete tasks and burdens as inherently dominating, that is, as constituting a relation of power, shows that he has cancelled out the possibility of a loving care for the other which is free of power motives and does not necessarily effect relations of domination and subordination. However, neither does the depiction of the second kind of care “which leaps forth and liberates” introduce a care for the other for her own sake as a primary and irreducible source of motivation. Although the aim of this care is not to dominate the other but to help her become authentic, what makes this care so important is that it serves the existentially paramount task of becoming authentic. Indeed, the whole point of what Heidegger considers to be the highest form of care is to help the other to transparently and freely take over her own historical possibilities as the ultimate purpose-horizon of her life.

But why would we help the other person in the first place? Is it because our historical paradigms of meaning and value prescribe such behavior as good, virtuous, or honorable? Or is it because we essentially encounter the other person as a you who elicits and calls for our personal love and care prior to and independently of all such paradigms? Heidegger does not say a word concerning this decisive question. In his whole analysis there is no account whatsoever of the possibility of encountering – in love, sympathy, conscience – the other individual person as a you to care for for her own sake. Nor is there any account of the difficulties of relating openly and lovingly to the other, or of our strong tendency to evade this possibility, to close ourselves to and depersonalize the other.

Ultimately, Heidegger’s repression of the possibility of a direct love and care for the other as an end in herself shows itself in the lack of radical effects that the recognition of this possibility would necessarily have had on his philosophical project. Had he recognized this possibility for what it is, would he not have had to give up the very notion of Dasein’s historical possibilities as our ultimate source of purpose and significance? Would he not, as a result, also have had to give up the idea that the basic challenge of existence lies in transparently choosing one’s own groundless and finite possibilities? In so far as we could still give sense to the task of choosing the heroes or value paradigms guiding our lives, would not this choice have to be grounded in our direct care for others and not the other way around? Finally, would not recognizing the possibility of directly encountering the other as a you to care for unsettle

Heidegger's basic motivation for the project of fundamental ontology, namely the idea that such a project is necessary to make possible an unprejudiced and open encounter with meaningful phenomena?

Let us, however, put these critical questions aside for now and turn to a more detailed examination of Heidegger's account of how Dasein, to become authentic, is to disclose and transparently choose its ownmost possibilities.

Collectivism, Subjectivism, Egoism

According to Heidegger, Dasein's possibility of authentic existence lies in transparently choosing its own finite and groundless possibilities from the historical heritage into which it is always already thrown. The point of departure, however, is that Dasein has first and foremost fled this possibility, in such a way that it lives and understands itself on the basis of the uprooted and prejudiced interpretedness of the 'They. Hence, Dasein's way to authenticity essentially goes from the interpretedness of the 'They to an originary disclosure and choice of its own possibilities.

We can immediately see that the task of accounting for Dasein's primordial understanding of its possibilities hinges on the same question as the task of accounting for what it would mean for a hermeneutic-destructive thinking to retrieve a primordial understanding of being: how are primordial historical meanings – senses of being, paradigmatic heroes – given and how do we access and explicate them? However, as we have seen, Heidegger is unable to answer this question, or even state it clearly, in *Being and Time*. In his analysis of Dasein's authentic resolute self-understanding he does not so much as touch the question how Dasein, through some kind of destructive retrieval, is to free itself from the possibilities of the 'They and get access to more primordial possibilities harbored by the heritage. Instead, the focus of the analysis is from the outset set on the individual Dasein's choice of its own possibilities from the heritage, whereby the question of the originary givenness of the heritage – as something transcending the prejudices of the 'They – is left unasked.

In what follows I want to suggest that this lacuna leads Heidegger's analysis of authentic resoluteness into an ambivalent oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism. In view of this fact it is not surprising that

the secondary literature contains opposing interpretations, highlighting either one of these aspects. Let us begin by looking at the collectivist tendency and then move on to the tendency towards subjectivism. Finally, I will suggest that Heidegger's analysis remains stuck in an egoistic-collectivist attitude in which collective pressure and egoistic desire figure as the ultimate motives determining our experience and understanding of meaningful beings.

So how is Dasein, who is first and foremost guided by the prejudiced interpretedness of the They, supposed to choose its own possibilities?

According to Heidegger, the interpretedness of the They is not something that Dasein will ever be able to emancipate itself from completely. Even when it becomes authentic, Dasein will still be beset by, and, to some extent, enmeshed in the They: "*Authentic being one's self* does not rest upon an exceptional state of the subject, a state detached from the They, but *is an existentiell modification of the They as an essential existentielle.*"⁵⁷⁰ But what does it mean that authentic existence is a "modification of the They"? Heidegger's formulation admits, I think, both of a weak and of a strong interpretation. The weak interpretation would be that Dasein can never hope to free itself completely and definitely from the interpretedness of the They. Given Dasein's tendency towards inauthenticity, and given the way our common understanding and language is dominated by the They, Dasein's struggle for authenticity will be a constant battle against collective uprootedness and prejudice, a struggle whose possible victories will always be provisional and incomplete. However, the formulation also allows for the strong interpretation that Dasein, in its choice of its own possibilities, is fundamentally referred to the world of the They as the ultimate source of its possibilities.

There are, I submit, many passages in Heidegger's analysis that speaks in favor of the strong interpretation. Heidegger begins his treatment of conscience and resoluteness by depicting Dasein's inauthenticity as the state in which the They has always already "decided upon" the possibilities of Dasein, and thus "relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly *choosing*

⁵⁷⁰ SZ, p. 130: "Das *eigentliche Selbstsein* beruht nicht auf einem vom Man abgelösten Ausnahmezustand des Subjekt, sondern *ist eine existentielle Modifikation des Man als eines wesenhaften Existentials.*" Cf. SZ, pp. 179, 267.

these possibilities.”⁵⁷¹ He also stresses that Dasein’s authentic choice of its possibilities does not imply any transformation of the world that Dasein has so far taken over from the They in a blind and prejudiced manner: “The ‘world’ at hand does not become another one ‘in its content’; the circle of others is not exchanged for a new one, and yet the being towards the ready-to-hand which understands and takes care of things, and the concerned being-with the others, are now determined in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-being-their-selves.”⁵⁷² However, if Dasein’s authentic choice of itself does not bring with it any change of the content of the world dictated by the They – what can this mean, except that the prevailing norms and possibilities of the They are taken over and affirmed as ultimate and authoritative? A few pages later, this interpretation seems to be forcefully confirmed:

Even resolutions remain dependent upon the They and its world. The understanding of this is one of the things that a resolution discloses, inasmuch as resoluteness is what first gives authentic transparency to Dasein. In resoluteness, Dasein is concerned with its ownmost potentiality for being, that, as thrown, can project itself only upon definite factual possibilities. Resolution does not withdraw itself from “reality,” but first discovers what is factually possible in such a way that it seizes upon it as this is possible, as its ownmost potentiality for being, in the They.⁵⁷³

Here, Heidegger states quite unequivocally that the interpretedness of the They provides and determines the possibilities from which Dasein has to choose itself. Not only does he write that the “resolutions remain dependent upon the They and its world.” He goes so far as to identify the

⁵⁷¹ SZ, p. 268: “Entlastung von der ausdrücklichen *Wahl* dieser Möglichkeiten.”

⁵⁷² SZ, 297f.: “Die zuhandene ‘Welt’ wird nicht ‘inhaltlich’ eine andere, der Kreis der Anderen wird nicht ausgewechselt, und doch ist das verstehende besorgende Sein zum Zuhandenen und das fürsorgende Mitsein mit den Anderen jetzt aus deren eigenstem Selbstseinkönnen heraus bestimmt.”

⁵⁷³ SZ, p. 299. “Auch der Entschluß bleibt auf das Man und seine Welt angewiesen. Das zu verstehen, gehört mit zu dem, was er erschließt, sofern die Entschlossenheit erst dem Dasein die eigentliche Durchsichtigkeit gibt. In der Entschlossenheit geht es dem Dasein um sein eigenstes Seinkönnen, das als geworfenes nur auf bestimmte faktische Möglichkeiten sich entwerfen kann. Der Entschluß entzieht sich nicht der ‘Wirklichkeit’, sondern entdeckt erst das faktisch Mögliche, so zwar, daß er es dergestalt, wie es als eigenstes Seinkönnen im Man möglich ist, ergreift.”

possibilities of the They with Dasein's factual possibilities in general: that authentic Dasein discovers the "what is factually possible" means that it discovers and seizes upon it as this is "possible [...] in the They."

All this seems to support an interpretation according to which Dasein would be fundamentally referred to the possibilities of the They, so that its authentic choice of itself would involve no need and no possibility to critically dismantle the common interpretedness of the They in order to attain a more originary understanding of the possibilities of a good and meaningful life. Hubert Dreyfus has offered a well-known defense of this kind of interpretation. His point of departure is the thesis that "Heidegger never denies that *all* significance and intelligibility is the product of the one," and that "Dasein *is* a more or less coherent pattern of the comportment required by public 'roles' and activities – an embodiment of the one."⁵⁷⁴ On this view, inauthenticity would consist in the belief that our collective historical norms constitute the universal and timeless truth, which is grounded in God or nature. To become authentic, Dreyfus claims, is not to attain a more primordial understanding than the one provided by the They; instead, it is to "take over the average for-the-sake-of-which one has in one's culture just like everyone else." The difference between inauthentic and authentic Dasein is that the latter understands that the historical norms of the They are not universal and timeless but amount to "what we in the West happen to do." As a result, Dreyfus states: "The only deep interpretation is that there is no deep interpretation."⁵⁷⁵

However, even though there is a tendency in Heidegger's argument to absolutize the collective norms of the They as our ultimate source of ethical-existential significance, the interpretation suggested above is problematic, both exegetically and – above all – systematically. The basic problem is that the interpretation is unable to uphold any distinction between collective prejudice and primordial understanding, however such a distinction is to be conceived. Heidegger's notion of the interpretedness of the They essentially builds on the thought that Dasein has a strong tendency to take over, in a blind and irresponsible way, the traditional and collectively sanctioned interpretation of things, which is normally prejudiced, so that it covers up and distorts the matters it pretends to

⁵⁷⁴ Dreyfus 1991, pp. 156, 159.

⁵⁷⁵ Dreyfus 1991, p. 157.

reveal. Hence, it would be absurd to claim that the collective interpretedness we happen to live in would constitute our ultimate source of truth and significance: it belongs to the very meaning of taking over the interpretedness of the They that we do not open ourselves to and disclose the matters at stake, just as it belongs to its meaning that it refers to the possibility of independently trying to understand the matters. The upshot of this interpretation is that Heidegger's notion of authentic resoluteness becomes indistinguishable from an attitude of cynical collectivism: to clear-sightedly accept the interpretedness of the They as one's destiny – how could this be anything else than legitimizing one's thinking by referring to what the collective concepts and norms happen to prescribe as good and true, even though one knows, in a basic yet more or less inarticulate way, that this is bad faith and self-deception?⁵⁷⁶

When we move from the question of the source of Dasein's possibilities to the question of the choice of its own possibilities, the collectivist tendency in Heidegger's account seems to give way to a tendency towards subjectivism.

⁵⁷⁶ In contrast to Dreyfus who pointedly equates Dasein's historical possibilities with the interpretedness of the They, there are many commentators who simply emphasize that Dasein receives its possibilities from the historical context and heritage into which it is thrown. Such a general historicist interpretation is of course exegetically true as far as it goes. However, the problem here is that Heidegger in *Being and Time* is unable to account for the difference between blindly taking over the norms that happen to dominate the collective context that Dasein identifies with, and attaining a more primordial understanding by critically retrieving the most qualified possibilities of meaning that our historical tradition harbors within itself. The upshot of this is that Heidegger's notion of the historicity and sociality of Dasein collapses into an oscillation between crude collectivism and irrational subjectivism. In so far as the historicist interpretation has no better account to offer of the difference between prejudice and genuine understanding it is bound to be haunted by the same problems as Heidegger himself. In the end, we need to ask whether these problems are just the result of the inadequate argumentation in *Being and Time*, or whether the very idea that our historical contexts of meaning determine the possible significances of particular beings is not in itself collectivist in a problematic way? To the extent that we cancel out the possibility of relating lovingly and caringly to other particular persons for their own sake – regardless of historical context – and instead elevate our historical contexts of meaning into an absolute source of significance, it seems that the only way in which such historical meanings and norms can concern us and bind us is on account of their collective power, that is, as manifestations of what the collective group with which we identify happens to value and appreciate. I will return to these issues in the last chapter as well as in the epilogue of the thesis.

As soon as Heidegger has posed the question of which possibilities authentic Dasein will choose – “But to what does Dasein resolve itself in resoluteness?”⁵⁷⁷ – he writes:

Only the resolution itself can give the answer. It would be a complete misunderstanding of the phenomenon of resoluteness if one were to believe that it is simply a matter of taking up and seizing hold of possibilities which have been presented and recommended. *The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of the actual factual possibility.* To resoluteness, the *indefiniteness* that characterizes every factually projected potentiality-for-being of Dasein necessarily *belongs*. Resoluteness is certain of itself only in a resolution. The *existentiell indefiniteness* of resoluteness never makes itself definite except in a resolution; it nevertheless has its *existential definiteness*.⁵⁷⁸

The same thought is repeated many times: in becoming authentic Dasein does not simply take up “possibilities which have been presented and recommended,” that is, proposed by the They. Instead, resoluteness essentially involves a “disclosive projection and determination” of Dasein’s possibilities.

But how do we disclose and determine our own possibilities?

To begin with, it bears noting that Heidegger rejects the idea that the existential analysis could have anything to say – be it *de facto* or *de jure* – about the specific content of Dasein’s existentiell choice, since this choice is always determined by the historical situation of the particular Dasein. Still, this “existentiell indefiniteness” has its “existential definiteness.” Heidegger thus thinks it is fully possible to explicate the existential structures that characterize Dasein’s choice of itself without entering upon

⁵⁷⁷ SZ, p. 298: “Aber woraufhin entschließt sich das Dasein in der Entschlossenheit?”

⁵⁷⁸ SZ, p. 298: “Die Antwort vermag *nur* der Entschluß selbst zu geben. Es wäre ein völliges Mißverständnis des Phänomens der Entschlossenheit, wollte man meinen es sei lediglich ein aufnehmendes Zugreifen gegenüber vorgelegten und anempfohlenen Möglichkeiten. *Der Entschluß ist gerade erst das erschließende Entwerfen und Bestimmen der jeweiligen faktischen Möglichkeit.* Zur Entschlossenheit *gehört* notwendig die *Unbestimmtheit*, die jedes faktisch-geworfene Seinkönnen des Daseins charakterisiert. Ihrer selbst sicher ist die Entschlossenheit nur als Entschluß. Aber die *existenzielle*, jeweils erst im Entschluß sich bestimmende *Unbestimmtheit* der Entschlossenheit hat gleichwohl ihre *existenziale Bestimmtheit*.”

the content of that choice. So how is Dasein's resolute choice of itself carried out?

In the quotation above we find the phrase "Resoluteness is certain of itself only in a resolution." Now this phrase and the very word "resoluteness" – *Entschlossenheit* – could easily seem to suggest that Heidegger would conceive of Dasein's choice as a radically free and ungroundable decision, in which Dasein projects itself, in a kind of blind leap, towards the possibilities that are to guide its life. However, for Heidegger the word *Entschlossenheit* – "entschlossen" literally means "not closed off" – signifies both decisiveness and openness. Indeed, the passage above describes the resolute choice as a "disclosive projection and determination," that is, as a choice that involves a qualified open understanding of Dasein's possibilities.

As far as I can see, Heidegger's only concrete strategy for accounting for Dasein's disclosure and choice of its possibility consists in referring to Dasein's anticipation of its own death as that which grants light and certainty to the choice. Let me quote the two main passages in which this notion is elaborated:

The more authentically Dasein resolves itself, that is, understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost eminent possibility in anticipating death, the more unequivocally and unarbitrarily does it choose and find the possibility of its existence. Only the anticipation of death drives every accidental and "preliminary" possibility out. Only being free *for* death gives Dasein its goal simply and pushes existence into its finitude. The finitude of existence thus seized upon tears one back out of the endless multiplicity of possibilities offering themselves nearest by – those of comfort, shirking and taking things easy – and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate*.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁹ SZ, p. 384: "Je eigentlicher sich das Dasein entschließt, das heißt unzweideutig aus seiner eigensten, ausgezeichneten Möglichkeit im Vorlaufen in den Tod sich versteht, um so eindeutiger und unzufälliger ist das wählende Finden der Möglichkeit seiner Existenz. Nur das Vorlaufen in den Tod treibt jede zufällige und 'vorläufige' Möglichkeit aus. Nur das Freisein *für* den Tod gibt dem Dasein das Ziel schlechthin und stößt die Existenz in ihre Endlichkeit. Die ergriffene Endlichkeit der Existenz reißt aus der endlosen Mannigfaltigkeit der sich anbietenden nächsten Möglichkeiten des Behagens, Leichtnehmens, Sichdrückens zurück und bringt das Dasein in die Einfachheit seines *Schicksals*."

And:

Anticipation discloses to existence that its outmost possibility lies in giving itself up, and thus it shatters all one's clinging to whatever existence one has reached. [...] Free for its ownmost possibilities, that are determined by the *end*, and thus understood as *finite*, Dasein prevents the danger that it may, by its own finite understanding of existence, fail to recognize that it is getting overtaken by the existence-possibilities of others, or that it may misconstrue these possibilities and force them back upon its own, thus divesting itself of its ownmost factual existence. [...] Because anticipation of the possibility-not-to-be-bypassed also discloses all the possibilities lying before it, this anticipation includes the possibility of taking the *whole* of Dasein in advance in an existentiell way, that is, the possibility of existing as a *whole potentiality-for-being*.⁵⁸⁰

Here we find Heidegger's basic idea that it is "only the anticipation of death" that allows Dasein to free itself from the accidental and provisional possibilities provided by the They, and makes it possible for it to "choose and find" its own possibilities. Yet how does Dasein's anticipation of its death enable its choice of itself?

The passages above seem to allow for two interpretations. On the one hand Heidegger could be seen as saying that Dasein's anticipation of its death merely opens it up to the *finitude* of its own factual possibilities. Heidegger thus specifies the sense of his claim that Dasein possibilities are "determined by the *end*" by saying that these possibilities are "understood as *finite*." However, if anticipation of death only discloses the finitude of Dasein and confronts it with the task of choosing its own finite possibilities – then it does not give any clue at all as to which possibilities Dasein is to choose. On the other hand, Heidegger's formulations also

⁵⁸⁰ SZ, p. 264: "Das Vorlaufen erschließt der Existenz als äußerste Möglichkeit die Selbstaufgabe und zerbricht so jede Versteifung auf die je erreichte Existenz. [...] Frei für die eigensten, vom *Ende* her bestimmten, das heißt als *endliche* verstandenen Möglichkeiten, bannt das Daseins die Gefahr, aus seinem endlichen Existenzverständnis her die es überholenden Existenzmöglichkeiten der Anderen zu verkennen oder aber sie mißdeutend auf die eigene zurückzuzwingen – um sich so der eigensten faktischen Existenz zu begeben. [...] Weil das Vorlaufen in die unüberholbare Möglichkeit alle ihr vorgelagerten Möglichkeiten mit erschließt, liegt in ihm die Möglichkeit eines existenziellen Vorwegnehmens des *ganzen* Daseins, das heißt die Möglichkeit, als *ganzes Seinkönnen* zu existieren."

support a stronger reading. He does not only write that death “determines the possibilities of Dasein,” but also stresses that anticipation of death “gives Dasein its goal” and “brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate*.” In some sense, Heidegger seems to suggest, Dasein’s anticipation of its death as its ultimate limiting possibility grants a measure that enables it to disclose and choose its own possibilities. However, Heidegger stops at this suggestion and does not give any hint about how Dasein is supposed to choose in the light of its mortality.

Heidegger’s problems with accounting for the grounds of Dasein’s authentic choice of its possibilities has led some commentators – e.g. Karl Löwith and Ernst Tugendhat – to criticize his conception of authenticity as a sort of “decisionism.”⁵⁸¹ The basic argument is that Heidegger’s fundamental failure to describe how Dasein is to assess the truth and normativity of the factual possibilities provided by the They, implies that Dasein’s resolute choice – which is in itself “immediate and without perspective”⁵⁸² – determines the truth of the possibilities it happens to choose. As Tugendhat formulates it: “Resoluteness does not conform to the truth; instead, the ‘truth’ of the current possibility consists precisely therein, that Dasein resolves upon it from out of its authentic being-itself.”⁵⁸³ I think this critical reading is correct in that it points to the fact that Heidegger is unable to account for any ground or measure that would allow Dasein to disclose and choose its own possibilities independently of the They. In so far as Dasein’s choice of itself is supposed to be independent of the They, the only thing left that could guide its choice is its own blind whims and impulses (if such are even thinkable apart from the They). However, not only does the view here ascribed to Heidegger suffer from deep philosophical problems. The interpretation of Heidegger as a decisionist or subjectivist is also distortive in so far as it overlooks the extent to which Heidegger stresses Dasein’s thrownness into its historical heritage as its absolute source of meaning. At no point would Heidegger claim that the resolute choice of the individual Dasein could by itself determine the truth or significance of its available historical possibilities.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. Löwith 1960, pp. 93f.; Tugendhat 1970, pp. 360f. Cf. also Wolin 1990, pp. 52ff., 64ff.

⁵⁸² Tugendhat 1970, p. 361: “unvermittelt und hinsichtslos.”

⁵⁸³ Tugendhat 1970, p. 360: “Die Entschlossenheit richtet sich nicht nach der Wahrheit, sondern die ‘Wahrheit’ der jeweiligen Möglichkeit besteht eben darin, daß das Dasein sich aus seinem eigentlichen Selbst-sein zu ihr entschließt.”

Recently, Steven Crowell has attempted to counter the above critique – that Heidegger’s concept of authenticity excludes critical deliberation – by arguing that Heidegger’s analysis of authenticity is not meant to supply standards for Dasein’s choice of itself. Instead, the aim of Heidegger’s account of conscience is to articulate “our capacity for entering into the space of reasons,” which is a prerequisite for all critical deliberation.⁵⁸⁴ According to Crowell, the inauthentic They-self acts in accord with the factual norms of the They in a “mindless” and “quasi-mechanical manner,” such that these norms determine her behavior much in the same way as the constraints of nature.⁵⁸⁵ By contrast, the call of conscience opens up Dasein to “a responsiveness to norms as norms,” which also means that Dasein is confronted with the task of responsibly accounting for itself and giving reasons:⁵⁸⁶ “what the call of conscience gives to understand is that that which I can never get into my power – what grounds me beyond my reach – is nevertheless *my* possibility. This, I suggest, can only mean that factic grounds become subject to a choice for which I am accountable; they are thereby taken up into the normative space of reasons.”⁵⁸⁷

Crowell is, I think, right in claiming that Heidegger’s analysis of authenticity is not meant to provide standards for Dasein’s choice but rather articulates the possibility of achieving an independent and responsible stance towards the norms at our disposal. However, since Crowell – like Heidegger – has no account to offer of an alternative source of truth and significance beyond the factual norms of the They, it seems to me that his interpretation in the end reproduces the oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism diagnosed above. To begin with, I believe it is misleading to say that the inauthentic self follows the norms of the They in a thoroughly quasi-mechanical manner. Heidegger describes – correctly, I think – the inauthentic self as being addressed by the norms of the They precisely as obligating and normative, more precisely, as the collective standards that tell us what we should be and do, and which we feel we must conform with in order to feel worthy and honorable and to avoid guilt and shame. Indeed, the inauthentic self is also from the outset

⁵⁸⁴ Crowell 2007, p. 49.

⁵⁸⁵ Crowell 2007, pp. 52, 54.

⁵⁸⁶ Crowell 2007, p. 55. Cf. Crowell 2008, p. 266.

⁵⁸⁷ Crowell 2007, p. 57.

engaged in giving reasons for and legitimizing its actions with reference to what is considered good, honorable, acceptable, etc. However, as soon as we recognize this it becomes difficult to give a clear sense to Crowell's thesis that it is only the call of conscience that opens up a "responsiveness to norms as norms," a sense that would account for the possibility of breaking with the normativity of the They and of freely assessing the truth and moral substance of our factual norms. It would seem that Heidegger's view on this matter is that anxiety and conscience confront Dasein – who, as inauthentic, has accepted the norms of the They in an uncritical manner as the universal and timeless truth – with the fundamental groundlessness and finitude of the factual meaning-context in which it lives. However, this does not imply that the factual norms of the They would be questioned or that Dasein would get access to some other kind of normativity than the collective pressure exerted by the norms of the They. On the contrary, Heidegger's analysis suggests that to become authentic is precisely to clear-sightedly and responsibly affirm and take over the factual norms of the They as a groundless destiny.

The problem with Crowell's solution is that any description of our basic openness to normativity is dependent on some account of what it is that obligates and claims us. In so far as there is no other, more primary, source of normativity than the collective norms of the They, Dasein's independent and responsible relation to normativity must consist in a transparent affirmation of these norms. Heidegger's analysis of authenticity accounts for no such source and neither does Crowell's.⁵⁸⁸ As

⁵⁸⁸ In my discussion, I have followed Crowell's interpretation of Heidegger's view conscience in *Being and Time* as this is developed in Crowell 2007 and Crowell 2008. Towards the end of the latter article Crowell – commenting on Heidegger's later essay "...Poetically Man Dwells..." (*...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...*) from 1951 – suggests that Heidegger, when reflecting on the character of the normative force that binds us, recognizes the claim of the other human being in a manner that mirrors Levinas's proto-ethics: "This does not mean that Heidegger and Levinas are saying 'the same.' But it does indicate that Heidegger too, when reflecting upon the normative force of the originary meaning-event, the orientation toward measure that makes all meaning possible, finds his way to relations between human beings" (Crowell 2008, p. 276). Philosophically, I have no doubt that this is the right – in fact, the only – way to go if we want to understand the sources of genuine ethical normativity and obligation. However, as far as I can see Heidegger never recognizes the absolute claim of the other person on me beyond every historical norm and value, and it is hard to see that the passage quoted by Crowell – in which Heidegger comments on some lines by Hölderlin – supports such a radical notion. Indeed, if Heidegger would really

a result, Crowell's interpretation is unable to open a way out of the vacillation between collectivism and subjectivism. On the one hand, Crowell seems to accept the factual norms of the They as our basic source of normativity;⁵⁸⁹ on the other hand, he argues – following John Haugeland – that these norms only gain “normative force” in so far as Dasein resolutely “commits” itself to them:⁵⁹⁰ “It follows that resolve or commitment cannot itself be rationally grounded: I can give reasons for committing myself to something, but those reasons will be normative only to the extent that I have *already* committed myself to them.”⁵⁹¹ What is this if not a reiteration of the tension between the belief in the authority of the They and the idea of a commitment or choice which, in so far as it is not already guided by the factual norms of the They, must remain a blind and irrational leap?⁵⁹²

recognize and understand the claim ascribed to him by Crowell, this would upset the basic philosophical framework which motivates and organizes both his thinking of authenticity in *Being and Time* as well as his later conception of the task of thinking.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. Crowell 2007, p. 53.

⁵⁹⁰ Crowell 2007, p. 59.

⁵⁹¹ Crowell 2007, p. 59n47. Cf. also Haugeland 1998, pp. 340ff.

⁵⁹² Another way of countering the decisionist critique is found in the kind of narrativist interpretation of Heidegger's concepts of authenticity defended by Charles Guignon. According to Guignon, Dasein's authentic choice of itself should not be understood as a radically free or arbitrary choice. Becoming authentic, Guignon claims, involves understanding that “I [...] find myself enmeshed in a particular historical culture that predefines the range of possibilities of action that will make sense in my situation” (Guignon 1993, p. 225). On this view, inauthenticity consists in becoming dispersed in the latest trends and demands of the public world while “lacking any overarching sense of what makes life worth living” (p. 227). Authenticity requires that Dasein face its own mortality and finitude, so that it is led to view its life as a “coherent story,” and focus itself – with “decisive dedication” – into a finite range of possibilities: “Authentic self-focusing, understood as resolute reaching forward into a finite range of possibilities, gives coherence, cohesiveness, and integrity to a life course” (p. 229). In this, Dasein's choice of itself is not completely blind and arbitrary; rather, it is guided by certain “metavalues”: becoming authentic requires “resoluteness, steadiness, courage, and, above all, clear-sightedness about one's own life as a thrown projection” (p. 232). As far as I can see Guignon – providing no account of a source of truth and significance beyond the collective norms of the They – remains firmly entrenched in the ambivalence between collectivism and subjectivism. Accepting the norms of Dasein's particular historical culture as that which “predefines the range of possibilities,” Guignon focuses solely on how Dasein should choose its possibilities in order to shape its life into a coherent narrative. However, the “metavalues” that are supposed to guide Dasein's choice tell us nothing about the truth or moral substance of the norms of the They; instead, they only – at most – function as criteria for constructing a formally coherent and harmonious life story. As concerns the question

So far, I have focused on Heidegger's inability to account for a measure that would allow Dasein to critically assess the truth or primordially of the factual norms and concepts of the 'They. However, since the aim of Heidegger's analysis of authenticity is none other than to describe Dasein's access to its sources of ethical-existential significance and normativity, what is at stake here is not only the question of critique and truth but also the question of what ultimately concerns Dasein as binding and significant. Now, since Heidegger cancels out the possibility of a direct sympathy for the other person for her own sake, and is unable to point to another source of normativity that would transcend the 'They, it seems to me that his vision of our basic ethical-existential motives remains pervaded by a simultaneously collectivist and egoistic attitude.

As we know, Heidegger suggests that the interpretedness of the 'They constitutes the source from which Dasein receives its possibilities. This interpretedness primarily concerns and motivates Dasein in virtue of its normality and acceptance by the 'They; in short, in virtue of the collective pressure and force it exerts on us. However, in so far as Heidegger attempts to bring in other motives which – beyond the social pressure of the 'They – are to guide Dasein's choice of its possibilities, he is only capable of grounding Dasein's choice in basically egoistic desires. It is hard to see that any of those motives Heidegger and his interpreters present would be anything else than modifications of our egoistic self-concern. This holds, I think, not only for our concern with our own death and finitude, and for our desire to choose and commit ourselves to possibilities in order to shape a coherent, meaningful, and psychologically-existentially healthy life. It seems that even our will to become independent, responsible and truthful will only amount to a sublimated expression of intellectual and moral narcissism as long as it is not anchored in a basic desire to open up to and care for other human beings.

The tendency towards egoism is in fact already manifest in Heidegger's basic analysis of Dasein's being as "care." As is well known, Heidegger claims that the expression "care for the self" (*Selbstsorge*) would be a "tautology," given that Dasein's care for other entities is ultimately grounded in its care for its own being and possibilities.⁵⁹³ This idea does

of what we should choose as the content of our lives, Guignon basically presents Dasein as faced with a blind and arbitrary decision.

⁵⁹³ SZ, p. 193.

not by itself imply any – at least not any straightforward – egoism. By stating that Dasein primarily cares about itself Heidegger wants to say that it cares about its being and its paradigmatic possibilities, which do not originate in the individual ontic self but which, quite the reverse, determine the self and its will.

Nevertheless, Heidegger's concrete analysis is ambivalent on this point. As a result of his basic failure to account for how Dasein's historical being and possibilities are given as binding and significant, Heidegger is again and again led to ground Dasein's experience of significance in its care for its own ontic self. This tendency comes clearly to the fore in the analysis of disposedness. According to Heidegger, Dasein's ability to experience beings as "mattering" to it – as useful, joyful, frightening, tragic – is "grounded" in its "disposedness."⁵⁹⁴ But how? In his analysis of fear, Heidegger specifies the basic role of disposedness in opening up Dasein to that which matters: "That *about which* fear is afraid is the fearful being itself – Dasein. Only a being that is concerned in its being about that being can be afraid. Fearing discloses this being as endangered and abandoned to itself."⁵⁹⁵ Hence, it is only because the feeling of fear from the outset discloses Dasein to itself as being at stake and exposed that it is able to experience different beings as frightening and worrisome. However, this basic analysis is not only meant to account for situations in which we fear for our own sake. Concerning the possibility of fearing for someone else's sake Heidegger writes: "But viewed precisely, fearing for . . . is, after all, being-afraid-for-*oneself*. What is 'feared' here is the being-with the other who could be snatched away from us."⁵⁹⁶ The same movement of thought is found in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's experience of loss in the face of the death of another human being: "The more appropriately the no-longer-being-there of the deceased is grasped phenomenally, the more clearly it can be seen that in such being-with the dead, the real having-come-to-an-end of the deceased is precisely *not* experienced. Death does

⁵⁹⁴ SZ, p. 137.

⁵⁹⁵ SZ, p. 141: "Das *Worum* die Furcht fürchtet, ist das sich fürchtende Seiende selbst, das Dasein. Nur Seiendes, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, kann sich fürchten. Das Fürchten erschließt dieses Seiende in seiner Gefährdung, in der Überlassenheit an es selbst."

⁵⁹⁶ SZ, p. 142: "Genau besehen ist aber das Fürchten für . . . doch ein *Sichfürchten*. 'Befürchtet' ist dabei das Mitsein mit dem Anderen, der einem entrissen werden könnte."

reveal itself as a loss, but as a loss such as experienced by those who remain.”⁵⁹⁷ In short, Heidegger basically argues that Dasein’s ability to experience things as mattering to it – even in the case of fearing for or mourning another person – is grounded in its care for itself and its own possibilities.

Although ultimately problematic, I think Heidegger’s analysis here contains an important yet limited insight: the fact that I am disclosed to myself as personally addressed by the situation at hand clearly constitutes a basic aspect of our experience of things as mattering and significant. If this component were removed, we would only have experiences in which we would experience things as important without them addressing us personally. But what kind of experience would this be? Would it be an experience of the kind we have when we watch human disasters, which have taken place far away or a long time ago, on TV or on the Internet? But is not even this experience just a modification of the primary experience of being personally addressed? Even though the tragedy I am witnessing has occurred long ago there seems to be nothing that hinders me from feeling personally addressed by the persons I perceive, from wanting to talk to them and help them, from mourning them. My lack of power to do anything does not mean that the experience loses its character of personal address. Should we not rather say that this kind of experience, in which we witness the joys and sorrows of other people at great distances in time and space (experiences which modern communication and media technology has increased *ad absurdum*) puts us in morally demanding situation in which we – as a *reaction* to our primary experience of being personally addressed – are forced to choose between either repressing the possibility of personal care, or genuinely caring in spite of our having little or no possibilities of concretely encountering or helping the people we care for.

However, Heidegger’s argument does not only involve the claim that experiencing oneself as personally addressed is a central feature of Dasein’s experience of significance. It also centrally involves the thesis that in experiencing other entities as significant – fearful, joyful,

⁵⁹⁷ SZ, p. 239: “Je angemessener das Nichtmehrdasein des Verstorbenen phänomenal gefaßt wird, um so deutlicher zeigt sich, daß solches Mitsein mit dem Toten gerade *nicht* das eigentliche Zuendekommensein des Verstorbenen erfährt. Der Tod enthüllt sich zwar als Verlust, aber mehr als solcher, den die Verbleibenden erfahren.”

threatening, sorrowful – it is ultimately Dasein’s care for itself, its basic egoism, that makes other things and persons appear significant to it. However, Heidegger does not offer any phenomenological support for this claim but seems to be led into it by the logic of the existential analytic itself, that is, by its primal repression of the possibility of a direct loving care for the other person as such.

In the end, I do not think that collective pressure and egoistic desire should be seen as different or opposed motives. Instead, it seems that they constitute different complementary aspects of the same egoistic-collectivist attitude. To the extent that we close ourselves to the possibility of relating openly to the other as a you, it seems that the only possibility that remains is the possibility of relating to others as a collective “we” or “they” – whereby the individual other person basically appears in terms of her social role or as a general representative of some group. Now, this way of relating to others is essentially characterized by both collectivism and egoism. When we – in our desire for honor, esteem, and respect and in our fear of shame, disgrace, and humiliation – care about the norms and opinions of our collective group, what we essentially care about is ourselves: about how I appear in front of the collective I identify with, and about how well I manage to realize what the collective happens to find honorable, good, and desirable. Conversely, in this attitude the content of my will is more or less completely formed by what my collective thinks is praiseworthy. Here, everything revolves around how I appear in front of my group of impersonal others: I care about the others because I care about myself and I desire what I desire because the others seem to desire it.

But is it not possible to think of a purely egoistic motivation, in which the collectivist aspects has been minimized or removed altogether? Is it not possible, for example, to ignore or disdain what the collective group surrounding me values and thinks about me, and instead be driven by a purely narcissistic will to self-affirmation and self-glorification of the kind that is so typical of philosophers and intellectuals? Although I cannot show this in detail here, I think that what might first appear as an attitude that has emancipated itself more or less radically from the pressure of the crowd in fact retains its basic collectivist character. As soon as we start reflecting on the psychological-existential meaning of the break with the collective group, we will invariably discover that the seemingly

independent will to self-affirmation hides within itself a secret longing for collective affirmation. The only difference is that the group we identify with has been modified: either the independent self-affirming individual identifies with some existing alternative group, or she identifies – in a spirit of resentment and revenge – with a fictitious, dreamt up, group which affirms her unconditionally and which she hopes will one day materialize as a real collective audience welcoming and praising her as a hero.

Heidegger's analysis of authenticity in *Being and Time* is, in short, haunted by severe problems that concern both the criteria and the ethical-existential motives informing Dasein's understanding and choice of its possibilities. Given Heidegger's inability to account for the difference between collective prejudice and originary understanding a situation arises in which, on the one hand, the prejudiced interpretedness of the They figures as the basic reservoir from which Dasein has to fetch its possibilities, and, on the other hand, Dasein's only criteria for choosing its own possibilities lies in its blind whims and impulses. Moreover, since Heidegger rules out the possibility of a direct sympathy for the other person for her own sake, his account of Dasein's basic ethical-existential motives is rooted in an egoistic-collectivist attitude. While the collective norms of the They constitute the source of all of Dasein's concrete possibilities, it is Dasein's egoistic care for itself that makes these norms, and the pressure they exert, seem important to it in the first place. In his later thinking, Heidegger will try get out of this impasse by attempting to answer the question that *Being and Time* opened up and left hanging: How can our historical world – with its meanings and norms – address us as binding beyond the prejudices of the They? However, given that Heidegger will not rehabilitate our relation to the personal other as our source of ethical-existential significance, we can expect that it will be difficult for him to find a way out of the egoistic-collectivist loop.

The End of Being and Time

Having completed his analysis of the basic structure of Dasein as being-in-the-world and temporality, Heidegger should, according to his own plan, be prepared to take on the remaining tasks of the project of fundamental ontology: to explicate the temporal sense of being as such and to destruct

the history of ontology. Yet this will never materialize. Heidegger never publishes the third division of the first part nor the second part. Instead, in the following years he gradually gives up the project of fundamental ontology. But why? How should we understand the philosophical problems motivating this breakdown and the ensuing turn in Heidegger's thinking? And how are they related to his struggle with the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology?

Let us begin where the published portion of *Being and Time* ends.

In fact, in the last paragraph of the book it is already possible to notice a new and surprisingly fierce tendency towards doubt and self-criticism. Having briefly summed up the results of the existential analytic, Heidegger writes that the explication of the constitution of Dasein remains only “*one way*” towards the aim of working out the question of being, and that it is only after we have gone along this way that it will be possible to decide “whether it is the *only* way or even the *right* one at all.”⁵⁹⁸ Heidegger's central worry here is centered on the “fundamental problem which still remains ‘veiled’”: “Can ontology be grounded *ontologically* or does it also need for this an *ontic* foundation, and *which* being must take over the function of providing this foundation?”⁵⁹⁹ That is to say, can the existential analytic of the being of a particular being, Dasein, precede and prepare the way for an explication of the sense of being or must the explication of being be ontologically grounded; must it, in some sense, start directly with questioning being itself? This basic worry is seconded by another critical question: “Why does being get ‘conceived’ ‘proximally’ in terms of the present-at-hand *and not* in terms of the ready-to-hand, which indeed lies *closer* to us? *Why* does this reifying always keep coming back to exercise its dominion?”⁶⁰⁰ That is, can the existential analytic – in particular the analysis of Dasein's authenticity and inauthenticity – account for the longstanding tendency of philosophy to conceive of being as presence-at-hand?

⁵⁹⁸ SZ, pp. 436, 437.

⁵⁹⁹ SZ, p. 436: “läßt sich die Ontologie *ontologisch* begründen oder bedarf sie auch hierzu eines *ontischen* Fundamentes, und *welches* Seiende muß die Funktion der Fundierung übernehmen?”

⁶⁰⁰ SZ, p. 437: “Warum wird das Sein gerade ‘zunächst’ aus dem Vorhandenen ‘begriffen’ *und nicht* aus dem Zuhandenen, das doch *noch näher* liegt? *Warum* kommt diese Verdinglichung immer wieder zur Herrschaft?”

Heidegger's self-critical queries might in principal be read as rhetorical questions, not intended to pose any threat to the project of fundamental ontology. However, the fact of the matter is that – regardless of Heidegger's intent at the time – they are astonishingly pertinent and target basic problems in the guiding idea that the existential analytic of Dasein will lead to an understanding of the sense of being.

How?

Heidegger began *Being and Time* by insisting on the ontic-ontological priority of the question of being, arguing that we always already live in a factual historical understanding of being which organizes our possibilities of understanding particular beings as beings. Since this understanding of being is first and foremost unthematic and prejudiced, the fundamental ontological task of explicating the sense of being emerges as a central condition for achieving a clear understanding of ourselves and other beings. Now, taken seriously this argument – building on the strict hierarchy of the ontological difference – would have two central consequences: first, fundamental ontology would have to start by directly questioning being as such, conceived as the ultimate dimension of meaning which determines our possibilities of grasping and explicating different beings, for example the human being, Dasein; second, the inquiry would have to take the form of a historical thinking, interpreting our factual understanding of being and critically destructing it in order to arrive at its historical origin.

However, none of this happens. As we have seen, Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology rests on the guiding idea that an existential analytic of the being of the human being, Dasein, is needed to prepare the way for an explication of the sense of being as such. Indeed, given that the "sense" of being signifies the basic "structure" or "framework" (*Gerüst*)⁶⁰¹ conditioning Dasein's understanding of intelligible being, Heidegger thought that it was both possible and necessary to analyze Dasein's basic structure of understanding – temporality – to be able to explicate, on this basis, the sense of being as time. Moreover, he maintained that the analytic had to take the form of an analysis of the structures characterizing Dasein's authentic existentiell understanding of itself and its possibilities: in order to grasp the primordial temporal structure of Dasein it is first

⁶⁰¹ SZ, p. 151.

necessary to access and explicate the authentic self-understanding in which Dasein discloses its ownmost possibilities as its groundless and finite historical heritage. By anchoring the ontological understanding of being in Dasein's struggle between authenticity and inauthenticity, he also thought it would be possible to diagnose the traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand as a result of philosophy's taking its starting point in inauthentic Dasein's flight from its primordial temporal existence.

Heidegger's existential-analytical approach implies that he *de facto* foregoes what the argument for the priority of the question of being – the ontological difference – establishes as the necessity of proceeding directly through a hermeneutic-destructive explication of the factual historical understanding of being which always already determines our gaze. Above I have already argued that Heidegger's concrete analyses of Dasein – contrary to his hermeneutic-destructive program – basically transpire as intuition-based phenomenological reflections on the structures of Dasein's experience. Now we will focus on the other aspect of the ambivalence, namely that the methodical approach of the existential analytic presupposes that the ontic-existential understanding of Dasein can function as the autonomous phenomenal ground of the ontological-existential explication in a way that runs counter to the initial argument for the priority of the question of being. Ultimately, this will also explain Heidegger's problems with accounting for the traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand as a symptom of Dasein's tendency towards inauthenticity.

The tension I have in mind is signaled by the manifest ambivalence of Heidegger's explicit attempt to articulate the relation between *existentiell* and *existential* understanding, i.e., between Dasein's ontic understanding of itself and its possibilities and its ontological understanding of its structure and sense of being. As he introduces this distinction, he accentuates the autonomy of *existentiell* understanding: in relating to the basic question of existence – to be itself authentically or not be itself – Dasein is said to be led by an “*existentiell*” understanding which is not in need of any “theoretical transparency of the ontological structure of existence.”⁶⁰² Still, it does not take more than a few pages until Heidegger feels compelled to claim that “*existentiell* interpretation can require existential analytic” and

⁶⁰² SZ, p. 12: “theoretischen Durchsichtigkeit der ontologischen Struktur der Existenz.”

that all previous explication of Dasein only receives its “existential justification” once the basic structures of Dasein have been worked out in the light of the question of being.⁶⁰³ Heidegger’s analysis of conscience exhibits the same tension. Having first emphasized that “existence is not necessarily and directly impaired by an ontologically insufficient understanding of conscience” he immediately continues: “Still, the existentially more primordial interpretation also discloses *possibilities* of a more primordial existentiell understanding.”⁶⁰⁴

What is the philosophical ambivalence at the root of these conflicting statements?

As opposed to Heidegger’s thesis about the hierarchical priority of the understanding of being, it belongs to the phenomenological method of the existential analytic that it ascribes autonomy and priority to Dasein’s ontic-existential understanding. To phenomenologically explicate the being of Dasein is to disclose the ontological structures that characterize Dasein’s existentiell experience and understanding. This means that in order to explicate the structure of an experience we need to have access to this experience and the existentiell understanding that it involves, so that we reflectively explicate the basic structures and moments constituting what we ontically experience. For example, Heidegger’s analysis of readiness-to-hand articulates the structure of what we ontically experience in our primary practical coping with tools whereas his analysis of conscience articulates the structure of what we ontically experience in hearing the call of conscience. Heidegger himself formulates this clearly when he writes that the existential analytic “only carries out the explication of what Dasein itself ontically discloses.”⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, to the extent that our existentiell experience itself involves the alternatives of either transparently

⁶⁰³ SZ, p. 16: “Existenzielle Auslegung kann existenziale Analytik fordern, wenn anders philosophische Erkenntnis in ihrer Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit begriffen ist. Erst wenn die Grundstrukturen des Daseins in expliziter Orientierung am Seinsproblem selbst zureichend herausgearbeitet sind, wird der bisherige Gewinn der Daseinsauslegung seine existenziale Rechtfertigung erhalten.”

⁶⁰⁴ SZ, p. 295: “So wenig die Existenz notwendig und direkt beeinträchtigt wird durch ein ontologisch unzureichendes Gewissensverständnis, so wenig ist durch eine existenzial angemessene Interpretation des Gewissens das existenzielle Verstehen des Rufes gewährleistet. [...] Gleichwohl erschließt die existenzial ursprünglichere Interpretation auch *Möglichkeiten* ursprünglicheren existenziellen Verstehens.”

⁶⁰⁵ SZ, p. 185: “Sie vollzieht nur die Explikation dessen, was das Dasein ontisch erschließt.”

encountering what we encounter, of fleeing from it and covering it up, the ontological explication necessarily becomes dependent on our capacity for existentiell insight: “The ontological ‘truth’ of the existential analysis is developed on the ground of the primordial existentiell truth.”⁶⁰⁶ Hence, we can only hope to explicate what we experience in anxiety and conscience if we possess the authentic existentiell understanding that consists in openly encountering these phenomena.

The upshot of this is that Heidegger’s entire fundamental ontological project is marked by the following ambivalence. On the one hand, the project is motivated by the thesis that our ontological understanding of being always already organizes our understanding of beings. On the other hand, the existential analytic presupposes that Dasein’s existentiell experiences and understanding functions as the autonomous phenomenal ground of the existential analytic. The analytic explicates the structures of phenomena that are already disclosed by our existentiell understanding, whereby the existentiell understanding itself does not seem to be determined by any existential understanding.

The fact of the matter is that Heidegger, after the initial argument for the priority of the question of being, makes no attempt to concretely show how Dasein’s understanding of being would determine its ontic understanding of itself and other entities. The thematic focus of the existential analytic constantly lies on the existentiell experience of pre-philosophical Dasein without referring to the ontological or pre-ontological understanding of being that is supposed to guide these experiences. For instance, in his analysis of authenticity Heidegger describes how Dasein through anxiety and conscience is confronted with its mortality and with the groundlessness of its historical possibilities, and how it can choose – in resoluteness – its ownmost finite possibilities. In this, however, he does not say word about how Dasein, in order to be able to achieve transparent self-understanding, would have to break free from and dismantle the traditional conception of being as presence-at-hand, and achieve a more primordial understanding of its own being as temporal being-in-the-world, and, ultimately, of the sense of being as temporality. Instead, the very possibility of explicating authenticity prior to all ontology

⁶⁰⁶ SZ, p. 316: “Die ontologische ‘Wahrheit’ der existenzialen Analyse bildet sich aus auf dem Grunde der ursprünglichen existenziellen Wahrheit.”

implies that it is fully possible to attain transparent existentiell understanding without primordial ontological understanding.

In short, the ontological difference that constituted the motivational ground of the project of fundamental ontology is to a great degree contravened by the approach of the existential analytic, something that undermines Heidegger's account for the decisive role of philosophy in our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Heidegger's inability to handle this ambivalence comes to the fore in the late methodological paragraph 63 titled "The hermeneutical situation at which we have arrived for interpreting the sense of being of care; and the methodological character of the existential analytic in general."⁶⁰⁷ The paragraph – which is placed between Heidegger's analysis of authenticity and his attempt to explicate, on this basis, the temporality of Dasein – begins by reemphasizing that the existential analytic must access Dasein's most qualified existentiell self-understanding as the phenomenal ground of the ontological analysis: "Our falling being alongside the things with which we concern ourselves most closely in the 'world' guides the everyday interpretation of Dasein, and covers up ontically Dasein's authentic being, so that the ontology which is directed towards this entity is denied an appropriate basis. [...] The laying-bare of Dasein's primordial being must rather be *wrested* from Dasein *in opposition* to the falling ontic-ontological tendency of interpretation."⁶⁰⁸ However – clearly sensing a difficulty – Heidegger now raises the question whence the ontological explication is to take its own "guidance and regulation":⁶⁰⁹ "Ontological interpretation projects pre-given beings upon the being that is their own, so as to conceptualize it with regard to its structure. Where are the guideposts to

⁶⁰⁷ SZ, p. 310: "Die für eine Interpretation des Seinssinnes der Sorge gewonnene hermeneutische Situation und der methodische Charakter der existenzialen Analytik überhaupt."

⁶⁰⁸ SZ, p. 311: "Das verfallende Sein beim Nächstbesorgten der 'Welt' führt die alltägliche Daseinsauslegung und verdeckt ontisch das eigentliche Sein des Daseins, um damit der auf dieses Seiende gerichtete Ontologie die angemessene Basis zu versagen. [...] Die Freilegung des ursprünglichen Seins des Daseins muß ihm vielmehr *im Gegenzug* zur verfallenden ontisch-ontologischen Auslegungstendenzen *abgerungen* werden."

⁶⁰⁹ SZ, p. 312: "*Leitung* und *Regelung*."

direct the projection, so that being will be reached at all?"⁶¹⁰ That is, what understanding guides the ontological explication and allows it to catch sight of and identify Dasein's basic structures of being: being-in-the-world, care, temporality, and historicity? To answer this question Heidegger has recourse to his introductory notion that Dasein always already lives in a factual pre-ontological understanding of being which ontology explicates and radicalizes: "Whether explicitly or not, whether appropriately or not, existence is somehow understood too. Every ontic understanding 'includes' certain moments, even if only *pre*-ontologically, that is, even if they are not grasped theoretically or thematically."⁶¹¹ However, is it really possible to rehabilitate, at this stage, the notion of the primacy of our factual understanding of being which the concrete methodical approach of the existential analytic has bypassed?

Heidegger makes the following attempt to specify the nature of Dasein's pre-ontological "self-interpretation":

Dasein understands itself as being-in-the-world, even if it does so without sufficient ontological definiteness. Being thus, it encounters beings which have the kind of being of what is ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. No matter how far removed from an ontological concept the distinction between existence and reality may be, no matter even if Dasein initially understands existence as reality, Dasein is not just present-at-hand but has already *understood itself*, however mythical or magical its interpretations may be. For otherwise, Dasein would never "live" in a myth and would not be concerned with magic in ritual and cult.⁶¹²

⁶¹⁰ SZ, p. 312: "Die ontologische Interpretation entwirft vorgegebenes Seiendes auf das ihm eigene Sein, um es hinsichtlich seiner Struktur auf den Begriff zu bringen. Wo sind die Wegweiser für die Entwurfsrichtung, damit sie überhaupt auf das Sein treffe?"

⁶¹¹ SZ, p. 312: "Existenz ist, ob ausdrücklich oder nicht, ob angemessen oder nicht, irgendwie mitverstanden. Jedes ontische Verstehen hat seine wenn auch nur *vor*-ontologischen, das heißt nicht theoretisch-thematisch begriffenen 'Einschlüsse'."

⁶¹² SZ, p. 313: "Das Dasein versteht sich, obgleich ohne zureichende ontologische Bestimmtheit, als In-der-Welt-sein. So seiend begegnet ihm Seiendes von der Seinsart des Zuhandenen und Vorhandenen. Mag der Unterschied von Existenz und Realität noch so weit von einem ontologischen Begriff entfernt sein, mag das Dasein sogar zunächst die Existenz als Realität verstehen, es ist nicht nur vorhanden, sondern hat *sich*, in welcher mythischen und magischen Auslegung auch immer, je schon *verstanden*. Denn sonst 'lebte' es nicht in einem Mythos und besorgte nicht in Ritus und Kultus seine Magie." Cf. also SZ, p. 321

The passage begins by insisting that Dasein always already possesses a pre-ontological, i.e., unthematic and more or less vague understanding of its own being as being-in-the-world. However, Heidegger's only argument here – that “otherwise, Dasein would never ‘live’ in a myth and would not be concerned with magic” – is weak and does not show what it is supposed to show. The fact that Dasein has always lived in different interpretations of being – mythical, magical, religious, philosophical – only shows that the human being has a strong tendency to develop general ontological interpretations of itself and of the world; it does not show that these interpretations build on a pre-ontological understanding of Dasein as temporal being-in-the-world. Indeed, it seems that Heidegger's claim that Dasein “understands itself” regardless of whether it misunderstands its own being as objective present-at-hand reality suggests the opposite to what is intended, namely that Dasein's ontic-existential understanding of itself and its possibilities is prior to and independent of its ontological understanding of its own being and of being as such.

The same tendency of Heidegger's argument for the priority of Dasein's factual pre-ontological understanding of being to work against itself is even more obvious in the following later passage: “*In saying ‘I,’ Dasein expresses itself as being-in-the-world.* But does Dasein, in saying ‘I’ in the everyday manner, mean *itself as being-in-the-world*? Here we must make a distinction. When saying ‘I,’ Dasein surely means the being that it itself always is. The everyday interpretation of the self, however, has a tendency to understand itself in terms of the ‘world’ with which it is concerned. When Dasein means itself ontically, it *fails to see* itself in relation to the kind of being of that entity which it is itself. And this holds especially for the basic constitution of Dasein, being-in-the-world.”⁶¹³ As Heidegger tries to specify the sense in which Dasein expresses itself as being-in-the-world, he claims that Dasein in saying “I” means “the being that it itself always.” However, when Dasein means itself in this way it “means itself ontically,” something that is possible even if Dasein has a distorted ontological understanding of its own being. Hence, what Heidegger's argument

⁶¹³ SZ, p. 321: “*Im Ich-sagen spricht sich das Dasein als In-der-Welt-sein aus.* Aber meint denn das alltägliche Ich-sagen *sich als in-der-Welt-seiend*? Hier ist zu scheiden. Wohl meint das Dasein ich-sagend das Seiende, das es je selbst ist. Die alltägliche Selbstausslegung hat aber die Tendenz, sich von der besorgten ‘Welt’ her zu verstehen. Im ontischen Sich-meinen *versieht* es sich bezüglich der Seinsart des Seienden, das es selbst ist. Und das gilt vornehmlich von der Grundverfassung des Daseins, dem In-der-Welt-sein.”

suggests is that – contrary to his intensions – Dasein can mean itself ontically regardless of whether it understands or misunderstands itself ontologically.

Heidegger's difficulties with rehabilitating the priority of Dasein's factual pre-ontological understanding of being as that which guides and regulates the existential analytic culminates in the following attempt to articulate the relation between our pre-ontological understanding of being and the existential analytic in terms of a circle where the latter presupposes the former:

In positing the idea of existence, do we also posit some proposition from which we deduce further propositions about the being of Dasein, in accordance with formal rules of consistency? Or does this pre-supposing have the character of an understanding projection, in such a manner indeed that the interpretation developing this understanding *lets* that which is to be interpreted *be put into words for the very first time, so that it may decide of its own accord whether, as this being, it will provide the constitution of being for which it has been disclosed in the projection in a formally indicatory manner?*⁶¹⁴

That is, pre-ontological understanding of being guides the existential analytic by projecting the being of the entity to be investigated. In this way, it makes it possible to interpret the entity in question and let it “decide” whether it “provides the constitution of being” projected by the pre-ontological understanding. This, however, implies that the determining role of the preceding factual understanding of being has shrunk to naught: if the pre-ontological understanding of being merely guides the investigation as a provisional interpretation of the being of Dasein which the phenomenological analysis can either confirm or refute – then the preceding understanding of being does not determine our possibilities to identify beings and explicate their basic structures. On the contrary, in that case it is our direct phenomenological explication of the

⁶¹⁴ SZ, p. 314f.: “Wird mit der Idee der Existenz ein Satz angesetzt, aus dem wir nach den formalen Regeln der Konsequenz weitere Sätze über das Sein des Daseins deduzieren? Oder hat dieses Voraus-setzen den Charakter des verstehenden Entwerfens, so zwar, daß die solches Verstehen ausbildende Interpretation das Auszulegende *gerade erst selbst zu Wort kommen läßt, damit es von sich aus entscheide, ob es als dieses Seiende die Seinsverfassung bergibt, aus welche es im Entwurf formalanzweigend erschlossen wurde?*”

structures of Dasein's experience which constitutes the origin and ground of all our historical understandings of being.

Heidegger's effort to rehabilitate, at this late stage, the notion of the priority of our factual historical understanding of being fails – and is bound to fail. Since the existential analytic transpires as a phenomenological explication of the basic structures of Dasein's existentiell experiences, it is impossible to recover this notion without radically transfiguring the basic methodical approach of the existential analytical, which of itself forces Heidegger to reduce the factual understanding of being to a provisional prejudice that gains its truth through an intuitive reflection on Dasein's experiences.⁶¹⁵

In addition to the above, Heidegger's existential analytic also runs into difficulties as concerns its ambition to diagnose the traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand as a result of its rootedness in Dasein's inauthentic existence.

Heidegger is to my mind basically right in assuming – in *Being and Time* – that the ontological investigations of philosophy cannot but transpire as explications of the basic structures of our ontic-existentiell experiences, so that the explication is dependent on the sight and understanding of the experience under investigation. Given his account of authenticity and inauthenticity, it is only in so far as we have access to Dasein's resolute understanding of itself in its groundlessness and finitude that we can hope to explicate the originary temporal structure exhibited by this understanding. Conversely, as long as we take our starting point in Dasein's inauthentic flight from itself the way is barred to an understanding of Dasein's temporal-historical being. However, it seems

⁶¹⁵ In view of the fact Heidegger in his later thinking will insist on the priority of our historical understanding of being and on the necessity of a radically historical thinking it is not surprising that he, in the later handwritten comments found in his copy of *Being and Time*, recurrently decries the book's tendency to conceive of the method of fundamental ontology as that of explicating and reading off ontic experiences. For example, as regards the argument in §63 that our inauthentic existence covers up the primordial being of Dasein and thus cannot serve as the "appropriate basis" for an ontological explication he writes: "Awry! As if one could read off ontology from the genuine ontic. What is, then, genuine ontic, if not genuine from out of a pre-ontological projection" (*Schief! Als könnte aus der echten Ontik die Ontologie abgelesen werden. Was ist denn echte Ontik, wenn nicht echt aus vor-ontologischem Entwurf*) (SZ, p. 311a). See also SZ, pp. 12a, 38b, 311a, 325a.

that Dasein's inauthentic existence does not by itself prescribe which interpretations of being that will be developed on its basis. It only motivates a general type of interpretation of being which in a sufficiently convincing way covers up and justifies our flight from ourselves.

The upshot of this is that Heidegger in *Being and Time* cannot account for why the understanding of being as presence-at-hand achieves and maintains its dominating role in the Western tradition. According to Heidegger's basic argument, inauthentic Dasein tends to understand itself on the basis of its experience of the non-human world. Here there are two kinds of experience that could serve as paradigms for a distortive, inauthenticity-serving, understanding of being: first, Dasein's practical coping with tools; second, its theoretical observation of objects. Both of these could, it seems, in principle fulfill the covering-legitimizing function. Whereas the conception being as readiness-to-hand would allow Dasein to forget the possibility of authentic existence, and relate to itself as an instrumentally manageable affair in the world, the conception of being as presence-at-hand would allow it to relate to itself as an object of theoretical knowledge. However, there is nothing in Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic existence that would explain why philosophy begins to understand being as presence-at-hand and not as readiness-to-hand – or perhaps as something else.

In short, Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology essentially remains trapped in the following ambivalence. On the one hand, the basic analysis of the hierarchical as-structure of understanding prescribes the need of inquiring directly into being as such as the ultimate determining dimension of understanding, and to do this through a hermeneutic-destructive thinking. On the other hand, the existential analytic unfolds as a reflective phenomenological description of the basic necessary structures of Dasein's experiences, so that the ontic-existential experiences function as the autonomous phenomenal ground of the phenomenological description. As we shall see, Heidegger's later thinking will evolve as an attempt to answer more radically to his notion of the historical structure of phenomenality. This centrally involves questioning being itself directly in a historical way – something that is only possible by developing the central question of his later thinking: How does being open up as a primordial and binding historical destiny?

Part Three: The Openness of Being

3.1 Introduction

The third part of this thesis turns its focus to Heidegger's later thinking of the problem of phenomenality. It asks: What role does the problem of phenomenality play in the transformations of Heidegger's thinking after *Being and Time*? How does the later Heidegger conceive of the dynamics of phenomenal shining? What is the nature and rigor of his later thinking and its relation to phenomenology?

Since the period under consideration is long and complex – stretching from the first years after publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, over the so called “turn” of his thinking in the mid 1930s, through the paradigmatic years of his later thinking in the 1940s, 1950s and the early 1960s – I will begin by briefly recounting the history of Heidegger's later thinking, thus anticipating the analyses to come.

During the first years after the publication of *Being and Time* in February 1927 Heidegger continues his attempt to advance and complete his guiding project of fundamental ontology. In the introduction to the lecture course “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,” delivered in the summer term 1927, Heidegger promises to take on the decisive task reserved for the suspended third division of the first part of *Being and Time*, namely, to explicate the sense of being as temporality. In his concrete lectures, however, he never gets beyond a very rudimentary sketch of this theme. Still, in these years Heidegger actually accomplishes major parts of his planned destruction of the history of Western philosophy, which was to constitute the second part of *Being and Time* and proceed through readings of Kant, Descartes, and Aristotle. To begin with, Heidegger works out an explication of the ontologico-temporal problematic in Kant, which he publishes in the 1929 book *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.⁶¹⁶ Moreover, in “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology” he offers an interpretation of Aristotle's treatment of the problem of time in the

⁶¹⁶ *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, GA 3.

Physics, such as was originally intended to complete the destructive program by expounding the phenomenal basis and limits of ancient Greek ontology. This is about as far as the project of fundamental ontology will ever get.

Though Heidegger does not as yet give up his ambition to complete *Being and Time*, his investigations in the years 1928-1933 lead him to results that ever more tend to undermine the project of fundamental ontology. In a series of intensively probing lecture courses and texts – e.g. “The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic” (1928),⁶¹⁷ “Introduction to Philosophy” (1928-29),⁶¹⁸ “What Is Metaphysics?” (1929),⁶¹⁹ “On the Essence of Ground” (1929),⁶²⁰ and “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics” (1929/30)⁶²¹ – Heidegger increasingly emphasizes the fundamental role played by Dasein’s understanding of being. Drawing especially on Kant and Plato, Heidegger articulates Dasein’s understanding of being in terms of a free projection of being which precedes and conditions all Dasein’s knowledge of different beings, including the human being. In the end, however, pursuing this line of argument unsettles the basic methodological idea of the project of fundamental ontology: that it is possible to access the sense of being by way of a phenomenological analysis of the structure of the human being. Indeed, after the spring of 1929 we do not hear Heidegger talking about a continuation of *Being and Time* anymore.⁶²² Still, although Heidegger’s thinking in 1928-1933 relinquishes the fundamental ontological project and points the way towards a transformation of his philosophical stance, he does not as yet achieve a breakthrough but basically remains stuck in a mode of transcendental-phenomenological thinking which is unable to answer to and draw the consequences of its own results.

In the spring of 1933 Heidegger decides to engage himself politically in the Nazi revolution. For Heidegger National Socialism appeared as a counterforce against the destructive and leveling tendencies of modernity, and as a possible preparation for a philosophical projection of a new meaning-laden world for the German people. On April 21 he is elected as

⁶¹⁷ “Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz,” GA 26.

⁶¹⁸ “Einleitung in die Philosophie,” GA 27.

⁶¹⁹ “Was ist Metaphysik?,” in GA 9.

⁶²⁰ “Vom Wesen des Grundes,” in GA 9.

⁶²¹ “Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik,” GA 29/30.

⁶²² Cf. Sheehan 1984, p. 186.

rector of the University of Freiburg and two weeks later he becomes a member of the NSDAP. Having taken over the position as rector with enthusiasm, Heidegger within a year grows increasingly frustrated with his effort to inject the new revolutionary spirit into the university and to become the leading philosopher of Nazi Germany. On April 12 1934 he hands in his application to resign – not least for the reason that he had made too many academic enemies in his dictatorial role as *Führer*-rector. Following the debacle of the rectorate, Heidegger begins to lose his faith in the philosophical potential of the official ideology and politics of Nazism, which he in the second half of the 1930s starts to interpret critically as a manifestation of the nihilist technical-subjectivist metaphysics that he first hoped it would overcome. However, the story of Heidegger's relationship to Nazism does not end here: after his resignation from the rectorate Heidegger for many years continues to support Hitler and the Nazi regime, and to entertain a belief in the unrealized philosophical potential of National Socialism; he remains a member of NSDAP until the end of the war; finally, we have what I believe is the later Heidegger's deep failure – despite his critique of Nazism – to respond morally and philosophically to the catastrophe of Nazism and to the Holocaust in particular.

As Heidegger finds his way back to philosophy after his debacle as Nazi rector, he initiates a basic transformation of his philosophical stance. The decisive “turn” in Heidegger's thinking – at least from the point of view of the problem of phenomenality – takes place in the mid 1930s. It unfolds in a series of lecture courses and papers – e.g., “Hölderlin's Hymns ‘Germanien’ and ‘Der Rhein’” (1934-35),⁶²³ “Introduction to Metaphysics” (1935),⁶²⁴ “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1936),⁶²⁵ and “Basic Questions of Philosophy” (1937-38)⁶²⁶ – as well as in the massive self-reflective manuscripts *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*⁶²⁷ written in 1936-38 and *Mindfulness*⁶²⁸ written in 1938-39. Apart from Hölderlin, who plays a pivotal role, Heidegger's main philosophical influences during

⁶²³ “Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein,’” GA 39.

⁶²⁴ “Einführung in die Metaphysik,” GA 40.

⁶²⁵ “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in GA 5.

⁶²⁶ “Grundfragen der Philosophie,” GA 45.

⁶²⁷ *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, GA 65 (henceforth referred to as *Contributions* in the main text).

⁶²⁸ *Besinnung*, GA 66.

these years are the early pre-Socratic thinkers and Nietzsche. As I will argue, Heidegger's turn basically consists in a redirection of his guiding question: whereas Heidegger in *Being and Time* never radically asked the question of how historical being is given to us but instead concentrated on phenomenologically describing the basic structures of Dasein – being-in-the-world, temporality, historicity, freedom – as the basis for explicating the sense of being, he now insists that the basic philosophical question must concern precisely the givenness or openness of historical being itself: how does being open up and address us as our finite but binding historical context of meaning? It is no exaggeration to say that Heidegger's transformation of his central question opens up and determines all of his subsequent later thinking. As concerns the problem of phenomenality/phenomenology, this has two main consequences: first, the question of the openness of historical being leads Heidegger to provide a new account of the dynamic happening which allows a historical world to arise and shine; second, it brings with it a change in the methodological character of his thought, so that the phenomenology of *Being and Time* gives way to a more radically historical reflection tracing the possibilities of understanding harbored by our history.

Heidegger's late thinking – stretching from approximately 1935 to his death in 1976 – constitutes a vast and multifaceted collection of texts which cannot be comprised in a straight narrative. Still, for the sake of achieving a preliminary overview, we may note some general lines of development.

From the mid 1930s until the end of the war in 1945 Heidegger is primarily occupied with articulating his new guiding question of the openness of being – which he primarily names “the event” (*Ereignis*) or the “clearing” (*Lichtung*) of being – and sketching the historical program of his later thinking. This essentially involves elaborating – chiefly through a set of extensive courses on Nietzsche – a new explication of the nature of metaphysics as well as a diagnosis of how the subjectivist and technical understanding of being characteristic of the metaphysical tradition gets radicalized into the modern technical understanding of being as a material reserve for human desire and manipulation. This destiny, Heidegger claims, can only be overcome through a return to the Greek beginning of the history of metaphysics, such that we attempt to reflect on the hidden and bypassed origin of this first beginning in order, thereby, to open up

the basic philosophical possibilities required to prepare the way for a second new beginning. During these years – especially in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” from 1936 – Heidegger also works out an analysis of the dynamics which allow a historical world to arise and shine, a dynamics which takes the form of an interplay between the “world” and the “earth,” and which is primarily realized in the work of art. After the war, in 1946, Heidegger publishes his “Letter on Humanism” which is his first public written presentation of his late philosophy.⁶²⁹ Heidegger’s 1949 lectures at the private Club zu Bremen, titled “Insight Into That Which Is,”⁶³⁰ mark the beginning of a new phase in Heidegger’s development. Here Heidegger introduces a new lapidary and meditative style which from now on will characterize his thinking. In contrast to his texts from the 1930s and 1940s, which were often marked by terminological excess and grand historic-apocalyptic visions, Heidegger now attempts to open up the questions by pursuing finite paths of thinking which take their point of departure in specific contexts of questioning: texts, poems, or some aspect of the contemporary situation. Hence, the bulk of Heidegger’s key texts from the 1950s onwards consist in shorter essays gathered in anthologies such as *Lectures and Essays*,⁶³¹ *Identity and Difference*,⁶³² *On the Way to Language*,⁶³³ and *On the Matter of Thinking*.⁶³⁴ Among Heidegger’s main philosophical endeavors in the 1950s we may name his deepened reflections on language, poetry and technology as well as his rearticulation of the dynamics of shining in terms of what he now calls the “fourfold.” Following the end of the teaching ban, to which Heidegger had been condemned after the war by the victorious powers, Heidegger also delivers two important late lecture courses: “What is Called Thinking?” in 1951-52⁶³⁵ and “The Principle of Ground” in 1955-56.⁶³⁶ Even as he gets older, Heidegger is able to produce texts that shed new light on his basic questions. In *On the Matter of Thinking*, containing texts from 1962-1964, Heidegger again takes up the question of phenomenology and delivers one

⁶²⁹ “Brief über den ‘Humanismus,’” in GA 9.

⁶³⁰ “Einblick in das was ist,” in GA 79.

⁶³¹ *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA 7.

⁶³² *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11.

⁶³³ *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, GA 12.

⁶³⁴ *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14.

⁶³⁵ “Was heißt Denken?,” GA 8.

⁶³⁶ “Der Satz vom Grund,” GA 10.

of his most qualified attempts to articulate the methodological nature and rigor of his late thinking. Heidegger's last seminars and short writings from the late 1960s and early 1970s still contain illuminating – and sometimes even drastically questioning – reflections on his philosophical project.

The question of phenomenality/phenomenology has always been present in the discussion of Heidegger's turn and of the nature of his later thinking. Indeed, the fact that William J. Richardson just before its publication in 1963 altered the title of his classic study *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* – from *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought* to *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* – on Heidegger's own suggestion brings to expression the basic question that will henceforth be at stake:⁶³⁷ In what sense – if any – does Heidegger's turn essentially involve a departure from phenomenology towards another kind of historical thinking?

The debate concerning the fate of phenomenology in Heidegger's later thinking by and large exhibits the same tension between a transcendental phenomenological and a hermeneutic-deconstructivist line of interpretation that characterized the discussion of his earlier production. And, as always, such interpretations of the development of Heidegger's thinking are strongly bound up with systematic convictions concerning what constitutes the philosophically most basic and potent dimension of his thought. In schematic outline, the scene could perhaps be depicted as follows:

For the transcendental phenomenological interpretation – defended by, e.g., Steven Crowell, Søren Overgaard and Daniel Dahlstrom – Heidegger's early production culminating in *Being and Time* – his so called “phenomenological decade” – naturally forms the prime point of focus. During these years, so the argument goes, the systematic core of Heidegger's thinking lies in his effort to elaborate Husserl's phenomenology by describing the basic structures characterizing Dasein's pre-theoretical experience of the world. From this point of view Heidegger's turn in the 1930s is prone to emerge as a more or less drastic parting with his earlier phenomenology in favor of a radical historical

⁶³⁷ Cf. Richardson 1963, pp. ix-xxiii; GA 11, pp. 145-152.

thinking, a thinking that, as a consequence, is essentially in jeopardy of collapsing into historicism and speculative construction. It is symptomatic of this tendency that all the main explications of Heidegger as a phenomenologist focus almost entirely on his thinking in the 1920s under exclusion of everything else. Although the dominating attitude towards Heidegger's later thinking is clearly skeptical, it has also occasionally been claimed that Heidegger's late thinking, at least in so far as it constitutes rigorous philosophy, still includes and rests on traditional phenomenological descriptions.

From the vantage point of the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation, by contrast, Heidegger's development is apt to appear not as a drastic disruption but rather as a continuously deepening reflection on the finitude and historicity of thinking which reaches its most radical and consequent expression in his later writings. As regards the question concerning the relation of Heidegger's later thinking to phenomenology, it is possible to discern two main alternative attitudes. On the one hand, we have the interpretation, defended by e.g. John van Buren, which views Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a paramount example of the metaphysical yearning for absolute presence. The idea is that Heidegger's attachment to Husserl's phenomenology in the 1920s hampers his primary effort to think the finitude and groundlessness of being, and that he is only able to free himself from this influence in the mid 1930s.⁶³⁸ On the other hand, we have the interpretation, defended by e.g. Hans Ruin that explicates Husserl's own phenomenology in terms of an intensified probing of the conditions and limits of phenomenal evidence, so that Heidegger's thinking is seen as a gradual radicalization of a tendency already present in Husserl.⁶³⁹

It is obvious that of the two interpretational tendencies mentioned above the latter hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation has strongly dominated the debate about Heidegger's later thinking. This, of course, is not surprising given that Heidegger constantly proclaims the radically historical character of his later thinking and also in practice attempts to make good this claim. However, the upshot of this is that although the question of phenomenality/phenomenology has certainly been at stake in the discussion, there has been little concrete effort to analyze the role of

⁶³⁸ Cf. van Buren 1994a.

⁶³⁹ Cf. Ruin 1994.

the question of phenomenality in Heidegger's late thinking or the phenomenological character of this thought. Whereas the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpreters have generally dismissed or bypassed this issue, the transcendental phenomenological interpreters claiming that Heidegger's late thinking involves phenomenological description have rarely substantiated their claims by concrete analyses. Finally, there are some interpreters – e.g. Günter Figal, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, and Andrew Mitchell – who claim that Heidegger's late thinking is indeed a radical realization of phenomenology. However, in arguing that the later Heidegger remains a phenomenologist these commentators tend to empty the concept of phenomenology of the basic belief in intuitive givenness as a measure of understanding, which is definitive of the concept as I use it here.

The aim of this part is to explicate Heidegger's later thinking as a continuous effort to come to terms with the problem of phenomenality. After an examination of Heidegger's development in the transitional years 1928-1933 I turn to investigating the main aspects of his late thinking of phenomenality. First, I interpret the turn of his thinking in the mid 1930s as a turn to the question of the phenomenality or openness of historical being. Second, I explicate his account of the dynamics that let a historical world arise and shine forth as a binding destiny. Third, I examine the character and rigor of his later historical thinking and its relation to phenomenology. Finally, I also make an attempt to critically discuss and delimit the explanatory force of Heidegger's late effort to account for the givenness and normativity of historical being. Since my investigation is strictly guided by the question of phenomenality, I will have to leave out many important themes of Heidegger's late production, such as his grand diagnoses of the history of being, his analysis of the technical nature of metaphysics, and his massive work on Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Jünger and the pre-Socratic thinkers.

Heidegger's later production contains nothing like a systematic phenomenological investigation of the basic structure of the epiphany of being. His writings from 1935 onwards constitute a complex and continuously shifting network of textual paths which open up and circle around his guiding questions from different thematic-conceptual viewpoints, without ever being summed up in a general overarching

conceptuality. This strategy of writing is ultimately rooted in Heidegger's conviction that the only rigorous way for thinking to answer to its matter – i.e. the givenness of historical being – is to take as its starting point the factual historical problem-situations in which we live and proceed through a kind of internal historical questioning of the hidden grounds and presuppositions conditioning these situations. Hence, to the later Heidegger the very idea of finding and articulating the general structure of phenomenal shining must appear as an illusory attempt to abandon the historicity and finitude of thought.

However, notwithstanding Heidegger's insistence on the irreducible historical way-character of his thinking, I think it is feasible to explicate the basic features recurring through his articulations of the dynamics of shining. But does not this mean that I in effect flout Heidegger's own notion of the rigor of thinking? It does. Although Heidegger's late thinking certainly constitutes one of the most qualified efforts ever to think and realize the historically finite nature of thought, I believe that, in the end, he exaggerates the degree to which our thinking is determined by its history. At the end of the day I believe that we – through and beyond our historical pre-understandings – have an open experiential access to beings which is not necessarily controlled by the pre-understandings inherent in our history, and on the basis of which we can develop general descriptions of the structures of these experiences. This also implies that in my view the later Heidegger himself – to be sure, in an unclear and ambiguous manner – is habitually lead to make use of general descriptions the sense of which is not only to express the internal logic of our finite historical situation but which ultimately aim at nothing less than articulating the general transhistorical structure of the epiphany of being from different conceptual points of view. Hence, even though my ambition to explicate the basic features of Heidegger's conception of the dynamics of shining goes against his self-understanding, I believe it might very well do justice to the concrete philosophical work that he actually does. Since my methodological decisions rest on answers to questions that we are still struggling with, I presently have to refer the reader to my critique of Heidegger's radical historicism in the last chapter of this part of the thesis, and to the epilogue in which I provisionally outline my view of these issues.

The third part is divided into the following chapters: (3.2) Investigations of the Philosophical Nature of Man 1928-33, (3.3) The Question of the Openness of Being, (3.4) The Dynamics of Shining, (3.5) Heidegger's Late Historical Thinking, and (3.6) Critical Delimitations.

3.2 Investigations of the Philosophical Nature of Man 1928-1933

The years 1928-1933 have commonly been treated as a somewhat subordinate transitional period in Heidegger's philosophical production, separating the early from the late Heidegger. These are the years when Heidegger initially attempts to press on with the project of fundamental ontology begun in *Being and Time* but is gradually forced to give it up – without, however, as yet being able to open up a new philosophical stance; these are also the years preceding and discharging into Heidegger's appointment as Nazi rector of the university of Freiburg in April 1933.

As a result of its intermediary status, this period has not been given much independent attention but has often been interpreted anachronistically, in such a way that isolated concepts have either been read backward as continuations of *Being and Time* or forward as early articulations of his later thought. What is more, some of the central philosophical ideas that Heidegger tries out during this period have been apt to appear dubious to later commentators, e.g., his new interest in metaphysics, his proposal of a metontological task for philosophy, as well as his idealistically colored explication of the understanding of being as a free world-projection. On the other hand, some interpreters representing the hermeneutic-deconstructive reading have saluted these years as the true beginning of Heidegger's turn, seeing in them a departure from the transcendentalism of the project of fundamental ontology toward a more radical questioning of the finitude and historicity of being, and taking this as the start of his later thought.⁶⁴⁰

In this chapter, I offer an outline of the main modifications that Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the years 1928-1933 in so far as they are relevant for understanding his struggle with the problem of

⁶⁴⁰ Cf., e.g., Krell 1986; Sallis 1990; Bernasconi 1993; Grondin 1995.

phenomenality. At least from this perspective, I think there is good reason to view these years as a transitional period rather than as the beginning of his late thinking. Even though Heidegger's investigations involve important modifications of the analyses of the structure of phenomenality in *Being and Time*, and lead him to results which undermine the project of fundamental ontology and prepare the way for his later thinking, he still basically remains stuck in the ambivalences of his old stance. As I will argue, it is only in the years following his resignation from the position as rector in 1934 that Heidegger is able to carry out the decisive turn of his guiding question, a turn which opens up and determines the matter and methodological approach of his later thinking.

The Philosophical Nature of Dasein

Günter Figal has characterized Heidegger's development after *Being and Time* as follows: "Dasein in its everydayness is not separated from philosophy anymore, but is essentially philosophical. Only thus can Heidegger adhere to a thought that has accompanied his philosophical work from the point of its autonomous beginning – namely, the thought of a historical philosophy."⁶⁴¹

I can only agree.

Heidegger entire effort to orient himself after *Being and Time* revolves around his new strong emphasis on the philosophical nature of Dasein. In his last Marburg lecture course "The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic" from the summer 1928 Heidegger writes: "metaphysics belongs to the nature of human beings."⁶⁴² A few months later, he begins his first course after the return to Freiburg, "Introduction to Philosophy," by asserting that the human being does not, strictly speaking, need to be introduced into philosophy since "we always already philosophize": "We do not philosophize every once in a while, but constantly and necessarily, in so

⁶⁴¹ Figal 1992, p. 93. "Dasein ist nicht mehr als Alltägliches von der Philosophie verschieden, sondern ist wesentlich philosophisch. Allein so kann Heidegger an einem Gedanken festhalten, der seine philosophische Arbeit von ihrem eigenständigen Beginn begleiten hat – dem Gedanken einer geschichtlichen Philosophie."

Cf. also Figal [ed.] 2007a, pp. 20f.

⁶⁴² GA 26, p. 274: "die Metaphysik gehört zur Natur des Menschen." Cf. also GA 26, p. 18.

far as we exist as human beings. To exist as a human being means to philosophize. [...] Philosophizing belongs to the human Dasein as such.”⁶⁴³ Why this renewed emphasis on man’s philosophical nature?

Even though Heidegger began *Being and Time* by pointing to Dasein’s factual pre-ontological understanding of being as the motivational ground for the entire philosophical question of being, the existential analytic approach implied that this pre-understanding of being was passed over. Instead of proceeding as a strict hermeneutic explication of Dasein’s factual historical understanding of being, the analytic transpired as a phenomenological description of the structure of authentic Dasein. In this, the focus of the existential analysis lay entirely on the authentic self-understanding of pre-philosophical Dasein, whereby this understanding functioned as the autonomous phenomenal ground for the philosophical analysis of the sense of being. This mode of analysis, however, flouted Heidegger’s basic notion that our historical understanding of being determines our ontic knowledge of beings. Moreover, it made it thoroughly unclear how the philosophical question of being is provoked by Dasein’s struggle for authenticity.

Now Heidegger closes this pre-philosophical clearance by forcefully stressing that the human being is always already challenged by the question of being as its own basic problem. Since our understanding of being precedes and determines our understanding of beings – including ourselves and our guiding possibilities – it must be at the basis of all ontic understanding. This means that there can be no pre-philosophical, e.g. mythical or religious, life-forms prior to or untouched by the philosophical problem of being. Instead, all apparently pre-philosophical forms of understanding must be grasped as “different possibilities, multiple levels and degrees of wakefulness” in which the human being can “stand in philosophy.”⁶⁴⁴ As a result, philosophy, conceived as the possibility of a

⁶⁴³ GA 27, p. 3: “Wir philosophieren nicht dann und wann, sondern ständig und notwendig, sofern wir als Menschen existieren. Als Mensch da sein, heißt philosophieren. [...] Das Philosophieren gehört zum menschlichen Dasein als solchem.”

⁶⁴⁴ GA 27, p. 3: “Weil nun aber das Menschsein verschiedene Möglichkeiten, mannigfache Stufen und Grade der Wachheit hat, kann der Mensch in verschiedener Weise in der Philosophie stehen.” Heidegger’s emphasis on the philosophical essence of man also prompts him to rethink the relationship between philosophy and religion. In the early Freiburg lecture courses Heidegger still basically conceived of philosophy

transparent enactment of our understanding of being, emerges as the basic and decisive undertaking guiding all our understanding of life and the world.

The Priority of the Understanding of Being

Heidegger's accentuation of the philosophical nature of man essentially rests on his modified analysis of the fundamental role played by the understanding of being within Dasein's understanding in general.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger articulated the hierarchical as-structure of phenomenal understanding in the following way: our understanding of particular entities as meaningful phenomena is conditioned by our understanding of the world, i.e., of the instrumental reference-networks in which we live and of the historical purposes in which these references are ultimately anchored; our understanding of the world is, in its turn, conditioned by our understanding of the different modes of being characterizing different beings; our understanding of the different substantial modes of being is finally conditioned by our understanding of the sense of being. However, in the years following the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger puts a considerable amount of effort into specifying and rearticulating the basic structure of phenomenal understanding. Let us consider the three main aspects of this rearticulation one at a time:

as an explication of pre-theoretical life in its primary temporal movement. In this, he kept open the possibility of an authentic pre-theoretical enactment of life in its temporality, and suggested that such an enactment was paradigmatically manifested in originary Christianity. In the years following the publication of *Being and Time* this constellation changes as Heidegger starts to view religion as a more or less inferior and unclear way of enacting our basic understanding of being. The conflict comes to the fore in the following remark from "The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic": "But might not the presumably ontic faith in God be at bottom godlessness? And might the genuine metaphysician be more religious than the usual faithful, than the members of a 'church' or even than the 'theologians' of every confession?" (*Ob aber nicht der vermeintliche ontische Glaube an Gott im Grunde Gottlosigkeit ist? Und der echte Metaphysiker religiöser ist denn die üblichen Gläubigen, Angehörigen einer "Kirche" oder gar die "Theologen" jeder Konfession?*) (GA 26, p. 211). In the end, Heidegger's explorations of the philosophical nature of man set the stage for his later effort to grant to philosophy – and to poetry – a decisive role in thinking and salvaging what had previously been the central matters of religion and theology: "the gods" and "the holy."

First, Heidegger accentuates the priority of our understanding of the world in relation to our understanding of particular entities. In *Being and Time* Heidegger's conception of the world grew out of his analysis of Dasein's practical coping with tools, whereby the world was explicated as the context of instrumental relations allowing us to grasp the particular tool as something-in-order-to-something. However, although Heidegger ultimately anchored the instrumental contexts of the world in the historical possibilities of Dasein – the historical paradigms of meaningful life bequeathed by our heritage – his emphasis on Dasein's practical coping still made it easy to think that his basic move consisted in replacing the traditional picture of our relation to the world as a theoretical seeing of isolated objects with the notion that Dasein's primary understanding has the character of a practical unthematic understanding of the particular totalities of tools and instrumental relations that we find around us. In "The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic" and in the subsequent essay "On the Essence of Ground" from 1929 Heidegger makes it thoroughly clear that our understanding of the world should not be identified with our orientation within particular totalities of tools: "If one identifies the ontic context of equipment [...] with the world" it becomes "hopeless" to understand Dasein's constitution as being-in-the-world.⁶⁴⁵

In order to bring out the priority of our understanding of the world over all ontic knowledge Heidegger proceeds through a reflection on the concept of "transcendence." What is crucial, Heidegger claims, is that being-in-the-world is not conceived as a new version of Husserl's concept of intentionality with the emphasis on pre-theoretical care rather than theoretical observation.⁶⁴⁶ According to Heidegger, Husserl's analysis of intentionality focuses on the fact that it belongs to the sense of our intentional acts to be directed towards the objects intended. By being-in-the-world, however, Heidegger does not denote the "ontic transcendence" of Dasein towards beings but the "originary transcendence" towards the world, conceived as the historical context of meaning- and being-

⁶⁴⁵ GA 9, p. 155n55: "Wenn man gar den ontischen Zusammenhang der Gebrauchsdinge, des Zeugs, mit der Welt identifiziert und das In-der-Welt-sein als Umgang mit den Gebrauchsdingen auslegt, dann ist freilich ein Verständnis der Transzendenz als In-der-Welt-sein im Sinn einer 'Grundverfassung' des Daseins aussichtslos." Cf. also GA 26, pp. 233, 235.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. GA 26, pp. 164-169, 211-215.

possibilities which grounds any understanding of beings:⁶⁴⁷ “Dasein surpasses beings, in such a way that it is only in this surpassing that it can relate to beings. Only thus can it also relate to itself as a being. [...] That in the direction of which the transcending Dasein transcends we call the world.”⁶⁴⁸

In short, it is only on the basis of Dasein’s primary transcendence towards the world, conceived as its historical context of meaning-possibilities, that it is able to experience and understand particular entities as one thing or the other – be it as theoretical objects or pre-theoretical tools.

Second, Heidegger undertakes an ontological expansion of his concept of world to include the different modes of being of entities. According to Heidegger’s analysis in *Being and Time*, Dasein’s world-understanding comprised its context of instrumental relations and its own possibilities as the guiding purposes of these relations. This understanding of the world was in its turn guided by an understanding of the manifold being-senses of beings and of the unifying sense of being as such. However, since the analytic focused exclusively on Dasein’s understanding of the world the hierarchy above remained unclear: How is our understanding of the world determined by our understanding of being? Does our understanding of the different substantial being-characters of beings transpire as a retrieval of a historical heritage – as does our understanding of our own possibilities – or is it rather the product of the analytical explication of the structures of Dasein?

After 1927 Heidegger begins to insist that our understanding of the world also embraces the totality of being-characters determining our access to beings. As Heidegger puts it in “Introduction to Philosophy”: “The world is the totality of the constitution of being, not only of nature and of the historical togetherness, but the specific totality of the manifold of being, which is understood in a unified way in being-with others, being alongside... and self-world.”⁶⁴⁹ Hence, Dasein’s understanding of the

⁶⁴⁷ GA 26, p. 194.

⁶⁴⁸ GA 27, p. 306f.: “Das Dasein übersteigt Seiendes, so zwar, daß es erst in diesem Überstieg zu Seiendem sich verhalten, also auch erst so zu sich als Seiendem sich verhalten [...] kann. [...] Dieses, woraufzu das wesenhaft transzendierende Dasein transzendiert, nennen wir Welt.”

⁶⁴⁹ GA 27, p. 309: “Welt ist das Ganze der Seinsverfassung, nicht nur der Natur und des geschichtlichen Miteinander und des eigenen Selbstseins und der Gebrauchsdinge,

world comprises the manifold of different being-modes of beings – their “what- and how-being”⁶⁵⁰ – so that this understanding of being constitutes the ultimate organizing layer in our understanding of different entities: tools, things, animals, as well as ourselves and our purposes.

Heidegger’s ontological broadening of his concept of world also allows him to attain a clearer articulation of the relation between our understanding of the being-modes of beings and our understanding of the sense of being. Whereas our understanding of the substantial being-modes of beings is now unequivocally seen as a part of our world-understanding – which, as will soon become clear, has the character of a free projection of the world and cannot be derived from any analytic of Dasein – the explication of the sense of being transpires as an existential analytic of the structures of our substantial understanding of being (transcendence, freedom, temporality), so that the analytic is supposed to make possible a transparent enactment of that understanding. As we shall see, Heidegger’s division of the understanding of being brings with it a division of the task of philosophy into fundamental ontology and metontology.

Third, Heidegger articulates the ontologically broadened world as the guiding for-the-sake-of-which of Dasein. One effect of Heidegger’s ontological broadening of his concept of “world” is that he thinks he is able to overcome the tendency towards egoism that still haunted his analysis of authenticity in *Being and Time*. Earlier I argued that Heidegger’s exclusion of the possibility of a direct care for the other human being for her own sake, and his inability to account for another source of normativity beyond the factual norms of the ‘They, gave rise to an oscillation between collectivism and subjectivism and led him to ground Dasein’s ethical-existential motives in its basic egoistic self-concern. In “The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic” Heidegger directs fierce criticism at the charge that *Being and Time* would contain an egoistic bias: “madness” (*ein Wahnwitz*) he calls the analysis ascribed to him – a result of incapability of the “most primitive methodology.”⁶⁵¹ However, Heidegger’s retrospective condemnations of supposed misinterpretations of his earlier work can often be read as self-corrections of ambiguities still

sondern die spezifische Ganzheit der Seinsmannigfaltigkeit, die im Mitsein mit Anderen, Sein bei...und Selbstwelt einheitlich verstanden ist.”

⁶⁵⁰ GA 9, p. 131.

⁶⁵¹ GA 26, p. 240.

marking the work in question. The fact that Heidegger is especially sour this time could be taken as a sign that what he claims is a foolish misinterpretation has indeed hit a sore point: a logic that ironically leads the existential analytic right back to the egoism that it is so eager to overcome.

So what has happened?

Although Heidegger is still far from having developed a convincing account of the givenness of historical meaning, his ontological widening of Dasein's world-understanding makes it difficult to base Dasein's choice of its own possibilities on the egoistic self-concern of the individual. In "The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic" he thus argues as follows. Given that the focus of the existential analytic is entirely on Dasein in its "metaphysical neutrality," the notion that Dasein exists for its own sake cannot be understood in terms of the human being's ontic care for itself; rather, that Dasein exists for its own sake means that it exists for its own sake "qua Dasein." Moreover, since Dasein is essentially transcendence towards the world Heidegger can write:

Dasein is in such a way that it exists *for the sake of itself*. If, however, it is a surpassing in the direction of world that first gives rise to selfhood, then world shows itself to be that for the sake of which Dasein exists. World has the fundamental character of the "for the sake of...," and indeed in the originary sense that it first provides the intrinsic possibility for every factually self-determining "for your sake," "for his sake," "for the sake of that," etc. Yet that for the sake of which Dasein exists is itself. To selfhood there belongs world; world is essentially related to Dasein.⁶⁵²

In short, that Dasein exists for its own sake means that it exists for the sake of its world. The world, comprising all the being-modes of beings, thus constitutes "the respective totality of that for the sake of which

⁶⁵² GA 9, p. 157: "Das Dasein ist so, daß es *umwillen seiner* existiert. Wenn aber die Welt es ist, im Überstieg zu der sich allererst Selbstheit zeitigt, dann erweist sie sich als das, worumwillen Dasein existiert. Die Welt hat den Grundcharakter des Umwillen von ... und das in dem ursprünglichen Sinne, daß sie allererst die innere Möglichkeit für jedes faktisch sich bestimmende deinetwegen, seinetwegen, deswegen usf. vorgibt. Worumwillen aber Dasein existiert, ist es selbst. Zur Selbstheit gehört Welt; diese ist wesentlich daseinsbezogen."

Dasein exists in each case.”⁶⁵³ Consider the displacement that allows Heidegger to dismiss at least every simple critique of egoism: If Dasein’s primary understanding of the world embraces the totality of being-modes determining what it means to be a human being at all, and constituting its purposes and heroes, then Dasein’s understanding and choice of itself and possibilities cannot be founded on any ontic self-relation, but needs to involve an understanding of the historical possibilities of being determining not only itself but all those human beings sharing the same historical world.

This argument clearly seems convincing from the viewpoint of Heidegger’s idea of the primacy of the historical world and his subsequent attempt to account for the binding force of historical being. Ultimately, however, the question – to which we will return in due course – is whether this attempt succeeds and whether Heidegger’s later notion of the bindingness of the historical world is not compatible with and even presupposes an attitude which is collectivist and egoistic at the same time.

Understanding of Being as Free World-Projection

Heidegger’s strong emphasis on the transcendence and priority of our understanding of being in relation to our knowledge of beings induces a new explication of our understanding of being in terms of as a free projection of a world.⁶⁵⁴

In *Being and Time* Heidegger fundamentally neglected the question of the phenomenal character of our understanding of being. Having first underscored the hierarchically determining role of our understanding of being in relation to all ontic understanding, the method of the existential analytic implied that Heidegger – in contradiction of the above thesis – tried to access the sense of being through a phenomenological description of the ontological structures of a certain being: Dasein. In this, Dasein’s possibility of authentic ontic self-understanding functioned as the autonomous phenomenal ground for the ontological explication. Heidegger’s neglect of the question of the understanding of being led *Being*

⁶⁵³ GA 9, p. 158: “die jeweilige Ganzheit des Umwillen des Daseins.”

⁶⁵⁴ For a perceptive and more detailed account of Heidegger’s conception of philosophy as world-projection see Figal 1992, pp. 94-110.

and Time into its basic ambiguities: on the one hand, Heidegger's inability to account for the givenness of historical being and purposes meant that his thesis about the priority and historicity of our understanding of being was contradicted by his concrete attempt to read off being through a phenomenological explication of the transcendental structures of Dasein; on the other hand, it meant that he was unable to account for the binding force of Dasein's purposes, which forced him into an uncontrolled vacillation between collectivism and subjectivism.

As Heidegger after the publication of *Being and Time* highlights the understanding of being as Dasein's primary transcendence of beings, he is faced with the task of providing a new account of the character of this understanding. Since our understanding of being precedes and determines all our ontic understanding – e.g. of ourselves and our existential possibilities – it cannot be attained by way of an explication of the authentic self-understanding of Dasein anymore. Hence, the question arises: how does our primary understanding of being transpire?

Heidegger's general answer to this question is that we need to conceive of our understanding of being as a free projection of world. In "On the Essence of Ground" he describes this understanding as follows:

As the respective totality of that for the sake of which Dasein exists in each case, world is brought before Dasein through Dasein itself. This bringing of world before itself is the originary projection of the possibilities of Dasein, insofar as, in the midst of beings, it is to be able to comport itself toward such beings. Yet just as it does not explicitly grasp that which has been projected, this projection of world also always *casts* the projected world *over* beings. This prior casting-over (*Überwurf*) first makes it possible for beings as such to manifest themselves.⁶⁵⁵

That is, prior to and as a condition of every experience of beings, Dasein throws out a world of being-senses over the totality of beings, on the basis

⁶⁵⁵ GA 9, p. 158: "Die Welt wird als die jeweilige Ganzheit des Umwillen eines Daseins durch dieses selbst vor es selbst gebracht. Dieses Vor-sich-selbst-bringen von Welt ist der ursprüngliche Entwurf der Möglichkeiten des Daseins, sofern es inmitten von Seiendem zu diesem sich soll verhalten können. Der Entwurf von Welt aber ist, imgleichen wie er das Entworfenen nichts eigens erfaßt, so auch immer *Überwurf* der entworfenen Welt über das Seiende. Der vorgängige Überwurf ermöglicht erst, daß Seiendes als solches sich offenbart."

of which these beings can appear as one thing or the other. This projection of the world does not have the character of a thematic discovery of some given essences or purposes but rather proceeds out of a “will” which lets the world happen and bind it.⁶⁵⁶ This originary “will” – preceding and conditioning every ontic will – Heidegger calls “freedom”: “Surpassing in the direction of world is freedom itself. Accordingly, transcendence does not merely come upon the for-the-sake-of as anything like a value or end that would be present at hand in itself; rather, freedom holds the for-the-sake-of *toward* itself, *and does so as freedom*. [...] In this, however, freedom simultaneously unveils itself as making possible something binding, indeed obligation in general. *Freedom alone can let a world prevail and let it world for Dasein.*”⁶⁵⁷

At the outset, Heidegger’s notion of world-projection undeniably remains a very abstract figure of thought. It is only in the lecture course “The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Parable of the Cave and the Theaetetus”⁶⁵⁸ from 1931-32 that Heidegger tries to describe more concretely how the projection of being is carried out in natural science, history, art, and philosophy. In Heidegger’s account, these possibilities of enacting the projection form a rising hierarchy. The world-projection of *natural science* is exemplified by the scientific revolution of the 17th century. Against the common explanation of the scientific revolution as the gradual discovery of the causal regularities of nature through the introduction of mathematical equations and controlled experiments, Heidegger claims that the rise of modern natural science was conditioned by a previous projection of being. It was only on the basis of a projection of nature as “a spatio-temporally determined totality of movement of masspoints”⁶⁵⁹ that it became meaningful to inquire into the mathematically expressible regularities of nature and test them in experiments. Heidegger depicts the projection of being at play in the *historical sciences* by reflecting on the

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. also GA 34, pp. 60f.

⁶⁵⁷ GA 9, p. 163f.: “Der Überstieg zur Welt ist die Freiheit selbst. Demnach stößt die Transzendenz nicht auf das Umwillen als auf so etwas wie einen an sich vorhandenen Wert und Zweck, sondern Freiheit hält sich – *und zwar als Freiheit* – das Umwillen *entgegen*. [...] Hierin erhüllt sich aber die Freiheit zugleich als die Ermöglichung von Bindung und Verbindlichkeit überhaupt. *Freiheit allein kann dem Dasein eine Welt walten und welten lassen.*”

⁶⁵⁸ “Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet,” GA 34.

⁶⁵⁹ GA 34, p. 61: “ein raumzeitlich bestimmter Bewegungszusammenhang von Massenpunkten.”

peculiar understanding exhibited by an eminent historian like Jakob Burckhart. What makes Burckhart a great historian is not that he would have been extraordinarily good at collecting historical data, but that he possessed “the essential anticipatory regard (*vorausgreifenden Wesensblick*) for the fate, greatness, and misery of man, for the conditions and limits of human action, in short, the anticipatory understanding of the *happening* of what we call history, i.e., of the *being* of this being.”⁶⁶⁰ Both of the above projections – of the being of nature and of the historical being of man – are in turn preceded and linked by the world-projections of *art* and *philosophy*. The essence of *art*, Heidegger argues, does not consist in expressing the inner experiences of the artist or representing some portions of the given totality of beings: “Rather, the artist possesses the essential regard (*Wesensblick*) for the possible; he brings out the hidden possibilities of beings in the artwork, and first makes the human beings see the really-being, with which they blindly busy themselves.”⁶⁶¹ And he continues: “What is essential in the discovery of reality happened and happens not through science, but through primordial philosophy as well as through great poetry and its projections (Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe).”⁶⁶² That is, the projection performed by great art is not limited to some sphere of being – e.g. nature or history – but, like that of philosophy, consists in freely projecting a finite worldly totality of being-possibilities, thus giving us access to beings in their being. Here, Heidegger claims, philosophy plays the basic, conditioning role in relation to art: it is philosophy that allows us to understand “what the work of art and poetry as such are.”⁶⁶³ What makes philosophy fundamental is that it carries the principal potential of enacting a transparent projection of being

⁶⁶⁰ GA 34, p. 62: “den vorausgreifenden Wesensblick für Menschenschicksal, Menschengröße und Menschenkümmerlichkeit, für Bedingtheit und Grenze des menschlichen Handelns, kurz das vorgreifende Verständnis des *Geschehens* dessen was wir Geschichte nennen, d.h. des *Seins* dieses Seienden.”

⁶⁶¹ GA 34, p. 64: “Das Wesen der Kunst [...] besteht [...] darin, daß der Künstler [...] den Wesensblick für das Mögliche hat, die verborgenen Möglichkeiten des Seienden zum Werk bringt und dadurch die Menschen erst sehend macht für das Wirklich-seiende, in dem sie sich blindlings herumtreiben.”

⁶⁶² GA 34, p. 64: “Das Wesentliche der Entdeckung des Wirklichen geschah und geschieht nicht durch die Wissenschaften, sondern durch ursprüngliche Philosophie und durch die große Dichtung und deren Entwürfe (Homer, Vergil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe).”

⁶⁶³ GA 34, p. 64: “was das Kunstwerk und die Dichtkunst als solche sei.”

on the basis of a basic understanding of the essential freedom and temporality of all such projections.

However, even though these examples shed some light on Heidegger's view of the hierarchical organization of the projection of being, it says almost nothing about its character and structure as free projection. To specify the philosophical sense of Heidegger's conception a little I will now look closer at the two basic systematic aspects that it is intended to address and articulate.

On the one hand, Heidegger's depiction of the free world-projection is an attempt to account for the *groundless* character of our understanding of being. Since the understanding of being precedes and determines all understanding of beings it constitutes the ultimate ground for all questioning and understanding: "As altogether the most antecedent *answer* the understanding of being provides the primary and ultimate *grounding*."⁶⁶⁴ As such, the understanding of being is itself characterized by a certain groundlessness: it cannot ground itself on any ontic understanding or explication of beings and it cannot transpire as a discovery of some kind of pre-given ideal senses. This leads Heidegger to describe the understanding of being as a projection originating in freedom: "Freedom," Heidegger writes, is the "*ground of ground (Grund des Grundes)*"; as such, it constitutes the "*abyss (Ab-grund) in Dasein*": "in its essence as transcendence, freedom places Dasein, as potentiality for being, in possibilities that gape open before its finite choice, i.e., within its destiny."⁶⁶⁵

In his account of the understanding of being as free projection Heidegger also has recourse to what he, at the time being, considers to be one of Kant's fundamental insights, namely, that the ultimate condition of possibility for all empirical experience lies in the productive capacity of our imagination to form ideas, which always already organize our experience without being groundable in the latter. This Kantian notion makes itself felt in Heidegger's explication of the formative character of the world-projection: the free projection of being does not take place as a

⁶⁶⁴ GA 9, p. 169: "Das Seinsverständnis gibt als vorgängigste *Antwort* schlechtin die erst-letzte *Begründung*."

⁶⁶⁵ GA 9, p. 174: "*Die Freiheit ist der Grund des Grundes*. [...] Als *dieser* Grund aber ist die Freiheit der *Ab-grund* des Daseins. [...] die Freiheit stellt in ihrem Wesen als Transzendenz das Dasein als Seinkönnen in Möglichkeiten, die vor seiner endlichen Wahl, d.h. in seinem Schicksal aufklaffen."

passive observation; rather, in the projection Dasein “gives” itself an originary “view (image) (*Anblick (Bild)*)” that functions as “a paradigmatic form (*Vor-bild*) for all manifest beings.”⁶⁶⁶ Or, to quote another formulation: the understanding of being is “a looking in the sense of a looking-forth (*Er-blicken*). This means: first *forming* what is looked-forth (the view) *through* the looking and *in* the looking, i.e., forming in advance, pre-forming.”⁶⁶⁷

As the above pages have made clear, it is not so hard to see the theoretico-dialectical motives driving Heidegger to conceive of the understanding of being as a free and creative world-projection. Nevertheless, this conception essentially remains an indeterminate theoretical construct lacking systematic clarifying force. The simple fact is that it is extremely difficult to see how the free projection of world described by Heidegger would transpire: How would it be brought about concretely – in art or in philosophy? How would it be able to form a world – what would give it its direction and illuminating power – if it would neither be grounded in any knowledge of beings nor rest heavily in its factual historical heritage?

As a matter of fact, Heidegger’s extreme emphasis on the groundlessness of the being-projection also gives rise to a backlash of sorts, a need to anchor the projection of being in the beings themselves. In “The Essence of Ground,” having first stressed the priority of the projection of being over all understanding of beings, Heidegger qualifies this notion in the following way: in the primary projection of the world beings are “not yet manifest in themselves,”⁶⁶⁸ and they could never be so “were it not for the fact that Dasein in its projecting is, *as projecting*, also already *in the midst* of such beings.”⁶⁶⁹ What Heidegger here has in mind is, however, not the trivial fact that Dasein has to be surrounded by entities in order to be able to see them; he is rather suggesting that the world-projection as such refers back to and is grounded in beings: “As disposed, Dasein is *absorbed* by beings in such a way that, in its belonging to beings, it

⁶⁶⁶ GA 9, p. 158.

⁶⁶⁷ GA 34, p. 71: “ein Blicken im Sinne des Er-blickens, das will sagen: *durch* das Blicken und *im* Blicken das Erblickte (den Anblick) allererst *bilden*, – im voraus bilden, vor-bilden.”

⁶⁶⁸ GA 9, p. 166: “an ihm selbst noch nicht offenbar.”

⁶⁶⁹ GA 9, p. 166: “wenn nicht das entwerfende Dasein *als entwerfendes* auch schon *inmitten* von jenem Seienden wäre.”

is *thoroughly attuned* by them. *Transcendence means world-projection in such a way that those beings that are surpassed also already pervade and attune that which projects.* With this absorption by beings that belongs to transcendence, Dasein has taken up a basis within beings, gained ‘ground.’”⁶⁷⁰

Here Heidegger for the first time introduces the idea that the projection of being is not a free production of the being-possibilities of the world but in some sense needs to be grounded in the totality of particular beings whose being it projects. Clearly, this sounds very much like a potential breaching of the ontological difference at the basis of his conception of the structure of phenomenal understanding. In fact, however, I think Heidegger’s idea of the ontic ground of the being-projection is *not* meant to radically unsettle the ontological difference between our understanding of being and our understanding of beings, but is rather motivated by his sharpening of that difference. Again and again Heidegger repeats his thesis about the priority of the projection of being in relation to all knowledge of beings. Even when he launches the idea of the ground of being in beings, he stresses that no beings are “manifest” prior to the projection of being since the latter first makes possible all experience of beings as beings. Hence, the receptive “pervadedness” or “dominatedness” of the projection of being by the totality of beings must take place before every possible understanding of beings. Heidegger’s central idea is thus that the primary projection of being essentially takes place through some kind of receptive interaction with the totality of particular beings – here still pre-phenomenal and undetermined – so that this projection first opens up the world of being which determines and gives us access to these beings as meaningful phenomena. For the moment this idea still remains rudimentary, and it is only later that Heidegger will take it up again and elaborate it in more detail in his analysis of the interplay between “world” and “earth” in “The Origin of the Work of Art.”

On the other hand, Heidegger’s notion of the freedom of the projection of being is intended to explain the normatively *binding* character

⁶⁷⁰ GA 9, p. 166: “Das Dasein wird als befindliches vom Seienden *ingenommen* so, daß es dem Seienden zugehörig von ihm *durchstimmt* ist. *Transzendenz* heißt *Weltentwurf*, so zwar, daß das *Entwerfende* vom Seienden, das es übersteigt, auch schon *gestimmt* durchwaltet ist. Mit solcher zur Transzendenz gehörigen *Eingenommenheit* vom Seienden hat das Dasein im Seienden Boden genommen, ‘Grund’ gewonnen.”

of the world: how does the world concern us as a for-the-sake-of-which that binds us?

Here too Heidegger rallies a Kantian motif, namely the thought that the human being can only be compelled by laws that she has freely given herself. However, whereas Kant locates the origin of the law in reason, conceived as the transcendently universal and necessary legislating agency of every particular individual, Heidegger suggests the idea that the bindingness of Dasein's ultimate purposes is dependent on its freely binding itself to these purposes. "Freedom alone," Heidegger writes in "The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic," "can be the origin of bindingness"⁶⁷¹: "In the projection of the for-the-sake-of-which as such Dasein gives itself the primordial bond."⁶⁷² Later, in the lecture course "The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Parable of the Cave and the Theaetetus," he develops this thought as follows: "Authentic becoming-free is a projecting *binding of oneself* – not just a yielding to a captivation, but a giving-of-a-bond-to-oneself, such a bond, namely, which remains binding from the outset and in advance, so that every subsequent comportment can thereby first become free and be free."⁶⁷³ That is to say: in the primary projection of being we do not only throw out a world of being-possibilities but we also bind ourselves to this world as the ultimate framework of purposes determining what weight and significance particular beings and actions can show up and take on for us in our lives.

However, even though there obviously truth in the Kantian notion that our motivating purposes cannot have the character of external reasons but in some sense need to engage us as our personal matters, Heidegger's articulation of the origin of normative bindingness in freedom remains vague and unconvincing: he is simply not able to show how any act of binding ourselves to certain purposes could ever grant to these purposes their binding character and their existential weight. If we not do from the outset encounter the significant matter as a claim which rests in

⁶⁷¹ GA 26, p. 25: "Nur Freiheit kann Ursprung von Bindung sein." Cf. GA 9, p. 164.

⁶⁷² GA 26, p. 247: "Im Entwurf des Worumwillen als solchem gibt sich das Dasein die ursprüngliche *Bindung*."

⁶⁷³ GA 34, p. 59: "Eigentliches Frei-werden ist ein entwerfendes *Sich-binden*, – kein bloßes Zulassen einer Fesselung, sondern das Sich-selbst-für-sich-selbst-eine-Bindung-geben, und zwar eine solche, die von vornherein im voraus verbindlich bleibt, so daß jedes nachkommende Verhalten im einzelnen dadurch erst ein freies werden und sein kann."

itself, and which we can either open up to and act upon, or perhaps cover up and ignore, it is hard to see how the fact that we bind ourselves to different purposes could make them significant. To be sure, it is possible to choose and bind oneself to certain significant matters – e.g. particular persons, tasks – in such a way that they gain a principal role in our lives. But such a choice presupposes rather than produces the significance of the matters we choose.

It could perhaps be seen as a symptom of the powerlessness of the above conception that Heidegger tries to back up his analysis of the freely binding world-projection with a second order argument about the finitude of Dasein. According to Heidegger, the projection of a world opens up a wide field of possibilities, which essentially exceeds the factual possibilities that Dasein, due to its finite thrownness among beings, can actually take over as its own. The “withdrawal” of excess possibilities effected by Dasein’s concrete facticity implies that the “those possibilities of world-projection that can ‘actually be seized upon’”⁶⁷⁴ are brought forth towards the individual Dasein: “The withdrawal lends precisely the binding character of what remains projected before us the power to prevail within the realm of Dasein’s existence.”⁶⁷⁵ That is to say: it is on account of the factual finitude of Dasein that the freely projected being-possibilities receive their power to prevail.

But this argument, too, fails to convince. Just as little as our guiding purposes and possibilities can gain their binding force through our act of binding ourselves to them, just as little is their supposed bindingness sharpened or strengthened by reason of their finitude. It is of course true that the finite concretion of life always brings with it a limitation of the circle of readily available possibilities. Yet it is utterly unclear why this finitude would strengthen the bindingness of our factual possibilities. To begin with, the limited character of our factual possibilities is always only provisional, such that there is nothing preventing us from looking beyond these possibilities towards other possibilities that could in principal become our limited factual possibilities. Moreover, even if we would – for some reason – be stuck with only certain possibilities, the fact that these

⁶⁷⁴ GA 9, p. 167: “die ‘wirklich’ ergreifbaren Möglichkeiten des Weltentwurfs.”

⁶⁷⁵ GA 9, p. 167: “Der Entzug verschafft gerade der Verbindlichkeit des verbleibenden entworfenen Vorwurfs die Gewalt ihres Waltens im Existenzbereich des Daseins.”

are our only possibilities could not account for their significance and bindingness.

Fundamental Ontology and Metontology

Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's philosophical nature as a being that understands being through projecting a world in the end leads him to divide the task of philosophy into fundamental ontology and metontology.

Heidegger's notion of the metontological task of philosophy has given rise to diverging interpretations. Steven Crowell has argued that the idea of a metontology is expressive of Heidegger's confused effort to recover a more traditional metaphysics in the wake of *Being and Time*, in the form of an inquiry into the totality of beings that would provide an "ontic ground of ontology."⁶⁷⁶ But, regardless of how we are to understand this metontological inquiry – as a study of existing nature, or as a study of the factual ontical situation into which Dasein is always already thrown – it cannot, Crowell maintains, function as a ground for our ontological phenomenological investigation of the sense-structures of Dasein without this giving rise to some kind of naturalistic dogmatism: "It is impossible that metontology could investigate thrownness – in the sense of demonstrating the natural, social, or historical limits of Dasein's understanding of being – since such investigation would already be grounded in that very understanding."⁶⁷⁷ Crowell's transcendental-phenomenological critique stands opposed to the more frequent hermeneutic-deconstructivist reading of Heidegger's metontology defended by, e.g., Jean Grondin and Robert Bernasconi.⁶⁷⁸ According to this reading, Heidegger's project of metontology undermines the priority and purity of the project of fundamental ontology by exposing the thrownness of Dasein into its factual historical circumstances as the ontic ground of all understanding of being. Bernasconi argues that metontology implies a "transformation of philosophy's own highest aspirations when it rediscovers its roots in the ontic";⁶⁷⁹ hence, "Heidegger is not readily able

⁶⁷⁶ Crowell 2001, p. 240.

⁶⁷⁷ Crowell 2001, p. 240. Cf. also p. 237.

⁶⁷⁸ For other versions of the hermeneutic-deconstructivist reading see, e.g., Krell 1986, pp. 27-46; Sallis 1990, pp. 139-167.

⁶⁷⁹ Bernasconi 1993, p. 34.

to sustain the purity of the distinction between the ontic and the ontological.”⁶⁸⁰ Grondin for his part reaches the following conclusion: “*Dasein* proves to be too finite and too historically situated to obtain a perspective on being which would enable it to derive *sub specie aeternitatis* the transcendental structures of its most fundamental being.”⁶⁸¹

Although the above interpretations pass opposed judgments on the systematic force of Heidegger’s idea of metontology, they all share the basic assumption that the task of metontology is to investigate the ontic ground of ontology. Now, even if that assumption is not altogether mistaken it seems to me that it ignores the extent to which Heidegger’s idea of metontology in fact springs forth from his sharpening of the ontological difference between ontology and ontics. Against the background of my previous analyses, I think it is possible to show convincingly that metontology is indeed nothing but the philosophical task of enacting a free projection of a world.

It is in an appendix to the course “The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic” that Heidegger develops the idea that philosophy is divided into two main tasks: fundamental ontology and metontology. By fundamental ontology Heidegger means the job of investigating the basic question “What does ‘being’ mean?”⁶⁸² As in *Being and Time* he insists that fundamental ontology must take the form of an analytic of *Dasein*: the only way to shed light on the sense and possibility of our understanding of being is to examine the structures of understanding: transcendence, projection, freedom, and temporality. However, even though fundamental ontology constitutes the ground of all ontology it does not “exhaust the concept of metaphysics.”⁶⁸³ According to Heidegger, it would be “fatefully misguided” to absolutize the problems of fundamental ontology as the sole and eternal task of philosophy, and so “negate them in their essential function.”⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, as fundamental ontology understands and elaborates itself radically it does, of inner necessity, effect an “overturning” (*Umschlag*)

⁶⁸⁰ Bernasconi 1993, p. 33.

⁶⁸¹ Grondin 1995, p. 69.

⁶⁸² GA 26, p. 171: “Was besagt ‘Sein?’”

⁶⁸³ GA 26, p. 199: “die Fundamentalontologie erschöpft nicht den Begriff der Metaphysik.”

⁶⁸⁴ GA 26, p. 197f.: “[Es wäre] verhängnisvoll irrig [...], wollte man gerade diese Probleme verabsolutisieren und sie so in ihrer wesentlichen Funktion zunichte machen.”

– *metabolē* – into “metontology.” Whereas fundamental ontology investigates being as such, metontology has “beings as a whole” (*das Seiende im Ganzen*) as its theme.⁶⁸⁵ In particular, Heidegger names “space” and “existence” as special themes of metontology, and also says it is here that the “question of ethics” can be posed.⁶⁸⁶

But how should the necessity of the turnaround into metontology be understood? Heidegger gives the following explanation:

Since there is being only insofar as beings are already there, fundamental ontology has in it the latent tendency toward a primordial, metaphysical transformation which becomes possible only when being is understood in its whole problematic. [...] there is being only when Dasein understands being. In other words, the possibility that being is there in the understanding presupposes the factual existence of Dasein, and this in turn presupposes the factual extantness of nature. Right within the horizon of the problem of being, when posed radically, it appears that all this is visible and can become understood as being, only if a possible totality of beings is already there.⁶⁸⁷

In short, our understanding of being presupposes the “factual existence of Dasein,” which, in turn, presupposed the “factual extantness of nature.” Hence, metontology is motivated as an inquiry into the “totality of beings” as that which is already presupposed in the fundamental ontological understanding of being. At least at a first glance this passage seems to offer patent proof of the correctness of the basic presupposition shared by Crowell, Grondin, and Bernasconi, namely that Heidegger’s metontology aims to ground the understanding of being in an ontic investigation of beings. The interpretation seems to get further confirmation as Heidegger

⁶⁸⁵ GA 26, p. 199.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. GA 26, pp. 174, 199.

⁶⁸⁷ GA 26, p. 199: “Da es Sein nur gibt, indem auch schon gerade Seiendes im Da ist, liegt in der Fundamentalontologie latent die Tendenz zu einer ursprünglichen metaphysischen Verwandlung, die erst möglich wird, wenn Sein in seiner vollen Problematik verstanden ist. [...] es gibt Sein nur, wenn Dasein Sein versteht. Mit anderen Worten: die Möglichkeit, daß es Sein im Verstehen gibt, hat zur Voraussetzung die faktische Existenz des Daseins, und diese wiederum das faktische Vorhandensein der Natur. Gerade im Horizont des radikal gestellten Seinsproblems zeigt sich, daß all das nur sichtbar ist und als Sein verstanden werden kann, wenn eine mögliche Totalität von Seiendem schon da ist.”

formulates the overturning into metontology in terms of “the *turn* (*Kehre*), where ontology itself expressly runs back into the metaphysical ontic in which it implicitly always remains.”⁶⁸⁸

Ultimately, the sense of Heidegger’s notion of metontology seems to hinge entirely on what he means by an inquiry into the “totality of beings.” To begin with, two remarks in Heidegger’s text speak against reading his metontology as an ontic investigation grounding ontology. First, Heidegger stresses that “metontology is possible only on the basis and in the perspective of the radical ontological problematic and in conjunction with it”;⁶⁸⁹ moreover, that it thematizes beings in their totality “in the light of ontology.”⁶⁹⁰ Second, he points out that metontology should not be understood as a “summary ontic” leaning on and summarizing the results of the positive ontic sciences into a comprehensive worldview.⁶⁹¹ Moreover, none of the interpreters above is able to provide an account of the kind of ontic investigation Heidegger would have in mind, which is not ruled out both by the text and by the systematic weakness of the account: whether conceived as an investigation into nature,⁶⁹² into god,⁶⁹³ or into the factual circumstances of *Dasein*⁶⁹⁴ it is very hard to see what Heidegger could even have envisioned as a mode investigation that could precede and ground our understanding of being.

However, if one looks closer at Heidegger’s elaboration of the metontological task of philosophy I think it becomes clear that the metontological investigation of the totality of beings that he envisions should not be understood as an ontic investigation of entities at all, but rather as an ontological projection of the world.

In his explication of the double task of philosophy, Heidegger has recourse to two historical sources: Aristotle and Kant. He opens the problem by introducing Aristotle’s distinction between *philosophia prōtē*, which investigates being, and *theologikē*, whose theme is “*aitia tois phanerois*

⁶⁸⁸ GA 26, p. 201: “die *Kehre*, in der die Ontologie selbst in die metaphysische Ontik, in der sie unausdrücklich immer steht, ausdrücklich zurückläuft.”

⁶⁸⁹ GA 26, p. 200: “Metontologie ist nur auf dem Grunde und in der Perspektive der radikalen ontologischen Problematik und einig mit dieser möglich.”

⁶⁹⁰ GA 26, p. 200: “im Lichte der Ontologie.”

⁶⁹¹ GA 26, p. 199: “summarische Ontik.”

⁶⁹² Crowell 2001, p. 238.

⁶⁹³ Crowell 2001, p. 239.

⁶⁹⁴ Crowell 2001, p. 240; Bernasconi 1993, pp. 33-34.

tōn theiōn, the grounds of what is manifesting itself as overwhelming in apparent beings [...]. *To theiōn* means simply beings – the heavens: the encompassing and overpowering, that under and upon which we are thrown, that which dazzles us and assaults us, the overwhelming.”⁶⁹⁵ Though the formulation is certainly somewhat obscure and ambiguous, it indicates that Aristotle’s theology, as interpreted by Heidegger, is not a science about different particular entities but rather inquires into the grounds characterizing the overwhelming totality in which we live. In fact, as Heidegger elaborates his reading of Aristotle’s theology through an explication of Kant’s notion of *metaphysica specialis*, it becomes clear that the totality in question for Heidegger coincides with world. According to Kant, the *metaphysica generalis* investigating the nature and conditions of metaphysics has to be complemented by a *metaphysica specialis* thematizing the “world,” not conceived as the object of an ontic investigation of nature, but as “the wholeness of beings in the totality of their possibilities, a wholeness which is itself, however, essentially related to human existence, and human existence taken in its final goal.”⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, the final part of Heidegger’s lecture course is precisely an attempt to clarify the metontological task of philosophy suggested by Aristotle and Kant by explicating the “ontological concept of world” constituting the correlate of Dasein’s primary free transcendent projection of the world as a binding totality of being:⁶⁹⁷ “Dasein transcends beings, and its surpassing is surpassing to the world,”⁶⁹⁸ whereby “world” signifies “the primordial totality of that which Dasein, as free, gives itself to understand.”⁶⁹⁹

A few months later, in the course “Introduction to Philosophy,” Heidegger articulates the double task of philosophy in terms of the problem “how the problem of being as such unfurls itself into the

⁶⁹⁵ GA 26, p. 13: “αἴτια τοῖς φανεροῖς τῶν θεῶν, die Gründe des am offensichtlichen Seienden sich bekundenden Übermächtigen [...]. Τὸ θεῖον meint: das Seiende schlechthin – der Himmel: das Umgreifende und Überwältigende, das worunter und woran wir geworfen, wovon wir benommen und überfallen sind, das Übermächtige.”

⁶⁹⁶ GA 26, p. 231: “die Ganzheit des Seienden in der Totalität seiner Möglichkeiten, diese selbst aber ist wesenhaft bezogen auf menschliche Existenz, und diese genommen in ihrem Endzweck.”

⁶⁹⁷ GA 26, p. 232.

⁶⁹⁸ GA 26, p. 233: “[Dasein] transzendiert das Seiende, und der Übersprung ist Übersprung zur Welt.”

⁶⁹⁹ GA 26, p. 247: “die ursprüngliche Ganzheit dessen, was sich das Dasein als freies zu verstehen gibt.”

problem of world.”⁷⁰⁰ Philosophy is here presented as the basic attitude which, on the basis of an explication of our understanding of being as a free and groundless world-projection, is able to enact the projection in an explicit and transparent manner: “Philosophizing, as explicit transcending, is a letting-happen of the transcendence of Dasein from its ground.”⁷⁰¹

We should now be in a position to sum up the philosophical gist of Heidegger division of philosophy into fundamental ontology and metontology. Fundamental ontology is the first and basic task to open up the question of being as such through an analytic of the structure of Dasein as transcendence, and it is this task that all of Heidegger’s lecture courses of this period are engaged in. Simultaneously, the results of the analytic itself throws out another direction of investigation. By depicting the substantial understanding of being as a free projection of a world, Heidegger opens the task of realizing this ontological projection as transparently as possible. Whereas fundamental ontology clarifies the sense of Dasein’s understanding of being, metontology, on this basis, enacts the primary projection of a totality of being-characters. Even though the thematic field of metontology thus roughly coincides with that of Husserl’s regional ontologies,⁷⁰² there are also important differences. As

⁷⁰⁰ GA 27, p. 391: “wie sich das Seinsproblem selbst zum Weltproblem entrollt.”

⁷⁰¹ GA 27, s. 396: “Das Philosophieren als ausdrückliches Transzendieren ist ein Geschehenlassen der Transzendenz des Daseins aus ihrem Grunde.”

⁷⁰² Naturally both Crowell and Bernasconi reject the idea that Heidegger’s metontology is thematically equivalent to Husserl’s regional ontologies. To my mind, however, the reasons they present are not convincing. Crowell gives one structural and one substantial argument: first, he claims that Heidegger explicitly integrates the regional study of different characters of being into fundamental ontology; second, he maintains that metontology cannot be part of Dasein’s understanding of being since it is intended to “provide grounds” for this understanding (Crowell 2001, pp. 232f.). The first argument builds on a selective reading of the relevant paragraph – GA 26, pp. 191-194 – in which Heidegger outlines the different problems encompassed by fundamental ontology, stating that the fourth basic problem concerns “the regionality of being and the unity of the idea of being” (*die Regionalität des Seins und die Einheit der Idee des Seins*). This, however, cannot be taken as a clear statement to the effect that fundamental ontology involves regional ontology; it could also be taken – more convincingly, I think – as meaning that fundamental ontology explicates the sense of the unity of being and its regionality without engaging in a substantial investigation of regional being-characters. Moreover, when Heidegger lists the themes studied by regional ontology – nature, history, art, space, number, human existence – these happen to include the only two themes explicitly singled out by Heidegger as themes of metontology, namely space and existence. The second argument is erroneous in view of the thesis I have argued for above: that metontology is not an ontic science

concerns its theme the metontological projection is a projection of a unified totality of being preceding and determining the interplay between different characters and regions of being, which means that the understanding of being does not “step out of one region and into another” but rather, in a kind of hermeneutic movement, “immediately swings back and forth, for example in the understanding of nature and history.”⁷⁰³ As concerns its methodological mode, the metontological projection of being does not, as by Husserl, have the character of a categorial intuition of universal being-senses but transpires as a free and groundless projection of a finite totality of being.

It should be clear by now that the standard interpretation of Heidegger’s metontology as an ontic grounding of ontology is problematic. Still, it is not just a cloud-castle. As we have seen, Heidegger maintains that our understanding of being precedes and conditions all ontic understanding of beings by projecting the being-characters in terms of which beings can show themselves as something.⁷⁰⁴ there can thus be no such thing as an ontic investigation of beings functioning as the ground for our understanding of being. At the same time, however, Heidegger’s articulation of the priority of our understanding of being and its character as a free and groundless projection leads him to the idea that the projection of being must be anchored in some kind of basic receptivity to the manifold of particular material beings among which we live. This idea, that being must somehow be grounded in beings, does not imply the possibility of an ontic science of beings; rather it must be grasped as an interplay between being and beings involved in the being-projection itself, thus preceding and conditioning all ontic knowledge.

but a projection of being. Bernasconi for his part claims that Heidegger’s “references to finitude, facticity, and thrownness guard against such a reading [i.e. of metontology as a regional science]” (Bernasconi 1993, p. 30). However, Heidegger conception of the task of metontology as an an investigation of the totality of being-characters does not imply that he would sidestep his conception of the historicity of understanding and take over Husserl’s idea of a universal eidetic science. Far from it. According to Heidegger, the projection of being enacted by metontology is a finite groundless projection of a historical world.

⁷⁰³ GA 27, p. 322: “Vor allem aber gilt es im faktischen Dasein, im Seinsverständnis desselben, die Vielfältigkeit des Seins dieses Seienden zu verstehen, wobei das Seinsverständnis aber nicht von einer Region in die andere hinaus- und übertritt, sondern gleichsam unmittelbar hin und her schwingt im Verstehen von Natur och Geschichte zum Beispiel.”

⁷⁰⁴ See, e.g., GA 26, pp. 16, 233, 245.

At the end of the day, Heidegger's doubling of the task of philosophy bears witness to a deep rift in his basic philosophical stance. As a result of Heidegger's radicalized emphasis on the priority and autonomy of our understanding of being as world-projection, the following set of questions arises: How does the fundamental ontological explication of the sense of being qua projection relate to the free projection of being? How can the existential analytic of the structures of Dasein precede the substantial projection of being? Must not the explication of the basic structures of Dasein as transcendence, freedom, and temporality be guided by our primary projection of being – e.g. the being of Dasein – rather than the other way around? It is clear, I think, that Heidegger's explication of the understanding of being as a free projection unsettles the priority and autonomy of the project of fundamental ontology. Indeed, as we have noted above, Heidegger's formulation of the metontological task of philosophy contains passages that indicate a reversed order of determination, as when he calls the overturning into metontology “the *turn* (*Kehre*), where ontology itself expressly runs back into the metaphysical ontic in which it implicitly always remains,”⁷⁰⁵ or, as when he begins his account by stating the following question: “And to what extent does existential analytic as metaphysical history and ‘humanitas’ get its sense only from the full concept of metaphysics?”⁷⁰⁶ Suggested in these passages is nothing less than the possibility that fundamental ontology itself might be in the end be understood and enacted in the manner of a historical projection of being.

However, although Heidegger opens up and articulates the mounting tension within his philosophical approach he is not yet prepared to let this tension free in its potentially revolutionary logic – maybe because his analysis of the understanding of being as free world-projection is still too weak and too dim to establish a genuinely new approach. Hence, while the years 1928-1933 prepare the way for Heidegger's later thinking by stressing the priority of our understanding of being as a free historical

⁷⁰⁵ GA 26, p. 201: “die *Kehre*, in der die Ontologie selbst in die metaphysische Ontik, in der sie unausdrücklich immer steht, ausdrücklich zurückläuft.”

⁷⁰⁶ GA 26, p. 196: “Und inwiefern erfährt erst die existenziale Analytik als metaphysische Historie und ‘Humanitas’ aus dem vollen Begriff der Metaphysik ihren Sinn?”

projection, Heidegger still basically remains stuck in the ambiguity between fundamental ontology and metontology.

The Superior Task of Philosophy and the Promise of National Socialism

Heidegger's conception of the metontological task of philosophy also brings with it a transformation of his view of the existential purpose and import of philosophy. Indeed, it implies a superordination of the task of philosophical ontology over all possible ontic ethical-existential concerns with particular beings.

Here I briefly want to outline how Heidegger's notion of the primacy of ontology develops after *Being and Time*, and how it acquires an exceptionally fierce and dangerous shape in the early 1930s as Heidegger combines his apocalyptic vision of the threatening annihilation of the meaning of the Western world, generated by the nihilistic metaphysics of the modern age, with the hope of a possible projection of a new meaning-laden world – a projection in which philosophy and politics can join forces.

Heidegger began *Being and Time* by insisting that the structure of phenomenality be conceived in terms of a strict hierarchy: it is our preceding ontological understanding of being that determines our ontic-existential understanding of particular beings as meaningful phenomena. Nevertheless, Heidegger's existential analytic transpired as a phenomenological explication of the structure of a particular being, that is, authentic Dasein. This implied that Dasein was accorded the possibility of an autonomous existential understanding of the "question of existence," the choice between inauthenticity and authenticity, so that this existential understanding constituted the phenomenal ground for the ontological explication.⁷⁰⁷ Hence, the basic question of philosophy was ultimately motivated by the basic question of existence: to the extent that our understanding of being guides – but does not determine – our existential understanding, this motivates the task to achieve a clear understanding of being, which would not cover up and distort but rather give free passage to the existential problems of life.

⁷⁰⁷ SZ, p. 12.

However, even though the analysis in *Being and Time* indeed ascribed a systematic priority to Dasein's existentiell understanding as the ground of its ontological understanding of being, Heidegger's account of the basic existentiell conflict between authenticity and inauthenticity already expresses a clear prioritization of what we could call a proto-ontological problem over every ethical problem. According to Heidegger, what is primarily at stake for Dasein is the transparent appropriation of its own historical possibilities – its heroes - in their finitude and groundlessness. Since these possibilities are supposed to determine the significances and roles with reference to which we can experience particular beings – including human beings and animals – as meaningful, and since authentic existence is supposed to imply that we responsibly appropriate these possibilities as our own, the outcome is that our existentiell struggle for authenticity conditions our ethical relationship to particular human beings. Still, although Heidegger ascribes a clear priority to authenticity over ethics he does not yet believe that philosophical ontology has priority over the existentiell understanding of the individual, nor, for that matter, that ontology could take part in the founding of historical being.

After the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger's view of the motivation and execution of philosophy undergoes a change. Now Heidegger maintains that philosophy is not exhausted by the task of explicating the transcendental structures of understanding constituting the horizon of our ontic experience, but also essentially involves the task of projecting the being-world that allows beings to appear as meaningful in the first place. Such a historical projection of being cannot be grounded on any direct ontic experience of particular beings as significant, since it is only the projection itself that establishes the world on the basis of which particular human beings, animals, and things can appear to us as important, engaging, morally appealing. In short, the philosophical projection of being gives all beings – including our fellow human beings – the significance they can have for us. The upshot of this is that the philosophical task of performing an originary projection of being takes on absolute primacy as the happening which allows a meaningful world to emerge and persist at all. This ontological task is placed over every other ontic or ethical demand since it first opens up other beings as significant in the first place, as possible objects of love, concern, dialogue.

Then, as Heidegger in the early 1930s combines his notion of the superordination of ontology over ethics with the apocalyptic idea about the historical destruction and leveling of the Western world, the basic conflict between ontology and ethics becomes acute: if it is the case, as Heidegger believes it is, that our historical world is threatened by total destruction of its meaning, then the ontological task to establish a new meaningful world becomes pressing as a task which overrides every ontic-ethical concern should there be a conflict between the two.

Driven to its ultimate logical-ethical consequence, this is not only a morally perilous thought but a thought that in principal closes the very possibility of encountering other human beings as significant in themselves. It is quite feasible, I think, to fathom a situation in which the institutional and ideological situation we are living in – e.g. a totalitarian society, genocide – is so cruel and oppressive, that we are forced to weigh the task of forcibly and even violently transforming this general situation in order to make possible a better life for the people living there against our ethical concern for some particular human beings. Still, what makes this a moral problem in the first place is that the ultimate motivation and guideline for our action can only lie in our love and concern precisely for particular human beings – be they considered as individuals or as a group. For Heidegger, however, this way of thinking is excluded for principal reasons. Since it is the being-projection of philosophy which first confers significance on human beings, it cannot itself be guided by a concern for such beings. Hence, Heidegger's superordination of ontology over ethics cannot be taken as more or less temporary suspension of the ethical but needs to be understood as an a priori closure of our direct ethical relation to the other, transforming the other into a function of our collective historical world of meaning.

The critique that Heidegger prioritizes ontology over ethics has of course been presented before by Emmanuel Levinas, and I will return to critically discuss the sense and problems of this prioritization later. What we need to see here is that it is precisely the above vision of the task of thinking in the face of the impending apocalypse of the Western world that centrally pervades Heidegger's understanding of National Socialism as a possible beginning of a philosophical projection of being.

In a letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from the end of March 1933, Heidegger sums up his basic view of the Nazi seizure of power in the following manner:

For me, the present events – precisely because much remains opaque and unmastered – have an unusual gathering power. They enhance the will and the certainty of acting in the service of a great assignment, and of assisting in the construction of a world grounded in the people (*volklich gegründete Welt*). For some time, the pallidness and shadowiness of a mere “culture,” and the unreality of so called “values” have sunk down into nothingness for me, allowing me to search for the new ground in Dasein. We will find this ground, and also the vocation of what is German in the history of the occident, only if we expose ourselves to being as such in a new manner and appropriation. Hence, I experience the present entirely from the future. Only thus can a genuine participation grow, and the *standing-within* (*Inständigkeit*) our history, which is indeed a precondition for true acting. By contrast, we need to calmly put up with the overly hurried playing along with the new things that is mushrooming all over, that is to say, with the clinging to the superficial, which takes anything and everything as “political” without taking into consideration that this can only remain *one* way of the first revolution. However, for many people this can become and has already become a way of the first awakening – supposing, that is, that we are ready to prepare for a second and deeper awakening.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁸ GA 16, pp. 71f.: “Das gegenwärtige Geschehen hat für mich – gerade weil vieles dunkel und unbewältigt bleibt – eine ungewöhnliche sammelnde Kraft. Es steigert den Willen und die Sicherheit, im Dienste eines großen Auftrages zu wirken und am Bau einer volklich gegründeten Welt mitzuhelfen. Seit langem ist mir die Blässe und das Schattenhafte einer bloßen ‘Kultur’ und die Unwirklichkeit sogenannter ‘Werte’ zur Nichtigkeit herabgesunken und ließ mich im Dasein den neuen Boden suchen. Wir werden ihn und zugleich die Berufung des Deutschen in der Geschichte des Abendlandes nur finden, wenn wir uns dem Sein selbst in neuer Weise und Aneignung aussetzen. So erfahre ich das Gegenwärtige ganz aus der Zukunft. Nur so kann eine echte Teilnahme wachsen und jene *Inständigkeit* in unserer Geschichte, die freilich Vorbedingung für ein wahrhaftes Wirken ist. Demgegenüber muß in aller Ruhe jenes überall aufschießende und allzu eilige Mitlaufen mit den neuen Dingen hingenommen werden. Jenes Sichankleben an das Vordergründliche, das nun plötzlich alles und jedes ‘politisch’ nimmt, ohne zu bedenken, daß das nur *ein* Weg der ersten Revolution bleiben kann. Freilich kann das für Viele ein Weg der ersten Erweckung werden und geworden sein – gesetzt daß wir uns für eine zweite und tiefere vorzubereiten gesonnen sind.”

In short, to Heidegger the Nazi accession to power appears as a “first revolution” which has the potential of being a “way of awakening” towards a “second and deeper” philosophical revolution: it is only if the political movement of Nazism can be lead over into the ontological task of understanding and appropriating being that it becomes possible to carry out an originary and transparent “construction of a world grounded in the people.” Hence, Heidegger sees the contemporary politics of Nazism “entirely from the future,” as a possible beginning of a future projection of being. In his inaugural address as rector of the university of Freiburg, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,”⁷⁰⁹ – which can be read as his philosophico-political manifesto – Heidegger repeats the same pattern of thought: on the one hand, he welcomes the rise of Nazism and makes it the main task of the university to work for this “departure” (*Aufbruch*) towards a new beginning in its “glory” and “greatness”;⁷¹⁰ on the other hand, he elevates the university, headed by the philosophical questioning of being, as the “preeminent school (*hohe Schule*), which from science and through science educates and disciplines the leaders and guardians (*Führer und Hüter*) of the fate of the German people.”⁷¹¹ Hence, Heidegger interprets the national socialist revolution as a possible beginning and preparation for the basic ontological task of projecting and constructing – via the recovery of the Greek origin of philosophy – a “truly *spiritual* world” (*wahrhaft geistige Welt*) for the German people.⁷¹²

We can thus see how Heidegger’s apocalyptic diagnosis of the Western world and his notion of the superior and urgent task of projecting a new world prepare the way for his philosophical affirmation of the Nazi revolution as the possible dawn of an ontological revolution to come. Of course, this explication of Heidegger’s philosophical understanding of Nazism does not suffice to answer the question concerning the motives – psychological, political, philosophical – that determine the lure that Nazism in particular exerted on him. As concerns the loose aggregate of ideas making up National Socialist ideology – e.g. the biologism and racism, the national revanchism and militarism, the *Blut und Boden*-

⁷⁰⁹ “Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität,” in GA 16.

⁷¹⁰ GA 16, p. 117.

⁷¹¹ GA 16, p. 108: “die hohe Schule, die aus Wissenschaft und durch Wissenschaft die Führer und Hüter des Schicksals des deutschen Volkes in die Erziehung und Zucht nimmt.”

⁷¹² GA 16, pp. 111f.

romanticism, the cult of health – most of these do not have any counterparts in Heidegger’s philosophical thinking, although his deeply conservative political worldview certainly made him feel attracted to some of them. Indeed, it must be said that some central parts of the Nazi doctrine – e.g. the biologicistic racism – are clearly at odds with the content of Heidegger’s philosophy. Still, I think Heidegger’s dream of an ontological revolution taking primacy over our ethical relation to particular human beings does shed some light on his penchant for this kind of movement: first, Heidegger’s contempt for the contemporary world as leveled and futile, and his revolutionary phantasy of founding of new meaningful world in which he himself will play a leading role is mirrored emotionally in the blend of resentment and anticipation characterizing the Nazi scorn of the dirty bourgeois world and the vision of a strong and national world; second, his superordination of ontology over ethics makes him liable to be attracted by the revolutionary zeal of the Nazis, and to explain away their crimes and transgressions as regrettable misfortunes counterbalanced by the import of the coming philosophical revolution.

In addition to this Heidegger’s philosophy at this time contains a central trait which makes him susceptible to conceive of the *political* revolution of Nazism as a possible beginning of a *philosophical* revolution to come.

In the beginning of the 1930s Heidegger thinks that the ultimate task of philosophy is to carry out a free world-projection, and to do this together with the other creators: the poets and the statesmen.⁷¹³ Now, by emphasizing the freedom and creativity of the world-projection Heidegger ultimately makes the possibility of performing such a projection dependent only on the capacity and resolve of the creators to perform this task. This scheme, in turn, opens the possibility of distinguishing between, on the one hand, the still uncertain and ontologically undetermined preparation for a philosophical projection – in the form of a collective political-emotional readiness and resolve – and, on the other hand, the philosophical projection itself as a future possibility. In his texts from this period, Heidegger persistently characterizes the Nazi takeover over as a “first awakening”⁷¹⁴: a “departure” (*Aufbruch*)⁷¹⁵ from the old world and a

⁷¹³ Cf., e.g., GA 40, p. 66.

⁷¹⁴ GA 16, pp. 72, 112.

⁷¹⁵ GA 16, pp. 95, 117.

“resolve to stand firm in the face of the German fate in its extreme distress.”⁷¹⁶ That is, even though Nazism does not yet involve a clear understanding of its ontological task – and though it is uncertain if it ever will – Heidegger believes that it expresses an awakening to the need to depart from the contemporary world and a resolute determination to take part in the establishment of a new destiny for Germany. In this situation the philosopher sees his chance: to take hold of the intensified mood of departure and resolute anticipation pervading the German people and lead it over into a new basic projection of being. Hence, we can see how Heidegger’s notion of the free world-projection enables him to see in the Nazi spirit of revolutionary determination and in its idea of a strong state headed by a determined leader a kind of pure potential for a philosophical world-projection.

In the mid 1930s Heidegger begins to distance himself from the official ideology of National Socialism, which he soon starts to interpret as a manifestation of the nihilistic technical-subjectivist metaphysics that he initially hoped it would be able to resist, a metaphysics which reduces all beings into a material reserve for human subjectivity to exploit and manipulate.⁷¹⁷ In these years, he also gradually abandons his philosophical idea of philosophy as a free world-projection and, with it, his notion that pre-ontological politics could ever play a central preparatory role for the primordial philosophical task of historically thinking the openness of being.

However – as we shall see – Heidegger never gives up his idea of the absolute primacy of the ontological task of thinking over every ontic ethical-existential task. In fact, it is precisely the sharp hierarchy between ontology and ethics that allows Heidegger to view his Nazi engagement not as an ethical failure disturbing the heart of his ontological approach but as a reason to radicalize precisely that approach. If Heidegger in 1933 saw the Nazi revolution as a possible emancipation from the nihilistic tendency of modern metaphysics, he now sees it – together with

⁷¹⁶ GA 16, p. 112: “Entschlossenheit [...] dem deutschen Schicksal in seiner äußersten Not standzuhalten.”

⁷¹⁷ Cf., e.g., GA 65, pp. 30, 117, 139, 319, 493.

communism and world-democracy⁷¹⁸ – as a manifestation of this tendency. Hence, Heidegger is able to interpret his fall into Nazism as a consequence of his inability to free himself radically from the technical-subjectivist metaphysics of the tradition – in which almost everybody else still remains stuck – and to present his own new thinking as a qualified stratagem to overcome the destructive metaphysics at the root of Nazism. However, I think it is hard not to see Heidegger interpretation of Nazism as a species of the technical-subjectivist metaphysics that his own thinking is called to overcome as a token of his deep failure to let the human disaster of Nazism and the Holocaust touch him deeply enough to force him into a radical questioning of his own philosophical project. When Heidegger equals Nazism with Communism and world-democracy and condemns them all as metaphysical nihilism it is plain that he has dodged the hard questions about the difference between metaphysics - be it more or less nihilistic – and the leap into ethical closure and murder; about the relationship between understanding historical being and relating openly and caringly to other human beings; and, hence, about the role of philosophy in the ethical-existential struggle of human life. I will return to discuss the philosophical and moral problems of Heidegger's later thinking in the last chapter of this part.

As stated above, these quick remarks do not offer anything like a thorough treatment of Heidegger's relation to National Socialism. My aim has only been to draw attention to some key features of Heidegger's basic philosophical orientation in the early 1930s which make it possible for him to greet the politics of Nazism as a possible beginning of a philosophical revolution. Finally, I think it is crucial to point out that the even though the moral problems at the heart of Heidegger's philosophical endeavor are historically linked to his relationship to Nazism this should not blind us to the fact that what is at stake here are deeply human problems that will always, no doubt, constitute a great temptation for ourselves and for philosophy – for example: the problem of openly encountering and caring for other human beings, the problem of political action and democracy, the temptation to flee and repress our moral responsibilities and legitimize our flight by instead embarking on a supposedly more basic quest for

⁷¹⁸ GA 16, p. 375: “In dieser Wirklichkeit [der universalen Herrschaft des Willens zur Macht innerhalb der planetarisch gesehenen Geschichte] steht heute Alles, mag es Kommunismus heißen oder Faschismus oder Weltdemokratie.”

ultimate grounds, for certain knowledge, for universal principles, or for the openness of being; the lure of the logic of resentment, according to which our difficulties in attaining collective self-affirmation make us despise the people we secretly envy, and generate phantasies of revenge and of a glorious return to our collective circle.

3.3 The Question of the Openness of Being

It is clear that Heidegger's philosophical approach undergoes a change, or a set of changes, in the mid 1930s: a change in the guiding question, in the conception of phenomenality, as well as in the way and style of thinking. In the Heidegger-literature, this change has commonly been labeled the "turn" – following Heidegger's word "die Kehre" – and has generally been seen as the rough dividing line separating the early from the late Heidegger. However, it is far from obvious how the philosophical sense and import of Heidegger's alleged turn should be understood, the last fifty years having witnessed a massive scholarly debate regarding this issue.

In his pioneering work *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* from 1964 William Richardson established the standard interpretation which, in various shapes, has dominated the literature to this very day. According to Richardson, Heidegger's thinking undergoes a turn in the years 1930-1935, a turn which consists in a "shift from There-being to Being":⁷¹⁹ whereas the early Heidegger primarily focuses on Dasein and basically conceives of being as "the project of There-being,"⁷²⁰ the later Heidegger turns his principal focus to being itself as something which precedes and, of its own accord, gives itself to Dasein's understanding. This shift of focus, Richardson claims, is also linked to an alteration of Heidegger's methodological approach, such that the phenomenological explication of the structures of Dasein carried out in *Being and Time* gives way to a historical thinking which articulates being such as it gives itself historically.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Richardson 1963, p. 624.

⁷²⁰ Richardson 1963, p. 238.

⁷²¹ See Richardson 1963, p. 525. For other more recent interpretations along the same line, see, e.g., Guignon 1993, pp. 15f.; Figal [ed.] 2007a, pp. 29ff.

However, for some years now Thomas Sheehan has argued emphatically that there never occurred a turn in Heidegger's central question. According to Sheehan, the standard interpretation of the turn has failed to distinguish between two quite different matters: on the one hand, Heidegger uses the word "turn" (*Kehre*) to designate the central issue of his thinking, namely the movement – characterized by a reciprocal co-belonging of being and Dasein – through which being is opened up; on the other hand, he uses it to name "the shift in the way [he] formulated and presented his philosophy beginning in the 1930s."⁷²² Indeed, in his 1962 letter to William Richardson Heidegger makes a clear terminological distinction between the two turns. Here he contrasts the "turn" (*Kehre*) as a designation of the issue itself with the "change" (*Wendung*) in his thinking of that issue.⁷²³ Sheehan argues that the common failure to see that the "turn" for Heidegger primarily names his central topic and not some reversal of his philosophical standpoint is a consequence of the failure to grasp what that topic actually is. Heidegger's central topic, Sheehan claims, is not being but "*that which 'gives' being*":⁷²⁴ "What produces (*poiei, läßt sein*) givenness? What enables being as *parousia* or Anwesen to be given at all?"⁷²⁵ Once we recognize that Heidegger's central issue was the event that opens up being, more specifically the reciprocity between being and Dasein operative in that event, it becomes impossible to interpret the changes that Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the 1930s as a radical turn of his guiding question from Dasein to being – as if these could be viewed as some kind of separable entities. Instead, Sheehan maintains that Heidegger's central question "remains unchanged,"⁷²⁶ and that the shift his thinking undergoes is only one of focus and emphasis. Whereas the early Heidegger focused on Dasein's projective understanding of being, the later Heidegger – realizing that "thrownness [...] always has priority over projection"⁷²⁷ – puts the emphasis "less on man projectively *holding* open the world and more on man's *being required* to hold open the world."⁷²⁸ Indeed, one could say that Sheehan ends up reformulating the

⁷²² Sheehan 2001b, p. 3.

⁷²³ GA 11, p. 149f. Cf. Sheehan 2010, p. 93.

⁷²⁴ Sheehan 2001a, p. 192.

⁷²⁵ Sheehan 2001b, p. 7.

⁷²⁶ Sheehan 2010, p. 92.

⁷²⁷ Sheehan 2001b, p. 15.

⁷²⁸ Sheehan 2010, p. 91.

traditional interpretation of the turn as a shift from Dasein to being, only that he underlines that this shift is a shift not in Heidegger's central question and interest, but a shift of emphasis between the two reciprocal aspects of the dynamics which gives being.

Now it is clearly important to distinguish, as Sheehan does, between the turn as a name for the internal logic of the matter of Heidegger's thinking and the turn as a change in his strategies for thinking and expressing this matter. Also, Sheehan is doubtlessly right in claiming that Heidegger's matter was not being but that which gives being – although it seems to me that he exaggerates the extent to which previous commentators would have claimed the opposite. Nevertheless, I believe Sheehan's heavy emphasis on the continuity of Heidegger's central issue is apt to blind him to the transformations that Heidegger's questioning of this issue undergoes. The fact that we can and should distinguish between the matter of thinking and the thinking of the matter does not imply that these aspects would be systematically detachable from each other. Even though it is true to say, at a high level of abstraction, that Heidegger's thinking always revolved around the same issue – that which gives and opens up being – this does not in any way rule out the possibility that Heidegger's understanding and questioning of this issue *as such* would undergo significant changes – as I believe it does.⁷²⁹

The aim of this chapter is to examine the turn that Heidegger's guiding question undergoes in the mid 1930s and show the extent to which this transformation is a transformation in his questioning of phenomenality. On this basis it also becomes possible to specify in what sense Heidegger's thinking exhibits a shift of focus from Dasein to being. Whereas this chapter focuses on Heidegger's redirection of his guiding question the next two chapters will move on to investigate the effects of this transformation; first, on his analysis of the dynamics of the event that opens up being; second, on his conception of the historical mode of thinking required to think and express this event.

Heidegger's struggle to reorient his thinking after 1934 is to a large extent carried out in the massive self-reflective manuscripts written in 1936-1938 and gathered in *Contributions*. However, my explication will primarily make its way through other texts from this period. This is for

⁷²⁹ For a similar criticism of Sheehan, see Malpas 2006, p. 152f.

essential reasons. The manuscripts of *Contributions* have the character of loosely organized logs, which record Heidegger's manic and repetitious attempts to name and formulate, often in quasi-poetic fashion, the basic coordinates organizing his new thinking of the "event" (*Ereignis*).⁷³⁰ This, however, means that *Contributions*, although containing many sharp and valuable formulations, largely renounces the peculiar way-character which normally gives Heidegger's thinking its force: the capacity to trace the logic of our philosophical conceptions back to their unthought origins, thus opening up new fields of questioning and description. In so far as it is this lack of a unifying way of thought which gives rise to the notorious difficulty of these manuscripts, we should take their difficulty not as a sign of a higher complexity, but rather as a lack of that unity which alone could grant them their complexity.

I will develop my argument by explicating in parallel fashion Heidegger's lecture courses "Introduction to Metaphysics" from the summer of 1935 and "Basic Questions of Philosophy" delivered in the winter of 1937-38. Why these texts? Although Heidegger's lectures on Hölderlin from the winter of 1934-35 already bear witness to his effort to reorient his thinking after the failure of his rectorate, "Introduction to Metaphysics" is his first programmatic attempt to articulate the basic philosophical stance that will guide all his later thinking. It is no coincidence that Heidegger in the 1953 preface to *Being and Time* refers precisely to "Introduction to Metaphysics" as the text, which, in place of the missing second half of *Being and Time*, provides an "elucidation of this question [of being]."⁷³¹ Even though the presentation still remains groping and ambivalent, these lectures provide an exceptional opportunity to follow Heidegger's struggle to move away from the framework of fundamental ontology towards a questioning of the opening of being, and to see the extent to which this struggle is centered on the problem of phenomenality. To specify the philosophical gist of Heidegger's new guiding question I will also draw on "Basic Questions of Philosophy." These lectures record Heidegger's attempt to guide his students into the dimension of thinking which he is simultaneously working out in the rambling aphoristic style of the *Contributions*, and to my mind they offer one of his clearest articulations of the question of his later thinking. Then,

⁷³⁰ Cf., e.g., Sheehan 2001a, p. 187.

⁷³¹ SZ, p. vii: "Erläuterung dieser Frage [nach dem Sein]."

in order to specify and summarize the sense of Heidegger's turn from the viewpoint of the problem of phenomenality, I will also take up the "Letter on Humanism" from 1946, which contains Heidegger's paradigmatic formulation of what is at stake in the *Keibre* from the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* to his later philosophical approach.

The Way to the Question

Heidegger opens his "Introduction to Metaphysics" boldly by stating the question: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"⁷³² This question, Heidegger claims, is the basic question of metaphysics; as such, it is nothing but an ambiguous and unclear formulation of the question of being. Even so, he lets this question serve as the starting point for his attempt to clarify and elaborate the sense of what will be the guiding question of his own later thinking.

According to Heidegger, the question of being is the "broadest," the "deepest," and the "most originary" question:⁷³³ it is the broadest, since it does not stop at any particular being but questions "beings as a whole and as such";⁷³⁴ it is the deepest, since it seeks the "ground for what is, in so far as it is in being."⁷³⁵ So far, everything sounds familiar enough. However, in examining in what sense the question of being is the most originary question Heidegger reaches the issue that constituted the methodological turning point in *Being and Time* and triggered the whole existential analytic: the question of the questioning being itself. Although the question of being comprises all beings as beings – and thus does not privilege any particular being – Heidegger notes that there is still one entity which presses itself upon us in a peculiar way: "the human beings who pose this question."⁷³⁶ By returning to this methodological juncture, Heidegger gives himself the opportunity to mark out his critical departure from the existential analytic approach. In *Being and Time* Heidegger had argued for the necessity of a preparatory analytic of the being of the

⁷³² GA 40, p. 3: "Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?"

⁷³³ GA 40, p. 4: "die weiteste, sodann [...] die tiefste, schließlich [...] die ursprünglichste Frage."

⁷³⁴ GA 40, p. 4: "Das Seiende im Ganzen als ein solches."

⁷³⁵ GA 40, p. 5: "den Grund für das Seiende, sofern es seiend ist."

⁷³⁶ GA 40, p. 5: "die Menschen, die diese Frage stellen."

questioning being, *Dasein*, in order to make possible a transparent investigation of the sense of being. By phenomenologically explicating the basic structures of *Dasein*'s understanding – being-in-the-world, temporality – he hoped to disclose the ultimate horizon of sense organizing all our understanding of meaningful phenomena. Now, however, Heidegger insists on two things that hamper the very possibility of a preparatory existential analytic.

First, Heidegger stresses that the question of being constitutes the most basic question, which is “necessarily co-asked in every question.”⁷³⁷ If the question of being concerns the ultimate ontological dimension which always already conditions and determines all other understanding and questioning – e.g. of the human being – then in posing this question we are required to address being itself directly. Hence, Heidegger characterizes the question of being as an “originary leap” (*Ur-sprung*),⁷³⁸ which, devoid of any possible support and preparation through any other investigation, first opens up being as the fundamental dimension in which all beings can appear as meaningful and be analyzable in the first place. Second, Heidegger argues that our immediate access to the question of being is radically closed. Everywhere around us we see and experience different entities: from trees to motorbikes to works of art. Yet, in so doing, we are fundamentally unable to grasp something like the being of these entities: “Everything we have mentioned *is*, after all, and nevertheless – if we want to lay hold of being it is always as if we were reaching into a void.”⁷³⁹ The reason for this is that we live in a factual historical understanding of being which in fact constitutes a “forgetfulness of being,”⁷⁴⁰ determining our gaze in such a way that we are unable to fathom what being is all about.

Since it is our understanding of being which determines and delimits all our subsequent possibilities of understanding different entities, and since our preliminary understanding of being is determined by a historical logic that has effectively blinded us to the dimension being, there is no hope of shedding light on the question of being through a traditional

⁷³⁷ GA 40, p. 8: “in jeder Frage notwendig mitgefragt.” Cf. GA 40, p. 7.

⁷³⁸ GA 40, p. 8.

⁷³⁹ GA 40, p. 38: “All das, was wir nannten, *ist* doch, und gleichwohl – wenn wir das Sein fassen wollen, wird es immer, als griffen wir ins Leere.“

⁷⁴⁰ GA 40, p. 27: “*Seinsvergessenheit*.”

phenomenological effort to see and describe the basic structures of the human being. Hence, Heidegger's projection of this basic historic-systematical impasse makes necessary a new form of investigation: our only possible access to being now lies in a "reflection on the provenance of our *concealed history*":⁷⁴¹ "The question, 'How does it stand with being?' must maintain itself within the history of being if it is, in turn, to unfold and preserve its own historical scope."⁷⁴² That is, philosophy needs to take the form of a radically historical questioning, which, maintaining itself "within the history of being," traces our distorted understanding of being back to its historical origin in the hope of explicating the historical beginning which determines our metaphysical history and also, possibly, harbors a more originary understanding of being as such.⁷⁴³

Heidegger's description the historical way of the question is bound up with the diagnosis of the historical dynamics of Western metaphysics, which he develops in these years. The diagnosis is – in short – the following:

According to Heidegger, the beginning of Western metaphysics takes place as Plato and Aristotle interpret being as presence – *ousia* – and truth as the correct correspondence of our statements with that which is present. The early pre-Socratic conception of being as *physis* still harbored a certain understanding of the happening that conditions and opens up being as presence – an understanding which is also discernible in the Greek word for truth, *alētheia*, whose literal meaning is uncoveredness. However, in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle the roots of *ousia* in *physis/alētheia* are cut off and being is interpreted as pure presence for the human being. This understanding of being – which is also, at the same time, a forgetfulness of the origin and nature of being – then determines the entire history of metaphysics, which essentially takes the form of an ever-increasing subjectification and technification of being. In the modern age the basic understanding of being as presence gets radicalized as Descartes reinterprets being as objectivity, that is, as the character of being an object of the subject's representations of things. This process reaches

⁷⁴¹ GA 40, p. 99: "Besinnung auf die Herkunft unserer *verborgenen Geschichte*."

⁷⁴² GA 40, p. 99: "Die Frage: Wie steht es um das Sein? muß sich selbst in der Geschichte des Seins halten, um ihrerseits die eigene geschichtliche Tragweite zu entfalten und zu bewahren." Cf. also GA 40, p. 46.

⁷⁴³ Cf. GA 40, p. 42.

its culmination in Nietzsche's idea that being is nothing but an expression of man's will to power and domination. Heidegger will later explicate the contemporary situation in which we live in terms of a technical-subjectivist understanding of being as "enframing" (*Ge-stell*), whereby the totality of beings – including the human beings – is understood as a standing reserve for the human subject to use and manipulate.⁷⁴⁴

In "Basic Questions of Philosophy" Heidegger – on the backdrop of the diagnosis above – elaborates the basic movement of thinking as a transition from the "first beginning" (*der erste Anfang*) to the "other beginning" (*der andere Anfang*). Just as in "Introduction to Metaphysics," he insists that there is only "one way"⁷⁴⁵ to reopen the question of being/truth, and that is through a "historical reflection."⁷⁴⁶ By the "first beginning," Heidegger means nothing but the onset of Western metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle, which determines the understanding of being/truth characterizing the whole tradition of philosophy, and which still opens up and delimits our field of comprehension. Given that the first Greek beginning harbors within itself all our possibilities of understanding, it is only by returning to this beginning and reflecting on its ground that we can hope to gain access to a new and more basic understanding of being and truth. The opening up of such an understanding – which would in effect revolutionize the whole previous metaphysical conception of truth/being – through a historical reflection Heidegger calls the "other beginning": "This reflection must show that the first beginning, in its uniqueness, can never be repeated in the sense of a mere imitation, and that, on the other hand, it remains the only thing repeatable in the sense of a reopening of that by which the dispute has to commence if a beginning, and thus the *other beginning*, is to come to be historically."⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁴ Cf, e.g., GA 7, p. 20. For some texts on Heidegger's thinking on technology and on the technical nature of metaphysics, cf. Fandozzi 1982; Zimmerman 1990; Rojcewicz 2006; Davis 2007; Ruin 2010.

⁷⁴⁵ GA 45, p. 33.

⁷⁴⁶ GA 45, p. 35: "geschichtliche Besinnung."

⁷⁴⁷ GA 45, p. 199: "Diese Besinnung muß zeigen, daß der erste Anfang in seiner Einzigkeit nie wiederholbar ist im Sinne eines bloßen Nachmachens, daß er andererseits jedoch das einzig Wiederholbare bleibt im Sinne der Wiedereröffnung von Jenem, womit die Auseinandersetzung anzuheben hat, soll wieder ein Anfang und somit der *andere Anfang* geschichtlich werden."

This idea – that the only way for thinking to free itself from metaphysics and to open up a more originary understanding of being, is through a confrontation with the first beginning, and a critical appropriation of its unthought possibilities – will henceforth determine Heidegger’s conception of the task of thinking. However, even though Heidegger never entirely gives up this mythology of beginnings, it gradually loses its rigorous hold on his thinking. From around 1950 onward Heidegger does not find it as necessary to stage his thinking as a faceoff with the first beginning, instead putting his trust in the prospect of travelling straighter ways from our contemporary metaphysical situation to more originary possibilities of understanding. These he does not only find in ancient Greece, but also in later thinkers and philosophers such as Hölderlin and Goethe as well as in the post-Greek etymological root systems of German, English and Latin.

Physis, Alētheia, and the Question of the Openness of Being

Having begun “Introduction to Metaphysics” by sketching the hermeneutical situation of his investigation Heidegger turns to the main task of the lecture course: to reopen the question of being by explicating its Greek origin.

According to Heidegger’s historical sketch, the first great beginning of our history of being lies hidden in the words and sayings of the pre-Socratic thinkers and poets: Parmenides, Heraclitus, Pindar, and Sophocles. Through a series of violent interpretations of separate textual passages, Heidegger advances the thesis that the early Greek thinkers understood being itself as *physis*: “*Physis* is being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.”⁷⁴⁸ But what is *physis*? Heidegger writes: “Now what does the word *physis* say? It says what emerges from itself (e.g. the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the

⁷⁴⁸ GA 40, p. 17: “Die φύσις ist das Sein selbst, kraft dessen das Seiende erst beobachtbar wird und bleibt.”

emerging-abiding sway.”⁷⁴⁹ That is, for the early Greeks *physis* named nothing but the happening of phenomenal appearing, opening up, emerging, and prevailing in appearance: “Being means appearing. Appearing does not mean something derivative, which from time to time meets up with being. Being essentially unfolds *as* appearing.”⁷⁵⁰ Just as in *Being and Time*⁷⁵¹ Heidegger here – via a violent interpretation of the Greeks – equates being with phenomenality: to be is to appear and to understand being is to understand the nature of appearing. However, whereas Heidegger in *Being and Time* used the Greek word *phainomenon* as the gateway to his analysis of the structure of phenomenal understanding, he now opts for the word *physis*. This change of vocabulary marks a redirection of Heidegger’s questioning of phenomenality, such that he shifts his focal point from the sphere of experienceable phenomena – including particular entities, the worldly context of significance, the structures of *Dasein* – toward that event which first allows the world of phenomena to emerge at all, toward what Heidegger calls the “epiphany of a world”: “The originarily emergent self-upraising of the violent forces of what holds sway, the *phainesthai* as appearing in the grand sense of the epiphany of a world.”⁷⁵² That is to say: *physis*, as Heidegger understands it, should be conceived neither as an ontic matter, a happening among beings, nor as a part or dimension of our understanding of the substantial being-relations of the world, but rather names the very emergence of that world: the basic epiphanic happening which allows a phenomenal world to arise and appear as our historical context of meaning in the first place.

So how does *physis* come to pass?

Heidegger’s depiction of the happening of *physis* in “Introduction to Metaphysics” still remains quite rudimentary and he will develop it in more depth and detail later in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” I will come back to that analysis in the next chapter. However, let me

⁷⁴⁹ GA 40, p. 16: “Was sagt nun das Wort φύσις? Es sagt das von sich aus Aufgehende (z.B. das Aufgehen einer Rose), das sich eröffnende Entfalten, das in solcher Entfaltung in die Erscheinung-Treten und in ihr sich Halten und Verbleiben, kurz, das aufgehend-verweilende Walten.”

⁷⁵⁰ GA 40, p. 108: “Sein heißt Erscheinen. Dies meint nicht etwas Nachträgliches, was dem Sein zuweilen begegnet. Sein west *als* Erscheinen.”

⁷⁵¹ Cf. SZ, p. 28.

⁷⁵² GA 40, p. 67: “Das ursprünglich aufgehende Sichaufrichten der Gewalten des Waltenden, das *phainesthai*, als Erscheinen im großen Sinne der Epiphanie einer Welt.”

briefly relate what Heidegger says in “Introduction to Metaphysics” just to give a picture of the kind of happening he has in mind.

Heidegger describes the epiphanic event which gives rise to a historical world of significance as an interplay between two irreducible moments: *physis* and *logos*. Whereas *physis* names the self-arising, self-emerging movement in which the totality of beings overwhelms and dominates us, *logos* designates the basic activity through which man attempts to join and gather together the onslaught of *physis* into the strained unity of a historical world. Heidegger characterizes this gathering activity as a violent strife, a *polemos*:

The strife first projects and develops the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought. This strife is then sustained by the creators, by the poets, thinkers, and statesmen. Against the overwhelming sway they throw the block of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up. With these works, the sway, the *physis*, first comes to a stand in what is present.⁷⁵³

Heidegger’s description of the strife between *physis* and *logos* is meant to account for the basic tension characterizing the emergence of a world. On the one hand, Heidegger underscores that the world is not just the feeble result of a free projection of man’s imaginative powers, but rather from the outset presses itself upon us as a still untamed, unnamed, undetermined power; on the other hand, he maintains that for the world to emerge as a unified context of meaning-relations it is essentially in need of the gathering activity of the creative individuals of the historical community, primarily the poets and the thinkers. Their decisive task it so set up concrete works of art and thinking that are able to join together and shape the central paths and scales of meaning which determine the significances that different beings may take on for us. In so far as such a work is able to offer an articulation powerful enough to establish and sustain such a paradigmatic gathering understanding it founds a historical

⁷⁵³ GA 40, p. 66: “Der Kampf entwirft und entwickelt erst das Un-erhörte, bislang Un-gesagte und Un-gedachte. Dieser Kampf wird dann von den Schaffenden, den Dichtern, Denkern, Staatsmännern getragen. Sie werfen dem überwältigenden Walten den Block des Werkes entgegen und bannen in dieses die damit eröffnete Welt. Mit diesen Werken kommt erst das Walten, die φύσις im Anwesenden zum Stand.”

world.⁷⁵⁴ The task of Heidegger's later thinking will be none other than to critically retrieve and explicate what the early pre-Socratic thinkers and poets had, in a still unclear and ambivalent manner, called *physis*.

Let me now attempt to specify somewhat the systematic sense of the guiding question of Heidegger's later thinking by following how he elaborates it in the lecture course "Basic Questions of Philosophy."

In "Basic Questions of Philosophy" – as in most of the central texts establishing the questioning stance of his later thinking – Heidegger takes his point of departure in the *question of truth* rather than the question of being.⁷⁵⁵ Since the inception of Western philosophy in Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger claims, we have tended to understand truth as "correctness" (*Richtigkeit*).⁷⁵⁶ For us, truth basically materializes as the capacity of the human subject to represent beings correctly in explicit or implicit utterances. Yet for such representation of beings to be possible in the first place, these beings must somehow be open and accessible to us. There must, Heidegger claims, prevail an "openness" (*Offenheit*) which allows the human being free access to the totality of beings.⁷⁵⁷ Since Heidegger holds that our contemporary conception of truth as correctness is determined by the onset of this conception in Plato and Aristotle, he insists that the only way to reopen the question of truth is through a historical reflection on this origin.⁷⁵⁸

As Heidegger returns to the Greek origin of our concept of truth, the questioning undergoes a decisive "turn" (*Kehre*).⁷⁵⁹ In order to understand how Plato and Aristotle determined the essence of truth as correctness we are led back to the primary question what it means to understand essences:

⁷⁵⁴ I will not dwell longer on Heidegger's account of the workings of *physis* – which is still quite vague and undeveloped – here, but will come back to investigate the dynamics of shining in the next chapter.

⁷⁵⁵ The question of truth emerges as a central point of departure for Heidegger in the lecture "On the Essence of Truth" – delivered in 1930 and printed in 1943 in a heavily revised version (cf. GA 9, pp. 177-202) – and in the lecture course "On the Essence of Truth: On Plato's Parable of the Cave and the Theaetetus" from 1931-32. It also constitutes the central question organizing the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," first published in 1936.

⁷⁵⁶ GA 45, p. 14.

⁷⁵⁷ GA 45, p. 19.

⁷⁵⁸ Cf. GA 45, p. 35.

⁷⁵⁹ GA 45, p. 47.

“The question of the *essence of truth* is *at the same time and in itself* the question of the *truth of the essence*.”⁷⁶⁰ According to Heidegger, Plato and Aristotle basically understood the essence of a thing as “*ti einai* – the whatness of beings.”⁷⁶¹ Having the status of the whatness that determines what beings can be, the essences are something that must always already be present to us in order for us to be able to experience particular beings as meaningful phenomena. Hence, the Greeks determined the essences as *ideai*: “What is sighted is as what beings give themselves in advance and constantly. *The what-it-is*, the whatness, is the *idea*.”⁷⁶² Even though Heidegger will critically revise the Greek understanding of essence as a constantly present and independently definable whatness, he unflinchingly endorses the hierarchical difference between our understanding of essences and our knowledge of particular entities:

If, in our immediate comportment toward individual beings, we did not have the essence already in sight, or, Platonically expressed, if we did not have the “ideas” of individual things in view in advance, then we would be blind and would remain blind, to everything these things are as individuals, i.e., as such and such, here and now, in these or those relations. And still more: according to the way and to the extent that we regard the essence, we are also capable of experiencing and determining what is particular in the things. What is viewed in advance and how it is in view are decisive for what we actually see in the individual thing.⁷⁶³

So how are the essences given and understood? Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger claims, conceived of the knowledge of essences in terms of a

⁷⁶⁰ GA 45, p. 47: “Die Frage nach dem *Wesen der Wahrheit* ist *zugleich und in sich* die Frage nach der *Wahrheit des Wesens*.”

⁷⁶¹ GA 45, p. 61: “*τί εἶναι* – das Was-sein eines Seienden.”

⁷⁶² GA 45, p. 62: “Gesichtet ist das, als was sich das Seiende im vorhinein und ständig gibt. Das *Was es ist*, das Wassein, ist die *ιδέα*.”

⁷⁶³ GA 45, p. 65: “Wäre in unserem unmittelbaren Verhalten zum einzelnen Seienden nicht jeweils im voraus schon das Wesen gesichtet, platonisch gesprochen: Hätten wir nicht im voraus die ‘Ideen’ der einzelnen Dinge im blick, dann wären und blieben wir blind für alles, was diese Dinge im Einzelnen so und so, hier und jetzt und in ihren jeweiligen Beziehungen sind. Mehr noch: Je nach der Weise, wie wir und wie weit wir das Wesen erblicken, vermögen wir auch das Einzelne der Dinge zu erfahren und zu bestimmen. Das, was im Vorblick steht und wie es im Vorblick steht, entscheidet über das, was wir jeweils im Einzelnen tatsächlich sehen.” Cf also GA 45, pp. 62, 79.

“bringing forth” (*hervor-bringen*) of the essences from anonymousness and obscurity “into the light” so that we may sight them.⁷⁶⁴ Such knowledge cannot be grounded on any seeing of beings since it precedes and conditions all such seeing. According to Heidegger, the Greek conception of knowledge of essences in the end refers back to and claims as its own ground the basic experience of *alētheia*: “the *unconcealedness* of the whatness of beings”:⁷⁶⁵

To productively see (*er-sehen*) a being as such in its beingness – in what it is as being – means nothing else than to encounter it simply in its *unconcealedness*, and, as Aristotle says, *thigein*, simply touch it, bump into it, and in bumping into it and pushing forward toward it, to bring it before oneself, to produce and see its look.⁷⁶⁶

In short, it is nothing but the primordial uncoveredness and openness of the essences that makes it possible for us to access them – by a kind of simple “touching” or “bumping into” them – and articulate them as the historical world guiding all our experience of beings. By explicating the ground of the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of truth as correctness Heidegger is thus led back to the notion of the uncoveredness of essences as that which allows us to grasp particular beings as meaningful phenomena and, hence, to utter correct or incorrect statements about them.

And yet, Heidegger, claims, even though Plato and Aristotle experienced the uncoveredness of essences as the ground and essence of truth they never asked the question about the nature of uncoveredness as such:

And assuming that they [the Greeks] would have established the unconcealedness of beings as the ground of the correctness of the assertion, is thereby this ground itself – *alētheia* in *its* essence – sufficiently determined and questioned? Did the Greeks ever ask about *alētheia* as such; did the Greeks make the unconcealedness of

⁷⁶⁴ GA 45, p. 85.

⁷⁶⁵ GA 45, p. 97: “die *Unverborgenheit* des Wasseins des Seienden.”

⁷⁶⁶ GA 45, p. 97: “Das Seiende als solches in seiner Seiendheit – in dem, was es als Seiendes ist – er-sehen, heißt nichts anderes als: es in seiner *Unverborgenheit* einfach antreffen und, wie Aristoteles sagt, ἅψαι, berühren, einfach darauf stossen und im Daraufstossen und dahin Vorstoßen vor sich bringen, den Anblick er-sehen.”

beings as such into that which is worthy of questioning? Does this, that the Greeks experienced the essence of truth as unconcealedness, automatically mean that the unconcealedness of beings was what was question-worthy for them? By no means.⁷⁶⁷

According to Heidegger, the first Greek beginning of philosophy was founded on the basic experience of *alētheia* as the ground which made possible all understanding of being and beings but which itself remained unquestioned. Plato and Aristotle never radically asked the questions: How does the opening up of essences – of being – occur? How do the essences give themselves? And what does it mean to come upon – touch them, bump into them – and bring them to light? In Heidegger's view, the first Greek beginning in Plato and Aristotle was thus essentially ambiguous and fragile: on the one hand, the experience of *alētheia* harbored an intimation – more originarily manifested in the pre-Socratic notion of *physis* – of the epiphanic happening according to which essences open up and prevail as uncovered; on the other hand, the fundamental lack of questioning and understanding of *alētheia* as such ultimately led the Greeks to interpret the uncoveredness of essences in terms of the stable presence – *ousia* – of the essences – *eidos/idea* – for the gaze of our preceding understanding.⁷⁶⁸ According to Heidegger, it is precisely the ambivalence of the first beginning which gives rise to the dialectics of forgetfulness characterizing the history of Western metaphysics: due to the initial ambivalent interpretation of *alētheia* as *ousia*, the uncoveredness of being is soon forgotten and truth is relocated in the capacity of human reason to represent beings in a correct manner.

Let me briefly summarize the systematic moments that bear up and constitute the systematic sense of the central question of Heidegger's later philosophy: 1. Heidegger reaffirms the ontological difference structuring our phenomenal understanding, maintaining that our preceding

⁷⁶⁷ GA 45, p. 111f.: “Und angenommen, sie [die Griechen] hätten die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als den Grund der Richtigkeit der Aussage gegründet, ist damit dieser Grund selbst – die ἀλήθεια in *ihrem* Wesen – hinreichend bestimmt und befragt? Haben denn die Griechen jemals nach der ἀλήθεια als solcher gefragt, haben die Griechen die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als solche zu dem gemacht, was des Fragens würdig ist? Heißt dieses – daß die Griechen das Wesen der Wahrheit als Unverborgenheit erfuhren – schon ohne weiteres, daß ihnen die Unverborgenheit des Seienden das Fragwürdige war? Keineswegs.”

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. GA 45, p. 68.

understanding of historical being – i.e. of the relations of significance and being making up our historical world – determines our understanding of beings as meaningful phenomena. 2. He insists that, as a consequence, the only way to question our received understanding of being/truth is through a historical reflection on its historical origin. 3. He projects the shape of the history of being as a unified series of events determined by a singular Greek beginning containing the basic horizon of our current understanding as well as the unthought ground of that understanding. 4. In confronting and explicating the Greek beginning Heidegger claims to come across precisely the hierarchical structure of understanding according to which the possibility of experiencing beings is determined by our preceding understanding of being. 5. As the ground of the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of what it means to understand being and truth Heidegger finds the notion of *alētheia*, signifying the uncoveredness of being. Moreover, in the pre-Socratic notion of *physis* he finds an even more originary conception of the happening that opens up being. However, both these Greek notions still remain unclear and largely unthought, and it is the central task of thinking to retrieve and explicate the matter that they indicate.

For Heidegger, then, the decisive task of thinking is clear: “to *bring* the *openness* itself, in what it is (*west*) and how it is (*west*), *upon its ground*.”⁷⁶⁹ The basic question, which is to guide Heidegger’s later thinking, is none other than the question concerning the openness and givenness of historical being.

The basic phenomenal motif of the later Heidegger’s guiding question is clearly recognizable in his various formulations of this question, e.g., as the question of “the truth of being” or of “the truth of the essence” – where truth means the disclosedness or openness of being/essence – or as the question of “being itself,” which should be heard as the question of how being itself is opened up and given. The fact that Heidegger’s late thinking circles around the question of the openness or phenomenality of being is also mirrored in his basic designations of the happening or dimension which opens up being, the most central of which are *Ereignis* and *Lichtung*. Heidegger eventually traces *Ereignis* back to the old German verb *eräugen*, which he explicates as meaning “to catch sight of, to call

⁷⁶⁹ GA 45, p. 189: “die *Offenheit* selbst, in dem, als was sie west und wie sie west, *auf ihren Grund zu bringen*.”

something to oneself through looking.”⁷⁷⁰ As such, the word names the basic event which opens up and lets being come into view. *Lichtung* – whose roots he finds in the old verb *lichten*, which he reads as “to make something light, free and open”⁷⁷¹ – is Heidegger’s name for the clearing or openness which allows being to shine forth. In what follows I will render *Ereignis* as the “event” or the “event of appropriation,” whereas I will translate *Lichtung* as the “clearing.” In the late text “Time and Being”⁷⁷² Heidegger simply uses the formula “Es gibt” – literally “it gives” – to name this giving of being.⁷⁷³

Heidegger’s Self-Critique: from Eidos/Idea to Alētheia/Physis

In “Introduction to Metaphysics” Heidegger offers a diagnosis of how the originary pre-Socratic conception of being as *physis* collapses in the works of Plato and Aristotle, and gives way to a new understanding of being in terms of *eidos* and *idea*, which determines the metaphysical shape of Western philosophy.

According to Heidegger, the Greeks named the meaningful appearance or look of an entity its *eidos*, whereas *idea* signified the general pre-understood essence or meaning that presents itself in the *eidos*: “What any being is consists in its look (*Aussehen*), and the look, in turn, presents the being’s whatness (allows it to *come to presence*).”⁷⁷⁴ The phenomenal appearing of meaningful entities is thus characterized by a double aspect: on the one hand, it refers back to the original emergence of the world in the happening of *physis*; on the other hand, it refers to the very phenomenal presence of meanings and entities for our seeing and understanding. As per Heidegger, the decisive alienation from the originary Greek understanding of being and the birth of metaphysical philosophy in Plato and Aristotle occurs at the precise moment when philosophy neglects and covers over the question of the origin of the

⁷⁷⁰ GA 11, p. 45: “erblicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen.” Cf. Sheehan (2001a), pp. 196-198.

⁷⁷¹ GA 14, p. 80: “etwas leicht, etwas frei und offen machen.”

⁷⁷² “Zeit und Sein,” in GA 14.

⁷⁷³ GA 14, p. 9f.

⁷⁷⁴ GA 40, p. 190: “*Was* je ein Seiendes ist, das liegt in seinem Aussehen, dieses jedoch praesentiert (läßt *anwesen*) das Was.”

world in the event of *physis* and starts to focus exclusively on the stable phenomenal presence of *eidōs* and *idea* as the ultimate dimension of being as such.⁷⁷⁵ The basic problem of this shift is that “what is a *consequence* of the essence (*Wesensfolge*) is raised to the level of essence itself, and thus takes the place of the essence.”⁷⁷⁶ As the origin of *eidōs/idea* in *physis* is covered up, the exclusive focus on *eidōs/idea* gives rise to the basic understanding of being as *ousia* – presence – which has determined the fate of philosophy ever since: “In the look, that is present, that which is, stands there in its what and its how. It is apprehended and taken, it is in the possession of a taking-in, it is the available presence of what comes to presence: *ousia*.”⁷⁷⁷ By determining being as presence for our intuitive seeing, philosophy sanctions its own forgetfulness of the originary event which first opens up and sustains our historical world.

As I suggested above, Heidegger’s turn from *phainomena* to *physis* implies a redirection of his guiding question towards the happening that opens up being. However, following this logic, I also think it is possible to read his analysis of the degeneration of Greek thinking from an originary understanding of being as *physis* to a metaphysical understanding of being as *eidōs/idea* as a self-critical transformation of his earlier conception of phenomenality. In this reading Heidegger’s way from *Being and Time* to “Introduction to Metaphysics” emerges as a move from a questioning of phenomenality within the paradigm of *eidōs/idea* to a questioning of phenomenality with reference to *physis*.

Yet how is it possible to understand Heidegger’s description of the relation between *physis* and *eidōs/idea* as a self-critique? Has not Heidegger always, from his earliest Freiburg lecture courses to *Being and Time*, been engaged in a radical critique of the primacy of seeing in general and of the theoretical gaze in particular, emphasizing again and again the historically conditioned character of all direct intuition? Clearly, this is the case. Still, this does not preclude that Heidegger’s early elaboration of his hermeneutic phenomenology is itself influenced by a certain paradigm of *eidōs/idea*.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. GA 40, pp. 66f., 189f.

⁷⁷⁶ GA 40, p. 191: “was eine *Wesensfolge* ist, zum *Wesen* selbst erhoben wird und so an die Stelle des *Wesens* rückt.”

⁷⁷⁷ GA 40, p. 190: “Im Aussehen steht das Anwesende, das Seiende, in seinem Was und Wie an. Es ist ver-nommen und genommen, ist im Besitz eines Hinnehmens, ist dessen Habe, ist verfügbares Anwesen von Anwesendem: οὐσία.”

As we know, Heidegger in the early 1920s develops his analysis of phenomenality by way of an interpretation of Aristotle. Going back to that analysis we can see that Heidegger has recourse precisely to Aristotle's concepts of *nous* and *eidōs* to articulate the historical as-structure of phenomenality. In his seminal 1922 text, "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation," Heidegger argues that we do not in the first place perceive things by way of simple and immediate sense perceptions. Rather, we primarily experience and see beings on the basis of a preceding understanding of the "possible as-what-determinations" with reference to which particular beings may show up as this or that.⁷⁷⁸ Heidegger discovers this preceding understanding in Aristotle's concept of *nous*. And what is *nous*? Heidegger writes: "*Nous* is *aisthēsis tis*, an apprehending which in each case simply pre-gives the 'look' [i.e. the *eidōs*] of the objects."⁷⁷⁹ Heidegger thus employs a certain notion of *noetic-perception-of-eidē* precisely to articulate the unthematic historical understanding of worldly significances, which precedes and determines all immediate seeing of meaningful entities.

The fact that Heidegger's originally develops his conception of our factual pre-understanding of the world in terms of a kind of unthematic eidetic seeing also manifests itself in Heidegger's deployment of the word *phainomenon* in *Being and Time* as the master concept regulating everything he says about the nature of understanding and explication. Looking back at this book it is striking that he from the outset articulates the problem of phenomenality entirely in terms of the character of self-showing: a phenomenon is "*that which shows itself in itself*,"⁷⁸⁰ whereas phenomenology means "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself."⁷⁸¹ Indeed, as Heidegger formalizes the notions of "sight" and "seeing" and empties them of their usual references to sense perception he retains precisely that aspect which is expressed in the Greek words *nous* and *eidōs*: "The *only* peculiarity of seeing which we claim for the existential meaning of sight is the fact that it lets the beings accessible to it

⁷⁷⁸ GA 62, p. 379: "mögliche 'Als-Was-Bestimmtheiten'."

⁷⁷⁹ GA 62, p. 381: "Der νοῦς ἰσθῆσις τις, ein Vernehmen, das das Aussehen der Gegenstände jeweils schlicht vorgibt."

⁷⁸⁰ SZ, p. 28: "das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende."

⁷⁸¹ SZ, p. 34: "Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen."

be encountered in themselves without being concealed.”⁷⁸² To be sure, Heidegger maintains that it is the task of phenomenology to exhibit “what proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all, what, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself, is *concealed*,” namely the being of *Dasein* and the sense of being.⁷⁸³ Nevertheless, he fundamentally determines being and sense as something which is capable of being exhibited, and which is in fact always already uncovered and seen – although our immersion in the world and our historical forgetfulness of being make us unable to grasp it: “The phenomenological exhibition of being-of-the-world has the character of rejecting distortions and obfuscations *because* this phenomenon is always already ‘seen’ in every *Dasein* in a certain way. And this is so *because* it makes up a fundamental constitution of *Dasein*, in that it is always already disclosed, along with its being, for the understanding of being in *Dasein*.”⁷⁸⁴

So far, we have seen that the Aristotelian paradigm of *eidos/idea* at least presents the proto-model for Heidegger’s early conception of phenomenality, and that his elaboration of this conception in *Being and Time* is dominated by the idea that our primary factual understanding of being has the character of an unthematic seeing of uncovered being.⁷⁸⁵ Let

⁷⁸² SZ, p. 147: “Für die existentielle Bedeutung von Sicht ist nur *die* Eigentümlichkeit des Sehens in Anspruch genommen, daß es das ihm zugänglich Seiende an ihm selbst unverdeckt begegnen läßt.”

⁷⁸³ SZ, p. 35: “solches, was sich zunächst und zumeist gerade *nicht* zeigt, was gegenüber dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, *verborgen* ist.”

⁷⁸⁴ SZ, p. 58: “Der phänomenologische Aufweis des In-der-Welt-seins hat den Charakter der Zurückweisung von Verstellungen und Verdeckungen, *weil* dieses Phänomen immer schon in jedem *Dasein* in gewisser Weise selbst ‘gesehen’ wird. Und das ist so, *weil* es eine Grundverfassung des *Daseins* ausmacht, insofern es mit seinem Sein für sein Seinsverständnis je schon erschlossen ist. Das Phänomen ist aber auch zumeist immer schon ebenso gründlich mißdeutet oder ontologisch ungenügend ausgelegt.”

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. also GA 17, p. 24; GA 20, pp. 90f.; SZ, pp. 58, 148. When Heidegger after the publication of *Being and Time* deepens his reflection on the freely projective character of *Daseins*’ understanding of being he, again, repeatedly has recourse to Plato’s theory of ideas (cf., e.g., GA 26, pp. 233-238; GA 9, pp. 160f.; GA 27, p. 215). This time, however, Heidegger presents Plato’s exemplary articulation of the understanding of being in terms of a seeing of ideas – “The look, *idea*, thus gives *what* something presences *as*, i.e. what a thing *is*, its *being*” (*Der Anblick, idéa, gibt also das, als was ein Ding anwest, d.h. was ein Ding ist, – sein Sein*) (GA 34, p. 51) – precisely in order to be able to confront it and overcome it: “But what kind of looking (*Blicken*) is this? It is not a

us now pay heed to the fact that Heidegger himself later explicitly denounces the Platonic character of his earlier stance and his tendency to understand being in terms of *idea*. This happens in two handwritten comments to the 1929 essay “On the Essence of Ground,” both comments probably written in the later 1930s.

The first comment refers to the approach taken in general: “The approach in terms of the truth of being is undertaken here still entirely within the framework of traditional metaphysics and in a straightforward retrieval corresponding to the truth of beings, the unconcealment of beings, and the unveiledness pertaining to beings. Beingness as *idea* is itself unveiledness.”⁷⁸⁶ The second comment is directed at a central passage in which Heidegger articulates the hierarchically founding relationship between our understanding of being and our understanding of beings in the following way: “Unveiledness of being first makes possible the manifestness of beings. This unveiledness, as the truth concerning being, is termed *ontological truth*.”⁷⁸⁷ In his later, handwritten comment to this passage Heidegger writes: “Unclear! Ontological truth is unveiling of beingness – via the categories – but beingness as such is already *one* particular truth of being. [...] This distinction between ‘ontic and ontological truth’ is only a doubling of unconcealment and initially remains ensconced within the Platonic approach.”⁷⁸⁸

But what is the philosophical sense of these remarks?

staring at something present, not a simple finding of something and receiving of something into our vision, but a looking in the sense of looking-forth (*Er-blicken*). This means first *forming* what is looked-forth (the look) *through* the looking and *in* the looking, i.e., forming in advance, pre-forming” (*Aber was für ein Blicken ist das? Kein Anblicken, etwa so, wie wir ein Vorhandenes angaffen, nicht ein bloßes Vorfinden und Aufnehmen in den Blick, sondern ein Blicken im Sinne des Er-blickens, das will sagen: durch das Blicken und im Blicken das Erblickte (den Anblick) allererst bilden, – im voraus bilden, vor-bilden*) (GA 34, p. 71).

⁷⁸⁶ GA 9, p. 126: “Der Ansatz der Wahrheit des Seyns ist hier noch ganz im Rahmen der überlieferten Metaphysik vollzogen und in einfacher und wiederholender Entsprechung zur Wahrheit des Seienden und Unverborgenheit des Seienden und Enthülltheit der Seiendheit. Seiendheit als *idéa* selbst Enthülltheit.”

⁷⁸⁷ GA 9, p. 131: “*Enthülltheit des Seins ermöglicht erst Offenbarkeit von Seiendem. Diese Enthülltheit als Wahrheit über das Sein wird ontologische Wahrheit genannt.*”

⁷⁸⁸ GA 9, p. 131: “Unklar! Ontologische Wahrheit ist Enthüllen der Seiendheit – durch die Kategorien – aber Seiendheit als solche bereits *eine* bestimmte Wahrheit des Seyns. [...] Diese Unterscheidung ‘ontisch-ontologische Wahrheit’ ist nur eine Verdoppelung der Unverborgenheit und bleibt zunächst im Platonischen Ansatz stecken.”

It is significant that the only concrete passage that Heidegger comments upon constitutes nothing but an articulation of the basic idea that our experience of beings is grounded on a preceding understanding of being. Heidegger's central self-critique is that his earlier conception of the understanding of being remains trapped within a Platonic metaphysics since it is developed as a "straightforward retrieval" of the phenomenal unconcealment and presence pertaining to particular entities; hence, his articulation of the basic difference between the unveiledness of being and the disclosedness of beings constitutes a "doubling of unconcealment," whereby the prior disclosedness of being is itself conceived as "unveiledness of beingness," i.e. as "*idea*."

None of Heidegger's self-critical comments suggests that he would dismiss his earlier conception of the understanding of being as some kind of naive revival of direct seeing. However, what they do say is that this conception conceives of being as a beingness which is somehow accessible as present and unveiled. On the basis of Heidegger's later explication of *physis* we may reckon what this means: it means that being has somehow been cut off from its epiphanic origin in *physis* and grasped as the basic phenomenal presence which grounds all subsequent ontic disclosure. Hence, according to Heidegger's own later stance, the problem with his early conception of our understanding of being is *not* that it conceives of this understanding as a kind of optical seeing, but rather that it – in a certain structural analogy with seeing – grasps precisely our factual unthematic understanding of being as a kind of absolute ground: a presence which, notwithstanding its unthematic, groundless and finite character, operates as the basic given which Heidegger never seriously questions.

Thus interpreted, Heidegger's self-critique very much answers to the critique I developed above, at the end of part two, of the basic lacuna haunting Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality in *Being and Time*. As I have tried to show, the central aim and achievement of *Being and Time* was to articulate the basic as-structure of phenomenal understanding: it is only on the basis of our preceding unthematic historical understanding of being and the world that we are able to see particular beings as meaningful phenomena, and explicate thematically what we have always already implicitly understood. Hence, Heidegger's analysis ascribed an absolutely basic role to our unthematic factual understanding of being as the

groundless ground of all direct seeing and reflective explication. However, in pursuing his existential analytic Heidegger never radically questioned the nature and givenness of this basic historical understanding of being and world. He never asked how historical being is given and discernible as something true or originary beyond our factual historical prejudices, or how it is able to engage us and bind us as our ultimate horizon of purposes. The upshot of this is that Dasein's historical understanding of being is presupposed as the basic dimension of understanding which is – somehow – always already unthematically there and present, but which at the end of the day remains a dogma shielding the critical question concerning the phenomenality of historical meaning. This lacuna then gives rise to the basic methodological ambiguity tearing up the unity of *Being and Time*: the ambiguity between Heidegger's program for a radically historical – deconstructive and hermeneutically retrieving – thinking, and his de facto recourse to an intuition-based method of phenomenological explication.

Heidegger's Turn Reconsidered

So how does Heidegger's turn appear in the light of the above examination of his new guiding question of the openness of being?

Let us begin by taking a look at the key passage in "Letter on Humanism" in which Heidegger for the first time publicly announces the "turn" which is at stake in the transition from *Being and Time* to his later thinking. The passage takes its starting point in the question how we should understand the fact that Heidegger in *Being and time* articulates Dasein's understanding in terms of a "projection":

If we understand what *Being and Time* calls "projection" as a representational positing, we take it to be an achievement of subjectivity and do not think it in the only way the "understanding of being" in the context of the "existential analytic" can be thought – namely, as the ecstatic relation to the clearing of being. The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that abandons subjectivity is surely made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first part, "Time and Being," was held back. Here everything turns around (*Hier kehrt sich das Ganze um*). The division in question was

held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turn (*Kehre*) and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. The lecture “On the Essence of Truth,” thought out and delivered in 1930 but not printed until 1943, provides a certain insight into the thinking of the turn from “Being and Time” to “Time and Being.” This turn is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the locality of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced in the fundamental experience of the forgetfulness of being.⁷⁸⁹

The quotation contains the following central points: 1. Heidegger states that the “turn” is what is at issue in the planned but never realized transition from the second to the third division of the first part of *Being and Time*, in which he was to move on to explicate the Temporality (*Temporalität*) of being on the basis of his previous analytic of the temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) of Dasein. Here, Heidegger writes, “everything turns around.” 2. For Heidegger, the “turn” does not signify a “change of standpoint” of *Being and Time* but rather names a logic belonging to the question of being itself, a logic which leads into “the locality of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced.” However, although *Being and Time* already experiences and opens up the “turn” it is unable to articulate it since it remains stuck in the “language of metaphysics.” The “turn” that Heidegger’s thinking undergoes in the mid 1930s is thus nothing but an attempt to say and realize the “turn” which lies in the

⁷⁸⁹ GA 9, pp. 327f.: “Versteht man den in ‘Sein und Zeit’ genannten ‘Entwurf’ als ein vorstellendes Setzen, dann nimmt man ihn als Leistung der Subjektivität und denkt ihn nicht so, wie ‘das Seinsverständnis’ im Bereich der ‘existentiellen Analytik’ des ‘In-der-Welt-Seins’ allein gedacht werden kann, nämlich als der ekstatische Bezug zur Lichtung des Seins. Der zureichende Nach- und Mit-vollzug dieses anderen, die Subjektivität verlassenden Denkens ist allerdings dadurch erschwert, daß bei der Veröffentlichung von ‘Sein und Zeit’ der dritte Abschnitt des ersten Teiles, ‘Zeit und Sein’ zurückgehalten wurde. Hier kehrt sich das Ganze um. Der fragliche Abschnitt wurde zurückgehalten, weil das Denken im zureichenden Sagen dieser Kehre versagte und so mit Hilfe der Sprache der Metaphysik nicht durchkam. Der Vortrag ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’, der 1930 gedacht und mitgeteilt, aber erst 1943 gedruckt wurde, gibt einen gewissen Einblick in das Denken der Kehre von ‘Sein und Zeit’ zu ‘Zeit und Sein’. Diese Kehre ist nicht eine Änderung des Standpunktes von ‘Sein und Zeit’, sondern in ihr gelangt das versuchte Denken erst in die Ortschaft der Dimension, aus der ‘Sein und Zeit’ erfahren ist, und zwar erfahren in der Grunderfahrung der Seinsvergessenheit.”

question of being itself, and which he could not follow through in *Being and Time*. 3. As concerns its content Heidegger only says that the “turn” leads into the “clearing of being,” and that the thinking answering to the turn leaves subjectivity behind and thinks the openness of being as the primary dimension which the human being has to receive and preserve.

But how should we understand the systematic sense of the turn?

The passage quoted above contains a reference to the paper “On the Essence of Truth” which was presented for the first time in 1930 but which was published in 1943 in a heavily revised version. Here Heidegger begins his pursuit of the question of the essence of truth, which during many years will constitute his central way into the dimension of his later thinking. The paper also ends with a question, namely “whether the question of the essence of truth must not be, at the same time and even first of all, the question concerning the truth of essence”?⁷⁹⁰ In a note at the end of the paper – appended in 1949 – Heidegger then offers the following retrospective remarks:

The question of the essence of truth finds its answer in the proposition *the essence of truth is the truth of essence*. [...] The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turn within the history of being. [...] Already in the original project, the lecture “On the Essence of Truth” was to have been completed by a second lecture, “On the Truth of Essence.” The latter failed for reasons that are now indicated in the “Letter on Humanism.” The decisive question (in *Being and Time*, 1927) of the sense, i.e., of the project-domain, i.e., of the openness, i.e., of the truth of being and not merely of beings, remains intentionally undeveloped.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁹⁰ GA 9, p. 200: “ob die Frage nach dem Wesen der Wahrheit nicht zugleich und zuerst die Frage nach der Wahrheit des Wesens sein muß.”

⁷⁹¹ GA 9, p. 201: “Die Frage nach dem Wesen der Wahrheit findet ihre Antwort in dem Satz: *das Wesen der Wahrheit ist die Wahrheit des Wesens*. [...] Die Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Wesen der Wahrheit ist die Sage einer Kehre innerhalb der Geschichte des Seins. [...] Der Vortrag ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’ sollte bereits im ursprünglichen Entwurf durch einen zweiten ‘Von der Wahrheit des Wesens’ ergänzt werden. Dieser mißlang aus Gründen, die jetzt in dem Brief ‘Über den Humanismus’ angedeutet sind. Die entscheidende Frage (Sein und Zeit, 1927) nach dem Sinn, d.h. nach dem Entwurfsbereich, d.h. nach der Offenheit, d.h. nach der Wahrheit des Seins und nicht nur des Seienden, bleibt absichtlich unentfaltet.”

That is to say: The answer to the question about the essence of truth, namely that the essence of truth is the truths of the essence, is nothing but an articulation of the turn in the history of being which it is the task of thinking to realize. And yet, though opening the path of the turn the paper “On the Essence of Truth” is still unable to walk it. However it is precisely this task which Heidegger later takes up and realizes in “Basic Questions of Philosophy,” where he describes the decisive turn of the question as follows: “The question of the *essence of truth* is *at the same time and in itself* the question of the *truth of the essence*. The question of truth – asked as a basic question – turns itself in itself against itself. This *turn* (*Kebre*), which we have now run up against, is an intimation of the fact that we are entering the compass of a genuine philosophical question.”⁷⁹²

There is, I think, no doubt that Heidegger’s most central substantial description of the “turn” lies in the statement that the “turn” is a shift from the question of the essence of truth to the truth of essence. Above I have already explicated how Heidegger in “Basic Questions of Philosophy” elaborates the question of the truth of the essence in terms of the question of the openness of being as the guiding question of his later thought: how does historical being/essence/world open up and give itself?

Yet how should we understand the turn to this question, the turn out of which the question springs forth and comes into view?

Heidegger’s paradigmatic formulation of the turn implies that his question of the sense of being in *Being and time* would still be a question of the essence of truth which is unable to turn into a question of the truth of the essence. To ask for the essence of truth is – to quote “On the Essence of Truth” – to ask for “what in general distinguishes every ‘truth’ as truth,”⁷⁹³ i.e., in phenomenological terms, to ask about the basic structures which condition and constitute our experience of truth. But is not this precisely what Heidegger sets out to do in *Being and Time*?

By articulating the question of fundamental ontology as the question of *sense* of being, Heidegger from the start directs the focus of his question towards the basic “structure” or “framework” (*Gerüst*) which constitutes

⁷⁹² GA 45, p. 47: “Die Frage nach dem *Wesen der Wahrheit* ist *zugleich und in sich* die Frage nach der *Wahrheit des Wesens*. Die Wahrheitsfrage – als Grundfrage gefragt – kehrt sich in sich selbst gegen sich selbst. Diese *Kebre*, auf die wir hier gestoßen sind, ist das Anzeichen dafür, daß wir in den Umkreis einer echten philosophischen Frage kommen.”

⁷⁹³ GA 9, p. 177: “was jede ‘Wahrheit’ überhaupt als Wahrheit auszeichnet.”

Dasein's phenomenal understanding of things. Hence, fundamental ontology is carried out as a phenomenological explication of these structures, whereby the guiding presupposition of this methodological strategy is that the explication of Dasein's basic structure as temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) will offer the phenomenal basis for an explication of the sense of being as Temporality (*Temporalität*). This, however, is to say that Heidegger's pursuit of the question of the sense of being has the form of a phenomenological investigation of the *essence of phenomenal understanding and truth*, i.e., of the structures which condition and constitute our experience of beings as meaningful phenomena and allow us to express true or false judgments about them.

Nevertheless, the analysis carried out in *Being and Time* engenders results which undermine and necessitate a turn of the question of fundamental ontology. According to Heidegger, the understanding of Dasein exhibits a historical structure upheld by the ontological difference: our experience of beings as meaningful phenomena is determined by our historical understanding of the world, and this, in turn, is determined by our historical understanding of being. This analysis implies a prioritization of our historically received understanding of being and the sense of being as the fundamental stratum determining all our other possibilities of experience and understanding. In the end, historical being emerges as the basic – finite and groundless – context of meaning which is always already open and unthematically understood. However: in *Being and Time* Heidegger never radically asks the question how being is opened up and given. This means that the openness of historical being – precisely as *alētheia* in Aristotle – takes on the role as the fundamental condition which sustains our entire phenomenal understanding without itself being put into question and thought through.

One could thus say that the fundamental ontological investigation of the sense of being – the essence of truth – gives rise to the question of how being is given, i.e., to the question of the truth of the essence, without, however, itself being able of carrying out this turn of the question. But why not? What is it that hinders Heidegger from completing the third division of the first part of *Being and time*? What is it that prevents him from shifting the focus to the question of the openness of being?

Here it is important to differentiate. There is, I think, no reason to suppose that Heidegger at the time of outlining the composition of *Being*

and Time or even in the wake of its publication would have had a clear notion of the turn of the question that he was later to articulate. On the contrary – as the years following the publication amply show – Heidegger’s abandonment of his plan to complete *Being and Time* could be described as the result of the mounting insight that the radical priority of the understanding of being implied by the existential analytic indeed undercuts the very ambition to clarify the sense of being through an explication of the structure of Dasein. It is only from a later perspective that the turn to the question of the openness of being emerges as a necessity which *Being and Time* gives rise to without Heidegger as yet being able to see and pursue it.

What prevents Heidegger from thinking the turn in the manner of a continuation of the project of fundamental ontology in *Being and time* is nothing else than the fact that the perspective of questioning guiding this project does not of itself open up the question of the openness of being – but rather presupposes that it remains closed. The very notion that there is an existential analytic path to the sense of being rests on the idea that it is possible to access and explicate the structures of a particular being – the human being, Dasein – as the transhistorical phenomenal ground which allows us to critically delimit the received traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand, and attain a true phenomenologically grounded understanding of being as temporality. This idea, however, is undermined by the results of the analytic, which imply that our understanding of being/sense is deeply historical, so that any investigation of the structures of Dasein or the openness of being would ultimately have to take the form of an explication the possibilities of meaning harbored by our history. Hence, the very task of asking and pursuing the question of the openness of being would have demanded a radical break with the entire perspective and methodological approach of *Being and time* in favor of another kind of historical questioning of how historical being is opened up and given to us.

We should now be able to spell out how this exposition relates to the dominating interpretations of Heidegger’s *Kebrre*.

As mentioned earlier, Thomas Sheehan has argued that Heidegger’s central question concerning that which gives being remains the same from beginning to end, that the happening which gives being itself has the character of a turn, i.e., of a reciprocal dynamics between being and

Dasein, and that the only thing that happens in the mid 1930s is that Heidegger' changes his terminology and shifts his emphasis from Dasein to being as the primary pole of this dynamics. However, even though Sheehan is right in claiming that Heidegger always asks about the source of being – rather than about its highest and most general substantial determinations – it seems to me that he is not able to account for what is at stake in the turn of Heidegger's question and thus also underestimates the changes that his thinking undergoes. As I have tried to show, Heidegger's turn consists in a shift from a questioning of the basic structures of phenomenal understanding – which uncovered the ground of this understanding in our historical understanding of being – to a historical interrogation of the openness of historical being. This, however, means that the same formal question concerning that which gives or produces being essentially gets transformed both as concerns the focus and sense of the question – from the structure of phenomenality to the phenomenality of being – and as concerns the manner of questioning: from phenomenological explication to historical reflection.

But what about the influential notion – also shared and varied by Sheehan – that Heidegger's turn consists in a shift of focus from Dasein to being, so that the earlier Heidegger would have emphasized the projective understanding of Dasein whereas the later Heidegger would stress the self-giveness of being as something that precedes the understanding of Dasein? Although there is clearly some truth to this notion, I think the interpretation above gives us reason to specify it a little.

To begin with, it is important to see that it is only in the middle of the 1930s that Heidegger clearly articulates the question about the openness and givenness of historical being. Once he has broached this question, he also – as we shall see – begins to describe the happening which opens up being in terms of a reciprocal relationship between being and the human being in which being has priority: it is historical being which gives or throws itself to the human being whereby it is the task of the human being to say and preserve this arrival of being. In *Being and Time*, however, this question still remained unraised, which implies that the question concerning the relationship between being and Dasein – and the question of which of them has priority – *also* remained dormant.

The fact that the focus of the existential analytic in *Being and Time* lay on the basic structures of Dasein's understanding did not in any way entail

that being would have been conceived as the product of Dasein's projections. In fact, Heidegger's analysis gives priority to the thrownness of Dasein into its factual historical understanding as that which determines its possibilities of projection. However, what the fundamental ontological approach does involve – and what the later Heidegger wants to overcome – is the guiding idea that it is possible to clarify the sense of being through an explication of the structures of Dasein. This idea presupposes two things: first, that it is possible to access and phenomenologically explicate these structures as the ground for an understanding of the sense of being; second, that the structures of Dasein constitute the ultimate horizon which organizes our understanding of being. From the viewpoint of the later Heidegger, the basic problem of the fundamental ontological approach is not that it would reduce being to the projections of Dasein but that it sidesteps and is unable to account for its own analysis of human understanding as structured by the ontological difference, and for the radical historicity of thought that this difference opens up. Heidegger's turn of his questioning from the essence of truth to the truth of the essence is indeed nothing but a drawing of the consequences of this analysis: the possibility of explicating the structures of Dasein as the ahistorical ground for our understanding of the sense of being is cancelled out in favor of a thinking which takes its starting point in what *Being and Time* discovered as the basic dimension of all our understanding – our factual understanding of being – and unfolds as a historical questioning of how historical being is opened up.

Hence, we can say that the turn of Heidegger's question is not primarily a shift of emphasis from the projection of Dasein to the self-givenness of being, but rather a shift from a questioning examining the basic structure of Dasein as thrown projection to a questioning investigating the happening – characterized by a dynamics between the throw of being and counter-throw of the human being – which first generates the factual understanding of being into which we are always already thrown.

3.4 The Dynamics of Shining

The aim of this chapter is to examine the later Heidegger's conception of the dynamics of the epiphanic happening which lets a historical world arise, and which he primarily designates by the names of the "event" (*Ereignis*) and the "clearing" (*Lichtung*). The question is: What is it that allows a historical world of meaning to open up and give itself as an originary and binding destiny? How should we conceive of phenomenality – something presenting itself as something – on the basis of this happening?

As we shall see, Heidegger articulates the happening which opens up being as a happening in which thinking and art play complementary roles: whereas it is the task of thinking to reflect on the basic character of this happening, and so prepare the way for a transparent enactment of art, it is in and through art in general and poetry in particular that a concrete historical world can open up and prevail. It is thus no coincidence that his main efforts to articulate the dynamics of shining are found in his texts on art and poetry. Hence, my investigation will to a large extent unfold as an explication of Heidegger's long essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" from 1936, which, aside from offering his most extended treatment of the nature of art, also constitutes his most ambitious attempt to describe the happening which lets a world arise. Although written in the early phase of his later thinking, the text's central analysis of the opening of the world as a "strife" between the "world" and the "earth" establishes the basic scheme which his later texts will elaborate and modify but never radically alter. To the central texts which allow us to follow Heidegger's thinking of this issue belong "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (1936),⁷⁹⁴ "Letter on Humanism" (1946), "The Thing" (1950),⁷⁹⁵ "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951),⁷⁹⁶ as well as the later texts on language and poetry written in 1950-1959 and gathered in the volume *On the Way to Language*.⁷⁹⁷ From 1949 onwards Heidegger rearticulates the dynamics of shining in

⁷⁹⁴ "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," in GA 4.

⁷⁹⁵ "Das Ding," in GA 7.

⁷⁹⁶ "Bauen Wohnen Denken," in GA 7.

⁷⁹⁷ *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, GA 12.

terms of the “fourfold,” which designates the unitary interplay between “sky” and “earth,” “divinities” and “mortals.”

Even though Heidegger’s account of the dynamics which opens up historical worlds constitutes the heart of his later conception of phenomenality, it has seldom occupied the center of the more systematic attempts to explicate his late thinking. Indeed, Heidegger’s notions of the strife between the world and the earth and the fourfold have primarily been treated in texts focusing on his thinking about art and poetry or in philologically oriented interpretations satisfied with mapping and paraphrasing Heidegger’s conceptual pathways. Why this evasion? Apart from the obvious reasons that Heidegger’s thinking of the dynamics of shining primarily takes place in texts dealing with art and poetry and that his explication of especially the fourfold unfolds in a nonstandard poetizing discourse, I think there are also philosophical reasons behind this avoidance stemming from the difficulty to integrate what Heidegger’s says on this point into the guiding systematic visions of what goes on in his later thinking. From the point of view of the hermeneutic-deconstructivist interpretation, Heidegger’s insistence on the material-sensuous earth as the ground of the historical world, as well as his strong emphasis on the capacity of art and poetry to form and gather the world, are liable to appear as disturbing or secondary aspects of what is conceived as his primary effort to think the historicity, finitude and differentiability of being. From the perspective of the transcendental-phenomenological interpretation, it is easy to dismiss what Heidegger has to say about the world and the earth and the fourfold within the framework of the deeply historicist program of his later thinking as peripheral or misleading in relation to the project of phenomenologically explicating the basic structures of our experience. Moreover, to most contemporary commentators Heidegger’s attempt to articulate the binding force of the world in terms of a religious rhetoric – holiness, gods, etc. – is bound to appear problematic, not only because of the religious rhetoric itself and the closeness to the burning issues of Heidegger’s ethics and politics, but also because, at the end of the day, the question of how historical meanings and values can grip us as holy and binding is still today a hard and almost unasked question.

There are, of course, also exceptions to this scheme. For example, as regards the hub of Heidegger’s conception of the dynamics of shining –

namely his account of the strife between the “world” and the “earth” – David Espinet has recently suggested that Heidegger’s notion of the “earth” can be read as an attempt to salvage a dimension of phenomenality both transcending and grounding our historical contexts of meaning. Opposed to this interpretation we find Julian Young’s interpretation of the “earth” not as a constitutive dimension of materiality-sensuousness withstanding the hegemony of history, but as a name for the hidden and mysterious manifold of other possible historical worlds surrounding our own finite world. In what follows, I will use these alternative interpretations as a foil against which I try to explicate the systematic sense and phenomenological potential of Heidegger’s conception: does his notion of the “earth” imply a rehabilitation of transhistorical phenomenality, or does it not? In the end, this question is decisive for how we should understand the later Heidegger’s account of phenomenality.

I will begin my examination with an outline of the basic ontological setup of Heidegger’s later thinking, focusing on his conception of history, language, and the difference between thinking and poetry. I then move on to a lengthier explication of Heidegger’s conception of the dynamics of shining as this is developed mainly in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” After that, I turn to Heidegger’s attempt to provide an account of the holiness or bindingness of the historical world. I end the chapter by outlining Heidegger’s later rearticulation of the dynamics of shining in terms of the “fourfold.”

The Givenness of Being as History and Language

Let me begin by delineating the basic ontological setup of Heidegger’s thinking of the dynamics of phenomenal shining. As my starting point I choose the opening words of Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism,” which in a highly compressed form announce the whole schema of his later thought:

We are still far from pondering the essence of action decisively enough. We view action only as causing an effect. The reality of the effect is valued according to its utility. But the essence of action is accomplishment (*das Vollbringen*). To accomplish means to unfold

something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness – *producere*. Therefore only what already is can really be accomplished. But what “is” above all is being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. This guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of being insofar as they bring this manifestation to language and preserve it in language through their saying.⁷⁹⁸

Starting from the question of the essence of action – thus heralding the themes of the possibilities and limits of human activity – Heidegger sets down three basic claims: first, he emphasizes that thinking does not “create” or “cause” the relation of being to man but rather “accomplishes” this relation as something which is already “handed over to thought itself from being,” thus ascribing a clear priority to being as that which of itself gives itself to thinking and to which thinking has to respond; second he claims that “language is the house of being,” implying that being essentially gives itself in and through language, and that the task of accomplishing the relation of being to man consists in bringing the “manifestation of being” to language; third, he indicates that this task is carried out in two different ways, by the thinkers and by the poets.

Let us consider these three claims in turn.

⁷⁹⁸ GA 9, p. 313: “Wir bedenken das Wesen des Handelns noch lange nicht entschieden genug. Man kennt das Handeln nur als das Bewirken einer Wirkung. Deren Wirklichkeit wird nach ihrem Nutzen geschätzt. Aber das Wesen des Handelns ist das Vollbringen. Vollbringen heißt: etwas in die Fülle seines Wesens entfalten, in diese hervorgeleiten, *producere*. Vollbringbar ist deshalb eigentlich nur das, was schon ist. Was jedoch vor allem ‘ist’, ist das Sein. Das Denken vollbringt den Bezug des Seins zum Wesen des Menschen. Es macht und bewirkt diesen Bezug nicht. Das Denken bringt ihn nur als das, was ihm selbst vom Sein übergeben ist, dem Sein dar. Dieses Darbringen besteht darin, daß im Denken das Sein zur Sprache kommt. Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch. Die Denkenden und Dichtenden sind die Wächter dieser Behausung. Ihr Wachen ist das Vollbringen der Offenbarkeit des Seins, insofern sie diese durch ihr Sagen zur Sprache bringen und in der Sprache aufbewahren.”

Being as history. In his classical study *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* William Richardson described Heidegger's turn as a "shift of focus from There-being to Being."⁷⁹⁹ Whereas the earlier Heidegger would have privileged Dasein's projective understanding of being, the later Heidegger would have emphasized the priority of being as something which is not created or projected by the human being but which gives itself to us of its own accord. As the quotation above indicates, there is obviously truth in this interpretation. Yet how should we understand its systematic sense? Having already dealt with this issue in the previous chapter, I will only briefly repeat the argument.

To grasp what is at stake for Heidegger in stressing the primacy of being over the human being it is crucial to see that Heidegger is neither simply reiterating the ontological difference nor making a move within the traditional conflict between idealism and realism. Already in his analysis of the structure of phenomenality in *Being and Time*, Heidegger made it clear that being is not an entity but signifies the basic layer of historical meaning conditioning our experience of entities as entities. Moreover, his notion of the basic thrownness of Dasein entailed that being is not the result of a creative projection by Dasein but must be conceived as the historical context of meaning which always already delimits the possibilities of Dasein's understanding. However, what Heidegger failed to do in *Being and Time* was to radically raise the question concerning the givenness of historical being. The upshot of this was that he was unable to start out from historical being as the ultimate determinant of his concrete thinking, and was instead led to explicate the sense of being by way of phenomenological analysis of the structure of the human being. Counter to his conception of the structure of phenomenal understanding, the strategy of grounding being in an analysis of structure of the human being in the end implied both a breach of the ontological difference and a prioritizing of the human being. Hence, what is at stake in Heidegger's stressing of the priority of being over the human being is not a drastic alteration of the analysis of *Being and Time* – which already gave priority to historical being – but a redirection of the main focus towards the question of the givenness of historical being and towards the question of what it means to think such givenness.

⁷⁹⁹ Richardson 1963, p. 243.

To understand the sense of Heidegger's questioning of being itself in its priority is basically to understand how it combines the themes of phenomenality and historicity. As Heidegger first articulated the epiphanic happening of being in terms of *physis*, and explicated *physis* as "what emerges from itself"⁸⁰⁰ and as "the unfolding that opens itself up,"⁸⁰¹ this was nothing but a rearticulation of the question of the *self-giveness* of being: how does being open up and give itself to us prior to and as a condition for all our subsequent acts of understanding? This theme is then echoed in all of his later descriptions of the self-initiating movement of being according to which being "gives itself," "throws itself," "sends itself" or "says itself" to the human being. Hence, the self-giveness of being that Heidegger has in mind is not a direct givenness of entities or meanings transcending our factual historical context, but signifies precisely the givenness of such contexts: "This 'it gives / there is' (*es gibt*) rules as the destiny of being. [...] Therefore the thinking that thinks into the truth of being is, as thinking, historical."⁸⁰² For Heidegger, then, the givenness of being is the sending of being as history.

Being as language. In the introductory paragraph of his *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger describes language as the "house of being." Some ten pages later he specifies this claim: "Language is the clearing-concealing arrival of being itself."⁸⁰³ This characterization of language as the "house" and "arrival" of being marks a transformation of Heidegger's analysis of language in *Being and Time*.⁸⁰⁴ What has happened?

In *Being and Time* Heidegger basically conceived of language in terms of the ability of linguistic utterances to express and communicate meaningful phenomena, which were primarily supposed to show up and be available in Dasein's implicit pre-linguistic understanding of the world. During the 1930s this conception undergoes a change. As early as 1931, in the lecture course "Aristotle's Metaphysics Θ 1-3. On the Essence and Actuality of

⁸⁰⁰ GA 40, p. 16: "das von sich aus Aufgehende."

⁸⁰¹ GA 40, p. 16: "das sich eröffnende Entfalten."

⁸⁰² GA 9, p. 335: "Dieses 'es gibt' waltet als das Geschick des Seins. [...] Darum ist das Denken, das in die Wahrheit des Seins denkt, als Denken geschichtlich."

⁸⁰³ GA 9, p. 326: "Sprache ist lichtend-verbergende Ankunft des Seins selbst."

⁸⁰⁴ For some more detailed studies of Heidegger's conception of language see, e.g., Bernasconi 1984; Sallis 1990, pp. 168-189; Dastur 1993; Taylor 1995b; Lafont 2000; Lysaker 2010; Powell [ed.] 2013. Cf. also Spanos 1979 and Fóti 1992.

Force,”⁸⁰⁵ Heidegger – through an interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of *logos* – intimates a critical reversal of his view: language, he writes, should be understood “not merely as a means of asserting and communicating, which indeed it also is, but [...] as that wherein the manifestness and conversance of the world first of all bursts forth and is”⁸⁰⁶ From 1935 onwards this conception of language is brought to bear at the heart of Heidegger’s thinking.

In the 1936 lecture “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” Heidegger makes one of his first attempts to spell out his new conception of language. Here he states the primacy of language for all phenomenal understanding bluntly: “Only where there is language is there world.”⁸⁰⁷ But how so? In order to be able to speak with each other about different matters at all, Heidegger argues, we first need to be able to hear and comprehend the common words that carry our speech and understanding: “We are a conversation (*Gespräch*) – and that means we are able to hear from one another. We are a conversation, and that also always means: We are *one* conversation. The unity of a conversation, however, consists in one and the same thing being manifest in the essential word, something we agree upon, and on the basis of which we are united and thus properly ourselves. The conversation and its unity support our existence.”⁸⁰⁸ That is to say: it is only on the basis of the primary unity of our language, the capacity of our words and expressions to say and present the same meanings, that the possibility is opened up to experience and communicate the world as a common historical context of significance. Elsewhere Heidegger articulates this a priori unity of language through an interpretation of *logos* as the primal “gathering”: “*Logos* is constant gathering, the gatheredness of beings that stands in itself.”⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁵ “Aristotle, Metaphysik Θ 1-3. Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft,” GA 33.

⁸⁰⁶ GA 33, p. 128: “nicht lediglich als Mittel des Aussagens und Mitteilens, was sie zwar auch ist, sondern [...] als dasjenige, worin die Offenbarkeit und Kundschaft der Welt überhaupt aufbricht und ist.”

⁸⁰⁷ GA 4, p. 38: “Nur wo Sprache, da ist Welt.”

⁸⁰⁸ GA 4, p. 39: “Wir sind ein Gespräch, das bedeutet zugleich immer: wir sind *ein* Gespräch. Die Einheit eines Gesprächs besteht aber darin, daß jeweils im wesentlichen Wort das Eine und Selbe offenbar ist, worauf wir uns einigen, auf Grund dessen wir einig und so eigentlich wir selbst sind. Das Gespräch und seine Einheit trägt unser Dasein.”

⁸⁰⁹ GA 40, p. 139: “Λόγος ist die ständige Sammlung, die in sich stehende Gesammeltheit des Seienden.”

Later, in the 1950s, Heidegger elaborates his thinking of language in a series of essays published in the volume *On the Way to Language*. “The Way to Language” from 1959⁸¹⁰ offers a paradigmatic articulation of his train of thought. It starts from the observation that we are incessantly talking about things, whether noiselessly for ourselves or explicitly in communication with others. Moreover, all this speech is characterized by the possibility of either exhibiting and making present the matters we talk about or covering them up and distorting them. Still, for our speech to be able to exhibit and communicate what it talks about it must be “preceded by a thing’s letting-itself-be-shown.”⁸¹¹ The argument – that the phenomena first have to show themselves in order for us, then, to be able to exhibit them – is familiar from *Being and Time*. Now, however, Heidegger gives the argument a different twist as he claims that our primary access to the phenomena lies not in a pre-linguistic understanding of the world but in a listening to language itself: “Speaking is of itself a hearing. It is listening to the language that we speak. Hence, speaking is not *simultaneously* a hearing, but is such *in advance*. [...] We not only speak language, we speak *from out of it*.”⁸¹² Why is this so? Heidegger explains:

Language speaks in that it, as showing (*die Zeige*), reaching into all regions of presence, lets whatever is present appear in such regions or vanish from them. Accordingly, we listen to language in such a way that we let it say its saying to us. No matter what other sorts of hearing we engage in, whenever we hear something this hearing is a *letting-something-be-said-to-us* (*Sichsagenlassen*) that embraces all apprehending and representing. In speech, as listening to language, we reiterate the saying we have heard.⁸¹³

Cf. also, e.g., GA 33, p. 128; GA 55, p. 276.

⁸¹⁰ “Der Weg zur Sprache,” in GA 12.

⁸¹¹ GA 12, p. 243: “geht diesem Zeigen als Hinweisen ein Sichzeigenlassen voraus.”

⁸¹² GA 12, p. 243: “Das Sprechen ist von sich aus ein Hören. Es ist das Hören auf die Sprache, die wir Sprechen. So ist denn das Sprechen nicht zugleich, sondern *zuvor* ein Hören. [...] Wir sprechen nicht nur *die* Sprache, wir sprechen *aus* ihr.”

⁸¹³ GA 12, p. 243f.: “Die Sprache spricht, indem sie als die Zeige, in alle Gegenden des Anwesens reichend, aus ihnen jeweils Anwesendes erscheinen und verschwinden läßt. Demgemäß hören wir auf die Sprache in der Weise, daß wir uns ihre Sage sagen lassen. Auf welche Arten wir auch sonst noch hören, wo immer wir etwas hören, da ist das Hören das alles Vernehmen und Vorstellen schon einbehaltende *Sichsagenlassen*. Im Sprechen als dem Hören auf die Sprache sagen wir die gehörte Sage nach.”

It is possible to pick out two basic strands of this argument. First, Heidegger articulates language as the historical whole of linguistic meaning-possibilities which always already harbors the possible meanings in terms of which we can experience and express beings as meaningful. Language is *die Zeige*: the fundamental repository of meaning which “reaching into all regions of presence, lets whatever is present appear in such regions or vanish from them,” that is, which opens up and determines our phenomenal experience and lets beings appear as one thing or the other. Second, this means that our primary relation to language becomes receptive. Given that language is not just a medium through which we communicate our pre-linguistic experiences but from the outset determines these experiences, then its meanings cannot be grounded in the experiences and the expressive acts of the individual human being. Rather, in order to experience things, or say something, or understand what another person says, we must always already “listen to,” i.e. receptively take in, our historical language as the basic element which regulates and makes intelligible experience and speech possible.

I cannot undertake a critical study of Heidegger’s conception of language in this thesis. Still, I briefly want to mention my attitude to this question. Whatever be the truth of Heidegger’s fundamental notion that our historical pre-understanding determines our phenomenal experience of beings – which remains the same in his early and later thought – one could ask to what extent it is illuminating to think that our pre-understanding is determined by and coincides with our ability to speak a historical language. Although Heidegger’s analysis of language as the basic element of thinking has a wide resonance in today’s philosophy – both in the analytic tradition and in the traditions of hermeneutics and deconstruction – and although it harbors vital insights into the deep linguisticity of our experience, I ultimately believe it dogmatically postulates language as the ground of understanding. By contrast, I think a phenomenological examination of the historical pre-understanding guiding our experience would show that we to a very large extent make use of more or less determinate concepts and typifications which are not inherently linguistic, without for that matter being either private or inexpressible. Moreover, I think it would be possible to show that the capacity of our words and expressions to mean something is generally dependent on their ability to express conceptual types and meaning-

patterns that we must also have a basic translinguistic access to. Hence, in my judgment, Heidegger's earlier conception of language as something that does not determine and delimit our possibilities of understanding, but which basically remains a medium for expression, communication and action, constitutes a more promising starting point for philosophical reflection on language.

Earlier I suggested that Heidegger diminished the role of language in *Being and Time* in order to account for the concreteness or our primary practical grasp of the meaningful world and not reduce it to an effect of our linguistic practices. However, his motive for rehabilitating the role of language seems to be analogous. For the Heidegger of the mid 1930s his earlier separation of the worldly context of meaning from language appears as having the effect of transforming the historical world into an abstract and ethereal system of ideas. Hence, Heidegger's introduction of language – as well as artworks and concrete things – as the element of historical meaning seems to allow for a better account for the concreteness and materiality of historical meaning and, ultimately, for the dynamics that lets a world arise and bind us. To sum up then: whereas Heidegger in *Being and Time* explicated our phenomenal understanding of the world in terms of our pre-linguistic grasp of the historical contexts of significance in which we live, he now insists that our primary access to the world transpires as a receptive hearing of our historically given language as the basic element which opens up the phenomenal world. On the basis of this modification we can articulate the guiding question of Heidegger's late philosophy as follows: how is a historical language opened up to us as a destiny?

Thinking and poetry. The quoted passage from "Letter on Humanism" asserted that although being gives itself to the human being of its own accord as historical destiny – and is not created by her – she is nevertheless needed in order to accomplish the self-giving happening of being. This is the task of the thinkers and the poets who in their different ways articulate being in language.

In his 1943 postscript to "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger describes the difference between thinking and poetry like this: "The thinker says

being. The poet names the holy.”⁸¹⁴ That is, whereas thinking – i.e. the post-metaphysical thinking attempted by Heidegger – reflects on and articulates the fundamental ontological status and dynamics of the basic happening which opens up the world, art in general and poetry in particular establish the world and make it shine forth as a unified and holy domain of meaning. Thinking and poetry thus play different yet complementary roles in the dynamics that opens the world.

As concerns the task of accomplishing the opening of the world, Heidegger ascribes a certain priority to thinking. Keeping in mind that thinking articulates the openness or truth of being whereas poetry names the holy, we can see that the following passage from the “Letter on Humanism” presents a clear hierarchy between the two tasks.

In this nearness [to being], if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurge of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth.⁸¹⁵

In short, by articulating the happening of being thinking first opens up the possibility of a transparent understanding and enactment of poetry. Not only does it elucidate the task of poetry for the poet; it also clarifies our understanding – i.e. the understanding of the recipients, the ordinary people – of poetry as the ultimate and ungroundable source of our historical world. On the backdrop of the clarity thus achieved the poet opens up the world as a “holy” context of meaning harboring our “gods,”

⁸¹⁴ GA 9, p. 312: “Der Denker sagt das Sein. Der Dichter nennt das Heilige.”

⁸¹⁵ GA 9, p. 338f.: “In dieser Nähe [zum Sein] vollzieht sich, wenn überhaupt, die Entscheidung, ob und wie der Gott und die Götter sich versagen und die Nacht bleibt, ob und wie der Tag des Heiligen dämmert, ob und wie im Aufgang des Heiligen ein Erscheinen des Gottes und der Götter neu beginnen kann. Das Heilige aber, das nur erst der Wesensraum der Gottheit ist, die selbst wiederum nur die Dimension für die Götter und den Gott gewährt, kommt dann allein ins Scheinen, wenn zuvor und in langer Vorbereitung das Sein selbst sich gelichtet hat und in seiner Wahrheit erfahren ist.” Cf. also GA 9, p. 351f.

i.e., our highest binding paradigmatic measures and purposes. However, as concerns the generation of substantial historical being, Heidegger gives priority to poetry: if thinking is more basic in the sense that it clarifies the ontological sense of and thus conditions a transparent enactment and reception of poetry, poetry is more basic in the sense that it establishes the basic historical contexts of being which thinking is always already referred to and in which it has to move as its given factual element of historical meaning.

In the rest of this chapter I will focus on the role of art and poetry in the realization of the epiphanic happening of being. Then, in the following chapter, I will return to the question of what it means to think this happening.

The Strife Between the World and the Earth

Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" constitutes his most elaborate attempt to depict the basic dynamics which, in and through the work of art, allows a historical world to open up and shine forth.⁸¹⁶

The central aim of the essay is none other than to describe how the work of art "opens up [...] a world" by carrying out the "strife" between the historical meaning-context of the "world" and the materiality of the "earth."⁸¹⁷ It is important to see from the start that in setting out to examine the nature of art, Heidegger is concerned with freeing what he calls art from the traditional conception of art as an object of the subject's aesthetic experience, and instead highlight the question of the truth of art. However, the truth of the artwork as he conceives of it does not consist in its ability to correctly represent any pregiven meanings of the world or in

⁸¹⁶ Heidegger's text has a long and thorny history. A first version was initiated and worked out somewhere between 1931 and 1935 – the actual text probably stemming from the end of this period; a second version was elaborated in 1935; a third version was completed in 1935-36 but published only in 1950 in the first edition of *Holzwege* with a new "afterword." As Heidegger then publishes the text in the Reclam-series in 1960 he also adds an "addendum" to the text. I will focus solely on this final published version of text, which essentially goes back on the third version from 1935-36. For a detailed study of the developments and modifications that Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the different versions, see Taminiaux 1993. Cf. also Espinet & Keiling 2011, pp. 16-18.

⁸¹⁷ GA 5, p. 28: "eröffnet [...] eine Welt."

expressing the inner life of the artist. Rather, the truth-task of the artwork is “the opening up of beings in their being, the happening of truth.”⁸¹⁸ His model example of an artwork is a Greek temple:

It is the temple work that first fits together and simultaneously gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire for the human being the shape of its destiny. The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people. [...] Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves.⁸¹⁹

As Heidegger’s choice of example indicates he understands the world-establishing function of the artwork in analogy with how a religious world of beliefs, norms and practices is set up and upheld by a compound of writings, artworks, music, buildings, and other public installations and practices. The task of the work of art is thus none other than to enact the epiphanic happening which opens up the world as the unified and binding historical context of ideals and purposes determining our possibilities of experiencing and grasping ourselves and the entities of the world as meaningful. Prior to the work of art we do not have access to a world or to meaningful entities; it is only through the work that a world of being and meaning opens up and shines forth: “In the work of art the truth of beings has set itself to work. ‘To set’ means here: to bring to stand. [...] The being of beings comes into the constancy of its shining.”⁸²⁰

According to Heidegger, poetry constitutes the fundamental level of the world-opening event of art. The function of poetry is to establish the

⁸¹⁸ GA 5, p. 24: “die Eröffnung des Seienden in seinem Sein: Das Geschehnis der Wahrheit.”

⁸¹⁹ GA 5, pp. 27ff.: “Das Tempelwerk fügt erst und sammelt zugleich die Einheit jener Bahnen und Bezüge um sich, in denen Geburt und Tod, Unheil und Segen, Sieg und Schmach, Ausharren und Verfall – dem Menschenwesen die Gestalt seines Geschickes gewinnen. Die waltende Weite dieser offenen Bezüge ist die Welt dieses geschichtlichen Volkes. [...] Der Tempel gibt in seinem Dastehen den Dingen erst ihr Gesicht und den Menschen erst die Aussicht auf sich selbst.”

⁸²⁰ GA 5, p. 21: “Im Werk der Kunst hat sich die Wahrheit des Seienden ins Werk gesetzt. ‘Setzen’ besagt hier: zum Stehen bringen. [...] Das Sein des Seienden kommt in das Ständige seines Scheinens.”

language which first opens up being and guides all other arts.⁸²¹ In the 1935 lecture “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” he writes:

The poet names the gods and names all things with respect to what they are. This naming does not consist in something previously known being merely furnished with a name; rather, by speaking the essential word, the poet’s naming first nominates beings to that which they are. Thus they become known *as* beings. Poetry is the founding of being in words. [...] But because being and the essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present at hand, being and essence must be freely created, posited, and bestowed. Such free bestowal is founding.⁸²²

Since there are no meaningful phenomena available prior to the emergence of language, poetry cannot transpire as an activity of naming or description accommodating itself to such phenomena. Rather, by establishing the words capable of assembling the significances of the world into their unity, the poet appoints the entities to what they are. In this way the poet founds the originary language which opens up our historical world, guiding all our speech and understanding.

Heidegger’s essay takes its starting point in the question concerning the character of the artwork as a material thing. Since the “thing” has always functioned as the “paradigmatic being,”⁸²³ it may seem natural to begin by explicating the thingness of the thing in order, then, to go on and specify the features that make the thing into an artwork. However, Heidegger argues, the traditional conceptions of the thingness of the thing are insufficient. He first rejects two concepts of the thing that are grounded in the theoretical experience of present-at-hand objects: the thing as an underlying substance and the thing as a unity in the stream of sensations. He then turns to the notion of the thing as a “synthesis of

⁸²¹ Cf. GA 5, pp. 59-64.

⁸²² GA 4, p. 41: “Der Dichter nennt die Götter und nennt alle Dinge in dem, was sie sind. Dieses Nennen besteht nicht darin, daß ein vordem schon Bekanntes nur mit einem Namen versehen wird, sondern indem der Dichter das wesentliche Wort spricht, wird durch diese Nennung das Seiende erst zu dem ernannt, was es ist. So wird es bekannt *als* Seiendes. Dichtung ist werthafte Stiftung des Seins. [...] Weil aber Sein und Wesen der Dinge nie errechnet und aus dem Vorhandenen abgeleitet werden können, müssen sie frei geschaffen, gesetzt und geschenkt werden. Solche freie Schenkung ist Stiftung.”

⁸²³ GA 5, p. 6: “das maßgebende Seiende.”

matter and form,”⁸²⁴ which, he claims, has its origin in our experience of tools. It is a basic characteristic of the tool that its material is subordinated to its form, so that both the material and the form are ultimately determined by their usefulness for human purposes. Yet according to Heidegger, the notion of the tool as formed material is unable to account either for the peculiar quality of the material thing as something “growing-of-its-own” (*Eigenwüchsig*) or for the “standing-in-itself” (*In-sich-stehen*) or “self-sufficiency” (*Selbstgenügsamkeit*) characteristic of the work of art.⁸²⁵

Now, if we bear in mind that Heidegger’s own analysis of the structure of phenomenal understanding in *Being and Time* was rooted precisely in the experience of tools, we can see that his critique of the model of the tool in fact opens up a reassessment of his own conception of phenomenality. Not only did the earlier analysis obliterate the material aspect of the phenomena by reducing them to instantiations of pre-understood significances and purposes. As a result of taking its starting point in the experience of the tool and proceeding by explicating the structural ground of this experience in Dasein’s understanding of the world, it also failed to radically ask the question concerning the openness and givenness of the historical world itself. Heidegger’s initial reflections on the thingness of the thing thus indicate the philosophical agenda of the essay. To begin with, Heidegger’s entire investigation of the nature of art is motivated by the hitherto unasked question of how being itself is opened up. Granted that the work of art constitutes the site which keeps the world open, the question of the phenomenality of being here takes the form of a question concerning the “standing-in-itself” of the artwork. Moreover, this intensified pursuit of the question of the phenomenality of being gives rise to a felt need to account for the material-sensuous aspect of the world. What is it, apart from the facticity of history, that grants to the world its concretion and specificity?

As Heidegger after the publication of *Being and Time* set his focus on our understanding of being, he explicated it terms of a free world-projection. Even though he put forward the idea that our projections of being in some sense need to be grounded in the totality of beings, this idea was never developed, and it remained fundamentally unclear how such

⁸²⁴ GA 5, p. 11: “Synthesis von Stoff und Form.”

⁸²⁵ GA 5, pp. 13, 25, 14.

projections could ever establish a unitary binding world. Now, however, Heidegger stresses that the world-establishing work of art is not the result of a free and creative projection on the part of the poet or the artist. In “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” he clearly spells out the twin bonds to which poetry is subject: “As the founding of being, poetry is bound in a *twofold* sense”:⁸²⁶ on the one hand, poetry is bound by the “winks of the gods,”⁸²⁷ by which Heidegger means the determinations granted by our history; on the other hand, it is bound by “the voice of the people,”⁸²⁸ i.e., “the tales (*die Sagen*) in which a people is mindful of its belongingness to beings as a whole,”⁸²⁹ by which he indicates what he in the art-essay will call the “earth”: the factual material milieu in which we live. To understand the dynamics of shining is to understand how the work of art founds and gathers a work on the basis of these twin bonds. Let us examine them in turn.

Firstly, Heidegger claims that the world-founding activity of art is not free but bound by the “winks of the gods”: “But the gods can only speak if they themselves address us and make a claim on us. The word that names the gods is always a response to such a claim. This response always stems from the responsibility of a destiny.”⁸³⁰ Hence, as Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes, the articulations of poetry must be seen as responses, which receive and comply with the relations of being and meaning that are already given through our history. Or, as he puts it in “The Origin of the Work of Art”: “The poetic projection comes from nothing in the sense that it never derives its gift from what is familiar and already there. Yet it does not come out of nothing in as much as what it projects is but the withheld determination of historical Dasein itself.”⁸³¹

⁸²⁶ GA 4, p. 45: “Die Dichtung ist als Stiftung des Seins *zweifach* gebunden.”

⁸²⁷ GA 4, p. 46: “die Winke der Götter.”

⁸²⁸ GA 4, p. 46: “die Stimme des Volkes.”

⁸²⁹ GA 4, p. 46: “Die Sagen, in denen ein Volk eingedenk ist seiner Zugehörigkeit zum Seienden im Ganzen.”

⁸³⁰ GA 4, p. 40: “Aber die Götter können nur dann ins Wort kommen, wenn sie selbst uns ansprechen und unter ihren Anspruch stellen. Das Wort, das die Götter nennt, ist immer Antwort auf solchen Anspruch. Diese Antwort entspringt jeweils aus der Verantwortung eines Schicksals.”

⁸³¹ GA 5, p. 64: “Der dichtende Entwurf kommt aus dem Nichts in der Hinsicht, daß er sein Geschenk nie aus dem Geläufigen und Bisherigen nimmt. Er kommt jedoch nie aus dem Nichts, insofern das durch ihn Zugeworfene nur die vorenthaltende Bestimmung des geschichtlichen Daseins selbst ist.”

But how does the receptive founding take place? Here is Heidegger's attempt to specify:

The poet's saying is the catching of these winks [of the gods], in order to pass them on to his people. This catching of the winks is a reception, and yet at the same time a new giving; for in the "first signs" the poet already catches sight of the completed whole, and boldly puts what he has seen into his word, in order to predict what is not yet fulfilled.⁸³²

That is, the poet does not only receive and represent the winks of the gods as a ready and obvious set of pre-given concepts just lying there in our history waiting to be expressed. Rather, in what is first only given as "first signs" the poet "catches sight of the completed whole, and boldly puts what he has seen into his word." Hence, at the same time as poet opens herself up to the address of history as our as yet undetermined manifold of being-possibilities she also through her founding words determines – decides and gathers – this manifold into a unified and limited historical world. As he writes in "The Origin of the Work of Art": in "fitting together" and "gathering" the "paths and relations"⁸³³ of the world the work of art puts up for decision "what is holy and what unholy, what is great and what small, what is brave and what cowardly, what is noble and what fugitive, what is master and what slave."⁸³⁴

Secondly, Heidegger maintains that in order to establish a world the artwork has to ground it on the "earth." But what is the "earth"?

As Heidegger's concept of the earth is linked to his effort to account for the phenomenal self-givenness of the world it holds a special importance for our investigation. However, the secondary literature contains only few attempts to systematically spell out the role of the earth in Heidegger's late thinking – over and above philological paraphrases of Heidegger's general description of the need for the world to be grounded

⁸³² GA 4, p. 46: "Das Sagen des Dichters ist das Auffangen dieser Winke [der Götter], um sie weiter zu winken in sein Volk. Dieses Auffangen der Winke ist ein Empfangen und doch zugleich ein neues Geben; denn der Dichter erblickt im 'ersten Zeichen' auch schon das Vollendete und stellt dieses Erschaute kühn in sein Wort, um das noch-nicht-Erfüllte vorauszusagen."

⁸³³ GA 5, p. 27f.

⁸³⁴ GA 5, p. 29: "was heilig ist und was unheilig, was groß und was klein, was wacker und was feig, was edel und was flüchtig, was Herr und was Knecht."

on the self-secluding materiality of the earth. Still, even here it is possible to note two interpretational tendencies loosely corresponding to the tension between a phenomenological and a hermeneutic-deconstructivist reading of Heidegger.

Recently, David Espinet has argued that the notion of the earth developed by Heidegger in “The Origin of the Work of Art” constitutes a phenomenological corrective to his radical conception of the historicity of understanding. According to Espinet, the “earth” signifies both our material-natural surroundings and the manifold of sensuous qualities: colors, sounds, scents, etc.⁸³⁵ In our everyday life, however, there is a strong tendency to cover over the sensuous aspect of our experience, and grasp things solely in terms of the significance they have in our historical world. The upshot of this is that our understanding rigidifies into an autistic repetition of received patterns of meaning: “What is silenced through the intentional yet distortive transparency of the world, is the sensuously experienceable as such, the earth. Thus intelligibility often thrusts itself between our listening and seeing and that which shows itself, so that we often superimpose fixed patterns of interpretation on the latter – on this unexpected, literally unheard-of and, as such, unrepresentable sense.”⁸³⁶ It is, Espinet argues, precisely because the work of art merges “our experience of sense and our experience of sensuousness”⁸³⁷ in an intensified manner that it is able to shatter our common understanding of the world and open us up to “a new and unexpected sense.”⁸³⁸ According to Espinet, Heidegger’s “earth” thus constitutes nothing but the material-sensuous ground which at the same time transcends and co-constitutes our world: a “*constantly* historical and, as such, *transhistorical* ground.”⁸³⁹ Hence, our experience of the earth – as it is made possible by the work of art – has the potential of critically unsettling our factual understanding of the world and give us access to new meanings. Notwithstanding the fact

⁸³⁵ Cf. Espinet 2011, pp. 53f., 58.

⁸³⁶ Espinet 2011, p. 58: “Was durch die intentionale, aber verstellende Transparenz von Welt verstummt, ist das sinnlich Erfahrbare selbst, die Erde. So schiebt sich Verständlichkeit häufig zwischen unser Hinhören und Hinsehen und jenes, was sich zeigt, das wir dann mit festen Deutungsmustern überlagern – ein unerwarteter, tatsächlich unerhörter und darin unrepräsentierbarer Sinn.”

⁸³⁷ Espinet 2011, p. 60: “Sinn und Sinnlichkeitserfahrung.”

⁸³⁸ Espinet 2011, p. 57: “ein neuer und unerwarteter Sinn.”

⁸³⁹ Espinet 2011, p. 54: “*jederzeit* Geschichtlicher und darin *transgeschichtlicher* Grund.”

that Heidegger in the end tends to downgrade the role of the material-sensuous earth in the artwork by overemphasizing its linguisticity and historicity, Espinet maintains that Heidegger's account of the earth "systematically" implies "the equal rank of earth and world."⁸⁴⁰

In Julian Young's interpretation of Heidegger's later thinking we find a quite different explication of Heidegger's "earth." Young provides the following affirmative historicist reading of the late Heidegger. As human beings we always live in a finite historical world – a "horizon of disclosure"⁸⁴¹ – which regulates what we can understand as meaningful. The world, moreover, does not coincide with "the limits of intelligibility per se" but has a "historically and culturally relative character."⁸⁴² This means that "in addition to what is intelligible to us, reality possesses an indefinitely large number of aspects, a 'plenitude' of 'sides' or 'facets' which would be disclosed to us were we to inhabit transcendental horizons other than the one we do, horizons which, however, we can neither inhabit nor even conceive. Truth, then is concealment, ultimate truth concealment of the, to us, *ineluctably* mysterious."⁸⁴³ According to Young, Heidegger introduces the notion of "earth" in "The Origin of the Work of Art" precisely to name the self-secluding manifold of meaning-possibilities encircling our world: "Earth [...] is [...] the dark penumbra of unintelligibility that surrounds [...] and grounds [...] our human existence."⁸⁴⁴ The function of the artwork is to make manifest the earth as the mysterious ground of the world which we normally tend to cover over and forget. In the end, Young argues, the materialization of the earth in the work of art makes the world shine forth as "holy": "Experienced as the self-disclosure of an unfathomable 'mystery' it acquires radiance, becomes as one might also say, numinous, a 'holy' place."⁸⁴⁵ For Young, then, the earth does not signify a sensuousness that would in any way disturb Heidegger's basic view of the hierarchical priority of the historical world in relation to every particular material-sensuous being, but rather names the origin of our world in a manifold of alternative worlds and histories.

⁸⁴⁰ Espinet 2011, p. 64: "die Gleichrangigkeit von Erde und Welt."

⁸⁴¹ Young 2002, p. 8.

⁸⁴² Young 2002, p. 9.

⁸⁴³ Young 2002, p. 9.

⁸⁴⁴ Young 2002, p. 9; cf. also Young 2001, pp. 38-40.

⁸⁴⁵ Young 2002, p. 45.

So what does Heidegger mean by “earth”?

Let me begin by quoting Heidegger’s description of the Greek temple in its groundedness on the earth at length:

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws out of the rock the darkness of its unstructured yet unforced support. Standing there, the building holds its place against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm visible in its violence. The gleam and luster of the stone, though apparently there only by the grace of the sun, in fact first brings to radiance the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air. The steadfastness of the work stands out against the surge of the tide and, in its own repose, brings out the raging of the surf. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter their distinctive shapes and thus come to appearance as what they are. The Greeks early called this coming forth and rising up in itself and in all things *physis*. It illuminates also that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this the *earth*. What this word means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise the earth occurs as the sheltering one.⁸⁴⁶

This description already shows that the earth cannot, as Young claims, be interpreted as a designation of the hidden plurality of historical

⁸⁴⁶ GA 5, p. 28: “Dastehend ruht das Bauwerk auf dem Felsgrund. Dies Aufruhren des Werkes holt aus dem Fels das Dunkle seines ungefügen und doch zu nichts gedrängten Tragens heraus. Dastehend hält das Bauwerk dem über es wegrasenden Sturm stand und zeigt so erst den Sturm selbst in seiner Gewalt. Der Glanz und das Leuchten des Gesteins, anscheinend selbst nur von Gnaden der Sonne, bringt doch erst das Lichte des Tages, die Weite des Himmels, die Finsternis der Nacht zum Vorschein. Das sichere Ragen macht den unsichtbaren Raum der Luft sichtbar. Das Unerschütterte des Werkes steht ab gegen das Wogen der Meerflut und läßt aus seiner Ruhe deren Toben erscheinen. Der Baum und das Gras, der Adler und der Stier, die Schlange und die Grille gehen erst in ihre abgehobene Gestalt ein und kommen so als das zum Vorschein, was sie sind. Dieses Herauskommen und Aufgehen selbst und im Ganzen nannten die Griechen frühzeitig die *Φύσις*. Sie lichtet zugleich jenes, worauf und worin der Mensch sein Wohnen gründet. Wir nennen es die *Erde*. Von dem, was das Wort hier sagt, ist sowohl die Vorstellung einer abgelagerten Stoffmasse als auch die nur astronomische eines Planeten fernzuhalten. Die Erde ist das, wohin das Aufgehen alles Aufgehende und zwar als ein solches zurückbirgt. Im Aufgehenden west die Erde als das Bergende.”

significance constituting the mysterious source of our finite world. Indeed, what Heidegger means by “earth” is “nature,” understood not as the theoretical object of natural science, but as the material and sensuous setting we inhabit and experience. As such, the “earth” comprises both the manifold of sensuous qualities – the “massiveness and heaviness of the stone,” the “firmness and pliancy of the wood,” the “brightening and darkening of color,” “the clang of tone,” “the naming power of the word”⁸⁴⁷ – as well as the material-organic milieu in which we establish and live our lives: the sun, the air, the waters, the climate and the weather, the rhythms of the days and the years, the terrain and the soil, the plants and the animals, the metals and the minerals.

To open up a world, Heidegger argues, the work of art needs to base the world on the earth as its material-sensuous ground. Conceived as this ground, the earth exhibits two basic traits: first, it is “that which, unforced, is effortless and untiring,”⁸⁴⁸ i.e., it rests in itself irrespective of all human purposes and is thus able to function as the concrete ground on which the world is set up; second, it is “the essentially self-secluding,”⁸⁴⁹ i.e., it withdraws from the open meaning-context of the world and from all attempts to penetrate into it, operating as the hidden and self-secluding ground of the world. Eventually, Heidegger describes the interplay between the world and the earth as a “strife” (*Streit*) that the work of art enacts: “The earth cannot do without the open region of the world if it is to appear as earth in the liberating surge of its self-seclusion. The world in turn cannot float away from the earth if, as the prevailing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on something decisive. In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigation of this strife.”⁸⁵⁰ Hence, in enacting the strife between the world and the earth the artwork does not only open the world by grounding it on the earth but also sets forth and presents the earth as the hidden material-

⁸⁴⁷ GA 5, p. 32: “das Massige und Schwere des Steins, [...] das Feste und Biegsame des Holzes, [...] das Leuchten und Dunkeln der Farbe, [...] den Klang des Tones, [...] die Nennkraft des Wortes.”

⁸⁴⁸ GA 5, p. 32: “das zu nichts gedrängte Mühelose-Unermüdliche.”

⁸⁴⁹ GA 5, p. 33: “das wesenhaft Sich-verschließende.”

⁸⁵⁰ GA 5, pp. 35f.: “Die Erde kann das Offene der Welt nicht missen, soll sie selbst als Erde im befreiten Andrang ihres Sichverschließens erscheinen. Die Welt wiederum kann der Erde nicht entschweben, soll sie als waltende Weite und Bahn alles wesentlichen Geschickes sich auf ein Entscheidendes gründen. Indem das Werk eine Welt aufstellt und die Erde herstellt, ist es eine Anstiftung dieses Streites.”

sensuous ground that it is: “The rock comes to bear and to rest and so first becomes rock; the metals come to glitter and shimmer, the colors to shine, the tones to sing, the word to speak. [...] *The work lets the earth be an earth.*”⁸⁵¹

But what is the systematic sense of Heidegger’s idea that the artwork needs to ground the world on the earth? Is Espinet right in claiming that the earth signifies a transhistorical ground which co-constitutes our historical world as an independent source of meaning? I do not think this is the case.

To begin with, it is crucial to keep in mind that Heidegger’s essay in no way questions the hierarchical ontological difference between our preceding understanding of our historical world and our possibility of experiencing particular beings as meaningful. This means that prior to the artwork’s establishment of a world we do not have access to any meaningful phenomena that could function as a measure for our understanding. Hence, to the extent that the earth constitutes a transhistorical ground it must do so as the material-sensuous aspect of the dynamics which establishes the historical world in the first place, prior to and as a condition for all particular phenomena. But what about the ground-character of the earth in the epiphany of the world?

It is, I think, obvious that Heidegger in some sense wants to anchor the world in the materiality of the earth in order to ensure that the world does not remain a set of abstract and floating conceptual schemata. But how? According to Heidegger, the work of art grounds the world on the earth as “something decisive”:⁸⁵² “In the earth, however, as the essentially self-secluding, the openness of the open encounters the highest form of resistance; it thereby finds the site of its steady stand in which the figure must be fixed in place.”⁸⁵³ That is, in order to gather and decide the meanings granted by history and make them stand forth in a concrete and specific form, the artwork needs to ground them in the material-sensuous milieu at hand. Although Heidegger does not spell out how this happens it

⁸⁵¹ GA 5, p. 32: “der Fels kommt zum Tragen und Ruhen und wird so erst Fels, die Metalle kommen zum Blitzen und Schimmern, die Farben zum Leuchten, der Ton zum Klingen, das Wort zum Sagen. [...] *Das Werk läßt die Erde eine Erde sein.*”

⁸⁵² GA 5, p. 36.

⁸⁵³ GA 5, p. 57: “An der Erde als der wesenhaft sich verschließenden findet aber die Offenheit des Offenen seinen höchsten Widerstand und dadurch die Stätte seines ständigen Standes, darein die Gestalt festgestellt werden muß.” Cf. also GA 5, p. 58.

is possible to discern two aspects of this grounding, answering to the two aspects covered by the notion of earth: on the one hand, the world must be grounded in – i.e. specified and fleshed out according to – the natural surroundings in which we live and in which the guiding purposes or our world can be concretely enacted and instituted; on the other hand, the world must be grounded in – i.e. expressed and shaped by – the materiality and sensuousness of the medium in and through which the artwork projects the world. By anchoring the meanings of history in the earth the work of art lets the guiding purposes and meanings making up the world arise and shine forth in a concrete and specific paradigmatic form.

That said, it is clear that the earth throughout Heidegger's descriptions constantly figures as the subordinate pole in a hierarchical relationship: the artwork "sets" the world "back" on the earth whereby the earth functions as "the sheltering one" (*das Bergende*).⁸⁵⁴ Even though the earth constitutes a necessary and irreducible moment in the constitution of the world, it essentially functions as a receiving dimension which gives concrete and specific form to meanings ultimately originating from our historical heritage. Indeed, there is nothing in Heidegger's account that indicates how our experience of the materiality and sensuousness of the earth could ever constitute the source of those central existential purposes and meanings which in the end organize our world and give all things any possible significance they might have. The inability of the earth to function as an autonomous source of meaning also becomes manifest in Heidegger's claim that it is only the opening of the world through the work of art that lets the earth emerge as the earth: "The temple work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again upon the earth, which itself only thus emerges as native ground (*heimatliche Grund*)."⁸⁵⁵ Taken as such – before and irrespective of the world – the earth is nothing but a meaningless manifold of material-sensuous data; then again, to the extent that the world is established in the

⁸⁵⁴ GA 5, p. 28.

⁸⁵⁵ GA 5, p. 28: "Das Tempelwerk eröffnet dastehend eine Welt und stellt diese zugleich zurück auf die Erde, die dergestalt selbst erst als der heimatliche Grund herauskommt."

artwork, the earth shows up as the concrete sensuous-material setting of this historical world.⁸⁵⁶

Hence, we must conclude – against Espinet’s suggestion – that Heidegger’s earth does not constitute a transhistorical ground capable of harboring new meanings. Still, Heidegger maintains that the work of art must ground the world on the earth as the material-sensuous milieu that informs and specifies the world and gives it its paradigmatic form, whereby the ultimate meanings of the world arrive from within our historical heritage. This also means that although Young’s reading of the earth as the hidden manifold of alternative historical meaning-possibilities goes astray and bypasses the constitutive role played by the materiality and sensuousness of the earth, his guiding intuition that Heidegger’s notion of earth does not shake the primacy of history is basically correct.

However, could it not be argued that Heidegger’s conception of the earth contains a systematic potential to break the dominance of history – even though Heidegger himself is unable to realize and develop it? I do not think so. At the end of the day it seems to me that the very idea of materiality-cum-sensuousness that Heidegger’s concept of the earth is an attempt to grasp and articulate is insufficient for accounting for a

⁸⁵⁶ Hence, I think Espinet is mistaken in his suggestion that Heidegger’s thinking of the earth would imply a critical dismissal of the analysis of *Being and Time* according to which we primarily experience things not as sensual data but in terms of their significance in our world (Cf. Espinet 2011, pp. 57f.). This analysis essentially remains in place. What Heidegger’s thinking of the earth *does* do is develop the material-sensual dimension of the world itself as a dimension specifying and giving the world its paradigmatic shape. Espinet’s attempt to argue that the material-sensual “earth” has the capacity of harboring new meanings is mirrored in his notion that the experienceable manifold of sensual qualities – which Espinet names *physis* – is played out on the “surface” of the earth, the “inner” of which remains concealed: “What becomes manifest in the appearing of the earth is an inaccessible interior that is concealed by an outer surface, an interior which can only come to fruition as outer surface” (*Was sich im Erscheinen der Erde zeigt, ist ein unzugängliches, durch eine äußere Oberfläche verborgenes Inneres, das nur als äußere Oberfläche zur Geltung kommen kann*) (p. 56). The idea, however, that the experienceable dimension of sensuality is a manifestation of a hidden inner dimension, seems misleading. As I have tried to show Heidegger’s “earth” is nothing but the material-sensual setting of the world, and beyond this it is just a meaningless abstraction. This also means that the self-secludedness of the earth does not signify the hidden interiority of sensuality but sensuality itself in its contradistinction to the openness of the world: sensuality as something that does not itself radiate phenomenal meaning but which constitutes the specifying and formative yet phenomenally inaccessible and closed dimension of the historical world.

phenomenality that could ground our understanding of ourselves and the purposes and significances of the world. If we wanted to radicalize and develop the question of sensuality in its full philosophical potential – which Heidegger certainly does not do – we could widen the notion of the sensuous to include, for example, the whole bodily-sensuous constitution of the human being, and we could carry out extensive investigations of the constitutive roles played by different material-sensuous aspects in structuring the sense of our central experiences and concepts. In fact, this has for some time been one of the main concerns of contemporary phenomenology. Still, however far we might travel down this road it seems fundamentally incomprehensible how the sensuous dimension of our experience – although certainly playing a more or less important co-constituting role in all our experience – could ever emerge as the basic phenomenal source grounding and giving sense to our central moral and existential concepts: love, justice, courage, honor, friendship, happiness, lust, pain, desire, trust, envy, and so on. In order to break the dominating idea of the absolute priority of historical meaning when it comes to understanding such matters, the concept of sensuality is not enough. In the end, this would require nothing less than a radical breach of the ontological difference and a rehabilitation of our direct experience of particular meaningful people and beings as a phenomenality which transcends history and which all historical understanding is an understanding of.

Anyway, on the basis of the above explication of the interplay between the world and the earth we should now be in a position to summarize Heidegger's conception of the dynamics that opens up a world: by determining and gathering the meanings handed down by history into a paradigmatic shape on the basis of the material-sensuous concretion of the earth the work of art opens a historical world as a unified and binding destiny. Moreover – as we shall see shortly – the opening of the world is conditioned by the work of thinking, which, by articulating this event as the origin of the world, makes possible a transparent enactment of art.

The Bindingness of the World

What is at stake in the task of establishing a world is not only the determination of the paradigmatic purposes and meaning-relations

constituting the world, but also the intensification of their bindingness: the power of the world to appeal to us and bind us as a destiny granting the significances according to which we live our lives and relate to other beings as meaningful.

It is – or so I want to suggest – precisely in order to articulate this problematic that Heidegger in the mid 1930s introduces a heavy religious vocabulary into the very center of his thought. From this time onwards he persistently talks about the holy, the god, the divinities, and so forth. As late as in the 1966-interview for *Der Spiegel* – which was not published until after his death in 1976 – Heidegger famously states, as a comment to the contemporary metaphysical situation, that “Only a god can still save us.”⁸⁵⁷ Heidegger’s rehabilitation of a religious vocabulary to articulate the problem of the world’s binding power over us is surely one reason why this problem has received little attention in the secondary literature.⁸⁵⁸ However, the fundamental philosophical reason for this neglect lies, I believe, in the fact that this problem, if touched, brings us face to face with questions that threaten to destabilize the basic systematic belief in the historicity of meaning shared by most of Heidegger’s interpreters: the belief that our ability to experience and grasp entities as significant is determined by the historical contexts of meaning and value in which we live. The question that Heidegger’s religious rhetoric is meant to address is none other than the question how such historical concepts and values can ever bind us and give significance to our lives in a way that distinguishes them from mere collective prejudices. This question is seldom investigated or even asked by the philosophers sharing in the metaphysics of historical meaning still governing us today, and Heidegger’s attempt to answer it will bear witness to how difficult – and in the end impossible – the question is to answer within the framework of that metaphysics.

Already a quick glance at the conceptual surface makes it clear that Heidegger’s religious discourse is intimately bound up with the problem of phenomenality: the holy “is opened up” (*eröffnet*), “dawns” (*dämmert*), and

⁸⁵⁷ GA 16, p. 671: “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten.”

⁸⁵⁸ As far as I am aware of, the relation between Heidegger’s religious discourse and the problem of phenomenality – in particular, the problem of the bindingness of the world – has not been explored in the secondary literature. For some studies of the religious dimension and vocabulary of Heidegger’s thought, see Caputo 1990; Kovacs 1990; Figal 2000; Vedder 2007; Crowe 2008; Fischer & von Herrmann [eds.] 2011.

“comes to radiate” (*kommt ins Scheinen*);⁸⁵⁹ the gods “appear” (*erscheinen*), and “come to presence” (*anwesen*) in the “splendor” (*Glanz*).⁸⁶⁰ Obviously, these religious concepts are expressive of some aspect of the phenomenal opening of the world. But what?

Let us begin by noting that Heidegger, following Hölderlin, diagnoses our present age as “the *destitute (dürftige)* time”: “the time of the gods who have fled and of the god who is coming.”⁸⁶¹ According to Heidegger, the history of Western metaphysics, characterized by an increasing forgetfulness of the openness of being and reaching its peak in the modern techno-subjectivist understanding of being as a mere object reserve for human manipulation, has effected a situation that he describes in terms of a “flight of the gods,”⁸⁶² a “lack of the power to fashion a god,”⁸⁶³ a “closure of the dimension of the hale (*des Heilen*).”⁸⁶⁴ This lack of holiness and gods is repeatedly equated to a diminishing of the luminosity of the world. In “Introduction to Metaphysics” Heidegger paraphrases the expression “flight of the gods” as “the darkening of the world.”⁸⁶⁵ He writes:

Dasein began to slide into a world that lacked that depth from which the essential always comes and returns to human beings, thereby forcing them to superiority and allowing them to act on the basis of rank. All things sank to the same level, to a surface resembling a blind mirror that no longer mirrors, that casts nothing back.⁸⁶⁶

The world from which the gods have fled is thus a “darkened” world, a “blind mirror.” But what does this mean? As a result of the world’s losing its “depth” – i.e., its ground in the openness of being, which constitutes

⁸⁵⁹ GA 5, p. 30; GA 9, p. 338f.

⁸⁶⁰ GA 9, p. 339; GA 5, p. 30.

⁸⁶¹ GA 4, p. 47: “Die Zeit der entflohenen Götter und des kommenden Gottes.”

⁸⁶² GA 40, p. 48: “die Flucht der Götter.”

⁸⁶³ GA 45, p. 90: “dieses Aussetzen der Gott-bildenden Kraft.”

⁸⁶⁴ GA 9, p. 352: “die Verslossenheit der Dimension des Heilen.”

⁸⁶⁵ GA 40, p. 48: “Weltverdüsterung.”

⁸⁶⁶ GA 40, p. 49: “Das Dasein begann in eine Welt hineinzugleiten, die ohne jene Tiefe war, aus der jeweils das Wesentliche auf den Menschen zu- und zurückkommt, ihn so zur Überlegenheit zwingt und aus einem Rang heraus handeln lässt. Alle Dinge gerieten auf dieselbe Ebene, auf eine Fläche, die einem blinden Spiegel gleicht, der nicht mehr spiegelt, nichts mehr zurückwirft.”

the sole source from which something “essential” can “come to” the human being – it is transformed into a weak and leveled phenomenal world, incapable of concerning and binding us, and thus of granting significance to particular beings. Hence, Heidegger names the predicament of our age “nihilism”: a deep “purpose- and meaninglessness of all beings.”⁸⁶⁷

It is also in this connection that Heidegger levels his hard and well-known criticism against the concept of “value.” Nietzsche who, according to Heidegger, ranks as the second great diagnostician of the nihilistic predicament of modernity alongside Hölderlin, sums up the nihilism of our age in the words “God is dead.” By this Nietzsche means that “the highest values devalue themselves.”⁸⁶⁸ The problem that Nietzsche has in mind is thus not that the Christian god, for example, would in some sense have become unbelievable and obsolete but that *all* our values – i.e. all our goals, ideals, gods, etc. – have lost what Heidegger calls their “effective power” (*wirkende Kraft*).⁸⁶⁹ Nietzsche hopes to overcome this situation by suggesting a “revaluation of all values” (*Umwertung aller Werte*)⁸⁷⁰: a clear-sighted creation of new values on the basis of the insight that all our values have their origin in the human subject’s will to power. However, Heidegger claims, by appropriating the concept of value as his own fundamental ontological concept Nietzsche himself remains the prisoner and consummator of nihilism. Nietzsche does not see that nihilism is the ultimate symptom of the basic tendency of Western metaphysics to cover up the openness of being and reduce being to subjectivity. According to Heidegger, every attempt to establish the phenomenal force of our historical world and its gods by grounding it in the value-positing capacity of the human subject is bound to fail: “Values are the powerless and threadbare mask of the objectification of beings, an objectification that has become flat and devoid of background. No one dies for mere values.”⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁷ GA 45, p. 196: “Ziel- und Sinnlosigkeit alles Seienden.”

⁸⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 12, p. 350: “was bedeutet Nihilism? – daß die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen.” Cf. GA 5, p. 222.

⁸⁶⁹ GA 5, p. 217.

⁸⁷⁰ Nietzsche, KSA 6, pp. 179, 365. Cf. GA 5, p. 223.

⁸⁷¹ GA 5, p. 102: “Der Wert [ist] die kraftlose und fadenscheinige Verhüllung der platt und hintergrundlos gewordenen Gegenständlichkeit des Seienden. Keiner stirbt für bloße Werte.” Cf. also GA 5, pp. 259f.

For Heidegger the only way to establish a forceful world is to anchor it in the self-opening happening of being. However, even though Heidegger dismisses the concept of value as one of the nastiest products of modern metaphysics, it is important to see that our contemporary concept of value – which is itself a result of the historicist awakening of philosophy that Heidegger played an important role in – is not that far removed from what Heidegger prefers to call the “gods,” the “directives” (*Weisungen*),⁸⁷² the “divine destinings” (*göttliche Geschicke*),⁸⁷³ the “laws” (*Gesetze*),⁸⁷⁴ or the “measure” (*Maß*).⁸⁷⁵ The decisive thrust of Heidegger’s critique of the concept of value is that it grounds the being and significance of beings in some capacity of the human subject, e.g., in its reason or its will to power. However, the concept of value dominating contemporary philosophy as well as our everyday discourse does not, I think, exhibit this subjectifying trait – at least not as a primal or necessary feature. By values we tend to mean the historical notions of what is good, virtuous, honorable, meaningful etc. that we receive from our historical context, which we cannot create at will, and which determine in advance what we can experience and grasp as morally and existentially important.⁸⁷⁶ Here it is, of course, important to attend to differences as well, and observe the specificity of Heidegger’s conception of the gods as concrete and finite paradigmatic formations of value originating in the poetic realization of the strife between world and earth. Still, this does not prevent us from translating Heidegger’s question into the question how values can concern and bind us: how can our guiding values arise as holy, as gods that we are prepared to die for?

So how should we interpret the philosophical sense of Heidegger’s talk about the gods and the holy?

In his “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger asserts the following order of determination: on the basis of a thinking of the openness of being, art can open up the holy as the essential domain of the god and the gods; on the

⁸⁷² GA 5, p. 30; GA 9, pp. 360f.

⁸⁷³ GA 7, p. 35.

⁸⁷⁴ GA 4, p. 46.

⁸⁷⁵ GA 5, p. 30.

⁸⁷⁶ For a classical and influential articulation of such a concept of value, which I believe largely expresses our pre-philosophical use of this concept today, see Charles Taylor’s book *Sources of the Self* from 1989.

basis of this opening of the holy, the god and the gods can appear.⁸⁷⁷ In “The Origin of the Work of Art” he provides a more thorough explication of what he means. To begin with, he emphatically stresses that what he calls “the gods” should not be conceived as some kind of super-entities that the artwork would picture and represent. Instead, the gods are intimately bound up with the capacity of the artwork to establish a world.⁸⁷⁸ On the one hand, Heidegger identifies the gods with the highest paradigmatic ideals and purposes determined and gathered by the artwork as the horizon of our historical world: “In the tragedy,” he writes, “the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought.” This means that tragedy puts up for decision “what is holy and what unholy, what is great and what small, what is brave and what cowardly, what is noble and what fugitive, what is master and what slave.”⁸⁷⁹ On the other hand, he makes the presence of these ideals as gods completely dependent on the self-standing of the artwork. Since it is the successful working of the artwork that allows the god to present itself in the first place – and not as a representation – the work indeed “*is*” the god.⁸⁸⁰ On the next page Heidegger goes on to specify the relations between the holy, the god, and the world:

Such setting up [of the work of art] is an erecting in the sense of dedication and praise. [...] To dedicate means to consecrate (*heiligen*) in the sense that in setting up the work the holy (*Heilige*) is opened up as holy and the god is invoked into the openness of its presence. Praise belongs to dedication as doing honor to the dignity and splendor of the god. Dignity and splendor are not properties beside and behind which there stands, additionally, the god. Rather, it is in the dignity, in the splendor, that the god comes to presence. In the reflected glory of this splendor there glows, i.e., there clarifies, what we called the world. To erect (*Er-richten*) means: to open up the right in the sense of a guiding measure which guides us along, in which form that which is essential gives its guidance.

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. GA 9, pp. 338f., 351f. See also GA 4, p. 59.

⁸⁷⁸ Cf. GA 5, pp. 29f.

⁸⁷⁹ GA 5, p. 29: “In der Tragödie wird [...] der Kampf der neuen Götter gegen den alten [...] gekämpft. [...] was heilig ist und was unheilig, was groß und was klein, was wacker und was feig, was edel und was flüchtig, was Herr und was Knecht.”

⁸⁸⁰ GA 5, p. 29.

[...] Towering-up-within-itself the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force.⁸⁸¹

Let me try to disentangle this convoluted passage: first, the work of art involves a “consecration” which opens up “the holy as holy,” i.e., as the holy domain of the god; second, it entails a “praising” and “doing honor to” the “dignity” and “splendor” in which the god is present; third, this opening of the holy and the splendor of the god allows the world to appear “in the reflected glory of this splendor.” This line of argument makes it clear that Heidegger’s notion of the holy, as well as his notion of the splendor and dignity in which the god is present, cannot simply be identified with the world’s highest stratum of purposes since they both condition the appearance of the world. Rather, the holiness and splendor in which the god can be present denotes nothing but the very capacity of the world to address and bind us as holy and praiseworthy, as something which gives significance to our lives and which we are ready to die for. It is, we could say, to the exact extent that the artwork is able to open up the world as holy that the highest paradigmatic ideals and values of the world can present themselves to us as gods.⁸⁸²

⁸⁸¹ GA 5, p. 30: “Solche Aufstellung ist das Errichten im Sinne von Weihen und Rühmen. [...] Weihen heißt heiligen in dem Sinne, daß in der werkhafte Erstellung das Heilige als Heiliges eröffnet und der Gott in das Offene seiner Anwesenheit hereingerufen wird. Zum Weihen gehört das Rühmen als die Würdigung der Würde und des Glanzes des Gottes. Würde und Glanz sind nicht Eigenschaften, neben und hinter denen außerdem noch der Gott steht, sondern in der Würde, im Glanz west der Gott an. Im Abglanz dieses Glanzes glänzt, d.h. lichtet sich jenes, was wir die Welt nannten. Er-richten sagt: Öffnen das Rechte im Sinne des Entlang weisenden Maßes, als welches das Wesenhafte die Weisungen gibt. [...] In-sich-aufragend eröffnet das Werk eine *Welt* und hält diese im waltenden Verbleib.”

⁸⁸² Against the kind of interpretation suggested here, Günter Figal has argued that Heidegger does not anticipate anything like a return of the gods: the modern “experience of the flight of the gods” explicated by Heidegger “must not turn into an expectation of a return of the gods” (Figal 2000, p. 184). According to Figal, the experience of the flight of the gods is an “experience of being, inasmuch as being itself – or, rather, *beyung* – in this experience comes to fruition in its basic character of self-refusal” (*Götterflucht ist Seinserfahrung, sofern in ihr Sein selbst – oder eben Seyn – in seinem Grundzug des Sichverweigerens zur Geltung kommt*) (p. 183). Since the experience of the gods as departed and absent is essential for accessing the openness of being as that which makes all relations of the human being to the world possible, Figal argues, the return of the gods would “immediately cover up the experience of being-possible” (*sofort die Erfahrung des Möglichseins verdecken*) (p. 184). However, it seems to me that Figal too strongly identifies the experience of the flight of the gods with the experience of the

At this point I would also like to quote a lengthier passage from “Letter on Humanism.” It provides, on the reading suggested here, an alternative formulation of the matter in question without deploying the rhetoric of holiness and gods:

Only in so far as the human being, ek-sisting into the truth of being, belongs to being can there come from being itself the assignment of those directives that must become law and rule for human beings. In Greek, to assign is *nemein*. *Nomos* is not only law but more originally the assignment (*Zuweisung*) contained in the dispensation of being (*Schickung des Seins*). Only this assignment is capable of enjoining (*fügen*) humans into being. Only such enjoining is capable of supporting and obligating. Otherwise all law remains merely something fabricated by human reason. More essential than instituting rules is that human beings find the way to their abode in the truth of being. This abode first yields the experience of something we can hold on to (*Erfahrung des Halts*). The truth of being offers a hold for all conduct.⁸⁸³

We see and confirm: it is only on the basis of an understanding of the openness of being that being – through the work of art and poetry – can address us as “directives” and “rules” that are capable of “binding” us – that possess “Halt.” Hence, what is at stake in Heidegger’s description of

openness of being. To be sure, Heidegger believes that the nihilistic experience of the departure of the gods is a symptom and an indication of the forgetfulness of the openness of being characterizing the tradition of Western metaphysics. Still, as far as I can see Heidegger’s later thinking is guided by the notion that it is possible to think the clearing/event of being in its very withdrawal and, by thus attending to the source of all historical being, to open up the possibility of instituting a holy and binding world, a world where our highest values and purposes address us as gods. Hence, according to Heidegger, the gods can only return and address us as gods on the condition that we receive them as our finite destiny from the self-withdrawing clearing/event of being.

⁸⁸³ GA 9, p. 360f.: “Nur sofern der Mensch, in die Wahrheit des Seins ek-sistierend, diesem gehört, kann aus dem Sein selbst die Zuweisung derjenigen Weisungen kommen, die für den Menschen Gesetz und Regel werden müssen. Zuweisen heißt griechisch *νέμειν*. Der *νομός* ist nicht nur Gesetz, sondern ursprünglicher die in der Schickung des Seins geborgene Zuweisung. Nur diese vermag es, den Menschen in das Sein zu verfügen. Nur solche Fügung vermag zu tragen und zu binden. Anders bleibt alles Gesetz nur das Gemächte menschlicher Vernunft. Wesentlicher als alle Aufstellung von Regeln ist, dass der Mensch zum Aufenthalt in die Wahrheit des Seins findet. Erst dieser Aufenthalt gewährt die Erfahrung des Halt. Den Halt für alles Verhalten verschenkt die Wahrheit des Seins.”

the epiphanic happening of being is not only a gathering of the substantial purposes of the world but also an intensification of the luminosity and binding power of the world. Or, as Heidegger puts it in “Basic Questions of Philosophy”: “history is the happening” – history here signifying precisely the opening up of being – “in which beings through the human being become more being.”⁸⁸⁴

Against this background we can also attempt to specify the sense that the words “the god,” “the gods” and “the divinities” acquire in Heidegger later writings. Heidegger himself never provides a general conceptual determination of the senses of these words but continuously adopts and deploys them in the course of explicating specific texts by especially Hölderlin. Still, I think it is possible to point to at least two aspects of meaning that resurface in Heidegger’s deployment of these words. On the one hand, Heidegger – especially when he talks about “the gods” or “the divinities” in the plural – denotes the concrete paradigmatic ideals that are granted by history and founded by the poets, and which constitute the holy horizon of purposes of our world.⁸⁸⁵ These ideals Heidegger also names the divine “directives,” “destinings,” or “laws.”⁸⁸⁶ On the other hand, Heidegger – especially when he talks about the “the god” or “the last god” in the singular – refers to the hidden source of the unity of the world. As we have seen, the work of art does not project the world as a paradigm of meaning created by the artist. Rather, it receives and gathers the divine winks harbored by our history and grounds them in the material-sensuous surroundings of the earth, in such a way that the phenomenal world that it sets up emerges as ultimately stemming from a

⁸⁸⁴ GA 45, p. 201: “Denn Geschichte ist jenes Geschehen, in dem durch den Menschen das Seiende seiender wird.”

⁸⁸⁵ Julian Young makes a similar distinction between “the gods” and “the God” (cf. Young 2002, pp. 94-95). I also agree with Young when he notes that “‘the gods’ of the late Heidegger” are thus “the reincarnations of early Heidegger’s heroes” (p. 96). He then goes on to interpret the gods as “exemplary, charismatic and therefore authoritative, figures memorialized in the collective memory of the culture” (p. 33). However, it seems to me that what Heidegger has in mind are not necessarily concrete historical persons but rather ideals that can be paradigmatically articulated and incarnated in different ways: as historical heroes (like e.g. Pericles, Gandhi, Martin Luther King), as quasi-mythical figures (like e.g. Odysseus, David or Jesus), or as narratives, poems or other artworks in which no single character but rather the work as a whole displays ideals, values and virtues in such a way that they appeal to us and grip us as our own.

⁸⁸⁶ GA 5, p. 30; GA 7, p. 35; GA 4, p. 46.

source beyond the artist and the artwork, a source which essentially remains hidden and mysterious. This hidden source of the unity of the world, which the artwork lets appear precisely as hidden, Heidegger tends to call “the god.” Hence, in the 1951 essay “...Poetically Man Dwells...”⁸⁸⁷ he writes: “Thus the unknown god appears as the unknown through the manifestness of the sky.”⁸⁸⁸

The Phenomenon and the Fourfold

Heidegger’s account of the fundamental dynamics that opens up the historical world as a determinate and binding destiny has thoroughgoing consequences for his conception of phenomenality.

In his analysis of the structure of understanding in *Being and Time* Heidegger grounded the possibility of experiencing particular beings as meaningful phenomena on Dasein’s preceding historical understanding of world and being: to show up as a phenomenon is to show up as an instantiation of the general historical meaning-patterns in which we always already live. This hierarchical as-structure – the ontological difference – also remains the foundation stone for Heidegger’s later thought. The whole line of argument maintaining that we are thrown into a history of being harboring our possibilities of understanding, and that the task of thinking and poetry is to prepare the opening of a historical world which is able to grant significance to being, builds on this difference. Both in his early and in his late thinking Heidegger rules out the principal possibility that we would possess some kind of direct open access to particular beings as the source of meaning that ultimately gives to our understanding of our historical meanings and concepts whatever existential weight or clarificatory force it might have.

However, although Heidegger articulated the historical as-structure of understanding in *Being and Time*, he never pursued the question of how historical being is given to us as an origin beyond our factual prejudices. This lacuna gave rise to the basic methodological ambivalence of the book, inducing Heidegger to pass over his basic conception of the

⁸⁸⁷ “...dichterisch wohnt der Mensch...,” in GA 7.

⁸⁸⁸ GA 7, p. 201: ”So erscheint der unbekannte Gott als der Unbekannte durch die Offenbarkeit des Himmels.”

historical as-structure of understanding, and embarking on a fundamental ontological investigation of the sense of being by way of transhistorical phenomenological explication of the universal structures of Dasein. Then, in the mid 1930s, Heidegger makes the question concerning the openness and givenness of historical being his guiding question, and develops an analysis of the dynamics which determines whether the world opens up a strong and radiant historical destiny or whether it collapses into an undecided and irrelevant mass of meaning-possibilities.

By firmly grounding all phenomenal givenness in the happening of being, Heidegger definitely shuts out the possibilities of understanding being either through a direct explication of the meaning-structures of beings or through a thematization of what we always already implicitly understand. According to the basic analysis that Heidegger elaborates in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” our historical world determines our access to beings, so that the world itself has its origin in the happening of being – the strife between world and earth enacted in the work of art. This means that the historical world that is given to us as our destiny is essentially grounded in and referred to the three basic phenomenally inaccessible aspects of this happening: first, to the undetermined historical multitude of meaning-possibilities at the source of our world; second, to the dark materiality and sensuousness of the earth; third, to the artwork’s creative gathering and determination of these aspects into a unified and forceful destiny. Hence, the phenomenon – that which shows itself as itself – of itself points to the fundamental happening of being as its phenomenally ungroundable ground.

Later, beginning with the 1949 lecture cycle “Insight Into That Which Is,” Heidegger reformulates his conception of phenomenality in terms of what he now calls the “fourfold” (*Geviert*).⁸⁸⁹ The notion is developed in a number of Heidegger’s later essays, the most important of which are perhaps “Building Dwelling Thinking” from 1950 and “The Thing” (which constitutes a slightly revised version of the first part of the Bremen-lecture cycle) from 1951.⁸⁹⁰

⁸⁸⁹ For more detailed studies of the fourfold, cf., e.g., Richardson 1963, pp. 566-94; Young 2006; Mitchell 2010.

⁸⁹⁰ Other texts in which Heidegger treats the “fourfold” are, e.g., “Language” (*Die Sprache*) (1950), “On the Question of Being” (*Zur Seinsfrage*) (1955), “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven” (*Hölderlins Erde und Himmel*) (1959), “Language and Homeland” (*Sprache*

Heidegger's thinking of the "fourfold" grows out of his renewed attempt to reflect on the "thing." For him the "thing" is nothing but a name for "what is paradigmatically real" (*das maßgebende Wirkliche*),⁸⁹¹ i.e., for the exemplary phenomenon or being. His attempt to think the thing is thus an attempt to articulate the dynamics constituting those entities which we primarily encounter and deal with in our lives. Heidegger describes the "thing" as the gathering point of the "fourfold": the "mirror-play of the simple onefold of sky and earth, divinities and mortals."⁸⁹² By conceiving of the thing as a point of intersection which is constituted by the unified interplay of the different relational aspects of the fourfold, Heidegger dissolves the idea of the phenomenon as a self-contained phenomenal presence. To experience and understand the thing is essentially to be opened to the play of the fourfold as the basic happening constituting the presence and significance of the thing while itself withdrawing from any direct phenomenal access.

However, in my view Heidegger's projection of the fourfold does not imply any radical alteration of the analysis of the dynamics of shining as a strife between the world and the earth which he developed in "The Origin of the Work of Art." What Heidegger now calls the "earth" ("the building bearer, nourishing with its fruits, tending water and rock, plant and animal"⁸⁹³) and the "sky" ("the year's seasons, the light and dusk of the day, the gloom and glow of the night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather"⁸⁹⁴) basically name two aspects of our material-sensuous surroundings which Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" summed up as the "earth"; the "divinities" ("the beckoning messengers of the godhead"⁸⁹⁵) in turn correspond to what he earlier called the "gods," i.e., the concrete paradigms of value and significance constituting the horizon of purposes of the "world"; finally, the "mortals" ("they [the

und Heimat) (1960), "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture "Time and Being" (*Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag 'Zeit und Sein'*) (1962), and the "Seminar in Zähringen" (1973).

⁸⁹¹ GA 7, p. 172.

⁸⁹² GA 7, p. 181: "Spiegel-Spiel der Einfalt von Erde und Himmel, Göttlichen und Sterblichen."

⁸⁹³ GA 7, p. 179: "die bauend Tragende, die nährend Fruchtende, hegend Gewässer und Gestein, Gewächs und Getier."

⁸⁹⁴ GA 7, p. 180: "die Zeiten des Jahres, Licht und Dämmer des Tages, Dunkel und Helle der Nachts, die Gunst und das Unwirtliche der Wetter."

⁸⁹⁵ GA 7, p. 180: "die Winkenden Boten der Gottheit."

human beings] are called mortals because they can die”⁸⁹⁶) is simply a new name for the humans beings in their finitude. Although the “fourfold” does not – as some commentators would have it – just amount to a dim mytho-poetical vision but has a relatively clear sense, it is nevertheless the case Heidegger that never offers a substantial analysis of the interplay between its different aspects that would raise it to a genuinely autonomous and clarifying figure of thought.⁸⁹⁷

Nevertheless, in one respect Heidegger’s thinking of the thing and the fourfold entails a critical expansion of his earlier view in that he now, for the first time, ascribes to our dealings with particular things an irreducible role in the realization of the openness of being.

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger still elevated the saying of being enacted by the thinkers and the poets as the sole essential task in the establishing of a historical world, so that the only role that was left for the ordinary people – the receivers of the world – was to hearken to the thinkers and the poets as the ultimate guides for their lives. Indeed, he never gives up his notion of language as the primary reservoir of meaning which determines all other forms of experience, understanding, and art. Hence, in the 1958 essay “The Word”⁸⁹⁸ Heidegger affirmatively quotes Stefan Georg’s line “Where word breaks off no thing may be,”⁸⁹⁹ which he explicates as follows: “The word’s rule springs to light as that which makes the thing be a thing. The word begins to shine as the gathering which first

⁸⁹⁶ GA 7, p. 180: “sie [die Menschen] heißen die Sterblichen, weil sie sterben können.”

⁸⁹⁷ In a recent text Andrew J. Mitchell calls the fourfold Heidegger’s “most phenomenological thought”: “The simple things around us – indeed, the things themselves – become the focus of his attention and lead him to a phenomenologically more robust sense of the world than heretofore found in his work” (Mitchell 2010, pp. 208f.). However, as I have argued above, Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold does not in any way unsettle the dominance of history in Heidegger’s thought by opening access to a phenomenality that would transcend and ground our historical heritage. Hence, this notion is not very phenomenological in the sense used here. Still, in calling the fourfold “phenomenological” what Mitchell primarily seems to have in mind is not its character as something self-given but rather its capacity to account for the rich texture of relations – including the earth and the sky – that always makes a thing into the thing it is.

⁸⁹⁸ “Das Wort,” in GA 12.

⁸⁹⁹ GA 12, p. 224: “Kein Ding sei wo das Wort gebracht.”

brings what is present to its presence.”⁹⁰⁰ From this it follows that “Poetizing is the basic capacity of human dwelling.”⁹⁰¹

However, even though our living among things is guided by the opening of language, the concrete thing is not reduced to an instantiation of prior meaning-relations anymore. Rather, the thing is seen as itself gathering and co-constituting the fourfold: “The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, into that thing.”⁹⁰² As was the case with the work of art, Heidegger describes the gathering of the thing as an interplay between receptivity and creation: for example, in building a bridge and thus establishing a concrete place in which the sky and the earth, the divinities and the mortals, can interact, the building “receives the *directive*” from the play of the fourfold.⁹⁰³ At the same time, however, the place “admits [...] and *installs* the fourfold”⁹⁰⁴ The things are thus the concrete places in which the play of the fourfold gets gathered and specified.

The upshot of this is that our dwelling among things assumes an irreducible role in the realization of the opening of the world: “Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the essence of the fourfold into things.”⁹⁰⁵ But how does this preserving take place? The fact is that Heidegger never offers any thorough analysis of this but only provides a few abstract mottos and a couple of examples. Here are Heidegger’s mottos: “The mortals,” Heidegger writes “dwell in that they save the earth [...] in that they receive the sky as sky [...] in that they await the divinities as divinities [...] in that they guide their own essential being – their being capable of death – into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there

⁹⁰⁰ GA 12, p. 224: “Das Walten des Wortes blitzt auf als die Bedingnis des Dinges zum Ding. Das Wort hebt an zu leuchten als die Versammlung, die Anwesendes erst in sein Anwesen bringt.”

⁹⁰¹ GA 7, p. 207: “Das Dichten ist das Grundvermögen des menschlichen Wohnens.”

⁹⁰² GA 7, p. 175: “Das Ding dingt. Das Dingen versammelt. Es sammelt, das Geviert ereignend, dessen Weile in ein je Weiliges: in dieses, in jenes Ding.”

⁹⁰³ GA 7, p. 161: “*empfängt* [...] die *Weisung*.”

⁹⁰⁴ GA 7, p. 160: “*läßt* das Geviert *zu* und [...] *richtet* das Geviert *ein*.”

⁹⁰⁵ GA 7, p. 153: “Das Wohnen schont das Geviert, indem es dessen Wesen in die Dinge bringt.”

may be a good death.”⁹⁰⁶ In “Building Dwelling Thinking“ he then provides the following concrete depiction of a bridge:⁹⁰⁷

The bridge swings over the stream “with ease and power.” It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other. [...] It brings stream and bank and land into each other’s neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. [...] Resting upright in the stream’s bed, the bridge-piers bear the swing of the arches that leave the stream’s waters to run their course. The waters may wander on quiet and gay, the sky’s floods from storm or thaw may shoot past the piers in torrential waves – the bridge is ready for the sky’s weather and its fickle nature. [...] The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants mortals their way, so that they may come and go from shore to shore. [...] Always and ever differently the bridge initiates the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side. Now in a high arch, now in a low, the bridge vaults over glen and stream – whether mortals keep in mind vaulting of the bridge’s course or forget that they, always themselves on their way to the last bridge, are actually striving to surmount all that is common and unsound in them in order to bring themselves before the haleness of the divinities. The bridge *gathers*, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities – whether we explicitly think of, and visibly *give thanks for*, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge, or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushed wholly aside.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁶ GA 7, p. 152: “Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie die Erde retten [...] insofern sie den Himmel als Himmel empfangen [...] insofern sie die Göttlichen als die Göttlichen erwarten [...] insofern sie ihr eigenes Wesen, daß sie nämlich den Tod als Tod vermögen, in den Brauch dieses Vermögens geleiten, damit ein guter Tod sei.”

⁹⁰⁷ Cf. also GA 7, pp. 174f., for Heidegger’s description of how a jug gather’s the elements of the fourfold.

⁹⁰⁸ GA 7, p. 154f.: “Die Brücke schwingt sich ‘leicht und kräftig’ über den Strom. Sie verbindet nicht nur schon vorhandene Ufer. Im Übergang der Brücke treten die Ufer erst als Ufer hervor. Die Brücke läßt sie eigens gegeneinander über liegen. [...] Sie bringt Strom und Ufer und Land in wechselseitige Nachbarschaft. Die Brücke *versammelt* die Erde als Landschaft um den Strom. [...] Die Brückenpfeiler tragen, aufruhend im Strombett, den Schwung der Bogen, die den Wassern des Stromes ihre Bahn lassen. Mögen die Wasser ruhig und munter fortwandern, mögen die Fluten des Himmels beim Gewittersturm oder der Schneeschmelze in reißenden Wogen um die Pfeilerbogen schießen, die Brücke ist bereit für die Wetter des Himmels und deren

Heidegger's description presents the bridge in its meaning for us as the gathering point of the fourfold. The bridge is what it is as part of a life which is essentially referred to the earth and the sky as the material-sensuous setting we live in, to the divinities as the holy paradigms that guide us, as well as to the finitude of our own being. However, at the same time as our building of the bridge belongs within the interplay of the different aspects of the fourfold it also involves the possibility of caring for and gathering these aspects – or refrain from doing it. That is to say: the bridge can be built so that it “saves” the earth and “receives” the sky, i.e., in such a way that our activity of building attends to and complies with our natural surroundings and lets them come forth as our material-sensuous ground and setting, not just exploiting them as material for our needs and desires; moreover, the bridge can be constructed so that it “awaits” the divinities, i.e., in such a way that it in some way institutes and reminds us of the need to receive the holy ideals that our history harbors, and not “make” our own “gods”;⁹⁰⁹ finally, the bridge can be built so that it “guides” us in our mortal being, i.e., in such a way that it serves our highest purposes in the best possible way at the same time as it bears witness to the finitude of our life. In short, what Heidegger means by preserving the fourfold are different ways of instituting and bearing witness to the different aspects of the fourfold in our dwelling among things.

Here I will not enter into a closer discussion of the philosophical sense and force of Heidegger's analysis of the thing and the fourfold. From the point of view of our guiding problem the important thing is to see that this analysis does not involve any radical transformation of the

wendisches Wesen. [...] Die Brücke läßt dem Strom seine Bahn und gewährt zugleich den Sterblichen ihren Weg, daß sie von Land zu Land gehen und fahren. [...] Immer und je anders geleitet die Brücke hin und her die zögernden und die hastigen Wege der Menschen, daß sie zu anderen Ufern und zuletzt als die Sterblichen auf die andere Seite kommen. Die Brücke überschwingt, bald in hohen, bald in flachen Bogen Fluß und Schlucht; ob die Sterblichen das Überschwingende der Brückenbahn in der Acht behalten oder vergessen, daß sie, immer schon unterwegs zur letzten Brücke, im Grunde danach trachten, ihr Gewöhnliches und Unheiles zu übersteigen, um sich vor das Heile des Göttlichen zu bringen. Die Brücke *sammelt* als der überschwingende Übergang vor die Göttlichen. Mag deren Anwesen eigens bedacht und sichtbarlich *bedankt* sein wie in der Figur des Brückenheiligen, mag es verstellt oder gar weggeschoben bleiben. Die Brücke *versammelt* auf *ihre* Weise Erde und Himmel, die Göttlichen und Sterblichen bei sich.”

⁹⁰⁹ GA 7, p. 154.

fundamental setup of Heidegger's later thinking: the ontological difference remains in force and the fourfold is nothing but a reformulation of the basic aspects of the dynamic which opens historical worlds. Hence, one should beware of interpreting Heidegger's notion of safeguarding the fourfold in terms of a care for particular human beings, animals and things on account of a significance they would possess prior to and irrespective of the opening up the world – even though his descriptions tend to be parasitic on our understanding of such a care. Hence, what Heidegger's call to safeguard the fourfold is meant to express is that in all our dealings with things we co-realize – foster or hamper – the happening which allows these things to be present and engage us as things in the first place, as meaningful phenomena.

The Highest Task: To Let Being Be

Heidegger's turn to the question of the openness of being, and his analysis of the dynamics which let a world arise, also implies a transformation of his view of the existential motivation and import of thinking. What is henceforth at stake in thinking is nothing less than the establishment of a binding historical world.

The later Heidegger's central idea that thinking is ultimately motivated by the aim of co-realizing the opening of a meaningful world dates back to the years after *Being and Time*. Let me recapitulate the history briefly: Even though Heidegger already in *Being and Time* articulates the structure of phenomenality in terms of the ontological difference between understanding of being and knowledge of beings, the philosophical task to pursue the question of being was ultimately motivated by the need to clarify the ontological horizon of Dasein's primary existentiell self-understanding. In the years 1928-1933 Heidegger reemphasized the priority of our understanding of being over all ontic-existentiell understanding, whereby he also proposed that philosophy has a double task: first, to explicate the structure of Dasein's understanding as a free projection of a being-world; second, to perform such a projection of a world in which beings can have meaning for us. The superordination of ontology over ethics implied by the notion of philosophy as world-projection, when combined with the apocalyptic idea of the threatening destruction of the Western world and the belief that the political

revolution of National Socialism could be a preparation for a genuine ontological revolution, paved the way for Heidegger's engagement in Nazism. In the late 1930s Heidegger gradually departed from his positive assessment of Nazism as a counterforce against the destructive forces of modernity, and instead began to diagnose Nazism as a symptom of the techno-subjectivist understanding of being characteristic of Western modernity, which reduces all beings into a material reserve for human subjectivity to exploit and manipulate.

As we saw earlier, Heidegger's notion of the ultimate task of philosophy as a free world-projection had many weaknesses. Not only did Heidegger fail to account for how such a projection could ever establish a unified world. He was also unable to tell what motivates and makes a new philosophical projection of being better than any other projection – save for its sharpened consciousness of its essential freedom and groundlessness. If so, however, what then motivates new projections of historical worlds at all – why not fall back upon and accept our old factual projections facing their groundlessness? As Heidegger elaborates his analysis of the dynamics of shining in the late 1930s he is finally able to give a consistent answer to the question of the motivation of philosophy: it is nothing less than establishing a world that is able to bind us as holy.

Heidegger's conception of the motivation and import of his later thinking comes to clear expression in his "Letter on Humanism." Indeed, the first paragraph contains the basic train of thought:

Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. [...] Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks. Such action is presumably the simplest and at the same time the highest because it concerns the relation of being to humans. But all working or effecting lies in being and is directed toward beings. Thinking, by contrast, lets itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being. Thinking accomplishes this letting.⁹¹⁰

⁹¹⁰ GA 9, p. 313: "Das Denken vollbringt den Bezug des Seins zum Wesen des Menschen. Es macht und bewirkt diesen Bezug nicht. Das Denken bringt ihn nur als das, was ihm selbst vom Sein übergeben ist, dem Sein dar. [...] Das Denken wird nicht

That is to say, since the possible significance of all particular beings and all our actions in relation to such beings is determined by historical being, and since thinking plays an essential part in the realization of the happening which decides over the occurrence or failure to occur of a binding being-world, thinking in effect acquires the absolute dignity of “highest action.” What has changed since 1933?

We may begin by noting two major alterations. First, Heidegger has rejected the idea that the task of opening up a world is carried out through a free projection. Instead, he insists that the task of letting being be is essentially receptive in relation to the self-giving of historical being. In this, thinking and poetry play complementary roles: whereas thinking reflects on the happening which opens up being, poetry, on this basis, establishes a world by hearkening to and gathering the possibilities of meaning always already addressing us out of our history into a strong and unified paradigmatic form. Second, by thus deepening his notion of the ontological-historical predicament of thinking, Heidegger has cancelled out the possibility of thinking that, prior to our philosophical questioning of the openness of being, there could be something like a pre-ontological state of collective political-emotional preparedness to project new worlds.

However, Heidegger elevation of thinking into our highest task is nothing but a reformulation of the priority of ontology over all other existential-ethical concerns. In fact, in his “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger explicitly takes up the question of how his thinking relates to a possible ethics. To answer this question, Heidegger returns to Heraclit’s use of the word *ēthos*, which he interprets as signifying the “abode, dwelling place [...] the open region in which the human being dwells.”⁹¹¹ Since it is precisely the task of Heidegger’s thinking to reflect on and articulate this openness of being he argues that his own thinking is already in itself “originary ethics.”⁹¹² By calling his own thinking an originary

erst dadurch zur Aktion, daß von ihm eine Wirkung ausgeht oder daß es angewendet wird. Das Denken handelt, indem es denkt. Dieses Handeln ist vermutlich das einfachste und zugleich das Höchste, weil es den Bezug des Seins zum Menschen angeht. Alles Wirken aber beruht im Sein and geht auf das Seiende aus. Das Denken dagegen läßt sich vom Sein in den Anspruch nehmen, um die Wahrheit des Seins zu sagen. Das Denken vollbringt dieses Lassen.”

⁹¹¹ GA 9, p. 354: “ἦθος bedeutet Aufenthalt, Ort des Wohnens. Das Wort nennt den offene Bezirk, worin der Mensch wohnt.”

⁹¹² GA 9, p. 356: “die ursprüngliche Ethik.”

ethics, however, Heidegger in no way questions but rather reaffirms the radical priority of his thinking of being over ethics. By co-realizing the happening of being thinking precedes and determines every possible ethics: it not only conditions ethics in the sense of an articulation of the principles and norms of our historical world; it also conditions ethics in the sense of our primary open experience of other people as meaningful.

The superior import that Heidegger ascribes to his thinking of being is a direct consequence of his basic idea that the historical happening of being possess the power of granting to the world – and, hence, to the particular beings – any significance they might have, and that thinking plays a decisive role in the realization of this happening. What is ultimately at stake in the task of thinking is thus not only to clarify the ontological horizons of our existential understanding, but also to co-realize – assist or hamper – the happening which decides whether a binding holy world arises at all. As a consequence, the task of thinking emerges as the highest thinkable task, a task that conditions and thus in principal overshadows every other possible existential-ethical concern for particular beings, even our concern for other human beings.

I will return to discuss the philosophical and moral problems of this conception later.

3.5 Heidegger's Late Historical Thinking

The guiding task of Heidegger's later thinking is to reflect on the "event" or "clearing" that opens up historical being. This turning of the question also implies a transformation of his mode of thinking. To the extent that the question of thinking concerns the happening which first opens up historical being and thus makes it possible for beings to be given as meaningful phenomena, this happening cannot be explicated through a intuition-based phenomenological investigation but rather needs to be approached by way of a historical reflection which takes its starting point in historical being itself. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the mode and rigor of Heidegger's late thinking.

There is no doubt that the change Heidegger's thinking undergoes in the mid 1930s in some sense involves a break with the phenomenological approach employed in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*. Not only

does Heidegger at this time give up the word “phenomenology” as a label of his thinking, in favor of such terms as “historical reflection” (*geschichtliche Besinnung*),⁹¹³ “reflection” (*Besinnung*),⁹¹⁴ “being-historical thinking” (*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*),⁹¹⁵ and, finally, just “thinking” (*Denken*).⁹¹⁶ In his concrete investigations the effort to articulate basic structures of meaning through phenomenological descriptions of our experience largely – but perhaps not completely – gives way to a thinking which remains radically anchored in particular historical constellations of meaning – philosophical texts, concepts, poems, artworks, etymologies – and transpires through a reflection on their basic unthought dimensions of meaning.

Heidegger's transformation of his thinking is, however, no straight and clear event, but exhibits at least the following phases:

In his texts from the mid 1930s to the end of the war in 1945 Heidegger is mainly focused on elaborating his new question concerning the openness of being, diagnosing the history of Western metaphysics, and explicating the dynamics of phenomenal shining such as it is realized in art and poetry. At this time, Heidegger sets up a historical program for thought: in order to break free from the *Seinsvergessenheit* of metaphysics, thinking has to take the form of a historical reflection which returns to the “first” Greek beginning of metaphysics, and, through a critical questioning of its unthought possibilities, opens up the possibility of an “other” beginning. However, as concerns the concrete mode and rigor of historical thinking, Heidegger is still unable to say almost anything. Nor is he able to distinguish sharply between the linguistic activity of poetry and thinking. In “Introduction to Metaphysics” he still lumps together the poets, the thinkers and the statesmen as the “creators” who “project” the “work” which establishes the world.⁹¹⁷ This bewilderment also conditions the effort to develop a kind of quasi-poetical saying of the event of being in the notebooks *Contributions* and *Mindfulness*. Apart from these big manuscripts Heidegger's thinking at the time mainly takes the form of massive historical explications primarily centered on Nietzsche and

⁹¹³ GA 45, p. 34.

⁹¹⁴ GA 7, p. 64.

⁹¹⁵ GA 65, p. 3.

⁹¹⁶ GA 14, p. 74.

⁹¹⁷ GA 40, p. 66.

Hölderlin but also treating, e.g., Hegel, Ernst Jünger, and the pre-Socratics thinkers. It is only towards the mid 1940s that Heidegger attains a clear articulation of the separate yet complementary tasks of thinking and poetry: whereas poetry “names the holy,” i.e., founds our historical world, thinking “says being,”⁹¹⁸ i.e., reflects on the happening of being as the origin of every such world without itself taking part in the founding of the world. In the 1949 lecture cycle “Insight Into That Which Is” Heidegger for the first time arrives at the style that will henceforth characterize his thinking: in lieu of the mighty, almost Hegelian, historical projections of the late 1930s Heidegger now develops his thinking in the form of shorter texts which, in a lapidary style avoiding the metaphysical conceptuality of the tradition and drawing on the resources of everyday language and its etymologies, stake out finite paths of thought through limited historico-textual contexts. In this, the programmatic idea about the necessity for thinking to proceed through a transition from the first to the other historical beginning – although not absent or discarded – moves into the background as Heidegger in his concrete writing tries to find more direct ways from the metaphysical meaning-constellations in which we live to their origin in the openness of being. However, it is only late – in the beginning of the 1960s – that Heidegger takes up and thematizes the question concerning the specific mode and rigor of his late thinking, and its relation to phenomenology. This happens in the texts gathered in the anthology *On the Matter of Thinking*, above all in the central essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”⁹¹⁹ from 1964.

Due to the fact that Heidegger’s late thinking, at least on the programmatic level, exhibits a turn from phenomenology to a historical mode of thinking, the discussion of the late Heidegger has largely been dominated by the hermeneutic-deconstructive line of interpretation. For such an interpretation – which certainly has taken many different forms – Heidegger later philosophy fundamentally appears as a radicalized attempt to answer to the historicity of being by way of a thinking which does not base itself on any appeal to phenomenal givenness but which transpires through intra-historical interpretation, destruction and retrieval of the finite meaning-possibilities contained by factual historical being itself. Although most defenders of a transcendental phenomenological reading

⁹¹⁸ GA 9, p. 312.

⁹¹⁹ “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens,” in GA 14.

tend to focus almost exclusively on the early Heidegger, and view his later developments as a more or less drastic break with phenomenology, there have also been some attempts to salvage the later Heidegger as a phenomenologist. Among these attempts it is possible to distinguish between three kinds of claim.

The two first claims can be extracted from Steven Crowell's ambivalent comments regarding the later Heidegger. In elaborating his transcendental phenomenological reading of Heidegger, Crowell concentrates almost solely on Heidegger's thinking in the 1920s, that is, the period when Heidegger "most clearly belongs to [the] phenomenological tradition."⁹²⁰ However, although Heidegger's later thought is said to "contain strong elements of postphenomenological and postmodern suspicion"⁹²¹ Crowell insists that Heidegger never abandons the phenomenological impulse. In so insisting Crowell seems to alternate between two claims. On the one hand, he maintains that Heidegger himself conceives of his late thinking as containing an essential element of phenomenology. Quoting a passage from "Letter on Humanism" he writes that "Heidegger's post-metaphysical thinking [...] draws upon the 'essential help of phenomenological seeing',"⁹²² and that "even the late Heidegger [...] remains committed to the possibility of phenomenology."⁹²³ On the other hand, he sometimes seems to be satisfied with the weaker thesis that the late Heidegger de facto continued practicing phenomenology regardless of what he thought he was doing: "Heidegger never abandoned [phenomenological seeing and description] in practice even if he abandoned it as a designation for his project."⁹²⁴

A third kind of claim is presented by Günter Figal who writes that Heidegger's thinking remains "radical phenomenology [...] also after *Being and Time*."⁹²⁵ This could easily be taken for a bolder version of Crowell's first claim yet it is not for the reason that the phenomenology it ascribes to the later Heidegger is not the transcendental phenomenology Crowell has in mind. According to Figal, the central matter of Heidegger's thinking is

⁹²⁰ Crowell 2001, p. 204.

⁹²¹ Crowell 2001, p. 204.

⁹²² Crowell 2001, p. 218; Heidegger GA 9, p. 357. Cf. also Crowell 2001, pp. 227f.

⁹²³ Crowell 2001, p. 221.

⁹²⁴ Crowell 2001, p. 220.

⁹²⁵ Figal 2009, p. 37: "Radikale Phänomenologie in diesem Sinne bleibt Heideggers Denken auch nach *Sein und Zeit*." Cf. also p. 45.

the disclosedness or openness of phenomena which the later Heidegger calls the “clearing.” This means that the task of thinking this “originary phenomenon” (*Ur-phänomen*) – Figal quotes Heidegger who quotes Goethe⁹²⁶ – gives thinking its specific phenomenological character. But how does this thinking proceed? Figal writes: “[The phenomenological interpretation] is not arbitrary. As interpretation, deserving of its name, it can only disclose what is contained in the historically transmitted texts. However, only it, as interpretation, discloses it. What is phenomenological [in the transmitted texts] comes to light only through phenomenology.”⁹²⁷ That is, what Figal calls Heidegger’s phenomenology is a thinking which essentially remains referred to historical possibilities, not in the sense that it would repeat an already existent historical understanding but in the sense that it autonomously discovers possibilities that have so far remained unthought. However, while Figal’s description – as well shall see – to a large degree captures the self-understanding of the later Heidegger it empties the concept of phenomenology of the central appeal to transhistorical intuitive givenness which is constitutive of the concept as used in this thesis. Hence, from our point of view, what Figal strictly speaking is saying is that Heidegger’s late thinking is deeply historical and not phenomenological in our sense of the word.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁶ Figal 2009, p. 45; GA 14, p. 81.

⁹²⁷ Figal 2009, p. 53: “[Die phänomenologische Interpretation] ist nicht willkürlich; als Interpretation, die diesen Namen verdient, kann sie nur aufdecken, was in den überlieferten Texten enthalten ist. Aber erst sie als Interpretation deckt es auf; [...] Das Phänomenologische in [den überlieferten Texten] kommt ans Licht allein durch die Phänomenologie.” Cf. also Figal 2009, pp. 38f.

⁹²⁸ In a similar way Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann has argued that Heidegger’s later “being-historical thinking” is “phenomenological through and through, that is, it is guided solely by the letting-itself-be-shown of the matter itself” (*das seinsgeschichtliche Denken durch und durch phänomenologisch, d.h. allein vom Sichzeigenlassen der Sache selbst, geleitet ist*) (von Herrmann 1990, p. 11; cf. also pp. 9f.). However, as far as I can see, von Herrmann is unable to give any substantial support for his interpretation. To begin with, the interpretation to a very large extent transpires a paraphrase of Heidegger’s own late rearticulation of phenomenology in terms of the capacity of thought to “correspond” to its “matter” (pp. 12f.), whereby von Herrmann does not seem to recognize that what is at stake for Heidegger here is precisely to free the concept of phenomenology from Husserl’s guiding notion of intuitive givenness and give it a new meaning as a name for the specific rigor of historical thinking. Moreover, to the extent that von Herrmann tries to specify the methodological character of Heidegger’s late phenomenology he describes it as a thinking which does not come to pass as a transhistorical seeing of phenomena: “In listening to the call [of being] thinking

Disregarding the third claim as irrelevant here, the question is: Is Heidegger's late thinking, despite of or in conjunction with its ostensible historicity, still phenomenological in some sense, either on the level of its conception of the nature of thinking or on the level of its concrete enactment, or in both respects?

The present chapter will unfold as follows:

I begin by briefly recapitulating Heidegger's view of the task and historical predicament of thinking, whereafter I move on to the main concern of the chapter: to examine the methodological nature and rigor of Heidegger's late thinking. Taking my textual starting point in the essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," I explicate Heidegger's late critique of Husserl's phenomenology and his attempt to elaborate his own thinking as a more rigorous way of answering to the matter of thinking, the "event" or the "clearing" of being. In so doing I also try to answer the question whether Heidegger's late thinking totally abandons phenomenology or whether it in some sense remains referred to phenomenological seeing and description.

History, Metaphysics, Thinking: A Repetition

Let us begin by briefly reiterating Heidegger's conception of the task and historical predicament of thinking as it is developed in the latter part of the 1930s. The guiding task that Heidegger sets for his thinking is to reflect on and articulate the happening which opens up and gives being. But how?

Heidegger's later thinking is to a very large extent an effort to deliver on the idea of the radical historicity of thought elaborated in *Being and Time* but not realized in its full consequence: the idea that our experience and understanding of beings as meaningful phenomena is determined by the meaning-possibilities inherent in the historical understanding of being in

comports itself phenomenologically in so far as it lets the matter itself, being as such, be shown" (*Im Hören auf den Zuruf [des Seins] verhält sich das Denken [...] phänomenologisch insofern es ein Sichzeigenlassen der Sache selbst, des Seins als solchen ist*) (p. 25; cf. also p. 36). However, if the seeing of phenomenology consists in attending to the historical givenness of being this is not phenomenology in our sense of the word, but rather some kind of intra-historical thinking.

which we always already live.⁹²⁹ For thinking this means that it cannot hope to examine or ground our factual understanding of being through some kind of direct phenomenological description of the basic universal structures of our experiences – since our access to these experiences is itself determined by our understanding of being – but rather needs to transpire by way of a historical questioning and articulation of the most originary possibilities of understanding harbored by our own history. However, Heidegger claims, the historical situation in which we today find ourselves is characterized by an extreme forgetfulness of being – a basic inability to think and express the openness of being as the origin of our historical world, which, in turn, is the reason why “the gods” have “fled,” i.e., why our world has lost its unity and binding force. According to Heidegger, this forgetfulness of the openness of being is the defining feature of Western metaphysics, which has determined our history since its Greek inception in Plato and Aristotle. Leaving the openness of being unthought, metaphysics basically interprets being as presence – *ousia* – for us. As a result, the history of metaphysics exhibits an ever increasing drive to ground being in the capacities of the human subject: in the logic of its judgments, in its reason, in its seeing, in its will to power, in its technologies.

When the idea about the radical historicity of thought is supplemented by the idea that we live at the end of a long and autistically closed history of metaphysical forgetfulness of being, the task to open up the question of being anew will necessarily have to take the following form. In order to access a more originary understanding of being we need to follow the history of metaphysics back to its Greek beginning. Only here, at the

⁹²⁹ Heidegger’s late historical approach could in fact be described as a realization of the destructive program announced in *Being and Time*, but never consistently accomplished. Already then Heidegger claimed that we, in order to free ourselves from our prejudiced traditional understanding of being as presence-at-hand need to trace our received conceptions back to their historical origins. And yet, since Heidegger was still unable to account for what it would mean to retrieve originary historical possibilities as our own historical destiny, he was forced to resort to a phenomenological explication of the experiences at the root of our historical conceptions. For the later Heidegger this possibility is cancelled out: the only way to attain a more originary understanding of being is to keep within and retrieve the historical possibilities of our history by thinking the unthought origin of the first Greek beginning.

instigation of the metaphysical understanding of being as presence, can we hope to find qualified possibilities of understanding which metaphysics, in founding itself, overlooked and forgot as its own unthought origin. Hence, by returning to the “first” Greek beginning of metaphysics and critically retrieving its unthought and conditioning possibilities, it becomes possible to open up an “other” beginning: a thinking which, by reflecting on the openness of being as the source of all presence, opens the way for a transparent receptive-gathering founding of new forceful worlds.

Heidegger will never give up this idea of a necessary dialectics of historical beginnings.⁹³⁰ However, from the beginning of the 1950s onwards it will move into the background and play a less determinative role in Heidegger's concrete enactment of his thinking as he tries to open up more direct pathways from the metaphysical present to various historical sources and paradigms on this side of the first Greek beginning capable of granting us access to metaphysics' unthought origins.

The Question of Phenomenology

Above I outlined the basic schema of Heidegger's late conception of the task and manner of thinking: to articulate the opening of being – event, clearing – by way of a historical reflection tracing the possibilities of understanding harbored by the metaphysical tradition as its unthought origin.

⁹³⁰ As late as in 1973, in a seminar in Zähringen, Heidegger is reported to have stated: “According to me, the entry into the essential domain of Da-sein, discussed at the end of yesterday's session – that entry which would render possible the experience of the instancy in the clearing of being – is only possible through the detour of a return to the beginning. But this return is not a ‘return to Parmenides’. It is not a question of returning *to* Parmenides. Nothing more is required than to *turn towards* Parmenides. The return occurs in the *echo* of Parmenides. It occurs as that hearing which opens itself to the word of Parmenides from out of our present age, the epoch of the sending of being as enframing” (*Meines Erachtens kann die Einkehr in den Wesensbereich des Da-seins, von der am Schluß der gestrigen Sitzung gesprochen wurde, – jene Einkehr, die die Erfahrung der Inständigkeit in der Lichtung des Seins ermöglichen würde, – nur auf dem Umweg einer Rückkehr zum Anfang vollzogen werden. Aber diese Rückkehr ist keine ‘Rückkehr zu Parmenides’. Es kommt nicht darauf an, zu Parmenides zurückzukehren. Nicht mehr ist erforderlich, als sich Parmenides zuzukehren. Die Rückkehr erfolgt im Echo des Parmenides. Sie geschieht als jenes Hören, das sich dem Wort des Parmenides von unsrem heutigen Zeitalter aus öffnet, der Epoche der Schickung des Seins als Ge-stell*) (GA 15, p. 394).

However, even though it is possible to project such a schema on the basis of an explication of Heidegger's texts its sense and clarificatory force are bound to remain unclear as long as we have not specified how Heidegger's concrete thinking of this schema is discharged. How do we get access to the happening of being provided that we do not make use of a phenomenological method? What is it that gives Heidegger's historical thinking its possible rigor and truth, and hinders it from deteriorating into a dogmatic historico-dialectical postulation of the *Ereignis* as the origin of being – an attempt to outdo the old grounds of metaphysics by fabricating a more basic groundless ground?

Although Heidegger from the mid 1930s onwards repeatedly articulates the task and historical predicament of his late thinking, and tries out various concrete strategies for effecting it, it is only relatively late that he explicitly takes up the question concerning the methodical mode and rigor of this thinking. This principally takes place in the anthology *On the Matter of Thinking*, gathering texts written in 1962-1964, especially in the central essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" from 1964. Other texts touching this question are Heidegger's letter to William J. Richardson" from 1962, "On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking"⁹³¹ from 1965, as well as some sections from the four seminars that Heidegger conducted in Le Thor and Zähringen 1966-1973. As Heidegger finally undertakes an account of the rigor of his late thinking this happens also involves a last confrontation with Husserl's phenomenology.

Let us begin by taking a look at Heidegger's late confrontation with Husserl and the concept of phenomenology, and then proceed to examine the specific methodological character of his own thinking.

Heidegger's essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" may be read as one extended attempt to critically re-appropriate Husserl's phenomenological motto "To the matters themselves!" Indeed, the title of the book of which it is part – *Zur Sache des Denkens*, which literally means: to the matter of thinking – can be read as a travesty of this phrase. By confronting Husserl's basic phenomenological demand for rigor and claiming to realize this demand in a more originary manner, Heidegger

⁹³¹ "Zur Frage nach der Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens," in GA 16.

gives himself the opportunity of raising the question of the specific rigor of his own late thinking.

Heidegger begins the essay by diagnosing the contemporary situation in which we live as the “end of philosophy.” Philosophy, Heidegger says, is metaphysics:

Metaphysics thinks beings as beings in the manner of a representational thinking that gives grounds. For since the beginning of philosophy, and with that beginning, the being of beings has shown itself as the ground (*archē, aition*, principle). The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as something that can be known, handled, and worked upon. As the ground, being brings beings in each case to presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present each in its own way to presence. [...] What characterizes metaphysical thinking, which seeks out the ground for beings, is the fact that metaphysical thinking, starting from what is present, represents it in its presence and thus exhibits it as grounded by its ground.⁹³²

We have heard it before: metaphysics understands being as presence and leaves the openness of being unthought. Now Heidegger specifies the task of metaphysics in terms of the activity of grounding. To think the being of beings as presence amounts to representing being as the ground which makes beings present for us. This happens by leading beings back on their being-ground, e.g., on ontic causes, transcendental conditions of possibility, dialectical mediations, or the will to power. According to Heidegger, the metaphysical impulse to ground all beings in their presence reaches its fulfillment – and, in this sense, its end – in the modern

⁹³² GA 14, p. 69f.: “Die Metaphysik denkt das Seiende als das Seiende in der Weise des begründenden Vorstellens. Denn das Sein des Seienden hat sich seit dem Beginn der Philosophie und mit ihm als der Grund (*ἀρχή, αἴτιον*, Prinzip) gezeigt. Der Grund ist jenes, von woher das Seiende als ein solches in seinem Werden, Vergehen und Bleiben als Erkennbares, Behandeltes, Bearbeitetes ist, was es ist und wie es ist. Das Sein bringt als der Grund das Seiende in sein jeweiliges Anwesen. Der Grund zeigt sich als die Anwesenheit. Ihre Gegenwart besteht darin, daß sie das jeweils nach seiner Art Anwesende in die Anwesenheit hervorbringt. [...] Das Auszeichnende des metaphysischen Denkens, das dem Seienden den Grund ergründet, beruht darin, daß es, ausgehend vom Anwesenden, dieses in seiner Anwesenheit vorstellt und es so aus seinem Grund her als gegründetes darstellt.”

diffusion of philosophy into a manifold of technified sciences, whose one and only aim is to plan and manipulate beings.⁹³³

Heidegger then asks whether there is still a task left for thinking at the end of philosophy: does the history of philosophy, apart from the “*last possibility*” just mentioned, harbor within itself a “*first possibility*” which philosophy “had to start out from” but which it was never able to “expressly experience and adopt”?⁹³⁴ To ask for the task of thinking is to ask for its “matter” (*Sache*).⁹³⁵ But what does it mean to attend to the matter of thinking? Heidegger mentions two thinkers who have both urged us to go to the matters themselves: Hegel and Husserl. In the following I will concentrate on Husserl.

For Husserl the motto “To the matters themselves!” constituted something of a gathering battle cry for the phenomenological movement. As he writes in his 1911 programmatic article “Philosophy as Rigorous Science”: “*The impulse to research must proceed not from philosophies but from the matters and problems.*”⁹³⁶ According to Heidegger, the function of Husserl’s motto is in the first place negative: to ward off prejudiced theorizing either – as in the case of naturalism – barring the way to the phenomena of consciousness by applying a dogmatic method or – as in case of historicism – deteriorating into empty speculation on the basis of received philosophical concepts and standpoints. So how should we reach the matters themselves? Heidegger’s thesis is that Husserl call to go to the matters primarily concerns the “securing and elaborating of the method.”⁹³⁷ This, Heidegger claims, comes to clear expression in the way that Husserl in *Ideas I* articulates the basic attitude of phenomenology in terms of the “principle of all principles,” which states that “*every originarily giving intuition (Anschauung) is a legitimizing source of knowledge, that everything originarily (in its tangible actuality, so to speak) offered to us in ‘intuition’ (Intuition), is simply to be received as what it gives itself, but also only within the limits in which it gives itself there.*”⁹³⁸ According to Heidegger, it is clear that the principle of

⁹³³ GA 14, pp. 70ff.

⁹³⁴ GA 14, p. 74.

⁹³⁵ GA 14, p. 75.

⁹³⁶ Hua XXV, p. 61: “Nicht von den Philosophien sondern von den Sachen und Problemen muß der Antrieb zur Forschung ausgehen.”

⁹³⁷ GA 14, p. 77: “Sicherung and Ausarbeitung der Methode.”

⁹³⁸ Hua III, p. 51: “*Am Prinzip aller Prinzipien: daß jede originär gebende Anschauung eine Rechtsquelle der Erkenntnis sei, daß alles, was sich uns in der ‘Intuition’ originär, (sozusagen*

all principles entails a thesis about the priority of the method: before every reflection on what constitutes the matter of philosophy the principle tells us *how* phenomenology is to proceed, namely in the manner of a strict registration and description of that which gives itself in our originary conscious intuition. This, however, implies that the principle has already unwittingly decided over “what matter alone can suffice for the method”:⁹³⁹

The method is not only directed toward the matter of philosophy. It does not merely belong to the matter as a key does to a lock. Rather, it belongs to the matter because it is “the matter itself.” If one wished to ask: Where does “the principle of all principles” get its unshakable right? the answer would have to be: from transcendental subjectivity, which is already presupposed as the matter of philosophy.⁹⁴⁰

The basic problem with Husserl's understanding of his guiding motto is thus that it does not in fact grant radical primacy to our attention to the matters themselves but rather determines the phenomenological method before and irrespective of an open look at the matters in question. Due to this failure to attend to the matter of philosophy Husserl naively succumbs to the traditional metaphysical conception of the task of philosophy, so that his entire phenomenology develops as a qualified attempt to realize this task: to ground the presence of beings. It is, Heidegger claims, only because Husserl has already determined being as presence for the transcendental subject that he can fashion the phenomenological method as a demand for intuitive givenness, and outline the phenomenological reduction as the central methodological maneuver that gives us access to

in seiner leibhaften Wirklichkeit) *darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt, aber auch nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt.*”

⁹³⁹ GA 14, p. 78: “welche Sache allein der Methode genügen kann.”

⁹⁴⁰ GA 14, p. 78f.: “Die Methode richtet sich nichts nur nach der Sache der Philosophie. Sie gehört nicht nur zur Sache wie der Schlüssel zum Schloß. Sie gehört vielmehr in die Sache, weil sie ‘die Sache selbst’ ist. Wollte man fragen: Woher nimmt denn ‘das Prinzip aller Prinzipien’ sein unerschütterliches Recht, dann müßte die Antwort lauten: aus der transzendentalen Subjektivität, die schon als die Sache der Philosophie vorausgesetzt ist.”

transcendental consciousness as the ground of the “objectivity of all objects.”⁹⁴¹

Heidegger’s late critique of Husserl bears witness to how much the distance to his teacher has grown since the 1920s. In his earlier critiques Husserl had always appeared as a radically ambivalent figure: on the one hand, he was the philosopher par excellence who through his phenomenology had opened the path to Heidegger’s own thinking; on the other hand, he had hampered and disfigured the principal possibilities of his phenomenology by remaining stuck in the theoretical attitude of traditional philosophy, so that Heidegger’s own thinking essentially developed as a critical appropriation of Husserl, stressing the primacy of the pre-theoretical experience and explicating the historicity and understanding of being at work in all phenomenal givenness. Now, by contrast, Husserl comes into sight alongside Hegel as an emblematic representative of the metaphysical effort to ground the presence of beings in subjectivity. In this, Husserl’s phenomenology is not given any precedence as the possibility Heidegger himself develops but simply appears as a qualified method to realize the goal of metaphysics.

The distanced and general character of Heidegger’s critique also entails that it is massively simplifying as a reading of Husserl’s phenomenology. As said earlier I think there is much truth in Heidegger’s basic thesis that Husserl’s thinking on the whole exhibits a powerlessness to radically question the logical-existential meaning of the motivating problems of philosophy, and that this inability makes him inclined to get trapped in the traditional problems and ideals of philosophy. Still, even if this is true, the rest of Heidegger’s critique does not follow.

Although Husserl’s philosophical program is all too much guided by a traditional urge for grounding and certainty this urge does not completely determine the directions and results of his thinking. Rather, I think one could say that Husserl’s production is characterized by an unusually versatile drive to see and describe the phenomena at hand regardless of how they fit his overall program. Hence, even though Husserl’s conception of the intentional structure of phenomenal givenness is primarily modeled on the paradigm of theoretical observation his thinking of phenomenality – in an ambivalent manner, to be sure - incorporates a

⁹⁴¹ GA 14, p. 78: “die Objektivität aller Objekte.”

wide range of phenomenal aspects which are not given as thematically present to consciousness (e.g. the temporal, intersubjective, bodily and historical aspects and horizons of our experience). Moreover, even though there is a strong tendency in Husserl to privilege the noetic acts of subjectivity as the source of the noematic meaning of the objects, he time and again – in an ambivalent manner, to be sure – explicates the noematic meanings directly as experienced without deducing them from the acts of the subject. Finally there seems to be no warrant at all for claiming that the very idea of phenomenal givenness is essentially linked to the metaphysical ambition to ground the presence of beings. Basically, this idea is simply a formal indication of the possibility of an open experience which – whatever its specific form and mode – gives us access to the matters themselves as that which our historical concepts and theories aim to conceive. As such, the notion of phenomenal givenness is not inherently motivated by an ambition to ground or secure our knowledge but can also be motivated by a will to openly encounter and account for what we actually experience – regardless of any concern for certain, absolute or universal knowledge – instead of falling back on preconceived concepts, theories or other grounds that detract us from and distort these phenomena.

Heidegger's harsh critique of Husserl must in the end be understood against the background of his driving ambition to demonstrate that his own late thinking in fact realizes the phenomenological demand for rigor in a more originary manner than Husserl himself. By straight away equating Husserl's notion of phenomenal givenness with the metaphysical will to ground presence Heidegger cancels out the possibility that direct intuitive seeing could play any role whatsoever as a ground or critical measure of his historical thinking, thereby suggesting that his own thinking exhibits a rigor that has nothing to do with phenomenological seeing.

In the closing paragraph of the last text of *On the Matter of Thinking*, the brief autobiographical sketch "My Way to Phenomenology,"⁹⁴² Heidegger sums up his relationship to phenomenology as follows:

⁹⁴² "Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie," in GA 14.

And today? The age of phenomenological philosophy seems to be over. It is already taken as something past which is only recorded historically along with other schools of philosophy. But in what is most its own phenomenology is not a school. It is the possibility of thinking - at times changing and only thus persisting - of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought. If phenomenology is thus experienced and retained, it can disappear as a designation in favor of the matter of thinking whose manifestness remains a mystery.⁹⁴³

What happens here? To begin with, Heidegger separates his own thinking from the dwindling movement of “phenomenological philosophy,” by which he means Husserl’s development of phenomenology into a transcendental philosophy reflectively investigating the structures of intentional consciousness. Second, he puts forward the claim that his own thinking realizes phenomenology as “the possibility of thinking [...] of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought.” Now, granted that Husserl’s phenomenology fails precisely in the task of attending to its matter and granted that his own thinking succeeds in this, then Heidegger can claim that his thinking indeed constitutes “true phenomenology” (*die eigentliche Phänomenologie*).⁹⁴⁴ However, Heidegger adds, as soon as phenomenology is thus conceived as the pure possibility of thinking to attend and answer to its matter we might as well give up the term phenomenology as a potentially misleading name – due to its association with Husserl’s intuitive method – for this possibility of thinking. Or, to quote another of Heidegger’s formulations: since the “event” (*Ereignis*) constitutes “the most inconspicuous of inconspicuous things” (*das Unscheinbarste des Unscheinbaren*)⁹⁴⁵ phenomenology henceforth has to take the form of a “phenomenology of the inconspicuous” (*Phänomenologie des*

⁹⁴³ GA 14, p. 101: “Und heute? Die Zeit der phänomenologischen Philosophie scheint vorbei zu sein. Sie gilt schon als etwas Vergangenes, das nur noch historisch neben anderen Richtungen der Philosophie verzeichnet wird. Allein die Phänomenologie ist in ihrem eigensten keine Richtung. Sie ist die zu Zeiten sich wandelnde und nur dadurch bleibende Möglichkeit des Denkens, dem Anspruch des zu Denkenden zu entsprechen. Wird die Phänomenologie so erfahren und behalten, dann kann sie als Titel verschwinden zugunsten der Sache des Denkens, deren Offenbarkeit ein Geheimnis bleibt.” As regards Heidegger’s understanding of phenomenology as a possibility, see also SZ, p. 38.

⁹⁴⁴ GA 14, p. 54.

⁹⁴⁵ GA 12, p. 247.

Unscheinbaren).⁹⁴⁶ Taken literally, this means nothing but a thinking that attends to and articulates that which cannot shine.

On the basis of the explication above there cannot be much doubt that Heidegger's attempt to think the origin of phenomenality leads him away from phenomenology towards a thoroughly historical reflection on the happening which opens up finite historical worlds. As a result, the stronger claim of Steven Crowell to the effect that the later Heidegger still conceives of his thinking as essentially making use of phenomenological seeing cannot be upheld. Examining Crowell's claim we see that it leans heavily on what seems to be Heidegger's affirmation of "phenomenological seeing" in "Letter on Humanism." Looking back at *Being and Time* as a first effort to penetrate towards the question of the truth of being Heidegger writes:

In the poverty of its first breakthrough, the thinking that tries to advance thought into the truth of being brings only a small part of that wholly other dimension to language. This language even falsifies itself, for it does not yet succeed in retaining the essential help of phenomenological seeing while dispensing with the inappropriate concern with "science" and "research." But in order to make the attempt at thinking recognizable and at the same time understandable for existing philosophy, it could at first be expressed only within the horizon of that existing philosophy and its use of current terms.⁹⁴⁷

This Crowell interprets as meaning that from the viewpoint of the later Heidegger it is the "concern with 'science' and 'research'" and not with "phenomenological seeing" that "spoils the project of *Being and Time*."⁹⁴⁸ However, even though the text can be taken to support Crowell's reading,

⁹⁴⁶ GA 15, p. 399.

⁹⁴⁷ GA 9, p. 357: "Das Denken, das in die Wahrheit des Seins vorzudenken versucht, bringt in der Not des erstens Durchkommens nur ein Geringes der ganz anderen Dimension zur Sprache. Diese verfälscht sich noch selbst, insofern es ihr noch nicht glückt, zwar die wesentliche Hilfe des phänomenologischen Sehens festzuhalten und gleichwohl die ungemäße Absicht auf 'Wissenschaft' und 'Forschung' fallen zu lassen. Um jedoch diesen Versuch des Denkens innerhalb der bestehenden Philosophie kenntlich und zugleich verständlich zu machen, konnte zunächst nur aus dem Horizont des Bestehenden und aus dem Gebrauch seiner ihm geläufigen Titel gesprochen werden."

⁹⁴⁸ Crowell 2001, p. 227.

it is also open for a divergent reading. Bearing in mind that Heidegger is always apt to use the word “seeing” as a formal indication of whatever mode of thinking that answers to the matter in question, his dismissal of the “concern with ‘science’ and ‘research’” could also be read to include the Husserlian ideal of intuitive givenness as the paradigm of phenomenological seeing. Apart from the fact that Heidegger repeatedly – and perhaps even on this occasion – presents his own later thinking as an overcoming of intuition-based phenomenology, the decisive systematic reason for dismissing Crowell’s first claim is that Heidegger’s late conception of phenomenality cancels out the principal possibility that a transhistorical givenness could ever function as the ground of our understanding. If this would in fact turn out to be possible his basic analysis of the radical historicity of being and thinking would collapse, and the notion of historicity would have to be rethought and critically delimited anew.

Hence, the question arises: What does it mean for Heidegger’s late historical thinking to rigorously answer to its matter?

The Matter of Thinking

According to Heidegger, the heart of the phenomenological rigor expressed in Husserl’s maxim “To the matter themselves!” does not consist in intuitive givenness but in the ability of thinking to attend to its matter prior to and as a condition for any determination of its method: it is only by attending and answering to its matter that thinking can materialize as a qualified way of corresponding to this matter. Conversely every attempt to determine the method prior to the matter will necessarily entail a blind and dogmatic postulation of the matter. But how should the ability of thinking to attend to its matter be understood? If thinking is determined by the matter, then this also means that every reflection on the methodological mode of thinking – including the mode of Heidegger’s own late thinking – is bound to remain empty as long as it has not entered upon the matter. So what is the matter of thinking according to Heidegger?

The tradition of metaphysical philosophy which reaches its end and fulfillment in the modern era, Heidegger tells us, has always understood being as presence and its own task as the grounding of beings in an

exemplary presence, without, however, ever asking the question about this presence as such. Still, Heidegger argues, in order for something to be present for us as an intelligible phenomenon it has to be illuminated by a light, that is, by a preceding understanding of being. This light, in turn, has to transpire in an openness, a free space, in which it can shine forth and illuminate beings. Heidegger calls this openness *die Lichtung* – the clearing. In so doing, he stresses that the word “Lichtung” has nothing to do with light but goes back on the verb “lichten” which means “to make something light, free and open, e.g., to make the forest free of trees at one place.”⁹⁴⁹ The fact that this etymology is doubtful and forced only underwrites how anxious Heidegger is to distinguish between the historical being-world – the light – and the clearing which first makes such worlds, and, hence, all phenomenal presence and all phenomenological intuition, possible:

We call this openness, which grants a possible letting-shine and show, the clearing. [...] Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness, and let brightness play with darkness in it. But light never first creates the clearing. Rather, light presupposes it. However, the clearing, the open region, is not only free for brightness and darkness but also for resonance and echo, for sound and the diminishing of sound. The clearing is the open region for everything that is present and absent.⁹⁵⁰

This also means that metaphysics, which attempts to think and ground being as presence, has always already unwittingly presupposed the clearing as its own constitutive element: “All philosophical thinking that explicitly or inexplicitly follows the call ‘to the matter itself’ is in its movement and with its method already admitted to the free space of the clearing. But philosophy knows nothing of the clearing.”⁹⁵¹ However, Heidegger claims,

⁹⁴⁹ GA 14, p. 80: “etwas leicht, etwas frei und offen machen, z.B. den Wald an einer Stelle frei machen von Bäumen.”

⁹⁵⁰ GA 14, p. 80f.: “Wir nennen diese Offenheit, die ein mögliches Scheinenlassen und Zeigen gewährt, die Lichtung. [...] Das Licht kann nämlich in die Lichtung, in ihr Offenes, einfallen und in ihr die Helle mit dem Dunkel spielen lassen. Aber niemals schafft das Licht erst die Lichtung, sondern jenes, das Licht, setzt diese, die Lichtung, voraus. Indes ist die Lichtung, das Offene, nicht nur frei für Helle und Dunkel, sondern auch für den Hall und das Verhallen, für das Tönen und das Verklingen. Die Lichtung ist das Offene für alles An- und Abwesende.”

⁹⁵¹ GA 14, p. 82: “Alles Denken der Philosophie, das ausdrücklich oder nicht ausdrücklich dem Ruf ‘zur Sache selbst’ folgt, ist auf seinem Gang, mit seiner

the fact that the clearing has remained unthought is not just the result of a failure on the part of metaphysical philosophy; rather, it belongs to very essence of the clearing that it withdraws from every possible presence:

This remains concealed. Does it happen by chance? Does it happen only as a consequence of the carelessness of human thinking? Or does it happen because self-concealing, concealment, *lēthē*, belongs to *a-lētheia*, not as mere addition, not as shadow to light, but rather as the heart of *alētheia*? Moreover, does not a sheltering and preserving rule in this self-concealing of the clearing of presence, from which alone unconcealment can be granted, so that what is present can appear in its presence? If this were so, then the clearing would not be the mere clearing of presence, but the clearing of presence concealing itself, the clearing of a self-concealing sheltering.⁹⁵²

That is: as the openness which first conditions all phenomenal presence and understanding the clearing itself withdraws from the understanding that it makes possible. As the unthought origin of philosophy, Heidegger claims, the clearing is the matter of thinking – what remains to be thought at the end of philosophy.

As we have seen, Heidegger in addition to the word *Lichtung* – “clearing” – also all uses the word *Ereignis* – “event” or “event of appropriation” – to signify the matter of his later thinking. In the essay “Time and Being,” initiating the volume *On the Matter of Thinking*, Heidegger thus articulates the “event” as the happening which “gives” both being and time, arguing that the “event” cannot be explicated or determined as a higher or more basic dimension of phenomenal being but essentially withdraws from the totality of phenomenal presence whose

Methode, schon in das Freie der Lichtung eingelassen. Von der Lichtung jedoch weiß die Philosophie nichts.”

⁹⁵² GA 14, p. 88: “Dies bleibt verborgen. Geschieht es aus Zufall? Geschieht es nur infolge einer Nachlässigkeit des menschlichen Denkens? Oder geschieht es weil das Sichverbergen, die Verborgenheit, die *Λήθη* zur *Α-Λήθεια* gehört, nicht als bloße Zugabe, nicht so wie der Schatten zum Licht, sondern als das Herz der *Ἀλήθεια*? Und waltet in diesem Sichverbergen der Lichtung der Anwesenheit sogar noch ein Bergen und Verwahren, aus dem erst Unverborgenheit gewährt werden und so Anwesendes in seiner Anwesenheit erscheinen kann? Wenn es so stünde, dann wäre die Lichtung nicht bloße Lichtung von Anwesenheit, sondern Lichtung der sich verbergenden Anwesenheit, Lichtung des sich verbergendes Bergens.”

origin it is: “Insofar as the destiny (*Geschick*) of being lies in the extending of time, and time, together with being lies in the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*), appropriating (*Ereignen*) makes manifest its peculiar property, that the event of appropriation withdraws what is most fully its own from boundless unconcealment. Thought in terms of appropriating, this means: the event of appropriation expropriates (*enteignet*), in this sense, itself of itself. Expropriation belongs to the event of appropriation as such. By this expropriation, appropriation does not abandon itself – rather, it preserves what is its own.”⁹⁵³ In his later writings Heidegger to a large extent uses the words “clearing” and “event of appropriation” as parallel designations for that which opens up being. As concerns their internal relationship he says the following: “[Appropriation] dispenses the open space of the clearing into which what is present can enter for a while.”⁹⁵⁴ However, it is important not to interpret this statement to the effect that the “event of appropriation” gives the “clearing” as a substantial being-world in which beings can appear, since the “clearing” also names precisely the dimension which first makes such worlds possible. Perhaps one could say that the “event” and the “clearing” designate different aspect of the same matter: whereas the “clearing” designates the constellation of self-withdrawing openness which encircles and conditions every substantial historical world “event” names the originary happening or dynamics which gives rise to and determine such constellations.

But how do we then know about the clearing/event, provided that it cannot be grasped as a phenomenon of a possible intuitive experience? How does the happening of being address thinking as its matter?

In a significant turn of phrase Heidegger writes that the clearing constitutes what Goethe called an “originary phenomenon” (*Urpänomen*), whereafter he immediately adds: “We would have to say: an originary matter” (*Ur-Sache*).⁹⁵⁵ That is, as the originary phenomenon which

⁹⁵³ GA 14, p. 27f.: “Sofern nun Geschick des Seins im Reichen der Zeit und diese mit jenem im Ereignis beruhen, bekundet sich im Ereignen das Eigentümliche, daß es sein Eigenstes der schrankenlosen Entbergung entzieht. Vom Ereignen her gedacht, heißt dies: Es enteignet sich in dem genannten Sinne seiner selbst. Zur Ereignis als solchem gehört die Enteignis. Durch sie gibt das Ereignis sich nicht auf, sondern bewahrt sein Eigentum.”

⁹⁵⁴ GA 12, p. 247: “[Das Ereignen] er-gibt das Freie der Lichtung, in die Anwesendes anwähren.”

⁹⁵⁵ GA 14, p. 81.

constitutes the origin of phenomenality itself the clearing cannot be understood as a self-showing phenomenon anymore, but rather has the character of a “matter,” an “originary matter.” But what is a “matter”? Heidegger explicates the word “matter” by invoking its old juridical meaning as “case” or “controversy,” such that the matter of thinking denotes “that which concerns thinking, is still controversial (*strittig*) for thinking, and is the controversy (*der Streitfall*).”⁹⁵⁶ In “Time and Being,” he supplements another important characteristic as he writes that the matter denotes “what is decisively at stake in that something uncircumventable is concealed within it.”⁹⁵⁷ Gathering the aspects cited above into a provisional formal definition we could say: the matter of thinking addresses us as something controversial and strained which, at the same time hidden and uncircumventable, lies at the origin of our historical understanding.

Still, should Heidegger’s thought of the clearing not just amount to a speculative postulation of a universal abyss at the basis of all presence and intelligibility, the clearing must somehow concretely announce itself to thinking in its controversiality. To see how this happens, it is crucial to recall Heidegger’s basic view of the radical historicity of thought: “every attempt to gain insight into the supposed task of thinking finds itself moved to review the whole history of philosophy.”⁹⁵⁸ That is, the history we inhabit harbors and delimits our possibilities of understanding. Hence, the metaphysical understanding of being as presence is not just a series of philosophical opinions but an articulation of the way in which being itself is still given to us.⁹⁵⁹ Moreover, to the extent that there are more originary possibilities of thinking the openness of being, these possibilities must always already be there as the latent but unthought possibilities of the history of metaphysics. The matter of thinking thus has the character of “something [...] that was already said a long time ago, precisely at the beginning of philosophy and for that beginning, but has not been

⁹⁵⁶ GA 14, p. 75: “dasjenige [...] was das Denken angeht, was für das Denken noch strittig, der Streitfall ist.” Cf. also GA 14, pp. 46f.; GA 11, p. 53.

⁹⁵⁷ GA 14, p. 8: “solches [...] worum es sich in einem maßgebenden Sinne handelt, sofern sich darin etwas Unübergebares verbirgt.”

⁹⁵⁸ GA 14, p. 74: “jeder Versuch, einen Einblick in die vermutete Aufgabe des Denkens zu gewinnen, sieht sich auf den Rückblick in das Ganze Geschichte der Philosophie angewiesen.” Cf. also GA 14, p. 10f.; GA 11, p. 50.

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. GA 16, p. 626.

explicitly thought.”⁹⁶⁰ Hence, the clearing cannot be postulated as the universal abyssal ground of phenomenality, but, in so far as it gives itself concretely, it gives itself as the specific finite origin of our finite history. In his well-known 1957 paper, “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics”⁹⁶¹ Heidegger offers a penetrating formulation of this logic:

For us, the criterion for the conversation with historical tradition is the same [as for Hegel], insofar as it is a question of entering into the force of earlier thinking. We, however, do not seek the force in what has already been thought: we seek it in something that has not been thought, and from which what has been thought receives its essential space. But only what has already been thought, prepares what has not yet been thought, which enters ever anew into its abundance. The standard of what has not been thought does not lead to the inclusion of previous thought into a still higher development and systematization that surpass it. Rather, the standard demands that traditional thinking be set free into its essential past which is still preserved. This essential past prevails throughout the tradition in an originary way, is always in being in advance of it, and yet is never expressly thought in its own right and as the originary.⁹⁶²

We see: the matter of thinking – the clearing – is not accessible as a “still higher development and systematization” which supersedes and embraces

⁹⁶⁰ GA 14, p. 75: “etwas [...] was längst und gerade am Beginn der Philosophie und für diesen schon gesagt, jedoch nicht eigens gedacht ist.”

⁹⁶¹ “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in GA 11.

⁹⁶² GA 11, p. 57f.: “Für uns ist die Maßgabe für das Gespräch mit der geschichtlichen Überlieferung dieselbe, insofern es gilt, in die Kraft des früheren Denkens einzugehen. Allein wir suchen die Kraft nicht im schon Gedachten, sondern in einem Ungedachten, von dem her das Gedachte seinen Wesensraum empfängt. Aber das schon Gedachte erst bereitet das noch Ungedachte, das immer neu in seinen Überfluß einkehrt. Die Maßgabe des Ungedachten führt nicht zum Einbezug des vormals Gedachten in eine immer höhere und es überholende Entwicklung und Systematik, sondern sie verlangt die Freilassung des überlieferten Denkens in sein noch aufgespartes Gewesenes. Dies durchwaltet anfänglich die Überlieferung, west ihr stets voraus, ohne doch eigens und als das Anfangende gedacht zu sein.” In the essay “The Way to Language” Heidegger provides a similar formulation of the necessity of thinking the *Ereignis* on the basis of the historical saying as the happening which this saying itself refers to: “The event of appropriation, espied in the showing of the saying [...] can only be experienced in the showing of the saying as the granting event” (*Das Ereignis, im Zeigen der Sage erblickt, läßt sich [...] nur im Zeigen der Sage als das Gewährende erfahren*) (GA 12, p. 247). Cf. also GA 7, pp. 184f.

the history of metaphysics; rather “what has already been thought, prepares what has not yet been thought, which enters ever anew into its abundance.” That is to say: the clearing grows and is only accessible out of the metaphysical understanding of being in which we always already live, namely as the dimension which metaphysics itself de facto unwittingly presupposes and leans upon in order to establish itself in the first place.

To specify the sense of this logic, we need to recall that Heidegger from the middle of the 1930s developed his basic analysis of the dynamics of the happening of being as a strife between the world and the earth. According to this analysis, our historical being-world arises as the result of a receptive-creative gathering of the world in the artwork which takes place on the basis of the still undetermined possibilities of history and the still dumb materiality of the earth. Now he draws the consequences of this analysis as concerns the phenomenal character of the clearing itself. Seeing that the “controversiality” of the matter of thinking refers to the “controversy” of the happening of being it becomes possible to grasp the way in which the clearing concerns us: if our historical understanding of being is essentially constituted by a strained gathering of a unified being-world on the basis of an undetermined multitude of historical possibilities and a self-secluding element of materiality and sensuousness, then the clearing is bound to announce itself precisely as the controversiality of our received historical understanding: its groundlessness, finitude and lack of systematic closure. The basic quasi-conceptual relations of our world will always remain strained and underdetermined since they essentially refer to the exceeding dimensions of history and materiality which simultaneously constitute and withdraw from the world.

The Way of Thinking

According to Heidegger, metaphysics reacts to the groundlessness and finitude of historical being by forgetting its self-withdrawing origin and setting itself the task of grounding it in an absolute presence. By contrast, he characterizes the task of thinking as a “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) from metaphysics into the “region, initially indicated with the name of the

clearing, wherein we human beings always already sojourn.”⁹⁶³ Hence, the task of thinking should not be conceived as an effort to continue or surpass the metaphysical project by establishing the clearing as the abysmal ground of every metaphysical ground but rather as the challenge to let go of this impulse and instead try to let being be as the finite destiny that it is by articulating its origin in the clearing.

So how does thinking go about to think its matter? Formally, the way of historical thinking could be characterized as follows:

Since thinking, unlike poetry, is not creatively founding in character it is fundamentally referred to the historical possibilities harbored by our history and consequently takes the form of an intra-historical reflection. As such, thinking receives its ultimate guideline from the concrete givenness of the clearing as the controversiality characterizing our factual historical understanding. Guided by this matter, thinking then transpires as a tracing of our received metaphysical understanding of being back to its basic supporting conceptual elements, whereby it attempts to exhibit the groundlessness and tension of these elements as a testimony of their origin in the clearing - the free gathering of the multitude of historical possibilities into the finite unity that it is.

At the end of the day, Heidegger's conception of the task of thinking implies that thinking itself takes on a finite and interminable character. At the very end of the essay “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” Heidegger again takes up the question of how the matter of thought is to be made accessible to thinking:

Does the matter for thinking require a manner of thinking whose basic feature is neither dialectic nor intuition? Regarding this, only the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking can prepare the answer. But what if the answer to this question of thinking were again only another question? And what if this issue, instead of pointing to an endless progression, indicated the finitude of thinking that lies in its matter?⁹⁶⁴

⁹⁶³ GA 16, p. 632: “in den mit dem Namen Lichtung erst angezeigten Bereich, darin wir Menschen uns ständig schon aufhalten.” Cf. also, e.g., GA 9, pp. 343, 352; GA 11, pp. 41f.

⁹⁶⁴ GA 16, p. 633: “Verlangt die Sache des Denkens eine Weise des Denkens, deren Grundzug weder die Dialektik noch die Intuition ist? Darüber kann nur die Frage

How should this be understood?

Since the clearing designates the openness out of which historical being arises and is only accessible as the concrete controversiality marking our factual understanding there is no principle possibility of investigating and determining once and for all the universal structure of the clearing as such. This, however, means that the task of thinking cannot consist in providing an answer to the question what the clearing is, but rather consists in tracing the effects and logic of the clearing in every new particular historical situation. Or, as Heidegger puts it in “Time and Being”: “Answering means the saying that corresponds to the matter that is to be thought here, the event of appropriation.”⁹⁶⁵ In short: as a result of the basic polemical logic of the happening which opens up being thinking must essentially take the form of a finite historical questioning of the matter of thinking, whose specific ways are always determined by the specific historical situation in which we find ourselves, and which, in the end, is always doomed to convert into a new questioning. Over and above the concrete work of tracing the logic of the clearing/event in our historical understanding, Heidegger believes that thinking will have to take recourse to silence⁹⁶⁶ and tautologies,⁹⁶⁷ i.e., to ways of expression whose central function it is to negatively delimit and let be the happening of being in its ungroundability.

Against the metaphysical effort to ground historical being in an absolute presence it is thus the infinite finite task of thinking to free up the dynamics of the openness of being in every new historical situation in order thereby to prepare the possibility of allowing finite being to arise and prevail as a unified and binding destiny.

So far I have concentrated on Heidegger’s explicit conception of the matter and method of thinking, whereby it has been become clear that at least on this level he gives up phenomenology in favor of a radically historical thinking. But what about his concrete enactment of this

nach der Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens die Antwort vorbereiten. Wie aber, wenn die Antwort auf diese Frage des Denkens wieder nur eine andere Frage wäre? Und wenn dieser Sachverhalt, statt in einen endlosen Fortgang zu weisen, die in seiner Sache beruhende Endlichkeit des Denkens anzeigte?”

⁹⁶⁵ GA 14, p. 25: “Antworten meint das Sagen, das dem hier zu denkenden Sachverhalt, d.h. dem Ereignis entspricht.”

⁹⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., GA 12, p. 255.

⁹⁶⁷ Cf., e.g., GA 15, p. 399.

conception? To what extent do his texts realize his idea of the mode and rigor of historical thinking? Moreover, could it be that Heidegger in his concrete thinking despite his explicit program – as Crowell's second claim goes – makes use of phenomenological seeing and description?

I think Heidegger's articulation of the *modus operandi* of his later thinking to a great extent constitutes an apt description of what actually happens in his texts. As mentioned earlier, Heidegger's effort to open up to basic question of his late thinking in the 1930s and 1940s was still marked by unclarity concerning the methodological mode of this thinking. Hence, he alternated between different strategies: from the quasi-poetical saying of *Contributions* and *Mindfulness*, over the more traditional phenomenological analyses found, e.g., "The Origin of the Work of Art," to the massive historical explications recurring in his lecture courses on Nietzsche and Greek philosophy. However, notwithstanding the methodological dissonance of these years, Heidegger already at this time very much makes use of the kind of historico-dialectical inference which will reach its most consequent expression in the following decades. In the beginning of the 1950s – starting with the lecture series "Insight Into that Which Is" from 1949 – Heidegger finds what one could call the paradigmatic form of his later thinking. From now on, he largely gives up the above strategies in favor of shorter texts which in a simpler and more lapidary style draw up finite paths of thinking through limited historico-textual landscapes.

Somewhat schematically we could say that Heidegger's later texts in different ways tend to enact the following three basic steps: First, depending on the guiding question Heidegger sets out from a given textual or conceptual constellation which – he will argue – is at the heart of our metaphysical horizon of understanding, e.g., a philosopher or a poet (Nietzsche, Hegel, Hölderlin, Trakl, Kant, Husserl, Aristotle, Heraclitus), some word or concept (being, time, truth, identity, science, metaphysics, *logos*), or some other aspect of the contemporary situation (the modern technical world, our dwelling and relationship to things, the specialization of the sciences, the flight of the gods). Second, on the basis of the chosen constellation he proceeds by explicating the basic ontological elements supporting our received understanding of the question under consideration, whereby these elements are shown to be variations of the originary metaphysical understanding of being as presence determining the

history of metaphysics. The third step consists in demonstrating that our basic understanding of being cannot account for itself but by itself refers back to the clearing/event as its unthought origin.

Here I will not go further into the first two steps of Heidegger's strategy: the description of the problem-constellation and the diagnosis of its basic ontological stratum of understanding. Let me only remark that even though these steps certainly contain a central and irreducible element of historical interpretation they are already guided by some understanding of the questions of concern and some understanding of the ontologico-existential relations of meaning which allow us to grasp something as the ground or motivation of a certain conception – in such a way that this guiding understanding of the matters themselves already challenges the idea of radical historicity by operating in the tension between historical prejudice and truth. However, the question of the rigor of historical thought and its ability to reach beyond the prejudices of metaphysics becomes acute in the third step, whose aim it is to positively demonstrate the origin of our understanding of being in the clearing/event.

Heidegger's positive articulation of the clearing/event basically has the character of a kind a historico-dialectical inference. As a necessary preparation for the inference, Heidegger always explicates our received metaphysical understanding of being laying bare its basic elements: the basic conceptions and meanings on which it rests without being able to account for their ground or origin. This diagnosis of the inability of metaphysics to account for the basic elements of its understanding – whereby these elements are manifested in their essential ungroundedness and underdetermination – by itself opens the question of the origin of this understanding. Yet what step leads from the documented limits of metaphysics to its supposed origin? Since the step to the origin cannot have the form of getting access to a determinable dimension beyond our historical understanding of being – this historical understanding in its ungroundedness and underdetermination being all we got – the step can only be enacted by inferring the clearing/event as a negative figure of thought supposedly articulating and circumscribing the groundlessness and tension of our received concepts as something ultimate.

Moreover, to guide his articulations of the clearing/event as the origin of history Heidegger consistently draws on etymological inferences. By tracing the historical roots of our common metaphysical concepts back to

earlier usages and older languages, Heidegger again and again attempts to open up originary meanings which our history allegedly already harbors in an unclear way and which have been neglected and forgotten due to the triumph of metaphysics. For example, he claims to demonstrate the roots of the word "Lichtung" in the old German verb "lichten," which is said to mean "to make something light, free and open";⁹⁶⁸ the roots of the word "Ereignis" in the verb "eräugen," which is said to mean "to catch sight of, to call something to oneself through looking";⁹⁶⁹ the roots of the word "Sache" in an older usage in which it still meant "legal case" or "controversy";⁹⁷⁰ the roots of the word *logos* in the verb *legein*, which is said to mean "gather."⁹⁷¹ Such an employment of etymologies in philosophical reasoning quite naturally gives rise to the critical question: how can references to etymology ever give any grounds for our systematic understanding of the matter in question? Heidegger, being well aware of this objection, already common in his lifetime, responds as follows:

It might look as though the essence of the thing as we are now thinking of it had been, so to speak, thoughtlessly poked out of the accidentally encountered meaning of the Old High German *thing*. The suspicion arises that the understanding of the essence of the thing that we are here trying to reach may be based on the accidents of an etymological game. The notion becomes established and is already current that, instead of giving thought to essential matters, we are here merely using the dictionary. The opposite is true. [...] The truth is [...] not that our thinking feeds on etymology, but rather that etymology is referred to the task of thinking in advance the essential issues involved in what the words, as words, denote in an undeveloped way.⁹⁷²

⁹⁶⁸ GA 14, p. 80: "etwas leicht, etwas frei und offen machen."

⁹⁶⁹ GA 11, p. 45: "erblicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen."

⁹⁷⁰ GA 14, pp. 46, 75.

⁹⁷¹ GA 40, p. 236.

⁹⁷² GA 7, p. 176f.: "Es könnte so aussehen, als werde das jetzt gedachte Wesen des Dinges aus der zufällig aufgegriffenen Wortbedeutung des althochdeutschen Namens *thing* gleichsam herausgedröselt. Der Verdacht regt sich, die jetzt versuchte Erfahrung des Wesens des Dinges sei auf die Willkür einer etymologischen Spielerei gegründet. Die Meinung verfestigt sich und wird schon landläufig, hier werde, statt die Wesensverhalte zu bedenken, lediglich das Wörterbuch benutzt. Doch das Gegenteil solcher Befürchtungen ist der Fall. [...] In Wahrheit steht es [...] nicht so, daß unser Denken von der Etymologie lebt, sondern daß die Etymologie darauf verwiesen

Hence, what Heidegger here claims is that his tracing of etymologies in no way implies that he would try to ground his articulation of the matters themselves on some information about the earlier meanings of our words available in dictionaries and etymological studies. On the contrary, etymology itself already presupposes an understanding of the matters that the words signify; only thus can the old words and usages appear and be determined as embryonic expressions of these matters.

However, even though Heidegger insists on the priority of thinking in relation to etymology his abundant use of etymologies is not a superficial or accidental feature of his thinking but is deeply motivated and prompted by his notion of the historicity of thought. Given the claim that the thinking of the openness of being is essentially referred to the meaning-possibilities harbored by our history, the etymological inferences become important as they seem to confirm that the clearing/event which Heidegger tries to articulate is *de facto* always already there in our history as a possibility which metaphysics has intimated and made use of without thinking it as such. But this is not all. Over and above the explication of the basic concepts of metaphysics in their groundlessness and tension, Heidegger's historical thinking strictly speaking has no positive guidance except the kind of unthought meaning-possibilities that old words can be taken to bear witness to. As a result, Heidegger's late thinking essentially transpires in a zigzag movement: on the one hand, an exposition of the basic groundlessness and tension of metaphysics which negatively opens up the abyss at the root of all presence; on the other hand, a guiding-confirming etymological tracing which allows for a more substantive articulation of the clearing/event as the unthought origin of metaphysics. In addition to etymologies Heidegger also makes use of poetry (e.g. Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl) and earlier thinkers (e.g. the early pre-Socratic thinkers, Aristotle, Goethe) to provide guidance for his thinking. The logic is the same as in the case of etymology: Heidegger employs a historical poem or saying as an embryonic indication which lets him confirm and spell out the possibility of meaning which his explication of metaphysics negatively opens up.

We can now see clearly that Heidegger in his later thinking not only abandons phenomenology in principle but also for the most part

bleibt, zuvor die Wesensverhalte dessen zu bedenken, was die Wörter als Worte unentfaltet nennen."

abandons it in practice in favor of another kind of historical thinking. Nevertheless, I think Crowell's second weaker thesis is quite true, namely that Heidegger in his concrete thinking does not altogether ditch phenomenology even though it stands in a tense and conflicting relation to his program and primary methodological practice.

Ultimately, I believe that Heidegger's inability to manage without phenomenology depends on a systematic necessity – on the inability of his historical thinking to realize its claims and on what I consider to be the fact that phenomenological description constitutes the decisive methodological moment determining the possible clarificatory force and truth of all philosophical thinking.

As I will argue in the last chapter of this part, the basic problem of Heidegger's late historical thinking is that it is unable to account for a truth that would transcend historical prejudices and theoretical constructions. The sole thing that such a mode of thinking, if rigorously pursued, can achieve is a certain negative critique and beyond that nothing but dialectical-rhetorical force.

As concerns the critically-dialectically inferring moment in Heidegger's strategy it is certainly possible – as Heidegger in many cases has shown – to trace the basic concepts supporting our common philosophical self-understanding and expose the groundlessness and tension characterizing these concepts. It is also clear, I think, that the ostensibly constant inability of metaphysics to ground our understanding is an indication that there are principle reasons why this cannot be done. However, Heidegger's historical mode of thinking hinders him from providing a positive articulation of these reasons. As long as he is satisfied with exposing the inability of metaphysics to ground its basic concepts and advances the clearing/event as an articulation of this inability, the notion of clearing/event does not add anything to the negative critique that would shed light on the predicament and limits of metaphysics. In order to take the decisive step from an exposition of the *de facto* inability of metaphysics to ground our understanding to the claim that this inability has its roots in the principal groundlessness of historical being he would have to offer some kind of concrete description of what this groundlessness is all about. Yet Heidegger's historical thinking lacks the means to take this step: in so far as he hopes to establish the clearing/event as the origin of being on the basis of his critique of

metaphysics and with the aid of etymological inferences it is doomed to remain a historical-dialectical construction which does not really show anything at all. In so far, however, as he is able to give to his notion of clearing/event any concrete descriptive content it is because he, despite his intentions, in fact attempts some phenomenological descriptions of this dynamics. As concerns the etymological moment of Heidegger's historical thinking the only thing such etymological reasoning can strictly speaking add to his thinking of the clearing/event is rhetorical force. Even if it were possible to show – which it hardly is – that Western philosophy has always presupposed something like the clearing/event as its unthought ground, this would only give us reason to reflect on the meaning and truth of this notion. At best, then, Heidegger's work of etymological tracing is able precisely to uncover forgotten meanings which can serve as guidelines and indicate new possibilities for our thinking of the matters in question – yet it can never by itself contribute to the truth of this thinking.

So what about phenomenology?

Of course we look in vain in Heidegger's later texts for the ambition to ground and clarify every central concept of his thinking through phenomenological analyses, which still characterized *Being and Time*. Still, a large portion of the texts written by Heidegger after 1935 involve greater or smaller bits of phenomenological description. In the 1930s and 1940s, when Heidegger's thinking is still in search of its new form, the phenomenological element is stronger. In several lecture courses Heidegger has recourse to phenomenological descriptions which do not base themselves on historical explications but on concrete attempts to exhibit and explicate the experiences in question. His most ambitious labor of phenomenological description from this period is found in "The Origin of the Work of Art." Taken his starting point in the work of art as it meets us and works on us in our experience of it, and concretely explicating a Greek temple as a paradigmatic artwork, he attempts to show how the artwork opens up being by realizing the strife between the world and the earth. As Heidegger after 1950 sharpens his historical mode of thought, the phenomenological element dwindles. Even so, his later texts also include phenomenological descriptions. For example, as we saw above, in the essays "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "The Thing" Heidegger offers concrete depictions of how the central dimensions of the

fourfold – sky and earth, gods and mortals – interact in and constitute concrete things such as a bridge or a jug.

However, even though Heidegger's later thinking entails an essential element of phenomenological description the role and status of phenomenology in this thinking is highly ambivalent. Given that his basic conception of the historicity of being and thought cancels out and cannot account for the possibility of phenomenology functioning as a ground of understanding he is bound to live in a certain denial of the phenomenological element of his thought. This means that he naturally tends to minimize the amount of phenomenological descriptions and also to cut them short and not let them develop freely and generously in the way that would be needed in order to shed light on the phenomena in question. Moreover, Heidegger's governing historical self-understanding also brings with it that his later phenomenological accounts are often characterized by a peculiar deficit of autonomous seeing and description.

The problem comes especially clearly to the fore in those of Heidegger later texts in which the phenomenological description is guided and bound by an explication of a poem. For example in the essay "Language" from 1950 Heidegger interprets the poem "Winter Evening" (*Winterabend*) by Georg Trakl, the last stanza of which reads:

Wanderer tritt still herein;
Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle.
Da erglänzt in reiner Helle
Auf dem Tische Brot und Wein.

In stillness, wanderer, step in;
Pain has petrified the threshold.
There lie, in pure radiance shining,
Upon the table bread and wine.⁹⁷³

On the backdrop of the poem in its entirety and also drawing on other textual sources Heidegger explicates this as follows:

Where does the pure radiance shine? On the threshold, in the discharge (*Austrag*) of pain. The rift of the dif-ference (*der Riß des*

⁹⁷³ Trakl 1977, p. 58. My translation is based on the one provided by Jim Doss and Werner Schmitt in Trakl 2010, p. 111.

Unter-Schiedes) makes the pure radiance shine. Its luminous joining decides the brightening of the world into its own. The rift of the difference expropriates the world into its worlding, which grants things. Through the brightening of the world in its golden luster, bread and wine at the same time attain to their own shining. The nobly named things are lustrous in the simplicity of their thinging. Bread and wine are the fruits of sky and earth, gift from the divinities to mortals. Bread and wine gather these four to themselves from the imply unity of their fourfoldness.⁹⁷⁴

We can see how Heidegger here goes along with and at the same time expands and elaborates the poem's concrete depiction, so that he projects the bread and wine of the poem as gathering points of the fourfold. This quasi-concrete projection of a nexus of meaning-relations, however, is all that Heidegger offers as he refrains from going one step further and offer some autonomous description of how this projection actually illuminates the central aspects of a meal with bread and wine.

This problematic tendency is in fact already present in Heidegger's description of the strife between the world and the earth in "The Origin of the Work of Art" and above all characterizes his later accounts of the fourfold – even though his thinking here does not have the form of an interpretation of poems. As we know, Heidegger insists that our understanding of the structures and dynamics of being cannot be grounded in a direct seeing explication of these structures but has to base itself on meanings harbored by our history. Now to the extent that Heidegger is able to ascribe to phenomenological description some function within the task of thinking such description must receive its entire force from its ability to articulate what is already there as meaning-possibilities in our heritage. Hence, the decisive work of a phenomenological description does not consist in clarifying our concepts by anchoring them in the concrete experiences and situations of which

⁹⁷⁴ GA 12, p. 25: "Wo erglänzt die reine Helle? Auf der Schwelle, im Austrag des Schmerzes. Der Riß des Unter-Schiedes läßt die reine Helle glänzen. Sein lichtendes Fügen ent-scheidet die Auf-Heiterung von Welt in ihr Eigenes. Der Riß des Unter-Schiedes enteignet Welt in ihr Welten, das die Dinge gönnt. Durch die Auf-Heiterung von Welt in ihren goldenen Glanz kommen zugleich Brot und Wein zu ihrem Erglänzen. Die großgenannten Dinge leuchten in der Einfalt ihres Dingens. Brot und Wein sind die Früchte des Himmels und der Erde, von den Göttlichen den Sterblichen geschenkt. Brot und Wein versammeln bei sich diese Vier aus dem Einfachen der Vierung."

they are concepts but in projecting nexuses of meaning which resonate with and bring to expression historical possibilities already there but not yet thought. The concrete result of this is, however, that Heidegger is tempted to be satisfied with descriptions that are so lacking in autonomous descriptive work that they risk remaining at the level of rudimentary outlines or constructions with little clarificatory force.

In sum, we can say that Heidegger's late thinking lives in a deep and irresolvable ambivalence between the ambition to realize a radically historical thinking and the impossibility of not letting phenomenology in as an essential element of this thinking. In *Being and Time* the ambivalence runs straight between Heidegger's conception of the historical structure of understanding and the deconstructive program on the one hand, and his concrete phenomenological analyses on the other. Now the ambivalence is played out within the framework of his conscious attempt to overcome it. The impossibility of this effort, however, makes it even more violent. Whereas the strict historical thinking in the fore of Heidegger's late production lacks the potential of accounting for the central theme of this thought, i.e., for the openness of being, the phenomenological work de facto performed in a denied and ambivalent manner still gives his thinking whatever clarificatory power it possesses.

3.6 Critical Delimitations

As we have seen, Heidegger's later thinking can be described as one long attempt to draw the consequences of his analysis of the historical as-structure of phenomenal understanding first developed in the 1920s, the systematic heart of which consists in the ontological difference: the notion that our understanding of the historical contexts of meaning in which we live determines our possibilities to experience particular entities as meaningful, whereby our direct experience or reflection cannot serve as a basic measure of understanding anymore. Whereas in *Being and Time* Heidegger was still unable to account for how being can be given as an ultimate historical context of meaning beyond our common prejudices, his later thinking is guided precisely by the aim to investigate the clearing/event that opens up historical being as a binding historical world that we are called to take over as a groundless destiny. In this, thinking

itself has to renounce phenomenology as its *modus operandi* and instead take the form of a historical reflection on the unthought possibilities of meaning always already harbored by our history.

But how does this effort succeed?

So far – in the first and second part of the thesis – I have concentrated my main critical interest on laying bare the deep ambivalences in Heidegger's earlier thought issuing from his central attempt to work out the historicity of phenomenal understanding while at the same time falling back on the phenomenological method of intuitive description in his own concrete investigations. Now I will turn to critically interrogating the systematic clarificatory force of Heidegger's later effort to articulate the radical historicity of being and thinking.

My critique will focus on two of the basic ambitions of Heidegger's later thinking of the clearing/event of being: first, on his attempt to compensate for the rejected question of truth by accounting for how our historical world can arise and address us as a binding destiny; second, on his attempt to account for the bindingness of the world as the ultimate source of ethical-existential significance, which allows us to experience particular beings as significant and important in the first place.

Both these aspects of Heidegger's thinking have been subject to critical challenge before. Ernst Tugendhat and, more recently, Cristina Lafont have criticized Heidegger's rejection of the question of truth concerning our historical world, both arguing that this rejection is unjustified and leads Heidegger to advocate a dogmatic acceptance of our factual world. However, even though I believe Tugendhat's and Lafont's critique is ultimately on target it seems to me that both of them underestimate the extent to which Heidegger, although rejecting the question of truth, nevertheless remains acutely concerned with the problem of how to distinguish between prejudiced and primordial understanding of historical being. As a result, they fail to diagnose how this problem forces Heidegger to hark back – in an extremely ambivalent way – to an intuition-based phenomenological method in the concrete investigations of *Being and Time*. Neither do they offer any extended critical examination of Heidegger's later attempt to compensate for the question of truth by accounting for how a historical world can arise and address us as a binding destiny. By contrast, Emmanuel Levinas has leveled severe critique at Heidegger's idea of our historical world as the source of

significance of all beings, insisting that Heidegger's ontological difference reduces and covers up our primary ethical relation to the other human being, who encounters us and claims us as such irrespective of the historical world we happen to live in. Still, although I also agree with the basic thrust of Levinas's critique he, too, refrains from offering a detailed analysis of Heidegger's late account of the bindingness of the world. Whereas I have already analyzed Tugendhat's critique in the second part of the thesis, I will discuss Lafont and Levinas in some detail in the epilogue.

In my critique, I will concentrate on Heidegger's ability to compensate/account for the question of truth and for the question of ethical-existential significance, leaving aside the other questions and themes that he is grappling with. Although severe, the purpose of my critique is not just negative in the sense of demonstrating deficiencies and inconsistencies in Heidegger's thought but essentially positive. In critically probing what Heidegger wants to but cannot account for these questions are opened up anew for us in the light of the challenge that his thinking poses to so many of our traditional ways of handling them. Moreover, by exposing the problems and unclarity of Heidegger's highest philosophical ambitions it becomes possible to clarify and appropriate the genuine sense and insights of his thinking within their proper limits. The work of critically delimiting the truths and insights of Heidegger's manifold paths of thinking still to a large extent lies ahead of us and here I can do no more than hint at some of these tasks.

In staking out the limits of Heidegger's late historical thinking, I already anticipate the epilogue of the thesis, in which I go on to question the ontological difference at the root of Heidegger's conception of the historicity of being, and provisionally outline a more positive vision of what I suggest is our openness towards beings as the source of truth and significance. Here is – as a backdrop for my critical delimitations – a rough outline of my positive account, which consists of two basic claims. First, I will suggest that our conceptual understanding, although always already guided by our factual concepts, is essentially open towards the particular matters that we experience, and that these matters constitute the source of truth of our understanding. Hence, I will suggest that our historical concepts and meanings do not determine our experience; rather, they constitute our provisional grasp of the matters and situations we

experience, whereby their truth/untruth consists in their ability to open up and illuminate or cover up and distort these matters. Second, I will suggest – following Levinas – that we, prior to and irrespectively of every historical context of meaning, encounter the other human being – and, in a way both similar and different, the animal – as someone who matters to me and addresses me personally, and whom I can either relate to in an open and loving way or whom I can turn away from and grasp solely in terms of the social role or meaning I ascribe to her. This primary access to the other as someone to love and care for is, I will argue, nothing but our basic source of moral and existential significance. As such, it is also the origin of whatever possible moral relevance our historical concepts and values can have in our lives.

In what follows I will basically rely on my previous explication of Heidegger's later thinking of phenomenality, and refrain from detailed commentaries on his texts. I will begin by interrogating the ability of Heidegger's conception of the clearing/event of being to account for the bindingness of the world. After that, I turn to examining the limits and possibilities of his late historical mode of thinking.

The Bindingness of Historical Being

Heidegger's late thinking of the clearing/event of being is intended to show how a historical world can open up and prevail as a groundless binding destiny.

I have already explicated Heidegger's conception of the dynamics that opens up a world in some detail. It comprises two main moments: First, thinking articulates the clearing/event as the self-withdrawing happening which grants historical being as a groundless and finite destiny. Second, the work of art – poetry above all – opens up a concrete world by co-realizing the strife between the world and the earth, i.e., by gathering the world as a finite paradigmatic totality of meaning on the basis of the still undetermined meanings bestowed by our history and on the basis of the dark materiality and sensuousness of the earth. What is it in this account that is supposed to grant to the world its status of something ultimate and binding that we are to receive and accept?

To begin with, it is crucial to take note of the basic role that Heidegger's conception of the clearing/event as a groundless happening

plays in his account of what it means to take over a world. To the extent that historical being is always granted as a groundless and finite constellation of meaning, we are confronted with the necessity of having to take over a certain finite world as a destiny without final grounds or reasons. If, however – as I will argue – our historical worlds of meaning do not determine but are in fact open towards the particular beings and situations that they grasp, then these worlds and their conceptual elements are strictly speaking not groundless at all but essentially part of our struggle with the truth: to open up to and take responsibility for or turn a blind eye to what we see – or could see, if we wanted to. Then, moreover, we are strictly speaking never faced with the necessity of accepting a world as a groundless and finite destiny. On the contrary, once we take heed of the dynamics of truth at the heart of our understanding, the very notion that we need to take over a certain constellation of meaning as a groundless destiny emerges as serving basically the same legitimizing existential function as the old metaphysical project of grounding: it allows us to close our eyes and opt for a certain framework of meaning with the legitimizing and reassuring argument – ground – that such decisions are necessary and cannot in principle be grounded. To be sure, there are situations in which we are faced with the problem of choosing a strategy of action on the basis of ideas whose truth is uncertain, and which may still prove false or misleading, but such an ungrounded choice does not cancel out but rather presupposes the dynamics of truth. The challenge of such a choice consists precisely in the need to act upon a set of ideas without being able to ground them while knowing all too well that they are not groundless in themselves but will eventually show up to be more or less true or false.

Still, although Heidegger believes that the world ultimately has to be understood and taken over as groundless this does not mean that he would conceive of historical worlds as arbitrary possibilities for us to choose between according to who knows what preference. Indeed his description of the strife between the world and the earth in “The Origin of the Work of Art” constitutes precisely an attempt to show what it is that allows a world to assert itself as a strong and binding destiny. However, apart from his concrete description of the strife Heidegger does not offer any additional explanation of how the different moments of the strife are supposed to grant to the world its binding power. The only way

to explicate Heidegger's conception is thus to extract those moments of the dynamics of being which could be thought to perform this function.

Here are some candidates for such moments:

1. In so far as the work of art receives and gathers meanings harbored by our history in a yet undetermined manner, this could be taken to imply that these meanings are able to address us as familiar and age-old. Though Heidegger believes that a new world always arises in a revolutionary tension to the old it nevertheless draws on and gives expression to meanings which are always already there in our heritage.

2. In so far as the work of art gathers and articulates meanings which constitute an unthought and conditioning dimension of our previous understanding, this could be taken to imply that these meanings are able to address us as cognitively-dialectically superior or even uncircumventable in relation to the old.

3. To the extent that the work of art grounds the world on the earth (remembering that this does not upset the ontological difference, that the world does not need to measure up to the earth as an autonomous source of meaning, but, rather, that the historically received meanings of the world only need to be specified and fleshed out in accordance with the local earth), this could be taken to entail that the world is able to address us as rooted in and expressive of our local material-sensuous milieu, to which we are more or less adapted and emotionally attuned.

4. To the extent that the artwork gathers and presents the meanings of the world in the form of concrete paradigmatic figures, this could be taken to strengthen the aesthetic-dramatic power of the world to impress and overawe us.

5. In so far as the work of art involves consecration and praising of our paradigmatic values as holy gods this could be taken to entail employing various mechanisms of collective pressure – e.g. putting the gods on pedestal in the social space, surrounding them with limits and taboos, singing their praise and condemning their denial – to invest the world with social import.

Now it seems that all the reasons I tried to extract from Heidegger's account in the end amount to different sorts of *rhetorical-persuasive force*: cognitive-dialectical force in so far as the meanings of the world appear not as true or false in relation to some independent beings or absolute standards but as in some sense cognitively superior in relation to other

meanings; sentimental force in so far as they appear as historically familiar and expressive of our local natural milieu; aesthetic-dramatic force in so far as they address us as a striking and overpowering paradigm of meaning; collective force in so far as they address us as ideals regulating the honor and shame of the community.

Our questions are: Can Heidegger's conception of the rhetorical-persuasive force of historical worlds compensate for the question of the truth, and uphold the crucial distinction between prejudice and primordial understanding? Moreover, can it account for a source of ethical-existential significance distinct from mere power and prejudice, and constituting a motive beyond our egoistic-collectivist desires? Let us consider these two questions successively.

The question of truth. As we have seen, Heidegger from the outset rejects the possibility of conceiving of our understanding of the world as true or false. Since the world constitutes the historical network of meaning which determines what we can grasp as meaningful phenomena it cannot in itself be true by corresponding to or false by misrepresenting beings accessible independently of this world. But is this move viable? Is it possible to replace the notion of truth with a notion of the rhetorical-persuasive force of our concepts without losing the capacity to account for essential elements of our experience and understanding? Can Heidegger's account provide an alternative or better description of what I have called the truth or falsity of our understanding?

It does not seem so.

The basic problem of Heidegger's conception of the rhetorical-persuasive force of the world – and the differences in such force – is, I think, that it cannot account for or replace the difference between the truth and falsity of our conceptual understanding. There seems to be nothing that prevents a historical constellation of meaning which fulfills all the criteria of rhetorical-persuasive force laid down by Heidegger from nevertheless containing essential elements of untruth – tendencies to omit, cover up and distort different aspects of our de facto experience – just as there seems to be nothing that prevents a conceptual setup that fails to satisfy these criteria from being able to open up and illuminate the matters we experience.

Consider, as an example, a culture that since time immemorial has upheld a rigorous classification of people into separate groups or classes characterized by different tasks, different social status and different codes of honor – all this, of course, in accordance with the will of the gods. Now there seems to be no principal hindrance for this world to fulfill all Heidegger's criteria for a strong historical world nor for freeing it of its metaphysical-theological self-interpretation and affirming it as a groundless destiny: it could articulate comparatively convincing meaning-possibilities harbored by the history of the culture in question, it could be rooted in and expressive of the local earth, it could – through art and other founding practices – be manifest in a strong paradigmatic shape. But, even so, it could be false and distortive in many respects: its classification of people into groups could be shown to cover up and distort essential aspects of what we de facto experience in our relations to others, for example that the other person primarily addresses me not on account of her social role or group but in herself – as a “you” whom I can either relate to in an open and caring way or close myself to and deal with only in terms of her social role and attributes; moreover, the origins of this classification could be shown to lie not in the gods or in the groundless happening of being but in the complex weave of existential motives (power, repression, utility, love, curiosity, hunger, etc.) and historical givens which tend to decide the shape of history. Indeed – as I will argue in the epilogue – it seems that all the historical meanings and concepts we employ to grasp human and natural realities beyond our factual concepts are centrally characterized by a dynamics of truth which cannot be reduced to a matter of rhetorical-persuasive power: regardless of their rhetorical-persuasive force, it belongs to these concepts that they can be more or less true or false, that is, more or less good – illuminating, opening, rich – or bad – obfuscating, distortive, poor – in helping us grasp the matters we experience.

However, would it not be possible to argue that Heidegger's conception leaves open the possibility in principle of a critical reflection on different conceptual alternatives on the basis of the concepts and meaning-possibilities at hand – a reflection which, although renouncing the idea that our concepts could be true or false in relation to some independent reality, would be able to account for differences in cognitive force and rationality that would transcend differences in pure rhetorical

force? The fact is that Heidegger himself never develops any notion of a historical reflection that would critically assess and compare the cognitive force of different substantial worlds and meanings. This, however, does not shut out the possibility that such a critical reflection could find a place within the framework of his thinking. Indeed, many attempts have been made to develop the idea of such a reflection by philosophers largely sharing the historicism of Heidegger, e.g., by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Charles Taylor and Alisdair MacIntyre.⁹⁷⁵

Although I cannot offer any ample treatment of this notion here, I briefly want to mention my reasons for thinking that no intraconceptual reflection can account for the dimension of truth characterizing our understanding. The idea at stake here is basically the idea that the historical conceptual possibilities at our disposal in themselves provide a basis for critically judging different conceptual constellations: concepts within our own tradition can be shown to be incoherent or unclear, or to contravene or have the character haphazard ad hoc-constructions in relation to more basic concepts within our historical understanding; regarding the possibility of critically assessing different historical frameworks of meaning - worlds, traditions - it almost always seems possible to find common conceptual ground on the basis of which a discussion can be enacted. Still, whatever forms such a critical reflection could exhibit it is hard to see that it could ever account or compensate for the question of the truth and untruth of concepts that belongs to our understanding of conceptual meaning. However strong or justified a constellation of meaning may appear in relation to our most basic concepts, or however basic a concept or meaning may be within our overall understanding - this does not make them true. The cognitive force or weakness of a concept issuing from its role within some conceptual context simply does not coincide with its being true or false in the irreducible sense of illuminating or distorting what we actually experience. Of course, concepts may seem self-evident and unquestionable to us on account of their normality, their historical dignity, their collective acceptedness, their role within a theoretical framework, their emotional and aesthetic vigor, and so on, but all these elements of rhetorical-persuasive force can be distinguished from the ability of our concepts to

⁹⁷⁵ Cf. Gadamer 1990; Taylor 1989; 1995b; MacIntyre 1977; 1985.

open up and organize our experience of the world. In fact, it is very hard to see how such historical reflection on the relative cognitive force of our concepts – which does not stop at negative critique – could strictly speaking be carried out at all without more or less covertly referring to the ability of the concepts in question to illuminate experiences that are not already totally determined by these concepts.

It seems that Heidegger's bypassing of the dynamics of truth and falsity makes it impossible for him to account for what it means to understand concepts and meanings in the first place. It is precisely the openness of our concepts towards that which they conceive that makes it possible for such concepts to be illuminating, clarifying, enabling or distortive, misleading, obstructive – whether we take these alternatives as reasons for appropriating or for rejecting them (it is of course not unusual that we make a concept our own precisely because it allows us to see what we want to see and disregard what we do not want to see). Not only does this openness form an integral moment of our understanding and appropriation of concepts within our own culture; it also lets us see how the encounter between different worlds and cultures always revolves around an irreducible dimension of shared experience. As soon as we recognize this, the very idea of our ultimate referredness to finite historical contexts of meaning, and of the possibility of radical conceptual gaps between different worlds and the necessity of finding common ground, loses its grip on us and emerges as a dogmatic construction. If our concepts would not offer themselves to us as possibilities to grasp or misinterpret matters that we experience irrespective of these concepts, would not our understanding of concepts be reduced to something like a skill in playing an autistic game with more or less determinate rules? A game which, to the extent that it determines truth in itself has nothing to do with truth, falsity, illusion, mistake, self-deception and insight? A *Glasperlenspiel*.

My critique of Heidegger's conception of the radical historicity of being and thinking should not cover up but rather enable us to see the true – yet limited – insights of this conception. Hence, as Heidegger's reflections have shown, there is no doubt that we always already live in a factual historical context of meanings and concepts, which unthematically guides our experience of and expectations about the beings and situations we experience, which provides the customary patterns for thinking and

talking about things, and which also forms the point of departure for every modification of our concepts. However, our historical concepts do not determine our experience of meaningful phenomena so that they would be immune to the question of truth; rather, they constitute nothing but our factual fallible – more or less true – grasp of what we experience independently of these concepts. Also, Heidegger's analysis of the clearing/event of being points to important aspects of those mechanisms that allow a world to address us as cognitively and emotionally powerful. Such power, however, has nothing to do with the truth or untruth of the world. Moreover, Heidegger's inability to account for the difference between truth and power – and to see to what extent his own analysis focuses on power – severely weakens his capacity to critically analyze the different motives that interact in the formation of collective contexts of meaning.⁹⁷⁶

The question of ethical-existential significance. Heidegger's analysis of the basic historical structure of phenomenality implies not only that our historical world contains the patterns of meaning which determine what we can experience as unified phenomena, but also that it constitutes the source which grants to particular beings their significance and weight. Prior to our understanding of our historical world – so the argument goes – we merely have access to a pointless and chaotic sensuality, so that it is only on the basis of the gods and purposes of our historical world that

⁹⁷⁶ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's analysis of the "They" displayed a sharp awareness of the mechanisms of collective pressure, especially as regards their role in shaping and directing our understanding and speaking. It is, however, no coincidence that he drops the notion of the "They" after *Being and Time*, and that it never reappears in his later writings. Why is this so? What made it possible for Heidegger to make room for the notion of the "They" in *Being and Time* was that he could still – although with difficulty – handle the distinction between the prejudiced understanding of the They and a more ordinary understanding, since he held on – in an extremely ambivalent manner – to the possibility of a direct phenomenological experience of the matters themselves as a measure of understanding. However, in his later writings he attempts to account for the difference between historical worlds solely in terms of their different degrees of rhetorical-persuasive power. As a result, the holy and binding world that Heidegger envisions – in contrast to the powerless and levelled world of European modernity – is nothing but a world with superior rhetorical-persuasive force, a kind of idealized and sublimated They-world. It would certainly have been difficult for Heidegger to pursue his analysis of the They in this context without disturbing his concepts of "holiness" and "bindingness" by revealing their basis in collective pressure.

particular beings can show up as significant phenomena that matter to us and claim us.

Although Heidegger's existential analytic in *Being and Time* already gave rise to the question about the bindingness of Dasein's historical purposes, he was not yet able to explicitly interrogate how such purposes can address us as important. One of the main objectives of Heidegger's later analysis of the dynamics which opens up being – the strife between the world and the earth – is to provide an answer to the question how a historical world can arise and claim us as binding and holy. Hence, we need to ask: Can Heidegger's conception of the bindingness of historical worlds compensate for his rejection of the possibility of a direct experience of others as significant in themselves? Can it account for how our world addresses us as binding and holy in a way that distinguishes it from mere collective pressure and prejudice?

It seems that this is impossible.

As I see it, the basic problem of Heidegger's conception lies in his denial of the possibility of encountering other people – or animals – as persons who concern and claim us as such, and whom we can love and care for, irrespectively of the historical context of values and purposes that we happen to live in. As a result, Heidegger's analysis of the rhetorical-persuasive power of historical worlds is essentially unable to account for ethical-existential significance beyond collective pressure.

Let us again reflect on the familiar example of a culture that upholds an age-old division of people into different hierarchically ordered groups or classes. Such a world, it seems, could well appear as holy and binding according to Heidegger's criteria: it could address us as familiar and alluring on account of its ability to bring to expression ancient historical ideals as well as the local earth; its highest ideals – its gods – could appear as cognitively-dialectically superior to our previous ideals; the paradigmatic shaping of the gods in art and poetry could be aesthetically-dramatically striking and sublime; the gods could finally be invested with all the collective force issuing from their function as standards for what the community holds to be honorable or shameful.

However, all the aspects of rhetorical-persuasive force listed above as granting holiness to the world are radically separate from the kind of ethical claim which we experience in encountering another human being. Whatever ideals or values such a world contains – be they better or worse

– the rhetorical and collective force they exert on us must be sharply distinguished from the ethical significance of the other person: to experience a certain historical paradigm as holy in Heidegger's sense is basically just to be impressed by its rhetorical-aesthetic-cognitive force and its status within the community; it has nothing to do with the other person's ethical appeal to me, which is independent of the rhetorical-persuasive power of my historical world. Correspondingly, our existential motives for wanting to comply with the values and ideals of our historical world are basically reducible to our egoistic-collectivist desire to excel in the eyes of our community, and need involve no genuine care for other particular persons as such. Hence, to deny or transgress the parameters of such a holy world could never in itself give rise to bad conscience or to remorse but only to feelings of collective shame and guilt.

These considerations seem to hold not only for whole worlds but for all our ethical-existential concepts and values: taken by themselves such concepts – e.g. goodness, love, freedom, courage, honor, trust, envy, authenticity – cannot make any ethical claim on us at all save for the power they exert on us on account of their role and status within our historical community. And how could they? As soon as we raise the question in earnest, it immediately seems quite unintelligible how a historical paradigm of meaning could ever address us as important in itself, as something we could care about for its own sake or which could grant meaning to anything else.

Heidegger's notion of historical being as the ultimate source of ethical-existential significance becomes especially problematic in his conception of the logic of fall and rebirth characterizing historical worlds. Given – as Heidegger argues – that we live in the nihilistic end-stage of the history of metaphysics, in which the world has grown dim and powerless and all beings – e.g. human beings – have lost their significance for us, it becomes our highest task to think the openness of being in order to prepare the possibility of the onset of a holy and binding historical world, a task which is superior to and overrides every ethical concern for particular human beings. What basically happens here is that Heidegger's disavowal of our primary ethical relation to others takes the form of a concrete denial of their significance in the present situation, and of a false promise to restore their significance as the result of the establishment of a strong collective

world – although in fact such a world would in no way open up the appeal of the other.

Earlier I argued that it was precisely the above scheme of thought that constituted a basic motivation for Heidegger's engagement in National Socialism. However, although Heidegger in his later thinking rejects Nazism, which he interprets as a manifestation of the modern techno-subjectivist understanding of being, he nevertheless retains his notion of the priority of ontology over ethics as well as his idea of the destruction of the meaning of our old world and the need to project a new meaningful world. The ethical deficit of this scheme manifests itself especially plainly in those passages where he highlights the import of his own thinking by contrasting it to merely ontic matters and catastrophes. For example, in "On the Question of Being" from 1955 Heidegger compares the *polemos* of the history of being with ordinary wars: "This is no war, but the *polemos* that first lets gods and humans, freemen and slaves, appear in their respective essence and enacts a differentiating dispute of being. Compared to this dispute, world wars remain superficial. They are less and less capable of deciding anything the more technological their armaments."⁹⁷⁷ In "The Thing" Heidegger makes use of a similar contrast:

Man stares at what the explosion of the atom bomb could bring with it. He does not see that the atom bomb and its explosion are the mere final emission of what has long since taken place, has already happened. Not to mention the single hydrogen bomb, whose triggering, thought through to its utmost potential, might be enough to snuff out all life on earth. What is this helpless anxiety still waiting for, if the terrible has already happened?⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷⁷ GA 9, p. 424f.: "Es ist kein Krieg, sondern der Πόλεμος, der Götter und Menschen, Freie und Knechte, erst in ihr jeweiliges Wesen erscheinen läßt und eine Aus-einander-setzung des Seins heraufführt. Mit ihr verglichen, bleiben Weltkriege vordergründig. Sie vermögen immer weniger zu entscheiden, je technischer sie sich rüsten."

⁹⁷⁸ GA 7, p. 168: "Der Mensch starrt auf das, was mit der Explosion der Atombombe kommen könnte. Der Mensch sieht nicht, was lang schon angekommen ist und zwar geschenist als das, was nur noch als seinen letzten Auswurf die Atombombe und deren Explosion aus sich hinauswirft, um von der einen Wasserstoffbombe zu schweigen, deren Initialzündung, in der weitesten Möglichkeit gedacht, genügen könnte, um alles Leben auf der Erde auszulöschen. Worauf wartet diese ratlose Angst noch, wenn das Entsetzliche schon geschehen ist?"

What is it that makes these passages so worrying? The problem is not, of course, that they are too gloomy and pessimistic in their diagnosis of our time as characterized by a reductive and dehumanizing metaphysics. What makes them so sad and problematic is rather the deep contempt and closedness towards the lives and suffering of concrete human beings that they express, which in effect make Heidegger's apocalyptic projection of a greater metaphysical catastrophe appear as a petty flight from the moral heart of life: if the lives of others human beings are not more important than that – if they are not absolutely important in themselves, regardless of the historical framework of meaning within the framework of which we happen to encounter them – then it is unintelligible why Heidegger's metaphysical catastrophes would be anything to worry about.

Still, the misleading pretensions of Heidegger's conception should not make us blind to the limited truths that it contains. Heidegger is doubtlessly right in claiming that we always already live in historical contexts of collective ideals and values which exert a powerful pressure on us, although this pressure should be clearly distinguished from the ethical-existential appeal and significance of the other human being. Moreover, in his analyses of the dynamics that makes a historical world arise and shine forth he is able to indicate some of the vital mechanisms that contribute to uphold the rhetorical-persuasive power of collective ideals and values. However, Heidegger's confused equation of the holiness of the world with its rhetorical-persuasive power substantially hampers his ability to transparently analyze the power interests that shape our historical worlds and sharply distinguish them from truth and ethical significance. Finally, it must be said that Heidegger's diagnosis of modernity in terms of an increasingly technical understanding of being contains important analyses and insights although I think that he ultimately misinterprets the basic sense of the situation and the tasks it engenders.

The Limits and Possibilities of Historical Thought

Heidegger's basic analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality induces him to develop a radically historical mode of thinking. While this ambition largely remained at the level of program in *Being and Time*, his later texts constitute a series of attempts to elaborate and enact such a thinking concretely. But how does this attempt succeed? What kind of

truth or cognitive force can Heidegger's historical thinking lay claim to? What are the principal possibilities and limits of such thinking?

Let me begin by briefly recapitulating the basic setup of Heidegger's historical thinking:

Since our phenomenal experience of beings as beings is determined by our preceding understanding of the historical meanings and contexts in which we live the possibility of thinking must in some sense consist in tracing and articulating the most qualified meanings that our history harbors. However, we presently live in a metaphysical understanding of being which is both distorted and uprooted: on the one hand, it understands being as presence – *ousia* – while leaving unthought and covering up the happening which opens up present being; on the other hand, it has been detached from its historical origin and handed down through history in an autistic fashion, so that it even lacks a clear grasp of its own basic understanding of being as presence. Hence, the task of thinking becomes to free ourselves from our metaphysical understanding of being and gain access to an understanding of the openness of being. But how? In *Being and Time* Heidegger thought that thinking must take the form of a destruction which dismantles our uprooted basic ontological concepts by tracing them back to their historical origin. This origin he found in Aristotle, whose texts, he believed, not only established the understanding of being as presence-at-hand dominating the history of philosophy but also – in an ambivalent manner – harbored a more originary understanding of the temporal sense of being. By returning to Aristotle he thus believed it would be possible to clarify the meaning of our received understanding of being, to free ourselves from this understanding, and to retrieve the more originary understanding of the temporality of being which Aristotle's texts have in store. However, since Heidegger did not yet pursue the question of how an originary historical understanding of being is given, his investigations in *Being and Time* did not in fact transpire through a retrieval of Aristotle but through direct phenomenological descriptions of the structures of Dasein. As Heidegger later elaborates his historical thinking, he is also guided by the conviction that in order for thinking to overcome metaphysics it needs to return to the first beginning of metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle. However, in contrast to his earlier view that thinking could proceed as a critical retrieval of Aristotle he now holds that it needs to take on the character of

a reflection, which, by attending to the controversiality and groundlessness of our basic metaphysical understanding of being as presence is able to think and articulate what this understanding presupposes yet essentially leaves unthought: the happening which opens up being.

In the preceding paragraphs I argued that Heidegger's basic denial of the openness of our historical concepts towards the beings they conceive makes him unable to account for the truth or falsity of our concepts – their ability to illuminate or cover up things – so that his analysis of the dynamics which opens up being is only able to provide a description of the rhetorical-persuasive force of these concepts. In the end, this also means that his late attempt at a historical thinking which fundamentally transpires as an internal reflection on our historical meanings and concepts is doomed to lack the capacity to openly describe the matters at stake as that which alone can measure the truth of our concepts and allow us to distinguish them from prejudices. However, even though Heidegger's historical thinking is unable to offer independent positive articulations of the matters it may still have important philosophical functions to perform. In what follows, I will briefly examine the two main methodological components of Heidegger's late historical thinking with a view to their limits and possibilities: 1. The method of returning to the historical origin of our understanding. 2. The method of attending to the controversiality and groundlessness characterizing our metaphysical understanding of being as a way to articulating the happening which opens up being.

The method of returning to the historical origin. For Heidegger the task of returning to the historical origin of our current understanding of being is no secondary appendage to some primary systematic investigation but constitutes the necessary way for thinking to access its matter: the openness of being. This notion of the necessity of a historical return rests heavily on two ideas: first, on the idea that our historical meanings are rooted in an originary opening of the world; second, on a specific interpretation of the autistic history of Western philosophy.

According to the later Heidegger, all our historical meanings and concepts ultimately have their origin in the creative-receptive realization of the happening of being whereby a historical world is opened up. It is here, in this originary event, that meanings are formed and acquire their

concrete paradigmatic shape. This, Heidegger claims, is precisely what happened in ancient Greece. On the backdrop of the early pre-Socratic – still vague and groping – conception of the openness of being as *physis* Plato and Aristotle developed an understanding of being as *ousia*: presence. The fateful thing about this metaphysical understanding of being, however, was that it left unthought and covered up the historical happening which made it possible. Since the guiding ontological understanding of philosophy thus blinded itself to the historicity of being, philosophy henceforth became the prisoner of this understanding, following and transmitting it in an autistic fashion without questioning its roots or legitimacy. As a result of this autistic uprooting of its dominating metaphysical understanding of being, philosophy also gradually lost sight of the originary meaning of this understanding as it gave way to a more and more technical and subjectivist interpretation of being. This constellation prescribes Heidegger's view of the necessary methodological pathway of thinking: to trace our current understanding back to its historical origin in Plato and Aristotle, the first beginning, in order to clarify its basic and guiding interpretation of being as presence; then, to reflect on the roots of being in the clearing/event of being, which Plato and Aristotle presupposed but essentially left unthought, and, by so doing, open up the possibility of a new realization of the happening of being: an other beginning.

But what about the truth of this picture?

In fact, I think that the basic premise of Heidegger's conception of the historicity of being, which supports his idea of the necessity of returning to historical origins, is untrue. The openness of our concepts towards that which they conceive implies that we are not referred to the meanings and concepts of our history as a groundless ground, moreover, that our meanings do not receive their concrete content from a primordial world-opening event. Although it is true that we always already live in historical conceptualities which primarily tend to guide our understanding, and which may be more or less empty and prejudiced, we are nevertheless free in principle to openly see and examine the matters we experience as the source of truth of our concepts. From this, however, it follows that even though the traditional concepts primarily guiding our sight would have the character of uprooted prejudices, there would be no essential need to return to their historical origin in order to emancipate ourselves from their

grip and access the matters. Indeed, it also follows that such a historical return cannot by itself yield any independent understanding of our concepts-and-their-matters at all. On its own it can only shed light on the histories of our conceptual formations and widen our horizons of conceptual possibilities without itself being able to distinguish understanding from mere prejudice. By contrast, the very possibility of an independent understanding resides in an open seeing and explication of the matters we experience, whereby the truth and meaning of the concepts we employ lie in their ability to help us grasp the matters in question.

Consequently, Heidegger's view of the historical logic and development of philosophy cannot be right. Even if philosophy had been dominated by an understanding of being covering up its own historical character, this would not have made it captive of its own heritage even though it might certainly have weakened its predisposition to question it critically. Since we are essentially open towards whatever we experience no historical beginning or paradigm could ever determine and delimit our possibilities of seeing and understanding with any necessity. Hence, Heidegger's depiction of the history of Western philosophy as an autistic and unified series of events completely determined by the metaphysical understanding of being issued by the first Greek beginning cannot but emerge as a dogmatic construction. To be sure, his diagnosis of the metaphysical nature of philosophy in my view captures a basic tendency in the history of philosophy and I also agree that the context of Greek philosophy provides an exemplary zone for reflecting on the driving problems and motives of philosophy – as well as on alternatives to these. Still, I think there is no doubt that Heidegger's mythologizing narrative about the history of philosophy as a monolithic unity determined by a singular Greek origin belongs to the weakest parts of his thinking: as concerns the matter of philosophy, it dogmatically shuts out all alternative questions, problems, motives, and tasks as irrelevant in relation to the determining metaphysical understanding of being; as concerns the historical sources of philosophy, it systematically disregards other traditions and contexts as irrelevant in relation to the straight Euro-Greco-

Germano-centric line of development Heidegger so badly wants to draw up from the Greeks to his own thinking.⁹⁷⁹

My claim about the openness of our conceptual understanding towards what we experience also has consequences for what it means to interpret the historical texts of philosophy. Granted that we are always fundamentally free in relation to the meanings and concepts we inherit – free to see the matters we experience, and to probe and modify the meaning of our concepts on the basis of this experience – this predicament also pertains to the texts of philosophy. Even though a text would take over its central concepts from the tradition without explicit critical reflection on their sedimented meanings, this would not in principal prevent it from modifying and giving new meaning to these concepts through its concrete analyses and descriptions of the matters in question. This freedom also pertains in relation to concepts which the text adopts as ontologically or otherwise systematically-architectonically basic. There is thus nothing that precludes a text from uncritically taking over some basic metaphysical concepts, e.g. of being or the human being, and nevertheless provide descriptions which are not determined by these concepts – although the relation between different levels of the text might in effect become contradictory and unclear. Hence, despite the fact that philosophy has always suffered from a strong tendency to let itself be guided by traditional concepts in a prejudiced manner, when we read a philosophical text it is always an open question to what extent the traditional philosophical concepts it employs determine the direction and content of its investigations and to what extent its concrete investigations determine the meaning of these concepts.

The upshot of this is that Heidegger's strong thesis about the necessary and fundamental nature of historical reflection is not only wrong, but that the strategy of historical interpretation it induces runs an essential risk of neglecting and misinterpreting the meaning of philosophical works. Heidegger's late readings of philosophical texts have a strong tendency to follow some version of the following scheme: first, an explication of the basic ontological concepts of the text, revealing that these concepts have been taken over from the tradition without a radical questioning of their meaning; second, a tracing of these concepts back to

⁹⁷⁹ For a critique of Heidegger's monolithic narrative of the history of philosophy see, e.g., Derrida 1989.

their historical sources; third a clarification of the originary meaning of these concepts and their unthought premises. Still, if the above considerations are accurate no examination of the ontological-systematic grounds of a text and of its ability to question them critically can decide in advance the extent to which the text has been able to emancipate itself from these concepts. The only way to decide this is to follow the concrete investigations of the text and find out what they are able to teach us about the matters it discusses – and thus about its concepts – in such a way that we, guided by the text, independently try to see and understand the matters as well as we can. If, however, we all too hastily interpret the text from its basic concepts and infer the meaning of these concepts historically we risk blinding ourselves to what the text actually has to say and falsely reduce it to some historical meaning from which it has in fact freed itself.

It is clear, I think, that Heidegger's late strategy of historical interpretation, tied as it is to his mythical conception of the logic of origin-and-fall characterizing the history of philosophy, entails a strong tendency to downplay the autonomy and manifold meanings of particular texts and let them collapse into their roles in the monolithic story he has to tell about the history of Western philosophy. By this, however, I do not mean to suggest that Heidegger's immense concrete work of explicating historical texts would completely fall victim to the distortive tendencies of the scheme of historical reflection outlined above. Far from it. In fact, I think there is no doubt that Heidegger's historical explications to a large extent exhibit an exemplary ability to engage the texts of the history of philosophy in his primary effort to ponder his guiding philosophical problems, and to make them speak to us in the light of these problems.

Thus far, I have only focused on the limits of historical reflection and the risks it harbors if one does not take heed of these limits. However, even if the work of historical reflection must always stand in a serving relationship to the work of independent seeing and explication this does not mean that it would be futile or inherently distortive. So what are the positive possibilities of such reflection?

Heidegger's basic analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality rests on the insight that we always already live in historical quasi-conceptual contexts of meaning, which primarily tend to guide our experience and understanding, and which constitute the starting point for

all our attempts at independent understanding. In addition, it rests on the insight that we – philosophers as much as everybody else – have a very strong inclination to let our seeing and thinking be led by the historical concepts at hand on account of their normality, familiarity, self-evidence, and social acceptability. While having these phenomena in sight Heidegger at the same time distorts their sense by misinterpreting our provisional guidedness by history and our tendency to let it determine our understanding in terms of a necessary hierarchical structure according to which our understanding of historical being determines our understanding of beings. However, even though his analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality is false, and the method of historical reflection is neither as basic nor as necessary as he thinks, the insights at the basis of this analysis still constitute motivations for historical reflection.

How?

To begin with, it is clear that historical reflection on the contexts and origins of historical texts forms an integral and irreducible part of all our efforts to understand such texts. Since every text is bound to set out from and make use of the conceptual and linguistic resources of its historical contexts, it will necessarily have to draw on – affirm, modify, specify, criticize, ironize – these resources in order to be able to say what it has to say in an intelligible way. Hence, to understand a historical text we have to have some understanding of the historical concepts and language that it draws on. Only such an understanding allows us to follow the text wherever it goes, be it that it remains stuck within the prejudices of its age, be it that it transcends these. However, in so far as our driving concern is to understand what the text has to say about its matters the historical reflection on contexts and origins will always play a subordinate and enabling role in relation to the decisive task of following and giving meaning to the concrete investigations of the text by relating them to our own best effort to see and understand the matters in question. But the explanatory capacity of historical reflection grows in relation to the incapacity of the text for independent thinking. To the extent that the philosophical text adopts its concepts from the tradition without being able to give them meaning through its own investigations, these concepts take on the character of prejudices whose meaning and truth is not grounded in the text. In such cases where the concepts themselves call for explanation, it may be of help to trace the historical origins of these

concepts. Here, the work of historical retrieval might shed light on why the concepts have been chosen and play the role they do, also, it might disclose historical meanings which the text draws on in an implicit manner. Hence, to the extent that we blindly let ourselves be guided by traditional historical concepts, history emerges as an explanation for the form our thinking takes.

In fact, historical reflection can have many vital roles to play in our philosophical effort to understand our lives and the world. Historical reflection has a powerful emancipatory potential in making us aware of the historical finitude and contingency of the meaning-worlds we live. By opening us up to alternative meanings and concepts either from our own history or from other cultures and histories such a reflection can confront us with meanings which transcend our normal horizons of understanding, potentially destabilizing our sense of normality and opening us up to new and unexpected, perhaps insightful or repressed ways of looking at things. This said, it is important to remember that the work of historical reflection can never in itself engender a positive understanding of concepts-and-their-matters but always has the function of guidelines or suggestions for our independent effort at seeing and understanding. Whatever historical concepts we might find and however great their potential insight or questioning force, they are bound to remain nothing more than new sets of prejudices as long as they have not been engaged in our open effort to see and understand the matters they are all about.

The method of examining the controversiality of metaphysics. If the first methodological step of Heidegger's historical thinking consisted in tracing our traditional metaphysical understanding back to its historical origin in ancient Greece, the second step consists in attending to and articulating what the metaphysical understanding of being as presence presupposes yet leaves unthought: the roots of being in the clearing/event which opens up being. Above I have already indicated that the kind of internal historical reflection Heidegger proposes is incapable of independently exhibiting the matters of thinking in a way that would distinguish them from prejudice and construction. Here I briefly want to spell out this argument in order, then, to attempt to delimit the positive potential of this aspect of Heidegger's historical thinking.

To account for how his historical thinking is to establish the clearing/event as the source of being Heidegger, as far as I can see, employs two main stratagems. On the one hand, he seems to believe that a reflection on the historical beginning of metaphysics is able to demonstrate the clearing/event as a historically-cognitively ultimate figure of thought – a figure which the metaphysical understanding of being itself presupposes and refers to in an implicit manner, and which his own thinking is supposed to be able to exhibit as the ultimate and insurmountable ontological horizon harbored by our history. On the other hand, in his later years, he develops the notion that thinking by attending to and articulating what he calls the “controversiality” of our received metaphysical understanding of being – its basic tensions and groundlessness – can indicate the clearing/event as the self-withdrawing source of this understanding.

However, none of these stratagems is capable of offering a positive demonstration of the clearing/event as the originary happening which grants historical being. As concerns the first strategy we must conclude that even though thinking would be able to present something like the clearing/event as an ultimate horizon of thought, which our tradition has always already presupposed as its basis, and which appears ontologically insurmountable given our historical context, this in itself would in no way show that the notion of the clearing/event would be true or genuinely clarifying. It would, at most, show that this notion would exert more or less strong rhetorical pressure on us due to its role in the tradition and its relative cognitive-dialectical power. In fact, the very idea that some concept or figure of thought could ever emerge as ultimate or basic for a given historical context is problematic. Since we are essentially free in relation to all such meanings, they can never absolutely delimit our possibilities of making sense. Hence, even in an extremely monolithic or totalitarian culture, the basic never-questioned concepts would still have the character of concepts that people would tend to allow to determine their understanding – but which they would nevertheless in principal be free to question in relation to what they see and experience.

But neither can Heidegger’s second stratagem attain its goal. It is, to be sure, possible to examine the controversiality exhibited by the texts of the philosophical tradition: the tensions, incompleteness and groundlessness charactering their basic concepts. Yet no such

deconstructive examination could in itself show that the controversiality thus demonstrated in some number of texts would be a necessary feature of historical being ultimately stemming from the polemical logic of the happening which opens up being. To positively interpret the controversiality as a testimony of the clearing/event would be pure speculation. It is precisely because Heidegger's strictly historical thinking lacks the basic capacity of showing up the matters themselves that he even in his later years is compelled to continue making use of phenomenology to give concrete content to his thoughts.

Heidegger's late strategy of examining the controversiality of being is ultimately grounded in two notions that are presupposed in advance and which this strategy itself is incapable of establishing: first, the notion that our understanding of historical meaning not only determines our experience of beings but that it is itself hierarchically structured, so that our understanding of being and the openness of being guides our understanding of other historical meanings and concepts; second, the notion that our understanding of being has its source in the polemical happening which opens up a strained and ungroundable historical world. Together these notions prescribe Heidegger's strategy for articulating the matter of thinking: to trace the ontological concepts at the basis of our received understanding, to disclose their tensions and groundlessness, and to take this controversiality as evidence of the self-withdrawing happening of being.

However, my reflections on the openness of our conceptual understanding make me believe that both these notions are false and that the methodological path that Heidegger proposes to the matter of thinking is neither necessary nor possible. However, apart from this it also – like the method of historical return – contains an inborn risk to miss and distort the meaning of the texts examined if it does not attend to its own limits.

As argued above, the thinking of philosophical texts is not only free in relation to the historical concepts it employs but also in relation to the concepts that are ontologically-systematically basic within its own conceptuality. Hence, it is in principal possible for a text to offer investigations which transcend and gainsay what its basic concepts – of being, knowledge, the human being – seem to have prescribed as the possibilities and limits of the investigations. The upshot of this is that no

strict examination of the basic concepts of a text can be sure to capture the determining horizon of the text, which means that if it is not attentive to the concrete investigations of the text, it risks reducing the text to its basic ontological framework in a blind and prejudiced manner. Moreover, a demonstration of the controversiality and groundlessness of the basic concepts of a philosophical text cannot by itself establish that the text suffers from some fundamental inability to account for its meaning. If the meaning and truth of our concepts resides in their ability to illuminate whatever experiential matter they are used to conceive it is quite possible for a text to use concepts in a more or less clear and meaningful way that is not dependent on any ability to systematically define and circumscribe their meaning.

But what about the positive possibilities of Heidegger's strategy? Has not Heidegger – and later, e.g., Derrida – shown that there are a lot of things that a critical deconstructive analysis of philosophical texts can do?

He has. Clearly, in many of his readings of the classical texts of philosophy he has been able to lay bare their dependence on basic ontological concepts of being and the human being which in a more or less hidden way determine the investigations without the texts' being able to ground or account for their meaning. Still, to grasp the sense and limits of such deconstructive analyses it is crucial to see that what they are able to show is *not* that our understanding is essentially determined by a groundless and polemical understanding of being rooted in the clearing/event. Rather, what they reveal is that the tradition of Western philosophy has de facto largely been characterized by the driving ambition to ground our knowledge of the particular matters of life and the world on a supposedly more basic understanding of the nature of being, knowledge, the human being, God, etc. – whereby this very ambition presupposes that the operation of grounding has the character of a conceptual-dialectic systematics in which our basic general concepts determine and delimit the meaning of our more specific concepts.

Far from mirroring the essential structure of understanding this dominating ambition in my view rests on a fateful denial of the openness of our understanding towards the beings we encounter. However, to the extent that philosophy de facto exhibits the effort to ground our knowledge on a basic understanding of being/knowledge/subjectivity/God in the manner of some conceptually-dialectically determined systems,

the strategy of critically deconstructing such efforts becomes a vital methodological possibility of philosophy. It can, for example, trace and lay bare the basic conceptions which, often in a hidden and unclear way, guide the projections of philosophy; it can analyze the failures of philosophical texts to ground and account for the meaning and legitimacy of their basic concepts, which inevitably arise from the very effort to ground meaning through conceptual-dialectical determination; it can investigate the omissions and repressions which haunt and destabilize the effort to attain systematic unity and closure. However, in and by itself the strategy of internal historical deconstruction can never achieve a positive understanding of the philosophical matters – nor, thus, of its own sense and limits – but is bound to remain a critical preparation for the task of independently describing and conceptualizing what we experience.

Epilogue: the Openness of Understanding

This thesis has been an attempt to trace and critically explicate Heidegger's life long struggle to come to terms with the problem of phenomenality and to account for the structure and dynamics which makes it possible for things to appear and be given as meaningful phenomena in our human experiences.

The historical story I have told was divided into three main parts centering on what I proposed can be viewed as the three main stages of Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality. In rough outline – omitting all the details, intermittences, complexities, ambivalences – the story could be summarized as follows:

In his earliest Freiburg lecture courses 1919-1921 Heidegger adopts Husserl's basic phenomenological principle that philosophy must do nothing but attend to and describe what is concretely given in our experience. In so doing, he insists that the primary sphere of givenness lies in our pre-theoretical experience, which does not have the character of distanced theoretical observation of objects, but transpires as a unified temporal experience of significance. However, Heidegger's early vision of phenomenology as an originary science of pre-theoretical life gives rise to deep ambivalences. First, although Heidegger claims that our experience and thinking are radically historical he as yet provides no account of the supposedly historical structure of phenomenality and basically presents and enacts his own investigations as reflective phenomenological descriptions of the basic ahistorical structure of our pre-theoretical experience. Second, by emphasizing the self-sufficiency of pre-theoretical life Heidegger loses the means to account for the role of philosophy in life. As a result, he oscillates between viewing phenomenological philosophy as a way to knowledge of the originary structure of life necessary for authentic existence, and as a historically contingent means to abandon the theoretical attitude in favor of the kind of direct enactment of pre-theoretical life he finds in early Christianity.

Then, in 1921-1922, Heidegger begins a period of massive explications of Aristotle in whose texts he believes he discovers the basic structure of phenomenality, centered in what he will eventually call the ontological

difference: it is only on the basis of our pre-understanding of historical being into which we have always already been thrown that we can experience particular beings as meaningful phenomena. Heidegger's conception of this structure seems to open up the possibility of accounting both for the historicity of phenomenality as well as for the function of philosophy in life. On the one hand, it suggests that our experience of particular meaningful phenomena is determined by our historical contexts of meaning. Hence, philosophy must abandon intuition-based phenomenology and instead take the form of a historical destruction, which, by dismantling the prejudiced tradition and tracing it back to its origin in Aristotle, opens up the possibility of retrieving the most qualified possibilities of understanding harbored by that origin. On the other hand, since Heidegger believes that our understanding of historical meaning is itself guided by an understanding of the sense of being, the philosophical task of clarifying the sense of being emerges as the decisive condition for achieving a clear understanding both of ourselves and of the world. However, Heidegger's conception of the task of philosophy as fundamental ontology, which he launches in *Being and Time* in 1927, is still beset with basic ambiguities which will eventually lead to its demise. Contrary to the analysis of the historical structure of phenomenality which dictates Heidegger's program of destruction, the concrete investigations of *Being and Time* basically transpire as reflective phenomenological descriptions of the ahistorical structures of Dasein: being-in-the-world, care, temporality. Ultimately, I suggested, the reason why Heidegger has recourse to the kind of phenomenological description which his analysis of the structure of phenomenality forbids, is that he is still unable to pose and answer the question how historical meanings can address us as in some sense true or binding – as not reducible to mere historical prejudices. This basic lacuna, besides hindering Heidegger from pursuing his program of a radically historical thinking, also gives rise to an uncontrolled tension between collectivism and subjectivism in his account of Dasein's authentic existence. Since he is unable to tell how it is that our guiding historical purposes or heroes are able to address us and bind us, he is forced to ground them either in the facticity of the collective world in which we happen to live or in the groundless arbitrary choice of the particular Dasein. What is more, I argued that Heidegger's account of the

ethical-existential motives determining Dasein's experience and acting is basically egoistic-collectivist.

Heidegger's philosophical investigations in the years 1928-1933, following the publication of *Being and Time*, gradually lead him to abandon the project of fundamental ontology. However, it is only after 1935 that he is able to articulate the basic question of his later thinking: how should we understand the originary happening which opens up and gives a historical world as a binding destiny? Heidegger's entire later thought is devoted to reflecting on the openness or phenomenality of historical being, which he will primarily call the "clearing" or "event." He elaborates his first paradigmatic account of the dynamics which opens up a world in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" from 1936, where this dynamics is explicated as a strife between the historical world and the material-sensuous earth enacted by the work of art. Later he rearticulates the dynamics of phenomenality in terms of the interplay of the fourfold: the divinities and the mortals, the earth and the sky. Elaborating the consequences of his view of the radically historical structure of phenomenality, Heidegger conceives of his later thinking as a strict historical reflection which returns to the first Greek beginning of metaphysics in order to attend to that which is presupposed but yet remains unthought, and which announces itself as a controversiality within the metaphysical understanding of being as presence: the self-withdrawing happening which first opens up finite historical being.

In the end, however, I argued that even Heidegger's later attempt to explicate how historical worlds can arise and address us as binding fails to account both for the question of truth and for the question of ethical-existential significance. Ultimately, his analysis only amounts to a description of the rhetorical-persuasive power of our historical contexts of meaning and value. In effect, I also argued that his historical strategies of thinking are unable to articulate the matters themselves as something separable from historical prejudice. Hence, the function of such strategies remains limited to negative critique and to providing suggestions for what I proposed constitutes the systematically decisive task of philosophical thought: to openly and independently see and describe what we actually experience from the point of view of the questions or problems at stake.

This is, in rough outline, what I have done so far. Now, however, I want to venture a few steps forward and critically question the ontological difference at the heart of Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the ontological difference between our understanding of historical being and our experience of particular beings forms the core of Heidegger's paradigmatic analysis of the basic structure of phenomenality developed in the early 1920s. The difference is strictly hierarchical: our understanding of historical being determines in advance what we can experience as meaningful phenomena, whereas our direct intuitive experience of particular beings cannot constitute a measure for our understanding of being. As such, the ontological difference sets the stage for Heidegger's late attempt to account for the dynamics which opens up historical being as a binding destiny as well as for his effort to develop a radically historical thinking tracing the basic yet unthought meaning-possibilities harbored by the history of metaphysics.

In the last chapter I indicated that Heidegger's failure to account for the cognitive and morally binding force of historical being was a consequence of the ontological difference and of his denial of the openness of our experience and understanding towards particular being. Yet I never asked the basic critical question about the truth and limits of the ontological difference, and about what it would mean to overcome it. In this epilogue I want to take the risk of asking this critical question straight out and try to indicate – in a very schematic and provisional manner to be sure – what the ontological difference dogmatically denies and covers up: our experiential openness towards particular beings as a basic and irreducible source of truth and moral significance.

Obviously this epilogue cannot hope to provide anything like a comprehensive and satisfactory discussion of the ontological difference, which, as we shall see, is not only basic to Heidegger's thought but has also for more than half a century guided the self-understanding of much philosophy. This would have required another book. Now, some readers might consider this reason enough to think that it would have been better to leave out the epilogue instead of adding such a sketchy and provisional endeavor to the interpretational work of the main text. To this, I answer: My reasons for writing the epilogue are both philosophical and personal, since I think it is not only potentially clarifying but also a matter of

honesty to try to bear witness to the place where I stand and from which I have tried to speak about Heidegger.

The epilogue unfolds in five consecutive steps: first, I outline what I call the “metaphysics of historical meaning,” which has for some time dominated the self-understanding of large parts of contemporary philosophy; second, I examine one of Heidegger’s last articulations of the problem of phenomenality, an articulation in which he suggests the “overcoming of the ontological difference”; third, I present my proposal that our conceptual understanding is essentially open towards the beings we experience as the source of truth of this understanding; fourth, I present my proposal that we are essentially open towards other persons as the source of truth of ethical-existential significance; fifth, I outline some of the transformations of our concept of philosophy that the above suggestions bring with them.

The Metaphysics of Historical Meaning

To get a sense of the stakes of a critique of Heidegger’s ontological difference – but also of the difficulties of and resistance to such a critique – it is important to see the extent to which this notion articulates a paradigm which has to a great extent dominated the self-understanding of philosophy since the middle of the 20th century, a paradigm which I will call the metaphysics of historical meaning.

The defining tenet of what I call the metaphysics of historical meaning is – to put it as formally as possible – the notion that there is a dimension of historical meaning which determines our experience and understanding of entities as meaningful, and which it is the task of philosophy to reflect on and clarify. In the continental tradition, Heidegger plays a pivotal role in establishing the metaphysics of historical meaning as a ruling paradigm. Drawing on different historical sources – e.g. Aristotle, Dilthey, Schleiermacher, German idealism – Heidegger elaborates a critique of Husserl’s basic phenomenological belief in an intuitive experience of meaning as the ultimate measure of understanding, insisting that it is our historical understanding of being which allows us to experience things as meaningful phenomena. In the second half of the century Heidegger’s idea of the primacy of historical meaning attains an almost hegemonic role within the continental tradition, and is primarily developed in the

hermeneutics of Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and others, and in the post-structuralist and deconstructivist thinking of Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and others. The structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss basically shares the same paradigm. In the tradition of analytic philosophy, the metaphysics of historical meaning arises as a strong paradigm after the Second World War. This very much happens through a series of attacks against the fundamental empiricist trait of logical positivism, whereby the new commonly shared notion emerges that our experience and understanding of what is experientially given is determined by the language and the concepts in which we live. This common notion is articulated and developed in many different directions during the second half of the century, constituting a central tenet of the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and – especially – of his heirs, of the ordinary language philosophy of John Austin, of the neo-Kantianism-cum-Hegelianism of Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell and Robert Brandom, of the historicist thinking of Charles Taylor and Alisdair MacIntyre, and of the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty. However, in the analytic tradition the metaphysics of historical meaning has never achieved a ruling position but has always lived in a tense relationship to the central tendency towards naturalist philosophy

Clearly, the field of philosophers and philosophical directions staked out above is extremely complex and heterogeneous, including a manifold number of diverging views both concerning the nature of the dimension of meaning (e.g. historical tradition, limitless differential context, sign systems, regimes of power, grammar of language games, theoretical wholes, conceptual schemes, pragmatic vocabularies) and concerning the philosophical task and method of thinking it (e.g. hermeneutic interpretation, deconstruction, structural analysis, analysis of power, therapeutic clarification, conceptual analysis, ironic discourse). Even so, I think it is no exaggeration to claim that they to a large extent share the same basic idea that there is a primary dimension of historical meaning which determines what we can experience and communicate as meaningful, whose truth and content cannot be investigated through any direct intuition of experiential givens, but which requires another kind of philosophical reflection on this dimension as such. Still, the point of sketching such a paradigm is not to lock a diverse group of philosophers into a uniform mold but to indicate a basic trait that they largely share and

vary. Of course, the texts of these philosophers also contain thoughts that do not fit into or even challenge the paradigm.

Although it seems to me that the metaphysics of historical meaning has for a long time played a dominant role both in philosophy and in the wider cultural discourse and imagination, it has naturally co-existed with various other philosophical paradigms, the strongest of which is surely to be found in the various types of burgeoning naturalist philosophy. Moreover, there have been some general criticisms of the metaphysics of historical meaning, the most important of which are, to my mind, the following: first, the idea that our understanding of conceptual meaning determines our knowledge of empirical reality has been contested by the naturalist thought of Willard Van Orman Quine and Donald Davidson and by Hilary Putnam's theory of direct reference; second, the idea that our historical meanings and values determine the existential significance of particular beings has been challenged by Emmanuel Levinas, who insists that it is our encounter with the particular other human being that is the source of all moral claims on us. In fact, as will become clear, I consider the following an attempt to critically question the ontological difference and provisionally articulate what I call the openness of our understanding to travel in the same general direction as these criticisms.

What is it that allows the metaphysics of historical meaning to ascend as a dominating paradigm of contemporary philosophy? It would of course be absurd to attempt to give a complete answer to this question here, covering all the philosophical and non-philosophical motives influencing the development of philosophy. Nevertheless, I think it might be illuminating to point to some of the basic philosophical reasons which contributed – and still contribute – to giving the paradigm its persuasive force.

It seems to me that there are two basic meaning-aspects characterizing the idea of a primary dimension of meaning – or its equivalents – which have for a long time lived side by side in contemporary philosophy without always being clearly distinguished from each other. First, the notion of meaning has signified the sphere of concepts or meaning-structures which determine what we can experience and understand as identifiable unities of meaning. Thus, e.g., our concept of a bicycle allows us to identify and understand the point and use of particular bicycles just as our concept of courage allows us to identify and judge actions as

courageous. Secondly, the notion of meaning has denoted the sphere of values and norms which determine what we can experience and understand as ethically-existentially significant and important. Thus, e.g., our historical values of love and courage constitute the ground of our ethical-existential appreciation of love and courage as important in our lives.

Now the gradual emergence of the metaphysics of historical meaning is very much due to the fact that it seemed to offer a convincing general picture of human experience and reality which allowed philosophy to overcome some of the basic problems and notions which had guided modern philosophy well up into the early 20th century, but which now began to appear misguided or senseless. To begin with, the idea of the primacy of historical meaning allowed – in accordance with its first aspect – philosophy to radically question and surmount the basic epistemological-ontological framework which had governed philosophy since the beginning of the modern era. On the one hand, it lets us dismiss the traditional dualism between inner consciousness and outer reality, as well as the ensuing epistemological question of how we can attain knowledge of the outer world, by suggesting that our access both to ourselves and to reality is guided by our historical concepts which determine in advance what we can identify as inner experiences, as external empirical objects or as reasons and grounds for knowledge. On the other hand, it allows us to overcome the traditional oscillation between empiricism and rationalism by suggesting that both our sense perception and our rational understanding of ideas is always already guided by our factual concepts which cannot be grounded either on empirical givens or on some self-grounding principles. Moreover, the idea of the primacy of meaning – in accordance with its second aspect – allowed philosophy to overcome the traditional paradigm of moral philosophy. During the whole modern era, moral philosophy had been led by the ambition to ground the moral concepts in terms of which we value and judge our souls and actions on some kind of ultimate universally binding principles, these principles being inferred in many different ways and from many different sources, e.g., from the laws and rights of nature, from the constitution of human reason, or from the happiness of human beings. The metaphysics of historical meaning allowed philosophy to leave behind this apparently hopeless ambition by claiming that our moral experience and

understanding is grounded in the values, norms, and virtues bestowed by our history. While it is generally agreed that such factual values and norms cannot be justified with reference to some external ahistorical grounds, it is an open and widely debated issue how critical discussion of such values is possible within and between different historical traditions.

However, the metaphysics of historical meaning does not only imply an alteration of our basic ontological picture of the world. After the death of the age-old project of philosophy to find ultimate grounds for our knowledge of life and the world, the idea of the primacy of historical meaning also allows philosophy to retain its rank as a fundamental and autonomous task of understanding. Given that our understanding of the historical contexts of meaning in which we live determines our experience and understanding of meaningful beings, and given that we first and foremost – both in our everyday lives and in the positive sciences – tend to employ these meanings in a naive and unthematic manner, then the philosophical reflection on the domain of meaning emerges as the fundamental form of understanding which, prior to every empirical experience, is able to examine and clarify the constitution of the meaningful world in which we live. Moreover, given that our understanding of the historical contexts of value in which we live determine what we can experience and judge as ethically-existentially significant, and given that we normally tend to enact this understanding naively as normal and self-evident, then the philosophical reflection on our values and norms appears as the basic form of understanding which is able to investigate the sources of our ethical evaluation of courage, love, honor, honesty, authenticity, justice, etc. In short, the metaphysics of meaning permits philosophy, as a reflection on the domain of meaning, to maintain its status as our most basic possibility of understanding reality as well as good and evil – this regardless of how philosophy more specifically conceives of its task: its guiding problems, its knowledge claims, its mode of investigation and communication.

But why call the philosophical paradigm I have tried to outline above a metaphysics of historical meaning? Is not this paradigm in point of fact superior to the earlier philosophical paradigms which it has helped us overcome? Is it not on the whole true and illuminating – even though, of course, it leaves a host of questions open, including questions concerning the nature of the paradigm itself?

My reason for calling the basic conception of the primacy of historical meaning a metaphysics is my belief that this paradigm for a long time has had – and still has – the character of a dogmatic view of the nature of reality and thinking, a view which to a very large extent functions as a collectively accepted truth which guides and limits our philosophical imagination and dialogue in advance, and which is very seldom radically questioned concerning its basic tenets. The dogmatic character of the paradigm does not prevent it from exhibiting genuine clarificatory power: if we look at our *de facto* experience there is obviously truth in the notion that our experience and understanding are generally guided by a historical understanding of meanings and concepts which lets us see reality as intelligible and meaningfully structured. What is more, there is evidently truth in the notion that we are always already thrown into historical contexts of values regulating what a given community regards as good or bad, and which are generally backed up by strong collective mechanisms of honor and shame. However, notwithstanding that the metaphysics of meaning harbors potential truth and clarificatory force its dogmatic character implies that this conception is blindly taken over and exaggerated, and almost never questioned and critically delimited in its genuine truth. Still, as I indicated in my earlier criticisms of Heidegger, I believe that the metaphysics of meaning fundamentally misconstrues the guidedness of our experience by historical concepts in terms of a radical determination of the former by the latter, whereby this denial of our primary experiential openness towards particular beings results in a blindness both to the source of truth of our understanding as well as to the source of significance in our lives.

Heidegger's groundbreaking articulation of the ontological difference has played a vital role in establishing the paradigm which I have called the metaphysics of meaning. This is the reason why he belongs to those few philosophers from the first half the 20th century – Wittgenstein being the other outstanding example – who we are still able to read and discuss with as our contemporaries. But this also seems to be the reason why the enormous discourse generated around Heidegger's thinking has tended to pay relatively little attention to the ontological difference itself. Whereas the phenomenological interpretation has never seriously taken on the challenge which the ontological difference poses for the decisive notion of an intuition-based reflection on our experience, but has simply insisted on

the possibility of such reflection, the hermeneutic-deconstructive interpretation has tended to take the ontological difference for granted and, instead of halting at this question, has rushed on to explicate and elaborate its consequences, e.g., the temporality, historicity, finitude, and differentiability of being and thinking.

However, it is precisely the fact that the ontological difference has for a long time tended to appear as the self-evident beginning of Heidegger's further thinking which should make us halt – as this fact bears witness to the basic yet unclarified role this difference has played for Heidegger and still plays for us today.

Heidegger's Last Word

In my thesis I have claimed to explicate Heidegger's basic conception of the structure of phenomenality which guides his thinking from the early 1920s onwards and which is centered in the ontological difference. Still, this is not the whole story of Heidegger's thinking of phenomenality. In one of his last texts, he returns once more to the problem of phenomenality only to question – for the first and last time – the ontological difference at the root of his thinking. The text in question is a short note on Cézanne's painting. Originally the text was part of a series of remarks published in a supplement – devoted to the poet René Char, who was a friend of Heidegger's – of the quarterly *L'Herne* in 1971, yet Heidegger had occasion to rework the text on Cézanne as late as 1974.

So why have I have put off dealing with this text until now? Well, for the reason that the text itself amounts to something like an epilogue to Heidegger's thinking. By questioning the ontological difference, it opens up questions which unsettle and, hence, cannot be integrated within the philosophical framework which constitutes Heidegger's earlier work anymore. At the same time, the text is too sparse to open up and establish a new framework. In this sense, it is really writing after the writing.

Heidegger's short text begins with a description of how Cézanne's paradigmatic landscape – the Montagne Sainte-Victoire – is gathered into its unity in his paintings. The text culminates in the following passage:

What Cézanne names *la réalisation* is
the appearance of what is present in the clearing

of presence – such that the duality of both is bound up in the simplicity of the pure shining of its images.

For thought, this is the question of the overcoming of the ontological difference between being and beings. But the overcoming only becomes possible if the ontological difference is first experienced and pondered as such, which in turn can only occur on the basis of the “question of being” posed in *Being and Time*.⁹⁸⁰

What happens here? The passage unfolds as an interpretation of Cézanne’s term “*la réalisation*,” by which he designates what takes place in his paintings. According to Heidegger, this term denotes “the appearance of what is present in the clearing of presence,” that is, the ontological difference at the root of his conception of phenomenality: in order for a being to appear as a meaningful phenomenon it must do so on the basis of the historical context of being which has been opened up by the clearing. However, as he continues the sentence this difference undergoes a decisive displacement which deprives it of its fundamental role. In Cézanne’s paintings, the appearance of what is present in the presence of the clearing happens in such a way that “the duality of both is bound up in the simplicity of the pure shining of its images.” For thinking, Heidegger continues, this implies nothing but an “overcoming of the ontological difference.” He ends the passage by stating that such an overcoming is only possible to the extent that the ontological difference has first been experienced and articulated as such.

Undoubtedly, this passage suggests a radical disruption in Heidegger’s thinking given that for the first time it announces the overcoming of the very basic tenet that has carried his thinking of phenomenality so far. Yet what is the concrete philosophical content of this passage, and what clarificatory force does it possess?

⁹⁸⁰ Figal [ed.] 2007a, p. 342: “Was Cézanne *la réalisation* nennt, ist das Erscheinen des Anwesenden in der Lichtung des Anwesens – so zwar, daß die Zweifalt beider verwunden ist in der Einfalt des reinen Scheinens seiner Bilder. Für das Denken ist dies die Frage nach der Überwindung der ontologischen Differenz zwischen Sein und Seiendem. Die Überwindung wird aber nur möglich, wenn die o. Di. zuvor als solche erfahren und bedacht ist, was wiederum nur geschehen kann auf dem Grunde der in ‘Sein u. Zeit’ gefragten Seinsfrage.”

In his introduction to the anthology *The Heidegger Reader*, in which Heidegger's text on Cézanne is reprinted, Günter Figal comments on this text as follows: "In this notion of Heidegger's, a fundamental theme of his thinking returns: All reflections on discovery, truth as unconcealment, *physis*, and being were part of the attempt to trace the mystery of phenomena that lies in their self-showing. Now, at eighty-five, Heidegger has found the clear and yet enigmatic answer in the 'pure shining' of the images."⁹⁸¹ It is clearly true, I think, that Heidegger's rooting of the ontological difference in the pure shining of Cézanne's paintings constitutes his final attempt to find an answer to his life-long question concerning the enigma of phenomenality. Still, it seems an overstatement to say that Heidegger's formulation really amounts to an answer – even an enigmatic answer – to this question, given that its sense is bound to remain so underdetermined. In so far as it implies a revolution of the basic setup of his thinking so far, but offers nothing but a vague hint forward, it robs us of every possibility of interpreting it with any certainty. Nevertheless, I want to make an attempt to reflect on the possible senses of the text by projecting it in the direction of two possible philosophical interpretations.

What I will call the radical interpretation of the text would be something like the following: by grounding the ontological difference in the "simplicity of the pure shining" of the images, Heidegger undermines the strict hierarchy of difference. If up to this point he had conceived of the particular phenomenon as determined by the historical context of meaning, he now lets the ontological difference be rooted in a more primary phenomenality. His talk of a "*reines Scheinen*" – "pure shining" – indicates such a displacement: by removing the prefix *er-*, which in the word "*erscheinen*" conveys that the appearance in question is the result of a prior happening, and adding the attribute "pure," he seems to want to point to a primary sphere of phenomenality which cannot be grounded in anything else and which constitutes the ground for the ontological difference. But what is this pure shining? Heidegger does not give anything like a clarifying answer to this question. He only indicates what he has in mind by describing the pure shining as a unity between being and beings, which precedes the ontological difference. However, the very

⁹⁸¹ Figal [ed.] 2007a, p. 43.

idea of a unified phenomenality preceding and constituting the ontological difference seems to imply a disruption of the hierarchical order of determination implied by this difference, and to suggest a deeper interdependence between historical being and particular beings, such that our understanding of being would not only determine our understanding of beings but would itself be determined by our experience of particular entities.

If this line of interpretation is correct, Heidegger's brief remarks on Cézanne would necessitate a radical critical revision of his earlier analysis of phenomenality and, hence, of his guiding idea about the task and historical method of philosophical thinking. Heidegger's basic idea of the hierarchical as-structure of understanding would have to give way to a conception in which our direct experience of particular beings would play an irreducible and determining role in the constitution of our phenomenal understanding. Hence, his notion of philosophical thinking as a historical reflection on the unthought meaning-possibilities of our history would give way to a thinking in which phenomenological seeing would play an irreducible role. Moreover, the very need to account for the binding force of historical being by anchoring it in the clearing/event would evaporate in so far as our access to particular beings would co-constitute both the truth and significance of our phenomenal understanding. Instead, we would be thrown back on the question how we should understand the basic relationship between being and beings – the question Heidegger here opens but never answers: In what sense could our direct experience of particular entities constitute a source of truth and significance for our understanding of meaningful reality? And what would this mean for the task of philosophy?

But does this interpretation go too far? Can we be sure that Heidegger's talk of overcoming the ontological difference was intended to radically question his entire earlier approach and open up a new beginning? We cannot.

Against the radical interpretation suggested above the following critical reply – which I will call the weak interpretation – could be mustered: Should not Heidegger's text primarily be interpreted as a commentary on what happens in works of art, more precisely in the specific art of Cézanne's paintings? Is not the overcoming of the ontological difference explicitly announced as something that happens in these images, so that

the difference is grounded in the “simplicity of the pure shining of its images”? Does not this, in turn, indicate that Heidegger’s commentary is still basically in line with his earlier analysis of the artwork in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, so that his talk of a unified pure shining would be a reformulation of his earlier analysis of how the work of art opens a world by realizing the strife between the world and the earth? Does not Heidegger’s formulation earlier in the text, that Cézanne’s images “join simplicity” (*jügend die Enfalt*) – i.e. that they join and gather the world into its unity – confirm this? However, as we saw earlier Heidegger’s description of the strife between the world and earth in *The Origin of the Work of Art* did not imply a radical break with the ontological difference. Even though the artwork had to ground the world on the earth Heidegger never allowed our direct experience of the particularities of the material-sensuous earth to emerge as an autonomous source of meaning: the world projected by the artwork received all its guiding meanings from the historical heritage whereby the earth was reduced to the material-sensuous element granting concrete shape to these meanings. Moreover, the world thus projected determined all our possibilities of experiencing meaningful phenomena. Could not Heidegger’s commentary on Cézanne easily be interpreted as saying basically the same, that Cézanne’s paintings open up a unified world by realizing some kind of interplay between being and beings, whose nature remains obscure, and which it would be most natural to interpret as a variation on his earlier analysis of the strife between the world and the earth? In that case, Heidegger’s talk of overcoming the ontological difference would strictly speaking amount to a hyperbolic restatement of the dynamics of that strife.

At least for now – and perhaps forever – I think we have to leave the question of the sense of Heidegger’s last articulation of the nature of phenomenality open and undetermined. Since the text on Cézanne is too short and vague to give us a clear understanding of its philosophical sense and consequences, and since it is not followed by other texts that would shed light on its content – if it is to be read back into his earlier philosophical framework or if it breaks with that framework and opens a radically new horizon of thinking – it is in principal impossible to attain a definitive answer as to how it should be read. However, this in itself is no great loss. In so far as our driving motivation for reading Heidegger is philosophical rather than philological, the point of the texts eventually

resides in their ability to teach us to see matters for ourselves. Arguably, Heidegger was never as generous and demanding as when he ended his philosophical path by opening up the question of phenomenality anew while leaving us alone with this question.

But how is it possible to overcome the ontological difference, which has now informed philosophy for many decades, without falling back into the futile dualisms – subject/object, idealism/realism, empiricism/rationalism – that Heidegger has helped us free ourselves from? Would this not mean forfeiting the insights into the domain of historical meaning always already determining our understanding that it has taken so much philosophical work to achieve? And what would be the consequences for our conception of the task of philosophy? I want to end this thesis by attempting a brief sketch of what it would mean to overcome the ontological difference and learn to see what I suggest to be the openness of our understanding towards the particular beings that we experience and understand. Of course, the only thing I can do here is to indicate the perspective and direction that I see opening up as a possibility for philosophy. The task of working out and probing the different aspects of this perspective lies in the future.

Our Openness Towards Beings as the Source of Truth

My first proposal is that our conceptual understanding, in its central parts, is open towards the particular beings and situations we encounter in our experience as the source of truth of our understanding.

Heidegger's analysis of the as-structure of understanding undoubtedly exposes a central feature of our everyday experience, namely that we always already tend to live in an understanding of general historical meanings and concepts that allow us to apprehend beings as meaningful phenomena: this as a human being, this as a dog, this as a chair. On the basis of this analysis Heidegger then articulates his conception of the ontological difference, such that he ascribes a strict – ontologically determining – priority to our historical understanding of being in relation to our experience of particular beings. However, what his concrete analysis of the as-structure of understanding actually shows is that our understanding of being is primary in the sense that it constitutes the factual pre-understanding that provisionally guides our experience and

allows us to identify the beings we experience in a smooth and unreflective manner. And yet, what Heidegger claims is not only that our understanding of being provisionally *guides* our experience but that it *determines* what we *can* grasp as meaningful phenomena; it determines – given his identification of phenomenality and being – what beings can be. It is this idea that makes Heidegger cancel out the possibility that our direct experience of beings could function as the ground for our understanding of the meanings of beings, and which makes him insist that a transparent understanding of being can only be achieved through a historical reflection on the meaning-possibilities harbored by our history.

As far as I can see, the most powerful critique of Heidegger's ontological difference from the point of view of the question of truth has been delivered by Cristina Lafont in her book *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure*.⁹⁸² Elaborating on Tugendhat's classical critique of

⁹⁸² Lafont's book, which was published in English in 2000 constitutes an extensively revised version of the original German book *Sprache und Welterschließung* from 1994. Jacques Derrida is also known for having proposed a critical deconstruction and delimitation of Heidegger's notion of the ontological difference. However, I will not be considering Derrida's critique since I believe it does not really question the ontological difference in the sense attempted here but rather amounts to a kind of critical elaboration of the ontological difference, an elaboration that rests on a basic affirmation of that very difference. Derrida writes: "entity and being, ontic and ontological, 'ontico-ontological,' are, in an original style, *derivative* with regard to difference; and with respect to what I shall later call *différance*, an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring. The ontico-ontological difference and its ground (*Grund*) in the 'transcendence of Dasein' are not absolutely originary. Différance by itself would be more 'originary,' but one would no longer be able to call it 'origin' or 'ground,' those notions belonging essentially to the history of onto-theology, to the system functioning as the effacing of difference. It can, however, be thought of in the closest proximity to itself only on one condition: that one begins by determining it as the ontico-ontological difference before erasing that determination. The necessity of passing through that erased determination, the necessity of that *trick of writing* is irreducible" (Derrida 1997, pp. 23f.). However, even though Derrida suggests that the ontological difference is "derivate" with respect to *différance* – that "*différance* [...] (is) 'older'" than the ontological difference (Derrida 1982, p. 22) – his own idea of *différance* presupposes the ontological difference: the notion that our direct intuitive experience of beings as meaningful is determined by the historical contexts of meaning into which we are thrown. It is the ontological difference which forms the basis of Derrida's attempt to articulate *différance* as the logic of differing/deferring which, he claims, characterizes our historical contexts of meaning, and which supposedly produces what appears as the identifiable meanings of our direct experience. Hence, the ontological difference cannot be conceived as another historical effect of *différance*. Instead, it must be presupposed as the basic hierarchical

Heidegger's conception of truth, Lafont critically interrogates Heidegger's ontological difference at the root of this conception by drawing on the theories of direct reference developed by Hilary Putnam and Keith Donnellan.

Lafont's principal thesis is that Heidegger basically understands language as world-disclosure, which means that he believes that our experience of beings is radically determined by the meanings and categories of our language. Although this conception of language receives a clear and consistent articulation only in Heidegger's writings after the *Kehre*, Lafont claims that it is already – albeit in an ambivalent way – at the basis of his thinking in *Being and Time*. The idea of language as world disclosure is, in turn, grounded in the ontological difference. According to Lafont, Heidegger's notion of the ontological difference implies the semantic thesis that meaning determines reference in the radical sense that our understanding of being determines not only what we can refer to with our words but also what we can experience as meaningful entities: “Given that our understanding of being is *constitutive* for what these entities are *for us*, it determines how we understand, perceive, and experience the world.”⁹⁸³ Even though Heidegger insists that our understanding of being is factual, i.e., historically contingent and changeable, he nevertheless conceives of it as strictly a priori: it precedes and determines in advance – as an absolute and uncircumventable historical fate – our experience of beings and it is, consequently, unrevisable by such experience.⁹⁸⁴ As a result, Lafont argues that Heidegger's thinking of the ontological difference in the end amounts to a linguistic idealism and leads to a relativization of the truth – understood by Heidegger as unconcealment – to our different historical ways of linguistically constituting the world.⁹⁸⁵ According to Lafont, however, Heidegger's ontological difference cannot

structure that grounds the possibility of postulating *différance* as the “non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences” and deconstruction as a primary task of thinking (Derrida 1982, p. 11). If it turned out that Heidegger's notion of the ontological difference is flawed and misleading; if it turned out that our factual historical contexts of meaning do not determine what we can experience but merely constitute our fallible preconceptions and concepts which receive their truth/untruth from our direct experience of beings – then Derrida's conception of *différance* as the basic logic regulating the production of meaning and truth would also collapse.

⁹⁸³ Lafont 2000, p. xiii.

⁹⁸⁴ Cf. Lafont 2000, pp. 110-112, 253-257.

⁹⁸⁵ Cf. Lafont 2000, pp. xv, 111.

be upheld. Drawing on Putnam and Donnellan, she argues that our understanding of the factual concepts and meanings that always already guide our experience of beings is, in so far as it has empirical content, essentially hypothetical and fallible in character, and cannot determine in advance the possible content of our experience. Moreover, it is a central feature of our language that we can use words to refer directly to beings without possessing an a priori knowledge of meaning supposedly necessary to allow us to pick out the referent. In referring to beings directly we use our factual understanding to refer to the beings themselves as independent of our understanding, that is, regardless of how they are ultimately to be described: “We can see that the referential use of terms presupposes the unproblematic availability of the distinction between *language* and *what language is about*. Only on the basis of grasping this difference can we adopt a *hypothetical* attitude toward the ascriptions we undertake vis-à-vis the objective world, a world presupposed by the activity of designation.”⁹⁸⁶ Heidegger, Lafont has it, is certainly right in claiming that we always already live in a factual understanding of being which guides our referring to and experience of beings. However, this understanding does not a priori determine our experience but merely has the status of fallible hypotheses about independent beings.

It seems clear to me that Lafont’s critique is able to track some of the basic problems of Heidegger’s ontological difference, and I see my own account as an elaboration and radicalization of this critique. Nevertheless, I want to draw attention to some problems with Lafont’s analysis, which delimit the force of her critique.

To begin with, I do not agree with Lafont’s exegetical claim that Heidegger would already in *Being and Time* put forward the thesis that our understanding of being is linguistically constituted. As I argued earlier, the early Heidegger basically conceives of Dasein’s understanding of being and the world as an understanding of pre-linguistic patterns of meaning, so that these meanings form the basis for our possibilities of linguistic expression and communication. However, regardless of whether Heidegger conceives of the understanding of being as linguistic or not, I think Lafont is right in maintaining that Heidegger’s conception of the ontological difference implies that our historical understanding of being a

⁹⁸⁶ Lafont 2000, p. 244.

priori determines our experience of beings, and that this conception suffers from deep problems of the kind she points to.⁹⁸⁷

Still, although Lafont is on the right track, it seems to me that her critical explication tends to pass by the central philosophical concern underlying Heidegger's ontological difference, something that severely weakens the force of her criticism.

Lafont basically explicates Heidegger's ontological difference as the general thesis that our factual pre-understanding of being determines what we can experience as beings. Her central critical argument is that Heidegger fails to see that our understanding of being, in so far as it has empirical content, must be conceived as fallible hypotheses about the world such as it is in itself independently of our understanding. In this, the theoretical concepts of the empirical sciences provide the paradigm for her critique of what Heidegger cannot account for and what the theory of direct reference can account for.

However, in so doing Lafont from the outset overlooks that the primary question guiding Heidegger's analysis of the ontological difference concerns the structure of our understanding and experience of *significant phenomena*. Central to this analysis is Heidegger's claim that our pre-theoretical experience of ready-to-hand beings in terms of their functions and significances is irreducible to and determines the possible relevance of our theoretical knowledge of present-at-hand beings. As Heidegger writes:

⁹⁸⁷ Taylor Carman and Mark Wrathall have both contested Lafont's claim that Heidegger is already a linguistic idealist in *Being and Time*, and I basically agree with their critique on this point (see Carman 2002, pp. 206-213; Wrathall 2002, pp. 222-224). However, both of them wrongly take this as evidence for the untenability of Lafont's central thesis that, according to Heidegger, our understanding of being radically determines what we can experience as beings. In this, it seems to me that they do not see or acknowledge the challenge that Lafont's critique actually poses to Heidegger's basic notion of the ontological difference, and the additional arguments they offer against Lafont are quite meager and unconvincing. Although Lafont, in replying to Carman and Wrathall, retains her thesis about the linguisticity of Dasein's understanding of being, she also – quite rightly – notes that this thesis is not relevant for the force of her basic critique: “Here, I must confess that I do not understand how the issue of whether meaning is prelinguistic or not could have any impact whatsoever on the question whether (and in which way) our experience is essentially prejudiced by a prior understanding, linguistic or otherwise. My concern here is the allegedly a priori *status* of such an understanding and not its specific structure or *content*. If it turned out that our cognitive capacities are essentially determined by our prelinguistic interpretative access to the world, I would not feel any better about it” (Lafont 2002, p. 244).

all the “properties” of the equipment are “bound up in” the ways in which it is “appropriate or inappropriate” in relation to some task or purpose.⁹⁸⁸ According to Heidegger, our primary understanding of beings as significant phenomena is determined by our prior understanding of the historical being-senses and paradigms of value – the heroes or gods – that form the teleological horizon of our world. This prior understanding of being organizes the networks of instrumental relations in which we live, and the significant roles and functions in terms of which particular beings can show up for us. However, this claim about the historical structure of our primary understanding of significance in no way commits Heidegger to the thesis that our knowledge of presence-at-hand objects – as paradigmatically manifested in the natural sciences – would be radically determined by our factual conceptual pre-understanding of the empirical characteristics of these objects. Heidegger is, to be sure, quite ambivalent regarding this question.⁹⁸⁹ Still, from a systematic point of view it is clear that he could retain his primary thesis that our understanding of significance is structured by the ontological difference, while admitting that the concepts of the empirical sciences function as fallible hypotheses about the beings under investigation. However, according to Heidegger, such empirical knowledge is not constitutive of our understanding of the significance of beings. For example, he could argue that whereas our empirical knowledge of the material and technical aspects of the car is clearly fallible, it is our historical understanding of the values and practices constituting the role of the car in our world which determines the way in which such empirical knowledge becomes relevant in the first place.

Now, I believe Heidegger is basically right in insisting that our understanding of the significance of beings is irreducible to, and not primarily constituted by, our empirical knowledge of the material-causal traits of these beings. This, however, implies that Lafont’s critical thesis about the fallible nature of the concepts of the empirical sciences, although true of them, strictly speaking does not unsettle Heidegger’s central notion of the historicity of understanding. For us, then, the question remains: Is our understanding of significance radically determined by our historical pre-understanding of being, or must this pre-

⁹⁸⁸ SZ, p. 83: “Zuhandenes hat allenfalls Geeignetheiten und Ungeeignetheiten, und seine ‘Eigenschaften’ sind in diesen gleichsam noch gebunden.”

⁹⁸⁹ Cf., e.g., GA 41, pp. 65-108. Cf. also Lafont 2000, pp. 259-275.

understanding rather be conceived in terms of our fallible provisional grasp of independent realities?

To specify the sense and direction of our question, it is crucial to begin by noting that there are in fact some kinds of understanding concerning which it seems true to claim – with Heidegger – that our understanding of the factual meanings and concepts of our culture ontologically determine what we can understand as meaningful beings. What I have in mind is our understanding of conventional practices and our understanding of social norms. It is, as we have seen, precisely these kinds of understanding that are paradigmatic for Heidegger in his analyses of equipment and of the gods and norms of our historical world. The problem arises in so far as he takes these specific types of understanding as the unquestioned starting point for his general interpretation of the basic structure of phenomenal being.

By conventional practices, I mean all the habits of acting that have been established and institutionalized in a given historical community. In our society, such conventions include hammering, driving cars, living in houses, using money, and so on. To understand the factual meanings and concepts characterizing the convention and to understand the convention itself ultimately amount to the same thing, whereby this understanding totally determines how particular entities can show up as relevant for the convention in question. By social norms or values, I mean the conceptions of what is good or evil, valuable or worthless, decent or indecent that characterize a given historical community, and which measure the value – the honor or shame – of the individual in the eyes of this collective. To understand social norms is essentially to understand the factual norms that happen to dominate in a given community, whereby these norms determine what meaning particular actions or traits can take on. As regards conventional practices and social norms, we see that it is true that our understanding of the factual meanings and concepts of our society determine what we can experience as meaningful beings. Here, there is no further question about the truth of our understanding – about how well it is able to grasp and illuminate realities beyond our factual historical concepts. To understand such concepts is simply to understand how one acts – and how one ought to act – in a given society.

However, Heidegger's analysis cannot account for our understanding of significance in so far as it involves a claim to grasp human and social

realities transcending our factual historical concepts. Here belongs, e.g., our understanding of ethical-existential significance beyond social norms, our understanding of the dynamics of the psyche and of our social world, as well as our philosophical understanding of the sense-structures of our experience. It is, I want to suggest, a central feature of this kind of understanding that it is essentially open and directed towards the particular beings we experience and understand. Although our understanding is always already guided by some historical pre-understanding, it belongs to the very sense of this experience that it is directed towards the particular beings as something which transcends our pre-understanding, and which constitutes the source of truth of our understanding.

To get a sense of the dynamics of truth characterizing our understanding of significance, let us consider the following examples. First, take a person who has always considered the soldier as a paradigm of courage, and who has, accordingly, always looked down on conscientious objectors and their likes as cowards. However, one day this person comes to realize that the task of withstanding and retaining one's moral autonomy in the face of social pressure might be equally demanding as the task of encountering physical danger. Second, consider someone who pictures a human being as a basically egoistic creature, and who uses this notion to justify a cynical attitude towards all moral and political claims on her. However, at some point this person opens up to and acknowledges the possibility of loving and caring for people in a non-egoistic manner, and simultaneously comes to recognize the role her notion of egoism has so far played in allowing her to cover up and legitimize her flight from this possibility and the moral claims that flow from it.

Now, it seems clear to me that we can only account for the dynamics of truth operative in the above examples if we conceive of our understanding in terms of our grasp – be it better or worse – of independent matters. What makes the initial understanding in the examples untrue is that it fails to account for and instead covers up and distorts what is actually there and accessible in our experience independently of our factual concepts; what makes the resulting understanding more true is its better ability to grasp and articulate the phenomena in question: the different faces of courage, the possibilities of egoism and love. By contrast, it seems quite impossible to account for the

play between truth and untruth exhibited in the examples in terms of how well the person's understanding complies with and makes use of the factual concepts of courage, egoism and love available in her historical context – or perhaps in some other context. Indeed, we need to see that all our factual concepts – however central or basic they are in a given context – gain their truth or untruth from their capacity to help us conceive of and articulate the transconceptual beings and situations we experience. There have been – and probably still are – historical communities dominated by a conception of courage modeled on the warrior, just as the conception of the human being as an egoistic creature exerts an equally strong and widespread influence in the contemporary Western world. However, even if these factual concepts were the only ones available in our culture – or in all the world's cultures – they would still be untrue, given that the truth or untruth of whatever concepts we possess essentially consists in the resources they provide for understanding what we experience.

What I want to suggest, then, is that the significant beings and situations that we experience as independent of our factual concepts constitutes the source of truth of our conceptual understanding; moreover, that it is our open transconceptual access to these matters – this primordial phenomenality, as it were – that makes the truth or untruth of our understanding experienceable in the first place.

Now, to claim that our conceptual understanding bears a relation of truth to the beings and situations that it grasps does not imply that it can be true or false in the same sense as propositions about empirical states of affairs. Such propositions – e.g. “the picture on the wall hangs askew” or “apes generally like bananas” – can be true or false depending on whether they present the matters they are about correctly or incorrectly. Our conceptual understanding, by contrast, is an understanding of general concepts and meanings, and does not involve any claims about specific empirical data. But neither is there any ground for trying to rehabilitate the old philosophical notion that our conceptual understanding would be true or false depending on how well it corresponds to some kind of universal general essences. However, if we – as I suggest – see our conceptual understanding as our provisional general grasp or the particular matters and situations given in our experience, then its truth or untruth must be conceived in terms of its ability to help us grasp the matters we

experience. In this, it can be more or less illuminating, clarifying, rich, precise or obscure, poor, limited, distortive.

Heidegger is of course right in claiming that our experience is always already guided by the factual conceptual pre-understanding we live in. This pre-understanding contains the typical general patterns of meaning which determine what we first and foremost tend to identify as unified phenomena and situations, which possibilities and scenarios we tend to anticipate, and which conceptual contexts we tend to draw on when we think about or discuss the matters in question. It also forms the point of departure – and provides the conceptual resources – for every modification of our concepts. If the culture we live in has only a poor or distortive conceptuality for accounting for a certain matter, this might make it quite difficult to grasp and articulate – both for ourselves and for others – what we experience. Nevertheless, our conceptual pre-understanding does not determine what we can experience as meaningful. Rather, it is essentially provisionally guiding and open towards the particular matters we experience: it is no more than our factual guiding grasp of matters and it possesses no epistemic authority other than its potential *de facto* ability to account for what we experience.

The fact that our understanding is not determined by our factual conceptual understanding also implies that the central moment of understanding consists in openly seeing and grasping the particular matters in question. In this, our factual concepts may help us or hinder us – yet they do not decide what we will understand. This is especially crucial to note when the question concerns our understanding of significant things that matter to us, because here our understanding is so intimately bound up with our emotions and our will. Given the difficulty of encountering and acknowledging a range of matters – e.g. moral challenges in relation to others, things that threaten our honor and self-esteem, our own crooked existential motives – we have a strong tendency to look away from these matters and to reach for concepts and explanations that cover up what we do not want to see and legitimize our attitude. Here it is obvious that our concepts do not function as lamps that illuminate what we experience. Instead, our understanding centrally depends on our will and ability to face and see what we encounter. In fact, our unwillingness to acknowledge central matters in our moral life has always to a greater or lesser degree shaped the collective moral

conceptuality of the community we live in. An extreme case in point is provided by all the historical communities who conceive of some group of people as essentially inferior or subhuman. Obviously, in such a situation it is easy to repress the moral possibility of relating to, say, the slave or the castless person as a you in a loving manner, whereas it is hard to find words for and communicate this possibility. However, even if our culture possessed the conceptual resources for accounting for a matter that we do not want to acknowledge, it is always in principle possible to misunderstand it by appropriating concepts and ideas that explain away the matter and allow us to see what we want to see.

In sum, then: whereas the truth of our understanding consists in our ability to see and account for the significant matters we experience, the truth of our factual concepts consists in their ability to help us grasp and articulate what we experience.

Our Openness Towards Persons as the Source of Significance

My second proposal is that we are open towards other human beings – and, in an analogous sense, animals – as persons to love and to care for, and that this openness constitutes our source of ethical-existential significance.

Let me, again, begin by critically delimiting the truth of Heidegger's viewpoint. Heidegger's basic notion of the ontological difference implies not only that our understanding of the historical contexts of meaning we live in conditions our possibility to identify particular beings as distinct meaningful phenomena, but also that it determines what we can experience as ethically-existentially significant and important. It is, he claims, the guiding values, ideals and virtues – the "gods" – of our historical world that determine what we can experience as ethical-existential claims and reasons in the first place, and which character traits and actions that will appear good or bad, honorable or despicable, meaningful or futile to us. Obviously, this conception is not plainly false but has a limited truth. It is clear that we always already live in – and that we have always already to some extent appropriated – the historical values of our community, and that these values exert a strong normative power over us.

But what kind of normative power?

It seems that taken by themselves our historical values and ideals can only concern us on account of their rhetorical-persuasive power, above all on account of the collective power they possess in our society. And this power is always strong. The task of living up to the norms pervading our collective group is generally totally decisive for our honor and reputation within the community and, hence, for our own feeling of self-esteem. Failure to comply with these norms is punished with shame, exclusion, and oppression. However, just as our historical values basically concern us in terms of their collective power, our motives for living up to such norms in view of this power are basically egoistic-collectivist. To the extent that my will is determined by my ambition to realize some value or virtue – e.g. I might want to be a good, wise and courageous person – and not by my sympathy and care for some particular person or persons, what motivates me is nothing else than my concern for how *I* appear in the eyes of my group and in the light of my collectively formed identity, into which I have invested my self-esteem.

In short, our historical values and norms cannot – however basic they are for our culture and for our personal identity – in themselves constitute the source of genuine moral claims or motives beyond our urge for egoistic-collectivist self-affirmation. The problem here does not lie in the possible historical relativity or finitude of our historical values but in their failure to exert any genuine moral claim on us. On this point, nothing is gained by positing universally valid moral principles or norms supposedly grounded in God, in nature or in human reason. Even if a norm addresses us as universal or well grounded, this does not by itself grant it moral significance even though it might increase its rhetorical-persuasive power. However, the fact that values and norms cannot constitute the source of moral significance does not, as we shall see shortly, exclude the possibility that they might indirectly serve genuine moral purposes.

So what is the source of ethical-existential significance? In fact, we already know it – how could we not –and I am certainly not the first person to point it out: it is the other human beings and our possibility of caring for them as such.

It is, of course, Emmanuel Levinas who first and paradigmatically presents the critique that Heidegger's ontological thinking sidesteps and reduces the primacy of our ethical relationship to the other human being. According to Levinas, Heidegger's ontology exceeds the "classical

intellectualism” of the philosophical tradition in stressing that our comprehension of being is not a merely theoretical attitude but fundamentally involves the whole of our pre-theoretical – temporal, practical, social – existence in the world.⁹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Heidegger retains the central idea that our relation to particular beings basically has the form of comprehension, so that our ability to grasp a being as meaningful is conditioned by our prior understanding of its being: “For Heidegger, an openness upon Being, which is not *a being*, which is not a ‘something,’ is necessary in order that, in general, a ‘something’ manifest itself.”⁹⁹¹ Although Levinas believes that Heidegger’s ontological difference captures the structure of our knowledge of impersonal beings he insists that it implies a radical reduction of the other human being to an entity which addresses us as significant only on the basis of our understanding of being: “To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing).”⁹⁹² Against Heidegger Levinas argues that the other human being does not primarily meet me as an object of comprehension at all. Rather, the other in his presence as a face addresses me as someone who “counts as such,” as someone who claims me and whom I am called to address and welcome regardless of the historical context or situation I happen to live in:⁹⁹³ “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.”⁹⁹⁴ According to Levinas, the other puts my egoistic urge to dominate all beings into question and reveals my “infinite responsibility” to the other person.⁹⁹⁵

I think Levinas’s central critique of Heidegger is basically correct and of decisive importance. Even though Levinas’s explication of Heidegger is in some respects insufficient, and does not always do justice to the complexity and potential of Heidegger’s thinking, he is certainly right in

⁹⁹⁰ Levinas 1996, p. 4.

⁹⁹¹ Levinas 1969, p. 189. Cf. Levinas 1996, p. 5.

⁹⁹² Levinas 1969, p. 45.

⁹⁹³ Levinas 1996, p. 6. Cf. also Levinas 1969, p. 53, where he writes: “When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history.”

⁹⁹⁴ Levinas 1969, p. 198.

⁹⁹⁵ Levinas 1969, p. 240.

claiming that Heidegger's thinking of being reduces and covers up the primacy of our direct ethical relationship to the other person. However, even though the vision I try to outline here is very much in line with the perspective opened up by Levinas,⁹⁹⁶ it must also be said that there are many aspects of his ethics that I find problematic. Since this is not the place for a detailed critique of Levinas, suffice it to mention what I see as some of the main problems in his thinking.

First, Levinas basically elaborates his thinking of the ethical relationship to the other in negative contrast to what he sees as the main tendency of Western philosophy to dominate and totalize beings, and he does this in a heavily theoretical-dialectical jargon. Both of these factors hamper his ability to phenomenologically access and clarify the existential-psychological dynamics characterizing our relations to others. Second, even though Levinas stresses the other's claim on me and my responsibility for the other it seems that, in the end, he shuts out the possibility of a direct loving care and desire for the other person as such; instead, he ultimately conceives of our direct relation to the other human being – who, in himself, is characterized as “the nondesirable, the undesirable *par excellence*”⁹⁹⁷ – as an indirect means to realize our primary desire for God as the totally other. Third, this explains why Levinas articulates the claim of the other on me in terms of an obligation or demand imposed on my basic egoism, and my possibility of goodness in terms of a “sacrifice without reserve.”⁹⁹⁸ Fourth, it also explains why he articulates our relation to the other as movement in which I transcend my tendency to totalize and dominate beings as the same, and reach out toward the “alterity” and “infinity” of the other.⁹⁹⁹ Both of the above characterizations are symptoms of Levinas's repression of the possibility

⁹⁹⁶ From a historical point of view, the perspective I try to articulate here belongs to the tradition of dialogical thinking initiated, above all, by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, and developed in France by Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Levinas. The guiding idea of this tradition is that the personal relationship between “I” and “you” constitutes the ethical-existential center of our lives, and forms the point of departure for all philosophical understanding of our selves, of language, of knowledge, of being. Recently, this tradition has received a new, strong and original articulation in the work of my friends and colleagues, Joel Backström and Hannes Nykänen, to whom my account is much indebted. Cf. Nykänen 2002 and Backström 2007.

⁹⁹⁷ Levinas 1998, pp. 68f.

⁹⁹⁸ Levinas 1981, p. 15.

⁹⁹⁹ Cf. Levinas 1969, pp. 194ff.

of an unegoistic love and care for the other as such – in which the other does not essentially appear as an obligation or as fundamental alterity – and his subordination of the I-you relationship to the concrete other to the supreme adventure of a self-overcoming communion with God. Fifth, Levinas's inability to account for the possibility of a positive love for the other goes hand in hand with an inability to distinguish clearly between such love and its opposite, namely the egoistic-collectivist attitude in which I relate to others solely as players within my desire for collective recognition and self-affirmation – for honor and self-esteem as opposed to dishonor and shame. It is precisely Levinas's blindness on this point that makes him unable to recognize the extent to which his desire for God must be seen as yet another strategy for covering up the possibility of loving and caring for the other, a strategy characterized by a narcissistic logic of resentment according to which my sacrifice and self-denial are taken as evidence of the superior dignity and godliness of my soul.¹⁰⁰⁰

Let me now briefly try to sketch my view of our relation to the other as the source of ethical-existential significance.

I suggest that we view our ethical relationship to other persons as a primordial phenomenal fact that cannot be explained or inferred from anything else. The other human being essentially meets and addresses me as a you who claims and concerns me personally, and whom I can relate to in love and care prior to and regardless of all possible values, principles, arguments, or gods. If we lacked the basic possibility of sympathy for the other we would, on a fundamental level, be morally autistic creatures. However, it is difficult to relate to the other in a loving way. There is a very strong tendency in us to close ourselves to the possibility of openly encountering the other with sympathy as a personal you, and instead yield to the egoistic-collectivist attitude in which I primarily care about how *I* appear in the eyes of my collective group or in the light of my collectively formed identity, my persona. In this attitude, others are reduced either to impersonal representatives of my collective audience or to role characters in my performance. In so far as I feel that others in one way or other threaten my persona, this typically generates powerful emotional reactions of envy, contempt, resentment, hatred, etc. The challenge of the personal encounter is basically the challenge of breaking with our egoistic-

¹⁰⁰⁰ For an excellent critique of Levinas, which elaborates in more detail many of the central points sketched above, see Backström 2007, pp. 183-192.

collectivist desire for self-affirmation and of opening up to the personal you in sympathy.

The possibility of a personal care for the other as such must be sharply distinguished from other motives that might encourage morally good actions. Take, for example, the situation where on my way home in the evening I see a person being abused and beaten by another. Granted that I decide to act, we can think of two possible motivations for my action: first, I can be driven to act because I feel an immediate sympathy for the abused person and want to help her; second, I can be driven to act because I want to live up to my self-understanding as a good and courageous person, and I would feel ashamed and would not be able to look at myself in the mirror if I just walked away. Now, whereas in the second scenario I do not primarily think about the abused person herself but only about how I perform in the light of my collective identity, in the second scenario I am directly concerned with the maltreated person herself irrespective of her role and the value of my actions in my egoistic-collectivist project of self-affirmation.

I think there can be no doubt that our personal I-you relationship to other persons constitutes our central ethical-existential challenge, and is decisive for the goodness and meaningfulness of our lives, namely whether we are able to live in an open and loving relation with others – in joy, sorrow or anger – or whether we close ourselves up within the enchanted circle of our egoistic-collectivist attitude. However, although our personal relationship to the other constitutes the source of morality, this does not imply that our moral life would exclusively take place in our personal relations to particular people. We are, indeed, from the very outset open to the ethical appeal of *all* human beings as persons to love and care for – whether we acknowledge this or not. In this, it is quite possible to have a certain general understanding of this ethical appeal which is to some extent independent of our ability to answer to it in our concrete relations to others, and which can serve as a guide for our ethical and political efforts. In so far as the traditional notions of the “holiness” or “absolute value” of human beings has a moral meaning, I would suggest that it is as articulations of a more or less abstract and vague

understanding of the absolute ethical appeal of all human beings and of the basic possibility of relating to them with sympathy.¹⁰⁰¹

It is precisely our understanding of the holiness of each person that constitutes the moral guideline for all political action. By politics I here mean all thinking and acting in which we are concerned with an anonymous collective group of people with the aim of forming and improving the factors – laws, institutions, habits, standards – that regulate the collective life of the group in question in order to make possible as good a life together as possible. Hereby, the relationship between ethics and politics is characterized by the following tension: on the one hand, our personal ethical relation to the other forms the source of all politics and can never in itself be understood in political terms; on the other hand, our openness to the ethical appeal of the other necessarily calls for political action that is directed at improving the social frameworks and living conditions of people considered in an anonymous way, and which essentially also involves an element of instrumental and economic thinking. Hence, we could say that our personal ethical relation to the other person – irreducible to politics – in itself demands politics – irreducible to ethics.

We are now also in a position to indicate the possible moral relevance of our historical norms and values. At the outset I stated that our will to realize the collective values of our community cannot constitute a genuinely moral motive since it is reducible to our egoistic-collectivist desire for self-affirmation. This is still as true as ever. Nevertheless, just as our openness to the ethical appeal of the other motivates political action it also grants indirect moral relevance to our collective values. This relevance stems directly from the fact that the values and norms regulating the collective dynamics of honor and shame as a rule constitute one of the

¹⁰⁰¹ The fact that many historical cultures have tended to ascribe full humanity only to members of a certain group of people – more or less widely defined – does not gainsay my thesis. On the contrary, I would suggest that it is precisely the basic possibility of encountering other persons in an open and loving manner, and the certainty that this possibility concerns all human beings, that motivates the need to define some people as sub-human to consolidate the status and power of the group that does the defining. To claim that there are historical cultures which, due to their horizon of meaning and values, lack the basic possibility of understanding and relating to some groups of people – e.g. slaves – as fully human is in effect to deny, often in the mode of an ostensibly benevolent, exoticizing racism, that the people of these cultures are fully human.

most powerful forces determining the course of collective action, namely how we collectively think and act in relation to freedom, justice, and equality; how we think and act in relation to other people and minorities; how we think and act in relation to war and torture, and so on. Of course, seeing the enormous power of our collective norms is also seeing our own moral weakness. However, the very power of social norms gives them a kind of indirect moral relevance on account of their potential to serve good or evil. Hence, in so far as we care for other people we are called to engage in the paradoxical challenge of fighting for the best values of our community while at the same time unmasking the moral emptiness and danger of all social normativity. In all this, the moral motivation of our thinking and acting, and the very possibility of distinguishing between good and evil in the first place, lies in our personal love and care for the other as such.

Transformations of Philosophy

The above account of our openness towards beings as the source of truth and significance at the end of the day brings with it a transformation of the identity of philosophy, both as concerns its task and its epistemic claims.

Philosophy has always seen it as its ultimate task – as its name also promises – to attain and foster wisdom: a qualified ethical-existential understanding of the good and meaningful life. It is this promise that has upheld the ambition of philosophy to play a leading role in the self-reflection both of the individual and of society at large. At the same time, philosophy, at least since Plato, has been characterized by a strong tendency to initially turn away its gaze from the concreteness of our immediate life with each other, and insist that the sole way to a qualified and well-grounded ethical understanding of life must go through a primary investigation of the nature of being and knowledge. It is only by understanding what being in general is, and what knowledge in general is, that we can hope to gain an understanding of ethical being and ethical knowledge. Hence, philosophy's way to wisdom has essentially had the character of a detour motivated by the notion of the primacy of ontology/epistemology over ethics. The notion of the primacy of ontology/epistemology has archetypally been grounded in some version

of the thought that our ethical understanding is hierarchically conditioned by our ontological-epistemological understanding of the basic stratum of being-knowledge – Platonic ideas, God, the conditions for certain knowledge, nature, transcendental subjectivity, language, being – that determines our ethical understanding of ourselves and of the good life. The metaphysics of historical meaning – including Heidegger – carries on this notion in the form of the idea that it is only through a reflection on our historical contexts of meaning and value that we can access the ultimate sources of our understanding of the good and meaningful life.

In the identity of philosophy the notion of the primacy of ontology/epistemology over ethics has been tightly linked to the notion of the *a priori* character of philosophical understanding: the notion that philosophy investigates a stratum of being-knowledge which determines and organizes our experience and knowledge of particular entities. This notion is also carried on by the metaphysics of historical meaning – including Heidegger. Even though these philosophers maintain that the meaning explicated by philosophy is not, as traditionally claimed, universal and necessary but historically factual and finite, they retain the basic notion that the philosophical understanding of historical meaning – language, concepts – precedes and determines our experience and knowledge of particular beings as meaningful phenomena.

However, if my account of the openness of our understanding towards particular beings is basically true, both of the above notions, which have for so long constituted the identity of philosophy, must be given up. As concerns the task of philosophy we must learn to see ethics as first philosophy; as concerns its method and epistemic claims we must learn to conceive of the basic understanding of philosophy as radically a posteriori phenomenology.

Ethics as first philosophy. To me there is no doubt that we must give up the traditional notion of the primacy of ontology/epistemology over ethics and henceforth – as Levinas suggests – conceive of ethics as “first philosophy.”¹⁰⁰²

Granted that our immediate I-you relationship to others constitutes the central ethical-existential challenge of our lives– it is nothing less than

¹⁰⁰² Levinas 1987, p. 59. Cf. also Levinas 1989.

the place where the substance of our souls and our central insights into life get decided – philosophy must, in so far as it wants to maintain its claim to wisdom, be primarily concerned with this challenge: try to understand and articulate it in the effort of living openly and clear-sightedly. In order to gain access to what directly encounters us in our lives with others, and to our own psychological dynamics, there is no need to start with a supposedly more fundamental and conditioning ontological-epistemological investigation of the nature of being, knowledge or meaning. But this does not mean – as history shows – that ethical-existential insight would be easy to attain. However, the primary difficulty here is not the intellectual difficulty characteristic of ontological-epistemological investigations. What makes personal ethical-existential insight difficult is that it is hard to live lovingly and openly in relation to others and that, in so far as we fail to do this, we are bound to repress, cover up, and distort the challenges facing us and the meaning of our own motives and reactions to make them more bearable and manageable. Moreover – and very much as a result of this – our present and our past tend to be dominated by paradigms of thought that cover up and steer us away from the primary ethical problematic of our lives.

The primacy of ethics in philosophy does not by itself imply that the traditional ontological-epistemological questions of philosophy would become meaningless or inherently repressive – although it certainly opens up a new critical awareness and a *prima facie* need to question their ethical-existential meaning and function. Clearly, there might be perfectly meaningful – even if not ethically-existentially central – questions to ask and investigations to undertake about different domains of being, knowledge and language, and about how these domains relate to each other. However, what the primacy of ethics does imply is that in so far as our philosophical questioning in any way concerns or draws upon the significance that the matters under investigation have in our lives it must be rooted in ethics.

Philosophy as a posteriori phenomenology. In accordance with its task to clarify our ethical-existential experience, and, more generally, the significance of different matters in our lives, philosophy must primarily take the form of phenomenology: a reflective description of the meaning-

structures and dynamics of our first-person experiences.¹⁰⁰³ In this, it must give up the traditional claim to a priori knowledge still characterizing the metaphysics of historical meaning without, however, giving in to the naturalist impulse to reduce our understanding of meaning to the kind of empirical knowledge sought by the natural sciences.

As Heidegger's criticisms of the possibility of direct phenomenological description have shown, the phenomenological undertaking is a demanding one. We always already live in historically transmitted and collectively sanctioned concepts and meanings which tend to guide our sight and which invite us to attend only to what our pre-understanding commands. Moreover, when it comes to ethically-existentially difficult matters we are tempted to repress what we encounter and instead fall back on concepts and descriptions that cover up and explain away what we do not want to see. However, such considerations do not in any way cancel out the basic possibility of phenomenologically describing our experiences.

Put quite formally, a phenomenological description is a description which, on the basis of a reflective intuitive explication of a certain experience, attempts to articulate the basic structures of meaning constituting the experience in question. As such, the phenomenological description is *a posteriori* in the sense that it essentially relies on our *de facto* concrete experiences, and is nothing but a description of these experiences.¹⁰⁰⁴ Indeed, it is quite possible – in light of the guiding

¹⁰⁰³ Even if I believe that phenomenology in a wide sense – considered as our basic access to our experience of meaning – must have methodological primacy in philosophy, I do not mean to suggest that there could not also be other vital and fruitful forms of philosophical investigation and argument.

¹⁰⁰⁴ For a good articulation of the reliance of phenomenological descriptions on our *de facto* experiences as their contingent ground, see Crowell 2002, where he writes: “For Husserl, essences are grasped *in re* through imaginative variation of what is given. Hence their necessity is always conditional: given such and such a thing, it must have these and those features. Whereas Kant attempts to establish that a certain *type* of experience is necessary by arguing that without it no unified self-consciousness is possible, Husserl can only reflect on the essential features of experiences that the subject *happens* to have. [...] For the same reason, phenomenological necessity differs from traditional metaphysical or absolute necessity. It cannot explain why there *must be* certain things. For instance, phenomenological reflection can establish a necessary connection between memory and perception: the act of remembering something refers necessarily to a previous act of perceiving it. But phenomenology can give no reason why there must be anything like memory, as a Leibnizian might argue that

problem at hand – to attempt to describe and articulate the structures of meanings constituting different kinds of experience, and without which they could not be what they actually are: love, shame, the call of conscience, erotic attraction, memory, courage, sense perception, practical coping, experiences of art and literature, etc. What is described here are not essences or forms that would in any way be prior to and, as such, determine our experiences; rather, what is described are the experiences themselves with a view to their basic structures.

Phenomenological descriptions are fallible: they can be true or false of the experiences they describe, and we are often mistaken. However, given that such descriptions are all about meaning, they are also – in a way that has not been given enough attention by phenomenologists – inherently threatened by confusion and essentialization: on the one hand, in describing general patterns of meaning there is always the risk of referring to different kinds of paradigmatic experience in an unclear and ambivalent way; on the other hand, there is the risk of dogmatically generalizing the structure of one kind of experience and postulate it as an essential structure necessarily determining experiences that are actually dissimilar. For example, in describing a certain kind of experience, which we call anxiety, we might easily confuse it with other experiences that are designated by this name; moreover, in so far as we understand our description as a description of anxiety *as such* we have essentialized it in a way that threatens to dissimulate and distort other more or less related experiences. In order to avoid ambivalence and essentialism and get a sense of the possibilities and limits of phenomenological descriptions we need to take seriously the fact that a phenomenological description can only arise and justify itself as a description of a particular kind of experience, whereby the scope and clarificatory force of the description is always bound to remain open and undetermined.

memory is necessary to the best of all possible worlds” (p. 108). Crowell’s central point is that the phenomenological understanding can only ground itself on the factual experiences we happen to have; whereas it cannot say anything about the necessity of these experiences – for all we know, they could have been otherwise or they could change in the future – it can explicate the essential and necessary structures characterizing these experiences: “The hermeneutic exploration of our factic situation suffices for insight into necessary connections” (p. 110).

Given that our phenomenological understanding of general meaning-structures is nothing but an understanding of our *de facto* experiences, it cannot determine in advance what we can experience and grasp in particular situations – unless, of course, we let it do so. Since we are basically open to what we experience and encounter it is always an open question how we will see and understand the particular phenomena we are facing – whether we find the phenomena in question illuminated and clarified by our previous understanding, whether we employ our previous understanding to cover up and distort what we experience, or whether our understanding is put into question and modified through the encounter.

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