Heidegger Explained

From Phenomenon to Thing

GRAHAM HARMAN

OPEN COURT
Chicago and La Salle, Illinois

Contents

Preface ix

Introduction 1

1. **BIOGRAPHY** 5
    - Early Life 5
    - Rising Star 7
    - The Hitler Era 10
    - Life after WWII 11
    - Appearance and Character 13

2. **A RADICAL PHENOMENOLOGIST** 15
    - Husserl's Phenomenology 16
    - 1919: Heidegger's Breakthrough 20
    - 1920–21: Facticity and Time 24
    - 1921–22: The Triple Structure of Life 28
    - 1923: Being in the Public World 32

3. **MARBURG** 37
    - 1925: The Dragon Emerges 38
    - 1927: Temporality and Being 44
    - 1928: Human Transcendence 50

4. ***BEING AND TIME*** 55
    - The Question of Being 57
    - Tools and Broken Tools 60
    - Fallenness and Care 66
    - Death, Conscience, and Resoluteness 71
    - Dasein's Temporality 73

5. **FREIBURG BEFORE THE RECTORATE** 79
1929: Nothingness 80
1929–30: On Boredom and Animals 84
1930: Veiling and Unveiling 91

6. **A NAZI PHILOSOPHER** 95
1933: The Rectoral Address 97
1933–34: Actions as Rector 100

7. **HERMIT IN THE REICH** 105
1935: Inner Truth and Greatness 106
1935: Earth and World in the Artwork 109
1936: The Echo of Hölderlin 112
1936–38: The Other Beginning 117
1940: The Metaphysics of Nietzsche 123

8. **STRANGE MASTERPIECE IN BREMEN** 127
The Thing 129
The Enframing 135
The Danger 138
The Turn 139

9. **THE TASK OF THINKING** 143
1950: Language Speaks 143
1951–52: We Are Still Not Thinking 146
1955: Releasement 149
1963–64: The End of Philosophy 151

10. **HEIDEGGER'S LEGACY** 157
His Legacy Now 157
Looking Ahead 160

Suggestions for Further Reading 165
Glossary 173
Appendix: Heidegger's Numerology 179
Index 185

2

A Radical Phenomenologist

Many interpreters of Heidegger like to split his career into "early" and "late" periods, with various competing theories as to when the turn in his thinking occurred. There are understandable reasons for this procedure: clear differences in terminology and tone are found in various phases of Heidegger's career. Even so, it is largely fruitless to read Heidegger as split into two distinct periods. His philosophy is a unified organism from its first appearance in 1919 to its final fruits in the early 1960s. When speaking of a maple tree, no one speaks of "early" and "late" tree, but simply tells the story of the birth, growth, and death of the single tree. It would be equally pointless when reading a novel to speak of a turn between "early" and "late" *War and Peace*: instead, we simply recount the plot of the novel and the often-surprising fate of its major characters.

Yet I would also not want to take the opposite approach, and write a book on Heidegger that split his thinking into such topics as "Heidegger's theory of knowledge," "Heidegger's philosophy of art," and "Heidegger's political philosophy." Why not? In the first place, we should take seriously Heidegger's view that every great thinker has only *one* great thought, rather than numerous separate ideas that could be classified under familiar headings. But even more important is the fact that a philosophy cannot be reduced to its *content*. A philosophy is not a set of definite opinions about specific subjects, one that would change completely with each minor change in the author's views. If your best friend swings overnight from atheism to religious zealotry, he still remains the same person; his personality and style of argument will remain the same even when his opinions have diametrically shifted. France was monarchist in 1782 and revolutionary in 1792, yet displayed the same French sensuality and intellectualism after the great event as before. The same holds for a great philosophy, even when its specific doctrines change over time. To explain a philosophy is not to explain the content of the philosopher's opinions at any given moment. Instead, to explain a philosophy means to approach the central insight that guides it through its entire lifespan, through all surface changes of opinion and all troubled reversals of viewpoint.

A philosophy is a living organism. Like every organism, it is born when it separates from its parents. Initially fragile and dependent on ancestors, a philosophy grows by expanding its core insight in surprising directions, by grafting ideas from other philosophies, and finally by asserting independence (sometimes violently) from its parents. The current fashion among scholars is to exaggerate the link between Heidegger and Aristotle, a philosopher with whom he has relatively little in common. Heidegger's true intellectual father is a far more obvious candidate: his teacher Edmund Husserl. Without Husserl, no Heidegger; without phenomenology, no *Being and Time*. It is Husserl who taught Heidegger how to use his own eyes, and Heidegger's various declarations of independence are aimed explicitly at Husserl, who was both as nurturing and as suffocating as mentors always are. The birth of Heidegger as an original philosopher comes in 1919, at the age of twenty-nine. Although traces of Husserl's DNA are still visible at this stage, the Heideggerian philosophy in 1919 is already an independent organism.

Heidegger is best understood as a heretic among the phenomenologists, just as Spinoza's philosophy can be seen as a Cartesian heresy, Hegel's philosophy as a Kantian heresy, Buddhism as a Hindu heresy, and the United States as a British heresy. Before turning to the heretic, we should briefly discuss the mentor whose work he radicalized: Edmund Husserl. This will require another biographical detour, though a shorter one than the last.

Husserl's Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl was born to Jewish parents on April 8, 1859, in Prossnitz in Moravia (now in the Czech Republic, but then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). Following secondary school in Olmütz, he attended the universities of Leipzig, Berlin, and Vienna. His initial focus was on mathematics, a field in which he flourished under such well-known teachers as Weierstrass and Kronecker. He received his doctorate in mathematics in Vienna in 1882, with a dissertation entitled "Contributions to the Theory of the Calculus of Variations."

Brentano and Intentionality

Fate, however, had a different vocation in store for Husserl than mathematics. In 1883 he came under the spell of the charismatic philosopher Franz Brentano, the same Catholic rebel who would later captivate the young Heidegger and the young Sigmund Freud as well. Brentano's classic book, *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint*, can be seen as a forerunner of Husserl's phenomenology. At this time philosophy seemed to be steadily losing ground to the booming natural sciences. In response to this situation, Brentano tried to carve out a special domain for philosophy by sharply distinguishing between mental acts and physical reality. Unlike the physical world, everything mental is distinguished by "intentionality" (an old medieval term revived by Brentano), which means that every mental act is directed toward an object. At each moment I see something, laugh at something, worry about something, or scream at something. All mental acts contain other objects: this "intentional inexistence," as Brentano calls it, creates a radical break between the physical and mental realms.

Under Brentano's influence, Husserl had discovered that philosophy was his true calling. Yet their relations were not always pleasant. Despite his rigorous mathematical training, Husserl was a sensitive and intuitive young man who often despaired when the master logician Brentano would smash his vague new insights with a single blow. For this reason, he must have felt somewhat relieved when Brentano sent him to the University of Halle to do his *Habilitation* in philosophy with Professor Carl Stumpf. In the same year Husserl converted to the Lutheran faith (at least officially), and in the following year he was married. Husserl and Stumpf formed an excellent relationship. Husserl's *Habilitation* thesis was on the concept of number, leading in 1891 to the publication of his first book, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic.* Even at this stage, Husserl dreamed of a new universal foundation for philosophy, one that would render all previous philosophies obsolete.

DISCOURAGEMENT AND THE BIRTH OF PHENOMENOLOGY

From 1887 to 1901, Husserl struggled as an instructor in Halle. He was frequently discouraged and insecure, and considered abandoning philosophy entirely. This long and difficult period ended with the bombshell publication in 1900–1901 of the multivolume work *Logical Investigations.* This book was one of the greatest achievements in all of recent philosophy, and provided endless fascination to Heidegger during his student years. It also marked the birth of the name "phenomenology" for Husserl's thinking, a name that would echo throughout the world in the decades to come. The first volume of *Logical Investigations* is an attack on "psychologism": the theory that logical laws are really just psychological laws of the human mind, a popular view at the time. The remainder of the work contains Husserl's trailblazing theories of linguistic and nonlinguistic signs, a new theory of wholes and parts, and above all, a new model of intentionality that departed from Brentano's in significant respects.

Among other differences, Brentano held that all intentionality is a kind of representation: a presence of something before the human mind. Husserl modified this to say that every intention is an *objectifying* act, including not just theoretical awareness, but also such obscure intentions as wishes, fears, confusion, and anger, all of which Husserl places on equal footing with conscious theoretical observation. Even more importantly, Husserl noticed that intentional objects are never fully present, since they always show us only one profile (or "adumbration") while hiding numerous others. In other words, a tree or house is never completely present to us, but is only a principle that unifies all our various perceptions of the tree and house from many different angles and distances. Both of these breakthroughs were later pushed further by Heidegger: Husserl's new interest in vague and obscure forms of intentionality was transformed into Heidegger's theory of moods, while the permanent invisibility of intentional objects would be radicalized into Heidegger's revolutionary analysis of tools.

SUCCESS

Although the *Logical Investigations* needed time to gain their full influence, the importance of the book was immediately recognized by the mathematician David Hilbert of the University of Göttingen. Hilbert urged that Husserl receive an assistant professorship in Göttingen. In 1901, Husserl received and accepted the call; the dark days of Halle had come to an end. The Göttingen years were surely the happiest period of Husserl's life. He had become the center of a worldwide philosophical movement, and would soon become the editor of a journal devoted entirely to his own style of philosophy. He basked in the admiration of his students, even while encouraging them to reject the authority of Husserl or anyone else and accept only what they could see directly with their own eyes. In later years Husserl was often criticized for delivering long-winded monologues in the classroom, but in the Göttingen period he seems to have been a good listener and an open-minded conversation partner. He also drastically reworked his philosophy in a way that Heidegger and other younger admirers would eventually reject. Stated briefly, Husserl turned toward the brand of philosophy known as idealism—placing emphasis on human consciousness rather than on the world itself. This turn is most clearly expressed in his 1913 book *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy*, usually called *Ideas I*, since two additional volumes were published after Husserl's death.

In 1916, as we have seen, Husserl was called to Freiburg as full professor, and remained in that city even after his retirement. Although Husserl graciously published Heidegger's *Being and Time* in his journal, he was somewhat disappointed with his former student's book, as can be seen from critical handwritten notes found in his personal copy. It seemed to him that Heidegger had relapsed from philosophy into anthropology, given Heidegger's detailed focus in the book on human existence. In 1929, Husserl's students and friends produced a so-called *Festschrift* for his seventieth birthday—following the German tradition of publishing collected essays by various authors in honor of a respected figure. Heidegger was given the honor of presenting the work to Husserl, yet the personal and philosophical distance between them continued to grow.

HUSSERL'S LATE CAREER

The rise of the Nazis in 1933 ended Husserl's central role at the University of Freiburg, as Jewish faculty members were persecuted. Yet Husserl continued to work intensely on philosophy, discussing new ideas with his talented disciple Eugen Fink, and honored by the continued pilgrimage of foreign admirers wishing to meet him. In 1935 Austria was not yet under Nazi rule, and Husserl accepted a lecture invitation to Vienna, the city where he had learned philosophy from Brentano a half-century earlier. Later that year, he enjoyed great success with further lectures in Prague, another city just a few years from Nazi invasion. These lectures contained the germ of his final great work: *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, whose first pages appeared in 1936. The final year of Husserl's life was dominated by a struggle with illness, and he died in Freiburg on April 27, 1938. Heidegger's failure to attend his former teacher's funeral under Nazi rule is viewed by his critics as an act of supreme cowardice. Heidegger explained it as simply a human failing, and sometimes claimed to have been sick in bed.

Like all great mentors, Husserl provided Heidegger with a brilliant model of how to reach his own mode of thinking. Yet great teachers can take years to overcome, and often provoke violent reactions in students as they struggle to see the world with their own eyes. The Martin Heidegger of 1919, not yet thirty years old, must have felt a strange mixture of thrill and anxiety as he presented his own first breakthroughs in philosophy, which already show decisive and permanent ruptures with Husserl.

1919: Heidegger's Breakthrough

As the Central Powers collapsed at the end of World War I, revolution swept through the streets of Germany. Everywhere there was talk of reform, of the need to reconstruct the whole of society and the university based on some guiding principle. The young Heidegger also had revolutionary tendencies, though not yet in the service of any political movement. In his lecture courses of 1919, he begins by addressing the widespread calls for reform. The title of these lectures in English is *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, though *On the Vocation of Philosophy* is another possible translation.

REFORMING SOCIETY THROUGH SCIENCE

In Heidegger's view, the task of philosophy is not to provide a new world-view for the public. A new world-view is always superficial and arbitrary, lacking deep roots, and so would not be able to save society. By contrast, Heidegger says that true reform is possible only through *science*. It should be noted that in German, the word for science (*Wissenschaft*) is not restricted to the exact natural sciences, as is usually the case in English. Instead, it refers to any kind of systematic knowledge at all. In the German sense of the term, history, sociology, and literary theory are also sciences; numerous German philosophers have used the word "science" to describe what they do. In fact, the young Heidegger insists that philosophy is the primordial science, the one with the broadest and deepest roots of all. The fundamental knowledge that we seek cannot come from any *particular* science: for example, we cannot reform the whole of society based on discoveries in psychology. After all, psychology is a limited field that cannot take account of equally useful insights drawn from physics, history, engineering, or aesthetics. Only philosophy has no limit to the objects it can discuss, and this means that only philosophy can provide a radical new basis for society. But philosophy is something we learn only by doing it ourselves, since the *history* of philosophy cannot help us: unless we are thinking for ourselves, we can learn nothing from Plato or Kant except superficial information about their opinions. Only those who deal with the deep and radical problems of philosophy for themselves can learn anything from the great philosophers of the past.

BEYOND HUSSERL

In 1919, the best example of a radical philosopher seeing the world with his own eyes seemed to be Edmund Husserl, Heidegger's own teacher. During this period, Heidegger still believes that phenomenology is the only way to reconstruct our entire model of the world. Yet a surprising twist to Heidegger's loyalties has already begun to emerge. In his 1919 lectures, the young Heidegger begins to imply that Husserl has not seen the world radically enough—that there are still damaging biases that haunt phenomenology. Although still praising his teacher, Heidegger begins to make subtle remarks about the need to reform phenomenology itself.

When we want to say in English that something exists, we say "there is" or "there are" such things. There are submarines. There are tornadoes. There are islands, jungles, and even fictional characters. In German they say *es gibt*, which literally means "it gives." The young Heidegger now asks what "it gives" means, a question he had been asking even in his doctoral thesis six years earlier. He is not interested in making clever grammatical jokes about the mysterious "it" that supposedly "gives." Instead, he simply wants to know what it really means when we say that a thing is. What sort of reality do things have? For Husserl, who walled philosophy off from the natural sciences, the reality of a thing is to appear as a phenomenon for human consciousness; any existence of things outside consciousness is secondary. In 1919, Heidegger begins to radicalize phenomenology, turning it into something completely different. For Heidegger as he reaches maturity, unlike for Husserl, if we say "there is a city called Beirut," this cannot mean that Beirut exists as a series of appearances in consciousness. In the young Heidegger's terminology, Beirut is neither a physical occurrence nor an appearance in consciousness. Instead, Beirut is an independent *event*. All things that exist have the character of events.

EQUIPMENT

At this point, Heidegger offers an example that is both brilliant and, by contemporary standards, somewhat offensive. As he stands in a lecture hall in Freiburg, addressing his students from the podium, Heidegger notes that professor and students all use the various objects in the room, taking them for granted. The podium is simply used, not consciously seen. The desks of the students, their pens and notebooks, are also taken for granted as useful items before they are ever clearly and consciously noticed. Heidegger now asks us to imagine what would happen if a "Senegal Negro" suddenly entered the room. This unlucky foreigner might have no concept at all of a lecture hall and its usual equipment. He might be utterly confused by the podium and have no idea of how to use it. Even so, he would not see the podium and the desks as meaningless colors and shapes. Instead, he might think of the podium as an item for voodoo or witchcraft, or as a barrier for hiding from arrows and slingstones. The "Senegal Negro's" failure to understand the room does not mean that the room is a sheer perception without any practical use. Instead, he would encounter the room as a form of "equipmental strangeness."

This is what the world means for the young Heidegger: it is not a spectacle of colors and shapes, but rather an environment in which all things have a special significance for us and are linked with one another in a specific way. What we learn from the visitor from Senegal is that objects always have a highly specific meaning even when they are not lucidly present in consciousness. Things are events, not perceptual or physical occurrences. They are a "how," not a "what"—in other words, they cannot be reduced to a list of traits and qualities that might be found in a dictionary. To repeat, the things encountered by humans are events, and this means that there is more to them than anything we can see or say about them. If I look at a flower from thousands of different angles and perform hundreds of experiments on it, all of these actions will never add up to the total reality of the flower, which is always something deeper than whatever we might see, no matter how hard we work. In some way phenomenology misses this point, since it claims that the true being of a thing lies in the way it is present in our minds. Under the influence of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Heidegger realized that historical reality is a deeper and darker layer of the world than Husserl's philosophy of phenomena can grasp. History tries to come to grips with events that are often complex and murky, not lucid appearances for human consciousness.

The Problem with Science

For the young Heidegger, then, the true reality of things is not visible, but hides from conscious view. In order to gain knowledge of things, any science has to objectify them, and to objectify things means to "de-live" them. In other words, knowledge always cuts things down to size or turns them into caricatures through some sort of oversimplification. No theory of numbers, birds, chemicals, or Stone Age societies will ever be able to exhaust the reality of these topics. To treat them scientifically means to "cut them off at the knees," converting them from mysterious and multifaceted things into concepts whose basic features can be clearly listed in a glossary. While this distortion is inevitable, it is a distortion nonetheless. Scientific knowledge of any kind, including Husserl's brand of philosophy, always fails to do justice to the things in the world, which are dark and stormy events locked in a network with other such events, rather than crystal-clear sets of knowable properties. To some extent, scientific knowledge is always a waltz with illusions, or at least with exaggerations.

We have seen that Husserl tried to save philosophy by criticizing scientific naturalism. For Husserl the world is not made primarily of forces, chemicals, potential and kinetic energy, or electromagnetic fields. What comes first for him is always phenomena perceived by humans, since these provide the true basis for any scientific theory. The young Heidegger now risks a bold criticism of his teacher. According to Heidegger, the problem is not the dominance of naturalism, but the dominance of *theory*. If scientific theories fail to do justice to the things, phenomenology also fails. If science wrongly reduces the mysterious things of the world to pieces of physical mass, phenomenology wrongly reduces them to appearances in consciousness. What things really are is events.

1920–21: Facticity and Time

A few semesters later, we find Heidegger pursuing his old religious interests, lecturing on such key Christian figures as St. Paul and St. Augustine. This lecture course is available in English as *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, and is highly recommended to anyone interested in the themes it covers. Here we need only focus on Heidegger's development of the new philosophical concepts that make his historical writings possible.

PHILOSOPHY REDEFINES ITSELF CONSTANTLY

Earlier, Heidegger claimed that all the specific sciences are too limited in the objects they describe; by contrast, philosophy has a universal scope. In 1920–21, he adds a new observation about the difference between philosophy and science. Namely, only philosophy constantly seeks to redefine itself and redetermine its own meaning. While each of the sciences goes through an occasional state of crisis that forces it to reconsider its basic concepts, such as physics after the development of relativity and the quantum theory, for philosophy this must happen constantly. Indeed, philosophy is nothing but a perpetual crisis and new beginning. All specific sciences begin by presupposing the nature of their object: only in moments of especial turmoil does chemistry ask what a chemical is or geometry ask what a shape is. It is philosophy alone that constantly faces crisis by redefining its subject matter again and again.

FACTICITY

Not only would Husserl agree with all of this, he actually said it all before Heidegger did. But there is something further that Husserl did not already notice. Pushing his earlier criticisms still further, Heidegger insists that philosophy cannot look at reality from the outside, by way of its appearance. To understand human activity, we have to view it as an independent event, not as something looked at by an observer. To use a German word, we have to view it as *Vollzug*, which means performance or execution, not one of Husserl's major terms. Human life is not something visible from the outside, but must be seen in the very act, performance, or execution of its own reality, which always exceeds any of the properties that we can list about it. In other words, life is "factical," and is marked by what Heidegger calls "facticity." The facticity of life simply means that life cannot be adequately described in theoretical terms. Human life is always immersed in a specific situation, involved with its surroundings in a very particular way. This facticity always remains partly obscure, and for this reason human life cannot be approached by the methods used in the sciences to describe inanimate matter.

Heidegger's name for human existence is Dasein ("being there" or simply "existence"), a word almost always left in the original German. For Heidegger in 1920–21, factical Dasein is the only subject matter of philosophy, for two related reasons. First, the only way to avoid reducing things to their appearance is to focus on the facticity of human life in its environment, where everything has a tacit meaning or function before we consciously notice it. Second, philosophy only arises out of a factical situation in the first place: Plato, Descartes, and Hegel were not disembodied souls floating through empty space, but were real human beings who only began to philosophize in a specific historical setting.

ENVIRONMENT

Husserl was right to say that we should abandon all traditional philosophical theories and see things with our own eyes. However, for Heidegger what we see with those eyes is not objects made up of visible properties, but an environment, and our environment is partly determined by history. In the environment, all objects gain their meaning only in their relations with one another. Everything belongs to a total system of meaning: for example, individual car parts might seem meaningless or useless in isolation, but when inserted in the car they immediately regain their full significance. While this is obviously true for objects such as cars and lecture podiums, it is equally true for my dealings with other humans and even with myself. I do not usually encounter other people as *homo sapiens*, nor do I simply observe isolated moods in my own mind. Instead, all of these things are interpreted according to their significance with respect to other things in the world. With this method of turning toward factical human life, Heidegger aims to do nothing less than revolutionize all of philosophy. The traditional categories of philosophy, found in Plato and Aristotle and later thinkers, are nothing but external descriptions of the properties of things. Any normal categories we use to describe things will fail to capture them as real events in their performance or execution. For this reason, we need an entirely new set of categories to do justice to factical Dasein.

The Importance of Time

To do justice to human Dasein, we need to interpret it in terms of *time*. Heidegger urges that time should not be viewed externally as an "occurrence." In other words, time cannot be understood when it is measured by clocks, stopwatches, or calendars, since all of these instruments distort time in the same way that science distorts its objects, by viewing them from the outside. What we need to do is find some way to grasp time as an event—in its execution, performance, or facticity. Although Husserl also wrote a famous work on time-consciousness (edited by Martin Heidegger himself) Husserl is still talking about the *consciousness* of time, not time itself. Heidegger's central misgiving about phenomenology is the way it treats various topics in terms of how they appear to consciousness, since this gives us only an external or superficial access to things. Whereas Husserl might have beautifully analyzed our consciousness of podiums and desks in the lecture hall, Heidegger tried to show what these things are for us before all explicit consciousness. The same is true of time. Heidegger wants to discuss not the consciousness of time, but its facticity—the ambiguous way that time is already at work in our environment before we have noticed it at all.

TWO KINDS OF THEORIZING

But if talking about something always means to distort or kill it, how is philosophy possible? After all, we have to say something about any subject, unless we wish to sit in silence. According to Heidegger, the proper way to describe anything in its factical reality is through what he calls "formal indication." Although Husserl never uses this concept, Heidegger boldly calls it the hidden meaning of phenomenology.

For Husserl, there are two ways to theorize about phenomena: "generalization" and "formalization." The difference between them is easy to explain. Generalization is the kind of theorizing that describes the properties of things, and it always moves step by step in a series of levels. For example, I might say that this cactus is green, this green is a color, this color is a sensory phenomenon, and this sensory phenomenon is a reality. In short, we are dealing here with what traditional philosophy called the "essence" of a thing.

Formalization is different. It does not need to move step by step, but can be done at any level of the process. For instance, I can say that this cactus *is,* but just as easily say that this green *is* or this color *is.* Here, we are dealing with what traditional philosophy called the "existence" of a thing. Not surprisingly, Heidegger rejects both generalization and formalization as models of theoretical awareness, since both of them reduce things to their external properties rather than grasping them in their deeper factical reality. "Formal indication" is Heidegger's name for the new kind of theorizing that somehow points to the facticity of life without reducing it to a set of surface qualities.

FORMAL INDICATION

Instead of listing all the adjectives that describe a cactus, or informing us of the obvious fact that the cactus "is," formal indication is a kind of knowledge that hints at some deeper reality of the cactus without ever claiming to exhaust it. In a certain sense, the whole of Heidegger's career amounts to nothing but variations on this same theme. For Heidegger, philosophy is a way of making things present without making them present. It does this by means of suggestions, hints, or allusions to the being of things that lies deeper than their presence to our consciousness.

Philosophy, Heidegger insists, is not a theoretical science. With this statement, he claims to cut against the grain of the entire history of philosophy, which overlooks the execution or performance of things in favor of their outward appearance. The thirty-one-year-old Heidegger no longer sees himself as just a good phenomenologist carrying Husserl's banner a bit further. On the contrary: he already sees himself as the key figure in the entire history of philosophy. In Heidegger's own mind, it is he alone who liberates factical life from the traditional categories that oppress it.

1921–22: The Triple Structure of Life

Heidegger's 1921–22 lecture course is entitled *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*—one of his many courses with misleading titles. In the printed version of the lectures, Heidegger actually spends less than a dozen pages discussing Aristotle before changing the subject. As he explains it, we cannot write the history of philosophy without philosophizing ourselves; hence, we must turn from Aristotle back to factical life. But life does not exist alone in a vacuum and later come down into a world. Instead, life and its environment are inseparable from the start. Dasein is never an isolated human creature, but always inhabits a specific environment made up of other things and humans. Life is always *this* particular life and no other or, as Heidegger puts it, life is "thisly"—a term that Heidegger seems to borrow from the medieval philosophy of Duns Scotus.

Life always has a threefold structure of past, future, and present. At any given moment, life does not choose the state in which it finds itself. There is no erasing our current situation, no matter how glorious or miserable it may be; our current life is already there before us, as the hand we are forced to play. The most we can do is try to work with the situation as we find it—and every moment, no matter how dull or horrible, has its possibilities. This is the threefold structure of life, which Heidegger sees as a truer form of temporality than clock time. We find ourselves delivered to a situation that must be dealt with somehow (past). Yet we are not mere slaves to this situation, since we go to work on our current situation by glimpsing possibilities in it that we can try to actualize (future). Finally, every moment of factical life is a profound tension between what is given to us and how we confront it (present). Life is a kind of *unrest*, forever torn between two poles of reality. Life is movement, or "motility."

Objects and Things

Heidegger emphasizes that the categories of life are drawn from life itself, not projected onto life by an outside observer. The motives for the philosophy of life always swell up from within the very heart of life. No scientist or philosopher can stand outside of life, uncontaminated by its ambiguous threefold structure. We must avoid any sort of theory that converts things into nothing but visible "objects," since this only strips away the full reality of things and reduces them to caricatures. Things are not objects: instead, they have significance, which means that they belong to a system of relations with other things in the environment. We encounter everything only from in the midst of life. To view things as part of "nature" is secondary to how we usually encounter them in everyday life, as Husserl already knew. But whereas Husserl thought that our encounter with things means viewing them as phenomena in consciousness, Heidegger thinks we encounter things mostly by taking them for granted.

Just as factical human life "temporalizes," torn in two directions between the situation it discovers and the possibilities that it projects onto this situation, the same can be said of the things we encounter. If someone has given me a gun, then this has already happened and there is no way to change it (past). Yet it remains my own decision whether to interpret the gun as something to be thrown in the garbage, sold, donated to a museum, melted down, hidden under the bed for self-defense, or used in a murder or bank robbery (future). The qualities of things emerge within factical life itself, and are not just external properties of those things. Even more generally, things have meaning only because human Dasein has the structure of *care*. This means that human beings always take a stand within the world, occupied with it, fascinated by it, overjoyed or horrified by it. We do not primarily look at the world like neutral observers, but care about what happens in it.

TRIOS OF TERMS

Heidegger's writings are filled with many different triads of terms, some more clearly explained than others. To cite an example from later in his career, Heidegger claims in *Being and Time* that every question has three parts: (1) that which is asked about, (2) that which is interrogated, (3) and that which is to be found out by the asking. Read in isolation, this hairsplitting analysis can seem either impressively subtle or annoying and arbitrary. The secret to unlocking all these triple structures is to realize that they are all variants of the same underlying concept: temporality. In every one of Heidegger's trios of terms, something is given ahead of time, some specific attitude is taken toward what is given, and the intersection of these two poles gives us the shadowy and ambiguous present.

Of all the threefolds in Heidegger's career, the one from the 1921–22 course is the murkiest of them all, and is explained in some of the worst prose of Heidegger's life. He first speaks of a difference between inclination, distance, and sequestration; this confusing triad is paralleled by the related threesome of "relucence," "ruinance," and "larvance" (all of them invented by Heidegger himself). Since this strange terminology does not survive into Heidegger's mature period, it can safely be forgotten.

RUINANCE

But while none of these terms are retained by Heidegger, he does give a detailed discussion of *ruinance*, and draws several interesting consequences. Factical Dasein (a.k.a. human life) is always in an environment in which it is tempted, seduced, soothed, or estranged. Whereas Husserl thinks that human life is primarily conscious awareness, or "intentionality," the increasingly rebellious Heidegger asks his students with open sarcasm: "Did intentionality fall from the sky?" This is just another way of insisting that human life always belongs to a specific environment. Against what Husserl says, philosophy cannot be free of presuppositions, since this would result only in an empty, external description of the world. Philosophy must *always* have presuppositions, because philosophy itself arises from the ruinance of factical life, just as poetry, engineering, or commerce do. Philosophy, says Heidegger, should be a *countermovement* to ruinance. We never rise above our environment to some pure, lofty pedestal and pass judgment on the world, as if we were untainted by it. What we can do is liberate the hidden presuppositions of life even while living it, making those suppositions partly visible by interpreting them.

KAIROLOGICAL TIME

Returning to his earlier fascination with the New Testament, Heidegger invokes the Greek word *kairos.* The Greek language has two words for time: *kairos* and *chronos.* Chronological time is the kind measured objectively in days and minutes, which Heidegger wants to reject as a way of understanding the time of factical Dasein. By contrast, *kairological* time refers to the richness of one special moment, and thus fits much better with the sort of philosophy that Heidegger is trying to develop. The time of Dasein is not about minutes passing on a clock, but about the tense interplay between two opposite poles of the world: the ruinance of our fascination with the environment, and the countermovement that frees us from our surroundings without ever freeing us entirely. Ironically, it is ruinance that hides *kairos* from us, clouding the real situation of our temporality and seducing us into thinking that time means days on a calendar. It is also ruinance that leads us to interpret our moods in terms of psychology: torment, agony, and confusion are wrongly viewed as subjective feelings unfolding inside of consciousness. In fact, they are not just feelings, but ways in which the depth of our factical reality shows itself.

NOTHINGNESS

In closing, it should be noted that Heidegger mentions *nothingness* here, a theme that eventually becomes highly important for him. If factical human life can be viewed as a kind of collapse, onto what does it collapse? On what floor or bedrock does it come crashing down? The surprising answer is "nothingness." Since factical life always has a highly specific character, it is finite, not unlimited. What lies beyond this finitude of our lives is nothingness— not the *concept* of nothingness or negation, but a genuine nothingness in reality itself. This topic will return a bit later.

1923: Being in the Public World

The 1923 lecture course turned out to be the last in Heidegger's early Freiburg period before he accepted his new position in Marburg. The title is *Ontology: Hermeneutics of Facticity.* Like many of Heidegger's better titles, this one summarizes the whole of his philosophical position at this point in his career. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the basic structure of being, and by 1923 Heidegger was already well on his way to becoming the great philosopher of being. But as we already know, being cannot be viewed from the outside by means of traditional descriptive categories. Being must be seen in its facticity as a shadowy event, not a lucid visible spectacle. Finally, the way to unlock this facticity is not through scientific theory, but through *hermeneutics*—a term derived from the Greek word for interpretation. Reality always partly eludes our grasp; it is not directly seen, but always interpreted in a specific way and from a specific standpoint. Taken as a whole, the title of this lecture course means simply that Heidegger wants to develop a theory of being through an interpretation of human life in its concrete historical reality.

HISTORICITY

This 1923 lecture course shows many of the same mixed feelings toward Husserl already encountered in earlier courses. Heidegger complains that the phenomenological movement has been ruined by superficial and wishy-washy admirers who do not fully understand it. Yet when we read Heidegger's attacks carefully, we find that they are aimed not at any of these supposed frivolous admirers, but at the theories of Edmund Husserl himself! Husserl wanted philosophy to be a "rigorous science," free of all presuppositions; by focusing only on things as they appear to us, and by analyzing these appearances in order to grasp their underlying principles, Husserl claimed to reach an "intuition of essences" of the phenomena.

Against this, Heidegger asserts that there is no philosophy without presuppositions, since all philosophy grows from a particular historical standpoint. There can be no intuition of essence, because things will always remain hidden from us to some extent. And furthermore, human beings are not solitary observers of the world, since we always belong to a specific environment that includes other people. Indeed, our access to things is not primarily through our own eyes. Before looking at things for ourselves, we have already heard about them, and we tend to interpret them in the same way as others. This is just as true of philosophy as of any other subject that interests humans. Before we select the greatest artists or musicians in human history, and before we choose our beloved person, we are already aware of how others assess them. A purely original, independent judgment is impossible.

Whereas Heidegger's earlier lecture courses said that the history of philosophy is a worthless topic unless we are philosophizing ourselves, he now stresses the other side of the issue: we cannot directly tackle philosophical problems outside of history, since these problems are already passed down to us with all sorts of historical encrustations. When we ask philosophical questions that seem original and highly personal, we do not realize that we are silently dominated by the Greek way of looking at the world. For this reason, a good deal of historical work is needed to clear up the subjects that are handed to us.

In short, Heidegger believes that phenomenology ignores history far too much. This is true not only of shallow and superficial followers of phenomenology, but even of Husserl's own way of thinking. As Heidegger puts it, we will have radical and serious phenomenology only when people see that direct presence of the world is never possible, and that concealment belongs to the very nature of phenomena. Although Heidegger does not dwell on the point, this amounts to the blunt claim that Husserl is not yet doing "radical and serious" phenomenology. Developing his own insights with increasing vigor, Heidegger has more or less announced a hostile takeover of the phenomenological movement. Since Husserl and Heidegger continued to work closely together in Freiburg, Husserl surely must have gotten wind of some of these remarks. It is a credit to Husserl's generosity and easygoing temperament that Heidegger was never excommunicated from the movement, but simply drifted away from it.

EXISTENTIALS

We have already heard Heidegger's warning that the traditional categories of philosophy do not do justice to human Dasein, which exists only as an act, event, or performance of its reality, not as something visible from the outside. Heidegger now introduces the term "existentials" for these new categories. Many of these existentials are highly memorable for those who have read Heidegger's works. Perhaps the most memorable is *das Man*, best translated as "the *they*" (just as Macquarrie and Robinson do translate it in their classic English version of *Being and Time*). We are all familiar with certain unsettling phrases in English that use "they" in an indefinite sense: "Is it really true that Professor X is being groomed as the next Dean of Humanities?" . . . "That's what they say." Here the word "they" does not refer to one person, twenty people, a 51 percent majority of people on campus, or even a 90 percent supermajority. "They" is merely an indefinite term for a loose, lazy, ambiguous, public sort of reality, for which no individual can be held responsible. We do not encounter the world directly, but always through the *talk* or *idle chatter* of the "they"—we see and say about Istanbul or the Eiffel Tower all the clichés that everyone else sees or says. This public reality is one of the existentials of human Dasein, a category of Dasein's being that can never be removed now matter how hard we try.

At all moments, Dasein has the ambiguous triple structure that we have repeatedly encountered in this chapter. Dasein is always marked by the existential structure known as "forehaving," which means that we are already in the midst of the world before saying or deciding anything about it. But Dasein is equally distinguished by the existential called "foreconception," meaning that we are not just dragged along in a stupor by the world that is given to us, but always approach it with a specific attitude toward what surrounds us. We never fully escape this interplay between the pregiven and the interpretations we make of it, which are always unified in a shadowy, two-faced present.

But although this triple structure is inescapable, Heidegger is aware that some moments of human existence come to grips with our facticity better than others. Only some instants of time are truly *moments of vision* (as Heidegger already noted with his earlier concept of kairological time). To sit and recite a list of clichés while swilling bottles of vodka and listening to advertising jingles would certainly have the same triple structure as making a brilliant political decision or discovering the theory of relativity. Nonetheless, Heidegger always tries to find ways to account for the superiority of the latter two examples. Although no human experience ever completely rises above its immersion in the public world, and although even the vodka-drinker rises above the public "they" to some small extent, Heidegger is always on the lookout for *better* ways of transcending the world: special types of boredom, special moods of anxiety, special philosophical attitudes, special moments of every kind. For us no less than for the "Senegal Negro," it often takes *strangeness* to make us more alert to everydayness, and Heidegger is among the most renowned analysts of chilling, edgy moods such as anxiety and being toward death.

Spatiality

To repeat an earlier point, the German word Dasein literally means being-there. The "there" where Dasein exists is called the world. Heidegger finds it useless to spend any time on the traditional problem of how our mind makes contact with a world. As Heidegger sees it, there was never any separation between them in the first place. If we speak of being-in-the-world, some people might think of this as a spatial relation, with humans inhabiting specific geometric coordinates in a grid of objective space. But never forget that these sorts of theories are precisely what Heidegger wants to avoid. We cannot define space through the modern theory that space is a set of objective coordinates filled with physical bodies. Space, like everything else, must be defined in terms of how we encounter it before any theory of space is even begun. The spatiality of the world is primarily a spatiality of *equipment*, in which everything has its own proper place and its own significance. We do not usually locate stop signs, gas stations, or traffic cones along pure axes of latitude and longitude measured from satellites, but simply notice right away if they are in the right place or wrong place with respect to other things in the environment. When they are in the wrong place, we do not respond to this by passing objective academic judgments, but simply by moving them, or perhaps by becoming frustrated or angry.

On this note, Heidegger's early Freiburg years came to an end. Barely thirty-four years old, he headed northward for a new professorship at Marburg, unaware that he would someday return to the Black Forest as Husserl's successor. Hans-Georg Gadamer gives us a picturesque anecdote about Heidegger's departure. Before leaving Freiburg, Heidegger assembled his students for a final nighttime gathering, where a bonfire was lit. He then rose to give a dramatic speech, one that began: "Be awake to the fire of the night! The Greeks . . .” This rhetorical mixture of Greek philosophy and romantic Black Forest fire ceremony is certainly stirring. Given what would happen to Heidegger and his nation during the 1930s, it is also somewhat ominous.