

The Husserl-Heidegger Confrontation: Dasein and Transcendental Subjectivity

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Today, I will discuss the Husserl-Heidegger confrontation. While the scholarly literature on the relationship between Husserl and Heidegger is *vast*, as late as 1993, Burt Hopkins cautions us that questions concerning the *phenomenological* issues of the Husserl-Heidegger controversy have “*yet to be explored, much less resolved*”.¹ To be sure, there is no consensus as to what this controversy amounts to. On the one hand, scholars like Richard Schacht claim that Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenology are “related in little more than name and motto; and that there is scarcely even a remote family resemblance between them”.² On the other, Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us that “the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl”.³ While the wide range of conflicting opinions places a *comprehensive* account of the relation between Husserl and Heidegger outside of our present scope, we can, nevertheless, commit ourselves to avoiding any partisanship by bringing these two thinkers together while being careful to attend to the complex differences between them. It is in this spirit that I will focus most extensively on Husserl and Heidegger’s collaboration on the article for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1927.

The received view of this collaboration is that it was a failure, with Heidegger rejecting Husserl’s notion of the (supposedly) ‘worldless’ transcendental ego and instead going toward an account of Dasein’s

¹ Burt C. Hopkins, *Intentionality in Husserl and Heidegger: The Problem of the Original Method and Phenomenon of Phenomenology* (1993), p. 4. See also: Theodore Kisiel, who claims that “a definitive appraisal of the relationship—personal as well as philosophical and professional—at the very heart of the phenomenological movement remains to be written”. Theodore J. Kisiel, “Husserl and Heidegger.” In *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree, Elizabeth A. Behnke, et al. (1997), p. 333.

² Richard Schacht, “Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology,” *Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 5 (1972), p. 312. See also: Herbert Spiegelberg’s claim that Heidegger “did not want anything to do with Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology”. Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (1994), p. 400.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), p. vii.

being-in-the-world, which Husserl derided as philosophical anthropology. In his commentary on the *EB* article, Thomas Sheehan presents a version of this reading when he claims that the “main issue” for Heidegger was Husserl’s notion of the transcendental ego, which—far from being the “absolute” and thereby non-worldly entity that Husserl intended—Heidegger considered to be “a concrete and ‘immanent’ possibility of Dasein”.⁴ While correct, problems arise when Heidegger’s rejection of transcendental subjectivity is taken to signal his renunciation of transcendental philosophy more broadly. As such, my aim today is to draw out the *transcendental* character that spans across Husserl and Heidegger’s conceptions of phenomenology. Broadly speaking, I want to extend Steve Crowell’s claim that Heidegger does not offer a “wholesale rejection” of Husserlian phenomenology, but a “developing and advancing” of its transcendental motivations.⁵

More specifically, I claim that Husserl and Heidegger are both responding to the problem of modern knowledge, which I take to be the problem of the correlation between being and thinking, or thing and thought. In their approaches to this problem, both thinkers put forward a project that is ‘transcendental’ insofar as they both stress that the thinking subject is a condition for the possibility of any knowledge of the world whatsoever. While they disagree on what this subject essentially *is*, both acknowledge the essential role that human beings play in the constitution of an intentional *space of meaning*, which, for both, underwrites any conceptual framing of the being-thinking correlation.

In the article, Husserl approaches the knowledge problem in terms of what he calls the “transcendental problem”. This leads him to refine the position expressed in *Ideas* that pure transcendental subjectivity is the necessary ground of all objective knowledge. He writes that the transcendental problem is “concerned with the ontological sense of any world at all as getting its meaning and validity from the functions of consciousness”. The underlying question concerns how our thinking (‘functions of consciousness’) is able to relate to being (‘the ontological sense of any world at all’), thereby securing the ‘meaning and validity’ of our knowledge. In other words, how

⁴ Thomas Sheehan, “The History of the Redaction of the Encyclopaedia Britannica Article.” In *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)* (1997), p. 52.

⁵ Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology* (2001), pp. 181–2.

does our thinking constitute a world that—at the same time—transcends our thinking? How does thinking go beyond itself and refer to beings in the world?

For Husserl, it was Descartes who first discovered the transcendental problematic insofar as Descartes realised that “the subjective conscious life in pure immanence is the place where all sense is bestowed and all being is posited and confirmed”.⁶ As per the evil genius hypothesis, Descartes tell us that it is not contrary to logic that the entire world that exists for us could only exist in our thinking, that all that *is* could be nothing more than the content of a dream or a delusion.⁷ Similarly, the transcendental problem extends to all our epistemological claims, placing into question “the world and all the sciences investigating it”.⁸ The world is no longer taken to be ‘simply there’ for us, but is drawn into a far-reaching doubt.

It is, therefore, part of the “essential” sense of the transcendental problem that it is ‘all-inclusive’. Everything that *is* “becomes unintelligible”.⁹ The unintelligibility arising from the transcendental problem impacts the being of the human being “in a particularly sensitive manner”.¹⁰ Namely, in the natural attitude, human beings are simply a ‘real part’ of the world, hence the problem is how the meaning and validity of the world can be constituted by a consciousness that is at the same time a part of the world itself. As Dermot Moran puts it, the question is “How can that which constitutes the whole be itself a constituted part of that very whole”.¹¹ In agreement with Moran, Dan Zahavi tells us that for Husserl it is “quite a puzzle” how immanent consciousness can constitute all transcendencies—including the facts of the natural world—while, at the same time, being “something that appears as a real part of the world”.¹²

⁶ Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, "'Phenomenology' the Encyclopaedia Britannica Article Draft A." In *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (1997), p. 96.

⁷ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (2012), p. 15.

⁸ Husserl and Heidegger, "*EB Article: Draft D*," p. 168.

⁹ "*EB Article: Draft B*," p. 124–5.

¹⁰ Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology* (1994), pp. 185–6.

¹¹ Dermot Moran, "Heidegger's Transcendental Phenomenology in the Light of Husserl's Project of First Philosophy." In *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. Steven Galt Crowell and Jeff Malpas (2007), p. 148.

¹² Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (2003), p. 48.

Later, we will see that for Heidegger, Husserl struggles with this problem because he unwittingly takes up ontological prejudices from the philosophical tradition in order to account for the human being, who cannot be captured by the ‘theoretical attitude’ characteristic of such a tradition. For now, our stress will be on Husserl’s conception of the knowledge problem as a transcendental problematic, which leads him to a notion of *transcendental* subjectivity that is to be sharply distinguished from any notion of the empirical subject as a ‘real’ feature of the natural world.

For Husserl, rethinking subjectivity is a necessary task. If we want to ask what the character of the world’s being for us *is* and how this can be rendered scientifically, then we must return to the question of the subject who constitutes this being. In other words, any inquiry into the meaning and validity of the world ought to interrogate human subjectivity, wherein this meaning and validity is constituted. For Heidegger, too, the transcendental problem demands a necessary “*regression to subjectivity*” [“*Rückgang auf das Subjekt*”], and it is in their differing responses to this necessity that the two thinkers begin to part ways.¹³

Husserl is of course adamant that this regression to subjectivity cannot make use of the conception of subjectivity that is described by any form of empirical inquiry. He claims if anyone were to try to find a solution for the transcendental problem while remaining within the natural attitude they would eventually run into a “transcendental circle”. Namely, the assumption that we can ground our knowledge of the natural world by an appeal to the facts of the natural world is untenable. In doing so, we presuppose the validity of the very thing we are trying to explain, thus our inquiry remains ‘transcendentally naïve’. After all, it is not impossible that such empirical facts are ultimately mediated by Descartes’ evil genius. Given the all-inclusiveness of the transcendental problematic, we must put out of play all naturalistic theses, which are tainted by the assumptions of the natural attitude. Rather, to move beyond the naturalistic assumption that the world is simply there, what is needed is a

¹³ For instance, Heidegger uses this expression frequently in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982), cf. §11, pp. 110–1 [156]; §13, p. 122 [172]; §15, pp. 154–5 [220]; §18, pp. 216–7 [308–9]; pp. 222–4 [318–9].

transcendental critique. This is to be achieved by “a mere change in focus [*Einstellungsänderung*]”, which requires us to perform the most radical form of the reduction—the *transcendental reduction*.¹⁴

As Thomas Nenon explains, Husserl calls this the ‘transcendental’ reduction because he sees it as the way of solving “the epistemological problem”—“the relation between knower and known, subject and object, that has been at the crux of modern philosophy since Descartes”.¹⁵ That is, of course, the transcendental problem of knowledge that we have been discussing. Essentially, the transcendental reduction goes a step further than the phenomenological reduction. Instead of suspending all ontological theses to properly analyse how phenomena are intended by consciousness, the transcendental reduction brackets out all correlation between the subject and world, allowing us to consider the subject *without recourse to the ‘outside’ world*. In doing so, the transcendental reduction opens up access to a field of ‘transcendental experience’, which—in contrast to the empirical or naturalistic conception of experience—does not presuppose the world, but recasts all worldly being as a correlate of transcendental consciousness.

In *Ideas*, Husserl describes the bracketing of “the whole world with all things, living creatures, men, ourselves included”.¹⁶ In doing so, he claims, we “have literally lost nothing, but have won the whole of absolute being, which, properly understood, conceals in itself all transcendencies, ‘constituting’ them within itself”.¹⁷ Namely, after the transcendental reduction is enacted, what remains as a ‘phenomenological residuum’ is the transcendental ego, which grants us access to a new “region of being”.¹⁸ This region of being is “absolute”, insofar as it serves as the ground for the constitution of all being but is not itself constituted.¹⁹ In other words, while the world requires subjectivity to be, subjectivity does not require the world to be. As Husserl states in *Ideas*, “*The Being of consciousness...though it would indeed be inevitably modified by a nullifying of the thing-world,*

¹⁴ Husserl and Heidegger, “*EB Article: Draft B*,” pp. 122–3.

¹⁵ Thomas J. Nenon, “Some Differences between Kant’s and Husserl’s Conceptions of Transcendental Philosophy,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 41, no. 4 (2008), p. 434.

¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (2012), §50, p. 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §33, p. 61.

¹⁹ As Von Herrmann puts it, pure subjectivity “is called absolute because it bears within itself the other type of being, reality, as the being of the spatial-temporal world, as intentional sense”. *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology* (2013), p. 134.

would not be affected thereby in its own proper existence”.²⁰ The being of the ‘thing-world’, on the other hand, is *relative*, insofar as the condition for its possibility is the subject. Accordingly, where the subject can be thought without the world, Husserl claims that the world cannot be thought without regress to the subject who constitutes it.

Taken together, by radically bracketing out the being of any possible world, we arrive at an absolute notion of subjectivity that is ontologically distinct from all posited being, including the naturalistic interpretation of subjectivity as a real empirical feature of the spatiotemporal fact-world. Instead, we arrive at a notion of subjectivity that is ‘transcendental’ insofar as it is fundamentally *not* an entity to be found in the world, even though it is a condition for the possibility of any world whatsoever. As Husserl claims in *Ideas*, “between the meanings of consciousness and reality yawns a veritable abyss”.²¹ Similarly, in the *EB* article, he states that the transcendental ego does not refer to any part of the objective world, but to “the subjective Conscious life itself, wherein the world...is made for ‘us,’ for ‘me’”.²² Again, the point is that to conceive of the subject as a real part of the world is to presuppose the validity of the world, which is to commit oneself to the transcendental circle that Husserl is eager to avoid.

At the same time, however, the subject must have *some* connection to the world. It is, after all, a crucial insight of Husserl’s phenomenology that human thought is essentially intentional, and, therefore, always reaching beyond itself toward the world. On this view, intentionality is a condition for the possibility of all ‘transcendent cognition’, i.e., thought that goes beyond itself and toward the things themselves. It follows that world and consciousness (or being and thinking) are always already together for Husserl, since it is only in terms of our intentional acts that we can claim to know the world like we do. Accordingly, the proper grounding for epistemology and the starting point for phenomenology is the transcendental ego, which the transcendental reduction reveals as the source of all intentional experience. As Husserl expresses it in 1931, if every form of transcendency is an

²⁰ *Ideas I*, §49, p. 94.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §49, p. 95.

²² Husserl and Heidegger, “*EB Article: Draft E*,” p. 189.

“immanent existential characteristic constituted within the ego”, then it follows that every possible sense, every conceivable being comes within the purview of the transcendental ego. As such, to conceive of being and thinking as totally separated and “related to one another merely externally by a rigid law” is “nonsensical”.²³

The tension arises, then, if the transcendental ego is connected to the world or if it is worldless. To remedy this tension, we ought to stress Husserl’s claim that the difference is a difference in *attitude*. He notes that every psychic experience is accompanied by a transcendental experience that, while “identical as regards content” can be freed from purely psychic experience (now considered worldly). Again, we can understand transcendental experience to refer to a conception of experience that traces the relative being of the world to the absolute being of the transcendental subject, as opposed to the empirical conception of experience, which Husserl holds to presuppose the external world.

For Sheehan and others,²⁴ the alleged worldlessness of the transcendental ego is at the centre of Heidegger’s critique of Husserlian phenomenology.²⁵ However, this Heideggerian account does not capture the subtlety of Husserl’s position, since it overlooks the way that Husserl does indeed intend the transcendental ego to have a connection to the world. To be sure, the transcendental ego is not a spectral epiphenomenon that hovers over and above us. As Husserl claims, “My transcendental ego is...evidently ‘different’ from the natural ego, but *by no means as a second, as one separated from it in the natural sense of the word*”.²⁶

As Timothy Stapleton reminds us, the difference between the transcendental and empirical egos is a difference in the horizon of interpretation. When we consider the worldly ego, the horizon of interpretation is the world of the natural attitude; when we consider the ego transcendently, there is

²³ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1973), §41, p. 84. .

²⁴ Kisiel, "Husserl and Heidegger," p. 337; Von Herrmann, *Hermeneutics and Reflection*, pp. 26–7; Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* (1998), pp. 77–107. ; Schacht, "Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology," pp. 304–12; Burt C. Hopkins, "The Husserl-Heidegger Confrontation and the Essential Possibility of Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl, Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger," *Husserl Studies* 17, no. 2 (2001), pp. 130; 138.

²⁵ Sheehan, "The History of the Redaction of the Encyclopaedia Britannica Article," p. 52.

²⁶ Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, "'Phenomenology' the Encyclopaedia Britannica Article Draft D." *Ibid.*, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer, p. 173 (my emphasis).

“no external horizon”, since there is nothing else on which transcendental subjectivity depends, hence transcendental subjectivity is a “pure ‘in itself’”.²⁷ Namely, if the transcendental reduction uncovers a region of absolute being that survives the nullification of all posited being, then it also reveals that “the horizon in which the subject constitutes itself as a subject is a ‘noematic’ achievement of that same subjectivity”.²⁸ The point is that instead of taking ourselves to be a thing in the world, we shift our attitude and take ourselves to be the ground of the constitution of all that *is*. As Eugen Fink puts it, in the transcendental attitude I recognise that the distinction between the “psychic *representation of the world* and the *world itself*... is first achieved in my own psychic being”.²⁹ In other words, we recognise that the being of any world is ultimately constituted by transcendental subjectivity, which marks the point at which all transcendental experiences converge. This field of transcendental experiences is the ‘residuum’ left over by the transcendental reduction, which, crucially, does not “preclude any relation to the world”, but rather reveals how the world is constituted.³⁰

In light of all this, I would suggest that the tension between the worldliness and worldlessness of the transcendental ego stems from Husserl’s attempt to avoid the transcendental circle by distinguishing his own sense of subjectivity from the philosophical tradition that preceded him. In this regard, Nenon provides us with a way to resolve the tension. He argues that in contrast to the Kantian conception of transcendental apperception—a logical form that is “invariant, universal and necessary”—for Husserl, the transcendental subject varies across different instances and exemplifications. Quoting *Ideas II*, Nenon claims that Husserl understands transcendental subjectivity to be conscious life “in the entire fullness of its concretion”, i.e., conscious life as it is manifest within a variable worldly context. What is *not* variant, for Husserl, according to Nenon, is our possibility to reflect on the constitution of the objects of cognition on the basis of transcendental consciousness.³¹

²⁷ Timothy J. Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning* (1983), p. 75. See also: Hopkins, *Intentionality in Husserl and Heidegger*, pp. 69–70.

²⁸ Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning*, p. 88.

²⁹ Eugen Fink and Edmund Husserl, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method* (1995), p. 35.

³⁰ Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning*, pp. 74–5. See also: Hopkins, “The Husserl-Heidegger Confrontation,” p. 138.

³¹ Nenon, “Some Differences between Kant’s and Husserl’s Conceptions of Transcendental Philosophy,” p. 435. See also: Hopkins, *Intentionality in Husserl and Heidegger*, pp. 58–9; 69–71.

It is in *this* sense that Husserl cautions us that the transcendental ego is “by no means” a second ego that is totally separable from our “natural ego”.³² As he writes in *Ideas*, while every act of thinking is variable insofar as it can come and go and, therefore, be “perishable in *point of fact*” this can only occur on the basis of a pure ego that is “*necessary in principle*” and “absolutely self-identical in all possible changes of experience” and which, therefore, cannot be considered as any “*real part or phase* of the experiences themselves.”³³ Rather, the transcendental ego is the ground of all possible intentional acts, which constitute the things themselves in a way that is always variable, but which nevertheless contains an invariable transcendental content that—through the reflections of the transcendental attitude—we can trace back to the transcendental ego, which is the “necessary source of different regions of being and that of the ontologies that belong therein”.³⁴ In this sense, Kockelmans explains that transcendental subjectivity “epistemologically precedes all objective reality.”³⁵ Or, as Husserl puts it in 1931, transcendental subjectivity is “the universe of possible sense”.³⁶

The transcendental reduction is thus intended to open up access to what Husserl in the article calls the “field of transcendental self-experience”.³⁷ Or, as he puts it in *Ideas*, the transcendental reduction will not only reveal ‘pure’ consciousness but also “subsequently the whole phenomenological region”.³⁸ This point regarding “the whole phenomenological region’ is emphasized by Crowell, who argues that the transcendental ego “is not a principle but a field of evidence, a space of meaning”.³⁹ Similarly, Kockelmans states that what is left after the transcendental reduction is “an *infinite realm of*

³² Husserl and Heidegger, “*EB Article: Draft D*,” p. 173.

³³ Husserl, *Ideas I*, §57, p. 111.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, §117, p. 245.

³⁵ Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 17.

³⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §41, p. 85. Furthermore, Stapleton qualifies this point by noting that Husserlian phenomenology does not fall into a Berkeleyan style of idealism insofar as it is “general objects” in the sense of *ideal essences* that are constituted by and thus dependent on transcendental consciousness. Hence, the claim is *not* that particular things cannot exist outside consciousness, the claim is that ideas cannot. *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning*, p. 67. Or, as Crowell puts it, Husserl does *not* advance a ‘metaphysical idealism’, but is only an ‘idealist’ insofar as his view is that the space of meaning can only be clarified by recourse to the subject who constitutes it. *Space of Meaning*, p. 173.

³⁷ Husserl and Heidegger, “*EB Article: Draft D*,” p. 173.

³⁸ Husserl, *Ideas I*, §33, p. 63.

³⁹ Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, p. 172.

transcendental experiences".⁴⁰ In other words, the transcendental ego does not refer to consciousness in any *traditional sense*, but is Husserl's mature conception of the *intentional space of meaning* that is prior to any divide between being and thinking. Transcendental subjectivity is the source from which meaning and knowledge spring forth, and we cannot reflect on this source as long as we consider ourselves to be nothing more than a part of the 'real' world, like we do in the natural attitude.

Taken together, if phenomenological analysis is to overcome the transcendental problem of knowledge, then we must bracket out all worldly being until we arrive at the transcendental ego, which is a region of 'absolute being' that is constitutive of all that *is* without itself being constituted, and, therefore, the proper starting point for any transcendental inquiry into human knowledge. The issue is that we cannot carry out this task within the confines of an account of subjectivity that merely *presupposes* the validity of the world in advance.

In this vein, both Heidegger and Crowell make the point that when Husserl speaks of consciousness and subjectivity "what he really has his eye on is something else".⁴¹ That is, the transcendental field of experience that we have been discussing, *the space of meaning* that underwrites any distinction between thing and thought. For Crowell, it is "with his eyes on the *same* field of transcendental experience" that Heidegger attempts to elucidate the way we constitute the being of entities by way of the phenomenological method.⁴² On such an account, the crux of the Husserl-Heidegger confrontation does not concern the proper domain of phenomenology—the space of meaning—but rather concerns the interpretation of the human being's relation to this domain, a relation which, for both, has been neglected by the philosophical tradition, and which, for both, phenomenology grants us access to.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 220.

⁴¹ Steven Galt Crowell, "Does the Husserl/Heidegger Feud Rest on a Mistake? An Essay on Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 18, no. 2 (2002), p. 134.

⁴² *Space of Meaning*, p. 176. As Caputo claims, it is in this sense that "Fundamental ontology is, in its own way, transcendental constitutive phenomenology". "The Question of Being and Transcendental Phenomenology: Reflections on Heidegger's Relationship to Husserl," *Research in Phenomenology* 7, no. 1 (1977), p. 98.

⁴³ See also: Rudolf Bernet, "Phenomenological Reduction and the Double Life of the Subject." In *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore J. Kisiel and John Van Buren (1994), p. 258.

Turning to Heidegger, it should come as no surprise that his interpretation of Husserl takes the form of an *ontological critique*, which is developed in several works that precede the *EB* article. Specifically, it is in the summer of 1925 that Heidegger offers his most *sustained* critique of Husserl. Hence, to adequately frame Heidegger's contribution to the *EB* article, we ought to briefly outline this 1925 position. Against the backdrop of this lecture, it will become clear that Heidegger's contention is with Husserl's conception of being and, by extension, Husserl's conception of the human being.

Søren Overgaard reminds us that Heidegger refers to this 1925 critique as an "immanent critique", in that he is not attempting to critique phenomenology from the outside, but is rather attempting to "bring phenomenology more in touch with the matters themselves".⁴⁴ As Heidegger says, this is necessary insofar as Husserl's phenomenological descriptions of the relation between consciousness and the world are 'constructive' in the sense that they are drawn from a particular metaphysical tradition and therefore "not derived phenomenologically by going back to the matters themselves".⁴⁵ Heidegger thus charges Husserl with violating the core principle of his own method, claiming that his "phenomenology is *unphenomenological!*".⁴⁶ In other words, Husserl's account of transcendental subjectivity is not derived from a return to the things themselves, but from a historically constituted mode of theoretical comportment that Heidegger claims presupposes a conception of being as *Vorhandensein*, i.e., as enduring 'objective presence'. For Heidegger, this means that "*phenomenological research stands under the constraints of an old tradition*".⁴⁷ Specifically, Husserl's phenomenology stands in the shadow of "an absolute scientific consideration" inaugurated by Descartes, i.e., the *certitude* of the cogito. On Heidegger's account, this leads to Husserl's "double neglect" of (1) the question of "the sense of being itself" and, by extension, (2) the question of the being of the intentional.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Søren Overgaard, "Heidegger's Early Critique of Husserl," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11, no. 2 (2003), p. 170. Moreover, Crowell and Dahlstrom make the further point that Heidegger's 1925 critique cannot serve as a straightforward *rejection* of Husserl insofar as Heidegger is at pains to defend Husserl from the criticisms of the neo-Kantian Rickert. See: Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, p. 196; Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Critique of Husserl." In *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore J. Kisiel and John Van Buren (1994), p. 235.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (1985), §11, p. 107 [146–8].

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, §13, p. 128 [177–8].

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §13, p. 115 [158–60].

Heidegger explains the possibility of this dual oversight by an analogy: Just like the mathematician can determine the field of their investigation and define the objects it investigates without raising the question of what the being of the mathematical *is*, one can determine the field of phenomenological investigation—pure subjectivity—without explicitly raising the question of what the being of this subjectivity *is*.⁴⁹ While Heidegger acknowledges that the question of being is tacitly raised and “even answered” by Husserl, it remains to be the case that this all takes place on the basis of a scientific perspective that takes ‘being’ to refer to enduring presence.⁵⁰

As Dahlstrom explains it, by reducing all that *is* to *essences* that guarantee certitude, Husserl overlooks an *understanding* of the *existence* of consciousness in its “specific being”,⁵¹ which, Heidegger claims, “*gets lost*” in the reduction.⁵² Yet, none of this is to say that Heidegger is *against* the transcendental reduction—as many have claimed—and which is most often taken to be the sole evidence that Heidegger *rejected* Husserl’s transcendental turn.⁵³ Rather Heidegger *reinterprets* the transcendental reduction ontologically.⁵⁴ As he puts it later, in the summer of 1927, the reduction is not regress to transcendental subjectivity, but a regress to our initial “apprehension of a being” and to our primary

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, §12, p. 108 [148–9].

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, §12, p. 112 [154–5]. On this point, Gail Soffer—in an otherwise problematic article—provides a Husserlian defence of this aspect of Heidegger’s critique. She points out that Husserl’s conception of phenomena is much more sophisticated than Heidegger’s description of *Vorhandensein*. She notes that despite his preference for theoretical inquiry, Husserl holds that “even thematic objects are contextual, not isolated, as emphasized by his notion of horizon”. And, further, that “the contexts discussed by Heidegger under the heading of readiness-to-hand would belong to the horizon of lifeworld tools”. See: Gail Soffer, “Phenomenologizing with a Hammer: Theory or Practice?,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 4 (1999).

⁵¹ Dahlstrom, “*Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl*,” p. 238. In Caputo’s words “Heidegger does not wish to *bracket* the being of the ‘subject’ but to penetrate to a deeper *understanding* of its Being”. Caputo, “The Question of Being and Transcendental Phenomenology,” p. 97.

⁵² Heidegger, *HCT*, §12, p. 110 [151–2].

⁵³ Walter Biemel, “Husserl’s Encyclopaedia-Britannica Artikel und Heideggers Anmerkungen Dazu,” *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 12, no. 2 (1950), p. 276; Bernard Boelen, “Martin Heidegger as a Phenomenologist.” In *Phenomenological Perspectives: Historical and Systematic Essays in Honor of Herbert Spiegelberg*, ed. P.J. Bossert (1975), p. 100; Schacht, “Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology,” pp. 305–6; Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, pp. 344–5; 361–4; 390–400; Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning*, pp. 4; 90–93; 110–12.

⁵⁴ Bernet, “*Phenomenological Reduction and the Double Life of the Subject*,” p. 249; Caputo, “The Question of Being and Transcendental Phenomenology,” pp. 88–9; 104; Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, pp. 197–9; “Does the Husserl/Heidegger Feud Rest on a Mistake?,” p. 125; Dahlstrom, “*Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl*,” p. 238; Overgaard, “Heidegger’s Early Critique of Husserl,” p. 169; Jacques Taminiaux, “The Husserlian Heritage in Heidegger’s Notion of the Self.” In *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore J. Kisiel and John Van Buren (1994), p. 285.

“understanding of the being of this being”.⁵⁵ In other words, Heidegger’s regression to subjectivity is a regression to Dasein’s *pre-ontological understanding* of being, which is a condition for the possibility of the conception of being as *Vorhandensein*. Specifically, Dasein’s being is structured by a pre-ontological understanding that is both historically constituted and future-orientated, and thus never able to be captured by reference to a universal and enduring ‘now’ moment. This pre-ontological understanding is concealed by any reduction to a static *eidōs*, thereby leading us to “dismiss the reality of consciousness as such” and surrender the ground on which the question concerning the being of the intentional can be raised.⁵⁶

In short, Heidegger’s 1925 position is that Husserl’s theoretical gaze fails to bracket an account of being as *Vorhandensein*, which leads him to overlook the specific character of Dasein’s temporally structured pre-ontological understanding of being, from which the conception of *Vorhandensein* is first derived. Dasein is the transcendental condition of this understanding, which is, at the same time, always shaped by a *particular* historically and culturally constituted context of shared meaning that cannot be captured by a traditional conception of being that is limited to what is present at hand. Such an ontological assumption necessarily deforms and fragments what the human being—as Dasein—fundamentally is.

In the *EB* article, Heidegger reiterates these 1925 criticisms in a different light. He begins his own draft by a reflection on the role of philosophy in relation to the other positive sciences. Unsurprisingly, for Heidegger, the unique problem for philosophy is the being-question, which he phrases here as the question “What are entities as such?” that has remained “shaky for a long time”.⁵⁷ In light of the 1925 lecture, we can see how this refers to the claim that the ‘ego metaphysics’ of the philosophical tradition (up to and including Husserl) has confined itself to a notion of being as *Vorhandensein*. To reiterate, for Husserl it was Descartes who discovered the transcendental problematic, to which Husserl responds with a radical regress to transcendental subjectivity. Once again, the problem for Heidegger is that this regression is *unphenomenological* since it is only a regression to a *particular* theoretical conception of

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, §5, pp. 21–2 [28–9]. See also: Kisiel, who notes that in Heidegger “Husserl’s eidetic method is displaced by a more fundamental understanding of being, as a primary familiarity from which we understand everything else”. “*Husserl and Heidegger*,” p. 336.

⁵⁶ *HCT*, §12, p. 109 [149–51].

⁵⁷ Husserl and Heidegger, “*EB Article: Draft B*,” pp. 107–8.

subjectivity, which distorts human being into *something* that is objectively present. His point is that we cannot undertake the regress to subjectivity from within the theoretical perspective that is privileged by Husserl. Rather, we must refrain from all talk of ‘subjectivity’ and return to a more originary sense of the human being—Dasein—who always already understands being ‘pre-ontologically’.

Heidegger therefore reconfigures the return to subjectivity in terms of what he sees to be the broader philosophical tradition’s recognition that an account of Dasein is necessary to the establishment of a fundamental ontology. Kisiel lends support to this view when he claims that Heidegger “seems to concede” phenomenology’s need to return to consciousness, yet unlike Husserl he recognises that the scope of the transcendental problem does not simply concern the region of pure subjectivity, but extends to “the being of entities in the articulated multiplicity of its kinds and levels”.⁵⁸ Crowell expands on this when he avers that Heidegger agrees with Husserl that the positive sciences all investigate objects that are ‘transcendent’ in the sense they are not immanently self-given, and that the being of such objects is “expressed” by ontological categories that can only be clarified by recourse to the subject.⁵⁹ After all, it is the subject who constitutes the transcendental space of meaning that makes possible the intelligibility of any object whatsoever. At the same time, however, on Heidegger’s reading it is crucial that this ‘essential subjectivity’ is not to be interpreted in the naturalistic or psychological sense, *nor* as the present-at-hand entity posited by Husserl. Both interpretations take the human being to be a thing among things. In other words, Heidegger repeats his 1925 position that the regress to subjectivity is not a regress to an objectively present transcendental ego, but to our pre-ontological understanding of being, which is a fundamental feature of temporal Dasein’s being-in-the-world and a necessary prerequisite to doing fundamental ontology.⁶⁰

It is thus because Husserl only returns to a theoretical conception of subjectivity that there is a tension regarding his conception of the relation between the world, the transcendental ego and the empirical

⁵⁸ Kisiel, "*Husserl and Heidegger*," p. 336.

⁵⁹ Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, p. 175.

⁶⁰ See again: Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, §5, pp. 21–2 [28–9]. As Caputo puts it, “Heidegger carries out Husserl’s demand that phenomena be led back into the act which discloses and constitutes it as a phenomenon but he identifies that act as the pre-ontological understanding of being”. “The Question of Being and Transcendental Phenomenology,” p. 102.

ego. As we saw, on one hand, the transcendental ego cannot be a part of the world like the empirical ego is, since this would commit Husserl to the transcendental circle that he is eager to avoid. On the other, the transcendental ego is the same as our empirical ego, just considered differently, and is in this sense a part of the world. On Heidegger's reading, this tension emerges because both approaches to consciousness are derived from a theoretical attitude that is confined to a notion of being as *Vorhandensein*. If we approach the human being phenomenologically, it is revealed that the human is not merely an *occurrent* 'piece' of the world but is rather a *fundamentally temporal* understanding of the world. If we refrain from taking the human being as something that is *on hand*, and consider the *originary being* of the human, then the problem of the transcendental circle falls away. The human being is no longer taken to be a *static part of the world*, and, consequently, the validity of the world is no longer presupposed in advance.

It is in this sense that by failing to explicitly raise the being question, Husserl's inquiry remains ontic, for Heidegger. Husserl misinterprets the transcendental domain of meaning as a region of consciousness that is merely on hand, and, in doing so, fails to ask after the being of things as they are for the human being. As Crowell points out, for Husserl, the question concerning the being of the transcendental subject is "meaningless".⁶¹ Transcendental subjectivity is the ultimate ground for the constitution of all that *is*. We cannot investigate anything beyond this ground, since it constitutes the limits of human knowing; it is the 'final stop', so to speak. This is confirmed by Schacht, who claims that "Husserl has no concern with the question of being since it is merely an intentional correlate of the transcendental ego".⁶²

In his commentary on Husserl's draft of the article, Heidegger puts these questions directly to Husserl. He asks: "What is the mode of being of this absolute ego—in what sense is it the *same* as the ever

⁶¹ Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, pp. 198–9.

⁶² Schacht, "Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology," p. 297. Hopkins qualifies this further, claiming that Husserl held "all questions pertaining to the being of the human [to be] the concern of psychology and anthropology". "The Husserl-Heidegger Confrontation," p. 131. By contrast, Bernet claims that Heidegger has 'no right' to say that Husserl is not concerned with "the being of constituting consciousness". "*Phenomenological Reduction and the Double Life of the Subject*," p. 255.

factical “I”; in what sense is it *not* the same?”.⁶³ In another place, Heidegger concedes to Husserl that “We are in agreement on the fact that entities in the sense of what you call ‘world’ cannot be explained in their transcendental constitution, by returning to an entity of the same mode of being”.⁶⁴ Yet, Heidegger continues, this should not be taken to mean that the entity “that makes up the place of the transcendental is not an entity at all”, and notes that this is precisely where the “central problem” of *Being and Time* arises.⁶⁵

The issue is that by maintaining a traditional conception of being as enduring presence, Husserl is unable to provide a *positive* phenomenological account of the human being (Dasein), whose being is never present-at-hand.⁶⁶ For Heidegger, it is this theoretical conception of being that underpins the tradition of ‘ego metaphysics’ that gives rise to the naturalistic ontology that Husserl is striving against. Accordingly, as Dahlstrom puts it, in Heidegger’s eyes, Husserl remains a victim to a more pervasive form of naturalism: “an ancient identification of being and presence”.⁶⁷ On Heidegger’s view, then, *Husserl leaves the knowledge problem unresolved*. Specifically, Husserl leaves open the very question that drove him: How is transcendental consciousness to be “united with reality in the unity of a real human being, who himself occurs as a real object in the world?”.⁶⁸ In short, Heidegger’s argument is that the knowledge problem arises only on the basis of a problematic conception of what ‘to be’ means, which means that the transcendental problem of the being-thinking correlation is foremost an *ontological* problem rather than an *epistemological* one. Once we are free from the ontological prejudices of the tradition, we will be able to establish a more *fundamental* ontology and the transcendental problem of knowledge will be dissolved.

⁶³ Martin Heidegger, "Appendix II: Re: Arrangement of Pages 21ff." In *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (1997), p. 139.

⁶⁴ "Appendix I: Difficulties with Issues." In *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (1997), p. 138.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ As Heidegger puts it “That which constitutes is not nothing; hence it is something, and it is in being...[thus] the question about the mode of being of what does the constituting is not to be avoided”. Ibid.

⁶⁷ Dahlstrom, "*Heidegger's Critique of Husserl*," p. 239.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *HCT*, §10, p. 101 [138–9].

To conclude, the above discussion should go some ways to highlight the transcendental element of both Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology. In the *EB* article, both Husserl and Heidegger approach the knowledge problem in terms of the "transcendental problem", which refers to the question of how our thinking is able to relate to being. In their response, both thinkers put forward a transcendental project that acknowledges the necessity of a 'regress' to the subjective conditions for the possibility of any meaningful understanding of *what is*. Husserl's aim is to avoid the vicious 'transcendental circle' which arises when we attempt to explain the validity of the world by reference to a particular part of the world. He thus reformulates his phenomenology as a transcendental critique of knowledge. His return to the subject is thus a return to transcendental subjectivity, which is the necessary ground of all human knowing and experience.

Heidegger, however, is critical of the ontological presuppositions that underpin Husserl's notion of transcendental subjectivity, which arise because Husserl's focus is not on the question of being. He thus offers an ontological interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, drawing attention to Dasein's preontological understanding of being, which is structured by temporality and thus covered over by the hypostatized notion of being that is presupposed by the philosophical tradition. While it is indeed questionable as to whether or not Husserlian phenomenology is in fact limited to *presence*, Heidegger's issue is that the transcendental problem of knowledge runs deeper than naturalism and is rather to do with the traditional conception of being as *Vorhandensein*. In simple terms, Heidegger claims that we must raise the question 'what is?' before we can raise the question 'what is knowable?'—that *ontology always precedes epistemology*. This is not to suggest, however, that Heidegger *rejects* Husserl's transcendental turn, since Heidegger is also interested in the conditions for the possibility of human meaning, it is just that Heidegger approaches the transcendental domain ontologically rather than epistemologically. Subsequently, on the one hand, Husserl's transcendental epistemology aims at the conditions for the possibility of meaning, since these conditions are hidden by the natural attitude. On the other, Heidegger's transcendental ontology aims at drawing out the conditions for the possibility of meaning that are hidden by the presuppositions of the more pervasive theoretical attitude, which can only glean what is *vorhanden*.

Despite these differences, however, I have attempted to highlight the common transcendental underpinning of Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology. In these differing ways, both Husserl and Heidegger are concerned with the problems that arise from the modern account of the being-thinking relation, which obscures the transcendental domain that both thinkers are attempting to articulate. Accordingly, both thinkers recognise that meaningful human experience exceeds the model of reality handed down to us by the philosophical tradition.

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