

From Lask to Heidegger – Transcendence beyond theoretical thinking

What is the theoretical and what can it accomplish? The problem of reality and objectivity leads to this basic question. It would not be reasonable to expect an immediate solution to a problem that has hardly been seen and where the primary elements of its founding have not yet been discovered. The only person who was troubled by the problem, Emil Lask, has fallen for the Fatherland. But to find the genuine problem in him is all the more difficult because he too wished to solve it in a theoretical way. (Heidegger, 1919)

Introduction: Heidegger and Transcendence

This lecture presents a part of my research project, in which I explore the way the notion of transcendence evolves in Heidegger's thought. What transcendence means for Heidegger is not always explicitly presented in his works; but even when it is, I think, it can be better understood by having its genealogy in view. This lecture focuses on the Neo-Kantian roots of Heidegger's thought, especially on the philosophy of Emil Lask, whom Heidegger admired and whose developments in transcendental logic greatly influenced Heidegger. The aim of this lecture is to show how Lask's and Heidegger's early transcendental notion of transcendence is being transformed in Heidegger's earliest lectures (1919-1921) towards the uniquely existential one, which already contains the essential relation between transcendence and individuality; a relation famously presented in *Being and Time*. This existential notion is especially valuable for understanding the non-theoretical notions of meaning and truth, which constitute the core of a new kind of non-theoretical intelligibility through which alone all the later Heidegger's work should be understood.

Between Lask and Heidegger: the limits of transcendental philosophy

Understanding transcendence as the *source* or the *ground* of truth was essential to the Neo-Kantian environment of which young Heidegger was a part. The Neo-Kantians, however, were confined by an epistemological meaning of such ground. Heidegger's first teacher – Rickert – defined the problem of transcendence in strictly epistemological terms as the question of the source of truth-validity, a source that must transcend the subjective representations. In context

of his value-philosophy a radical separation is offered between the existing world and the non-existing, transcendent values which do not exist but *hold*. It is those transcendent values that prescribe the normative conditions of truth in Rickert.

Another Rickert's student, namely Emil Lask, offers that instead of looking for a transcendent voucher for truth beyond the real thing, we should understand truth as already belonging to things. Following Fichte he writes that the notion of "reality" as we know it in the sensible world is a constructed notion, it consists of two un-real elements: a categorial form and a formless irrational matter. The matter is not anti-rational, but simply foreign to rationality, it is alogical. In a manner that is close to Kant, Lask states that the beingness of beings, which gives things their theoretically recognizable form, is what makes them intrinsically true. Truth is not a value "outside" of beings but belongs to beings themselves.

Rickert's attempt to place the object of knowledge outside of sensible reality is thus opposed to Kant's intention, which, according to Lask, was to overcome the dualism between Being and truth by subordinating the nature of Being to the rules of understanding. The definition of objective something as determined by transcendental logic means that what is sensible, the perceived, stands in truth, it is true. The object as the transcendental-logical content is set as "object" in correlation to the knowing subject. Objects are constituted as what they are (truly) by the contact with subjectivity. Objects were not "anything truly" "before" this contact.¹

However, to avoid subjective idealism, an individual coming to existence in the form of some essence cannot be *fully* determined by subjectivity. Kant would agree that while transcendental categories are subjective, there is still the alogical element of the intuited matter that originates independently of consciousness – this is the principle of receptivity. But if truth originates only in this subjectively determined sphere, subjective idealism remains optional. Lask carefully examines the gap between subject's spontaneity and receptivity. First, even though the alogical matter has no meaning before it is taken into the categorial form, it is an element of the real object. Rationalist mistake is in turning this element into another "logical material".² Hence,

¹ Lask. E., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Zweiter Band. p. 30

² *Ibid.* p. 36

despite our difficulties in grasping the way this element relates to consciousness, it is still constitutive of the objects of consciousness. Second, it seems absurd to think that the matter to which we apply categories has no vote on the possibility of such application. Even though Kant's power of judgement does not operate according to rules, it's work is not random; the alogical matter must somehow determine which regional forms are relevant for it.³ Thus, the independence of form and matter seems dubious.

The first point invites us to formulate the problem of transcendence in a new way – rather than thinking of something foreign to consciousness, we should think of a transcendent element as a component of consciousness itself - consciousness is not really “immanent”. This formulation is close to Husserl's account of intentionality, yet Lask tries to take it in a direction that is different from Husserl's idealism, and Heidegger will later even show that consciousness is not just not really “immanent”, but also not really “consciousness”.

The second point calls for a further analysis of the way subjectivity determines the form of an object while being dependent in this determination on what the alogical matter requires of it. Transcendental logic requires that a concrete regional category would be dependent on its material. The category of Being, for example, is only applicable to sensible matter – only sensible objects *exist*; while category of validity is applicable only to the non-sensible – only propositions are *valid*.⁴ From here stems the principle that Heidegger in his habilitation work calls *the principle of material determination*:

Form is a correlative term. Form is form for the material. All material is in form commensurate with it. Form gets its meaning from the material. (Heidegger, 1916., p.67)

For its part this principle includes the fundamental correlation of object and subject in itself. This essential connectedness of the object of cognition and the cognition of the object receives its clearest expression in the concept of the *verum* as one of transcendentals, of the determination of objects in general. (Heidegger, 1916., p. 246)

³ Ibid. pp. 62-63

⁴ Ibid. p.71, 98, 116

Verum, that is truth, belongs to object's logical form, to its categorial structure. Yet, this structure is determined by the alogical matter, it is not compelled by subjectivity – the constitutive forms do not belong to consciousness. Frankly they do not “belong” anywhere before consciousness induces their manifestation according to the material it illuminates. The material already contains the *possibility* of various categorial manifestation, a possibility that is fulfilled by consciousness. This ability of consciousness to “awake” various types of categorial forms is dependent on its ability to induce a minimal reflexive form of mere “something in general”.⁵ Heidegger will later show that this is a formally indicating ability - such empty structures as “identity” or “relation” get different meanings in different domains, thus allowing the subject to interrogate the thing while letting it show itself according to its domain.⁶ Subjectivity enables the determinability of reality by opening it through the reflexive category of identity and letting the pure “it gives”⁷ to manifest. Heidegger adopts this principle but specifies that reflexive categories characterize *intentionality* – the questioned thing is not merely allowed to be determined by its matter, but is intended as determinable, as requiring being-thus-or-thus determined.⁸ A solution to Kant's problem of a priori knowledge lies in this subject-object relation – the categories are not subjective but neither do they belong to the absolutely transcendent thing-in-itself. Rather the subject is itself transcending in a way that lets reality *determine itself* by projecting onto it the illuminating distinctiveness of a “mere something”.

In his theory of judgement Lask goes even further, preparing the way for Heidegger's breakthrough to the primordial non-theoretical sphere of experience. The sphere in which things are given to subjectivity as a determinate meaning is prior to judgement.⁹ Judgement is an additional theoretical act that either affirms what is experienced or denies it. Positive truth, or rather *correctness*, as well as formal logic, belong to this theoretical sphere, which is derivative in a double sense. First, it is derivative from the oppositionless quasi-transcendent

⁵ Ibid. p.140, but also Heidegger. M., *Duns Scotus' Theory of the Categories and of Meaning* p. 138

⁶ Heidegger. M., *Duns Scotus' Theory of the Categories and of Meaning* p. 248

⁷ Durch die Identität ist das bloße Etwas ein Gegenstand, ein Etwas, das "es gibt". Die Kategorie des "Es-Gebens" ist die reflexive Gegenständlichkeit. (Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Zweiter Band. P. 142)

⁸ Heidegger. M. *Question and Judgment*

⁹ Lask, E., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Zweiter Band. pp. 420-426

sphere of life experience, to which belongs the *truth* of objects (rather than a mere correctness of judgements).¹⁰ But even this quasi-transcendent sphere is already artificial, already constituted by the subject. In this sphere the subject has already caused an artificial division between the alogical matter and its form in order to determine certain experienceable things as being-thus-experienced. The original undetermined state, pregnant with multiple possibilities of determinability, is touched by subjectivity that causes it to collapse into a meaningful state-of-affairs. The experienced state-of-affairs already bears a truth-value, depending on whether the creative act of determination was harmonious or not. We do not judge in order to experience meaningful world, we merely surrender to it, live it.¹¹

Here we come to the borderline between Lask and Heidegger. Since reality is determined by subjectivity on a pre-theoretical level of lived experience, subjectivity cannot be originally theoretical. While for Lask, this surrendering to life in which the categories are not known but lived is beyond philosophical comprehensibility, for Heidegger an intensification of such a primordial bearing of life experience through an “absolute sympathy with life” is the aim of philosophy understood as phenomenology.¹²

Subjectivity transcends in a way that determines certain meanings but not others; its existence is essentially teleological - it is incessantly living and reviving realities on the level where any theoretical subject-object separation does not yet exist. Even though for Lask the oppositionless pre-judgmental sphere is only quasi-transcendence and not actual transcendence, the actual transcendence is still thought in a negative quasi-theoretical way – it is something like a quasi-theoretical unity that is being disintegrated by a structurally-selective eye of the theoretical subject, in order to illuminate certain pieces of this monolith in experience, and then dissect it for further theoretical uses. The problem of transcendence, however, cannot be authentically viewed as long as we are imagining any kind of quasi-structured absolute, indifferent to the real living historical subjectivity. Heidegger offers a

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 302-303

¹¹ Ibid. p. 396

¹² Heidegger. M., *Towards the definition of philosophy*

thought-experiment of radical objectification in which the very givenness of things is taken objectively and wanders whether it makes any sense.

Is there even a single thing when there are only things? Then there would be no thing at all; not even nothing, because with the sole supremacy of the sphere of things there is not even the 'there is' [es gibt]. Is there the 'there is'? (Heidegger, 1919)

Heidegger's development of the existential transcendence in the 1919-1921 lectures

A notion of a non-theoretical meaning that Heidegger needs is dependent on the notion of non-theoretical lived experience, while such a notion of experience is itself dependent on the notion of meaning in context of which it will be intelligible. This is indeed a circle, but it is also a sign that we hit the ground of primordially. A phenomenological explication of experience and meaning must be executed at the same time and in a way that the two are inseparable. First, Heidegger points out that experience is not an objective process, not a thing-like phenomena that is passing before us and can be dissected, but rather it is an event (Ereignis) which appropriates (ereignet) itself according to its essence.¹³

Event of appropriation is not to be taken as if I appropriate the lived experience to myself from outside or from anywhere else; 'outer' and 'inner' have as little meaning here as 'physical' and 'psychical'. The experiences are events of appropriation in so far as they live out of one's 'ownness', and life lives only in this way. (Heidegger, 1919)

The *principle of order* as one of the main principles of theoretical intelligibility is to be abandoned – in the context of lived experience there is no inner or outer, no physical or psychical. The source of truth cannot belong to a different metaphysical realm (such as the realm of thing-in-itself or transcendental values) since any realm is already a de-vivified objectification of the event of experience. Although the context of Heidegger's usage of

¹³ “Lived experience does not pass in front of me like a thing, but I appropriate [er-eigne] it to myself, and it appropriates itself according to its essence. If I understand it in this way, then I understand it not as process, as thing, as object, but in a quite new way, as an event of appropriation.”

'Ereignis' here is evidently different than in his later thought, I think that the underlying motivations in both usages are related. Heidegger is after a different kind of intelligibility, and understanding experience as Ereignis - a happening of lived meaning - is crucial for it. The problem of how billions of experiencing beings take part in the common universe while each of them is an event of appropriation is overloaded with theoretical presuppositions, yet it does point towards the problem of thinking a *non-theoretical kind of unity*, to which each experiencing self is essentially related. Such thinking, however, can only be pursued after an explication of the way a single case of Ereignis exists as a non-theoretical unity of lived experiences. In fact, the way the problems of unity and multiplicity of lived experiences are understood, are two of the four guiding questions Heidegger lists for performing a deconstruction of any philosophical system in order to make its pre-conceptions visible. The other two are the way 'I' stands in relation to experiences and the way 'I' has itself.¹⁴ Three of those questions are addressed in Heidegger's idea of the historical "I" as living in a situation.

Situation in the life-context: a situation is a certain unity in natural experience [Erlebnis].

In every situation a unitary tendency is present. It contains no static moments, but 'events'.

The basic form of the life-context is motivation. In situational experiences it recedes. The motivating and the motivated are not given explicitly. They pass implicitly through the 'I'. The intentionality of all experiences of a situation has a definite character, which originates from the total situation. Example of a situation: 'going to the seminar'. (Heidegger, 1919)

The lived experience, in its appropriating essence, lives through certain meaningful unities. Such unities can be discerned but not objectively separated. In fact, they can interpenetrate each other in an unlimited number of ways. Each situational unity is held together not by a static principle, but by a *unitary tendency*. The basic form of life context, Heidegger says, is motivation. The historical "I" is not a point-like self, and neither it is an "I" as so-and-so objectively described. Rather it exists in its active motivations. The historical self is the living

¹⁴ Heidegger. M. *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*. pp. 73-74

force existing in a continually changing context of situations as motivational possibilities. The historical self does not reflectively possess itself as a transcendental subject would but enacts itself. Unlike the objectifying understanding in which “the observer does not come into question”¹⁵, the “phenomenological understanding is determined by the *enactment* of the observer.”¹⁶

The self in the actual enactment of life experience, the self in the experiencing of itself is the primal reality. Experience is not taking note but the vital being involved, the being worried so that the self is constantly co-determined by this worry. (Heidegger, 1920)

Heidegger’s phenomenological analyses of experience show that nothing is simply *given* in experience apart from the way the self *has itself* in relation to the situation and *enacts* a certain attitude that determines the *how* of the relational-sense. This enactment-sense is most important for an understanding of experience. The event of appropriation is not a mechanical process that allows some list of pre-determined meanings of the universe to manifest themselves according to a set of rules. But rather any factual sense is intrinsically tied with the way one *existentially relates oneself to her bearing-of-the-situation*. The enactment-sense is a realization of the historical life-tendency, it determines the how of intention without being one-sidedly dependent on some “objective realm”. In fact, it determines the very possibility of constituting an artificial image of an objective world “out there”.

Heidegger does not speak explicitly about transcendence at this stage, but I think we can infer what is implicitly going on here. Transcendence does not take us outside the lived experience, but deeper into the tangible meaningfulness of one’s existence through a radical self-relation. This relation is to be voluntarily enacted, and is an achievement that lasts only a moment if not again voluntarily renewed. The meaning of transcendence can only be explicated by understanding the role it plays in one’s concerned existential self-determination. There can be no absolute unsurpassable boundary between the living self and the transcendent. In

¹⁵ Heidegger. M., *Phenomenology of Religious Life*. p.56

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Heidegger, there is no *our* side or *other* side in the traditional transcendental sense, the emphasis is not on *explanation*, but rather on *understanding*. The quality and the depth of one's *understanding* is not a matter of constructing disengaged theories about the self and its relation to the world, but rather of the right enactional complexes of experience. Since all understanding is a historical comprehension of a self-enacted situation, there can be no disengaged understanding of what lies beyond the layer of the immediately given in the everyday experience. It is only by transforming one's own enactional quality of life that a deeper understanding of transcendence is *experientially* achieved.

Another important point is that meaning belongs to experience understood as Ereignis, the situational unity of which is a non-theoretical unity that can only be grasped temporally. Enactments do not flow in factical occurring, but rather happen according to their own lawfulness, which Heidegger relates to pure temporality in a Husserelian sense.¹⁷ Heidegger's own thoughts on the genuine meaning of history in 1920 course are also helpful to understand this sense of primordial temporality. One of its important features is its achievement-directedness. A primordially enacted sense of history is essentially characterized by having the wholeness of one's entire past pushing to the future determination of one's existence. Primordial enactment is an intensification of the motivational element of self-concern in the mode of moment-to-moment decisive destruction of the flow of experience, so the whole unity of the event is meaningfully held together as a directedness of one's self-owning existence. Since transcendence in the existentially-enactional sense is not an ideal schema or a logical condition of truth-experience but is something that is experientially relevant, it must be tangible in the primordial enactment as an ultimate where-to of event's intrinsic directedness, a purpose of the existentell striving into the depth of one's existence.

Heidegger exemplifies the essence of this enactional truth-quality of life and its all-encompassing moment-to-moment decisive character in his lectures on the phenomenology of religious life. But already few years before these lectures took place, in his talk about

¹⁷ Heidegger. M., *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*

Schleiermacher's second speech on religion, Heidegger agrees that what is phenomenologically essential in understanding lived experience is not reflecting on consciousness that already became but on the very *becoming of consciousness*; and this enacmental aspect is only present in religious experience purified from any "religious content". Religious experience is not theoretical but is rather the most demonstrative example of lived experience that is essentially determined by an enacmental truth-directedness. Heidegger finds such authentic experience which lives the primordial temporality and is determined by its enacmental striving towards transcendence in the religious life of the early Christians. In relation to Paul's letters Heidegger says:

Truth stands in relational connection to faith. That shows that the faith itself represents a context of enactment, which can experience an increase. (Heidegger, 1921 p.77)

The conversion to Christian life experience concerns the *enactment*. (Heidegger, 1921 p.86)

The phenomena of enactment must be entwined with the sense of facticity. Paul makes of enactment a theme. (Heidegger, 1921 p.86)

The significance of the world - also that of one's own world - is given and experienced in a peculiar way through the retrieval of the relational complexes in the authentic enactment (Heidegger, 1921 p.87)

The faith of early Christians is not understood here as an objective "taking-to-be-true" but as a decisive moment-to-moment attitude towards one's existence in relation to the transcendent ground of all life as it is revealed through the life of Christ. In this view, the turn towards God and the awaiting of the second coming (παρουσια) is experienced by the early Christians not as objective beliefs and expectations, but as an inner tension of a perpetual effort of being awake and present to their meaning-determining state-of-mind. This inner tension is a way to remain open to what they learned to discern as a felt potentiality of Ereignis to be entirely transformed and illuminated by the exuberant purity of living transcendence.

Since the source of meaning is not a *what* content of an already formed and objectively grasped consciousness but the very becoming of consciousness at each moment, to be actively aware of this becoming is a qualitatively different level of self-enacting existence, which escapes theoretical definition and is better understood when its uniqueness is presented using the *affective* and *temporal* dimensions. That is why Schleiermacher emphasizes the *feeling* in religious experience, and Heidegger speak of a fundamental Christian enactment as living temporality authentically.¹⁸ Enactment and feeling are temporal in essence, unlike theoretical concepts which can never grasp neither temporality nor tangibility of a non-theoretical unity.

Conclusion

Heidegger's development of the existential sense of transcendence and its intrinsic relation to individuality is a result of the overcoming of his Neo-Kantian background. During his student years Heidegger tried to reinterpret the problem of reality by using Husserl's phenomenological method in breaking the subjectively-epistemological tendencies of his time. This brought him close to Lask's philosophy and his notion of transcendence. This notion is still transcendental, yet in its principle of material determination it breaks up with Kant's formal idealism. The truth of beings belongs to beings themselves, and only its theoretical manifestation is brought by consciousness. The original life experience that precedes any theorization is, however, beyond Lask's still too theoretical attitude, thus the source of truth remains for him a pseudo-theoretical transcendent unity of the universe. In this picture there is no place for a philosophically-relevant living individuality, but only for a self-reflecting anonymous consciousness.

Heidegger's phenomenological explications of lived experience discover a new sense of individuality, which is not individual because of the way it is objectively determined (the kind that Rickert and Lask rightly dismissed), but *intrinsically* individual because of its essential role in the event of appropriation, which is the existential origin of meaningfulness. This kind of

¹⁸ Heidegger. M., *Phenomenology of Religions Life* . p. 97

individuality is not opposed to universality, but rather is a pre-theoretical characterization of the way the world worlds (weltet) in its being-appropriated through the historical unity of a self-owning "I". Such individuality, fully revealed in religious experience, can only be grasped by its role in what we may call an *existential transcendence*. Consequently, it can only be understood in the context of the enactionally-affective and ontologically-temporal aspects of existence.

Heidegger's leap beyond the theoretical and the discovery of existential sense of transcendence in his early lectures require that all his later thought will be interpreted in the context of a non-theoretical intelligibility. It means, for example, that the second division of *Being and Time*, which is a perfect example of an *affective intelligibility* is a key to understanding the magnum opus, and without which any attempt to "make sense of Heidegger" is perfectly anti-Heideggerian.

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