

Biological and Historical Life: Heidegger between Levinas and Dilthey

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Introduction

Due in part to the radical antinaturalistic legacies of Edmund Husserl and neo-Kantianism, subsequent phenomenology often remains uneasy with nature, life, and biology—categories suspected of being reductionist—even as it proposes to articulate them anew in contrast with their standard natural scientific conception. In Heidegger and Levinas, nature is a problematic category referring to a chaotic and contingent yet instrumentalized realm of alienated brutality that endangers uncoercive dwelling and ethical transcendence. Heidegger’s philosophical trajectory is partially exemplified by multiple attempts to rethink “life”—in his early project of a hermeneutics or self-articulation of factual life—and “nature”—as a more originary φύσις (*physis*) in light of poetic dwelling in his later thought (Heidegger 1983, 11 and 1978, 237–99).

In Levinas’s critique of Western ontology, such life and nature continue to be overly anonymous and impersonal, tied to the self-assertion of the will and to a pagan participation and absorption in the mysterious powers of being that lets them be rather than calling for interpersonal justice. The ontology of nature and being is not to be rethought through primordial sources, such as returning to the radical upsurge and sway of archaic Greek *physis*, as its power is only interrupted by a transcendence that is irreducible to nature—whether it is causal, constructed-sedimented, or more originary.

The derivative character of nature, as a construction and projection of spirit or as a separate phenomenal sphere left to scientific inquiry, is a primary thesis of transcendental philosophy, which—as customarily portrayed—delineates the scope and limits of legitimate cognitive knowledge based on consciousness

and the model of—a primary achievement—modern scientific-mathematical inquiry. By 1910–11, Husserl described the late modern cultural situation as one of crisis—indicated by naturalism and historicism—and the potential resolution of this crisis in renewing philosophy as a rigorously scientific and transcendental enterprise (Husserl 1911, 289–341). While neo-Kantian philosophy bisected nature and spirit, factuality and value, Husserl revived and radicalized transcendental philosophy with an experientially richer and logically more sophisticated form associated with the phenomenological method.

The question remains to what extent Heidegger and Levinas transcended or only modified the transcendental paradigm of Husserl and their neo-Kantian teachers. In both cases, interpreters and critics dispute whether their thought signifies a radical departure or a more subtle reorientation. Despite their criticisms of Husserl’s ostensibly overly theoretical and intellectualistic conception of phenomenology, as well as its subject-oriented tendencies, basic concepts and strategies such as the phenomenological reduction, passive synthesis, temporality and intentionality, categorial intuition and formal indication continue to inform and echo in their own discourses.

More intriguingly, given their respective questioning of the priority of consciousness and the transcendental subject through worldly “being-there” (*Dasein*) and the transcendence of the self through the other, their departures from Husserl do not lead either thinker back to naturalistic or efficient causal explanations of experience and the world. This is noteworthy given: (1) Heidegger’s use of a different language of the immanence of self-interpreting life and of nature and naturalness—from the violence of the upsurge and holding sway of *physis* to the apparent nostalgic sentimentality for fields, groves, and rivers—and (2) Levinas’s persistent identification and critique of this idiom of life and nature as the crucial element of Heidegger’s thinking and its failures.

Despite their transformations of phenomenology, Heidegger and Levinas remain beholden to its commitment to a realm that is independent of the contingent causal nexus of the natural world and ontic empirical inquiry. The inheritance of transcendental philosophy—and its contestation of what Husserl called the “naturalistic worldview”—joins them, even as the question of nature—whether there is a disclosive encounter with an “other nature” or an ethical revelation of an “other of nature” beyond calculation and instrumentalization—sets their thought into opposition. I will consider in this discussion to what extent Heidegger’s early project of a hermeneutics of factual life and Levinas’s reorientation of phenomenology toward transcendence, excess, and escape suggest divergent yet intersecting responses to the potential, risks, and problems

of transcendental philosophy in light of the phenomenological critique of the “nature” of naturalism that orients and troubles their philosophical strategies.

The question of nature

Husserl’s polemic against scientific naturalism coincided with his deep concern with the epistemological basis of and modes of inquiry in the natural sciences. While present in their earliest writings, Heidegger and Levinas leave such concerns aside in intensifying Husserl’s polemic. Heidegger rejected epistemology as distorted philosophy, which concerns the question of being prior to that of knowing, and Levinas’s radical critique of ontology in the name of ethics cannot restore philosophy’s epistemological dimension. Likewise, even if Levinas distrusts Heidegger’s suspicion of technology, science, and modernity in general, as his postwar comments in essays such as “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us” make clear, Levinas maintains the phenomenological critique of scientific and poetic naturalisms in a desire for “a land foreign to every nature” (Levinas 1969, 34). Levinas already advocated this critique in the 1930s; not to pursue a more fundamental encounter with being but for the individual human person irreducible to natural or material factuality.

Whereas by the mid-1930s issues of nature, life, and biology are entwined with Heidegger and National Socialism, Levinas earlier—in the first chapter of *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*—focused on the reductive character of scientific naturalism (Levinas 1995). Levinas commented in 1931 that the “world overflows nature,” that is, the lived world exceeds and is irreducible to scientifically known nature, and “the phenomenological method wants to destroy the world falsified and impoverished by the naturalistic tendencies of our times . . .” (2004, 62).

Heidegger and Levinas do not seriously question Husserl’s arguments that self and world cannot be adequately understood naturalistically or materialistically as a nexus of efficient causes. It is an important issue whether this unavoidably presupposes a transcendental constitutive subjectivity, even as it appears to be deferred through the there or a transcendence that exceeds constitution, intentionality, and the self, and leads to aporia.

It is significant that Levinas (1) notices in *On Escape* in 1935—unlike Husserl and Heidegger—the ethical social moment in materialism and articulates the importance of pleasure and sensuous bodily existence and (2) simultaneously rejects any reification or fetishism of the body and biological or natural existence

however these are expressed. Even as Levinas mentions Hitler, and Nietzsche, he employs vocabulary from Heidegger that indicates that he associates all three figures with a second variety of naturalism (Levinas 2004, 21). This is not the naturalism of the modern scientific worldview, which all the classical phenomenologists—and Heidegger most of all—criticize, but of a romantically celebrated, heroically embraced, or tragically accepted nature. Levinas diagnoses such ideologically configured nature as consisting of being, fatalism before nature, and barbarism: “Every civilization that accepts being—with the tragic despair it contains and the crimes it justifies—merits the name ‘barbarian’” (Levinas 2003, 73 and 2004, 18). Heidegger’s proper name is unmentioned yet “ontologism” is (Levinas 2003, 71).

Levinas’s underlying critique of Heidegger from the 1930s to the 1990s is of its naturalism in this second sense; being as nature—not as science or metaphysical essence but rather—in the sense of accepting and advocating the brutality of the factuality, the self-sufficiency, and thereness of being and accordingly legitimating injustice and violence (2003, 51–4 and 2004, 134). For Levinas, like Adorno, no poeticizing about the gift and generosity of being, the awe of natural phenomena, or the nostalgic simplicity of rural life can be excused. The gift and generosity of being offers no adequate basis for distinguishing the murderer who enjoys life and the murdered who is denied life.

As Kierkegaard asked whether the indifference of the external world, in which it shines or rains on the just and the unjust alike, is equally the rule of the spiritual world, Levinas posed in 1935 the question of the indifference and neutrality of being for the individual person. Given what is to come, irrespective of his depiction of Heidegger’s thought, the legitimacy of this question stands. Whereas Adorno critiqued Heidegger for privileging the human over nature, Levinas objected in the postwar period to Heidegger’s privileging of anonymous, indifferent, and neutral being in nature and encompassing landscapes (Adorno 2001, 13; Levinas 1998, 116–17 and 1981, 182). There are no persons in such environments; “In the *Feldwege*, there is a tree; you don’t find humans there” (Levinas 1998, 116).

Levinas stresses in “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us” the monotheistic and modern technological destruction of pagan groves, sacred sites, and mystery-laden landscapes. Levinas praises this destruction because it undermines the distinction between native and stranger—and accordingly between nature and artifice—and the violence that this distinction repeatedly justifies. Nature is conceived here as antihuman and mythical violence; love of locality, place, and native landscapes is seen as dividing humans into native and foreign. Despite

Levinas's earlier interpretation of phenomenology as "de-reifying the human being" and humanizing things, responsiveness to things is identified with cruelty to one's fellow humans (Levinas 1990, 231–2). Nature and mystery cannot make humanity human; it is rather by serving one's fellow humans by cultivating and reshaping the land in order to feed them (Levinas 1990, 233). It is, Levinas contends, distance from nature that allows humans to engage in their earthly task of not approaching "the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the beggar" with "empty hands" (1990, 26).

The Holy Land is neither wilderness nor forest paths; hunger is holier than being. The tamarisk planted by Abraham is a Hebrew acronym for "food, drink and shelter, three things necessary to man which man offers to man. The earth is for that" (Levinas 1990, 233). Though Levinas advocates the separation of human freedom in relation to nature, a distinct response to nature remains as Levinas insists that "man inhabits the earth more radically than the plant." Levinas distinguishes this radical earthly inhabiting from Heidegger's worldly care and dwelling by its being devoted to welcoming and serving the other rather than itself.

Levinas associates Heidegger's ontology with a kind of naturalism. Not that of scientific causal explanation but being as an apparently natural and ethically unquestionable holding-sway to be heroically embraced or tolerated in resignation. Such naturalism is inherently inadequate to the ethical, since it excuses violence. Levinas identifies such dynamic self-unfolding power as central to Western ontology through a line connecting the self-preservation and striving of the *conatus*, the struggle for and self-assertion of existence, the will to power, and Dasein's primary concern for itself in its individuation or its ownness and mineness (Bernasconi 2005, 171–6; Nelson 2009, 189–204).

Heidegger rejected "biologism" in the first sense of naturalism discussed above—that is, as a reduction of human existence to its biological elements—and rejected the notion of a biological or Darwinistic struggle for existence. Heidegger criticized the notion of a "struggle for existence" (*Kampf ums Dasein*), between objectively existing beings (1994, 134 and 1989, 482). This is an essential moment of Heidegger's thought and of ontology in general for Levinas, who describes being *as war* and ontology *as violence* in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* (1969, 21–30).

Insofar as Heidegger opposes these concepts, Levinas's critique appears to miss its target. However, the biological and the natural are not solely natural scientific categories applying to objective entities and their relations. Levinas does not consider Heidegger to be an acute naturalist or scientist, and he is

less concerned with biology as a natural scientific discipline or Darwinism as a biological theory. His primary concern is with social and ontological Darwinism and their ideological constructions of nature. By emphasizing self-interest as well as absorption and participation in collective organisms—and such egoism and collectivism are complementary in totalitarianism—being and nature become excuses for and justifications of the violence and injustice of humans against humans.

Notably, while Levinas addressed the question of whether being and the fatalism that rivets the person to it can be escaped, Heidegger was speaking that same year in his lecture-course *Introduction to Metaphysics* of the violent upsurge and holding sway of *physis*, of the ontological and not merely ontic conflict of *polemos* and *Auseinandersetzung*, and the violent event of founding and creating accomplished by great statesmen, artists, and thinkers (Levinas 2003, 53).¹ In other examples, Heidegger speaks of fields, forests, and rivers and the peasants who appreciate them in less violent yet nostalgic and sentimental ways. As Adorno argued, Heidegger employed the language of nineteenth-century romantic naturalism with its categories of the sublime and the sentimental or pastoral idyllic; even if he rejected the Latin “*natura*” for the more originary *physis*.

The two senses of naturalism—the efficient causal and the poetic—discussed so far do not exhaust questions of nature, life, and biology in Heidegger and Levinas. Levinas detects vitalist elements in Heidegger, but he noted in 1935 that the discourse of creative life-forces is tied to the self-assertion of life and thus to being such that escaping or getting out of being cannot be renovation, creation, or return (Levinas 2003, 54). Intuitionist life-philosophy was critiqued by the early Heidegger, as it forgets that perception and experience only speak through language and interpretation.

Heidegger and the hermeneutics of historical life

What indicates the possibility of “life beyond naturalism” is the hermeneutical “life-philosophy” (*Lebensphilosophie*) associated by the early Heidegger with Dilthey and contrasted with Bergson’s intuitionism. In an early lecture-course on intuition (*Anschauung*) and expression (*Ausdruck*), Heidegger distinguished Dilthey’s historically oriented and interpretive life-philosophy from the biologically oriented and intuitionist life-philosophy of Bergson and James and opts for the former (1993b, 15).

The transition from intuition to the interpretation of expression is part of the young Heidegger's turn from pure phenomenology as a rigorous science toward an impure hermeneutics of factual life wherein "life" (*Leben*) is encountered and interpreted in its enactment and occurrence within its situation and its contextual immanence. Such a hermeneutics of factual life suggests the possibility of a life encountering and articulating itself. Hermeneutics signifies more than the art of reading texts. It is the self-explication of immanent life—irreducible to a biological factuality or vitality—but in its historical, linguistic, and relational-interpretive nexus (*Zusammenhang*) as facticity and possibility. While Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey's strategies is gradually displaced through the 1920s, much of it remains in the background of *Being and Time*. This hermeneutical dimension is underappreciated in Levinas's interpretation.

In interrogating the encompassing and entrapping character of immanence, particularly its codification as ontology, Levinas interprets Heidegger as its primary perilous culmination. Yet by engaging the relations of language, life, and interpretation in the early Heidegger, this assessment calls for further contextualization—in the sense of situating rather than reducing to a set of determinate conditions. Heidegger's early project of a hermeneutics of factual life complicates Levinas's questioning of nature, life, and existence in Heidegger.

What makes offacticity a question—and thus an opening—is its groundlessness. As the early Heidegger clarifies, turning to facticity is a promise and a threat: the promise that the real (or material or empirical) would be disclosed in a way left undetermined by the doctrines of realism (or materialism or empiricism). The threat thus revealed would not be an immediate ground of experience providing the foundation for knowledge but rather the groundlessness that must be disturbing to thought. The promise propels us toward the factual; whereas the threat means that we only ever find ourselves on the verge of grasping it. The factual (approached in *Being and Time* as thrownness and birth) as enigmatic, as inappropriable and as abyssal generates the call that makes us responsible. As Heidegger writes in a note added to *Being and Time*, our responsibility is to the very finitude that leaves us without a given ground and incapable of self-grounding.

Approaching the factual puts us in a position of relating to what is other, contingent, and plural such that it is always indirect and deferred further along the hermeneutic arc. The specific structure of this relating is, in these early texts, the structure of formal indication so that this hermeneutic circle comes to include a moment of rigorous formalization of intentionality that transcends it (i.e. a turn towards the "how" of Dasein's being-in-the-world) and a radical

deformalization (i.e. an interpretive turn toward individual and concrete ways of understanding).

According to Heidegger in 1919, philosophy has been overly abstract, conceptual, and theoretical and needs to attend to our concrete factual existence without reifying it or being transfixed by and absorbed in it. Contrary to the prevalent life- and worldview philosophies that rejected reflection as the conceptual reification and self-alienation of life, and which had long departed from Dilthey or Bergson's insights, Heidegger argued that the immediate concreteness of life addresses those caught up in it as a fundamentally philosophical issue concerning their own existence. Insofar as the immediacy of experience and perception is already mediated by language and historicity, this existence is interpretive prior to explicit conscious reflection. Yet life is still, via the reflexive categories that inform ordinary practices and everyday ways of speaking, as much reflective and conceptual as it is intuited and lived.

"Life" is not a physical or biological factuality or a transparently given immediacy for intuition. It is structured and mediated by categories (the categorial) that are shifting and only accessible through their enactment and practice. Heidegger's strategy proceeds through the lived and interpretive "categories of life"—Dilthey's conception that challenges the static ahistorical categories of consciousness and the reductive interpretation of reason offered by transcendental philosophy, and a precursor to the "existentials" or existential categories of *Being and Time*—and as *logos*, the communicative event and enactment of one's own existence through language.

Factual life inexorably entails more than the pure immanence of life or the blind fatality of "brute facts" for the young Heidegger. The self-explication of life requires recognizing the ruination and dispersion of factual life, as *Dasein*—according to Heidegger later in the decade—only comes to itself through its very interruption (*Bruch*) and brokenness (*Gebrochenheit*) (2004, 252). Adorno argues that Heidegger is captured in the contradiction of *Dasein* being simultaneously broken and whole (2003, 117). This paradox is comprehensible through the formal indication of factual—that is, in each case historical and temporal—life.

Dasein is dispersed and outside of its element, such that intuitive immersion in and irrationalist celebration of the supposed immediacy and vitality of life is deeply problematized. As exposed, dispersed, standing outside of itself, ruined and fallen, factual life does not simply "heighten" and "intensify" its monadic life, ego, or will in overcoming resistance and alterity. Entangled amidst things with others in the between of the world, factual existence elicits its own self-articulation through communication by enacting the hermeneutical

“categories of life” as singularly in each case its own to be. Such processes of self-interpretation and self-reflection, and the possibility of an individuation more encompassing than the instantiation of a conceptual category or general type, are part of the very facticity of human existence.

Alienation is not alien to human life if in the uncertainty, uncanniness, and risk of understanding and interpretation, human existence is opened to itself in being an issue for itself, as the freedom of an undecided possibility, and as responsibility for how it relates and does not relate to things, others, and itself. Human life is thus “lived” (*er-lebt*), and disturbingly de-lived (*ent-lebt*). The living of it involves the finitude and questionability of existing—in its relational context (*Zusammenhang*) and dis-relational breakdowns—and the care and effort of understanding and interpretation in communication with others, the world, and oneself.

The strategy of formally indicating factual life, for which the categories of formal and transcendental logic are insufficiently formal and universal, discloses the “self” as worldly and constantly referred and dependent (*angewiesen*) beyond itself; not as neutral and indifferent but as care (*Sorge*); as “each time” (*je*) singular (*einzelnes*) and its own (*eigenes*) rather than as common and universal. Care is for the early Heidegger inherently communicative. It is not the will or *conatus* of modern philosophy but the middle voice, “*vox media*,” originating in the address of factual life, and factual life speaks the language of the world even when it speaks solely to itself (Heidegger 2005, 357). As such, the self becomes itself in relation to what it is not; it is individuated in relation to alterity.

Even as facticity is described as the primordial happening (“*es ereignet sich*”) and upsurge of a pre-intentional and pre-theoretical “it” (*es*) or “there” (*da*), which is irreducible to consciousness, intentionality, and the subject, the categorial formalization involved in formal indication ruptures absorption in the immediacy and immanence of life to be receptive and faithful to it. Heidegger’s early project transformed phenomenology by calling attention to its historical, linguistic, and interpretive character. Further, it indicates a different understanding of language and interpretation as worlding and happening—as event (*Ereignis*), a term Heidegger already uses verbally and hence temporally in the “*es ereignet*” of 1919—and performative enactment (*Vollzug*) (1987, 73–5).

Phenomenology is more than the description of the a priori essences and transcendental conditions of life, subjectivity, and consciousness—nor is it independent of the empirical-ontic, the finite, and the factual. Intentionality, subjectivity, and the transcendental indicate questions rather than answers for Heidegger. Heidegger remarked in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* that one

only gains life by giving oneself over to it (*Hingabe*), and—rather than producing, positing, constructing, or constituting its object—the philosophical stance is an “eros” letting itself go (*sich-los-lassen*) in life (Heidegger 1993a, 263).

Expression and its interpretation might appear phenomenologically secondary to intuition and perception, and the seeming transparency of conscious life to itself; yet experience is already structured in the facticity and possibilities of worldly and communicative relations such that its complexity is inaccessible to direct intuition. Encountering and confronting phenomena occur through signification, disruption, and the categorical-hermeneutical work of interpretation embedded in everyday practices.

Despite Heidegger’s switch from the mathematical to the historical in 1915, he could still claim that logic interested him the most. His engagement with themes and issues from *Existenz* and *Lebensphilosophie* does not signify an abandonment of earlier concerns with logic, particularly the problem of how a thiness (*haeccitas*) is graspable through the categorical, as their historical reinterpretation and hermeneutical transformation.

Hermeneutics, the art of interpretation, likewise involves the double task of the grammatical interpretation of language and the “technical” or “indirect” psychological interpretation of individuality. As the latter inevitably proceeds through language, especially in being concerned with new and different ways of speaking, questions of concept-formation and logic are inexorable in the practice of hermeneutics. Departing from his work in Scholastic and modern logic, Heidegger increasingly approached these questions through Greek and early Christian interpretations of *logos*.

The hermeneutical turn in Heidegger’s early thought, along with a more rigorous understanding of hermeneutics that avoids reducing it to the either/or of transcendental rationalism or existential irrationalism, suggests that his early thought transcends “transcendental philosophy” qua Husserl and neo-Kantianism, even if it preserves transcendental moments in reinterpreting them as hermeneutical and historical. Nor does it, as his critics contend, embrace the irrationalism of the pure nonconceptual and nonlinguistic intuitive immediacy of concrete existence.

Heidegger challenges the intellectualistic apriorism of transcendental philosophy through his early project of a “hermeneutics of factual life” while distancing himself from and warning of being entombed in mere living or intuitive and irrational celebrations of life. Since factual life addresses and claims humans as a philosophical issue concerning their own existence and how it is to be lived, immanent existence is questionable and interpretive rather than self-certain and

intuited. As communicative, mediated, and indirectly interpretive of itself, such life is inevitably reflective and conceptual as well as intuited and lived.

In the early Heidegger, life is not interpreted as an atomistic and unshared living as the struggle and self-assertion of a *conatus*, will, or ego. Life is primarily lived in the medium and between as *logos*, which signifies the communicative event, enactment, and interpretation of one's own existence in a hermeneutical situation or relational context of others, things, pragmatic affairs, and meanings. This lived-nexus (*Lebenszusammenhang*) is too complexly mediated to be self-transparent to introspection, intuition, and perception, as Heidegger makes clear in his response to thinkers as diverse as Husserl and Bergson. The life-nexus, as Dilthey previously established, is structured prior to self-consciousness and self-description by the media of history, language, and interpretation. In engaging and articulating its hermeneutical situation in a particular language, place, and time, interpretation and reflection cannot evade the historical, communicative, and pragmatic conditions of its life.

Interpretation involves the reliance on and possibilities of deconstructing (*Destruktion*) traditions, habits, and customs as the reified and unreflective sedimentations of historical life that inform and deform lived experience. Entangled in the world, factual existence categorially enacts, articulates, and individuates its life as its own. Interpretation and reflection, as practices of "appropriation" in the sense of translation, deconstructing, and individuation, belong to the very facticity of human existence. They are not foreign to it, as in the anti-intellectualism and intuitionism of popularized *Lebens-* and *Existenzphilosophie*. Such issues are relevant to Levinas's judgment of Heidegger as an irrational life-philosopher, affirming the virility of the *conatus* and the violence of its struggle for existence, and as retaining an overly intellectualist and cognitivist understanding of understanding (*Verstehen*) that reduces ethics to truth.²

Biological nature and interpretive life

Regarding Heidegger's pre-originary logicism, logic as the communicative event of the word, Heidegger asserted that the problematic of logic had barely begun to be fundamentally addressed in Western philosophy since Aristotle (1994, 21). Heidegger criticized logic as a one-sided extreme and a "violation of the living spirit" (Heidegger/Rickert 2001, 58). He did not reject the role of thought, reflection, and concepts in order to intuitively return to "life as such."

Life can only be grasped immanently or responsively from out of itself in its categorial, historical-hermeneutical, and ontological-existential character.

Heidegger concurred with Husserl and Rickert's critique of life-philosophy insofar as it is oblivious to the categorial and conceptually informed character of human life and culture, implying that the question of the entity at issue can be ontically answered through depictions of human nature based on the human sciences. In contrast to the ontic and anti-conceptual tendencies of life-philosophy, the question of *Dasein* is one of the categorial (existential) qualities of its existence and consequently a preeminently philosophical question (Heidegger 1995a, 216). Heidegger recognized philosophical significance in life-philosophy although it failed to think the issue of life radically enough. The task of a hermeneutics of factual life is to articulate life more primordially than life-philosophy did (1995b, 50). Heidegger remarks that Dilthey's thinking of life is more originary yet like all life-philosophy ultimately recognized life's disquiet only to quiet and sublimate it (1995b, 38–50).

Heidegger's use of "life" (*Leben*) resists its biologicistic interpretation in life-philosophy, vitalism, and social Darwinism, since these avoid the facticity and fundamental disquiet (*Unruhe*)—a precursor to the constitutive uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*)—of history and life (1995b, 30–54). That is, its immanent ruination and questionability (1994, 2). Life is not only given as stability, security, and certainty but exposed as dispersal, distance, and ruination (1994, 103). Rather than being a continuum of vital energy or evolutionary progress, disquiet and uneasiness characterize life and indicate its fundamental motility (1994, 93). "Life-philosophy" is too absorbed in life to clarify it. It is a tautology, like the "botany of plants" as Heidegger repeats in *Being and Time*, saying nothing about the categorial character of the life that it seeks to articulate or its ontological status (1977, 46 and 1995a).

"Life" (*Leben*) as "living-experience" (*Erlebnis*), "expression" (*Ausdruck*), and "interpretive understanding" (*verstehen*) is not simply intuited. It is not merely concrete, immediate, or self-transparent to itself. Life is instead a hermeneutical process as it is constituted by multiple tendencies toward *Entleben*—of dispersion, rupture and the interruption of ruination (*Ruinanz*). Life itself is already its own self-differentiation and deferment (1987, 84–5 and 1993a, 232).

The distance and non-transparency of life to itself has three dimensions. (1) The self-understanding of life cannot avoid the question of death and the possibility of its own impossibility. It occurs in relation to its own potential absence. (2) The understanding of life inevitably involves the universalization of the singular that Husserl called categorial intuition and which Heidegger reinterprets as formal

indication and hermeneutical anticipation. (3) It is constitutively “always already” and pre-theoretically interpretative such that life embraces more than biological facts as life is mediated by the facticity and possibilities of history, language, and tradition. Criticisms of “life-philosophy” misconstrue Dilthey’s project. Dilthey never proposed a self-intuition of life. He called for reflection (*Besinnung*) and recognition of the categorial character of life through the “categories of life.”

Despite Heidegger’s reemployment of transcendental language in his engagement with Kant in the 1920s, he modified Husserlian and neo-Kantian transcendentalism by rejecting its reliance on an inadequate mathematical-scientific model of theory. He criticized the transcendental ego as an inadequate basis for knowledge. The “I think” is inadequate if not referred to the question of the *being* of the “I am,” the “I am” that Heidegger called an originary facticity (1977, 46). Instead of being the founding moment for knowledge, the cognitive attitude of the transcendental subject was founded in relation to a primordial level of attunement with the world (in mood, disposition) and in intrinsically communicative understanding.

Knowing presupposes the “pre-understanding” of the knower in attunement and understanding. Occurring in attunement and movedness, pre-understanding is not a preestablished and monadic prejudice prior to and isolated from communication. This “pre-understanding” of things, the world, and being is their intersection, their event and encounter. It is this communicative crossing prior to reflection and choice but not to worldly relations that orients all understanding, including intellectual inquiry.

Motility does not refer to the intuited givenness of an isolatable bodily organism but the affectivity of a historical being situated within an “effective” or “formative” nexus (Heidegger 1994, 161). Heidegger mentions the effective contextual nexus (*Wirkungszusammenhang*) and generation, which are contexts and nexuses of individual life for Dilthey, to which the individual passively and actively belongs (1993b, 157). The phenomena are never immediately given and received; they are disclosed in myriad ways requiring communication and interpretation. There is no disregarding the facticity of the world, the body, and materiality; Dilthey and Heidegger articulate their inherently interpretive formation.³

The human body is not given and perceived independently of a hermeneutical situation of interpretation, insofar as it exceeds a brute factuality of intuition and a facticity that is understood and interpreted in one way or another. Heidegger’s suspicion of the direct intuition or biological explanation of the body, developed from his early critique of popular “life-philosophy” to his later criticisms of

biological and racial interpretations of Nietzsche, situates his reserve with the body, especially a body without a nexus and world of significations. This is insufficient insofar as his critique of discourses of the body emerged from considerations of the way in which Dasein is in its world, how it is as a linguistic and social-historical being. Dasein is a bodily being and, in his early thought, articulated through the categories of life. Following this argument, “the body” is insufficient for interpreting this very bodily being in the world or worldly embodiment.

Conclusion

Levinas criticized Heidegger for starting his analysis too late with pragmatic relations with things, as perception and nourishment are “prior to” such relationships. Still, perception and nourishment cannot be thought of as an attribute of Dasein’s being in the sense of a past prior to history and language. They involve a care for self and other, a concern with things and behavior that is aimed at use, and are inherently interpretive via the practical interests of an individual human life (Dilthey) or Dasein (Heidegger) and according to the structures of meaningfulness and their disruption. Heidegger’s conversion of intentionality from a guiding principle of a perceiving subject to an orienting comportment of a worldly finite being shows how the “subject” is embodied in a world that is not only physical and material but meaningful, linguistic, and historical. This brings his thought into proximity to the historical-hermeneutical understanding of “life” in Schleiermacher and Dilthey, who recognized that interpreting phenomena immanently from out of themselves requires indirect interpretation and communication in the context of historical life and direct perceptual intuition based in the species’ biological life.

Notes

- 1 Compare to (Heidegger 1983, 47).
- 2 Compare to (Chanter, 2001, 81–2).
- 3 Contrast with (Chanter 2001, 12).

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