

# *Whence Heidegger's Phenomenology?*

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## Whence Heidegger's Phenomenology?

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Early in our half-century-long project (still ongoing) of rethinking psychoanalysis as a form of phenomenological inquiry, George Atwood and I discussed why Husserl's transcendental phenomenology was not suitable as a model for a psychoanalytic phenomenology. In his version of "rigorous science," Husserl claimed to be able to suspend or "bracket" all assumptions about the natural and historical worlds and thereby gaze with presuppositionless certainty upon the universal structures of human subjectivity.

The practice of transcendental phenomenology presents a spectacle of thought detached from social life, circling inwardly upon itself and mistaking a reified symbol of its own solitude for the discovery of its absolute foundation. The transcendental ego—that radically isolated entity disclosed in relation to a world that has been reduced to a mere correlate of its inner intentions—is thus a secondary product of the method followed. (Atwood and Stolorow 1984: 13)

Some fifteen years after these words were written, I became immersed in a close study of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962/1927), which is still ongoing. Three features of this work seemed to me to be groundbreaking. First was Heidegger's crucial initial move in choosing the inquirer himself/herself as the entity to be interrogated as to its Being. Heidegger reasoned that, because an unarticulated, pre-philosophical understanding of our Being is constitutive of our kind of Being, we humans can investigate our own kind of Being by investigating our understanding of that Being. Accordingly, the investigative method in *Being and Time* is a *phenomenological* one, aimed at illuminating the fundamental structures of our understanding of our Being.

Second, Heidegger's ontological contextualism—his mending of the Cartesian subject/object split with the claim that our Being is always already a Being-in-the-world—immediately struck me as providing a solid philosophical grounding for a post-Cartesian psychoanalytic phenomenology, replacing the Cartesian isolated mind that undergirds Freudian theory.

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Third, Heidegger's analysis of *Angst*, world-collapse, uncanniness, and thrownness into Being-toward-death provided extraordinary philosophical tools for grasping the existential significance of emotional trauma. *Being and Time* showed how human existence is intelligible only in terms of both its emdeddedness in a world and its temporal finitude (Stolorow 2011).

Whence did Heidegger's groundbreaking post-Cartesian phenomenology originate and evolve? It is customary to regard Heidegger's teacher, Husserl, as the originator of phenomenology and the inspiration for Heidegger's phenomenological work. After all, one edition of *Being and Time* is dedicated to Husserl "in friendship and admiration". And yet, whereas Husserl's phenomenology (as described by Atwood and me) seemed almost a caricature of the Cartesian isolated mind, Heidegger's was its polar opposite. This glaring discrepancy left me with a lasting feeling of uneasiness, a feeling finally resolved by Scharff's (2019) superb contribution. Through a careful examination of Heidegger's lectures during the decade prior to *Being and Time*, Scharff convincingly establishes that it was Dilthey, not Husserl, who sowed the seeds of phenomenology for Heidegger, emphasizing an interpretive understanding of the experience of life as lived. These early lectures culminated in the book *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (Heidegger 1999/1925). Facticity for Heidegger refers here to Dasein's "being-there for a while at a particular time" (1999/1925: 37). Scharff gives us a lens through which we can see that both the book's title and Heidegger's concept of facticity are soaked in Diltheyan influences. And they both foreshadow phenomenological developments yet to come, especially in regard to Dasein's temporality.

Although Scharff for the most part does not focus his scholarship on *Being and Time*, a close look at this later work powerfully confirms Scharff's thesis. Early in his discussion of phenomenology Heidegger invokes Husserl's maxim, "To the things themselves!" (Heidegger 1962/1927: 50), an aphorism that encourages one to imagine Heidegger's phenomenology to be a descendent of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. That this is not the case is shown especially clearly in Heidegger's direct refutation of Husserl's claim, through bracketing of assumptions, to engage in presuppositionless inquiry—the God's-eye view. To the contrary, insists Heidegger, "an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (1962/1927: 191f.), rejecting Husserl's essential methodological principle. In Heidegger's vision, phenomenology is always interpretive (hermeneutic) and never presuppositionless.

Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in *interpretation*.... The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. (Heidegger 1962/1927: 61f.)

In opposition to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology could never be cleansed of presuppositions.

The Being of an entity, for Heidegger, refers to its *intelligibility as*, its understandability as, the entity it is. *Being and Time* for the most part is devoted to

illuminating the Being of Dasein, interpreting its multiple thematic structures (existentials) from out of the complexity and richness of the experience of human life itself, with particular emphasis on its relationality and, above all, its temporality. Scharff's study of Heidegger's earlier lectures and their debt to Dilthey's phenomenology allow one to recognize the Diltheyan influences that pervade *Being and Time*, undistracted by Husserl's super-Cartesianism. For this I am very grateful.

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