Transcendence and Phenomenology

Edited by
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scm press
in association with
The Centre of Theology and Philosophy
University of Nottingham
2007
15. Heidegger, Dilthey, and ‘the Being-Question’: Towards a Critical Appraisal of Heidegger’s Use of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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Introduction

In his 1925 lecture course History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena, Heidegger tells his students:

As superior as his analyses in the particular certainly are [in Ideen 1 and II], Husserl does not advance beyond Dilthey. However, at least as I [Heidegger] see it, my guess is that even though Dilthey did not raise the question of being and did not even have the means to do so, the tendency to do so was alive in him. (HCT 125)²

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1 This essay is a revised and extended version of a paper, under the title ‘Dilthey, Heidegger, and Levinas’, delivered at a Conference on ‘Phenomenology and Transcendence’ in Nottingham University (2 September 2005). I wish to thank the participants of that conference, in particular Branko Klun, Felix O’Murchadh, James McGurk and Regina Swartz, for their interest in and kind reception of that paper.


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In this paper, I want to take seriously Heidegger’s disclaimer to his students that he is doing something new with the tradition of phenomenology and phenomenological research inaugurated by Husserl, and deal with his claim that he is doing something new with the tradition of hermeneutic-phenomenological research inaugurated by Dilthey.² I intend to demonstrate that if we follow Heidegger philosophically down the path of his appropriation of Dilthey’s manner of thinking, then it becomes quite clear that it is Dilthey (and not Husserl, nor Aristotle) who is Heidegger’s real philosophical mentor in Heidegger’s so-called ‘phenomenological decade’ of 1917–27.³ This paper in fact makes a stronger claim; it argues that Heidegger uses implicitly central features of Dilthey’s hermeneutic-phenomenological method of enquiry, in particular Dilthey’s interest in the experience of language, in order to correct Husserl’s manner of phenomenological reflection: that is to say, Heidegger uses Dilthey to read Husserl against Husserl. This is why Husserl could see and did see (much to his disappointment) both overt and covert attacks on his own particular position in philosophy and phenomenological research in the unfinished text of Heidegger’s Being and Time,⁴ whether that author inscribed

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such attacks there wittingly, or not. The phenomenological manner of thinking advanced by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, therefore, is both better read and better evaluated in terms of its appropriation of Dilthey's manner of thinking than in terms of a result of any philosophical engagement with Husserl in *Auseinandersetzung*, as several commentators and critics, including Heidegger himself, profess.

There are three sections in this paper. The first section outlines Heidegger's general appropriation of some tenets of Dilthey's expansive thought that are most relevant to an evaluation of Heidegger's overall 'path of thinking' about 'the Being-Question'. The second section reconstructs Heidegger's specific deployment of Dilthey's hermeneutic method in the formulation of 'the Being-question' and its relation to *Dasein* in *Being and Time*. The final section contains an evaluation, pace Levinas, of Heidegger's partial and highly selective use of Dilthey's idea.

6 'In order to come to a clear-headed and definitive position on Heideggerian philosophy, I devoted two months to studying *Being and Time*, as well as his more recent writings. I arrived at the distressing conclusion that philosophically I have nothing to do with this Heideggerian profundity, with this brilliant unscientistic genius; that Heidegger's criticism [of my work], both open and veiled, is based upon a gross misunderstanding of my work; that he may be involved in the formulation of a philosophical system of the kind which I have always considered my life's work to make forever impossible. Everyone except me has realised this for a long time.' E. Husserl, 'Letter to Alexander Pfänder, January 6, 1931', tr. B. Hopkins, in *Husserl, Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger* (1917–1931), Appendix 2, p. 482.

7 Heidegger's use of hermeneutics in *Being and Time* continues to baffle commentators. According to one commentator: 'It is not worthy then, that *Being and Time* does so little to clarify the nature of hermeneutics, so little to explain to the puzzled reader how ontology could be a matter of hermeneutic interpretation.' W. Blattner, 'Ontology, the A Priori, and the Primacy of Practice' in S. G. Crowell and J. Malpas (eds), *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 210–27 (p. 24). Once Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey's hermeneutic manner of thinking is understood, however, this part of Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy is less puzzling.


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profoundly ahistorical understanding of history. Heidegger was not quite interested in developing all of the features of Dilthey's particularly expansive philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie) either. According to Dilthey, 'the religious thinker, the artist, and the philosopher create on the basis of lived experience.' Heidegger, quia philosopher, however, appears to be interested only in those (lived) experiences that say something to him about the question of the meaning of Being itself and its relation to Dasein, by which Heidegger means, the awareness of the 'there' (Da) of 'Being' (Sein), and in which I find myself implicated as a being in Being and as a being who has some implicit 'understanding of Being' (Seinsverständnis). This 'understanding of Being', Heidegger notes in Being and Time, extends not only to oneself and the world but also to one's fellow human being. It is, nevertheless, an intrinsic feature of our experience of being a being in Being that such an experience, like all of our experiences (Erlebnisse), as Dilthey argued and as Heidegger agrees, cannot but be lived (er-lebt) and somewhat understood. Thus Heidegger concludes, pushing Dilthey's manner of thinking towards a topic that Dilthey himself did not address, that 'the meaning of Being can be something unconceived and unconstructed [unbegriffen], but it never completely fails to be understood [es ist nie völlig unverständlich]' (BT 228).

The centrality of what Heidegger calls 'the hermeneutic of the facticity of Dasein' in the formulation and elaboration of 'the question of the meaning of Being' in Being and Time, then,

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13 Scant treatment of one's own fellow human being is given in Being and Time, or in other works after that, by Heidegger.

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clearly indicates that Heidegger employs some version of Dilthey's manner of thinking in his own philosophical researches into 'the question of the meaning of Being'. It also indicates, it seems to me, some direct influence of Dilthey's manner of thinking on Heidegger's own effort to find new words and new meanings of words that Dilthey was unaware of, such as, for instance, the very term Dasein itself. In Dilthey's well-known triad, human experience (Erlebnis) contains implicitly some form of understanding (Verstehen) and that understanding is completed and raised to a higher level of meaning in expression (Ausdruck).

'Each of these consequent phases', therefore, 'is a step in a creative process', but what remains in this process, as de Boer notes, is 'the orientation to the individual, which is not 'crossed out', but 'raised' and 'intensified' [in its meaning]. This, of course, occurs in the interpretation of any thing, for, it 'too', is tuned to the individual, whether this be a psychical experience, an act, a literary work or an object of culture. Heidegger, however, seems to apply this general triadic-hermeneutic model of understanding to his own methodological use of the very term Dasein itself - whether hyphenated as Da-Sein, or not - for, in Heidegger's interpretation of that term, Dasein expresses the meaning of its own experience and its own (pre-)understanding of Being, even though this new meaning that Heidegger gives to and sees in [this term 'Dasein'] never featured, hitherto, in the German language. From all of this, therefore, I think that we can conclude, and conclude in fairness to Heidegger, that Heidegger is only interested in those tenets and themes that he found in Dilthey's expansive writings (or in anybody else's

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17 Schelling, for example, does talk about God as als reines Dasein and Brentano wrote a book Vom Dasein des Gottes but such would be unintelligible in the context of Heidegger's meaning and use of such terms in his philosophy of die Seinsfrage and its relation to Dasein.
writings for that matter that he happened either to encounter or to choose to read) that would help him methodologically ‘to raise anew the question of the meaning of Being’ and its relation to Dasein, his topic in philosophy, his task in phenomenology and phenomenological research, and his contribution to hermeneutic phenomenology. If this is the case, however, then Heidegger’s famous retort in the Introduction to Being and Time about Husserlian ‘phenomenology’, that ‘higher than actuality stands possibility’ – reiterated in his 1969 Supplement to ‘My Way to Phenomenology (1962)’ – is really being directed against Husserl’s concept of phenomenology, as the latter excludes any such possibility, and in favour of a possibility inherent within Dilthey’s concept of phenomenology, though this is not explicitly stated as such by Heidegger.

There is, then, a general but nonetheless definite conceptual ambiguity, to which I would like to draw attention, in Heidegger’s use of the terms ‘phenomenology’ and ‘descriptive psychology’ in Being and Time, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, and especially in his 1925 lectures on The History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena where Heidegger portrays a more intimate philosophical connection between Dilthey’s ‘Descriptive Psychology’ and Husserl’s ‘Descriptive Psychology’, and speaks of an ‘an inner kinship’ between Husserl’s manner of thinking in the Logical Investigations (1900–01) and Dilthey’s manner of thinking in his 1894 Academy essay ‘ideas towards a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology’ (HCT 24).19


19 Heidegger even stresses, almost in the same breath, the point that ‘the decisive move’ towards the ‘idea of a descriptive psychology’ that begins in Franz Brentano’s Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint (1874) not only ‘had a profound impact on Dilthey [in the 1894 Academy essay]’ but also that ‘the truly decisive aspect of Brentano’s way of questioning is to be seen in the fact that Brentano became the teacher of Husserl, the subsequent founder of phenomenological research’ (HCT 20–3).

It is true that both Dilthey and Husserl (and Brentano of the Vienna period) called their work ‘descriptive psychology’, but identity in terms is not equivalent to identity in concepts. There is no ‘inner kinship’, whatsoever, between Dilthey’s manner of thinking adopted in the Academy essay of 1894 and Husserl’s manner of thinking adopted in the Logical Investigations. Any ‘inner kinship’ between both forms of analyses is, at most, negative in character; that is to say, both Dilthey and Husserl’s forms of analyses do not avow the applicability of the method of the natural sciences in the study of the meaning of experiences that are characteristically lived by humans – the experiences of human normative acts of logical reasoning as such being Husserl’s selected topic of investigation, the whole of ‘life’ being Dilthey’s topic of investigation. Such ‘an inner kinship’ between Dilthey’s analysis of (lived) experiences from the point of view of their structural totality and inherent historical (and linguistic) depth-dimension in ‘ideas towards a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology’ and Husserl’s analysis of the (lived) experiences of a normative logical consciousness as such from a descriptive-ideetic psychological point of view, as presented in the second volume of the Logical Investigations, is ‘an inner kinship’ that is entirely fabricated by Heidegger. This is why Dilthey was particularly impressed by the first volume of the Logical Investigations, the Prolegomena, wherein ‘naturalism in the particular form of psychologism, specifically psychologism in the particular field of logic’ (HCT 116) is refuted, and yet less than impressed by the descriptive-ideetic-psychological analysis of the experiences of (abstract, ahistorical) logical consciousness as such in the second volume, comprising, in two parts, the Six Logical Investigations, and which, as Heidegger notes in ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, are ‘three times as long’ as volume one.20 Nevertheless, this is why Dilthey is correct to compare in his letter to Husserl, alluded to and quoted by Heidegger in his 1925 lectures, ‘their [Husserl–Dilthey] work to boring into a mountain from opposite sides until they break through and

20 Heidegger, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, p. 76.
meet each other' (HCT 24). But their work bore into the same mountain (=Erlebnisse) from opposite sides, and when they meet each other, it is Husserl who must break through to Dilthey, not Dilthey to Husserl.

Dilthey begins with what Husserl leaves out, namely, with the lived nature of experiences themselves in all their particularity and totality as founded and rooted in historical, linguistic, social, personal, temporal and mundane existence. Meaning is to be found within those experiences themselves, and not by way of either factual inner perception or eidetic intuitive inspection of intentional consciousness and its contents in inner reflection, as advocated by the Brentanean–Husserlian school of descriptive a priori psychology from about the mid-1870s onwards.

Dilthey’s starting point is a simple starting point, but it is important to note that it is a standpoint that resides outside of ‘the natural standpoint’ (die natürliche Einstellung) as depicted by Husserl. According to Dilthey, human experiences are characterized by a desire to understand such experiences, and when we understand the meaning of such experiences we endeavour to express that meaning in language, which itself is a product of human activity and human interactivity. Things (Dinge), from Dilthey’s point of view, therefore, cannot be regarded simply as lying-there-in-stock (vorhanden) with an existential and essential meaning, whether attention is directed towards them, or not, as fostered in the thesis of the natural standpoint because the very meaning of those things presented to our experiences necessarily depends upon the particular way in which the meaning of such things is interpreted and articulated in our experiences of them. The chair at the top of the wedding table facing the bride, the electric chair awaiting the condemned man, the wheelchair presented to the patient recovering from an operation, are never ‘initially’ seen as chairs that are somehow first given as things given to acts of outer perceptual-sense experience, and which later obtain their meaning via the achievements of the sense-bestowing activity of one’s own actual intentional consciousness (as Husserl’s analysis of ‘thing-perception’ in Ideas I demonstrates). This is ‘an unnatural’ way for a human being to experience the world, even through identifiable acts of outer perceptual-sense experience, as Heidegger stresses in The History of the Concept of Time, following Dilthey. The (hypo)thesis of the natural standpoint, nevertheless, is a way of looking at the world, and a way of interpreting the world of things given to outer perceptual-sense experience from a decidedly non-human point of view, no more and no less; and it is a way that depends upon the linguistic expressions and historical evolution of the natural-scientific community, as well as metaphysical hypotheses about the nature of the human being in that world of things. Our actual experiences – and experiences are things that cannot but be lived – however, are simply not things given to acts of outer perceptual-sense experience (Sein als Ding) or reducible to (conscious) experience immanently perceived (Sein als Erlebnis), the twin poles of Husserl’s ‘Being-talk’ (Seinsrede) in the transcendental reduction (Ideas I, §46). This is exactly what Heidegger is alluding to, without mentioning Husserl’s Ideas I by name, when he concludes in Being and Time:

Our everyday environmental experiencing [Erfahren], which remains directed ontically and ontologically towards entities within the world, is not the sort of thing that can present [the lived experiences of] Dasein in an ontically primordial manner for ontological analysis. Similarly our immanent perception of experiences [Erlebnissen] fails to provide a leading-clue [Leitfaden] which is ontologically adequate. (BT 22.6)

A different way of addressing and explicating the meaning of experiences – and not just the reflective consciousness of experiences – therefore, is needed in phenomenology and phenomenological research.21 This is Heidegger’s critical conclusion against Husserl, as it had been Dilthey’s too, and before

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Heidegger. A different leading clue is needed, if we are to go back to the things themselves of experiences (zu den Sachen selbst). And just as Dilthey had found before Heidegger, Heidegger too finds in our actual experience of language and hermeneutics a much more reliable 'rod and staff' (Stab und Stecken)\(^2\) – though Heidegger says this of his reading of Brentano's 1862 doctoral thesis on Aristotle's metaphysics – in the reading of any text in philosophy, including his reading of 'the master's' [Husserl's] texts.

Heidegger, therefore, had solved his 'main difficulty' (eine Hauptschwierigkeit) concerning how the manner of reflection that called itself 'phenomenology' is to be conducted, and with which he struggled for many years, as he recalls in 'My Way to Phenomenology', when reading and rereading Husserl's texts in phenomenology, both the Logical Investigations and Ideen I and later Ideen II.\(^3\) The way to do phenomenology is to hear what is expressed in the words themselves. In Heidegger's way of doing phenomenology, then, 'hearing' what is expressed in the written word must re-place, and so, dis-place 'seeing' that which is deposited in actual intentional consciousness and its objectivities. This includes a fortiori, 'seeing' that which is retrievable in and through consciousness's reflection upon itself, as Husserl had stipulated in his way of doing phenomenology.\(^4\) Or, perhaps more accurately speaking, for Heidegger, it is only through hearing what is expressed in the written words that seeing what is talked about is made present, in an analogous manner to the way in which the apostles recognized Jesus only after he spoke, i.e., upon hearing his words they saw him (though the analogy cannot be pressed too far here in

\(^2\) Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 74; English translation 'chief help and guide' modified.

\(^3\) Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 76.

\(^4\) Heidegger, of course, will give this 'living now' of Ideas I, § 77 a distinctively Kierkegaardian temporal interpretation on top of his appropriated Diltheyan-historical interpretation, with the net result of overriding 'historicality' by 'temporality' in Division Two of Being and Time.

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Heidegger's method for the authority of the text itself is the final court of appeal, not the author of the text. Here, then, Heidegger's alignment to Dilthey's hermeneutic starting point overwrites methodologically the Husserlian starting point in phenomenology and phenomenological research, with Husserl's and Brentano's idea of 'descriptive psychology', as a matter of fact, 'losing in competition' (Besiegtenwerden im Wettstreit), if I may borrow a phrase from Brentano's Vienna lectures in Descriptive Psychology.\(^6\) All of this, therefore, both confirms and advances Dilthey's conclusion that 'because our mental life finds its fullest and most complete expression only through language, explication finds completion and fullness only in the interpretation of the written testimonies of human life'.\(^7\)

The following commentary that Heidegger makes in his 1925 lectures, purportedly, on Husserl's theory of expression and perception in the Sixth Logical Investigation, '§ 37 The Fulfilling Function of Perception: The Ideal of Ultimate Fulfilment' (Logical Investigations, 761–64) bears testimony to the extent to which Heidegger has already incorporated and internalized this methodological switch and leap (Sprung) in his critical reading of Husserl's texts, for, as Heidegger explains to his students:

It is ... a matter of fact that our simplest perceptions and constitutive states are already expressed, even more, are interpreted in a certain way. What is primary and originary here? [Heidegger rhetorically asks, and he answers.] It is not so much that we see the object and things ... but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter. (HCT 56)


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Because Heidegger situates the above commentary as being a commentary on Husserl’s theory of expression, some commentators have been led to believe – wrongly, in my opinion – that here Heidegger is unearthing something that is embryonic in Husserl’s thought (in particular in the Sixth Logical Investigation). Such is clearly not the case. Rather, what Heidegger is defending above is a version of Dilthey’s views on the priority of the way linguistic acts of meaning contain the highest step in the expression of meaning in human experience – including the expression of meaning that is contained and present in, at the most basic and simplest level of meaningful acts of perception, the perception of things given to outer perceptual-sense experience – and not Husserl’s position in the Sixth Logical Investigation, for whom ‘Suggestive acts constitute

27 Cf. T. Kisiel, ‘On the Way to Being and Time: Introduction to the translation of Heidegger’s Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs’ in T. Kisiel, Heidegger’s Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretive Signposts (London & New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 36–65 (p. 38). Cf., also, D. Moran, ‘Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl’s and Brentano’s Accounts of Intentionality’, Inquiry 43 (2000), pp. 59–66 (p. 58). Kisiel does recognize in his earlier study Genesis (1991), nevertheless, that ‘It is well known that the [Husserlian] phenomenological “principle of all principles” gives the primacy to intuition [over expression]. Less noted [by Husserl?] in this context is the inseparable intentional relation between intuition and expression, that is, between intuitive fulfilment and empty intending. All of our experiences, beginning with our most direct perceptions, are from the start already expressed, indeed interpreted [as in Heidegger’s Diltheyean inspired reading of Husserl]. This Diltheyean emphasis of the intentional structures described by Husserl in the Logical Investigations is the seminal insight of Heidegger’s hermeneutic breakthrough in 1919’ (Genesis, p. 49). This Diltheyean emphasis, however, on the way ‘immediate experience . . . is already contextured like a language’ (Genesis, p. 49) is precisely one that is not described by Husserl at all in the Logical Investigations, nor could he or does he describe it so because of Husserl’s unphenomenological theory of language (e.g., animating marks on a page) and his assertion of the way the description (the linguistic sign) of the intended object gives away to the intended object itself and drops out in the immediacy of intuitive fulfilment in consciousness in Husserl’s theory.

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the lowest step: they possess no fullness whatever’ (§ 37, 761, my emphasis). It is this very fact of our linguistic experience – and language is an experience – whereupon meaning is expressed in and through the words we use and where meaning is ‘fulfilled’ and ‘completed’, however not fully articulated or fully capable of articulation, such meaning is therein, that Dilthey uses against Husserl’s phenomenological manner of proceeding. It is not a phenomenological fact, as Husserl leads us to believe in the Sixth Logical Investigation, that linguistic acts of meaning in themselves are ‘empty’ intending acts requiring ‘intended objects’ – whatever ontological status the latter objects may have – to complete their meaning. (Nor is it a phenomenological fact of linguistic experience that words qua marks on a page are animated by a sense-bestowing intentional consciousness, as Husserl suggests in his theory of language, and which he transfers over to his theory of perception in his objection to Brentano’s understanding of ‘physical phenomena’ as ‘immanent sense data’ e.g. as ‘reds’ rather than as the red of the rose, or as ‘sounds’ rather than as the song of the singer, i.e. as sensations actively interpreted through objectivizing acts.)

28 If Heidegger had actually provided this passage from the Logical Investigations, in addition to his ‘gloss’ or ‘interpretation’ of that passage, his students would have been more able to see that Heidegger is merely ‘alluding’ to Husserl’s position and ‘critiquing’ that position as well. It is worth remembering what Schleiermacher writes about the literary device of ‘allusions’. He notes: ‘Allusions always involve a second meaning, and if a reader does not catch the second meaning along with the first, he misses one of the intended meanings, even though he may be able to follow the literal one. At the same time, to claim that there is an allusion where there actually is none is also an error. An allusion occurs when an additional meaning is so entwined with the main train of thought that the author believes it would be easily recognised by another person.’ F. Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics and Criticism, tr. A. Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 23.

29 ‘I hear a barrel organ – the tones sensed are interpreted as those of a barrel organ’ (Husserl, Logical Investigations, p. 860). ‘I do not see colour sensations but coloured things; I do not hear sound sensations but the song of the singer’ (Husserl, Logical Investigations, p. 569). Husserl’s view on the sense-bestowing (Sinngabe) function of the
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In the above passage from the Sixth Logical Investigation that Heidegger is alluding to in his 1925 lecture course, therefore, Heidegger is really 'correcting', rather than 'elucidating' (for his students) Husserl's theory of expression and perception. And Heidegger is correcting Husserl's position on phenomenological grounds, or, more precisely stated, on grounds that are based upon our very own experience of language itself — just as Dilthey had corrected Husserl beforehand (but of which Husserl appears to have taken no notice). Heidegger is certainly not 'developing' philosophically prefigured possibilities inherent in Husserl's Sixth Logical Investigation. Heidegger, after all, is not an authority on the interpretation of anybody else's text, or, for that matter, his own texts, even if, as commentators have noted, 'Heidegger himself has been at pains to point this out, [. . . ] and that his hermeneutical phenomenology already finds its foundation in Husserl's Sixth Investigation Section 37' and that he is engaging 'in Auseinandersetzung with Husserl, his mentor in the phenomenological decade 1917—27. 30 If Heidegger is

correcting Husserl's position on phenomenological grounds of the experience of language, as Dilthey did before him, and if this is what Heidegger is doing with (Husserlian) phenomenology in his 1925 lectures, then there is not a case to be made for the argument that it is Dilthey, and not Husserl, contrary to the Heidegger's own self-interpretation and self-evaluation, who is Heidegger's real philosophical mentor during Heidegger's so-called phenomenological decade of 1917—27. 31

It seems to me that this case can be made, and that this case can be made at two levels, first at a general level of discussion about Heidegger's philosophy and second at a very particular level of discussion of Heidegger's elaboration of the Being-Question in Being and Time. At a general level, Heidegger's declared interest and explicit stress in Being and Time, and in many other earlier and later works, on what is said about Being and on what is written about Being as a matter that both contains and raises both the meaning and our understanding of life-experiences to a higher level of comprehension — however unnoticed such an 'understanding of Being' may be for some, or however actively forgotten such an issue may be for contemporary philosophers, such as Dilthey, Husserl, Scheler, Nietzsche and the likes — testifies to Heidegger's practical adherence to Dilthey's triadic-hermeneutic model of experience-understanding-expression in his methodological retrieval of the question of the meaning of Being in phenomenology and phenomenological research. The second case, which is to be made at a very particular level of interpretation, requires a more detailed

indeed, starting from a comprehensive, understanding, patient, and tireless reading — a generous reading' (Jacques Derrida, On Touching — JeanLuc Nancy, tr. Christine Irizzary (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 21), then this cannot be said of Heidegger's reading of Husserl's Sixth Logical Investigation in his 1925 Summer Semester lecture course, but it can be said of his 'generous' reading of Husserl's text through Diltheyan spectacles.

philosophical reconstruction of Heidegger's advancement of Dilthey's manner of thinking in the actual formulation and elaboration of 'the Being-Question' and its relation to Dasein in Being and Time. The following section attempts this.

Heidegger's Appropriation of Dilthey's Thought in the Elaboration of 'the Being-Question'

That the question of the meaning of Being must find its origins in 'ontic experiences', testifies to Heidegger's deference to Dilthey's general hermeneutical-phenomenological investigations into the meaning of life experiences. Though Heidegger begins his philosophizing with Dilthey's stance in hermeneutic phenomenology, he clearly does not end with Dilthey. It is of importance, therefore, to distinguish three things in Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey's manner of thinking in the elaboration of 'the Being-Question', namely: (i) the influence of Dilthey on Heidegger's starting point in philosophy, (ii) the question of the meaning of Being that Heidegger discerns about our life experiences of the meaning of Being that Dilthey is oblivious to (as much as other thinkers are, from Parmenides to Husserl), and (iii) the precise nature and extent of the influence of Dilthey's manner of thinking in Heidegger's argument for the ontic-ontological priority of Dasein in the formulation of 'the Being-Question'.

Heidegger's starting point

Heidegger's starting point in Being and Time appears to be straightforward and innocuous, at least as it is presented by him. According to Heidegger, 'everybody understands the sky is blue,' 'I am happy,' and similar statements' (BT 23).32

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32 BT, p. 23, translation modified. Heidegger continues, however, to note that such average understanding of Being demonstrates that it is incomprehensible: 'Allein diese durchschnittliche Verständlichkeit demonstriert nur die Unverständlichkeit.'

Heidegger, therefore, starts with the meaningfulness of certain basic everyday linguistic experiences. Herein, Heidegger starts with Dilthey; or, perhaps more accurately speaking, Heidegger starts by drawing our attention to particular linguistic statements that already express meaning about things that are, about that-which-is (das Seiende). It now follows from this starting point - statements about that-which-is - that if everybody understands the emphasis that Heidegger puts on the verb to be in these statements, namely, that the sky 'is' blue and that I 'am' happy, then in addition to and in distinction from some understanding of that-which-is as referred to by such statements, in this instance, the sky and being in a happy mood, 'something like the Being of that-which-is [das Sein des Seienden]' is also understood in 'this expression', however implicit. What Heidegger is not doing here, then, is giving an argument either for or against the existence (or continued existence) of the external world, or an argument either for or against the existence (or continued existence) of the inner world, the inner world of experiences that no-one else has direct access to. This is not his concern. That the sky is blue and that I am happy would lead Augustine, for example, to distinguish radically the outer and the inner world, and to develop, accordingly, an appropriate method of 'interiority' to examine the human condition. Heidegger, however, is not interested in following Augustine (completely) down this particular methodological line of existential-philosophical inquiry. Likewise, Heidegger is not concerned with the question of the 'exteriority' of the external world, as his (in)famous comment in Being and Time that 'the "scandal of philosophy" is not this proof [of the external world] has yet to be given, but that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again' (BT 249) makes crystal clear; as his equally famous retort makes clearer, that Dasein, unlike Leibniz's monads, does not need windows to look out onto the world since where else do I experience my being except from being-in-the-world (BT § 43).

By starting with linguistic statements that already express meaning about that-which-is, whether that-which-is is of an
inner or outer nature, Heidegger's starting point in *Being and Time* actually evades any questions pertaining to the existence of the inner or outer world. This is not to imply that in this starting-point Heidegger is advocating some form of meditation on a platonic universal of Being, for, as he insists — and as he was to later correct himself in *Introduction to Metaphysics* — the meaning of Being must always be understood, and can only be understood, and is only understood in relation to actual experiences of 'that-which-is' (*das Seiende*), to 'ontic experiences' just as Dilthey had stressed.\(^{33}\) Hermeneutic focus has to begin and return to 'ontic experiences' themselves. Indeed, Dilthey's stress to Husserl on this very point may well account for Husserl's rather enigmatic self-evaluation of the influence of conversations he had held with Dilthey in 1906 in the transition of his own thought from the descriptive-eidetic psychological analyses of the *Logical Investigations* (1900-01) to the position of transcendental idealism (that occurred around 1907-08), first documented in *Ideas I* (1913),\(^{34}\) because in the reduction 'the meaning of Being as thing [Sein als Ding] given to actual acts of outer perceptual-sense experience and 'the meaning of Being as (conscious) experience [Sein als Erlebnis] given to actual acts of immanent perception is the focus of his meditations on the meaning of Being.\(^{35}\)

33 Cf., also, HCT, pp. 90-1.

34 Dilthey died in 1911, and so could not have read Husserl's version of transcendental idealism in *Ideas I*. If he were alive, he no doubt would have pointed out the thoroughly ahistorical nature of that position too, just as he had to Husserl about the latter's earlier position in the *Logical Investigations*, in particular the second volume of descriptive-eidetic analyses of the experience of an ideally logical-normative consciousness as such.

35 Thus Heidegger's remarks in HCT about why 'a fundamental problem [the question of the meaning of Being] is left unsolved and must remain unsolved in it [he means, as is evident from the context, in 'the work of the two leading researchers in phenomenology today, Husserl and Scheler'] and why it must, what conditions must be fulfilled in order to pose it, and how this leads to a more radical definition of the task of phenomenological research. This problem is the basic phenomenological

Heidegger, however, is not concerned with the meaning of Being as thing given to outer perceptual-sense experience or with the meaning of Being as (conscious) experience immanently perceived, rather he is concerned with the linguistic fact that in understanding the meaning of statements about that-which-is — whether such statements refer to things given to outer sense perception, experiences immanently perceived, moods, dispositions, tools, God, Gods, or whatever — this understanding also presupposes some understanding of the meaning of Being itself. This is what I am calling Heidegger's starting point. It is a starting point that is clearly 'overlooked', 'pre-supposed', 'unthought', 'jumped over' by Husserl in his reduction — a reduction, it must be noted, as Husserl himself explicitly tells us, marks a return to 'genuine talk of Being [Seinsrede]' (whatever are the conclusions he arrives at in that return). This is why Heidegger can point out (correctly) to his students in his 1925 lectures that the question of the meaning of Being is not only raised in Husserl's philosophical position but also answered — the meaning of Being is to be (pre-)determined in and through an analysis of things given to outer sense perception and of (conscious) experience immanently perceived — and so, the question of the meaning of Being as a question (als Frage) itself gets lost precisely through the reduction. In other words, the question of the meaning of Being is left 'unthought' (implicit) and yet also 'unthought' (not thought by the author) and so in this double sense this issue is hermeneutically 'unreduced' in Husserl's philosophical 'reduction'. And yet the particular method of reductions, both the transcendental and the eidetic reduction, and the particular

question of the sense of being, a question which an ontology [such as Husserl's transcendental reduction in *Ideas*, for example] can never pose but already constantly presupposes and thus uses in some sort of answer [to the question of the sense of Being], grounded or otherwise. The immanent critique of the natural trend of phenomenological research allows the question of being to arise. A partial answer to this question is in fact the real theme of this course' (pp. 90-1). See some critical evaluations of his answer on pp. 395-6 of this chapter.
manner of thinking (reflection) advocated by Husserl within these reductions, can never in principle tackle the question of the meaning of Being itself, the very thing (die Sache selbst) that grounds in the first place Husserl’s meditation on Being in the Seinsrede of his reduction. The problem, as far as Heidegger can see, is not just with Husserl’s ‘talk of Being’, however; it is a problem with anybody’s explicit ‘talk about the Being’ of that which is (Sein des Seienden), and that problem has existed from time immemorial, i.e. from Parmenides onwards.36

From a Diltheyean hermeneutic-methodological point of view, the problem for Heidegger seems to be this. In understanding the meaning of the statements ‘the sky is blue’ and ‘I am happy’, the meaning of Being itself is indeed thought in such experiences but it is not thought out of that thought; that is to say, the meaning of Being lies at once both un-thought (implicit) and un-thought (not thought by the author) in the understanding of such statements. It is as if in becoming aware in my actual experiencing of the fact that the sky is and that I am, or that you are and that the world is, or that the stone ‘is’ or that ‘the lecture hall is illuminated’ etc., these very awarenesses point to the fact that I must have already somehow forgotten (in my memory, as Augustine would add in Book X of the Confessions) the very thing itself (die Sache selbst), that is, the source of the intelligibility of those statements, namely, that the sky is understood by me to be a being in Being and that I understand myself to be a being who understands that I am a being in Being.37 Recall Book 10 (17) of the Confessions, where Augustine remarks, ‘I hid in my memory not their images but the realities.'38 And recall Augustine’s well-known remarks

37 Husserl speaks about such ‘becoming aware’ in the Sixth Logical Investigation, but Husserl’s concept is of an entirely different nature and in an entirely different context from Heidegger’s starting point and Heidegger’s concern and argument about the question of the meaning of Being.

from De Trinitate (and often quoted by Heidegger in his lectures in the 1920s):

while there are three in numbers, existence, life and understanding, and though the stone exists and the animal lives, yet I do not think that the stone lives or that the animal understands, whereas it is absolutely certain that whoever understands also exists and is living. That is why I have no hesitation in concluding that the one which contains all three is more excellent than that which is lacking in one or both of these.39

It is this ‘understanding of Being’ – which Heidegger insists extends equally to the world, to myself, and to my fellow human being – that withdraws, hides and is forgotten in our very understanding of and experiencing of the things themselves that is expressed in such everyday statements as ‘the sky is blue’, ‘I am happy’, and so forth.40

39 There is, therefore, in Augustine’s method of ‘interiority’ much more involved than reaching an understanding of one’s own individual existence in Being. As one commentator points out, ‘Augustine’s demonstration of God’s existence begins precisely where his refutation of the sceptics ended, that is, from the certainty that he exists, lives and understands, and proceeds by a very detailed line of reasoning to the conclusion that God exists. A careful analysis of this process of argumentation shows that it contains five steps.’ J. McBride, Albert Caes: Philosopher and Littérateur (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1992), p. 36. This author then proceeds with admirable acuity to detail Augustine’s line of reasoning (pp. 36–7). Cf., also, Tarnicrus J. van Bavel, ‘The Anthropology of Augustine’, Louvain Studies 5 (1974), pp. 34–47 (p. 35).
40 Such a pre-ontological understanding of Being that is deposited in our ontic experiences of that-which-is would have been as hidden from Parmenides as it would have been from Plato as it was from Aristotle and Aquinas – and so in the unfolding of the history of western metaphysics, from Parmenides to Husserl. And so, it also goes without saying that this ‘pre-ontological understanding of Being’ has absolutely no connection with Husserl’s Sixth Logical Investigation and the latter’s phenomenological elucidation of Kant’s thesis ‘Being is not a real predicate’ that unfolds therein. Notwithstanding Jacques Taminiaux’s meticulous investigations into this matter, I find Heidegger’s own ‘suggestions’ philosophically misleading.
Because the meaning of Being is not thought but implicit, and this is precisely how Heidegger following Dilthey understands the 'unthought' (das Ungedacht), this points to the possibility of retrieving that meaning, but such a retrieval (Wiederholung) can only be enacted and set in operation hermeneutically. Thus Heidegger can now argue in Being and Time that the only way in which 'ontology' – where 'ontology' means post-Kantian study of the way the meaning of the living word of 'Being' is understood – is possible is 'as [hermeneutic] phenomenology'. This statement on Heidegger's part, therefore, cannot, without gross distortion of its significance, be turned around, as it has been by commentators, to suggest that Heidegger really meant 'only as ontology is phenomenology possible', where 'ontology' refers to classical metaphysics and 'phenomenology' refers to Husserlian (eidetic or transcendental) phenomenology. Rather, it means that the only way in which the question of the meaning of Being can be resurrected from oblivion and kept alive 'today' (heute), which is Heidegger's desire in the opening sentence of Being and Time, is by actively engaging in a hermeneutic reading of texts in the history of philosophy that deal with this matter in order to relive the experience and understanding of Being itself that has been deposited and expressed in and through their written word but which has been left unthought. Thus in Heidegger's starting point, 'hearing' that which is unthought (in any talk about that which is) methodologically replaces 'seeing' that which is revealed in and through the 'seeing'. This is why it is only by way of hermeneutic-phenomenology that [post-Kantian] ontology is possible.

41 This applies in all of Heidegger's reading of the texts of any other contemporary thinker, poet, politician that purports to address and express our understanding of the meaning of Being in a person's life, in a society, or in a nation. Heidegger's selection is not as innocent or arbitrary as it might seem, then, and this can call into question his entire approach to 'the Being-question', but such is outside the scope of this paper. Cf. H. Ott, Martin Heidegger: A Political Life, tr. A. Blunden (London: Fontana Press, 1993).
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makes the meaning of Being ‘worthy of questioning [fragh-
würdig]’ in the anticipatory awareness, in the present, of my
own death in the future (Vorlaufen zum Tode), as disclosed
from within the particular mood of Angst.

In the anticipatory awareness, in the present, of one’s own
death, the questionable appearance of the meaning of Being
becomes unavoidable because in that awareness the statement ‘I
am’ both means and expresses at once an understanding that
that I am, that I am not-to-be, that not-to-be is part of what it is
to be an ‘I am who am’, and that my mode of being harbours no
self-guarantee is being at all, yet is (fact), hence, why. Saying ‘I
am’ in the mood of Angst in anticipatory awareness of one’s
own death, and understanding what that statement means,
therefore, both contains and expresses a different kind of
particular experience of the meaning of Being in comparison to
such similar statements as ‘the sky is blue’, or ‘I am happy’, or
‘Give me a glass of water, I am dying of thirst’. Heidegger
believes that the anticipatory awareness of my own death in the
present, and of my own death only, brings us methodologically
to ‘the Being-question’ (BT 235). Dilthey, of course, could not
regard any such inner ‘brooding’ over one’s own death, from a
methodological point of view, as a requirement of historical-
hermeneutic research into the meaning of our life experiences
or of death, and indeed it would be improperly invoked as such, if
it were. And yet, it is not invoked by Heidegger as a historical-
hermeneutic possibility in Being and Time either, rather it is
invoked in that essay as an existential-methodological task
(requirement), for, ‘this possibility [disclosed in Angst] must
not be weakened; it must be understood as a possibility, it must
be cultivated as a possibility, and we must put up with it as a
possibility, in the way we comport ourselves towards it [in
such brooding over death]’ (BT 306). Herein Heidegger gives
Dilthey’s manner of thinking a particularly Kierkegaardian-
existentialistic twist in the methodological elaboration of ‘the
Being-question’, and it is one that sets Heidegger’s project out-
side of the bounds of Diltheyean hermeneutic phenomenology
and inside the bounds of the future memory inscribed in Easter

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liturgical rites of Christian religious experience of ‘Remember
man that thou are dust, and onto dust thy shalt return.’

The ontic-ontological priority of Dasein in ‘The
Being-question’

Strictly speaking, therefore, it is really only in and through the
experience of the tenuouslyness of being and the accompanying
questioning of that presence in the understanding of that Being
that is evoked in the understanding of one’s own being as a
being-for-death, in the mood of Angst, for that individual being
in Dasein, that Dasein, in Heidegger’s scheme of thing, exhibits
its ontic-ontological priority in ‘the Being-question’. In fact,
Heidegger explicitly tells us that ‘we [he] have [has] chosen to
designate this entity as ‘Dasein’, a term which is purely an
expression of its Being [als reiner Seinsausdruck]’ (BT 32).43
What Heidegger seems to be saying here is that the meaning of
this term is purely determined by the underpinning meaning of
the particular experience itself, and not the accorded meaning
of linguistic convention, and it expresses what is understood in
that experience from out of itself, namely, the questionable
presence of the meaning of the tenuouslyness of Being itself, i.e.
the understanding of the essence of finite being in human (lived)
experience of being itself. This is a highly creative use of lan-
guage by Heidegger – what other German understands the term
Dasein in the way Heidegger understands it as an expression
depicting the awareness of the ‘There’ of ‘Being’, in which I find
myself implicated as a being in Being who only in and through
questioning the very meaning of being itself makes ‘the struc-
tural totality’ of Dasein visible? And yet the meaning that
Heidegger gives to this term Dasein and his use of language in

42 Cf. M. Heidegger, The Concept of Time, tr. W. McNeill (Oxford:
Blackwell, 1992), bilingual English–German edition, containing M.
Heidegger, Der Begriff der Zeit: Vortrag vor der Marburger Theolo-
genschaft Jui 1924, ed. H. Tietjen, with postscript (Tübingen: Niemeyer,
1989).

43 Cf., also, HCT, § 17.
this way is strictly in accord with Dilthey’s philosophy of life, and with the expression of part of life’s meaning that we mortals are all too familiar with, namely, the contingency of Being. This underlines Heidegger’s characteristic existentialistic rendering of Dilthey’s triadic structure of Erlebnis-Verstehen-Ausdruck in his famous depiction in Being and Time of the human being as a being whose own being is the matter at stake for that being in the way that being expresses itself and goes about itself (es geht um) in its being-in-the-world. Thus he is Dilthey’s manner of thinking, albeit radically modified through Kierkegaardian glasses, that is at work in the meaning that Heidegger gives methodologically to Dasein, and not Husserl’s manner of thinking or Husserl’s theory of perception, nor Aristotle’s phronesis, nor Plato’s eros, nor what can be seen via listening to the normative power of Greek or German etymological terms (as Heidegger himself conceded, later, to Fr Richardson). If this is the case, then the particular ‘understanding of Being’ that is constitutive of Dasein’s ontic-ontological priority in the formulation of the ‘Being-question’ is one place where a relevant evaluation of Heidegger’s philosophy can, and perhaps should, begin.

Towards a Critical Evaluation of Heidegger’s Use of Hermeneutic Phenomenology in the ‘Being-question’

According to Heidegger, the ‘understanding of Being’ that is distinctive of Dasein’s mode of being-in-the-world differs from any understanding of Being that is gained in and through cognitive-reflection on beings as beings (das Seiende). In point of fact, identifying and pointing to beings that either come into existence or go out of existence cannot add to or subtract from Dasein’s ‘understanding of Being’ because such indications presuppose some understanding of Being already there for Dasein, but deferred in the process. It is a central contention in Heidegger’s formulation and elaboration of ‘the Being-question’, therefore, that there is an ‘understanding of Being’ that is always and already present implicitly in Dasein, back behind of which we cannot go, i.e. that we cannot think, when addressing ‘the question of the meaning of Being’ in phenomenology and phenomenological research. Heidegger thinks that this position in phenomenology and phenomenological research is unchallengeable and unquestionable, for, as noted above, pointing to beings in their being will obstruct the issue at hand, or at least it will lead to a fundamental mis-targetting of the issue at hand that Heidegger wishes to address in his ‘Being-question’, ‘Doesn’t insistence on what is,’ Heidegger asks rhetorically in his late lecture ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’, ‘block access to what-is?’ (Verweist die Insistenz auf dem Beweisbaren nicht den Weg zu dem, was ist?)44 Insistence on what is deflects attention from the way what is, is. Hence, insistence by us on the being of the being of beings, deflects attention from the ‘understanding of Being’ that is already presupposed, according to Heidegger, as a precondition both for, to and in any such ostentation.

For Heidegger, then, questions pertaining to the ‘understanding of Being’ and to the being of the being of beings must be kept not only distinct but also unrelated. The former belong to phenomenology, the latter remains outside of phenomenological remit. The ‘understanding of Being’ and the being of the being of beings, therefore, are entirely different concepts of being in Heidegger’s starting point in philosophy. Heidegger himself clearly recognizes this distinction in Being and Time.

Heidegger, in fact, insists on this distinction in Being and Time because his ‘path of thinking’ about the ‘Being-question’ and its relation to Dasein clearly requires it. Heidegger, however, does not explore any further this distinction in Being and Time (or in


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later works). Heidegger's starting point and finishing point in philosophy and phenomenological research, therefore, remains asserted, and the same, namely:

Entities are [Heidegger's emphasis], quite independently of the experiences by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained. But Being 'is' only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs. (BT 2.2.8)

In order for Heidegger to maintain this position, Heidegger must acknowledge, as de Boer has acutely pointed out, that there is a being [small 'b'] of the being of entities that precedes the Being of the understanding of Being [big 'B']. Heidegger does not turn to the significance of this first being of the being of entities that is not reducible to the understanding of Being of those entities deposited in Dasein in his 'path of thinking' about 'the Being-question'. The being of the being of entities is set aside, and not returned to in the development of Heidegger's thought, as it had been set aside and not returned to in the development of Husserl's thought either. Recall Husserl's famous transcendental reduction. Outside of all that we can know and actually do know about things given to outer perceptual-sense experience, there is 'nothing' of any intelligible or sensible nature to know 'in itself'; there is only 'nonsensical thought'.

That such things or entities are not a matter for phenomenology and phenomenological research. Likewise, outside the apodictic knowledge of the existence of a currently lived psychical-act experience (and its intentional object, if it exists) in an act of immanent perception — and whose non-existence is inconceivable — lies its existence; but that such an experience exists (in its facticity as Dilthey understands it) in immanent

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perception is not a matter for phenomenology and phenomenological research in Husserl's definition of phenomenology. The facticity of lived experiences is to be ignored because their meaning is not susceptible to scientific analysis and scientific generalizations or conceptual analysis in any form in Husserl's eidetic eyes. There can be no eidetic science of the 'thisness' of this particular experience here and now. And since the essential features of such lived-experiences is all that counts, the very lived nature of the particular experiences themselves in their uniqueness must be passed over and not be entertained as a matter for philosophy and phenomenological research. This is what Heidegger, influenced by his reading of Dilthey, means when he says to his students in his 1923 lectures that 'the being of the intentional [acts of consciousness] . . . gets lost precisely through them [i.e. both the eidetic and the transcendental reductions] (HCT 110). And yet Heidegger himself does not return to this facticity of the life experiences of Dasein. That I exist, that you exist, that you die, that I die are not the concern of Heidegger's phenomenology either, but my understanding of myself as a being-for-death is. Outside of one's own actual understanding of oneself as a being-for-death, then, that you are murdered, or that blood-lust and domination 'exists' (not in Heidegger's sense of that term) is not the concern of Dasein in Being and Time. It is at this point that Levinas, inspired by Dilthey's philosophy of life, raises the following, critical question within both Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology and phenomenological research: is not the very anonymous existence of things that are and of experiences that are a presupposition itself requiring and inviting a hermeneutic investigation? This investigation, however, would lie both beyond and outside the dual limits set by Husserl in the transcendental reduction on the 'understanding of Being' as thing given to outer sense perception and on the 'understanding of Being' as (conscious) experience immanently perceived, and outside the existential-phenomenological limit set by Heidegger on 'the understanding of Being' as that which is hermeneutically deposited and revealed in anxious anticipation, in the present,
of one’s own death in Dasein, whose own being, and own being alone, remains the root of ‘the understanding of Being’ and the sole matter at stake that needs to be thought in philosophy and phenomenological research. If Heidegger is right, and if our ‘understanding of Being’ extends equally to the world, to myself and to my fellow human being, then the critical question that Levinas raises is how can I reach ‘an understanding of Being’ that is not mine but shareable and for the good of our human existence, and therefore for the good of our human understanding? Focusing on Dasein – i.e. on the awareness of the ‘There’ (Da) of ‘Being’ (Sein), in which one finds oneself implicated as a being in being and as a being-for-one’s-own-death – methodologically excludes a prioristically such an ethical (or ‘metaphysical’ in Levinas’s sense) possibility within phenomenology and phenomenological research. Heidegger’s insistence on the ontic-ontological priority of ‘the understanding of Being’ in Dasein as the back behind of which we cannot think, then, is itself a presupposition, an assertion that needs to be tested for its phenomenological credentials.

If ‘the understanding of Being’ that I possess, and in which I live, move and have my being, extends equally to the world, to myself and to my fellow human being – as Heidegger suggests – then the very existence of the other human being and of that being’s understanding of Being has at least the potential to call into question ‘the understanding of Being’ that I have acquired (and can acquire) about the world, about myself and about my fellow human being. Would not my concern for the being of another shatter the concern that I actually can have and do have about that which is at stake in my own being a being in Being?

‘Do not do unto others, that you would not have done to yourself’ (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31) is a familiar injunction recorded in the Bible but it is one that is rooted in human ‘ontic’ experiences. So, who are the ‘others’ that is referred to here? Clearly ‘the other’ is not merely an empirical other given to acts of outer perceptual-sense experience through perspectival variations, nor the ‘other’ who plays a necessary role in the dialectical constitution of the consciousness of the self in relation to the other.

whether conceived in Hegelian or Husserlian dialectical manner, nor the ‘other’ whom I hold in friendship and she in friendship to ‘me’, as Aristotle and Aquinas would have it. Rather, the other that is spoken of ‘not to be done as one would have done to oneself’, is he and she who have been othered in society: the poor, the widow, the orphan, the leper, the marginalized. This is what is expressed and understood and meant in this biblical injunction, and it has a universality of meaning, albeit not arrived at or as clearly seen in eidetic ideation as Husserl would like, or in existential brooding about one’s own death as Heidegger would like, but nonetheless it contains a universality all the same, ‘for those who have eyes to see it’. In this invocation to serve the other, the other, Levinas remarks, takes ‘the me’ (le moi) in me as hostage or pledge (otage) of his and her responsibility; this is an ‘ontic experience’ and it is an ‘ontic’ experience whose meaning is expressed and documented in biblical verse and in everyday life experiences. ‘Biblical verses do not function here as proof but as testimony of a tradition and an experience. Don’t they have as much right as Holderin and Trakl to be cited?’ And, of course they do, if you follow Dilthey’s revolutionary philosophy of life, for, ‘The religious thinker, the artist, and the philosopher create on the basis of lived experience.’ Hence the expression and understanding of life experiences that are written about and spoken about by the prophets in the psalms and in the stories of the New Testament invite the reader to engage both in and with a person’s reflection on his and her own self understanding. Here, however, there can be no ‘science’ of human self-understanding, only hermeneutic ‘retrieval’ and ‘interpretation’ of the significances of the way of life that unfolds in and through human experiences themselves.

Outside of my actual experiences lies the very existence of my fellow human being, but this is an experience, and it is an experience that must be thought. And outside of that the God who calls me to be responsible before the other, for the other, to the other, is also an experience, an experience recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and an experience that must be thought. A true existential humanism is a humanism of the other, then, but such a humanism of the other is only intelligible in light of affirming a relation to a third, to He, who is present, in addition to you and me, as Absolutely Other, whom I can never be seized directly and always remains a “He”.51

If Levinas is right, then we should be able to go back to Heidegger’s Being and Time to traces where Heidegger acknowledges, but does not listen to, the word of God. And, indeed, there is documentary evidence in Being and Time. At a critical point in his analysis of death, Heidegger declares that even if one were assured of one’s whither and thither, the meaning of the tenuousness of being experienced in Angst cannot be cancelled, struck out, denied in the affirmation of such a Creator God.52 In Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger takes a different view. He suggests that affirming the existence of a Creator God would cancel the questioning of the meaning of Being, as an answer to that question has been accepted.53 But is Heidegger correct? If

51 De Boer, ‘Beyond Being’, p. 24, and, as de Boer continues, ‘For this Levinas uses the term “illéité”, which is derived from il, illé.’ Cf. also, E. Levinas, ‘Signification and Sense’ in Humanism of the Other, pp. 9–44 (pp. 41–2).
52 Cf. BT, p. 175.
53 This is what lies behind Heidegger’s famous remark in 1953 that if he were to be called by faith he would have to ‘shut up shop’. ‘Report of a session of the Evangelical Academy in Hofgeismar, December 1953’, tr. J. Greisch in R. Kearney (ed.), Heidegger et la question de Dieu (Grasset, 1988), p. 335. Cf. also, J. Derrida, Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowby (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 175, n. 3. Walter A. Brogan says that Heidegger hints at this as early as in his 1922 Aristotle essay ‘and queries whether the idea of a philosophy of religion is not itself contradictory, even though his own courses had more than once bore this title’, Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being, p. 12.