

# **A History of Philosophy**

## **70 Husserl and Heidegger**

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I'm talking about Nietzsche's view of knowledge and truth and seeing how he takes the pluralism between different viewpoints to be simply an extension of various underlying emotional tendencies, ultimately reducible to the will to power in varying degrees, and that it's this Nietzschean approach which is one of the major influences shaping the contemporary post-modernism and for that matter the pluralism of our day. And as we were trying to get some acquaintance with phenomenology and particularly Husserl, we were noting that his concern is precisely this lack of any firm foundation for the sciences, mathematics, logic, and any other kind of human knowledge. And he blames this on naturalism and naturalistic philosophy with its attempt to explain human knowledge in purely, in terms of purely natural processes.

So you get historical explanations, you get psychological explanations, he talks there of historicism and psychologism, and of course Nietzsche would be a prime example of psychologism, a psychological explanation of the knowledge claims which people make. One of the other tendencies of his day, which he is criticizing, is the work of a neo-Kantian philosopher whom we mentioned back then, I think, Wilhelm Dilthey, who was interested in philosophical world views and classified world views into three sorts, each of which he attributed to some aspect of human psychology. So that you get, if you like, the rational mind, you get the value-oriented mind, you get the empirically concerned individual, in fact, the three things that Jaspers was trying to pull together in terms of what constitutes the whole of authentic human existence.

Well, what Husserl does is to see in this another kind of naturalistic explanation, in which, while he's grounding world views in the human spirit, it's really in the human spirit understood simply in terms of certain psychological types, and how you're going to overcome the relativism if that's the case. In other words, what Husserl is after is not just new foundations of new foundationalism, but a universal foundation, something that isn't just an account of differences because of different psychological types, as in Nietzsche and Dilthey, but rather is something about the universal structure of the human self, by virtue of which there is a universal foundation. That's what he's after.

Now, one of the complaints that he has in this same context is that the subject-object dichotomy, which has dominated thought since Descartes, asking for an isolation of the object from all subjective influences in our thinking, that subject-object dichotomy is really very artificial. After all, if you are saying, I know something, you're hardly getting at what knowledge is if you just represent the object. The I know is an act of the subject, and it is the loss of that human subjecthood, the loss of

an adequate understanding of the human spirit, which is what ails the naturalistic philosophy and what therefore underlies the failure of naturalism.

So what Husserl wants then is, if you like, and this is what he calls it, a science of the human spirit, or a science of the human consciousness, a science of the I. Now, that of course is the sort of thing that Descartes attempted, at least that's where Descartes started, but while Husserl goes back to Descartes, back that is to the beginning of universal doubt out of which the cogito emerges, I think, for Husserl's purposes, Descartes was not nearly radical enough in his suspended judgment. He suspended judgment on everything that could possibly be doubted, but immediately jumped from the I think to the assertion that he's a thinking thing. With that very brief nod of recognition, he leaves the human subject altogether and has really not examined what is universal about human consciousness, the I in the I know.

On the other hand, Immanuel Kant, in asking what it is that orders and unifies our experience, our knowledge, the whole range of human consciousness, comes up with the transcendental self, and talks of a synthetic unity of our perception, you recall. Now, Husserl seems to find the direction he wants to go. What Kant called the transcendental ego, the transcendental self, the transcendental self, Kant, in the rational psychology section of the critique of pure reason, discusses, you remember, you read it, you outlined it, discusses some of Descartes' attempts to get at the I, the self, and decided that those metaphysical speculations simply did not have adequate grounds.

Husserl is not discouraged by Descartes' failure. What Husserl attempts to do, then, is to go back to Descartes foundations and see if he can, from that starting point, elicit something of the universal structure of the transcendental ego. So, that brings us down to the need for a more radical starting point.

I might mention that when he was asked to lecture at the Sorbonne, where everybody has to pay homage to Descartes. I mean, he's the patron philosopher, patron saint of French philosophy. What he did was to present lectures known as the Cartesian meditations.

Cartesian meditations. Starting with Descartes, literally, and trying to describe his methodology in relation to Descartes. Well, what he does do, then, is to talk about two aspects of the phenomenological method that he wants.

First of all, bracketing, which is simply suspending judgment. The sort of thing Descartes did about all objects of thought and objects of perception. He uses the term epoché at times.

That's the term that the Greek skeptics used for suspended judgment. So, bracketing, suspense of judgment, eparchy. Descartes did it with whatever could be doubted as part of his methodology.

Husserl isn't doubting the existence of objects when he brackets them. He never questions their existence. His concern is why we do not have a more well-grounded knowledge of their very assets.

That's his concern. The foundations of knowledge. So, in bracketing objects of knowledge, he's bracketing variables between particular bits of knowledge.

Particular kinds of knowledge. In fact, he emphasizes consciousness sometimes, much more than knowledge, and brackets all the objects of consciousness. Consciousness of all sorts, not just consciousness of some clearly articulated understanding.

All states of consciousness. And he tries to get at that universal structure of consciousness. All particulars, all theories, all interpretations are bracketed.

I might add that at the beginning of his work, he tried to maintain a purely theoretical attitude. That is to say, not involving any practical dimensions of human existence as the pragmatists do, in talking of human knowledge. But, in the later stages of his work, he talked of even bracketing that theoretical attitude, which is an artificial sort of thing.

Recognizing that when I say I know something, you see what I know is something as part of my overall worldview. The overall way in which I live. What I know, how I know, is an ingredient in my Lebenswelt.

My lived world. And what he wants to do is to get at the I of the lived world, rather than the I of some abstruse theoretical knowledge of the world. So I know of pre-scientific consciousness.

The I know of a pre-theoretical consciousness. That is to say, the I know of ordinary life. That's what he wants to get at.

Now, that latter move of his led to the attempt of students of his to do a phenomenological description, not just of the I know, but of the entire activity of the I in the life world. And that's the sort of thing you find in the existential phenomenologists like Heidegger. So you can see that they grew out of Husserl at precisely that point of bracketing the theoretical scientific attitude and trying to get at the I who is there within the world in a pre-theoretical, non-theoretical basis.

Put that another way. Come back to this subject-object dichotomy. The naturalist ignores subjectivity in Husserl's sense and focuses simply on the object, giving objective scientific accounts of how that knowledge is possible.

It would be a mistake, on the other hand, to bracket out the object and just concentrate on the subject in some sort of introspective fashion. Because there is in the life world, there is in reality, no such thing as the I of I know without an object of knowledge. So what you're trying to study really is not the subject, not the object, in the sense that Descartes said, that's a thinking thing, that's an extended thing.

No, what you're trying to study is the hyphen. Yeah, what is the relationship between these two by virtue of which we have knowledge? Because the I know something, know is the hyphen. You see? So what is that universal structure of consciousness of which knowledge is a phenomenon? You see, that's the question.

Well, that same sort of thing becomes evident in the existentialists when Heidegger says that our existence, design, literally being there, you see, it's not a private, isolated being, my being. It's a being there in the world, you see. And the same is true in Sartre's well-known statement that we're cast into a world not of our own making.

There's a being in the world, that's the very nature of human existence, that inness, being in the world. So the mistake then of Descartes was not only that he was not radical enough in his doubt, in his bracketing, didn't go back far enough, but it was also that he conceived of the I as a separated I. That is to say, I'm an I where there or not there's a world, you see. And he didn't know there was a real world until Meditation 6. For all that time, he may be working just an I. Well, Meditation 3, it's God and I, you see.

But he really has no basis for arguing other finite selves until Meditation 6. You've got a body, and hence some analogous reading in terms of my mind-body relationship and yours. Well, it's a very artificial kind of rule. And what Husserl is after is an understanding of the I as it is concretely.

The theoretical attitude of Descartes has to be bracketed. You cannot abstract the I from its concrete relationships. Well then, what are we going to say about the hyphen? A little thing like a hyphen.

And the main thing that Husserl emphasizes, and this is often regarded as his great discovery, the one thing is the intentionality of consciousness. The intentionality of consciousness. Now, keep in mind the term intentionality as it was used in the late medievals.

It has to do with the conscious external reference that the mind has in knowing something. Perception, knowledge, and other states of consciousness are teleological acts. Acts are oriented towards an object.

Now, Descartes gives us the image of consciousness as simply entertaining ideas within the mind. And that view leaves wide open whether there are any objects the ideas are about. Whereas what Husserl is saying is one of the universal features, part of the very essence of human consciousness, is that it's always consciousness of.

Consciousness of, an idea of, knowing that. It's always referenced to it. It's directional.

And that's true even in memory. You're referring back, anticipation, referring on to the future. Thinking of some absent member of the class, reference to him.

There's always that. Sometimes it's a reflexive act. Thinking on that thought, you see.

But this is the very nature of the act of consciousness. It's not a passive sort of thing, the way Locke pictured receiving ideas passively, *tabula rasa*. But it's an active sort of thing.

And this is his debt to Kant, you see. Kant introduced the notion of the self, the conscious self, as an active kind of knower that actually contributes to experience forms that unify it, temporally and spatially. And then categories that unify the understanding beyond the experience.

Now, this is what Husserl, then, is referring to, that act of consciousness that does something. What does it do? And the language that is used here for describing what intentionality does ranges from various things. First, it makes the object present to me.

The object does not present itself to me passively, opening the door, you see. But I, by, as it were, giving attention to, get the reference there, by giving attention to something, putting my mind to it, see what we're saying? Putting my mind to it, giving attention, and looking at. What I do is to make the object present.

I bring the object in. This is sometimes said as a constitutive act. Yes, because in the act of knowing, I constitute the object an object, an object of knowing.

In terms of the subject-object relationship, there's no object without a subject. How could it be an object if it's not an object for some subject? Any more than there isn't a subject without an object. How can it be a subject if there's no subject to have some object? And so, what it does is to constitute the object, the object for me that it is, you see.

Now, that's almost Kantian. In the act of knowing, the thing in itself becomes a thing for me. In knowing, I constituted a thing for me, you see.

Well, in addition to constitutive, it is a constructive act. Just as for Kant, it is the time form that schematizes the understanding. So, the very nature of my knowing, you see, constructs the overall situation, pulls it together for me.

It's not just the isolated object, but the whole scene that is interrelated for me. All knowledge is, in that sense, self-referential. It's like, here I stand, I can see no other, because from where I stand, I see it all in these relationships in relation to me that are.

Whereas, from your perspective, it might be different, but it's constructive. By the same token, it is a meaning-giving act. It's a meaning-giving act.

It's not so much Husserl who uses this phrase, I think, but some of the later writers. The underlying assumption here is that whatever else the act of knowing does, in seeing it as the object for me, I give it meaning for me. And in that sense, I give it meaning.

The confusing thing is that intentionality with its referentiality is itself sometimes called the act of meaning, simply because our word meaning is ambiguous. Because if I mean something, what do I mean when I say, it's you I mean, but it's you I'm referring to, it's you I intend in what I'm saying. So one sense of meaning has to do with referentiality, intentionality.

The other sense of meaning is, yeah, more the existential thing of giving meaning to something that's meaningless, or giving it a certain meaning that it's going to have for me. So, in the more existential phenomenology, you find the notion of meaning-giving. In any case, it's the notion of ordering the objects, ordering the world.

Yeah, consciousness is not passive, but active. Consciousness is not representational, carrying mental pictures of what's out there. It's not representational, it's constitutive.

The idea, the ideas that I have about something constitute it as that for me. It's not just representational, copy theory. So, intentionality then is the key to the whole thing.

If you read much about Husserl, you soon discover that he spent most of his energies trying to develop the method and left other people to use it. That may be an over-generalization. He does do, for instance, a phenomenology of time consciousness.

Time consciousness. And time is no ordinary object of thought, anything post-continent. Because if time is the unifying form of all consciousness, it's the form you remember of the internal sense.

But even our ideas of the external sense are known to us in the internal sense, and so they are time-organized as well. So the whole world for me is time-organized. Well, what he's trying to do there is to do a phenomenology of that time consciousness, which is really getting at the heart of the Kantian sort of thing.

His earlier works, things like *The Foundations of Mathematics and Logical Investigations*, are attempts to do the kind of phenomenology that would establish the foundations in the universal structure of the self of mathematics. That is to say, of logic. You see, the foundations of logic.

In fact, this little book of Kant, of Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, actually contains two essays of his. One is entitled *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*. His point being that none of the other sciences is rigorous because none of them has an underlying foundation that validates the scientific method.

Not even logic does. Mathematics doesn't. So he's calling out for a philosophy that will establish those foundations.

The second is called, let's see, another full title, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*. Let's see. I wrote it down.

I wrote it down. Let's see. Yeah, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

Now you can see what he's after there. The crisis has no adequate foundations. The whole thing's in danger of getting relativized.

And transcendental phenomenology, yes, a phenomenology of the transcendental self, which will arrest that process and establish adequate foundations. So that's the overarching concern of Husserl. And it inspired a whole following of people.

Inspired a whole following of people. I remember back in the, when would it be? Oh, in the 1960s, I guess it was. I attended a meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy out at Yale.

And that meeting, as people were standing around in the lobby of the meeting place, people would come up to you, assuming that you were of like mind with them, and rave in almost messianic tones about the project they were involved in. Increased numbers from last year. It looks like we're gaining ground.

That sort of thing. A real messianic kind of spirit to it that was sort of fascinating to catch that enthusiasm, which was almost a religious enthusiasm. It was interesting to see.

Well, Hegel. Pause for comment. Hegel.

Husserl. Pause for comment. Question.

Okay, you'll find that Stumpf is pretty clear on this. He's also good on Heidegger, so be sure to use that. Now, let me take then the next step from Husserl to Heidegger himself.

And here in Heidegger, you have not transcendental phenomenology, phenomenology of the transcendental self, but existential phenomenology. Phenomenology of existence. Heidegger is no longer concerned to establish a new kind of foundationalism.

That's not his project. The problem with Husserl is that the process of bracketing is never completed. So that you simply cannot strip the transcendental self bare of the evidence of this, that, or the other kind of object of knowledge.

And catch it as it were in its bareness. It's as if Heidegger is saying to Husserl what Hume said to Descartes, or Locke, who had talked about having a notion of a substantive soul, even over and above all of the particular ideas of sensation and reflection and everything else of which we're immediately aware. To which Hume replied, I never catch myself without some idea.

Well, it's as if Heidegger is saying the same to Husserl. You never catch the hyphen without the object. You never catch the intentional state bare, unclothed with objects.

And so he has to part company with Heidegger's optimism about a method of establishing some rigorous foundation, new foundationalism. Incidentally, I think Heidegger's right in that. It seems to me that any attempt you might make to bracket presuppositions, bracket reference to some particular object, is going to be very difficult.

It's a kind of abstraction, thinking of the hyphen relationship in abstraction. But the very nature of thinking abstractly, abstract ideas, is that it always takes off from particulars. And such particulars become symbols of something much greater than that.

So that the difficulty involved there is the difficulty in abstract thinking that does not have some point of reference, which makes meaningful symbolic language possible.

Well, instead of what Husserl is doing, what Heidegger proposes to do is to use this phenomenological method of describing structures of things, to use this on conscious existence, on human existence, to a phenomenology of human existence. That is to say, what Husserl's method involved was not only the bracketing, but also eidetic intuition.

Eidetic has to do with ideas, where idea, you remember, was Plato's term for the forms, the ideals, the universals, the essences. So, eidetic intuition is an immediate awareness of those universal essences of the universal structures of consciousness. And what Husserl wanted to do was to describe what one finds, what one observes, in that eidetic intuition, like intentionality.

Well, what Heidegger wants to do is to focus not on some universal structure of consciousness underlying all-knowing, but to focus on universal structures of existence, which are called existentialia. Existentialia. Now, what he's trying to do is to distinguish categories of objects, distinguish categories of objects from the existential qualities of the human subject.

Let's see what the universal existential characteristics of being in this world are. Existential refers to the conditions of the subject in this world. So that the hyphen becomes not a knowing relationship, but a being in relationship with all the existential qualities that that entails. Now, at the same time, as he's dissatisfied with Husserl, he also has problems with other existentialists.

People like Nietzsche. Even Jaspers. He refers to all sorts of them.

Because of what they are doing, he calls simply the elucidation of existence. They're trying to elucidate the way in which we feel, the way in which we experience our existence. The elucidation of our existence.

Oh, they may be trying to elicit some authentic existence. The elucidation and eliciting of existence. In other words, what they're doing is abandoning any traditional philosophical activity.

The traditional philosophy, all the way back to the Greeks, was concerned with being. Capital B. Not just elucidating our existence in the world. So that the Greeks were interested in the archaic, the basic stuff.

If you like, in the ground of all being. You see? In the ground of being. So what Heidegger wants to do is to look at our, oh, incidentally, this ground of all being is known as Sein.

Being itself. As distinct from being for me. Being itself.

And our existence, our being in the world, is Dasein. Okay? So what Heidegger wants is to do a phenomenological description of Dasein, our being in the world, to see if the ground of being, being itself, the ground of being appears, you see, is present to us in our Dasein, in our being in the world. Can we gain then some understanding, some awareness of the ground of being from probing our own being in the world? For instance, he has, let's see, he has a piece called *What is Metaphysics?* That was published in 1929.

*What is Metaphysics?* Where he says, of course, it's about Sein, being, rather than Dasein. And then he goes about asking questions that have existential moments. Why is there something rather than nothing? Good question.

Why is there something rather than nothing? And he tries to capture the existential moment of that question. As if you are hanging over the edge of a cliff, a bottomless precipice, and on the edge of nothingness are asking, why is there something rather than nothing? In other words, how can I be on the verge of nothingness? Can I ever survive? You see. So looking through the existential, what, dread, terror, anguish, to ask what it uncovers.

And similarly in some of the other writings of his, similar sorts of things. But his major work, published in 1927, is called *Being and Time*. Notice how significant the title is.

You see, *Being and Time*. So the title is Sein und Zeit. Now being, sure, he wants to get at the nature of being.

Time, the temporality of our existence, of our conscious existence in this world, that's what's likely to uncover the existential qualities and stir them up. And in any case, in the Kantian tradition, it's time that structures our conscious existence of anything. So what then is revealed in this? Now, when I say in our being, what is revealed in that, he's not saying what we can infer from it, Descartes style.

You see, it's not that he's trying to take mental representations and do a causal inference. No, but do we have a direct awareness of the ground of being in the consciousness of our own existence? When you hit rock bottom, is there something there? That's what he's asking. Well, his big project in *Being and Time* then was a phenomenology of design.

His intention was to describe these existentialia, the universal structures of consciousness, of being in this world. Universal aspects of it, revealing structures. He only completed half of the project, part one, which has to do with temporality and our being, design.

Part two, which was to have to do with temporality and being itself, *Zeit* never got done. Why not? Well, it's usually said because he became convinced that this wasn't

the method to use, and so it was only half done. The question seems to have been something like this.

Even granted that something like being itself is disclosed in our conscious being, how are we going to interpret that? How are we going to understand it? Time may be the structure of our being in the world, but is it the structure of being itself? However, would we know? You see? And so he feels that we need to get a more direct kind of approach towards being itself. And that's where he turned to more existential ways, like the why is there something rather than nothing question, or to going back to all pre-scientific and pre-philosophical vocabulary, to early Greek, before the rise of philosophy, to see if there's something that shows itself in the language of the early Greeks. And he does all sorts of interesting etymologies.

Trying to get at that. For instance, he asks himself in a little essay called On the Essence of Truth, what truth is. And the etymology that he uses repudiates the conventional view of truth as the correspondence between thought and thing, or as Aquinas put it, the adequation of thought to thing, repudiates that. And etymologically looks at the Greek word *aletheia*, says there's the alpha privative that negates, and here's the word for a stone or a rock.

So truth is saying something about no stone? Yeah, that is to say the rock, the stones are all rolled away, and there you can see what's under them. So, truth is the nature of something that shows itself. That is to say, what appears is the being that appears to you in your own existential moment.

That is true. And interestingly, how that coincides with our phrase, a moment of truth. A moment of truth.

You see, in which you were forced to reveal the sort of person you were, you revealed it to yourself in that moment of truth. Well, let me come back to being and time, however, and a few comments about some of the things he does there, which I think are particularly important. One of the things that immediately becomes evident is that in trying to describe *Dasein*, one's being in the world, one's conscious existence, inevitably, he uses the word *I*. Yeah, as any of us would, he's a first person.

Or perhaps the word *you*. But he's using the word *I* not in the sense of a unique individual, but the *I* is conceived as universal. That is to say, he's looking for the universal dimensions of *I*-ness, of the hyphen.

The universality there, not the idiosyncrasy, but the universality. The *I* is universal. Now, you say that's odd.

Not if you've read Hegel. Because in Hegel, what you find is that the I, the individual, is a synthesis of the universal and the particular. Remember, in his logic, you move from particular, no, you move from universal to particular to individual.

So the individual is the concretized universal, what Hegel called the concrete universal. Universal possibilities, universal characteristics concretized in the individual. So the I is universal.

Now, it seems to me that's a very important notion. Because if you're trying to find universal points of reference in response to relativism, pluralism, and so forth, what he's saying is that even though you may examine the individual, there's something universal about every individual. No, the universal is not just an empirical generalization about particulars.

It's not something you deduce from a collection of particulars. It's something that appears within the particulars. So that you can say that there are certain universal human characteristics of a skeletal thought, which get fleshed out in particular ways in individuals.

So the universal and the individual are not separate things. The universal appears in the individual, which is why being can appear within our being in the world. Because ours is a particular manifestation of being itself.

The I is a concrete universal. He uses the word facticity to describe the experience of being sort of a bare fact, insignificant, just an object in this kind of world. He uses the term, he for a hand and zayn to describe the status of something, which is just an instrument, a tool used by others.

For a hand and Zayn is to be on hand, something that's on hand. Just there to be used. And obviously, for human existence, they're very inauthentic kinds of existence.

He uses the term existentiality to refer to the possibilities inherent in human existence. Possibilities inherent in human existence. The freedom to be that is contained in human existence.

He uses the term forfeiture and fallenness to speak of the experience of forfeiting the kinds of possibilities that human existence involves. He speaks of conscience in those terms, and the term being unto death is significant. As if there's intentionality in all consciousness, then the consciousness of our own existence, of our own life, is, among other things, a consciousness of being unto death.

Time's running out for all of us. The existential quality there, being unto death. He speaks of mitzayn as another such universal feature.

Mitzayn is literally being with, togetherness. Yeah, that's prior to being alone. We're basically relational beings.

Our conscious existence is always related; our identity is always related to that of others. Mitzayn. As But the particular thing that might be worth noting is that he regards, how he regards understanding and language.

Because here you get that postmodern theme coming through again. Understanding is a way we have of projecting the meaning of our design onto objects. So that in the subject-object relationship.

To say that I understand an object is to say I am making that in my own image. I'm making it an object for me. I project my meaning onto it.

And for that reason, both knowing and using language are simply modes of being in the world. However, can you live, survive, exist in a world like this, somebody asks. All by projecting meaning onto it.

Your meaning. And by naming things where the name gives it the meaning you want it to have, you see. And by talking about it in ways that are more significant for what they reveal about you than what they reveal about the thing.

What then is the quest for truth? Well, the quest for truth is the quest for the uncovering of being. No stone. Quest for the uncoveredness of being.

So the quest for the truth about anything else is simply an indirect way of engaging in the quest for the being that shows itself within my existence. How can I ever exist in a world like this, you see. And it shows itself, therefore, in my uses of language, so on and so forth.

So he has that thoroughly post-modern view. And it is that in Heidegger, which is picked up on by Gadamer in his *Truth and Method*, which is the classic of phenomenological hermeneutics that we'll be talking about later. Well, question? Comment? You'll find almost the same view of knowledge in John Paul Sartre.

Not in the book you're reading, but in his larger work, which, parallel to Heidegger, is called not *Being and Time*, but *Being and Nothingness*. *Being and Nothingness*. Okay, now next time I want to talk about Sartre.

Would you bring the Sartre book, *Transcendence of the Ego*, with you? Hopefully, you will have given it a first reading. I say a first one because I think you'll have to do a couple to get the hang of it.