History of Philosophy
70 Husserl and Heidegger
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Abstract:

Dr. Arthur Holmes explores the evolution of **phenomenology**, focusing on **Edmund Husserl's** attempt to find a **universal foundation** for knowledge to combat the relativism of **naturalism** and **psychologism**. Husserl utilized **bracketing** and the **intentionality of consciousness** to move beyond the artificial **subject-object dichotomy**, viewing the self as an **active participant** that constitutes the meaning of objects. Following this, **Martin Heidegger** shifted the focus from a transcendental science of the "I" to **existential phenomenology**, which examines the universal structures of human existence known as **Dasein**. Heidegger rejected Husserl's pursuit of a rigid foundation, instead analyzing how **being** reveals itself through human **temporality**, language, and the experience of **being-in-the-world**. Ultimately, the text illustrates how these shifts in thought laid the groundwork for **post-modern** perspectives on truth and the **projected meaning** of the human spirit.

Briefing Document:

Phenomenology and Existentialism: The Philosophical Projects of Husserl and Heidegger

Executive Summary

This briefing document analyzes the development of phenomenology from Edmund Husserl's search for a "rigorous science" to Martin Heidegger's existential analysis of *Dasein*. The central tension identified in these philosophical movements is the rejection of naturalism—which attempts to explain human knowledge through purely natural, psychological, or historical processes—in favor of finding a universal foundation for human consciousness and existence.

Key takeaways include:

- **Husserl's Foundationalism:** Husserl sought to overcome the relativism of "psychologism" (e.g., Nietzsche and Dilthey) by identifying the universal structure of the "transcendental ego" through a method of "bracketing" (*epoche*).

- **Intentionality:** The core of Husserlian phenomenology is the "intentionality of consciousness," the principle that all consciousness is "consciousness of" something. Knowledge is viewed as a constitutive, active process rather than a passive representation of objects.

- **Heidegger's Existential Shift:** Heidegger moved from transcendental structures to existential ones, focusing on *Dasein* (being-there). He argued that the subject cannot be abstracted from the world and that "truth" is an "uncovering" (*aletheia*) of being within the existential moments of life.

- **Rejection of the Subject-Object Dichotomy:** Both thinkers challenged the Cartesian separation of the "thinking thing" from the "extended thing," focusing instead on the relationship—the "hyphen"—between the self and the world.

Husserl's Critique of Naturalism and Psychologism

Edmund Husserl's primary concern was the "crisis" of European science: the lack of a firm, universal foundation for mathematics, logic, and human knowledge. He identified several obstacles to this foundation:

- **Naturalism:** The attempt to explain knowledge through purely natural processes, which Husserl argued fails to account for the universal spirit of human consciousness.

- **Psychologism and Historicism:** Husserl criticized figures like Nietzsche and Dilthey for reducing knowledge claims to psychological types or historical contexts. He viewed Nietzsche's "will to power" as a prime example of psychologism, which leads to a relativism where "truth" is merely an extension of emotional tendencies.

- **The Subject-Object Dichotomy:** Following Descartes, traditional philosophy isolated the object from subjective influence. Husserl argued this was artificial; knowledge is an "act of the subject," and the loss of "human subjecthood" is the fundamental ailment of naturalistic philosophy.

The Phenomenological Method: Bracketing and Intentionality

To find a universal foundation, Husserl developed a specific methodology intended to move beyond the limitations of individual psychological types.

Bracketing (*Epoche*)

Husserl utilized "bracketing" or "suspense of judgment" to isolate the universal structures of consciousness:

- **Suspension of Variables:** All particular theories, interpretations, and objects of perception are bracketed to focus on the "I" in the "I know."

- **The Lived World (*Lebenswelt*):** In his later work, Husserl moved toward bracketing even the "theoretical attitude" to reach the "pre-theoretical" consciousness of ordinary life—the "I" of the lived world.

The Intentionality of Consciousness

Husserl's most significant discovery was that consciousness is "intentional." It is not a passive receptacle but a teleological act.

Feature of Intentionality	Description
Referentiality	Consciousness is always directed toward an object ("consciousness of").
Active/Constitutive	The subject "constitutes" the object in the act of knowing; there is no object without a subject.
Non-Representational	Knowledge is not a "copy theory" or mental picture; it is an act that makes the object "present" to the self.

Meaning-Giving	The act of knowing gives meaning to the object, ordering it within the subject's overall situation.

Heidegger: From Transcendental to Existential Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, adapted the phenomenological method but rejected Husserl's optimism regarding "bracketing." Heidegger argued that one "never catches the hyphen [the relationship] without the object."

Dasein and Being-in-the-World

Heidegger shifted the focus from the "transcendental ego" to *Dasein* ("being there").

- **The Inseparable Self:** Unlike Descartes, who conceived of a "separated I," Heidegger argued that human existence is fundamentally "being-in-the-world."

- **Existentialia:** Instead of categories of objects, Heidegger sought to describe the universal structures of human existence, which he termed *existentialia*.

Key Structures of Dasein

The document outlines several universal characteristics Heidegger identified in the human condition:

- **Facticity:** The experience of being a "bare fact" or an object in the world.

- **Fallenness (Forfeiture):** The experience of forfeiting the possibilities inherent in human existence.

- **Mitzayn (Being-with):** The realization that human existence is inherently relational; we are "together" prior to being "alone."

- **Being-unto-death:** The consciousness of temporality and the fact that "time is running out."

- **Freedom:** The inherent "possibilities" contained within human existence (*existentiality*).

Truth, Language, and Post-Modern Implications

Heidegger's work suggests a transition toward post-modern views of knowledge and truth, later expanded by thinkers like Gadamer.

Truth as Uncovering (*Aletheia*)

Heidegger repudiated the "correspondence theory" of truth (truth as the match between thought and object).

- **Etymology of Aletheia:** Heidegger interpreted the Greek word for truth as "uncovering." He likened it to rolling away a stone to reveal what is underneath.

- **The "Moment of Truth":** Truth is not a static scientific fact but the being that "shows itself" within an existential moment or a specific human experience.

Understanding and Language

For Heidegger, understanding and language are not merely tools for description but "modes of being in the world."

- **Projecting Meaning:** Understanding is a way of projecting the meaning of one's own *Dasein* onto objects. To "understand" an object is to make it an "object for me."

- **The Quest for Being:** The quest for truth is an indirect quest for the "being that shows itself" within one's own existence. Language reveals the speaker as much as, or more than, the object being discussed.

Comparison of Husserl and Heidegger

Feature	Husserl	Heidegger
Primary Project	New Foundationalism / Rigorous Science	Ontology / The nature of "Being" (*Sein*)
Subject Focus	Transcendental Self (The I that knows)	*Dasein* (The I that exists in a world)
Method	Bracketing (*Epoche*) to find universals	Probing existential moments (e.g., dread, terror)

	Universal structure of consciousness	*Aletheia* (Uncovering of being)
View of Truth		
Role of Time	Structure of internal sense/consciousness	The structure of existence and "being-unto-death"

Study Guide:

Study Guide: Phenomenology and Existentialism—Husserl and Heidegger

This study guide examines the philosophical transition from the naturalistic explanations of the 19th century to the development of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl and its existential evolution through Martin Heidegger. It explores the quest for a universal foundation of knowledge, the nature of consciousness, and the structures of human existence.

Short-Answer Quiz

1. Why did Edmund Husserl criticize naturalism and naturalistic philosophy? Husserl argued that naturalism failed to provide a firm foundation for sciences like mathematics and logic because it attempted to explain human knowledge through purely natural processes. He specifically critiqued "psychologism" and "historicism" for reducing universal knowledge claims to mere psychological types or historical accidents, leading to a crisis of relativism.

2. What is the "subject-object dichotomy," and why did Husserl find it problematic? The subject-object dichotomy is the traditional view, dominant since Descartes, that isolates the object of thought from the subjective act of thinking. Husserl found this artificial because it ignores the "I know" as an act of the subject, leading to a loss of understanding regarding the human spirit and the universal structure of consciousness.

3. Explain the concept of "bracketing" (eparchy) in Husserl's methodology. Bracketing involves suspending judgment regarding the existence of objects, theories, and interpretations to focus purely on the structure of consciousness. Unlike Cartesian doubt, which questions whether objects exist, Husserl's bracketing sets aside the "existence" of the object to examine the essential foundations and universal structures of how that object is experienced.

4. How does Husserl's concept of the "transcendental ego" differ from Descartes' "thinking thing"? Husserl believed Descartes was not radical enough because he immediately jumped from the "I think" to the assertion that he was a "thinking thing," failing to examine the universal structure of the "I." Husserl sought to use the transcendental ego—a concept influenced by Kant—to find a universal foundation for knowledge that exists within the human self.

5. What does Husserl mean by "the intentionality of consciousness"? Intentionality refers to the inherent "referentiality" of the mind, meaning that consciousness is always "consciousness of" something. It is an active, teleological process where the mind is oriented toward an object, making that object present to the subject through acts of perception, memory, or anticipation.

6. In what ways is the act of knowing "constitutive" and "constructive" for Husserl? The act of knowing is constitutive because it creates the object as an "object for me," meaning there is no object without a subject to perceive it. It is constructive because the subject's consciousness orders and interrelates the entire scene, pulling together isolated bits of data into a unified, meaningful whole based on the subject's perspective.

7. How did Martin Heidegger's "existential phenomenology" depart from Husserl's "transcendental phenomenology"? Heidegger rejected Husserl's attempt to find a "bare" transcendental self through bracketing, arguing that one can never catch the subject without an object. Instead of seeking a foundational science of the "I," Heidegger used the phenomenological method to describe the universal structures of human existence, which he called "existentialia."

8. Define "Dasein" and "Sein" in the context of Heidegger's philosophy. "Dasein" literally means "being there" and refers to the specifically human mode of being in the world, which is always relational and temporal. "Sein" refers to "Being itself" or

the ground of all being, which Heidegger attempted to uncover by probing the nature of Dasein.

9. What is Heidegger's interpretation of truth as "aletheia"? Heidegger rejected the conventional view of truth as a correspondence between thought and object, looking instead at the Greek etymology of "aletheia." He defined truth as an "uncovering" or "disclosing" of being—a moment where the "stones are rolled away" and being shows itself within an individual's existential moment.

10. How does Heidegger describe "inauthentic" existence through the terms "facticity" and "for-handen-zayn"? "Facticity" refers to the experience of being a bare, insignificant fact or an object in the world, while "for-handen-zayn" (being on hand) describes the status of a being that is treated merely as a tool or instrument. Both represent modes of existence where the individual's unique possibilities and freedom are forfeited to the status of a mere object or utility.

Essay Questions

1. **The Quest for Foundations:** Analyze Husserl's argument that European science was in a state of crisis. How did he propose that transcendental phenomenology could provide the "rigorous science" necessary to save logic and mathematics from relativism?

2. **The Active Knower:** Compare Husserl's "intentionality" with the passive "tabula rasa" of Lockean empiricism. How does the concept of an active, meaning-giving consciousness change the relationship between the subject and the "lived world" (Lebenswelt)?

3. **From the "I" to "Being":** Trace the evolution of the "hyphen" from Husserl's study of the subject-object relationship to Heidegger's study of "being-in-the-world." How does this shift change the focus of philosophy from epistemology to ontology?

4. **Temporal Existence:** Discuss the significance of time in the works of both Husserl and Heidegger. How does time function as a unifying form of consciousness for Husserl, and how does "being unto death" define the structures of Dasein for Heidegger?

5. **Language and Postmodernism:** Evaluate Heidegger's view that understanding and language are "modes of being in the world." How does the idea that we "project meaning" onto objects through naming and language contribute to contemporary postmodern views on truth?

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Aletheia	A Greek term for truth, interpreted by Heidegger as "uncovering" or "disclosing" being, rather than a correspondence between thought and object.
Being unto Death	A universal feature of human existence (Dasein) characterized by the conscious awareness that one's time is finite and running out.
Bracketing (Eparchy)	The phenomenological method of suspending judgment about the external world and its theories to focus on the structures of consciousness.
Dasein	Literally "being there"; Heidegger's term for human existence as a being that is always situated in and related to a world.
Eidetic Intuition	An immediate awareness or observation of universal essences and structures of consciousness, a core part of Husserl's method.
Existentialia	The universal structures or characteristics of human existence (such as temporality or being-with) as described by Heidegger.
Facticity	The experience of existing as a "bare fact" or an insignificant object within the world, often associated with inauthentic existence.
For-handen-zayn	Literally "being on hand"; a mode of being where a person or thing is viewed as an instrument or tool to be used by others.

Intentionality	The fundamental property of consciousness as being "directional" or always "consciousness of" an object.
Lebenswelt	The "lived world"; the pre-scientific, pre-theoretical world of ordinary life and experience that Husserl sought to examine.
Mitzayn	"Being with"; the existential structure indicating that human existence is inherently relational and tied to the identity of others.
Psychologism	The attempt to explain universal knowledge claims (like logic) purely in terms of underlying psychological tendencies or types.
Sein	"Being itself"; the ground of all being which Heidegger sought to understand through the study of human existence (Dasein).
Transcendental Ego	The universal, ordering structure of the self that unifies experience, a concept Husserl adapted from Kant to find a foundation for knowledge.