

The Paradigm Shifts of Hermeneutic Phenomenology: From Breakthrough to the Meaning-Giving Source

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For the French Heideggerian Jean Beaufret, so revolutionary was the shift from the Husserlian Cogito to the Heideggerian Dasein, from an intentionally oriented consciousness to a historically and so hermeneutically situated ex-sistence, that he compares it to the gestalt switch of a paradigm change that T.S. Kuhn has found in modern scientific revolutions. Beaufret thus likens the transition from Husserl to Heidegger in phenomenology to the development from Newton to Einstein in modern physics. In both instances, the first insight led to the second, but the second insight involves a leap that renders it incommensurable with the first. “To anyone who places himself in intentionality, the experience of ek-stasis is inaccessible, just as relativity physics remains unthinkable from the point of view of Newton, even though Newton already espied the principle that Einstein was destined to develop.”¹

Heidegger makes his revolutionary breakthrough to a hermeneutic phenomenology as early as KNS 1919,² which portrays our world of ordinary experiences as thoroughly charged with meaning: “Living in an enviroing world, it signifies [*bedeutet*] for me everywhere and always, it is all fraught with world, ‘*it’s worlding* [*es weltet*]” (GA 56/57: 73/61), i.e., it’s contextualizing, it’s articulating itself into the meaningful wholes

that we call worlds. Beginning with the course of WS 1919–20, entitled *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, he observes that these *Bedeutsamkeitszusammenhänge*, contexts of meaningfulness, are not immediately given and available for phenomenological examination, since they operate only tacitly and implicitly as the background of human experience. “Meaningfulness is not experienced as such, expressly and explicitly” and so must be explicated out of its precedent latency so that “we can then first fully understand what it ‘is’ and means to live factually ‘in’ meaningfulness” (GA 61: 93/70). This is the basic task of a hermeneutic phenomenology, its phenomenological re-duction to the tacit level of meaningfulness. This meaningfulness is never and nowhere immediately given, it is at most “appresent” (GA 20: 359–61/260–2), a tangential background presence that has to be brought to givenness and fuller presence by way of the hermeneutic-phenomenological reduction. “The domain of origin of philosophy... can only be made accessible by the attitude of original science [*Urwissenschaft*] – the domain of origin [*Ursprungsgebiet*] is not given to us. We know nothing of it from ‘practical life.’ It is far from us, we must bring it nearer to us *methodologically*” (GA 58: 203/153; also 26–27/22–23). And yet this original domain in its original vitality is what at first is nearest to us. “Something that lies so near to us that we mostly do not even expressly concern ourselves with it. Something from which we have no distance at all even to see it in its ‘at all’; and the distance *to* it is lacking because we are it itself, and we see ourselves only from out of the life itself that we are, that is us (accusative), in its own directions” (GA 58: 29/24). What is constituent of this simple nearness that we are in our intimate life of meaningfulness?

This earliest passage in the Heideggerian opus on the near-far interplay in the basic phenomenon of phenomenology will recur throughout Heidegger’s lifelong *Denkweg*, in discussions of his central topic of *Sein*, *Da-sein*, *das Ereignis*, etc., for example: “Dasein is ontically ‘nearest’ to itself and ontologically farthest; but pre-ontologically it is certainly not a stranger” (GA 2: 22/SZ 16). “Dasein is ontically indeed not only near or even the nearest, we *are* it, each of us, we ourselves. In spite of this or rather because of this, it is ontologically the farthest” (GA 2: 21/SZ 15).

And in the “Letter on ‘Humanism’” (1947): “Being is essentially farther than all beings and is yet nearer to the human being than every being, be it a rock, an animal, an artwork, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from the human being” (GA 9: 331/252). In a further discussion of the near-far interplay, the “Letter” then provides a powerful hermeneutic clue of the intimate identification we have with our native language: “As simple, being remains mysterious, the simple nearness of unobtrusive prevailing. The nearness occurs essentially as language itself. . . . But language is the house of being in which the human being ex-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of being, guarding it” (GA 9: 333/253–54).

But decades before the emphasis falls on our intimate dwelling in the language of being, it falls upon the vitally intimate and intensive sense of the self that develops in the life each of us has in our respective concrete historical situations. History here is a peculiarly “reflexive” dimension built into life itself; it is not objectified history but rather lived history, which is situated in the spontaneous experiencing OF experience, the streaming return of experiencing life upon already experienced life. “The empowering experience of experience that takes itself along is the understanding intuition, the *hermeneutic intuition*, the originary phenomenological back-and-forth formation of re-cepts and pre-cepts from which all theoretical objectification, indeed all transcendent positing, falls out” (GA 56/57: 117/99).⁵ “History is here not understood as historical science but as living co-experiencing, as life’s being familiar with itself and its fullness” (GA 58: 252/190). This is the intimate experience of my “having” myself. “Having myself is no staring at an object, no fixed determination, but rather the living process of winning and losing familiarity with concrete lived life itself. As a process it is not a dwelling upon an object but an inclination, originating from life experiences, toward new, living, proximate horizons, it is an originating and inclination in which I, in living, *am intelligible to myself*, even if what is experienced presents the most difficult puzzle of my existence. The intelligible context is life itself and therein I have my self” (GA 58: 165/126).

This intelligible context in which I have myself constitutes a sphere of self-sufficiency (*Selbstgenügsamkeit*) that sustains my life of meaning in all of the tasks and demands that life poses to itself and resolves for itself without having to leave this sphere of meaning. “Life always addresses and answers itself in its own language. Structurally, life does not need to spin out of itself in order to maintain itself in its meaning. Its structure suffices unto itself, even to somehow overcome again and again its imperfections, its insufficiencies, in all possible forms and contingencies and conditions – this is what the sense of ‘self-sufficiency’ means. It refers to a *structural character* of life that it puts upon itself: *that it itself is an ‘in itself.’* It bears within itself structurally (which pervades every how and what in their innermost content) the availabilities necessitated by itself as possibilities of fulfillment of the tendencies growing out of itself” (GA 58: 42/34). The phenomenological re-duction that overtly demarcates this self-sufficient sphere of intelligibility in which we meaningfully live brings to light the complex of tacit relations with our worlds and ourselves that each of us spontaneously develops in response to our particular cares and concerns (GA 58: 250/188).

The very terms of this early “hermeneutics of facticity” are drawn from Wilhelm Dilthey’s philosophy of life. Heidegger takes his point of departure from Dilthey’s simple insight that human *life itself*, precisely in this holistic and *reflexive* self-reference, already demonstrates the capacity to understand *itself* as a whole (*Zusammenhang*). This self-referential and holistic character indigenous to human life itself is the basis and justification of Dilthey’s lifetime project, in an oft-cited phrase, purely and simply “to understand life *from out of itself*.” In his quest for a critique of historical reason, Dilthey gradually renounces the elevated reason of Kant’s detached transcendental ego, “in whose veins flows no real blood,” and calls instead for a return to the “this-side” of life, to the full facticity of *unhintergehbare life itself*, “behind which thought cannot go,” the vital original reality given to human beings to live before they come to think about it, an irreducible ultimate and irrevocable givenness that human beings cannot but live in and are

bound to live out. It is the phenomenological return “to the things themselves,” in this case, back to the transcendental fact of life itself. Starting from the ineradicable givenness of the facticity of life, the phenomenologist must now enter into this life in order to understand it from out of *itself, in its own terms*.

But it is Hans-Georg Gadamer, freely paraphrasing Dilthey, who has given us the most succinct and telling formulation of Dilthey’s hermeneutic insight: “Das Leben selbst legt sich aus. Es hat selbst hermeneutische Struktur.”⁴ “Life itself lays itself out, explicates itself, interprets itself, articulates itself. Life itself has a hermeneutic structure.” Accordingly, a “hermeneutics OF facticity” must be regarded as a double genitive. That is to say, the facticity of life experience, on the basis of the matter-of-fact understanding of what it means to live and to be that develops from simply living a human life, already spontaneously articulates and contextures itself, repeatedly unfolding into the manifold of vitally concrete and meaningful relations (beginning with I-myself-being-embodied-in-the-world-with-others-among-things) which constitute the fabric of human cares and concerns that we call our historical life-world. Accordingly, any overtly phenomenological hermeneutics OF facticity, in its overt expository interpretation of the multifaceted concerns of the human situation, is initially but an explicit recapitulation of an implicit pan-hermeneutic process already operative in historical life itself. Factic life experience, facticity, is *through and through hermeneutical* (*understandable, intelligible, meaningful*), a meaningful whole thoroughly pervaded by the discursivity of speech (*Rede*). Put genetically, from childhood on, as we are acculturated into our native language, we have been embarked on a meaning-full voyage of discovery and interjected into the various contexts of meaningfulness in which we live, meaningful wholes called “worlds.” Heidegger’s formulae for the pan-hermeneutic character of human life typically focus on the milieu of meaning in which we are indigenously immersed: “*Life is what it is only as a concrete meaning-laden gestalt*” (GA 58: 148/114); “I myself” am a context of meaningfulness in which I myself live” (GA 58: 248/187); “I, in living, *am intelligible to myself...*

The intelligible context is life itself and therein I have my self” (GA 58: 165/126). “In factic life we always live in meaningful contexts that have a self-sufficient measure, i.e., they speak to themselves in their own language” (GA 58: 250/188); “meaningfulness [is] the reality-character of factic life” (GA 58: 104/83), its very being. The thoroughly hermeneutic character of human life is emphatically conveyed by Heidegger’s properly hermeneutical translation of Aristotle’s definition of the human being as *zōon logon echon*, not in the traditional manner as the “rational animal” but rather as the living being possessive of, and possessed by speech, of which the loquacious Greeks were his prime example. Dilthey’s central triad of *Erlebnis-Verstehen-Ausdruck* (living experience-understanding-expression) in *Sein und Zeit* becomes the triad of basic existentials that constitute our being-in and being-here, *Befindlichkeit-Verstehen-Rede* (situated disposition-understanding-the discursivity of speech).

Heidegger’s own compact definition of the meaning of meaning continues to accentuate the all-pervasive character of our hermeneutic situation: “Sinn ist das durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Woraufhin des Entwurfs, aus dem her etwas als etwas verständlich wird” (GA 2: 201/SZ 151). “Meaning, [pre]structured by prepossession, preview, and preconception, is the toward-which of the projection by which something becomes intelligible as something.” This definition can be distinguished into the pre-structure of understanding and the as-structure of interpretation, as Heidegger does (GA 2: 201/SZ 151), or it can be more existentially distinguished into a contextual and a telic vector of sense. Richard Polt puts this distinction quite nicely in terms of the unique historical situation in which each of us finds ourselves: “Each of us is thrown into a concrete heritage, inhabits a meaningful world, and projects possible ways to act in terms of some ultimate ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ – a possibility that provides the *raison d’être* for one’s choices and in terms of which one’s meaningful world is structured.”⁵ That is why meaning is an existential of Dasein and not a property belonging to entities. “Hence only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless” (GA 2: 201/SZ 151). It

is this essential connection of man and meaning that leads Thomas Sheehan to call the human being “pan-hermeneutical,” for only the human being is essentially in need of and in search of meaning, ever striving to make sense.⁶ Humans are pan-hermeneutical because they cannot *not* make sense of everything.

From the start, we already *know how* to live as human beings, and this pre-understanding of the ways of being is repeatedly elaborated and cultivated in our various forays into the enviroing world of things and the communal world of being-with-others, both of which intercalate and come to a head in a most concentrated and focused form in the most comprehensive of meaningful contexts, the self-world of our very own being-in-the-world. This *tacit* dimension of pre-predicative understanding on the level of life and being moreover revolutionizes our sense of both *knowledge* and *truth*. For the tradition that runs from Parmenides to Husserl, the basic mode of knowing is the total transparency of illuminative seeing, intuition, which in temporal terms means a making-present. In the context of a hermeneutics of facticity, by contrast, the basic mode of knowing is interpretive exposition out of a background of pre-understanding that by and large remains tacit, latent, withdrawn, absent and, at most, only appresent, a tangential and background presence that shades off into the shadows of being’s concealment (GA 20: 359/260).⁷ The shift in basic cognitive mode from intuition to interpretive exposition⁸ correspondingly shifts the process of truth from a saying-seeing identification to a chiar-oscuro disclosing and uncovering of dimensions that may well tend to remain concealed, like life for Dilthey and being for Heidegger, which nevertheless must be brought to language, at least an apropos chiar-oscuro language. At any rate, note the proximity of a hermeneutics of facticity to one of Heidegger’s most celebrated “theses,” namely, that Dasein IS disclosiveness, the locus of originary truth as the unconcealment of being. The *hermeneutic situation of factic life itself*, unfolding itself against the background context of the enviroing world of tool usage and procurement of products, the interpersonal world of social usage and communal custom in being-with-others, and the self-world

of striving-to-be and coming to terms with oneself in one's unique and proper being, *is the proximate disclosive arena of originary truth as unconcealment.*

In his book tellingly entitled *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning*, Steven Crowell takes issue with the sharp break between Husserl and Heidegger in the latter's movement toward his hermeneutic phenomenology, which would also involve a radical shift in basic cognitive mode from intuition to interpretive exposition out of a background of tacit understanding. Speaking against such a radical shift is Heidegger's appeal in KNS 1919 to the hybrid notion of a "hermeneutic intuition," suggesting an amalgamation of phenomenological reflection and interpretation operating in unity.⁹ That Heidegger even entertains intuition and so reflection in a hermeneutic context is unusual since in KNS 1919 he had already taken to heart Paul Natorp's objections against Husserl's phenomenology of attaining intuitive access to the immediacy of life experience by way of a reflective approach, since reflection exercises an analytically dissective and dissolving effect upon the life stream. Reflection acts as a theoretical intrusion that interrupts the stream and cuts it off, in effect stilling the stream of life, such that life experiences are no longer lived but looked at. But Crowell counters by noting that Husserl's reflective intuitive description is not objective theory but simply a methodological version of clarification.¹⁰ He also notes that Heidegger diligently avoids the term *Reflexion* to describe his method but instead uses the term *Besinnung*, which Crowell translates as "reflection."¹¹

But Heidegger himself clearly uses *Be-sinnung* with its full hermeneutical possibilities in mind, as "being mindful of meaning," and not as reflection.

I can in factic experiencing, in the context of expectation, in the full web of motivation, live unreflectively and still experience meaning mindfully, and thereby be thoughtful [*unreflektiert lebend, doch besinnlich erfahren, dabei nachdenklich sein*]. I can recall what is experienced in memory and indeed, by way of remem-

bering, factually undergo the very flavor of the experience again. What is experienced can weigh on me, occupy me, or I can, in taking interest in the experience, take notice of it, especially bear it in mind; I can “narrate” what is experienced and indeed in its factually vital movements or “pulls.” (GA 58: 111/88)

Taking notice (*Kenntnisnehmen*) is for Heidegger the first step toward expressing experiences in the narrative, dynamically temporal language that befits a hermeneutics of factic life experience.

I can in factic experience *mindfully think over meaning* [*besinnlich nachdenken*], bring what is experienced to my consciousness. I can *report* about it, *converse* about it with another. – *Taking notice* and *giving notice* are particular modifications of factic experience, which however do not fall out of factic life experience; they remain in the style of the experience. What is noticed are not states of facts, but states of meaningfulness [*Bedeutsamkeitsverhalte*]. (GA 58: 218–19/164–65)

This is also Heidegger’s response to Natorp’s second objection against phenomenology’s claim to simply describe what it sees. For such a description, according to Natorp, is circumscription into general concepts and a subsumption under abstractions, a language which objectifies the experiences.

Crowell also notes that Heidegger broadens the notion of “sight” to characterize any access to beings and be-ing, thus an access in general, and situates it under the existential of understanding.¹² But this will turn out not to be in favor of the sight of intuition and free it of its objectifying tendencies. Heidegger rather cites the circumspection (*Umsicht*) of concern and the regard (*Rücksicht*) of solicitude, both of which exhibit holistic tendencies that seek out the overview of contexts so essential to proper interpretation. Then there is the sight of transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*) that designates the knowledge of the self as a whole in the entirety of its life (GA 2: 195/SZ 146). And intuition?

“By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding, [...] we have deprived pure intuition of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. ‘Intuition’ and ‘thinking’ are both derivatives of understanding, and already rather remote ones. Even the phenomenological ‘intuition of essences’ is grounded in existential understanding” (GA 2: 196/SZ 147).

THE PARADIGM SHIFT TO THE MEANING-GIVING SOURCE

Thomas Sheehan has identified another paradigm shift that takes place at the heart of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology. In summary, the shift is from the field of meaning exposed by way of the hermeneutical-phenomenological reduction to the meaning-giving source that enables that field of meaning. Whence sense? What makes meaning at all possible? What lets meaningfulness come about at all? In his brief account, Sheehan provides a two-concept answer to this question, one that comes from the very core of *Being and Time* and the other from the core of the later Heidegger. What makes meaning possible at all? The answer: *die Lichtung*, the lighted clearing that opens a realm of intelligibility for the human being. But what then makes the clearing possible? The answer: *das Ereignis*, the properizing event of appropriation that throws us into the unique clearing of intelligibility in which we happen to find ourselves thrown.

A longer and more detailed account¹⁵ follows the development of Heidegger’s thought from his repeated failure to complete the published fragment of *Being and Time*, which prompts a radical change in direction of his thought that is gradually made known through his talks, lecture courses, and writings from the thirties on, most of which were not published until well after the war. Our story begins with the repeated attempts to draft the Third Division of the First Part of *Being and Time*, entitled “Time and Being,” without success. The fulcrum of the story is a reconstituted version of “Time and Being” that Heidegger jotted down, in my estimation, in his “cabin copy” of *Sein und Zeit* in the late thirties, and that sketches out the stages of the reversal into the new direction that the later Heidegger was pursuing (GA 2: 53n):

1. The transcendental difference.
2. Overcoming the horizon as such.
3. The turn around into the source.
4. Meaningful presence out of this source.

1. This recalls the overall title of the First Part of *Being and Time*, which was to conclude with the never-published Third Division entitled “Time and Being”: “The interpretation of Dasein in terms of temporality and the explication of time as the transcendental horizon for the question of Being.”

2. The lecture courses of 1927–30 seek to further elaborate the ecstatic-horizonal unity of temporality, which was begun in § 69c of *Being and Time* in a section entitled “The Temporal Problem of the Transcendence of the World.” Toward the end of this period, the single yet threefold horizon of time is subjected to increasing critique in view of its display of objectifying tendencies.¹⁴ Horizontal temporality will eventually be displaced and re-placed by grounding Dasein in the temporal playing field (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*), usually simply time-space (*Zeit-Raum*) (GA 65: 18, 234–35).

3 & 4. The talk that Heidegger first delivered in 1962 entitled “Time and Being” most clearly makes the turn into the source and derives meaning and meaningful presence (*Anwesen*) from out of this source. The source, at first identified neutrally as an It, is initially said to let or allow meaningful presence, *Anwesenlassen*. The letting is more originally understood as a giving, such that It gives being, It gives time. The giving is then specified further as It sends being, It extends time, or more precisely, time-space. And the It itself? The It that gives is *das Ereignis*, which “appropriates being and time into their own out of their relationship” (GA 14: 24/19). Moreover, in giving, “the sending source keeps itself back and, thus, withdraws from unconcealment” (GA 14: 27/22). The meaning-giving source itself is self-concealing and remains insuperably concealed, the ultimate facticity beyond which we can go no further.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. 3: *Approche de Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 117.
- 2 Theodore Kisiel, "Das Kriegsnotsemester 1919: Heideggers Durchbruch zur hermeneutischen Phänomenologie," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 99 (1992): 105–122.
- 3 The second, corrected and expanded edition of GA 56/57 gives us a simpler rendition of these points: "Phenomenological intuition as the experience of experience, the understanding of life, is hermeneutical intuition (making intelligible, giving meaning). The immanent historicity of life as such constitutes hermeneutical intuition" (GA 56/57: 219/187).
- 4 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965), 213; *Truth and Method*, second, revised edition, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1994), 226. I am indebted to Eric Nelson for identifying the original source of this oft-cited line, sometimes mistakenly attributed directly to Dilthey himself.
- 5 Richard Polt, "Heidegger in the 1930s: Who are We?" in François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 40.
- 6 Thomas Sheehan, "The Turn: All Three of Them," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, 33.
- 7 "Auslegung ist die Grundform alles Erkennens" (GA 20: 359/260). What interpretive exposition is said to expose in this everyday context is the "appresentation of meaningfulness by way of bringing out into relief the referential correlations accessible at the time" (GA 20: 359/260).
- 8 Cf. Theodore Kisiel, "From Intuition to Understanding: On Heidegger's Transposition of Husserl's Phenomenology," in Kisiel, *Heidegger's Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretative Signposts* (London/New York: Continuum, 2002): 174–86.

- 9 Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths Toward Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern, 2001), 134.
- 10 Ibid., Chapter 6: Heidegger's Phenomenological Decade, 115–28.
- 11 Ibid., 284.
- 12 Ibid., note 13, 283.
- 13 Cf. Thomas Sheehan, "The Turn," Bret W. Davis (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2010): 82–101. The "brief account" above is distilled from one of his unpublished papers.
- 14 Theodore Kisiel, "The Demise of *Being and Time*: 1927–1930," Richard Polt (ed.), *Heidegger's "Being and Time": Critical Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005): 189–214, esp. 206–7.