The History of Historicism, Formal Indication, and Ruinance

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ABSTRACT: This essay focuses on Heidegger's 1921–22 lecture course *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research* and attempts to re-frame the fascinating methodological innovations introduced here by the young Heidegger, specifically formal indication, life as ruinance, and ontological phenomenology as counter-ruinance. Rather than approaching these simply or even primarily as supplements to or departures from Husserlian phenomenology, I suggest that we view them first and foremost as strategies necessitated in response to the challenge of late-stage historicism – that is, in light of the challenge of carrying out the task of philosophizing, seeking the truth about "what is," in a mode emphatically and insuperably immanent to the condition of exhaustively historically determined consciousness.

KEYWORDS: historicism; philosophical method; phenomenology; history of philosophy

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Heidegger's fascinating 1921–22 Freiburg lecture course, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, never really arrives at the project its title announces, though it does deliver on its subtitle: an *Initiation into Phenomenological Research* (GA 61). If we were to ask why Heidegger never manages to address Aristotle directly in the course, one somewhat tongue-in-cheek answer would be that the students in this course did not complain to the administration about the extensive preliminary methodological meditation. By contrast, the students one year prior, in Heidegger's *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, *did* officially object when, already past mid-term, they had yet to address any theological content whatsoever.[1] Heidegger, in response, abruptly shifted course and, in the remaining sessions, presented close readings of Paul's Letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians. The students the following winter term were simply less anxious to meet the Stagirite, it would seem, and so Heidegger was free to embark on an unencumbered and utterly original meditation on what he refers to here as both "phenomenological ontology" and "ontological phenomenology" (GA 61: 60/46). Indeed, we see the young Heidegger pushing the method of Husserl, with its positing of the foundational role of subjectivity and its purified quasi-scientific search for eidetic structures, into some wholly unfamiliar territory.

I stress this particular feature of these courses, their slowness in getting around to their announced subject matter, because I take it to be indicative of where Heidegger's philosophical curiosity was predominantly directed at the time. Although he surely intended to offer readings of Aristotle and of Paul's letters, respectively, in accord with the titles announced for these two courses, once he had begun his reflection on philosophical method, once he had raised the questions about the "how" of philosophizing in the phenomenological mode, he found that discussion utterly consuming. Indeed, philosophical method seems to function at this point as something like an *idée fixe*, a compulsion Heidegger cannot but follow.

To be clear, I have no interest in a psychologicalizing account of Heidegger's project here. I am not suggesting a merely psychological motivation, but rather a sort of historico-philosophical compulsion, a *Not* or a 'necessity' arising from the historical moment in which Heidegger

is taking up the task of thinking philosophically. Now, one prominent Heidegger researcher describes the 1921–22 lecture course, which has been the subject of a number of in-depth studies, as "verbose, baroque, and turgid."[2] There are two frames within which the course is usually approached. On the one hand, Heidegger's discussion of phenomenological method is seen as kind of supplement to and transformation of *Lebensphilosophie* or "philosophy of life," where philosophizing is presented not as a meditation on life as an object, but as itself a radically immanent activity within life, a modification of the activity of living. David Farrell Krell's discussion of the course in his *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* certainly foregrounds this aspect of Heidegger's discussion, remarking that "the overarching theme of the course" is "the imbrication of phenomenology and factical life."[3] On the other hand, this course is often approached as a particularly revealing glimpse into the laboratory in which Heidegger is at work radicalizing Husserlian phenomenology, and it is viewed then with an eye to 1927's *Being and Time*. Indeed, this is surely how this text is read in the first chapter of Will McNeill's recent study, *The Fate of Phenomenology: Heidegger's Legacy*, in a chapter entitled "To the Things Themselves! Heidegger's Early Confrontation with Husserl's Phenomenology," and the 1921–22 course is central to McNeill's discussion on this point for very good reason.[4] And while there have been other illuminating treatments of this particular text, none of these have been as tightly focused on one aspect as I would like to be here[5] – namely, in the following, I offer an alternative framing for considering the meditation on philosophical method that Heidegger provides here, and I believe this sheds a revealing light on the text.

To this end, I will argue that it is the position articulated by the philosophical school or approach of late-stage "historicism" that provides the pressing necessitation for Heidegger's repurposing of Husserl's method. I will show that the innovations introduced or further developed here – such as conceptual formal indication, everyday pre-philosophical life as ruinance, and philosophy as counter-ruinance – can be helpfully understood as concerted responses to the specific challenge of late-stage historicism. Indeed, one might even argue that we find here Heidegger's *most* pointed, strategic, and potent articulation of the task late-stage

historicism faces, that of thinking from an exhaustively historically determined starting point, precisely because Heidegger does not in this lecture course become preoccupied with demonstrating the existence of different fundamental modes of being, the ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) and the present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*), and revealing the latter as secondary, a project that initially draws Heidegger's phenomenological gaze in the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*. The task of this essay, consequently, is simply to read the 1921–22 lecture course, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, extremely carefully within this alternative late-historicist framing.

PHILOSOPHIZING IN THE MODE OF "HISTORIOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

In this course, Heidegger opens by suggesting to his students that, before turning to Aristotle directly, it is necessary to pose the general question, "What are studies in the history of philosophy?" (GA 61: 1/3). Studies in this area usually approach their subject matter, philosophy's past, as something "pre-conceptually determined in regard to its content [*vorgrifflich gehaltlich bestimmt*]," namely "as part of objective history, as having objective and object-like relations and properties [*geschichtlich objektiv, mit objektiven und objektmässigen Beziehungen und Eigenschaften*]" (GA 61: 1/3). But what we should really be asking about, Heidegger suggests, is the historiological *as it participates in philosophizing*, which is not as an object or as a set of objects located somewhere long ago, back in past time. Rather, this historiological aspect of our thinking can only come to light when it is glimpsed "in philosophizing itself":

> It is graspable only as existence, accessible out of pure factical life, thus with and through history [*Es ist nur wie Existenz ergreifbar, zugänglich aus dem rein faktischen Leben, also mit und durch Geschichte*]. (GA 61: 1/3, tm)

What one wishes to grasp or access, Heidegger insists, is not past events or elements as they once were, but rather the historical determining activity now in effect, which is exerting itself upon our consciousness

in our concrete experience of living in the world. Indeed, philosophizing will prove to be nothing but a certain modification of that activity of living. And if "taking seriously the task of studying the history of philosophy…is accomplished in philosophizing," then "philosophy is a historiological discerning of factical life (i.e., a discerning that accomplishes itself understandingly as actualizing history) [*Philosophie ist historisches* (*d. h. vollzugsgeschichtlich verstehendes*) *Erkennen des faktischen Lebens*]" (GA 61: 2/3, tm).

This fact, that we can only hope to catch site of the historical determining influence on our life and our thinking as we live out our lives in this world, leads Heidegger to suggest in Part II of the course that he and his students must first begin philosophizing, in order then to catch sight of the *vollzugsgeschichtliches Verstehen* or "historically actualizing understanding" that is happening there. This, however, obviously requires that they pose the preliminary question "What is philosophy?" Thus, the entirety of Part II is an adamantly first-person or immanent account of what appears in the experience of asking after the being of philosophy.

Heidegger notes that this question, "What is philosophy?" tends to be either underestimated or overestimated in our historical moment, and each of these occurs from two distinct perspectives.

1) *The Underestimation of the Question of Philosophy*: On the one hand, the importance of the question is *underestimated*, first, when it is suggested that philosophy should behave more like the sciences, which for their part set aside any "extensive reflection on their own concept" (i.e., science); Philosophy too, it seems to one who approaches with this attitude, should just "begin straightaway" and "set to concrete work." Second, from another perspective, the importance of the question is underestimated as well when it is suggested that philosophy should set aside any laborious self-definition because it is something "deeper" and "higher" than the sciences, something which ultimately "cannot and ought not be defined" (GA 61: 14–15/12–13).

2) *The Overestimation of the Question of Philosophy*: On the other hand, the importance of the question is sometimes *overestimated*, Heidegger tells his students, for instance when, first, we demand at the outset the most general, all-encompassing, universal definition, which is tasked with doing justice to every mode of philosophy in the tradition and every philosophical sub-discipline, as well. Second, it is also overestimated from another perspective, when we demand that philosophy provide a maximally proper and rigorous definition, assuming here that this must "satisfy the requirements fixed by scholastic logic" (GA 61: 15/13, tm). This would amount to an uncritical adoption of the classic Aristotelian model of definition, as put forward by medieval Scholasticism under the formula, "definition is made by proximate genus and specific difference [*definitio fit per genus proximum et differentiam specificam*]" (GA 61: 17/14).

Even if we are convinced of the need to resist these four common errors in approaching the question of "What is philosophy?", Heidegger insists that these errors nevertheless "announce something of a genuine intention toward the meaning of philosophy and toward its possible ways of being appropriated [*etwas von einer echten Intention auf den Sinn der Philosophie und seine mögliche Aneignungsweise bekunden müssen*]" (GA 61: 15/13, tm). That is, these deficient ways of proceeding suggest, precisely *as deficient*, that whatever philosophy is, it will be properly accessed only in the concrete activity of philosophizing, not in some predetermined or received notion of philosophy, *and* they suggest that philosophizing must be directed in its activity toward the register of apparently relevant principles, with respect to whatever subject matter it is investigating. From this set of observations about the initially deficient appearing of philosophy, Heidegger will proceed toward an illuminating determination, to which we will return in the last section.

For now, we simply note here Heidegger's observation that, "as an object [*Gegenstand*] philosophy, like every object, has its way of *becoming genuinely possessed* [*des* genuinen Gehabtwerdens]" (GA 61: 18/15, tm).

Even in our initial questioning about philosophy, as with any object of inquiry, in our explicitly deficient or impoverished grasp, there is already indicated a mode in which we would know or have the object of inquiry properly. It is indicated as a mode of knowing or having to which we do not yet have access, but indicated nonetheless as the means by which the deficiency of our initial grasp would be overcome.

As Heidegger observes, "this question ["What is philosophy?"], in this formulation and with this occasioning, i.e., posed at the initiation and as the initiation of a philosophical investigation itself, gives rise above all to a manifold vexation [*entsteht zumeist eine vielfältige Quälerei*]" (GA 61: 13/12, tm). We find ourselves in an initial condition of *Quälerei* or "vexation, torment, disturbance," with regard to what we wish to think, what we wish to understand about our world and ourselves at this historical moment. Heidegger writes,

> Now, insofar as ruinance and questionability are experienced, but philosophy decisively sets itself [*Philosophie aber sich entscheidet*] to explicating radically that which is factical for it each time [*dieses ihr je Faktische radikal zu explizieren*], it renounces the possibility of having recourse to revelation, recourse to any sort of certification of its possessions and its possibility of possession, and not as though it [philosophy] wished to be presuppositionless, but rather because it stands in a pre-possession [*Voraushabe*] – the factical. Questionworthiness and questioning sharpen the comportment toward history [*schärft das Verhalten zur Geschichte*] – the "how" of the historiological [*das Wie der Historischen*]. (GA 61: 2/3–4, tm)

This is a dense and elliptical passage. Philosophical thinking, Heidegger tells us, starts today from an initial condition of ruinance, from the Latin *ruina*, which Heidegger defines by reference to a *Sturz* or a "collapse, downfall, decline," and the troubling or vexing questionworthiness of what it wishes to clarify and understand.[6] This is our factical relation

to the object of philosophical inquiry, but even this indeterminacy and distance is itself a relation and, thus, a "pre-possession." And indeed, this will be the key to Heidegger's response to our condition of exhaustively historically determined consciousness, the path along which questioning will proceed by "sharpening the comportment toward history." Fascinating here is that, by way of philosophical questioning, we apparently do not transcend our historically determined condition, we do not arrive at some revelation or at some pure and secured presuppositionless intellectual grasp. Rather, we proceed philosophically by "sharpening" our relation to *the history we are already inheriting*.

The problem, Heidegger observes, in responding to this questionworthiness in our present historical moment is that,

> The *situation* that belongs to the understanding of philosophy is not being appropriated [*die der Philosophie zugehörige* Situation *des Verstehens nicht zugeeignet wird*], or more precisely: the opinion that this [situation] is there, without further ado; the blindness over against our own spiritual situation [*geistige Situation*], which is distinguished from every other previous blindness in the history of spirit [*Geistesgeschichte*] precisely by its being more distanced than ever from the situation of understanding, but in just such a way that, it has alive in itself indeed a specific direction of determination [*so zwar aber daß sie in sich selbst gerade eine spezifische Bestimmungsrichtung*], or rather it [our spiritual situation] has been roused up into the genuine superficiality that is decisive for the appropriation of the situation of the understanding [*für die Aneignung der Verstehenssituation*]. This "falling away" ["*Abfall*"] is characteristic of leveled-down apprehension and experience, of "the historiological consciousness" [*das nivellierte Auffassen und Erfahren, «das historische Bewußtsein»*]. (GA 61: 38/30, tm)

This "tendency toward being carried away," this turning away from and taking for granted the situation of living in which we might come to understand our object here, presents a peculiar challenge to thinking *today*. Even if there may well be a certain blindness that belongs to everyday pre-philosophical human life as such, in any and every period, Heidegger suggests here quite clearly that our particular historical moment, our present historical context, is subject to the most extreme blindness. We stand at a greater distance from the situation of life and understanding than individuals in other historical epochs, apparently because of a certain *Abfall*, "falling away" into the world. This is what Heidegger a few lines later calls "a tendency toward being-carried-away…the ruinous flight into the world; away from the object [*eine Tendenz zum Wegbringen…die ruinante Flucht in die Welt; weg vom Gegenstand*]" (GA 61: 39/31, tm).

This extreme initial blindness, superficiality, distraction, and falling away, which belong to everyone in our historical moment, would present little more than an inconvenience, or at most a practical problem in the project of disseminating one's philosophical results broadly, *were Heidegger not a thinker firmly situated in the philosophical school of historicism*. We will, in the next section, turn to a discussion of what precisely characterizes thinkers within this historicist "school." For now, let us note simply that it would be possible, in principle, to climb out of that initial everyday benightedness, if one could, for instance, presume to arrive at one's philosophical concepts in an *a priori* fashion, with reason simply reflecting on and clarifying its own innate contents and determining what it can deduce about reality on that basis. Or, alternatively, *a posteriori*, if thought could secure pure, uninterpreted sense data and determine what can be legitimately derived from that content about the nature of the reality being perceived. For a historicist thinker in the period to which Heidegger belongs, however, both these paths are blocked. We have only the concepts that our historical inheritance has provided us, only the structures of intelligibility imposed upon us by our tradition, which are always already at work organizing our experience and our thinking more or less exhaustively – there is no hope of suspending this influence

as *rationalist* or *empiricist* thinkers may have hoped to do throughout the modern philosophical period. And, as Heidegger observes our situation, the concepts we inherit at present appear insufficient for the task. Before we turn to the precise manner in which the formal indication of our concepts will allow Heidegger's ontological phenomenology to bring about a "counter ruinance" and to succeed in philosophizing even while remaining entirely immanent to our uniquely impoverished historical moment, let us briefly sketch the development of the philosophical school of historicism up to and including Heidegger.

THE HISTORY OF HISTORICISM – FROM HISTORY AS SCIENCE TO HISTORY AS PROBLEM

Historicism is difficult to discuss as a philosophical school or movement for two reasons. First, many of those thinkers who might be seen as central to its development, both early and late, never use the term "historicism" to describe their philosophical standpoint or approach. Second, although a complex continuity can be discerned in that development, from the late 18th century all the way through the 19th and 20th centuries and beyond, there is a profound *reorientation* of historicist thought that occurs at the end of the 19th century, which divides the movement into an early- and late-stage and, indeed, transforms the school's basic project to such an extent that its aims and motivations come to seem utterly at odds with one another. Nonetheless, even given this peculiar *volte face* in its development, I am inclined to agree with Friedrich Meinecke, author of *Historism*: *The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, when he approaches the school as a kind of complex whole and writes of it, "the rise of historicism was one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in Western thought."[7]

We cannot do justice here in this essay to the richness and complexity of this philosophical school, but we can offer at least what I think is a helpful developmental schematic. That is, we can organize this intellectual movement into, on the one hand, a first stage in which the study of history is being championed as vital to human life and then pursued as a scientific discipline and, on the other hand, a second stage in which

history and historical determination are being recognized and then critiqued as a problem. Let us turn to the earlier stage before tracing the through line to the later.

In the early modern period, as the impressive accomplishments of the scientific study of nature began to accumulate, there remained a certain acknowledged limit to its reach, indeed what Lessing refers to as a "broad and ugly ditch" between the natural world and the human world.[8]

The realm of nature presented a proper object of science insofar as it obeyed universal, necessary, and rationally, indeed mathematically, renderable laws of causation. The realm of human activity and its historical unfolding, by contrast, seemed subject to all manner of accident, contingency, whim, and all the idiosyncrasies and even perversions of human desire, at both the individual and collective registers.

Opposing this long-standing prejudice against the study of history, stretching back as far as Aristotle's dismissal of *historia* as less philosophical and less serious even than *poiēsis*,[9] historicism takes shape as an insistence on the possibility of studying human history *scientifically*. These historians granted that the study of the human past cannot simply employ the *same* method as the natural sciences, but it can nonetheless arrive at a secured and scientifically legitimate knowledge of its subject matter through the employment of a strict, consistent, and self-conscious method of interpretation and through the critical assessment of the reliability of its sources. As Frederick Beiser remarks about the early-stage practitioners of historicism,

> In their view, history had its own special standards and methods of knowledge, which are no less demanding and exacting than those of the natural sciences. While the methodology of the natural sciences is mathematical and mechanical, the methodology of history is holistic and interpretive. The natural scientist attempts to discover through reason laws that hold in all times and places, whereas the historian attempts to fathom through intuition the unique and individual.[10]

The hermeneutic approach of the early historicists secured its results by insisting on a *holistic* and *detailed* approach to the accumulation of data about the period being studied. The method could be more assured of the scientific validity of its understanding of the meaning or value of a given historical occurrence, the more data it had amassed, the more exhaustive and totalizing its view of the context, and so long as its data could be trusted as sound. This foundation it secured by what was called "source criticism."

To be sure, something like this had been a component of historical method stretching all the way back to the invention of the discipline by Herodotus,[11] but it was employed with ever greater rigor by early historicist thinkers. And one hears this early commitment still voiced in a remark by one of the greatest late-stage historicist thinkers, Michel Foucault, in discussing the historicist method he claims to inherit from Nietzsche,

> Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary…Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material…[It] demands relentless erudition. Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies.[12]

Here Foucault thematizes the methodological commitment to accumulating and evaluating a mass of historical sources, building thereby an extraordinarily complex portrait of all the factual details of a given period in order to explain a given historical occurrence or act. He then suggests negatively the need for an utterly immanent hermeneutic, the holistic approach to interpretation mentioned above by Beiser.

The historicist interprets historical events, identifying patterns and dynamics at work in a given historical moment, while insisting on the *absolute autonomy of the historical world*. That is, every historical

occurrence can and must be explained exclusively by those forces at work within history itself, at that moment in that place, rejecting any extra-historical *metaphysical* reference (e.g., to the providential plan of God, the logic of the unfolding of *Geist*, the sure hand of universal Reason) as well as any *naturalistic* reduction (e.g., to the laws of causation that order and explain the material world).

Rather, the early historicist approach often distinguishes between a general and an individual level *within history*, insisting on a distinction between the spiritual and the practical, the state and the citizen, a higher and a lower register, but always within the given historical epoch. Here, for instance, in a sort of eulogy for his mentor Leopold von Ranke, often thought of as the inaugurator of the modern "source-based" discipline, Friedrich Meinecke remarks that von Ranke had insisted on the necessity of recognizing the thorough-going relatedness and interpenetration of these two levels in approaching any given historical phenomenon. For example, Meinecke writes that, for von Ranke, in the course of interpreting certain specific actions undertaken by politicians during the 16th century Protestant Reformation,

> however clearly the practical basis of these interests may be depicted, they immediately become endowed with a certain spirituality, and the men representing them act with a certain distinguished assurance, as though sustained by an invisible power still at work in and behind those interests. The practical and the spiritual are seen to be inseparably interwoven.[13]

The task of the historicist interpreter is to explain every event and every act against the backdrop of that spiritual register, understanding, vitally, that spiritual register as never outside the historical, but rather as utterly immanent to it. Meinecke again, quoting Ranke:

> "The spiritual reality which suddenly rises up before you [the historian] in all its unsuspected originality cannot be deduced from any higher principle." The unseen spiritual power working itself out in practical

> interests and sustaining those who are led by it, is thus (according to Ranke) none other than the particular State involved…As such, and in spite of all points of comparison and all points of connection with a higher level, this State is inwardly marked off from all other States, because a particular spiritual principle is at work in it, expressing itself outwardly in its constitution and politics. "By the principle of the State," he says, "we must understand not some abstraction, but its very inner life."[14]

Already here we see the beginnings of the shift toward the perspective from which history becomes a problem. From the scientific commitment to the autonomy of history, i.e., the necessity of interpreting every historical occurrence exclusively according to the general, spiritual, state- or culture-level determining dynamics and forces, historicism begins to draw two uncomfortable consequences. On the one hand, it seems that there is a simple relativism of value implied, whereby every historical cultural context is utterly *sui generis*, no general comparisons or evaluations being possible across historical periods. On the other hand, this contextual relativism can then be reflexively applied *to the perspective of the historicist students of history themselves* – is it not the case, the historicist interpreter must ask themselves, that my own interpretive work in reading and criticizing the past events of the tradition I inherit would also be exhaustively determined by the "unseen spiritual power" already at work on me in my own present historical moment? Not just the set of terms, concepts, values, arguments, and associations that provide the structures of intelligibility according to which I experience the world, think critically about it, and then decide to act, but also all the biases, exclusions, marginalizations, myopias, and generally regrettable or even condemnable prejudices that are spiritual threads, as it were, completely woven through those terms, concepts, values, etc.

How then are we to take up the traditional task of philosophy or science today, i.e., arriving at the truth about "what is," given what historicism seems to be revealing as our condition of *exhaustively historically*

determined consciousness. This is, to my mind, the most fundamental philosophical question of our age, for every other philosophical question is interrupted and paralyzed by its implications. If every thought, every opinion, every action of every human being is historically determined so radically, how is science, how is philosophy even possible? How can we access truth? What does truth now even mean?

My central contention is that this historicist problematic is the motivating impulse for Heidegger's brilliant radicalization of phenomenology in the 1921–22 *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* lecture course. Indeed, it is precisely this inheritance that Heidegger has in mind when he remarks,

> We are today, in our existence, different from all previous generations simply by the fact . . . that we are the successors of forbears in a way no previous generation was. We are such [successors] in a quite peculiar sense, insofar as we possess a marked *historiological consciousness* (with the corresponding methodological possibilities) of our relation to the past, live in this consciousness, see ourselves in it, and see (await) the future with it and out of it. (GA 61: 74/55–56)

It is this condition and its unique "methodological possibilities" that interest us here.

After observing this contemporary hyper-awareness of our relation to the past, in a subsection entitled "Tradition," Heidegger undertakes a fairly extensive discussion of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, the first volume of which had appeared just three years prior in 1918, and this engagement with Spengler is extremely revealing as concerns our focus here, namely the significance of the challenge of late-stage historicism in occasioning the philosophical methodological innovations introduced in this course. To be sure, here in the 1921–22 course, in the 1920–21 "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion" course mentioned above, and elsewhere,[15] Heidegger is deeply ambivalent about the value of Spengler's study. But what is especially revealing here, and perhaps quite

unexpected, is what precisely Heidegger praises and what he criticizes. In his massively popular work, Spengler had opposed many common pre-war liberal attitudes in Germany, both scholarly and popular, by insisting that Western European culture was not enjoying a long period of general progress and advancement, but had actually entered a phase of broad, inexorable, and indeed entirely natural decay.[16] One might expect that Heidegger would focus on the resonance between this diagnosis of historical decline and his own critique of Western metaphysical thinking, but this is in fact *not* where Heidegger directs his attention. Indeed, he generally sees this aspect of Spengler's project as merely a popularized, philosophically unsophisticated regurgitation of Nietzsche's critique of the nihilism of post-Platonic Western civilization.[17] What Heidegger appreciates most in Spengler, by contrast, is that he is "the most consistent and reliable spokesman for historiological consciousness" (GA 61: 74/56), or what Heidegger refers to in the 1920–21 course as "[Spengler's] *radical self-deliverance* to the historical process" (GA 60: 38/27, tm). This is nothing other than what we have presented here as late-stage historicism's emerging philosophical problem, the question of how to proceed philosophically given the exhaustive historical determination of consciousness. As Jeffrey Andrew Barash remarks, for Heidegger "the challenge of Spengler. . .lay in his disbelief in the conception of science founded in ideal continuity, transcending the purely relative elements of culture."[18] But what Heidegger criticizes in Spengler is the latter's attempt, despite his criticisms of the scientific aspirations of his contemporary historical theorists and despite his acknowledgement of the challenged condition of "historiological consciousness," to establish nonetheless a ground for historical thinking that will allow a quasi-scientific understanding of the past and even a predictability as history continues to unfold; to be sure, Spengler grounds this understanding in a novel way, rejecting that "ideal continuity" posited as an almost Platonic or Kantian transcendent source of understanding, but rather seeing a "periodicity," a "polarity," and a "tension,"[19] which organizes all cosmic processes, including all cultures in their historical development, such that that they can all be understood *a priori* to be involved in a process of maturation and decline.

Ultimately here, Heidegger insists that any scientific or quasi-scientific attitude toward the past, studying it as an object or as object-like and presuming to unveil there an intelligible overarching order, is merely the *Zeitigung* or the "temporalizing, bringing to maturity or fulfillment" of our contemporary, historically situated consciousness, i.e., that pre-relation to the past or the fact of our consciousness having been already determined by the past and by the tradition we inherit in factical life. He goes on,

> The question of the sense and the right of the tradition – itself a phenomenon within the basic phenomenon of the historical – is reassumed into the problematic of the historical itself, and the sense of the historical is, in turn, rooted in the facticity of factical life. The problem of the relation of Objective history to the historical is included in the aforementioned problematic. Yet, insofar as the historical receives its sense from *facticity*, it is appropriate to bring this latter itself into sharper focus and make it the focus of our discussion. (GA 61: 75/57)

It is in service of this project of bringing the historical aspect of factical life into sharper focus that Heidegger employs the elements that will be taken up in the final section of this essay. There, I would like to lay out the innovations introduced by Heidegger, specifically insofar as they are motivated by the historicist challenges of that project, namely the approach to concepts defined in a "formally indicative" manner and the relation of philosophy to everyday life understood as counter-ruinance.

CONCEPTS AS FORMAL INDICATIONS AND PHILOSOPHY AS COUNTER-RUINANCE

In this lecture course, the question of the meaning of Being seems to exist alongside other fundamental philosophical questions. Indeed, from its opening, various queries are introduced as taking center stage in the investigation: "what is history?," "what is philosophy?," "what is a definition?," "what is a principle?," "what is life?" (GA 61: 1–2/3–4, 12/11,

17–18/14–15, 21/18, 84/64). However, at one point in the discussion of the basic project of philosophizing, the question of the meaning of Being does emerge with what seems its familiar centrality for Heidegger's thinking.

Having begun from the initially indeterminate and troublingly insufficient appearance of "what philosophy is," Heidegger arrives at the insight that philosophy is appearing as a "comportment toward beings that is discerning in principle (*prinzipiell erekennendes Verhalten zu Seienden*)" (GA 61: 57/44), but he then asks, "what is the principle for beings in themselves" (GA 61: 44/57)?

> What is ultimately at issue in beings as such? Being or, more determinately, in respect to the way such "Being" is graspable, the meaning of Being, is, philosophically, the principle of every being. Being is not, however, the "universal" of all beings, the highest genus, that which beings would fall under as particular instances. (GA 61: 57/44, tm)

Here Heidegger is encouraging us to think Being *not* as the universal concept under which beings are ordered as instantiations of a given essential character, but as a kind of *archē*, a "principle, source, and origin," which he defines elsewhere as "that on the basis of which something "is" in its own proper way, that on which everything depends" (GA 61: 21/18). Although, as we saw above, there is an unprecedented blindness and presumption of transparency that belong to our contemporary situation, nonetheless even our impoverished historical understanding of beings relates us to Being, the source of their being as they are. And yet, already here the young Heidegger is insisting on an unorthodox discerning relation toward Being. He writes,

> The object of philosophy, beings in their Being, co-determines from out of itself (function of principle) the [philosophical] comportment…The discerning comportment [of philosophizing] has an original and radical sort of relation in-principle toward beings in their Being (not a being-in-position and grasping, not a discussing [*nicht Einstellung und Erfassen, Besprechen*]…). (GA 61: 60–1/46)

The question is how philosophy, in this early iteration of Heidegger's thinking, can dig down into the ground of what is initially appearing to us in our historically determined condition, and nevertheless define and know beings in their Being in such a mode that Being is not reduced to a being, not grasped and discursively delimited according to a predetermined and unreflective understanding. This is what our contemporary historical moment requires of us. And the tool that Heidegger hits upon here in order to accomplish this task is the employment of the "formally indicative" definition of our concepts. He writes,

> It is characteristic of a definition as indicative, that it precisely does not give fully and properly [*gerade nicht voll und eigentlich gibt*] the object being determined. Indeed, it merely indicates, but as genuinely indicative it does give directly the principle of the object… The positive reference [*positive Anweisung*] is provided by the further character of the definition, namely, that it is "formally" indicative (From the point of view of what is genuine, that which is initially given is precisely *of a genuine origin* [*gerade einen genuinen Ursprungs*]; explicitly, however, it is first and necessarily already declined [*abgefallen*], though indeed genuinely held fast in the decline [*im Abfall*]). "Formally indicated" does not mean merely represented, meant, or intimated in some way or other, such that it would remain completely open how and where we are to gain possession of the object itself. "Indicated" here means that that which is said is of the character of the "formal," improperly [*uneigentlich*], but precisely in this "im-" there resides at the same time positively the referring [*positive die Anweisung*]. The being empty with respect to content in its sense-structure [*Das leer Gehaltliche in seiner Sinnstruktur*] is at the same time that which provides the direction of actualization [*die Vollzugsichtung*]. (GA 61: 32–33/26)

This is a long and complex passage, but what I want to draw out is the way in which formally indicative philosophical definition is presented as a means of proceeding philosophically in a condition in which we explicitly experience our "declined" and "improper" initial relation to the object of definition, to beings in their Being. And this is possible, for Heidegger here, "insofar as ruinance and questionability are now experienced [*Sofern als nun die Ruinanz und Fraglichkeit erfahren wird*]" (GA 61: 2/3) over against beings in their Being as an unsatisfactory initial grasp of beings. But precisely in that experience of decline and impropriety, there is entailed a direction toward what is not yet adequately or properly grasped, not yet possessed, the principle of what is being investigated, the Being of beings. Fascinating is the idea that we are able to indicate that ground of beings, i.e., draw it into the definition of beings indicatively, even as we allow it to remain ungrasped, unmastered, by withholding positive content, leaving the definition merely formal, or empty.[20]

And thus, it is insofar as philosophy begins today from the sense of having fallen away from the Being of beings, insofar as we experience our condition as one of ruinance, that we have a directionality suggested, a movement by which we might approach Being, though apparently without aspiring to grasp or master it as an Object, as a being. This is the sense in which philosophy, in the mode of historicist ontological phenomenology, is essentially a movement of counter-ruinance. Heidegger writes,

> Phenomenological interpretation, as existentiell, manifests itself by its very essence as a "*counter*"*-movedness*...We can determine something about the (ruinant) "against" or (formally) the "against-which," as a genuine factical property of life, only insofar as we take seriously the phenomenological task of encountering the ruinant counter-movedness and the "against-which" in the factical modes of access to their actualization. This encounter is possible only if factical ways of access, i.e., ways of movedness in facticity, have been appropriated interpretively...(GA 61: 132–33/99)

Simply tracing back in the direction indicated by the dissatisfaction and impropriety of our initial relation to beings, we can be confident that we are moving toward reversing the exceptionally fallen condition of our historical present.

CONCLUSION

I hope to have indicated the perhaps surprising way in which Heidegger at this early stage inherits the late-historicist challenge and the way in which his innovations here (formal indication, life as ruinance, and ontological phenomenology as counter-ruinance) should be seen specifically as strategies carrying out the project of philosophizing in a mode utterly immanent to that historically determined condition.

NOTES

1 This lecture course appears along with other topically related materials in *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (GA 60).

2 Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's* Being and Time (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 233. (Hereafter, *GBT*.)

3 David Farrell Krell, in the introduction to his *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 37. Indeed, Krell treats this lecture course at some length, detailing its "extraordinary contents" and insisting that the text "would amply repay the most meticulous reading" (Krell, 37) – this is precisely what I propose to do here, at least with respect to the question of history and its determining influence on human experience and thought. He sees Heidegger here as taking up the challenge of philosophizing from within and about the "movement," "movedness," and "process" of "life," "life" being a concept that Heidegger will eventually exchange in *Being and Time* for *Dasein* and *existence*. Krell does not, however, develop the relation between Heidegger's engagement with "life-philosophy" here and the passages where Heidegger takes up the philosophical challenges of historically determined consciousness.

4 William McNeill, *The Fate of Phenomenology: Heidegger's Legacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020).

5 Ted Kisiel offers a helpful summary of the course contents, situating it meticulously in the context of Heidegger's early development, in Kisiel, *GBT*, 232–7. He remarks that, although the course's most important element may *appear* to be a "change in Heidegger's 'fundamental definition of philosophy' in the direction of a 'phenomenological ontology,'" the course's "deeper goal," "further accentuating its counter-Husserlian direction, is to develop the intrinsically historical character of such ontological research, in keeping with the fundamentally historical movement of life itself. Ultimately, therefore, there is no difference between the ontological and the historical – this is clearly not Aristotle or Husserl" (Kisiel, *GBT*, 233). See also Kisiel, "Heidegger (1920–21) on Becoming a

Christian: A Conceptual Picture Show," in eds. T. Kisiel and J. van Buren, *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 175–94. Charles Bambach, in his *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), traces the history of German historicism from Wilhelm Windelband to Heinrich Rickert to Wilhelm Dilthey, and closes with a final chapter on Heidegger. For Bambach, Heidegger's encounter with what we will discuss here as the late-stage challenge of historicism, his consideration of the fact that "the historicist faith in the meaning and coherence of human history had been shattered" (Bambach, 188), takes place in the context *both* of a certain crisis in contemporary theology *and* of a crisis in Heidegger's personal faith. Indeed, Bambach writes that Heidegger's "turn toward historicity and hermeneutics must not…be understood as a turning away from theology or from theological questioning…[It amounts to a] radicalization of his original mode of questioning rather than a rejection of it. His turn toward Paul, Luther, Overbeck, and Schleiermacher paralleled his phenomenological investigations by focusing on the *historical* context of self-disclosure and intentionality" (Bambach, 204). Scott Campbell as well, in his extensive and illuminating treatment of this course in chapters three and four of his *The Early Heidegger's Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Being, and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), focuses on Heidegger's appeals to early Christian thought, the immediacy of lived temporal experience and the inevitability of self-alienation there, and Campbell places front and center the historicity of human life, as Heidegger treats it. About the courses of the 1920's, Campbell writes, "Heidegger's project…can be described as an attempt first to take account of life's temporal-historical constitution and, with that, an endeavor to recover or retrieve temporal-historical motivations. Facticity allows for the retrieval of the various ways in which history affects human existence" (Campbell, 6). Finally, Jeffrey Andrew Barash takes up this course and its

significance for Heidegger's philosophy of history, or for his thinking of the essentially historically situated character of human life, in the third chapter of his *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), a chapter entitled "Existence and History: Heidegger's Radical Turning Point between 1918 and 1923." Barash, tracing the problem of historically determined thinking, notes that, in the series of lectures from 1920–21, "Heidegger rarely mentioned the thought of Husserl. Instead, he focused on the thinking of those he considered to be the major historical theorists among his contemporaries" (Barash, 113), including often, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, as we shall see, Oswald Spengler.

6 *Ruinanz* is a term Heidegger introduces in this lecture course and subsequently abandons. It is usually understood to have been replaced with the term *Verfallenheit* or "fallenness," which will be central to *Being and Time*. Hans Ruin has argued compellingly in "Thinking in Ruins: Life, Death, and Destruction in Heidegger's Early Writings," *Comparative Continental Philosophy* 4.1 (2012): 15–33, that we should take up the notion not merely as an abandoned alternative terminology, in the context of Heidegger's own development, but rather as a forceful and rich concept on its own terms. He writes, "In the end, this particular term invites us to think deeper about the connection between the fallenness of life and the practice of philosophical destruction or deconstruction. And as such it actualizes the question of the legacy of Heidegger's thinking as a whole. Through the lens of ruinance, he comes forth as a thinker animated by a profound sense of loss, of the trace, and of irretrievable origins, in the vicinity of both Benjamin and Derrida" (Ruin, 16). I agree with this entirely and would add only that I think the historicist framing of Heidegger's introduction of the notion of *Ruinanz* that I am sketching here allows the term to present itself in its real force and richness.

7 Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. J.E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959/1972), liv.

8 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "*Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*," in *Werke und Briefe* (Frankfurt: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989), viii.441). Cited by Beisner.

9 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451a36–b14.

10 Frederick Beiser, "Historicism," in eds. B. Leiter and M. Rosen, *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 160–1.

11 At the very least, Herodotus suggests that he is abiding by the methodological principles of transparency and maximum inclusivity. He tells us that he will explicitly identify his sources, promising to relate what others apparently actually believe: "So far the Egyptians themselves have been my authority; but in what follows I shall relate what other people, too, are willing to accept in the history of this country, with a few points added from my own observation" (*Hist.* II.147). He also mentions his commitment to exhaustive reporting, or conveying every opinion or explanation he has encountered, even those about which he himself is skeptical: "I am bound to tell what I am told, but not in every case to believe it" (*Hist.* VII.152). Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

12 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in ed. D. F. Bouchard, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. D.F. Bouchard and S. Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971/1977), 139–40.

13 Meinecke, *Historism*, 499.

14 Meinecke, *Historism*, 499–500.

15 See Barash's extensive discussion of Heidegger's engagement with Spengler, in his third chapter, entitled "Existence and History: Heidegger's Radical Turning Point between 1918 and 1923" (Barash, *Historical Meaning*, 113–125).

16 As Charles Bambach observes about Spengler's study, "the book's real point was often missed. What characterized Spengler's work was not its theory of numbers, its morphology of history, or its Faustian grasp of space and time, but its cultural pessimism.

Spengler's book was a clear sign of the collapse and destruction of the old, worn values of the prewar world. Spengler, or rather 'the Spengler phenomenon,' revealed that German culture was experiencing a 'crisis' concerning its own fundamental history and identity, a crisis that threatened the meaning and continuity of the historicist tradition" (Bambach, *Crisis*, 188–9).

17 In "The Anaximander Fragment," composed in 1946 and published in the collection *Holzwege* in 1963, Heidegger remarks that it is Nietzsche "from whose philosophy (all too coarsely understood) Spengler predicted the decline of the West – in the sense of the Western historical world" (GA 5: 326/EGT 17). Indeed, it is here that Heidegger remarks, "Historicism has today not only not been overcome, but is only now entering the stage of its expansion and entrenchment" (GA 5: 326/EGT 17).

18 Barash, *Historical Meaning*, 118.

19 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2: *Perspectives of World History*, trans. C.F. Atkinson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1922/1928), 4. See also Spengler, *The Decline of the West. Volume I: Form and Actuality*, trans. C.F. Atkinson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1918/1926).

20 Ted Kisiel characterizes the peculiar features of this course's presentation of "formal indication" in the following, very helpful way: "...formal indication [here in the 1921–22 course], which seeks a middle ground between abstractly strict universal definition (its overestimation) and concrete experience (underestimation of definition), is now charged with the skepticism of radical questioning" (Kisiel, *GBT*, 233).