

The Basic Problems of Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger

[From *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982, pp. 1-23.]

Introduction

§ 1. Exposition and general division of the theme

This course sets for itself the task of posing the basic *problems of phenomenology*, elaborating them, and proceeding to some extent toward their solution. Phenomenology must develop its concept out of what it takes as its theme and how it investigates its object. Our considerations are aimed at the *inherent content* and *inner systematic relationships* of the basic problems. The goal is to achieve a fundamental illumination of these problems.

In negative terms this means that our purpose is not to acquire historical knowledge about the circumstances of the modern movement in philosophy called phenomenology. We shall be dealing not with phenomenology but with what phenomenology itself deals with. And, again, we do not wish merely to take note of it so as to be able to report then that phenomenology deals with this or that subject; instead, the course deals with the subject itself, and you yourself are supposed to deal with it, or learn how to do so, as the course proceeds. The point is not to gain some knowledge about philosophy but to be able to philosophise. An introduction to the basic problems could lead to that end.

And these basic problems themselves? Are we to take it on trust that the ones we discuss do in fact constitute the inventory of the basic problems? How shall we arrive at these basic problems? Not directly but by the roundabout way of *a discussion of certain individual problems*. From these we shall sift out the basic problems and determine their systematic interconnection. Such an understanding of the basic problems should yield insight into the degree to which philosophy as a science is necessarily demanded by them.

The course accordingly divides into *three parts*. At the outset we may outline them roughly as follows:

1. Concrete phenomenological inquiry leading to the basic problems
2. The basic problems of phenomenology in their systematic order and foundation
3. The scientific way of treating these problems and the idea of phenomenology

The *path* of our reflections will take us from certain individual problems to the basic problems. The question therefore arises, How are we to gain the starting point of our considerations? How shall we select and circumscribe the individual problems? Is this to be left to chance and arbitrary choice? In order to avoid the appearance that we have simply assembled a few problems at random, an introduction leading up to the individual problems is required.

It might be thought that the simplest and surest way would be to derive the concrete individual phenomenological problems from the concept of phenomenology. Phenomenology is essentially such and such; hence it encompasses such and such problems. But we have first of all to arrive at the concept of phenomenology. This route is accordingly closed to us. But to circumscribe the concrete problems we do not ultimately need a clear-cut and fully validated concept of phenomenology. Instead it might be enough to have some acquaintance with what is nowadays familiarly known by the name "phenomenology." Admittedly, within phenomenological inquiry there are again differing definitions of its nature and tasks. But, even if these differences in defining the nature of phenomenology could be brought to a consensus, it would remain doubtful whether the concept of phenomenology thus attained, a sort of average concept, could direct us toward the concrete problems to be chosen. For we should have to be certain beforehand that phenomenologi-

cal inquiry today has reached the center of philosophy's problems and has defined its own nature by way of their possibilities. As we shall see, however, this is not the case—and so little is it the case that one of the main purposes of this course is to show that conceived in its basic tendency, phenomenological research can represent nothing less than the more explicit and more radical understanding of the idea of a scientific philosophy which philosophers from ancient times to Hegel sought to realize time and again in a variety of internally coherent endeavours.

Hitherto, phenomenology has been understood, even within that discipline itself, as a science propaedeutic to philosophy, preparing the ground for the proper philosophical disciplines of logic, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion. But in this definition of phenomenology as a preparatory science the traditional stock of philosophical disciplines is taken over without asking whether that same stock is not called in question and eliminated precisely by phenomenology itself. Does not phenomenology contain within itself the possibility of reversing the alienation of philosophy into these disciplines and of revitalising and reappropriating in its basic tendencies the great tradition of philosophy with its essential answers? We shall maintain that phenomenology is not just one philosophical science among others, nor is it the science preparatory to the rest of them; rather, *the expression "phenomenology" is the name for the method of scientific philosophy in general.*

Clarification of the idea of phenomenology is equivalent to exposition of the concept of scientific philosophy. To be sure, this does not yet tell us what phenomenology means as far as its content is concerned, and it tells us even less about how this method is to be put into practice. But it does indicate how and why we must avoid aligning ourselves with any contemporary tendency in phenomenology.

We shall not deduce the concrete phenomenological problems from some dogmatically proposed concept of phenomenology; on the contrary, we shall allow ourselves to be led to them by a more general and preparatory discussion of the concept of scientific philosophy in general. We shall conduct this discussion in tacit apposition to the basic tendencies of Western philosophy from antiquity to Hegel.

In the early period of ancient thought philosophia means the same as science in general. Later, individual philosophies, that is to say, individual sciences—medicine, for instance, and mathematics—become detached from philosophy. The term philosophia then refers to a science which underlies and encompasses all the other particular sciences. Philosophy becomes science pure and simple. More and more it takes itself to be the first and highest science or, as it was called during the period of German idealism, absolute science. If philosophy is absolute science, then the expression "scientific philosophy" contains a pleonasm. It then means scientific absolute science. It suffices simply to say "philosophy." This already implies science pure and simple. Why then do we still add the adjective "scientific" to the expression "philosophy"? A science, not to speak of absolute science, is scientific by the very meaning of the term. We speak of "scientific philosophy" principally because conceptions of philosophy prevail which not only imperil but even negate its character as science pure and simple. These conceptions of philosophy are not just contemporary but accompany the development of scientific philosophy throughout the time philosophy has existed as a science. On this view philosophy is supposed not only, and not in the first place, to be a theoretical science, but to give practical guidance to our view of things and their interconnection and our attitudes toward them, and to regulate and direct our interpretation of existence and its meaning. Philosophy is wisdom of the world and of life, or, to use an expression current nowadays, philosophy is supposed to provide a *Weltanschauung*, a world-view. Scientific philosophy can thus be set off against philosophy as world-view.

We shall try to examine this distinction more critically and to decide whether it is valid or whether it has to be absorbed into one of its members. In this way the concept of philosophy should become clear to us and put us in a position to justify the selection of the individual problems to be dealt with in the first part. It should be borne in mind here that these discussions concerning the concept of philosophy can be only provisional—provisional not just in regard to the course as a whole but provisional in general. For the concept of philosophy is the most proper and highest result of philosophy itself. Similarly, the question whether philosophy is at all possible or not can be decided only by philosophy itself.

§ 2. The concept of philosophy

Philosophy and world-view

In discussing the difference between scientific philosophy and philosophy as world-view, we may fittingly start from the latter notion and begin with the term "*Weltanschauung*," "world-view." This expression is not a translation from Greek, say, or Latin. There is no such expression as *kosmotheoria*. The word "*Weltanschauung*" is of specifically German coinage; it was in fact coined within philosophy. It first turns up in its natural meaning in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*—world-intuition in the sense of contemplation of the world given to the senses or, as Kant says, the *mundus sensibilis*—a beholding of the world as simple apprehension of nature in the broadest sense. Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt thereupon use the word in this way. This usage dies out in the thirties of the last century under the influence of a new meaning given to the expression "*Weltanschauung*" by the Romantics and principally by Schelling. In the Introduction to the draft of a System of Philosophy of Nature, (1799), Schelling says: "Intelligence is productive in a double manner, either blindly and unconsciously or freely and consciously; it is unconsciously productive in *Weltanschauung* and consciously productive in the creation of an ideal world." Here *Weltanschauung* is directly assigned not to sense-observation but to intelligence, albeit to unconscious intelligence. Moreover, the factor of productivity, the independent formative process of intuition, is emphasised. Thus the word approaches the meaning we are familiar with today, a self-realised, productive as well as conscious way of apprehending and interpreting the universe of beings. Schelling speaks of a schematism of *Weltanschauung*, a schematised form for the different possible world-views which appear and take shape in fact. A view of the world, understood in this way, does not have to be produced with a theoretical intention and with the means of theoretical science. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel speaks of a "moral world-view." Görres makes use of the expression "poetic world-view." Ranke speaks of the "religious and Christian world-view." Mention is made sometimes of the democratic, sometimes of the pessimistic world-view or even of the medieval world-view. Schleiermacher says: "It is only our world-view that makes our knowledge of God complete." Bismarck at one point writes to his bride: "What strange views of the world there are among clever people!" From the forms and possibilities of world-view thus enumerated it becomes clear that what is meant by this term is not only a conception of the contexture of natural things but at the same time an interpretation of the sense and purpose of the human *Dasein* [the being that we are ourselves] and hence of history. A world-view always includes a view of life. A world-view grows out of an all-inclusive reflection on the world and the human *Dasein*, and this again happens in different ways, explicitly and consciously in individuals or by appropriating an already prevalent world-view. We grow up within such a world-view and gradually become accustomed to it. Our world-view is determined by environment—people, race, class, developmental stage of culture. Every world-view thus individually formed arises out of a natural world-view, out of a range of conceptions of the world and determinations of the human *Dasein* which are at any particular time given more or less explicitly with each such *Dasein*. We must distinguish the individually formed world-view or the cultural world-view from the natural world-view.

A world-view is not a matter of theoretical knowledge, either in respect of its origin or in relation to its use. It is not simply retained in memory like a parcel of cognitive property. Rather, it is a matter of a coherent conviction which determines the current affairs of life more or less expressly and directly. A world-view is related in its meaning to the particular contemporary *Dasein* at any given time. In this relationship to the *Dasein* the world-view is a guide to it and a source of strength under pressure. Whether the world-view is determined by superstitions and prejudices or is based purely on scientific knowledge and experience or even, as is usually the case, is a mixture of superstition and knowledge, prejudice and sober reason it all comes to the same thing; nothing essential is changed.

This indication of the characteristic traits of what we mean by the term "world-view" may suffice here. A rigorous definition of it would have to be gained in another way, as we shall see. In his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Jaspers says that "when we speak of world-views we mean Ideas, what is ultimate and total in man, both subjectively, as life-experience and power and character, and objectively, as a world having objective shape." For our purpose of distinguishing between philosophy as world-view and scientific philosophy, it is above all important to see that the world-view, in its meaning, always arises out of the particular factual existence of the human be-

ing in accordance with his factual possibilities of thoughtful reflection and attitude-formation, and it arises thus for this factual *Dasein*. The world-view is something that in each case exists historically from, with, and for the factual *Dasein*. A philosophical world-view is one that expressly and explicitly or at any rate preponderantly has to be worked out and brought about by philosophy, that is to say, by theoretical speculation, to the exclusion of artistic and religious interpretations of the world and the *Dasein*. This world-view is not a by-product of philosophy; its cultivation, rather, is the proper goal and nature of philosophy itself. In its very concept philosophy is world-view philosophy, philosophy as world-view. If philosophy in the form of theoretical knowledge of the world aims at what is universal in the world and ultimate for the *Dasein*—the whence, the whither, and the wherefore of the world and life—then this differentiates it from the particular sciences, which always consider only a particular region of the world and the *Dasein*, as well as from the artistic and religious attitudes, which are not based primarily on the theoretical attitude. It seems to be without question that philosophy has as its goal the formation of a world-view. This task must define the nature and concept of philosophy. Philosophy, it appears, is so essentially world-view philosophy that it would be preferable to reject this latter expression as an unnecessary overstatement. And what is even more, to propose to strive for a scientific philosophy is a misunderstanding. For the philosophical world-view, it is said, naturally ought to be scientific. By this is meant: first, that it should take cognisance of the results of the different sciences and use them in constructing the world-picture and the interpretation of the *Dasein*; secondly, that it ought to be scientific by forming the world-view in strict conformity with the rules of scientific thought. This conception of philosophy as the formation of a world-view in a theoretical way is so much taken for granted that it commonly and widely defines the concept of philosophy and consequently also prescribes for the popular mind what is to be and what ought to be expected of philosophy. Conversely, if philosophy does not give satisfactory answers to the questions of world-view, the popular mind regards it as insignificant. Demands made on philosophy and attitudes taken toward it are governed by this notion of it as the scientific construction of a world-view. To determine whether philosophy succeeds or fails in this task, its history is examined for unequivocal confirmation that it deals knowingly with the ultimate questions—of nature, of the soul, that is to say, of the freedom and history of man, of God.

If philosophy is the scientific construction of a world-view, then the distinction between "scientific philosophy" and "philosophy as world-view" vanishes. The two together constitute the essence of philosophy, so that what is really emphasised ultimately is the task of the world-view. This seems also to be the view of Kant, who put the scientific character of philosophy on a new basis. We need only recall the distinction he drew in the introduction to the *Logic* between the *academic* and the *cosmic conceptions of philosophy*. Here we turn to an oft-quoted Kantian distinction which apparently supports the distinction between scientific philosophy and philosophy as world-view or, more exactly, serves as evidence for the fact that Kant himself, for whom the scientific character of philosophy was central, likewise conceives of philosophy as philosophical world-view.

According to the *academic concept* or, as Kant also says, in the scholastic sense, philosophy is the doctrine of the skill of reason and includes two parts: "first, a sufficient stock of rational cognitions from concepts; and, secondly, a systematic interconnection of these cognitions or a combination of them in the idea of a whole." Kant is here thinking of the fact that philosophy in the scholastic sense includes the interconnection of the formal principles of thought and of reason in general as well as the discussion and determination of those concepts which, as a necessary presupposition, underlie our apprehension of the world, that is to say, for Kant, of nature. According to the academic concept, philosophy is the whole of all the formal and material fundamental concepts and principles of rational knowledge.

Kant defines the *cosmic concept* of philosophy or, as he also says, philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense, as follows: "But as regards philosophy in the cosmic sense (*in sensu cosmico*), it can also be called a science of the supreme maxims of the use of our reason, understanding by 'maxim' the inner principle of choice among diverse ends." Philosophy in the cosmic sense deals with that for the sake of which all use of reason, including that of philosophy itself, is what it is. "For philosophy in the latter sense is indeed the science of the relation of every use of knowledge and reason to the final purpose of human reason, under which, as the supreme end, all other ends are subordinated and must come together into unity in it. In this cosmopolitan sense the field of philosophy can be defined by the following questions: 1) What can I know? 2) What should I do? 3) What may I hope? 4) What is man?" At bottom, says Kant, the first three questions are concentrated in

the fourth, "What is man?" For the determination of the final ends of human reason results from the explanation of what man is. It is to these ends that philosophy in the academic sense also must relate.

Does this Kantian separation between philosophy in the scholastic sense and philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense coincide with the distinction between scientific philosophy and philosophy as world-view? Yes and no. Yes, since Kant after all makes a distinction within the concept of philosophy and, on the basis of this distinction, makes the questions of the end and limits of human existence central. No, since philosophy in the cosmic sense does not have the task of developing a world-view in the designated sense. What Kant ultimately has in mind as the task of philosophy in the cosmic sense, without being able to say so explicitly, is nothing but the *a priori* and therefore ontological circumscription of the characteristics which belong to the essential nature of the human *Dasein* and which also generally determine the concept of a world-view. As the most fundamental *a priori* determination of the essential nature of the human *Dasein* Kant recognises the proposition: Man is a being which exists as its own end. Philosophy in the cosmic sense, as Kant understands it, also has to do with determinations of essential nature. It does not seek a specific factual account of the merely factually known world and the merely factually lived life; rather, it seeks to delimit what belongs to world in general, to the *Dasein* in general, and thus to world-view in general. Philosophy in the cosmic sense has for Kant exactly the same methodological character as philosophy in the academic sense, except that for reasons which we shall not discuss here in further detail Kant does not see the connection between the two. More precisely, he does not see the basis for establishing both concepts on a common original ground. We shall deal with this later on. For the present it is clear only that, if philosophy is viewed as being the scientific construction of a world-view, appeal should not be made to Kant. Fundamentally, Kant recognises only philosophy as science.

A world-view, as we saw, springs in every case from a factual *Dasein* in accordance with its factual possibilities, and it is what it is always for this particular *Dasein*. This in no way asserts a relativism of world-views. What a world-view fashioned in this way says can be formulated in propositions and rules which are related in their meaning to a specific really existing world, to the particular factually existing *Dasein*. Every world-view and life-view posits; that is to say, it is related being-ly to some being or beings. It posits a being, something that is; it is positive. A world-view belongs to each *Dasein* and, like this *Dasein*, it is always in fact determined historically. To the world-view there belongs this multiple positivity that it is always rooted in a *Dasein* which is in such and such a way; that as such it relates to the existing world and points to the factically existent *Dasein*. It is just because this positivity—that is, the relatedness to beings, to world that is, *Dasein* that is—belongs to the essence of the world-view, and thus in general to the formation of the world-view, that the formation of a world-view cannot be the task of philosophy. To say this is not to exclude but to include the idea that philosophy itself is a distinctive primal form of world-view. Philosophy can and perhaps must show, among many other things, that something like a world-view belongs to the essential nature of the *Dasein*. Philosophy can and must define what in general constitutes the structure of a world-view. But it can never develop and posit some specific world-view qua just this or that particular one. Philosophy is not essentially the formation of a world-view; but perhaps just on this account it has an elementary and fundamental relation to all world-view formation, even to that which is not theoretical but factually historical.

The thesis that world-view formation does not belong to the task of philosophy is valid, of course, only on the presupposition that philosophy does not relate in a positive manner to some being qua this or that particular being, that it does not posit a being. Can this presupposition that philosophy does not relate positively to beings, as the sciences do, be justified? What then is philosophy supposed to concern itself with if not with beings, with that which is, as well as with the whole of what is? What is not, is surely the nothing. Should philosophy, then, as absolute science, have the nothing as its theme? What can there be apart from nature, history, God, space, number? We say of each of these, even though in a different sense, that it is. We call it a being. In relating to it, whether theoretically or practically, we are comporting ourselves toward a being. Beyond all these beings there is nothing. Perhaps there is no other being beyond what has been enumerated, but perhaps, as in the German idiom for "there is," *es gibt* [literally, it gives], still something else is given, something else which indeed is not but which nevertheless, in a sense yet to be determined, is given. Even more. In the end something is given which must be given if we are to be able to make beings accessible to us as beings and comport ourselves toward them, something which, to

be sure, is not but which must be given if we are to experience and understand any beings at all. We are able to grasp beings as such, as beings, only if we understand something like being. If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual comprehension, what actuality signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us. If we did not understand what reality means, then the real would remain inaccessible. If we did not understand what life and vitality signify, then we would not be able to comport ourselves toward living beings. If we did not understand what existence and existentiality signify, then we ourselves would not be able to exist as *Dasein*. If we did not understand what permanence and constancy signify, then constant geometric relations or numerical proportions would remain a secret to us. We must understand actuality, reality, vitality, existentiality, constancy in order to be able to comport ourselves positively toward specifically actual, real, living, existing, constant beings. We must understand being so that we may be able to be given over to a world that is, so that we can exist in it and be our own *Dasein* itself as a being. We must be able to understand actuality before all factual experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense as over against the experience of beings is in a certain sense earlier than the experience of beings. To say that the understanding of being precedes all factual experience of beings does not mean that we would first need to have an explicit concept of being in order to experience beings theoretically or practically. We must understand being—being, which may no longer itself be called a being, being, which does not occur as a being among other beings but which nevertheless must be given and in fact is given in the understanding of being.

§ 3. Philosophy as science of being

We assert now that *being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy*. This is not our own invention; it is a way of putting the theme which comes to life at the beginning of philosophy in antiquity, and it assumes its most grandiose form in Hegel's logic. At present we are merely asserting that being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy. Negatively, this means that philosophy is not a science of beings but of being or, as the Greek expression goes, *ontology*. We take this expression in the widest possible sense and not in the narrower one it has, say, in Scholasticism or in modern philosophy in Descartes and Leibniz.

A discussion of the basic problems of phenomenology then is tantamount to providing fundamental substantiation for this assertion that philosophy is the science of being and establishing how it is such. The discussion should show the possibility and necessity of the absolute science of being and demonstrate its character in the very process of the inquiry. Philosophy is the theoretical conceptual interpretation of being, of being's structure and its possibilities. Philosophy is ontological. In contrast, a world-view is a positing knowledge of beings and a positing attitude toward beings; it is not ontological but ontical. The formation of a world-view falls outside the range of philosophy's tasks, but not because philosophy is in an incomplete condition and does not yet suffice to give a unanimous and universally cogent answer to the questions pertinent to world-views; rather, the formation of a world-view falls outside the range of philosophy's tasks because philosophy in principle does not relate to beings. It is not because of a defect that philosophy renounces the task of forming a world-view but because of a distinctive priority: it deals with what every positing of beings, even the positing done by a world-view, must already presuppose essentially. The distinction between philosophy as science and philosophy as world-view is untenable, not—as it seemed earlier—because scientific philosophy has as its chief end the formation of a world-view and thus would have to be elevated to the level of a world-view philosophy, but because the notion of a world-view philosophy is simply inconceivable. For it implies that philosophy, as science of being, is supposed to adopt specific attitudes toward and posit specific things about beings. To anyone who has even an approximate understanding of the concept of philosophy and its history, the notion of a world-view philosophy is an absurdity. If one term of the distinction between scientific philosophy and world-view philosophy is inconceivable, then the other, too, must be inappropriately conceived. Once it has been seen that world-view philosophy is impossible in principle if it is supposed to be philosophy, then the differentiating adjective "scientific" is no longer necessary for characterising philosophy. That philosophy is scientific is implied in its very concept. It can be shown historically that at bottom all the great philosophies since antiquity more or less explicitly took themselves to be, and as such sought to be, ontology. In a similar way, however, it can also be shown that these attempts failed over and over again and why they had to fail. I gave the historical proof of this in my courses of the last two semesters, one on ancient philosophy and the other on

the history of philosophy from Thomas Aquinas to Kant. We shall not now refer to this historical demonstration of the nature of philosophy, a demonstration having its own peculiar character. Let us rather in the whole of the present course try to establish philosophy on its own basis, so far as it is a work of human freedom. Philosophy must legitimate by its own resources its claim to be universal ontology.

In the meantime, however, the statement that philosophy is the science of being remains a pure assertion. Correspondingly, the elimination of world-view formation from the range of philosophical tasks has not yet been warranted. We raised this distinction between scientific philosophy and world-view philosophy in order to give a provisional clarification of the concept of philosophy and to demarcate it from the popular concept. The clarification and demarcation, again, were provided in order to account for the selection of the concrete phenomenological problems to be dealt with next and to remove from the choice the appearance of complete arbitrariness.

Philosophy is the science of being. For the future we shall mean by "philosophy" scientific philosophy and nothing else. In conformity with this usage, all non-philosophical sciences have as their theme some being or beings, and indeed in such a way that they are in every case antecedently given as beings to those sciences. They are posited by them in advance; they are a *positum* for them. All the propositions of the non-philosophical sciences, including those of mathematics, are positive propositions. Hence, to distinguish them from philosophy, we shall call all non-philosophical sciences positive sciences. Positive sciences deal with that which is, with beings; that is to say, they always deal with specific domains, for instance, nature. Within a given domain scientific research again cuts out particular spheres: nature as physically material lifeless nature and nature as living nature. It divides the sphere of the living into individual fields: the plant world, the animal world. Another domain of beings is history; its spheres are art history, political history, history of science, and history of religion. Still another domain of beings is the pure space of geometry, which is abstracted from space pre-theoretically uncovered in the environing world. The beings of these domains are familiar to us even if at first and for the most part we are not in a position to delimit them sharply and clearly from one another. We can, of course, always name, as a provisional description which satisfies practically the purpose of positive science, some being that falls within the domain. We can always bring before ourselves, as it were, a particular being from a particular domain as an example. Historically, the actual partitioning of domains comes about not according to some preconceived plan of a system of science but in conformity with the current research problems of the positive sciences.

We can always easily bring forward and picture to ourselves some being belonging to any given domain. As we are accustomed to say, we are able to think something about it. What is the situation here with philosophy's object? Can something like being be imagined? If we try to do this, doesn't our head start to swim? Indeed, at first we are baffled and find ourselves clutching at thin air. A being—that's something, a table, a chair, a tree, the sky, a body, some words, an action. A being, yes, indeed—but being? It looks like nothing—and no less a thinker than Hegel said that being and nothing are the same. Is philosophy as science of being the science of nothing? At the outset of our considerations, without raising any false hopes and without mincing matters, we must confess that under the heading of being we can at first think to ourselves nothing. On the other hand, it is just as certain that we are constantly thinking being. We think being just as often as, daily, on innumerable occasions, whether aloud or silently, we say "This *is* such and such," "That other is *not* so," "That *was*," "It *will* be." In each use of a verb we have already thought, and have always in some way understood, being. We understand immediately "Today is Saturday; the sun is up." We understand the "is" we use in speaking, although we do not comprehend it conceptually. The meaning of this "is" remains closed to us. This understanding of the "is" and of being in general is so much a matter of course that it was possible for the dogma to spread in philosophy uncontested to the present day that being is the simplest and most self-evident concept, that it is neither susceptible of nor in need of definition. Appeal is made to common sense. But wherever common sense is taken to be philosophy's highest court of appeal, philosophy must become suspicious. In *On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism*, Hegel says: "Philosophy by its very nature is esoteric; for itself it is neither made for the masses nor is it susceptible of being cooked up for them. It is philosophy only because it goes exactly contrary to the understanding and thus even more so to 'sound common sense,' the so-called healthy human understanding, which actually means the local and temporary vision of some limited generation of human beings. To that generation the world of philosophy is in and for itself a topsy-turvy, an inverted, world. The demands and

standards of common sense have no right to claim any validity or to represent any authority in regard to what philosophy is and what it is not.

What if being were the most complex and most obscure concept? What if arriving at the concept of being were the most urgent task of philosophy, the task which has to be taken up ever anew? Today, when philosophising is so barbarous, so much like a St. Vitus' dance, as perhaps in no other period of the cultural history of the West, and when nevertheless the resurrection of metaphysics is hawked up and down all the streets, what Aristotle says on one of his most important investigations in the *Metaphysics* has been completely forgotten. "That which has been sought for from of old and now and in the future and constantly, and that on which inquiry founders over and over again, is the problem What is being?" If philosophy is the science of being, then the first and last and basic problem of philosophy must be, What does being signify? Whence can something like being in general be understood? How is understanding of being at all possible?

§ 4. The four theses about being and the basic problems of phenomenology

Before we broach these fundamental questions, it will be worthwhile first to make ourselves familiar for once with discussions about being. To this end we shall deal in the first part of the course with some characteristic theses about being as individual concrete phenomenological problems, theses that have been advocated in the course of the history of Western philosophy since antiquity. In this connection we are interested, not in the historical contexts of the philosophical inquiries within which these theses about being make their appearance, but in their specifically inherent content. This content is to be discussed critically, so that we may make the transition from it to the above-mentioned basic problems of the science of being. The discussion of these theses should at the same time render us familiar with the phenomenological way of dealing with problems relating to being. We choose four such theses:

1. Kant's thesis: Being is not a real predicate.
2. The thesis of medieval ontology (Scholasticism) which goes back to Aristotle: To the constitution of the being of a being there belong (a) whatness, essence (*Was-sein, essentia*), and (b) existence or extantness (*existentia, Vorhandensein*).
3. The thesis of modern ontology: The basic ways of being are the being of nature (*res extensa*) and the being of mind (*res cogitans*).
4. The thesis of logic in the broadest sense: Every being, regardless of its particular way of being, can be addressed and talked about by means of the "is." The being of the copula.

These theses seem at first to have been gathered together arbitrarily. Looked at more closely, however, they are interconnected in a most intimate way. Attention to what is denoted in these theses leads to the insight that they cannot be brought up adequately—not even as problems—as long as *the fundamental question* of the whole science of being has not been put and answered: *the question of the meaning of being in general*. The second part of our course will deal with this question. Discussion of the basic question of the meaning of being in general and of the problems arising from that question constitutes the entire stock of basic problems of phenomenology in their systematic order and their foundation. For the present we delineate the range of these problems only roughly.

On what path can we advance toward the meaning of being in general? Is not the question of the meaning of being and the task of an elucidation of this concept a pseudo-problem if, as usual, the opinion is held dogmatically that being is the most general and simplest concept? What is the source for defining this concept and in what direction is it to be resolved?

Something like being reveals itself to us in the understanding of being, an understanding that lies at the root of all comportment toward beings. Comportment toward beings belongs, on its part, to a definite being, the being which we ourselves are, the human *Dasein*. It is to the human *Dasein* that there belongs the understanding of being which first of all makes possible every comportment toward beings. The understanding of being has itself the mode of being of the human *Dasein*. The more originally and appropriately we define this being in regard to the structure of its being, that is to say, ontologically, the more securely we are placed in a position to comprehend in its structure

the understanding of being that belongs to the *Dasein*, and the more clearly and unequivocally the question can then be posed, What is it that makes this understanding of being possible at all? Whence—that is, from which antecedently given horizon—do we understand the like of being?

The analysis of the understanding of being in regard to what is specific to this understanding and what is understood in it or its intelligibility presupposes an analytic of the *Dasein* ordered to that end. This analytic has the task of exhibiting the basic constitution of the human *Dasein* and of characterising the meaning of the *Dasein's* being. In this ontological analytic of the *Dasein*, the original constitution of the *Dasein's* being is revealed to be *temporality*. The interpretation of temporality leads to a more radical understanding and conceptual comprehension of time than has been possible hitherto in philosophy. The familiar concept of time as traditionally treated in philosophy is only an offshoot of temporality as the original meaning of the *Dasein*. If temporality constitutes the meaning of the being of the human *Dasein* and if understanding of being belongs to the constitution of the *Dasein's* being, then this understanding of being, too, must be possible only on the basis of temporality. Hence there arises the prospect of a possible confirmation of the thesis that time is the horizon from which something like being becomes at all intelligible. We interpret being by way of time (*tempus*). The interpretation is a Temporal one. The fundamental subject of research in ontology, as determination of the meaning of being by way of time, is *Temporality*.

We said that ontology is the science of being. But being is always the being of a being. Being is essentially different from a being, from beings. How is the distinction between being and beings to be grasped? How can its possibility be explained? If being is not itself a being, how then does it nevertheless belong to beings, since, after all, beings and only beings are? What does it mean to say that being belongs to beings? The correct answer to this question is the basic presupposition needed to set about the problems of ontology regarded as the science of being. We must be able to bring out clearly the difference between being and beings in order to make something like being the theme of inquiry. This distinction is not arbitrary; rather, it is the one by which the theme of ontology and thus of philosophy itself is first of all attained. It is a distinction which is first and foremost constitutive for ontology. We call it the *ontological difference*—the differentiation between being and beings. Only by making this distinction—*krinein* in Greek—not between one being and another being but between being and beings do we first enter the field of philosophical research. Only by taking this critical stance do we keep our own standing inside the field of philosophy. Therefore, in distinction from the sciences of the things that are, of beings, ontology, or philosophy in general, is the critical science, or the science of the inverted world. With this distinction between being and beings and that selection of being as theme we depart in principle from the domain of beings. We surmount it, transcend it. We can also call the science of being, a critical science, *transcendental science*. In doing so we are not simply taking over unaltered the concept of the transcendental in Kant, although we are indeed adopting its original sense and its true tendency, perhaps still concealed from Kant. We are surmounting beings in order to reach being. Once having made the ascent we shall not again descend to a being, which, say, might lie like another world behind the familiar beings. The transcendental science of being has nothing to do with popular metaphysics, which deals with some being behind the known beings; rather, the scientific concept of metaphysics is identical with the concept of philosophy in general—critically transcendental science of being, ontology. It is easily seen that the ontological difference can be cleared up and carried out unambiguously for ontological inquiry only if and when the meaning of being in general has been explicitly brought to light, that is to say, only when it has been shown how temporality makes possible the distinguishability between being and beings. Only on the basis of this consideration can the Kantian thesis that being is not a real predicate be given its original sense and adequately explained.

Every being is *something*, it has its what and as such has a specific possible *mode of being*. In the first part of our course, while discussing the second thesis, we shall show that ancient as well as medieval ontology dogmatically enunciated this proposition—that to each being there belongs a what and way of being, *essentia* and *existentia*—as if it were self-evident. For us the question arises, Can the reason every being must and can have a what, *a ti*, and a possible way of being be grounded in the meaning of being itself, that is to say, Temporally? Do these characteristics, whatness and way of being, taken with sufficient breadth, belong to being itself? "Is" being articulated by means of these characteristics in accordance with its essential nature? With this we are now confronted by *the problem of the basic articulation of being*, the question of the necessary

belonging-together of *whatness* and *way-of-being* and of the *belonging of the two of them in their unity to the idea of being in general*.

Every being has a way-of-being. The question is whether this way-of-being has the same character in every being—as ancient ontology believed and subsequent periods have basically had to maintain even down to the present—or whether individual ways-of-being are mutually distinct. Which are the basic ways of being? Is there a multiplicity? How is the variety of ways-of-being possible and how is it at all intelligible, given the meaning of being? How can we speak at all of a unitary concept of being despite the variety of ways-of-being? These questions can be consolidated into *the problem of the possible modifications of being and the unity of being's variety*.

Every being with which we have any dealings can be addressed and spoken of by saying "it is" thus and so, regardless of its specific mode of being. We meet with a being's being in the understanding of being. It is understanding that first of all opens up or, as we say, discloses or reveals something like being. Being is given only in the specific disclosedness that characterises the understanding of being. But we call the disclosedness of something truth. That is the proper concept of truth, as it already begins to dawn in antiquity. Being is given only if there is disclosure, that is to say, if there is truth. But there is truth only if a being exists which opens up, which discloses, and indeed in such a way that disclosure itself belongs to the mode of being of this being. We ourselves are such a being. The *Dasein* itself exists in the truth. To the *Dasein* there belongs essentially a disclosed world and with that the disclosedness of the *Dasein* itself. The *Dasein*, by the nature of its existence, is "in" truth, and only because it is "in" truth does it have the possibility of being "in" untruth. Being is given only if truth, hence if the *Dasein*, exists. And only for this reason is it not merely possible to address beings but within certain limits sometimes—presupposing that the *Dasein* exists—necessary. We shall consolidate these problems of the interconnectedness between being and truth into *the problem of the truth-character of being (veritas transcendentalis)*.

We have thus identified four groups of problems that constitute the content of the second part of the course: the problem of the ontological difference, the problem of the basic articulation of being, the problem of the possible modifications of being in its ways of being, the problem of the truth-character of being. The four theses treated provisionally in the first part correspond to these four basic problems. More precisely, looking backward from the discussion of the basic problems in the second half, we see that the problems with which we are provisionally occupied in the first part, following the lead of these theses, are not accidental but grow out of the inner systematic coherence of the general problem of being.

§ 5. The character of ontological method

The three basic components of Phenomenological method

Our conduct of the ontological investigation in the first and second parts opens up for us at the same time a view of the way in which these phenomenological investigations proceed. This raises the question of the character of method in ontology. Thus we come to the third part of the course: the scientific method of ontology and the idea of phenomenology.

The method of ontology, that is, of philosophy in general, is distinguished by the fact that ontology has nothing in common with any method of any of the other sciences, all of which as positive sciences deal with beings. On the other hand, it is precisely the analysis of the truth-character of being which shows that being also is, as it were, based in a being, namely, in the *Dasein*. Being is given only if the understanding of being, hence the *Dasein*, exists. This being accordingly lays claim to a distinctive priority in ontological inquiry. It makes itself manifest in all discussions of the basic problems of ontology and above all in the fundamental question of the meaning of being in general. The elaboration of this question and its answer requires a general analytic of the *Dasein*. Ontology has for its fundamental discipline the analytic of the *Dasein*. This implies at the same time that ontology cannot be established in a purely ontological manner. Its possibility is referred back to a being, that is, to something ontical—the *Dasein*. Ontology has an ontical foundation, a fact which is manifest over and over again in the history of philosophy down to the present. For example, it is expressed as early as Aristotle's dictum that the first science, the science of being, is theology. As the work of the freedom of the human *Dasein*, the possibilities and destinies of philosophy are bound up with man's existence, and thus with temporality and with historicity,

and indeed in a more original sense than is any other science. Consequently, in clarifying the scientific character of ontology, *the first task is the demonstration of its ontical foundation* and the characterisation of this foundation itself.

The *second task* consists in distinguishing the mode of knowing operative in ontology as science of being, and this requires us to *work out the methodological structure of ontological-transcendental differentiation*. In early antiquity it was already seen that being and its attributes in a certain way underlie beings and precede them and so are a *proteron*, an earlier. The term denoting this character by which being precedes beings is the expression *a priori*, *apriority*, being earlier or prior. As *a priori*, being is earlier than beings. The meaning of this *a priori*, the sense of the earlier and its possibility, has never been cleared up. The question has not even once been raised as to why the determinations of being and being itself must have as character of priority and how such priority is possible. To be earlier is a determination of time, but it does not pertain to the temporal order of the time that we measure by the clock; rather, it is an earlier that belongs to the "inverted world." Therefore, this earlier which characterises being is taken by the popular understanding to be the later. Only the interpretation of being by way of temporality can make clear why and how this feature of being earlier, *apriority*, goes together with being. The *a priori* character of being and of all the structures of being accordingly calls for a specific kind of approach and way of apprehending being—a *priori cognition*.

The basic components of *a priori* cognition constitute what we call *phenomenology*. Phenomenology is the name for the method of ontology, that is, of scientific philosophy. Rightly conceived, phenomenology is the concept of a method. It is therefore precluded from the start that phenomenology should pronounce any theses about being which have specific content, thus adopting a so-called standpoint.

We shall not enter into detail concerning which ideas about phenomenology are current today, instigated in part by phenomenology itself. We shall touch briefly on just one example. It has been said that my work is Catholic phenomenology—presumably because it is my conviction that thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus also understood something of philosophy, perhaps more than the moderns. But the concept of a Catholic phenomenology is even more absurd than the concept of a Protestant mathematics. Philosophy as science of being is fundamentally distinct in method from any other science. The distinction in method between, say, mathematics and classical philology is not as great as the difference between mathematics and philosophy or between philology and philosophy. The breadth of the difference between philosophy and the positive sciences, to which mathematics and philology belong, cannot at all be estimated quantitatively. In ontology, being is supposed to be grasped and comprehended conceptually by way of the phenomenological method, in connection with which we may observe that, while phenomenology certainly arouses lively interest today, what it seeks and aims at was already vigorously pursued in Western philosophy from the very beginning.

Being is to be laid hold of and made our theme. Being is always being of beings and accordingly it becomes accessible at first only by starting with some being. Here the phenomenological vision which does the apprehending must indeed direct itself toward a being, but it has to do so in such a way that the being of this being is thereby brought out so that it may be possible to mathematise it. Apprehension of being, ontological investigation, always turns, at first and necessarily, to some being; but then, *in a precise way, it is led away from that being and led back to its being*. We call this basic component of phenomenological method—the leading back or reduction of investigative vision from a naively apprehended being to being *phenomenological reduction*. We are thus adopting a central term of Husserl's phenomenology in its literal wording though not in its substantive intent. For Husserl the phenomenological reduction, which he worked out for the first time expressly in the *Ideas Toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. For us phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed). Like every other scientific method, phenomenological method grows and changes due to the progress made

precisely with its help into the subjects under investigation. Scientific method is never a technique. As soon as it becomes one it has fallen away from its own proper nature.

Phenomenological reduction as the leading of our vision from beings to being nevertheless is not the only basic component of phenomenological method; in fact, it is not even the central component. For this guidance of vision back from beings to being requires at the same time that we should bring ourselves forward toward being itself. Pure aversion from beings is a merely negative methodological measure which not only needs to be supplemented by a positive one but expressly requires us to be led toward being; it thus requires guidance. Being does not become accessible like a being. We do not simply find it in front of us. As is to be shown, it must always be brought to view in a free projection. This projecting of the antecedently given being upon its being and the structures of its being we call phenomenological construction.

But the method of phenomenology is likewise not exhausted by phenomenological construction. We have heard that every projection of being occurs in a reductive recursion from beings. The consideration of being takes its start from beings. This commencement is obviously always determined by the factual experience of beings and the range of possibilities of experience that at any time are peculiar to a factual *Dasein*, and hence to the historical situation of a philosophical investigation. It is not the case that at all times and for everyone all beings and all specific domains of beings are accessible in the same way; and, even if beings are accessible inside the range of experience, the question still remains whether, within naive and common experience, they are already suitably understood in their specific mode of being. Because the *Dasein* is historical in its own existence, possibilities of access and modes of interpretation of beings are themselves diverse, varying in different historical circumstances. A glance at the history of philosophy shows that many domains of beings were discovered very early—nature, space, the soul—but that, nevertheless, they could not yet be comprehended in their specific being. As early as antiquity a common or average concept of being came to light, which was employed for the interpretation of all the beings of the various domains of being and their modes of being, although their specific being itself, taken expressly in its structure, was not made into a problem and could not be defined. Thus Plato saw quite well that the soul, with its logos, is a being different from sensible being. But he was not in a position to demarcate the specific mode of being of this being from the mode of being of any other being or non-being. Instead, for him as well as for Aristotle and subsequent thinkers down to Hegel, and all the more so for their successors, all ontological investigations proceed within an average concept of being in general. Even the ontological investigation which we are now conducting is determined by its historical situation and, therewith, by certain possibilities of approaching beings and by the preceding philosophical tradition. The store of basic philosophical concepts derived from the philosophical tradition is still so influential today that this effect of tradition can hardly be overestimated. It is for this reason that all philosophical discussion, even the most radical attempt to begin all over again, is pervaded by traditional concepts and thus by traditional horizons and traditional angles of approach, which we cannot assume with unquestionable certainty to have arisen originally and genuinely from the domain of being and the constitution of being they claim to comprehend. It is for this reason that there necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of being and its structures, that is, to the reductive construction of being, a **destruction**—a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed down to the sources from which they were drawn. Only by means of this destruction can ontology fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts.

These three basic components of phenomenological method—reduction, construction, destruction—belong together in their content and must receive grounding in their mutual pertinence. Construction in philosophy is necessarily destruction, that is to say, a de-constructing of traditional concepts carried out in a historical recursion to the tradition. And this is not a negation of the tradition or a condemnation of it as worthless; quite the reverse, it signifies precisely a positive appropriation of tradition. Because destruction belongs to construction, philosophical cognition is essentially at the same time, in a certain sense, historical cognition. History of philosophy, as it is called, belongs to the concept of philosophy as science, to the concept of phenomenological investigation. The history of philosophy is not an arbitrary appendage to the business of teaching philosophy, which provides an occasion for picking up some convenient and easy theme for passing an examination or even for just looking around to see how things were in earlier times. Knowledge of the

history of philosophy is intrinsically unitary on its own account, and the specific mode of historical cognition in philosophy differs in its object from all other scientific knowledge of history.

The method of ontology thus delineated makes it possible to characterise the idea of phenomenology distinctively as the scientific procedure of philosophy. We therewith gain the possibility of defining the concept of philosophy more concretely. Thus our considerations in the third part lead back again to the starting point of the course.

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/heidegge.htm> (6 Nov 09)