**Phenomenology Seminar— “What is phenomenology?” (Nicola Spano)**

Notes provided by Nous Monkey

Email: [nousmonkey@gmail.com](mailto:nousmonkey@gmail.com)

Content from Nicola Spano (the teacher of this phenomenology seminar).

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Note: The content below is from the Phenomenology Seminar in 2020. The content makes references to previous notions mentioned in the course but not in these notes. For background information: read: *The Idea of Phenomenology* by Husserl (also check Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or The International Encyclopedia of Philosophy for more details). The notes below are about: “The train of thought” (last chapter of *The Idea of Phenomenology)* and Heidegger’s introduction to *Being and Time*. (Permission for using the teacher’s notes has been approved). These notes do not cover the entire material in the course, they were given to students during the corona period.

**The train of Thought**

Let us review Husserl’s idea of phenomenology by reading the main passages of the ‘train of thought’ that he wrote after giving the five lectures.

At the beginning of this train of thought of the lectures, Husserl writes:

Natural thought in life and in science is untroubled by the difficulties concerning the possibility of knowledge, while philosophical thought is determined by the position taken with respect to the problems of the possibility of knowledge. [p. 61]

In our *natural attitude of thinking*, which we adopt both in our daily life and in the empirical science, *we take for granted the possibility to know*. This is not the case in the *philosophical attitude of thinking*, in which *we wonder how knowledge is possible*.

But what does it mean exactly that we wonder how knowledge is possible? Husserl writes:

The perplexities in which the reflection on the possibility of a knowledge that makes contact with the things themselves becomes involved: how can knowledge be sure that it corresponds to things as they exist in themselves, that it "makes contact" with them? [p.61]

The investigation into the possibility of knowledge *aims to determinate how an act of knowledge can actually ‘grasp’ or ‘make contact with’ the known object*, which exists and is what it is irrespectively of whether any individual knowing subject knows it or not.

According to Husserl, if we employ the method of the empirical sciences to investigate how knowledge is possible at all, *we end up not just with falsities about the very possibility of knowing, but more radically, with absurdities (i.e., contradictions)*:

Absurdity: when one engages in natural reflection upon knowledge and subordinates it and its achievements to the natural system of thought found in the sciences, one at first gets involved in theories that, although initially attractive, invariably end up in contradiction or absurdity. - Tendency toward blatant skepticism. [p.61]

Since he already gave such an explanation in the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, in the *Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl does not explain why the method of the empirical sciences is unsuitable to carry out a critique of the possibility of knowledge. Long story short, in this earlier work Husserl argues that *any attempt at explaining knowledge in terms of a psychophysical event fails to account for the very possibility of its objectively validity*. As a result, all the empirical sciences that try to account for the possibility of knowledge fall prey to absurdity or contradiction, insofar as, by reducing knowledge to a psychophysical fact, these sciences deny the very principles that make them possible as objectively valid theories. A self-refuting skepticism is the outcome.

Against this background, Husserl argues that “the method of the critique of knowledge is the phenomenological method” (p. 61). How can we, by means of this method, investigate into the possibility of knowledge? Husserl writes:

At any rate, if epistemology is to address the possibility of knowledge, then it must possess forms of knowledge concerning the possibility of knowledge that are themselves indubitable, that count as knowledge in the strictest sense - where there is absolutely no doubt about their own possibility or the fact that they have made contact with their object. If we become unclear or uncertain as to how it is possible for knowledge to reach its object, and if we are then inclined to doubt whether such a thing is possible, then we must first consider indubitable cases of knowledge or possible knowledge - ones where knowledge actually reaches, or would reach, its object. [p. 62]

In order to start a critique of knowledge we need to find, through the phenomenological method, *forms of knowledge concerning the very possibility of knowledge that are indubitable*. If we do not do that, we end up with skepticism. But where can we find such forms of knowledge? In order to answer this question, we should first of all reflect on what makes knowledge dubitable or indubitable. For instance, why do we take, in the footsteps of Descartes, the sphere of the so-called *cogitationes* as indubitable? In this regard, Husserl writes:

One answer - and this is the obvious answer in terms of the conceptual pair or word pair immanence and transcendence. The intuitive knowledge of the cogitatio is immanent, the knowledge that belongs to the objective sciences - the natural and the human sciences, and, upon closer consideration, the mathematical sciences as well is transcendent. With the objective sciences comes transcendence, which is always questionable. One can ask: how can knowledge reach out beyond itself, how can it make contact with a being that is not to be found within the confines of consciousness? With the intuitive knowledge of the cogitatio, this difficulty falls away. [p. 62]

At a first glance, we believe that the dubitability of knowledge depends on the fact that *reality is external to our mind*. On this view, the known object *transcends the act of knowledge* in the sense that *it is not contained, as a part, in this mental act*. Our doubt, then, concerns precisely how we can ascertain that the mental act of knowledge ‘goes beyond’ itself and grasps the object existing outside of it. Accordingly, we have no doubt when the known object is, instead, internal to our mind. In this case, the object is *immanent to the act of knowledge* in the sense that *it is contained, as a part, in this very act*. Since the *cogitationes* are inside of the mind, the knowledge of them is indubitable. In the natural attitude of thinking, this understanding of transcendence and immanence in terms of containment receives a psychophysical interpretation. As Husserl says:

At first one is inclined to interpret, as if it were entirely obvious, immanence as real [reelle] immanence, indeed, as real [reale] immanence in the psychological sense: the object of knowledge also exists in the experience of knowing, or in the consciousness of the ego, to which the experience belongs, as a real actuality. One takes it to be a simple matter of course that the act of knowing finds and makes contact with its object in the same consciousness and in the same real [realen] now. The immanent is in me, the beginner will say at this point, and the transcendent is outside of me. [p. 62-63]

That said, Husserl points out that the difference between transcendence and immanence is more complicated than the one pictured above:

Upon closer examination, however, one can distinguish between real [reelle] immanence and immanence in the sense of the self-givenness that constitutes itself in evidence. What is really [reell] immanent counts as indubitable precisely because it presents nothing else, it refers to nothing "beyond" itself, because here what is meant is also adequately self-given, full and complete. At first any form of self- givenness other than the self-givenness of the really [reell] immanent is not yet in view. [p. 62]

Upon closer reflection, we realize that the knowledge of the *cogitationes* is indubitable not so much because the *cogitationes* are immanent in the sense of being inside of the mind or consciousness, but rather because the *cogitationes* are *immanent in the sense of being adequately self-given*, such that *the act of knowledge directed at them does not mean anything that is beyond their appearance*. Husserl develops this insight by characterizing knowledge in terms of ‘evidence’, namely as the *identity between what is meant and what is given*. On this view, we have indubitable knowledge when we intend the known object only according to the features that this object itself, and not an image or a representative of it, presents to us in appearance:

For "things to be given" is for them to present themselves (to be represented) as such in these phenomena [i.e. perceiving, recollecting, imagining, judging, etc.; NS]. And this does not mean that the things are once again there for themselves and then "send their representatives into consciousness." [...] Rather, things exist, and exist in appearance, and are themselves given by virtue of appearance; to be sure, taken individually, they exist, or hold, independently of appearance - insofar as nothing depends on this particular appearance (on this consciousness of givenness) - but essentially, according to their essence, they cannot be separated from appearance. [p. 68]

On the basis of the insight that indubitable knowledge depends on the self-givenness of the object, Husserl formulates the methodological principle needed to carry out the critique of knowledge. This methodological principle is that of the *phenomenological reduction*:

As a result [of the reflection upon what indubitable knowledge is; NS], the concept of the phenomenological reduction acquires a more precise and deeper determination, and a clearer sense: it is not the exclusion of the really [reell] transcendent (say, in the psychological-empirical sense), rather it is the exclusion of the transcendent as such, as an existence to be assumed, that is, everything that is not absolute givenness in the genuine sense - the absolute givenness of pure seeing. [p. 66]

The phenomenological reduction is the *methodological procedure through which I exclude anything transcendent, and, correlatively, I attend only to what is immanent*. It must be noted, though, that the transcendence that I exclude is not what is outside of the act of knowledge, but rather *what is not self-given*, such as all the objects that are theorized in the empirical sciences (e.g. the real world, the psychological ego, psychophysical

processes, etc.) and, more in general, everything that is emptily referred to without its “simply being there” in appearance.

To have this subtle difference in full view is of fundamental importance. Indeed, after the performance of the phenomenological reduction the problem of the possibility of knowledge becomes to understand how, *within the sphere of immanence as absolute self- givenness*, an act of knowledge can make contact with the object:

Thus the question that initially drove us is also reduced: not how can I, this person, in my experiences, make contact with a being in itself, something that exists out there, outside of me; in place of this question, which was ambiguous and, because of its transcendent freight, unstable and complex, we have now a pure basic question: how can the pure phenomenon of knowledge make contact with something that is not immanent to it, how can the absolute self-givenness of knowledge make contact with something that is not self-given, and how is this contact to be understood? [p. 64]

The problem of how the act of knowledge can make contact with the object is still present within the sphere of pure experiences because, as Husserl points out,

even the evident and reduced phenomenon, requires a distinction within immanence between the appearance and that which appears. Thus we have two forms of absolute givenness, the givenness of the appealing and the givenness of the object - and the object within this immanence is not immanent in the real [reellen] sense; it is not a part of the appearance [...]. [p. 67]

Thus, even within the sphere of absolute self-givenness we find *a distinction between the appearance, i.e. the cogitatio or experience, and that which appears, i.e. the object of the appearance*. The latter is not contained, as a part, in the former. The phenomenological critique of knowledge must therefore *investigate how the act of knowledge can, within immanence, make contact with the known object, and it must determine what degree of evidence is possible to achieve depending on the specific mode of givenness characterizing this object.* Indeed, there are different kinds of objects of appearance, or, as Husserl also calls it, ‘intentional objects’. Examples of intentional objects are sensible things, states of affairs, numbers, values, and essences. Essences in particular have a crucial importance for the phenomenological project of a critique of knowledge. Indeed, phenomenology is a science insofar as it does not concern the study of individual experiences or individual intentional objects of knowing, but rather it concerns the study of what essentially pertains to the essence of them. In the fourth lecture, Husserl concisely clarifies this whole point by saying:

If we restrict ourselves to just the phenomenology of knowledge, then we will be concerned with the essence of knowledge that can be exhibited in direct intuition. That is, we will be concerned with the exhibition and analytical partitioning of the various sorts of phenomena that are embraced by the broad title "knowledge" within the framework of the phenomenological reduction and self-givenness. Then the question is: what is essentially contained and grounded in such phenomena; from what factors are they constructed; what possibilities of combination do they found

when they are taken essentially and as purely immanent; and what general relations flow from them? And here we will not only be concerned with what is really [reell] immanent, but also with what is immanent in the intentional sense. It belongs to the essence of cognitive experiences to have an intentio: they refer to something; they relate themselves in one way or another to an objectivity. This "relating itself to an objectivity" belongs to them even if the objectivity does not. What is objective can appear, can achieve a certain givenness within appearance, even though it neither really exists in the phenomenon of knowing nor as a cogitatio. To explain the essence of knowledge, and to bring the essential connections that belong to it to self- givenness, is to inquire into both of these sides, to investigate this relation that belongs to the essence of knowledge. Here lie the riddles, the mysteries, the problems concerning the final sense of the objectivity of knowledge, including its validity or invalidity when it is a matter of judgment, its adequation when it is a matter of evidence, etc. [p. 55]

**Being and Time**

At the beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger states very concisely the aim of this work:

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being. But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression 'Being'? Not at all. So first of all we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question. Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely. [p. 20]

The aim of *Being and Time* is first of all “ to work out the question of the meaning of Being”, that is, *to clarify what this question is asking exactly and why it is important to pose such a question*. We should note, then, that the aim of *Being and Time* is not that of immediately clarifying the meaning of Being, but rather it is that of clarifying *the question* of the meaning of Being. Indeed, Heidegger points out that, despite the fact that we do not understand what we really mean by 'Being', we do not raise the question of its meaning at all.

For Heidegger *the clarification of the question of the meaning of Being requires the phenomenological method*. This may come as no surprise to someone, since we saw that also Husserl states something apparently similar, when, in the *Idea of Phenomenology*, he argues that a science of being in the absolute and final sense depends on the success of phenomenology. However, great care is needed here and one should refrain from drawing a simplistic analogy between Husserl and Heidegger. In fact, for Heidegger *phenomenology is not a science, which, in the form of epistemology, investigates into the essence of knowledge*. *Nor is a science the ontology which, on the ground of the phenomenological method, strives to disclose the meaning of Being*.

With this difference in mind, let us move on to the discussion of the introductory remarks in *Being and Time*.

**§I. The Necessity for Explicitly Restating the Question of Being**

In this section, Heidegger clarifies the reason why the question of the meaning of Being is no longer raised by us. To begin with, he writes:

This question has today been forgotten. Even though in our time we deem it progressive to give our approval to 'metaphysics' again, it is held that we have been exempted from the exertions of a newly rekindled *gigantomachia peri tēs ousias* [i.e. the “battle of giants concerning being”; NS]. Yet the question we are touching upon is not just any question. It is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from then on as a theme for actual investigation. What these two men achieved was to persist through many alterations and 'retouchings' down to the 'logic' of Hegel. And what they wrested with the utmost intellectual effort from the phenomena, fragmentary and incipient though it was, has long since become trivialized. [p.21]

The question of the meaning of Being “*has today been forgotten*”, in the sense that we do not feel the need to revive the “battle of giants concerning being”. These giants are the Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, Plato’s and Aristotle’s achievements in understanding the meaning of Being, although fragmentary and incipient, should have motivated us to keep posing the question of the meaning of Being so as to gain a clearer understanding. On the contrary, over time their achievements has become trivialized to the point that we are no longer pushed to pose this question.

In more detail, Heidegger argues that

On the basis of the Greeks' initial contributions towards an Interpretation of Being, a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect. It is said that 'Being' is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and hence indefinable concept require any definition, for everyone uses it constantly and already understands what he means by it. In this way, that which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden has taken on a clarity and self-evidence such that if anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method. [p. 21]

In the pages 22-24 that follow the passage quoted above, Heidegger deepens the prejudices that strengthen the belief into the unnecessity of posing the question of the meaning of Being. They are:

* -  The prejudice that, *although Being is the most universal concept, Being is not a class or genus of all things that are* (i.e. entities).[[1]](#footnote-1)Heidegger agrees that the universality of Being is not that of a class or genus, but he points out that this cannot mean that Being is the clearest concept or that it needs no further discussion. On the contrary, Being is the darkest of all concepts.
* -  The prejudice that *the concept of Being is indefinable*.[[2]](#footnote-2) Heidegger agrees that Being cannot be defined as done in traditional logic. Indeed, traditional logic is for him based on Ancient ontology and is, under certain limits, justified only to define entities but not Being itself. And yet, the indefinability of Being does not eliminate the question of its meaning. On the contrary, it demands that we take this question even more seriously.

- The prejudice that *Being is a self-evident concept*. Heidegger agrees with this claim only to the extent that we take it to mean that, in our everyday life, we understand all expressions in which Being is said “without further ado”. Yet for him this does not prove that Being is a self-evident concept, but only that we have a vague and average understanding of it. The very fact that in our daily life we have this as continual as obscure understanding of Being shows us the necessity to raise the question of its meaning again.

In light of these prejudices, Heidegger remarks again that the problem in not just that of clarifying the meaning of Being, but, prior to this, that of clarifying *the very question* of the meaning of Being:

By considering these prejudices, however, we have made plain not only that the question of Being lacks an answer, but that the question itself is obscure and without direction. So if it is to be revived, this means that we must first work out an adequate way of formulating it. [p. 24]

**§2. The Formal Structure of the Question of Being**

In this section, Heidegger tries to find a way for an adequate formulation of the question of Being. In order to do that, he clarifies first of all the structure of any question whatsoever. In any inquiry (i.e. questioning), he argues that we always have the following factors [pp. 24-25]:

* -  Every inquiry is a seeking, which, as such, is guided beforehand by what is sought.[[3]](#footnote-3) For example, if I ask my friend Firat whether he is doing well after his operation, I am already familiar with the meaning of ‘be doing well’, with the fact that it takes time to recover after an operation, etc.
* -  Every inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has thus ‘that which is asked about’. In my example, that which is asked about is Firat’s health.
* -  Within that which is asked about, there lies ‘that which is to be found out’ by the asking, that is, ‘that which is really intended’ through it. Once that which is really intended is discovered, the inquiry reaches its goal. For example, that which I really intend through my asking is to know whether my friend Firat is getting better after his operation. Once I discover it, I accomplish the goal of my asking.
* - Every inquiry has, in addition to what is asked about, ‘that which is interrogated’. For example, that which is interrogated is my friend Firat.

Heidegger remarks that any adequate formulation of a question in general and of the question of Being in particular requires that we fully clarify all the factors mentioned above:

When one makes an inquiry one may do so 'just casually' or one may formulate the question explicitly. The latter case is peculiar in that the inquiry does not become transparent to itself until all these constitutive factors of the question have themselves become transparent. [p. 24-25]

In the case of the question of Being, then, what is ‘that which is asked about’? How can the inquiry be guided beforehand by it? What is ‘that which is really intended’? What is ‘that which is interrogated’?

We know that ‘*that which is asked about*’ is *Being*. How can the inquiry be guided beforehand *by Being itself*? For Heidegger, it is our *vague average understanding of Being* that guides us in posing the question of its meaning:

* Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way. As we have intimated, we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being. Out of this understanding arise both the explicit question of the meaning of Being and the tendency that leads us towards its conception. We do not know what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What is "Being"?', we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptionally what that 'is' signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact[[4]](#footnote-4)* [p. 25]

‘*That which is really intended*’ in our questioning is a clear understanding of the *meaning of Being*. In this respect, Heidegger points out “what is to be found out by the asking-the meaning of Being-also demands that it be conceived in a way of its own, essentially contrasting with the concepts in which entities acquire their determinate signification” (p. 26). That is to say, the meaning of Being should not be understood in the same way in which we understand entities (i.e. things that are), for Being is not itself an entity. Rather, Being is always the *Being of entities*; after all, is not every inquiry a seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is, in the sense that it exists, and with regard to the fact that it is thus and thus determined, in the sense that it has such and such features? But then, if ‘Being’ means the Being of entities,

then *entities themselves* turn out to be ‘*that which is interrogated*’. As Heidegger says, “these are, so to speak, questioned as regards their Being” (*ibid*.).

The fact that the entities themselves turn out to be what is interrogated pushes Heidegger to make this crucial remark:

But if the characteristics of their Being can be yielded without falsification, then these entities must, on their part, have become accessible as they are in themselves. When we come to what is to be interrogated, the question of Being requires that the right way of access to entities shall have been obtained and secured in advance. [p. 26]

To this point, one could still think that Heidegger is doing nothing but following Husserl. Indeed, Heidegger is advocating here the necessity of *securing in advance the access to entities as they are in themselves*. Is not this task, one may think, the task of a critique of knowledge, which clarifies how it is possible that the knowing subject can grasp the Being of transcendent entities? The answer is no. For Heidegger, securing in advance the access to entities as they are in themselves *does not depend on the success of any critique of knowledge*. To understand the reason why, let us just keep reading the text.

After saying that what is interrogated is the entities themselves, Heidegger notes:

But there are many things which we designate as 'being' ["seiend"], and we do so in various senses. Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at- hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is’. In which entities is the meaning of Being to be discerned? From which entities is the disclosure of Being to take its departure? Is the starting-point optional, or does some particular entity have priority when we come to work out the question of Being? Which entity shall we take for our example, and in what sense does it have priority? [p. 26]

Among the different entities that are, there is actually a specific entity whose priority announces itself. Heidegger calls this entity ‘*Dasein*’:

If the question about Being is to be explicitly formulated and carried through in such a manner as to be completely transparent to itself, then any treatment of it in line with the elucidations we have given requires us to explain how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way of access to it. Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it - all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity -the inquirer- transparent in his own

Being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about - namely, Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "Dasein". If we are to formulate our question explicitly and transparently, we must first give a proper explication of an entity (Dasein), with regard to its Being. [pp. 26-27]

According to Heidegger, when we work out the question of Being Dasein has priority as what is interrogated,. Indeed, *the disclosure of the meaning of Being depends upon the specific mode of Being of this entity*, since it is Dasein that poses the question of Being, looks at it, understands and grasps it conceptually.

It follows, then, that *the specific mode of Being that belongs to Dasein must be clarified if the question of Being in general is to be completely transparent to itself and, thus, adequately formulated*.

**Dasein’s Understanding of its own Being and the Question of Being in General.**

In order to deepen Dasein’s priority as that which is interrogated with respect to the question of Being, let us read the section concerning the *ontical priority* of this question. Indeed, the term ‘ontical priority’ refers precisely to the *entity* which, among all other entities, is privileged with respect to the question of Being. In this respect, Heidegger writes:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being a relationship which itself is one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological. [p. 32]

With respect to the question of Being, Dasein is *ontically distinct* from all other entities insofar as it is *ontological*. Namely, the peculiarity of Dasein is that *it ‘understands’ its own Being*. All other entities, such as trees, stones, rocks, etc., are not ontological, since they do not understand their own Being.

Heidegger points out immediately, tough, that Dasein’s understanding of its own Being is not, first and foremost, a theoretical accomplishment:

Here "Being-ontological" is not yet tantamount to "developing an ontology", So if we should reserve the term "ontology" for that theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities, then what we have had in mind in speaking of Dasein's "Being- ontological" is to be designated as something "pre-ontological". It does not signify simply "being-ontical", however, but rather "being in such a way that one has an understanding of Being". [p. 32]

In understanding its own Being, Dasein does not yet develop an ontology such as those developed by philosophers. For this reason, Heidegger designates the ‘understanding’ of Being that belongs to Dasein as ‘pre-ontological’. Dasein’s understanding of its own Being is thus pre-ontological in the sense that *it is not a theoretical inquiry that is aimed at developing an ontology*. But, then, what kind of understating is this?

In order to answer this question, we should read the whole *Being and Time*! For the purpose of the seminar, there is no need to do that and I will limit myself to clarify, in a very concise manner, Dasein’s understanding of its own Being in light of Heidegger’s fundamental notion of ‘temporality’.

Always in the section on the ontical priority of the question of Being, Heidegger writes:

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. [p. 32]

Heidegger calls the Being of Dasein ‘existence’. In understanding its own existence, *Dasein decides its own possibilities of being*. [[5]](#footnote-5) Later in *Being and Time*, Heidegger will clarify the precise meaning of this understanding by saying that *Dasein is essentially temporal*. Dasein is essentially temporal because, to begin with, *it exists by expecting a possibility*. This possibility is not merely the possible occurrence of some event, but it is a possible Dasein itself. Indeed, the possibility of Being of Dasein is expected conjointly with the expectation of any event. For instance, I exist by expecting my possibility of being teaching again our class in person. Only by expecting this possibility, I can expect the possibility that our seminar will take place in the same manner as before. By expecting its own possibility, Dasein comes toward itself (*auf sich zu*) and, in doing so, Dasein is futural (*zukünftig*). For Heidegger, Dasein’s coming toward itself represents the presupposition of our common concept of future. The reason is that the common concept of future indicates the being not-yet-now of an event in objective time, yet we saw that no event can be disclosed as future if a possible future Dasein is not conjointly expected with it.

Dasein is not temporal only because of its being futural. In fact, Heidegger remarks that, in recollecting or forgetting something, Dasein comports itself toward something as no-longer- now, as past. And like in the case of the future, Dasein does not just recollect or forget a past event, but, in doing so, it also recollects itself in what it already has been. Were this not the case, it would be impossible to disclose the past event as past. For example, if I recollect our past classes, it is only because I recollect, in conjunction with it, my realized past possibility of being teaching those classes. Furthermore, Heidegger observes that the having-been-ness (*Gewesenheit*) of Dasein,[[6]](#footnote-6) if understood in its primary, existential sense, does not mean that Dasein no longer is. On the contrary, the having-been-ness of Dasein is retained and, therefore, Dasein is what is was. As an example, I am who I was, in the sense that I am still the teacher who ran the previous classes of the seminar. And even if I wanted to take distance from this and became unwilling to teach the remaining classes, my past being would still affect my present being, if only because my present being would be precisely that of ‘me being unwilling to teach again’. Thus, what I have been essentially belongs to my present being, and even if I put some distance between me and my past, all the ways in which I do so, e.g. forgetting, repressing, and suppressing, are nothing but modes in which I am my having-been-ness. I cease to be what I have been only when I no longer am, namely when I am dead. Last but not least, Heidegger argues that my having-been-ness not only essentially belongs to my present, but also to my future. Indeed, we saw that in its present being Dasein is always ahead of itself, expecting its own possibility of being. Therefore, in the very act of coming toward itself, Dasein also goes back to what it has been. For example, by coming toward my future possibility of being teaching again our class in person, I go back to my realized past possibility of being teaching in person the previous classes.

In doing so, I *presently* expect to become who I was, as it were. This is, indeed, how Heidegger describes the present in the existential sense of the term. Differently from our common understanding of time, the existential being present of Dasein is not an instant, a point in the unidirectional and irreversible sequence of nows. Instead, Dasein is its present only in its being futural and its being past. In the present, Dasein is enpresenting (*Gegenwärtigen*), that is, it dwells with the entities that are at hand by coming toward its expected possibility of Being and by going back to its having-been-ness. As an example, I dwell with, that is, I am fully present with the entities at hand (which in this case is first of all the computer I am using to write these very comments) by going back to my past being teaching the previous classes and my future being teaching the next ones. After all, it is by keeping these possibilities of mine in view that I am now deciding what to write exactly.

**§7. The phenomenological method of investigation.**

Let us finally examine Heidegger’s conception of phenomenology. According to him, “phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible” (p. 59). We know that the theme of ontology is first of all the Being of Dasein, so let us see why phenomenology can give us a secure access to this Being. Heidegger writes:

With the question of the meaning of Being, our investigation comes up against the fundamental question of philosophy. This is one that must be treated *phenomenologically*. Thus our treatise does not subscribe to a 'standpoint' or represent any special 'direction'; for phenomenology is nothing of either sort, nor can it become so as long as it understands itself. The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the w h a t of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research. The more genuinely a methodological concept is worked out and the more comprehensively it determines the principles on which a science is to be conducted, all the more primordially is it rooted in the way we come to terms with the things themselves, and the farther is it removed from what we call "technical devices", though there are many such devices even in the theoretical disciplines. [pp. 49- 50]

In this passage, we already see the presence of some differences from Husserl’s conception of phenomenology. First of all, Heidegger argues that *the fundamental question of philosophy is the question of the meaning of Being*. In the *Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl argued instead that the fundamental question of philosophy is, first of all, the question of how knowledge is possible. Furthermore, this disagreement with his master on the aim of phenomenology, pushes Heidegger to make another claim that would not receive Husserl’s approval, namely the claim that *phenomenology is a method*, which, as such, simply *characterizes the way in which the research is to be carried out without specifying its object*. In fact, Husserl would agree that phenomenology is a method, yet he would add that phenomenology is also a discipline and, more specifically, a science. As a science, phenomenology has its own field of inquiry, which for Husserl is the sphere of pure experiences and that which appears in them. On the contrary, for Heidegger phenomenology is a method that “makes the Being of entities stand out in full relief” (p. 49). That is to say, phenomenology *serves for the investigation of whatever Being of whatever entity we take into consideration*.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Apart from these differences, Heidegger still follows Husserl with respect to the general idea that phenomenology leads us to the “thing themselves”, instead of manipulating these things as done in technology and even in the theoretical sciences. To clarify what it means to go to the thing themselves, Heidegger offers first a negative characterization, that is, he clarifies what going to the things themselves *is not*:

Thus the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' It is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated; it is opposed to those pseudo-questions which parade themselves as 'problems', often for generations at a time. Yet this maxim, one may rejoin, is abundantly self-evident, and it expresses, moreover, the underlying principle of any scientific knowledge whatsoever. Why should anything so self-evident be taken up explicitly in giving a title to a branch of research? In point of fact, the issue here is a kind of 'self-evidence' which we should like to bring closer to us, so far as it is important to do so in casting light upon the procedure of our treatise. We shall expound only the preliminary conception of phenomenology. [p. 50]

To go to the things themselves is to *not* perform any arbitrary construction of the object under investigation. It is to *not* take the accidental features of this object as fundamental findings about it. It is to *not* presuppose any conception or theory whose truth is dubious. It is to *not* be guided by questions that are improperly formulated. However, Heidegger notes that someone may rejoin that these are methodological prescriptions that we find in any scientific inquiry whatsoever. Therefore, they do not fully make clear why we need a phenomenological method. Furthermore, if we take the things themselves to be what is ‘self-evident’, why do we need such a method to access to them? Is not what is self-evident easily and directly accessible to us?

In order to reply to these objections, a positive characterization of what it means to go to the things themselves is required. Before seeing this characterization, though, I would like that you keep in mind the following: whereas in giving a negative characterization of what it means to go to the things themselves Heidegger does not distance himself from Husserl, he will now take distance from the master. Indeed, for Heidegger *to go to the things themselves does not mean, as it does for Husserl, to make the case that there is an identity between what is meant in an empty judgment and what is given in a intuition.*

**A. The Concept of Phenomenon.**

Heidegger clarifies the meaning of ‘phenomenology’ by analyzing first the meaning of the two terms that make up this word, which are the term ‘phenomenon’ and the term ‘logos’. Then, he analyzes the meaning that results from their composition.

As regards the term ‘phenomenon’, Heidegger writes:

The Greek expression *phaìnómenon* which the term 'phenomenon' goes back, is derived from the verb *phaìnesthai*, which signifies "to show itself". Thus *phaìnómenon* means that which shows itself, the manifest [*das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare*]. *Phaìnesthai* itself is a middle-voiced form which comes from *phaìnō—*to bring to the light of day, to put in the light. *Phaìnō* comes from the stem *tha*—like phṓs, the light, that which is bright*—*in other words, that wherein something can become manifest, visible in itself. Thus we must keep in mind that the expression ‘*phaìnómenon*’ signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifest. Accordingly the *phaìnómena* or 'phenomena' are the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to the light—what the Greeks sometimes identified simply with *tà ónta* (entities). [p. 51]

Heidegger is used to clarify the meaning of terms by tracing them back to their etymological origin. Here, he traces back the meaning of the term ‘phenomenon’ to the meaning of the Ancient Greek term ‘*phaìnómenon’*, which means ‘to show itself’. As for Husserl, also for Heidegger *a phenomenon is thus that which shows itself and it is not a representative (in the form of an image, a sign, an indication, or whatever else) of something else*. Interestingly, though, Heidegger does not characterize the place of manifestation as the place of vision (intuition), such that the phenomenon is what shows itself insofar as it is seen by someone, i.e. the knowing subject. Heidegger will never make a reference to the knowing subject as that to whom the phenomenon shows itself. Instead, he characterizes the place of manifestation as the place where the phenomenon comes to light. *It is insofar as the phenomenon comes to light that it shows itself, without any reference to a putative observer*. Accordingly, *phenomenology is a method to bring to light phenomena, thereby making them show themselves in themselves*. But what are exactly these phenomena that come to light or, at least, can be brought to light? Well, they are nothing but the entities of the world, which in Ancient Greek take the name of *tà ónta*.

Given that, you may be wondering whether also Being, and not just entities, comes to light and gives itself. After all, Heidegger argues that, although Being is always the Being of entities, it should be kept distinct from them. In order to answer this question, Heidegger complicates the pictures he just gave by introducing a different concepts of phenomenon:

each case on the kind of access we have to it. Indeed it is even possible for an entity to show itself as something which in itself it is not. When it shows itself in this way, it 'looks like something or other' *("sieht" ... "so aus wie ... "*]. This kind of showing-itself is what we call "seeming" (*Scheinen*). Thus in Greek too the expression ‘*phaìnómenon’* ("phenomenon") signifies that which looks like something, that which is 'semblant', 'semblance' [*das "Scheinbare", der "Schein"*]. *Phaìnómenon ágathón* means something good which looks like, but 'in actuality' is not, what it gives itself out to be. If we are to have any further understanding of the concept of phenomenon, everything depends on our seeing how what is designated in the first signification of ‘*phaìnómenon’* ('phenomenon' as that which shows itself) and what is designated in the second ('phenomenon' as semblance) are structurally interconnected. Only when the meaning of something is such that it makes a pretension of showing itself—that is, of being a phenomenon—*can* it show itself as something which it is *not*; only then *can* it 'merely look like so-and-so'. When *phaìnómenon* signifies ‘semblance’, the primordial signification (the phenomenon as the manifest) is already included as that upon which the second signification is founded. We shall allot the term 'phenomenon) to this positive and primordial signification of *phaìnómenon*, and distinguish "phenomenon" from "semblance", which is the privative modification of phenomenon" as thus defined. [p. 51]

Heidegger states that there are many ways in which something can show itself. This should be no surprise, as we saw that also Husserl argues that there are different modes of self-givenness. Among the different ways in which an entity can show itself, Heidegger goes on, there is a way in which the entity in question shows itself as something which, in fact, it is not. As an example, you can think about a wax statue that resembles a famous person, let us say Queen Elizabeth. This wax statue depicts so perfectly Queen Elizabeth that, at first, it may even deceive you and make you believe that the person who stands before you is Queen Elizabeth herself. But even when you discover that the wax statue merely looks like Queen Elizabeth, the statue does not simply show itself as something that represents something else, as when, for example, we say that an image of a famous singer represents that singer. The wax statue, more radically than that, continues *to show itself as something that pretends to be something else*. Heidegger calls this specific manner of showing itself "seeming" or ‘semblance’ (*Scheinen*).[[8]](#footnote-8) Also seeming or semblance, as a way of showing itself, is a phenomenon; yet it is a phenomenon in a secondary and derivative sense of the term, which presupposes the meaning of phenomenon in the original sense. Indeed, we understand that something shows itself as something which in itself it is not precisely as a *privative modification* of the fact that something shows itself in itself. Considering our example, we understand that the wax statue shows itself by pretending to be Queen Elisabeth only thanks to the fact that, prior to that, we understand that, in contrast to the mere semblance of the statue, Queen Elizabeth can also show herself in person.

That said, Heidegger points out that these two possible meanings of the term ‘phenomenon’ have nothing to do with the meaning of ‘appearance’ (*Erscheinung*) or ‘mere appearance’ (*blosse Erscheinung*). He writes:

This is what one is talking about when one speaks of the 'symptoms of a disease'. Here one has in mind certain occurrences in the body which show themselves and which, in showing themselves a s thus showing themselves, 'indicate' ["*vindieieren*"] something which does *not* show itself. The emergence [*Auftreten*] of such occurrences, their showing-themselves, goes together with the Being-present-at-hand of disturbances which do not show themselves. Thus appearance, as the appearance 'of something', does *not* mean showing itself; it means rather the announcing-itself of [*von*] something which does not show itself, but which announces itself through something which does show itself. Appearing is *a not- showing-itself*. But the 'not' we find here is by no means to be confused with the privative "not" which we used in defining the structure of semblance. What appears does *not* show itself; and anything which thus fails to show itself, is also something which can never seem. All indications, presentations, symptoms, and symbols have this basic formal structure of appearing, even though they differ among themselves. [pp. 52]

An appearance, Heidegger says here, is “*the announcing-itself of something which does not show itself, but which announces itself through something which does show itself*”. A classic example is that of the symptoms of an illness. The fever that shows itself when I am sick *indicates* something which does not show itself, that is, the flu. Accordingly, we say that the flu *announces* itself through the showing itself of the fever. Thus, the appearance, or, as Heidegger also calls it, the appearing or what appears, is a *not-showing-itself*, and yet, the ‘not’ here has a different meaning from that of a semblance. Whereas a semblance is a not-showing-itself in the sense that it shows itself as something which in fact it is *not*, an appearance is a not-showing- itself in the sense that it does *not* show itself, but it is rather announced by something which shows itself. In the example of the wax statue, Queen Elizabeth shows itself as a semblance, and it is precisely because it does show itself that it counts as such (i.e. as a semblance). On the contrary, the flu does not show itself, and counts as an appearance insofar as it is announced by the fever.

Heidegger goes on by emphasizing the relation of dependence between appearances and phenomena:

In spite of the fact that 'appearing' is never a showing-itself in the sense of "phenomenon", appearing is possible only *by reason of a showing-itself of something*. But this showing- itself, which helps to make possible the appearing, is not the appearing itself. Appearing is an *announcing*-itself [*das Sich-melden*] through something that shows itself. If one then without being itself an appearance, one has not thereby defined the concept of phenomenon: one has rather presupposed it. This presupposition, however, remains concealed; for when one says this sort of thing about 'appearance', the expression 'appear' gets used in two ways. "That wherein something 'appears'" means that wherein something announces itself, and therefore does not show itself; and in the words [*Rede*] 'without being itself an "appearance", "appearance" signifies the *showing-itself*. But this showing-itself belong, essentially to the 'wherein' in which something announces itself. According to this, phenomena are *never* appearances, though on the other hand every appearance is dependent on phenomena. If one defines "phenomenon" with the aid of a conception of 'appearance' which is still unclear, then everything is stood on its head, and a 'critique' of phenomenology on this basis is surely a remarkable undertaking. [p. 53]

As we have discussed above, *an appearance is not a phenomenon, but rather it presupposes a phenomenon in order to announce itself*. In this respect, Heidegger remarks that one may also take the term ‘appearance’ to mean ‘that wherein something appears without being itself an appearance’. As an example, we may say that the fever is that wherein something, i.e. the flu, appears without being itself an appearance. This formulation of the meaning of appearance, though, is ambiguous, since in it the term 'appear' is used in two opposite ways. In the expression ‘that wherein something appears’, the term ‘appear’ means that which announces itself, that is, that which does not show itself (i.e. the flu). On the contrary, in the expression 'without being itself an appearance’, the term ‘appear’ means that which shows itself (i.e. the fever). Yet for Heidegger the showing-itself of something belongs essentially to ‘that wherein something announces itself’. Therefore, he remarks that the ambiguity of this formulation, by turning everything upside down, is dangerous as it exposes phenomenology to the risk of criticism. Given that, Heidegger sums up the possible meanings of ‘appearance’ and says:

So again the expression 'appearance' itself can have a double signification: first, *appearing* in the sense of announcing-itself, as not-showing-itself; and next, that which does the announcing [*das Meldende selbst*] that which in its showing-itself indicates something which does not show itself. And finally one can use "appearing" as a term for the genuine sense of "phenomenon" as showing-itself. If one designates these three different things as 'appearance', bewilderment is unavoidable. [p. 53]

But there is even another possible meaning of ‘appearance’, which is the following:

But this bewilderment is essentially increased by the fact that 'appearance' can take on still another signification. That which does the announcing—that which, in its showing-itself, indicates something non-manifest—may be taken as that which emerges in what is itself non-manifest, and which emanates [*ausstrahlt*] from it in such a way indeed that the non- manifest gets thought of as something that is essentially never manifest. When that which does the announcing is taken this way, "appearance" is tantamount to a "bringing forth" or "something brought forth", but something which does not make up the real Being of what brings it forth: here we have an appearance in the sense of 'mere appearance'. [p. 53]

In the case of a ‘mere appearance’, *what announces itself is thought of as something that never comes to light*. The reason is that, one the one hand, what shows itself indicates what never shows itself, as the former is an emanation from the latter; on the other hand, what show itself is not constitutive of the Being of what never shows itself, thereby concealing what this never- showing-itself is in itself. Given that what shows itself is an emanation from what never shows itself, Heidegger calls it a ‘bringing forth’ [*Hervorbringung*] or ‘something brought forth [*Hervorgebrachtes*] (but one can also translate this terms as, respectively, ‘production’ and ‘what is produced’). It is precisely this something brought forth that takes the name of ‘mere appearance’. To give an example of a mere appearance, Heidegger mentions Kant:

That which does the announcing and is brought forth does, of course, show itself, and in such a way that as an emanation of what it announces, it keeps this very thing constantly veiled in itself. On the other hand, this not-showing which veils is not a semblance. Kant uses the term "appearance" in this twofold way. According to him "appearances" are, in the first place, place, the 'objects of empirical intuition': they are what shows itself in such intuition. But what thus shows itself (the "phenomenon" in the genuine primordial sense) is at the same time an 'appearance' as an emanation of something which hides itself in that appearance-an emanation which announces. [pp. 53-54]

In Kant, appearances are the objects that show themselves in empirical intuition (the meaning of ‘appearance’ here is hence that of ‘phenomenon’ in the original sense). Yet the objects of empirical intuition are also mere appearances, insofar as they are emanated from, and hence indicate, the ‘thing in itself’ that never comes to manifestation but only announces itself through these objects.

That said, Heidegger mentions also the case of a ‘mere semblance’:

In so far as a phenomenon is constitutive for 'appearance' in the signification of announcing itself through something which shows itself, though such a phenomenon can privatively take the variant form of semblance, appearance too can become mere semblance. In a certain kind of lighting someone can look as if his cheeks were flushed with red; and the redness which shows itself can be taken as an announcement of the Being-present-at-hand of a fever, which in turn indicates some disturbance in the organism. [p. 54]

Like in the case of an appearance, in a mere semblance a phenomenon indicates something which does not show itself. However, *the peculiarity of a mere semblance consists in the fact that this phenomenon shows itself as something which in fact it is not*. Husserl gives the example of one’s cheeks that, due to the lighting, look like red, thereby indicating the being present at hand of fever. The cheeks are, thus, the phenomen that, by showing itself, indicates the fever, which is instead what does not show itself. Yet this phenomenon is a mere semblance, since the cheeks indicating the fever only look like red when in fact they are not so.

Heidegger concludes the analysis of the distinctions under investigation by emphasizing the importance of the original meaning of ‘phenomenon’ as that which shows itself. Only by grasping this meaning, he argues, we can clarify all the other concepts:

"Phenomenon", the showing-itself-in-itself, signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered. "Appearance", on the other hand, means a reference-relationship which is in the entity themselves, and which is such that what does the referring (or the announcing) can fulfil its possible function only if it shows itself in itself and is thus a 'phenomenon'. Both appearance and semblance are founded upon the phenomenon, though in different ways. The bewildering multiplicity of 'phenomena' designated by the words "phenomenon", "semblance", "appearance", "mere appearance", cannot be disentangled unless the concept of the phenomenon is understood from the beginning as that which shows itself in itself. [p. 54]

With all the distinctions between ‘phenomenon’, ‘semblance’, ‘appearance’, and ‘mere appearance’ in full view, Heidegger concludes this section by saying:

If in taking the concept of "phenomenon" this way, we leave indefinite which entities we consider as "phenomena", and leave it open whether what shows itself is an entity or rather some characteristic which an entity may have in its Being, then we have merely arrived at the *formal* conception of "phenomenon". If by "that which shows itself" we understand those entities which are accessible through the empirical "intuition" in, let us say, Kant's sense, then the formal conception of "phenomenon" will indeed be legitimately employed. In this usage "phenomenon" has the signification of the *ordinary* conception of phenomenon. But this ordinary conception is not the phenomenological conception. If we keep within the horizon of the Kantian problematic, we can give an illustration of what is conceived phenomenologically as a "phenomenon", with reservations as to other differences; for we may then say that that which already shows itself in the appearance as prior to the "phenomenon" as ordinarily understood and as accompanying it in every case, can, even though it thus shows itself unthematically, be brought thematically to show itself; and what thus shows itself in itself (the 'forms of the intuition') will be the "phenomena" of phenomenology. [pp. 54-55]

If we leave open whether what shows itself is an entity or the Being of an entity, we are operating with the *formal concept of ‘phenomenon’*, where ‘formal’ means precisely that *the question of what exactly shows itself remains undecided*. Furthermore, if we understand ‘phenomenon’ as ‘that which *immediately and directly* shoes itself’, then we are operating with the *ordinary concept of ‘phenomenon’*. For Heidegger, an example of phenomenon in the ordinary sense is Kant’s objects of empirical intuition, which are indeed immediately and directly accessible. However, Heidegger points out that the ordinary concept of ‘phenomenon’ *is not* tantamount to the *phenomenological concept of ‘phenomenon’*. If the two concepts were identical, then Heidegger would not be able to respond to the objection raised at the beginning of the section against the need of phenomenology. If phenomena showed themselves directly and immediately, why would we need the phenomenological method? We need this method precisely because, *taken in the phenomenological sense, phenomena need instead to be brought to show themselves thematically*. With the distinction and connection between the concepts of ‘phenomenon’, ‘semblance’, and ‘appearance’ in full view, you can now easily understand why this is the case: *many phenomena are at first concealed in the form of appearance or are disguised in the form of semblance*. As an example of phenomena to be brought about, Heidegger mentions space and time as the so-called ‘forms of intuition’ in Kant. Yet you can imagine what he also has in mind: the Being of entities and, in particular, the Being of Dasein!

But how can exactly the phenomenological method bring phenomena to show themselves thematically? In order to reply to this question, Heidegger turns to the analysis of the meaning of the other term that makes up the word ‘phenomenology’, namely the term ‘logos’.

**B. The concept of *Logos*.**

How can phenomenology bring phenomena to light? For Heidegger, the answer lies in the concept of ‘logos’*.* Like he did with the concept of ‘phenomenon’, Heidegger traces back the current meanings of ‘logos’ to the meaning that this concept had in Ancient Greek:

In Plato and Aristotle the concept of the *logos* has many competing significations, with no basic signification positively taking the lead. In fact, however, this is only a semblance, which will maintain itself as long as our Interpretation is unable to grasp the basic signification properly in its primary content. If we say that the basic signification of *logos* is "discourse", then this word-for-word translation will not be validated until we have determined what is meant by "discourse" itself. The real signification of "discourse", which is obvious enough, gets constantly covered up by the later history of the word *logos*, and especially by the numerous and arbitrary Interpretation, which subsequent philosophy has provided. *Logos* gets 'translated' (and this mean, that it is always getting interpreted) as "reason", "judgment", "concept", "definition", "ground", or "relationship". But how can 'discourse' be so susceptible of modification that *logos* can signify all the things we have listed, and in good scholarly usage? Even if *logos* is understood in the sense of "assertion", but of ''assertion'' as 'judgment', this seemingly legitimate translation may still miss the fundamental signification, especially if "judgment" is conceived in a sense taken over from some contemporary 'theory of judgment'. *Logos* does not mean "judgment", and it certainly does not mean this primarily—if one understands by "judgment" a way of 'binding' something with something else, or the 'taking of a stand' (whether by acceptance or by rejection). [pp. 55-56]

Heidegger tells us that already in Plato and Aristotle ‘logos’ had different meanings, without any of them being the original one. Yet this putative equality of meanings is for him a semblance: in showing itself as having equal possible meanings, logos shows itself as something which it is not. In fact, for Heidegger *there is an original meaning of ‘logos’, which, as such, is necessary to understand all other meanings*. What is this meaning? It is that of ‘discourse’, which is the literal translation of ‘logos’. Yet he points out that, in turn, it is necessary to understand properly the meaning of ‘discourse’ itself. Indeed, in the recent history of philosophy the real meaning of discourse has been constantly covered up by numerous and arbitrary translations, which for Heidegger are always tantamount to interpretations that are guided by the historically embedded ways of thinking of Dasein (as the interpreter). As a result, *these interpretations are always open to revision, enhancement and replacement*. They are those of "reason", "judgment", "concept", "definition", "ground", or "relationship". The term ‘discourse’ is susceptible of so many translations insofar as it is primarily understood in the sense of ''assertion'' as 'judgment'. However, for Heidegger this meaning, which stems from the contemporary theory of judgment, is not actually the original meaning of logos, especially if we one understands ‘judgment’ as a way of ‘binding’ something with something else or as the ‘taking of a stance’ by acceptance or rejection of what is judged about.

Although Heidegger does not mention explicitly his name, he is criticizing even Husserl here. Indeed, Husserl describes judgement precisely in terms of ‘assertion’, ‘binding’, and ‘taking of a stance’.[[9]](#footnote-9) For Husserl, an act of judgment is an intentional act of consciousness through which we *assert* something to be the case or not, thereby *taking a stance* on its existence by *accepting* or *rejecting* it. Furthermore, in judging, we say that something is such and such, thereby *binding* something to something else. More precisely, in the most basic form of judgement we assert that a subject S is a predicate P. The fact that ‘S is P’ is what Husserl calls a ‘state of affairs’. A state of affairs is, thus, the intentional object of a judgment and is the ‘binding’ or ‘relating’ of a subject to a predicate. In his own terminology, Husserl designates this ‘binding’ or ‘relating’ as ‘a predicative synthesis of identification’. For example, if I judge that ‘the pen on my table is blue’, the intentional object of my assertion is precisely the predicative identity between the pen (i.e. the subject) and its blueness (i.e. the predicate).[[10]](#footnote-10) In so doing, I take a stance on the fact that the pen is blue, that is, I accept the fact that the pen is blue as actually existing.

After criticizing the interpretation of ‘discourse’ as ‘judgment’, Heidegger gives his own interpretation:

*Logos* as "discourse" means, rather the same as *deloun*; to make manifest what one is 'talking about' in one's discourse. Aristotle has explicated this function of discourse more precisely as *apophainesthai*. The *logos* lets something be seen (*phainesthai* ), namely, what the discourse is about; and it does so either for the one who is doing the talking (the medium) or for persons who are talking with one another, as the case may be. Discourse 'lets something be seen' *apo...*: that is, it lets us see something from the very thing which the discourse is about. In discourse (*apophansis*), so far as it is genuine, what is said [*was geredet ist*] is drawn from what the talk is about, so that discursive communication, in what it says [*in ihrem Gesagten*], makes manifest what it is talking about, and thus makes this accessible to the other party. This is the structure of the *logos* as *apophansis*. This mode of making manifest in the sense of letting something be seen by pointing it out, does not go with all kinds of 'discourse'. Requesting (*euche*), for instance, also makes manifest, but in a different way. When fully concrete, discoursing (letting something be seen) has the character of speaking—vocal proclamation in words. The *logos* is *phone*, and indeed, *phone meta phantasias*—an utterance in which something is sighted in each case. And only because the function of the *logos* as *apophansis* lies in letting something be seen by pointing it out, can the *logos* have the structural form of *synthesis*. Here "synthesis" does not mean a binding and linking together of representations, a manipulation of psychical occurrences where the 'problem" arises of how these bindings, as something inside, agree with something physical outside. Here the *syn* has a purely apophantical signification and means letting something be seen in its *togetherness* [*Beisammrn*] with something—letting it be seen *as* something. [p.56]

The primary meaning of logos as ‘discourse’ is that of *making what is talked about manifest*. It is logos, thus, that brings phenomena to light and lets them be seen by the speaker or the hearer of the discourse. When logos makes something manifest *by pointing it out*, it takes the form of *apophansis*, which we could translate as ‘assertion’. Yet Heidegger points out that *apophansis* as ‘assertion’ should not be taken as the binding or linking together of mental representations inside of the mind, which are supposed to agree somehow with a reality existing out of it. By letting something show itself, the discourse as assertion is rather a synthesis in the sense that it lets something be seen *qua* something, that is, it lets something be seen *as* such and such determined. The paradigmatic example is, once again, that of a predicative judgment asserting that a subject S *is* the predicate P, such as the assertions that ‘the pen is blue’, ‘Andrea is tall’, etc.

One may wonder, then, whether and to what extent Heidegger actually takes distance from Husserl. In fact, also for the father of phenomenology *logos* makes what is talked about manifest. In more detail, Husserl would perfectly agree that *the being of entities is brought to light only by discourse*. As he says in section §44 of the 6th *Logical Investigation*, “being can only be apprehended through judging” (see Hua XIX, 668). Only at the level of discourse as judgment, one sees that an entity *is* such and such determined (e.g. that the pen *is* blue). Heidegger, who thoroughly studied the *Logical Investigations*, knows this very well, as well as he knows that for Husserl truth is not an agreement between psychophysical appearances immanent to consciousness and physical realities that transcend it. Yet, as we saw, Heidegger does not agree that the original meaning of discourse is ‘judgment’. Nor he agrees that that true knowledge is, as for Husserl, the agreement between what is meant and what is immanently given. Heidegger characterizes instead truth as follow:

Furthermore, because the *logos* is a letting-something-be-seen, it can therefore be true or false. But here everything depends on our steering clear of any conception of truth which is construed in the sense of ‘agreement'. This idea is by no means the primary one in the concept of *aletheia*. The 'Being-true' of the *logos* as *aletheuein* means that in *leghein* as *apophainesthai* the entities of which one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden (*alethes*); that is, they must be discovered.

Similarly, 'Being false' (*pseudesthai*) amounts to deceiving in the sense of covering up: putting something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passing it off as something which it is not. But because 'truth' has this meaning, and because the *logos* is a definite mode of letting something be seen, the *logos* is just not the kind of thing that can be considered as the primary 'locus' of truth. If, as has become quite customary nowadays, one defines "truth" as something that 'really' pertains to judgment, and if one then invokes the support of Aristotle with this thesis, not only is this unjustified, but, above all, the Greek conception of truth has been misunderstood. [p. 57]

According to Heidegger’s famous concept of ‘truth’ as *aletheia*, *something is true insofar as it is unhidden* (*alethe*), whereas *it is false insofar as it is hidden* (*lethe*). This should be no surprise, as this conception of truth results from Heidegger’s concept of phenomenon. If you remember, phenomenon, in the phenomenological sense, is for Heidegger something that must be brought to light. *Once it shows itself for what it is, the phenomenon becomes true*. On the contrary, *a phenomenon becomes false when it conceals itself*. But why and how should it hide itself? Heidegger finally makes clear the reason, which, as I anticipated, lies in the notions of ‘semblance’ and ‘appearance’. *A phenomenon can conceal, hide itself insofar as, in the form of an appearance, it announces itself through something else, which however passes it off as something which it is not*. Accordingly, *this something that announces the phenomenon takes the form of a semblance, precisely because it lets the phenomenon be seen as something which, in fact, it is not*. The paradigmatic example of this subtle play of concealment and unconcealment is that between Being and entities. *Being announces itself through entities, and yet, it can also be concealed by them as soon as they pass it off as an entity it itself*. For Heidegger, this is exactly what happened throughout the history of ontology after Plato and Aristotle, as philosophers have made the mistake of conflating Being with entities.

That said, Heidegger points out that it makes no sense, as philosophers often do, to attribute truth and falsity to *logos*, since truth has nothing to do with the ‘agreement’ between the judgment of a knowing subject and the things themselves. *It is not logos that is made true by the givenness of the things themselves, but rather it is the things themselves that are made true by means of the logos that brings them to light.*

1. Why is this the case? In the *Metaphysics* (998b23, 1059b31), Aristotle argues that every genus must be differentiated by some differentia that falls outside that genus. However, in the case of Being this differentiation would mean that Being is differentiated by some Non-Being, which for Aristotle is something absurd. Furthermore, in *Metaphysics* Γ.2, Aristotle points out that “being is said in many ways”; because of that, there is not a universal class that includes all entities insofar as they ‘are’ in one and the same sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Why is this the case? For Aristotle the essence of an entity can be defined in terms of its genus and differentia specifica. For instance, the essence of man is that of being a rational (differentia specifica) animal (genus). Therefore, Being, as most universal concept, is indefinable, because there is no genus above it in terms of which the definition can be given. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. To understand why it is the case that every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought, you may think of Meno’s paradox as formulated in Plato. This paradox, I recall, runs as following: if you know what you search for, then inquiry is unnecessary; if you do not know what you search for, then inquiry is impossible; therefore, inquiry is either unnecessary or impossible. The traditional solution of this paradox consists in pointing out that there is not only either knowledge or ignorance. If I search for something, I must already be familiar with what I look for, otherwise I could not even start my research. Yet I do not have knowledge in the proper sense of the term and, in fact, I need to carry out my research precisely to gain such a knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See note 3 above [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In this respect, Heidegger remarks that “we cannot define Dasein's essence by citing a ‘what’ of the kind that pertains to a substantial thing [eines sachhaltigen Was; my translation]” (p. 32). That is to say, the existence of Dasein cannot be defined in terms of a set of fixed properties as it is done in the case of traditional logic, whose subjects are conceived according to the old Aristotelian notion of ‘substance’. On the contrary, there is nothing fixed in Dasein’s existence, whose “essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be” (pp. 32- 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Namely, Dasein’s being past as opposed to its being futural. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Although, we saw that the Being of Dasein is what is to be investigated first due to the onto-ontological priority of this entity. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Husserl calls this mode of self-givenness ‘perceptual fictum’, see 5th Logical Investigations §27. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, see §28 of the Fifth Logical Investigation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Strictly speaking, then, the object of a judgment is neither the subject nor the predicate, but rather the relation between the two. Subject and predicate, considered in and for themselves, are the intentional objects of the judgments only insofar as they are the more simple objects that, in their predicative synthesis of identification, make up the state of affairs, which is, accordingly, the complex object resulting from their synthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)