

William McNeill

# The Time of Life

Heidegger and *Êthos*

## THE TIME OF LIFE

SUNY series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy  
Dennis J. Schmidt, editor

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Heidegger and *Êthos*

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WILLIAM MCNEILL

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Zu eng begrenzt ist unsere Tageszeit  
Wir sind und sehn und staunen, schon Abend ists,  
Wir schlafen und vorüberziehn wie  
Sterne die Jahre der Völker alle.

The time of our day is too narrowly spanned  
We are and look and are astonished, already it is evening,  
We sleep and like stars pass over  
The years of all the peoples.

—Friedrich Hölderlin, "Rousseau"

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## Introduction

The present study seeks to explore Heidegger's understanding of *ēthos*—of the originary dimension of the ethical and of human action—conceived in terms of the time of life and the temporality of human existence. *Ēthos* for Heidegger means our dwelling, understood temporally as a way of Being, yet such dwelling must be understood, on the one hand, in terms of our stance and conduct in the moment of action—the way in which we are held and hold ourselves, and thus “dwell,” in the presence of the moment—and on the other hand, in terms of our more enduring way of Being that is brought about temporally in and throughout the unfolding of human experience. The essays that comprise this volume examine various dimensions of this tension between the moment of presence and the temporalizing of that moment as brought about and attuned by the antecedent claims of a greater whole.

The first chapter considers the phenomenon of life—of the Being of living beings—in relation to time and temporality by following Heidegger's phenomenological explorations of human and animal life in his Freiburg lecture course of 1929–30 entitled “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude.” The question of the relation between animal and human life is for Heidegger ultimately a question of *world*, of what “world” is and of what it means to “have” a world and to be “in” a world. However we understand the status of animals and of different modes of animal life, we always and inevitably do so in terms of an understanding of world. To be in the manner of human beings does not mean, on Heidegger's account, to be an entity of a certain species, with certain specifiable features and abilities (a conception that Heidegger views as a form of scientific reductionism that elides the very openness and indeterminability of our Being). It means, rather, nothing other than to be subject to, and addressed by, this antecedent claim of a historically determined world. The distinctive self-relation of human life, the ability to be (to dwell in) a relation to one's own Being, presupposes an “ekstatic” Being-outside-itself of our

very Being, an ekstasis that is possible only as a relation to the phenomenon of world. Heidegger's investigation suggests, however, that *world*—understood as the open manifestness of beings as such and as a whole—is neither a purely ontological nor a transcendental phenomenon, but is temporalized historically in and as the unfolding of human existence. The poietic event of “world-formation” is, on this interpretation, not something that the human being accomplishes in and through his or her actions; rather, it first enables our very Being, our self-understanding and ability to relate to ourselves as beings that are already manifest. Indeed, the primary disclosure of world, Heidegger argues, is not at all an accomplishment of the already existent human being, nor, therefore, of human self-understanding or intellect. It is, rather, accomplished by the phenomenon of attunement, through which we are first disclosed to ourselves as being in this way or that, in the midst of beings as a whole. Attunement, as Heidegger had already argued in his 1927 work *Being and Time*, is primary in enabling our very dwelling, our *ēthos*. Even if such *ēthos* can subsequently be modified by understanding, by *logos* and by deliberation, such understanding nevertheless always remains responsive to an attunement and way of Being that is already given and situated, localized in a particular locale or site of dwelling. That *logos* (whether as language, thought, or understanding) neither originates nor coincides with the primary disclosure of our own Being is, however, on the positive side, our having always already departed from where we have been, our ekstastic Being-outside-ourselves as a being underway, a departure that is precisely able to leave be, to let be (*Seinlassen*)—in a letting that enables our very dwelling. A withdrawal from the site of presence, a dwelling in such withdrawal, enables our very return, our emergence into presence, even though such return is always bound to the moment. In the case of those beings we recognize and acknowledge as animals, their dwelling place, by contrast, coincides with a habitual haunt or environment, a habitat (and this is indeed an early root meaning from which *ēthos* derives).<sup>1</sup> The haunt of the human being, such dwelling in concealment, marks the human being as an exceptional site of disclosure and self-concealing, as having an *ēthos* that is truly haunting, altogether uncanny, *unheimlich*.

Chapter 2, “Care for the Self: Originary Ethics in Heidegger and Foucault,” attempts, by way of a dialogue between Heidegger and Foucault, to open up the ontological dimension of the ethical in the work of both philosophers in terms of the ontological relation to self, shifting our understanding of “ethics” away from a set of theoretically constructed norms, principles, or rules governing practice, and to-

ward an understanding of the ethical in terms of our concrete ways of Being in the world, our *ēthos*. The realm of *ēthos*, the chapter tries to show, is that of “originary” *praxis*, of a pre-theoretical and pre-philosophical dimension of worldly dwelling that exceeds, and indeed is prior to, the traditional theory/practice distinction in which theory is understood in advance as severed from practice, yet in such a way that it can and should be subsequently “applied” to ethical and political practice. In this traditional understanding, philosophy or theory is, implicitly or explicitly, understood as non-worldly, detached from the world—and thus from its own original grounds as itself a *praxis*, a concrete way of Being of the one philosophizing. By contrast, the philosophical cultivation of *ēthos* that this chapter discerns in both Foucault and Heidegger remains attentive to the singularity, the concrete uniqueness, of a particular existence, seeking to dwell in that very dimension otherwise eclipsed by our scientific understanding of the world, which from Aristotle on began to take hold of philosophy itself. In this second chapter, we attempt to approach this originary dimension of the ethical, or of *ēthos*, by bringing into view a constellation of issues that will be developed further in the remaining chapters. One’s *ēthos* is not something permanent and unchanging: it is never entirely reducible to what Hans-Georg Gadamer has fittingly called “a living network of common convictions, habits, and values” transmitted by one’s historical community and world.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is constantly in transition, a manner of dwelling in being underway, and as such names a way of Being and dwelling in the world that can—and from a philosophical point of view must—be interrogated, understood, and transformed through various practices of the self. The Being of the self, as primarily an ontological relation to self for both Heidegger and Foucault, is not a theoretical abstraction from the ontic or concrete, but is, the present chapter tries to show, the concrete happening of an originary freedom that is never reducible to what one is or has been. The philosophical and “protoethical” task of care for the self (Foucault) or of authentic existence (Heidegger), a task that expressly takes up and engages this freedom in the knowing, questioning cultivation of one’s *ēthos*, demands an understanding of selfhood in terms of the temporality of action, the phenomenon of world, and the historical determination of one’s worldly Being.

It is these three moments that, taken together, articulate Heidegger’s understanding of *ēthos*, an understanding that in many respects is indebted to Aristotle’s account of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom, or excellence in deliberation pertaining to *praxis*). In Aristotelian ethics, we may recall, one’s *ēthos* is determined by the ethical virtues

that dispose us to act with courage, self-restraint, justice, etc.; by the deliberative virtue of *phronēsis* that enables us to deliberate well in the particular situation of action; and by our *theōria* or contemplation of the world afforded by *sophia*, or philosophical wisdom. Yet Heidegger, despite his admiration for Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* (as presented in Book Six of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), does not simply adopt Aristotle's understanding of human *ēthos*. As we have shown in a previous study, Heidegger indeed goes to great lengths to undermine the supremacy accorded to *theōria* both in Aristotle and in the philosophical tradition.<sup>3</sup> What are the repercussions for Heidegger's understanding of *ēthos*? In chapter 3, we briefly examine how Heidegger's analyses of the temporality of human action, while drawing on Aristotle's insights into the temporality of *phronēsis* as critically oriented toward the *kairos* or opportune moment at which an action engages—what Heidegger will render as the *Augenblick*—nevertheless effect a certain displacement of Aristotle's conception of *ēthos*. Here we turn to an early lecture course, delivered in the summer semester of 1924, that Heidegger gave under the title "Fundamental Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy." Whereas in chapter 2 the question of selfhood was examined primarily in terms of the ontological relation to self, and in terms of the question of freedom, our third chapter seeks to develop further the issue of the concrete practice of self-formation contributing to the cultivation of one's *ēthos*. Specifically, we shall try to follow this earlier, 1924 account of *ēthos* in Heidegger's work in raising the question of the relation between the moment of action and the role of ethical virtue in concretely bringing about one's ethical stance and conduct. In particular, how does Heidegger's understanding of the ekstastic temporality of human existence impact the traditional, Aristotelian understanding of virtuous *praxis* as entailing both ethical and intellectual virtues? Heidegger's early, phenomenological analysis, we try to show, initiates a certain displacement of an ontology of presence-at-hand operative in Aristotle's accounts of ethical *praxis*—an ontological perspective premised on the primacy of *theōria*, which tends to conceal the distinctive temporality in which the *kairos* of human action is enclosed—and does so in opening Aristotle's account of *ēthos* onto the fundamentally unsettled and unsettling dimension of the distinctive temporality and historicity of human existence.

Chapters 4 and 5 move into this dimension of historicity in seeking to make visible something of how Heidegger's understanding of the temporality of human *praxis* develops, in his work of the 1930s, into an understanding of the *Augenblick* or moment of action not only as the site of disclosure of a world, but as the site of the historical

destining of world conceived as an event (or *Ereignis*) of Being. Chapter 4 begins with a recollection of Heidegger's characterization of the *Augenblick* in his 1924–25 reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as presented in his lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*, and traces its development in subsequent phenomenological works of the 1920s. It then shifts to a consideration of the reflections entitled *Contributions to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*, dating from 1936–38, an extremely rich and productive period of Heidegger's work that is commonly regarded as marking a fundamental “turning” in his thought. The 1929–30 course “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude” is, we suggest, a particularly important course in helping us to understand this turning or transition. What is at stake here is once again a certain displacement or shift in emphasis, in which the *Augenblick* is seen not only in regard to human action, but as belonging in advance, and always already, to a happening of world that exceeds human action and that indeed first calls it into Being. Not only is the time of the *Augenblick*—as already in the phenomenology of the 1920s—not that of a “now” or point in time that can be set before us or represented as one “moment” in a linear sequence of events; it is also now seen as historical in the sense of belonging to the *Ereignis* or event of the “history of Being,” that is, to the way in which Being happens as world and is destined to human beings, in a destining that opens us to the necessity of our historicity. Chapter 5 seeks to examine more closely Heidegger's developing understanding, in the early to mid-1930s, of how worlds are historically determined, by focusing on the issue of historical beginnings. The task here is to shed further light on what Heidegger at one point describes as “the concealed moments [*Augenblicken*] of the history of Being” (GA 65, 92). The term *historical beginnings* is, we suggest, ambiguous: on the one hand, it implies that all beginnings, in the realm of human activity, are already and inevitably historically determined; on the other hand, it refers to the beginnings of historical worlds, epochs, or human actions, the moments of disruption and irruption in which those worlds, epochs, or actions emerge and are sent or destined into their own historicity. Our fifth chapter seeks to illuminate Heidegger's understanding of such ruptures, to which our *ēthos* is ineluctably exposed.

Chapters 4 and 5 also broach the topic of what Heidegger calls the “first beginning” of Western philosophy and the possibility of a transition to “another beginning.” The first beginning, the Greek beginning, is marked above all by the discovery and ascendancy of *theōria*, conceived as a pure contemplation of the forms of all beings, a way of Being in which contemplation is increasingly severed from ethical and



political *praxis*—separated out, abstracted and isolated to the point where it is no longer seen as being itself a worldly *praxis* at all—and the forms are likewise studied in abstraction from their sensuous, material embodiment. On both sides (sides that, in modernity, would eventually become “subject” and “object”) what occurs is a removal and distancing of human dwelling from its exposure to the sensuous immediacy of things. We proceed as though we were not really, immediately or compellingly, claimed by and dependent on the sensuous. Yet this fantastical hypothesis—this story we tell ourselves of our not really belonging to the world, of our standing over and beyond it in all the glory of our dominance—has all too real repercussions. For Heidegger, the “first beginning” neither lies behind us in some remote, Greek past, nor is it the romanticized theme of some nostalgic longing. It is what continues to hold sway over us, that which dominates our future and unfolding actions, to the extent that our cultural *ēthos* is pervasively dominated by science and technology. Its repercussions affect not only those of us who engage directly in the production of science and technology, or those of us who, directly or indirectly, consciously or unthinkingly, have affirmed this way of life. They affect the entire world, all beings, which find themselves unable to resist the hegemonic force that imposes itself across the globe, eradicating other histories, other cultures, other languages, other ways of Being, other *ēthē*. Heidegger’s work is not only a meditation on the power of this “first beginning” of Western culture, an attempt to understand it in all its dimensions; it is also thereby an attempt to prepare for the possibility of what he calls “another beginning.”

In the final two chapters, 6 and 7, we seek to accompany Heidegger in his understanding of *ēthos* into the dimension of poetry and tragedy, a dimension of human dwelling that comes to be largely concealed and withheld in and through the ascendancy of the first beginning, yet which, if Heidegger is right, belongs no less assuredly to our destiny. It is striking that of the many studies concerned with Heidegger and ethics or Heidegger and “*praxis*,” few venture to embrace the dimensions of poetic dwelling or tragedy.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is precisely these topics that become central to Heidegger’s endeavors, from the 1930s onward, to think *ēthos* otherwise than from a theoretically skewed perspective. In both chapters, we attempt to consider—admittedly in an all too cursory and underdeveloped way—the conception of poetic dwelling that Heidegger embraces with respect to the poetry of the German poet Hölderlin (in whose work the theme of poetic dwelling is poetized) and in relation to Greek tragedy. Our interpre-

tations focus in particular on the distinctive temporality that is brought to the fore both in Hölderlin's poetizing and in Greek tragedy.

Chapter 6 first attempts to situate the transition into the realm of poetic dwelling by recollecting a number of themes that emerged as central in previous chapters. In particular, we recall the primary disclosure of world through the phenomenon of attunement, as well as what the 1929–30 course already identified as the poietic moment of world-formation, understood as an antecedent event that first grounds our Being as dwelling. This formation and happening of a world, as the manifestation of beings as a whole in their Being, is, we suggest, the event of an originary *poiēsis* of which we are not the origin, yet which, happening in and through us, first enables our dwelling. A language and thought attuned to this arrival, to this coming to pass of a world, would presumably not yet be a discourse seeking to determine something “as” something—whether that of the apophantic discourse of science, the apophantic-hermeneutic discourse of Heidegger's early phenomenology, or indeed that of the hermeneutic deliberation of Aristotelian *phronēsis* itself, all of which are dianoetic, and concerned with determining that which already manifests itself in a certain way (with a view to constant laws determining the presence at hand of things; with a view to the existential-historical situatedness and engagement of the philosophizing self; or with a view to determining the best course of action under given circumstances in order to attain a certain end). It would, presumably, be a “simple naming” attuned to a letting-be disclosive of world in general, a letting-be that, as enabling presence itself, first enables vision, letting something be seen in its Being. It is in Hölderlin's poetizing above all, we try to indicate, that Heidegger finds precisely such a language and attunement. Yet Hölderlin's poetry is distinctive for Heidegger in that it seeks to poetize precisely the inaugural moment (or *Augenblick*) of this poietic disclosure and arrival of world. It poetizes, as Heidegger puts it, the “essence” or event of this poetizing itself, the time of poetizing. And in so doing, it poetizes the essence of human dwelling as an exposure to this dimension of that which, in its very withdrawal, exceeds such dwelling even as it calls it into Being—the dimension of what Hölderlin names the divine. The poietic accomplishment of human dwelling is thus, we try to show, called upon to unfold itself in a continual exposure to a not being at home, to what the Greeks called *to deinon*, which Heidegger—in keeping with his understanding of human Being as dwelling—translates as *das Unheimliche*: the “uncanny,” or literally “that which is not of the home.” Yet this very

exposure, the tragic predicament of human action and *ēthos*, is what was once brought to the fore and celebrated in Greek tragedy.

In our final chapter, chapter 7, we pursue this line of thought in first examining what Heidegger might mean when, in his 1946 "Letter on 'Humanism,'" he claims that "[t]he tragedies of Sophocles . . . shelter the *ēthos* in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle's lectures on 'ethics'" (W, 184). Yet the same essay of Heidegger's also alludes to a statement made by Aristotle in the context of his discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics*. Heidegger writes: "But Aristotle's word in the *Poetics*, although it has scarcely been pondered, is still valid—that poetizing [*Dichten*] is truer than the exploration of beings" (W, 193). What kind of truth is it that is disclosed by poetizing? And why is the poetic disclosure of *ēthos* in Sophoclean tragedy "more primordial" than that disclosed by the philosophical-scientific discourse of Aristotle's *Ethics*? In seeking to address these questions, our final chapter presents a reading of the *Poetics* that argues that Aristotle's account there indeed preserves for us the thoughtful recollection of a more originary accomplishment of dwelling. In so doing, we give particular attention to the role of *theōria* in Greek tragedy—a *theōria* not yet philosophically distanced from sensuous immediacy—and to the affective dimension of attunement in which tragic presentation accomplishes its enigmatic *katharsis*. Central to understanding both, we argue, is the role of story or plot, of *muthos*, which Aristotle identifies as "the first principle and, as it were, the soul of tragedy" (1450 a38). The unfolding of human dwelling or *ēthos* in and before a world that always exceeds it is, we try to show, not simply depicted poetically in Greek tragedy, but is shown to be itself a poetic dwelling, accomplished in its Being by the *poiēsis* of a world that occurs in each case as *muthos*—as *muthos* that is at once singular and unique, and yet worldly, bringing about a belonging to a whole that will always exceed us, rendering our dwelling, as Heidegger understands it, forever *unheimlich*, *deinon*, "uncanny."

In its thematic orientation toward the moment or *Augenblick* and its tension with *theōria*, the present study may thus be viewed as a sequel to our earlier work *The Glance of the Eye*.

## Abbreviations

### WORKS BY ARISTOTLE

[DA] *De Anima*. Edited by W. D. Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956. Translated as *On the Soul* by W. S. Hett. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.

[M] *The Metaphysics*. 2 vols. With a translation by H. Tredennick. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933/35.

[NE] *Ethica Nicomachea*. Edited by L. Bywater. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894. Translated as *The Nicomachean Ethics* by H. Rackham. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934.

[P] *De arte poetica liber*. Edited by Rudolf Kassel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965. Translated as *The Poetics* by W. Hamilton Fyfe. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.

[PR] *Problems. Books I–XXI*. Translated by W. S. Hett. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.

[R] *Ars rhetorica*. Edited by W. D. Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959. Translated as *The “Art” of Rhetoric* by John Henry Freese. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

### WORKS BY FOUCAULT

[FR] *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by P. Rabinow. London: Penguin, 1991.

### WORKS BY HEIDEGGER

[BW] *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

[BZ] *Der Begriff der Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989. Translated as *The Concept of Time* by William McNeill. Bilingual edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

[EM] *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953. Translated as *An Introduction to Metaphysics* by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

[GA 9] *Wegmarken*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 9. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976. Translated under the title *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[GA 18] *Grundbegriffe der Aristotelischen Philosophie*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2002.

[GA 19] *Platon: Sophistes*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 19. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1992. Translated as *Plato's Sophist* by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

[GA 24] *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 24. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975. Translated as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

[GA 26] *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 26. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978. Translated as *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* by Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

[GA 29/30] *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 29/30. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983. Translated as *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

[GA 34] *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 34. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988. Translated as *The Essence of Truth: Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus* by Ted Sadler. London: Continuum, 2002.

[GA 39] *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 39. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980.

[GA 45] *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik"*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 45. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1984. Translated as *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic"* by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

[GA 53] *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister."* Gesamtausgabe vol. 53. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1984. Translated as *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* by William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

[GA 65] *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 65. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989. Translated as *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

[GA 66] *Besinnung*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 66. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997.

[GA 69] *Die Geschichte des Seyns*. Gesamtausgabe vol. 69. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1998.

[H] *Holzwege*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950.

[ID] *Identität und Differenz*. 8th ed. Pfullingen: Neske, 1986. Translated as *Identity and Difference* by Joan Stambaugh. Bilingual edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

[NI, NII] *Nietzsche*. 2 vols. Pfullingen: Neske, 1961. Translated as *Nietzsche* (4 vols. in 2) by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991.

[QT] *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

[SDU] *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983.

[SZ] *Sein und Zeit*. Halle a. d. S.: Niemeyer, 1927. Translated as *Being and Time* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987. Where reference is made to marginalia, I have used *Sein und Zeit*, 15th ed. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979.

[TK] *Die Technik und die Kehre*. 6th ed. Pfullingen: Neske, 1985.

[VA] *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. 5th ed. Pfullingen: Neske, 1985.

[W] *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967. Translated under the title *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[WHD] *Was Heißt Denken?* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984. Translated as *What Is Called Thinking?* by J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

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## ONE

### The Phenomenon of Life

*Human, Animal, and World in Heidegger's 1929–30  
Freiburg Lectures*

[I]n what way, and whether, the Being of animals, for example, is constituted by a “time” at all, remains a problem in its own right.

—Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Do animals have Angst?

—Heidegger, *The Fundamental  
Concepts of Metaphysics*

Throughout his Marburg and Freiburg lecture courses of the 1920s, as in his magnum opus *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger never ceased to emphasize the central importance of the phenomenon of world—a phenomenon that, he claimed, had never been adequately appreciated or understood in the history of philosophy, if indeed it had been seen at all.<sup>1</sup> As Hannah Arendt astutely noted, Heidegger’s concept of world “in many respects stands at the center of his philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> While *Being and Time* emphasized world as a referential totality of signification, enabling the disclosure of meanings that first “found the possible Being of word and language” (SZ, 87), and as a phenomenon to which Dasein was always already exposed in advance, that to which Dasein could only inevitably return in whatever degree of explicitness (76), it also highlighted the fundamental attunement of *Angst* as that which “first discloses world as world” (187). The “peculiar temporality” of *Angst* “holds” Dasein in the presence of its ownmost thrownness, yet in such a way as to hold the moment or *Augenblick* of possible decision “at the ready” (344). Such being held, the present study will argue, enables the distinctive phenomenon of human *ēthos*. For in disclosing Dasein in its “being toward” its ownmost possibility for Being, the temporality of *Angst* thereby first opens Dasein to the possibility of coming toward itself within and from out of its



thrownness, a “coming toward itself” that Heidegger elucidates as the originary phenomenon of the future (325), of Dasein’s freedom, understood as a coming to be free for its ownmost potentiality for Being. We should note from the outset that, by contrast with Greek ontology, for which the world is disclosed by the *theōria* of philosophy and science, the primary disclosure of the presencing of a world is, on Heidegger’s account, accomplished not by contemplative or philosophical knowledge, but by a fundamental *pathos* or attunement (*Befindlichkeit*); and such *pathos* is fundamental in attuning, in advance of any explicit deliberation or discursive understanding, the way in which we are held in the presencing of the moment—in short, in attuning our entire *ēthos*.

In this first chapter, concerned with the phenomenon of life and with the time of life, we seek to approach what is distinctive and unique about the temporality of human life—or in Heidegger’s terms, about the relation between the finite Being (*Dasein*) of human life and the happening of a world—by accompanying Heidegger’s phenomenological analyses of animal life as presented in his 1929–30 Freiburg lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. What emerges from these analyses is, we shall argue, that the very *sense* of life—the sense of presence and of the time of life—is quite different in the case of human being and animal respectively. In and of itself, of course, the claim that there is a decisive distinction between the Being of the human and that of other living beings is quite traditional and, where it issues in humanist or theological claims as to the superiority of the human species, not unproblematic, to say the least. Yet what is radical about Heidegger’s phenomenological analyses here, we try to show, is that this distinction is never entirely reducible to an existing difference between different species of living being (and in this sense is not of the order of presence), but is itself temporalized in the “ekstatic” temporality of the world into which human Dasein is thrown. The happening of this temporal distinction not only enables the Being and worldly dwelling of human beings as intrinsically “protoethical,” that is, as ethical in the originary sense of the word *ēthos*; it also implicates such dwelling in what Heidegger calls an event of world-formation (*Weltbildung*). With regard to human *ēthos*, the time of human life becomes visible as held in the tension between the presence of the moment and the poietic happening of a greater whole.<sup>3</sup>