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THE NEW YEARBOOK FOR PHENOMENOLOGY AND
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Three Levels of Historical Analysis in Early Heidegger

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Abstract: In this paper I distinguish and analyze three distinct levels of historical analysis in early Heidegger's work. In the wake of Dilthey and Yorck, Heidegger develops an ontology of "historical being" that focuses on Dasein's always already given immersion in and dependency on the encompassing intergenerational history or tradition. But Heidegger also develops a phenomenological–existential account of the original sense of history, which identifies the true origin of "history" not in tradition, but in the interiority of the existing singular self outside all societal significations. A third strand in early Heidegger stems from his analysis of Paul's understanding of living historically in the face of the end of time. In a brief conclusion I show that these three levels of analysis are not consistent with each other, and that, therefore, Heidegger's account of history in *Being and Time*, which draws on the three different levels, is inherently unstable.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger; history; historicity; Wilhelm Dilthey; Yorck von Wartenburg

Introduction

At the center of early Heidegger's philosophy (1919–25) stands the problem of factual life or facticity.² In stark contrast to the metaphysically and/or biologically

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1. Ingo Farin teaches philosophy at the University of Tasmania (Australia). He is co-translator (with James G. Hart) of Husserl's *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and of (with Alex Skinner) Heidegger's *The Concept of Time*.
 2. See the pioneering study by Theodore Kisiel, "Das Entstehen des Begriffsfeldes 'Faktizität' im Frühwerk Heidegger's," in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch* 1986/87, vol. 4, 91–120, and his book *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), especially 19–29, as well as the relevant essays in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore Kisiel & John van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994). In recent years, the concept of facticity has been discussed not only in relation to Heidegger, but also more generally in relation to metaphysics and philosophy at large. See the various

colored life philosophies of his time (Bergson, Nietzsche, and Simmel), Heidegger's notion of factual life is characterized by its intrinsic historicity.³ Heidegger writes that the concept of facticity "becomes intelligible only through the concept of 'the historical'"⁴ (*GA* 60: 9).⁵ For all practical purposes, early Heidegger uses "factual life" and "historical life" interchangeably. Put differently, the underlying problematic that the word "facticity" indicates is "history" and/or "historical existence." Early Heidegger's fundamental question is: What does it mean to exist historically or to have a historical perspective? Heidegger asks after "the meaning of historical being"⁶ or "the meaning of the historical in itself" (*GA* 60: 39; also *GA* 64: 3).

Early Heidegger approaches this problematic of "the historical" on three different levels. First, consciously appropriating Dilthey's and Yorck von Wartenburg's contributions towards understanding "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*; *GA* 64: 3), early Heidegger develops what one may call a historical methodology for philosophy, issuing in the claim that philosophy is "historical knowing" (*GA* 64: 103). This understanding, however, is based on history as an inter-generational, real, world-historical process. Second, in working through the problem of historical being, Heidegger also turns to phenomenology (*WD*: 158; *GA* 56/57: 165). He arrives at a phenomenological–existential concept of history that is anchored in the interiority of intentionality; that is to say, intentionality's historical self (*GA* 59: 43–86). Third, Heidegger also explores early Christianity, in particular Paul's Letters, in order to explicate what it means to live historically (*GA* 60: 67–156). The last two approaches have a very strong tendency to fix exclusively "the historical" in the interiority of self or *Dasein* alone, thus "reducing" the domain of history to that of the individual self and its inward historical continuity throughout its individual lifespan. By contrast, the first approach, critically continuing Dilthey and Yorck, locates "the historical" in the reality of a shared tradition, a common historical situation, and the overarching reality of generative human life.

contributions in *Rethinking Facticity*, ed. François Raffoul & Eric Sean Nelson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), as well as the collection of essays in *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation: Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Dan Zahavi, Sara Heinmämä & Hans Ruin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003).

3. See François Raffoul's "Factual Life and the Need for Philosophy," in *Rethinking Facticity*, 70–71.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, references to Heidegger's work relate to the *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978–); henceforth cited as *GA*, followed by the volume number(s), then the page number(s).
5. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger correlates facticity with the past or having-beenness [*Gewesenheit*]: "The primary existential meaning of facticity lies in having-beenness" (*GA* 2: 434).
6. Martin Heidegger, "Wilhelm Dilthey's Forschungsarbeit und der gegenwärtige Kampf um eine historische Weltanschauung," Ten Lectures given in 1925, in *Dilthey Jahrbuch*, vol. 8, 1993. In the following abbreviated as *WD*.

I. Inter-generational History

My aim in this section is very limited and geared towards the clarification of just one point: early Heidegger's appropriation and transformation of the concept of "historicity" that he inherited from Dilthey and Yorck.⁷ What exactly did Heidegger find in Dilthey and Yorck?

Three things stand out. First, historical life is taken as "a reality *sui generis*;" it is not something "constructed" out of a sensible manifold (as in Rickert, Windelband, and Simmel). For instance, Dilthey writes: "The language, in which I think, has come into being in time. My concepts have evolved in it. I am, down to the inscrutable inner cells of my being, a historical creature."⁸ Second, history cannot be reduced to "nature." More specifically, history is not just the ephemeral play on the surface of an ever stable sameness of things. History is the kind of reality which is never the same. Therefore, it resists categorization by generic concepts. Third, acknowledgement of the *sui-generis* reality of history implies that philosophy is historical too, since it is the expression of historical life. The demands of objectivity developed in relation to coping with the sameness of nature (cosmos) cannot dictate the standards for understanding historical life and historical experience and, *a fortiori*, philosophy as a product of human life. Yorck tends to be much more adamant about the last two points than Dilthey, in effect taking a line that is very close to Heidegger's.

For Heidegger, these three points constitute the lasting result of the breakthrough to "historical consciousness" or the "historical worldview." Heidegger fully embraces the results of this position, even though he finds fault with Dilthey's own particular philosophical justification and disagrees with Dilthey's later reformulations and changes.

Unlike Dilthey, who remains ambivalent about the final prospects and ultimate benefits of the historical consciousness, early Heidegger emphatically and

7. The literature on the Dilthey–Heidegger connection is vast. Among the many extensive and penetrating studies I have found the following the most helpful (in addition to the standard works referred to in note 2 above): Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, And the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Robert, C. Scharff, "Heidegger's 'Appropriation' of Dilthey before *Being and Time*," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, January 1997, 105–28; István M. Fehér, "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, *Lebensphilosophie*: Heidegger's Confrontation with Husserl, Dilthey, and Jaspers," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, 73–90. For Heidegger's thought in relation to the problem of history at large see Christopher Fynsk, *Thought and Historicity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003). That early Heidegger's historical philosophizing can be traced back beyond Dilthey to Hegel has been shown by Thomas Schwartz Wentzer, "Hegel's Challenge to the Early Heidegger," in *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation*, 217–38.

8. All references to Dilthey's works are to *Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner Verlag, 1958–90); henceforth cited as *GS*, followed by the volume number and page number(s). Here *GS* VII: 278.

unconditionally accepts it as a *universal* breakthrough to the historical nature of “all facts of the mind” (*GA* 56/57: 164), leaving no loophole open for any theoretical position “outside” history. For Heidegger, historical consciousness is emancipation *tout court*. The historical point of view emancipates from the shackles of theory and metaphysics, as well as from the interpretive predominance of the natural sciences (*GA* 56/57: 164). Of course, all of this is also a key aspect in Dilthey’s own perspective. For Dilthey, however, the emancipation of the historical worldview is overshadowed by the accompanying problem of “relativism” and the “anarchy of systems” (*GS* V: 9). Heidegger does not see any such dangers.⁹ Using Dilthey’s own stipulated difference between the natural sciences and the humanities, Heidegger holds that the criterion of science—universal and objective knowledge—is not a standard applicable to historical life as a lived reality, which means that the problem of “relativism” is nothing but a “sham problem.” Instead, Heidegger pushes for a view that accentuates and intensifies the historical reality in human life as a fundamental and inescapable *fact* beyond which one cannot go.

But this “fact” is not an “objective” fact “of” history, nor a fact “about” history, let alone an occurring fact “in” history. Rather, it is the fact that humans cannot exist but historically (=facticity). For Heidegger, living historically implies the conscious, self-reflective seizing of the particular historical situation in which we live. Instead of fleeing from the historical altogether or keeping it at arm’s length through theoretical externalization (for instance, through historiography, epistemology of history, the worry of relativism, etc.), Heidegger holds that we have to accept history as an *immanent* reality in human life. Just as death is nothing external, let alone “objective,” so history is nothing “outside” human life. History is constitutive of human life; it is within, not without. What Dilthey calls our “being-in” (“*Darinnensein*”; *GS* VIII: 99)—that is, our immersion in life at a particular historical time—becomes the defining characteristic of *Dasein* for Heidegger. And Heidegger accentuates, perhaps more than Dilthey, that to live historically means to live in a particular historical “situation” (*GA* 56/57: 205). This situation is opened up only through a self-reflexive grasp of the future that is possible from within the historically grown contemporary situation. To be historical means to act and to project oneself into the future from within a historically delimited, but not determined, historical situation, which itself is the product of the past.

9. Occasionally early Heidegger would even defend “relativism,” for instance when he says that since Dilthey the spectre of relativism has haunted philosophy and that the proper response would be to “lose the fear of this spectre [of relativism].” *GA* 59: 154. He also says that in virtue of the uniqueness and concreteness of human life “relativism” is “inevitable.” *GA* 59: 190. But it seems that Heidegger’s considered view is that the very label “relativism” is still governed by the unquestioned acceptance of its opposite, absolute knowledge, and that this simple opposition is best called into question, like other contrasts that are more or less unthinkingly bandied about (rationalism, irrationalism, etc.; *GA* 58: 149).

In contrast to Dilthey's epistemological and much more contemplative approach to historical consciousness,¹⁰ Heidegger tends to emphasize the practical implications of historical consciousness. For Heidegger, historical consciousness means that one cannot reflect oneself out of history. The spell of theory or metaphysics is broken by the historical worldview. Self-reflective historical consciousness enhances and sharpens the awareness of the fact that one is implicated in the historical situation in which one lives, whether one wants it or not. It draws one into history and demands that one seizes the historical moment. It is diametrically opposed to a metaphysical consciousness, which attempts to understand human life from a supra-historical standpoint. Thus Heidegger writes:

Only if history is seen in such a way that one's own effective reality [*Wirklichkeit*] is seen within this historical connection, can we say that life knows about the history in which it stands, knows the reality of historical consciousness. One's own epoch is [then] experienced as a situation, in which the present itself has its place, not only in relation to the past, but also as a situation in which the future will be shaped or has been shaped. Hence, the rise and the vigilance of historical awareness is not a matter of course; it does not come with life as such. Rather, it is a task to develop it. (*WD*, 145)

The "task" announced here accurately describes the impetus driving Heidegger's work during the early 1920s. "*Destruktion*" of the predominance of theory and metaphysics, and the contestation of the pretensions of the natural sciences to define reality as such—all these issues Heidegger prosecutes from the perspective of the supreme reality of historical life. Whereas "nature" does not have a historical "situation," humans are directly implicated and involved in the historical situation in which they live and shape future historical developments, carrying on with what they consider the legacy or heritage that has been handed down to them. Being-in-the-world is being-in-history. For Heidegger, historical awareness or experience and historical agency are inseparably linked together, as they define the *fundamental characteristic* of human life. It is this self-reflexive, practical, involved historical-existence-in-a-situation that Heidegger calls "historicity" ("*Geschichtlichkeit*").¹¹ Historicity is the historical stance that grasps that one exists "historically;" this stance *is* only, if and when it is actualized in historical engagement in a historical situation.

While Dilthey and Heidegger share the view that "history" must be seen "as a reality *sui generis*," which defines human life (*WD*: 145), only Heidegger recognizes

10. See Heidegger's criticism of Dilthey in *GA* 59: 165–8. In his paper "Heidegger's 'Appropriation' of Dilthey before *Being and Time* (*Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35/1 [1997], 105–28), Robert C. Scharff convincingly argues that despite the many criticisms leveled against Dilthey by Heidegger, Dilthey is a very import philosophical source and even inspiration for Heidegger's early philosophy. While I agree with this claim, I think it is important to also delineate where Heidegger moves away from Dilthey.

11. Cf. Gadamer's article on historicity in *Religion und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Ed. Kurt Galling (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958), 1496–8.

that this is just the starting point for a proper “ontology of ‘the historical’” (GA 64: 14). This defines the crucial difference between Dilthey and Heidegger.¹² In fact, in thinking through “the historical” as an *ontological* problem, outside the confines of the project of a “Fourth Critique,” Heidegger would develop the main thematic lines in his *magnum opus Being and Time*, incidentally by formulating arguments that show a close affinity to critical objections Count Yorck von Wartenburg had raised in his correspondence with Dilthey.¹³

Like Heidegger, Yorck has not much interest in the historical sciences per se, nor the epistemology of historiography.¹⁴ Unlike Dilthey, Yorck eschews external reflections about relativism and absolute knowledge. Instead, he is keen on understanding the ontological dimension of history. And, like Heidegger, Yorck grasps that man’s historical existence puts a premium on action and praxis over contemplation and theory. Just like Heidegger, Yorck thinks that Dilthey gives too much room to epistemological questions concerning what we can know about history and how historical knowledge affects our lives. In a letter from 1888, Yorck articulates his ontological take on the problem of history by noting that “just as much as I am nature, *I am history*” (BW: 71; my emphasis). In contrast to Dilthey, who approaches history through its objective productions, institutions, and ideas, in which life expresses itself, namely via a consciousness that intends history as an objectivity from which it is different as consciousness (GS VIII: 226), Yorck takes history as something immanent to our lives. History is what we live. We *are* history. We are not just “in” history. To be historical in this sense must not be confused with studying historical events. It is not the same as having “knowledge” about history.¹⁵

Moreover, Yorck draws the philosophical conclusion that if we are history and cannot step outside history even in thought, philosophical thinking must be historical too. Unlike Dilthey, who is unwilling to give up the claim of objectivity and universal truth for the historical sciences, Yorck takes the radical step of acknowledging the historical nature of philosophy itself. He writes: “Because to philosophize is to live, so in my view (don’t be alarmed!) there is such a thing as a philosophy of history. ... There is no true philosophizing that is not historical. It is intrinsically wrong to separate systematic philosophy from history of philoso-

12. It would certainly be unfair to argue that Dilthey is merely interested in the epistemology of the historical sciences. He clearly sees that the historical is *the defining* dimension of the *existence* of human beings. However, because of his great historical sensibilities, Dilthey would never consider an ontology of the historical, fearing that it would slide back into “Platonism.” Ironically, he does not detect the Platonic baggage in his own scientific theorizing aimed at universality of knowledge.

13. *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm Dilthey und dem Grafen Paul Yorck v. Wartenburg (1877–1897)*, ed. Erich Rothacker (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1923); henceforth cited as BW.

14. For Yorck’s philosophy, see my entry on “Paul Yorck von Wartenburg” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, at <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

15. It is significant that Dilthey never gives up the idea that the deeds and objectifications in “history” tell us “what mankind really is” (GS VIII: 226), which effectively pursues the philosophical ideal of universal knowledge through the medium of history.

phy" (*BW*, 251). Heidegger quotes these statements by Yorck in his 1924 review article on the Dilthey–Yorck correspondence (*GA* 64, 13), and he inserts the same quotes in *Being and Time* three years later (*GA* 2: 531). These statements express Heidegger's position *in nuce*, which he had already gained independently by studying Dilthey's work during and directly after the First World War. It is therefore no wonder that in a letter of 1924 Heidegger does acknowledge Yorck as a kindred thinker, writing that Yorck "was half a century ahead of his time."¹⁶

This can be spelled out in more detail. One of the most trenchant and philosophically most "effective" criticisms that Yorck levels against his friend Dilthey is that despite his accentuation of historical reality, he still downplays "the generic difference between the ontic and the historical" (*BW*: 191). Again, Heidegger quotes this criticism in 1924 (*GA* 64: 10) and in *Being and Time* (*GA* 2: 528). According to Yorck, Dilthey does not pay enough attention to the specific character of historical reality as it is lived. This is so because Dilthey tends to fall back into an "ontic" (or "aesthetic" or "ocular") approach, which "looks" at history from outside (by way of an "objective" or "theoretical" perspective), as if history was a given object, just like any other theoretical or natural object. But if we *are* history, as Yorck insists, that approach must fail (or, rather, must give a distorted account of our historical being). It reifies history at the expense of historical agency and the practical impetus inherent in historical consciousness. Yorck's criticism is exactly the kind of criticism that early Heidegger levels against Dilthey and the neo-Kantians in 1919/20, namely when he critiques their shared presupposition that historical reality is "an objective reality" (*GA* 60: 48). Like Yorck, Heidegger argues that the "theoretical" or "objective" approach to history—Yorck would call it the "ocular" or "ontic" approach—cuts off "the living relation" to history (*GA* 60: 48), namely as a whole to which we belong, which we "are," and which we, therefore, never "have" as an object present at hand.

When Yorck speaks of the generic difference between "the ontic" and "the historical," we need to understand that Yorck uses the word "ontic" to refer to nature, as well as everything that is grasped as something unchanging (i.e., that which presents itself to the eye of theoretical speculation in timeless fashion, as if lifted out of the context of the changing world around us). It is what falls under the domain of "the ocular" (*BW*: 71), what the mind's eye sees as if *sub species aeternitas* (as, for instance, essences, ideas, etc.).¹⁷ By contrast, "the historical" refers to the "visible" and "invisible" historical "forces" that shape our lives (i.e., the actions, inventions, decisions, and articulated "stances" towards life that "effectively" influence our way of life and thinking, and which are still felt as our "heritage," handed down to us from previous generations; *BW*: 71). According to Yorck, history is a

16. J. W. Storck & T. Kiesel: "Martin Heidegger und die Anfänge der Deutschen Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte. Eine Dokumentation." In *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*. Ed. v. Frithjof Rodi, vol. 8, 1992–3, 203.

17. Yorck's concept of the ontic (and the ocular) ranges over the same kind of things that Heidegger calls "present-at-hand."

continuous line of “effects,” and to illustrate this point he approvingly refers to “Goethe’s dictum of our having lived [*Gelebthaben*] for at least three thousand years” (*BW*: 71). While Dilthey would not at all disagree with this (he himself speaks of the “effective connections” in history; *GS* VII: 156–60), it is Yorck who makes it the all-defining characteristic of the historical. History is “virtual” and “effective,” where actions and deeds of past generations reverberate in the present. Moreover, Yorck clearly understands that virtual history requires a methodological approach of its own. It cannot be thematized in “ontic” or “ocular” terms, that is, as something universally present which presents itself to theoretical speculation.

To the extent that Yorck and Heidegger agree on this point, they are united in their criticism of Dilthey. For despite Dilthey’s great insights into the historicity of life, in the end Dilthey still searches for the common genus of life, “the identity of human nature” underlying all cultures and times, in order to satisfy the “demands of universal validity” (i.e., in order to have an objective self-same basis for the propositions of the human sciences; *GS* VII: 137, 141). Dilthey sees “history” as an unfolding of different aspects or sides of the same human life, humanity (*GS* VIII: 220–26). While it might look as if Heidegger’s insistence on the “primacy of factual life” (*GA* 58: 173) is close to Dilthey’s dictum that “life” is the “basic fact” from which all philosophy must take its starting point (*GS* VII: 359), it is important to realize that Dilthey’s concept of “life” refers to the common and shared ground of humanity at large, which means that Dilthey, for all his immersion in history, ultimately subordinates the historical to the ontic, which is the exact opposite of what Heidegger does. For Heidegger subordinates the ontic (the theoretical and the theoretically grasped objects that show up within a theoretical framework, including the objective study of history) to the always historically situated life, factual life, which itself does no longer have a fixed “essence” or “nature”—on account of its being historical through and through.

Although Heidegger and Yorck agree in their criticism of Dilthey, we must also note a crucial difference between Yorck and Heidegger. For although Yorck has a very keen sense for the generic difference between “the ontic” and “the historical,” he still takes it in a dualistic sense. For Yorck, humans are “co-determined” by history *and* nature. Yet one of the pre-eminent historians of the nineteenth century, Johann Gustav Droysen, developed the ontico-historical difference in a much more radical way. In §82 of *The Principles of History*, first published in 1858, Droysen writes: “What their genus is to animals and plants ... that History is to human beings.”¹⁸ And around the turn of the century (1903–5), Jacob Burckhardt provides a very similar account of the ontico-historical difference, claiming that “in nature we have *regnum*, *genus*, *species*, whereas in history we have peoples, families,

18. Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 357. In summer semester 1926 Heidegger held a semester-long “seminar” called “On History in the Wake of Droysen.” A black notebook with student reports of the seminar meetings exists in Heidegger’s *Nachlass* at the Deutsche Literaturarchiv in Marbach (with the signature 75.7251).

and groups.”¹⁹ Droysen and Burckhardt eliminate altogether the natural or ontic side in human beings. This is much more radical than Yorck, because it breaks with all residual dualism and essentialism. The obvious implication in Droysen and Burckhardt is that whereas things in nature have a fixed essence, human beings lack it altogether. Not falling under a genus or species, humans are not “exemplars” or “particulars” which share a generic nature. Instead, they are truly singular entities, but within the continuous line of history, the historical realities of families, groups, and peoples. While history itself is always changing, it is historical life (and it alone) which *defines* human beings in their existence. Historical reflections of this sort directly challenge traditional metaphysical assumptions. Most notably, it undermines the concept of an underlying human nature (a genus- or species-concept of humans).

In the wake of such historical or historicist considerations, early Heidegger attempts to work out the new philosophical foundations of the ontology of factual life. Heidegger’s thought, taking shape under his chosen mentors Dilthey and, particularly, Yorck, turns the critical force of historical or historicist analysis against the stronghold of metaphysics in the interpretation of human life and reality at large. In this sense, Heidegger continues and radicalizes the project of historical criticism of metaphysics and speculation begun in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. First of all, early Heidegger’s frequent attacks on objectivism, theoretism, traditional ontology, metaphysics, transcendental philosophy (constitution!), and so on, are ultimately rooted in the concern that in their pursuit of “the ontic,” philosophers ignore “the historical,” the historical reality in which we live and have our being. Second, in his first postwar lecture, Heidegger already shifts the philosophical focus from the transcendental I to “the historical I,” which constitutes the center of lived experiences (*GA* 56/57: 74). Only if and when the historical I “is somehow fully present” and engaged in the world around it (*GA* 56/57: 73), namely as part of a “situation” (*GA* 56/57: 205), can we say that “everything is meaningful,” or that “it worlds,” as Heidegger famously puts it (*GA* 56/57: 73). The “situation” that Heidegger has in mind is the “historical” situation in which one finds oneself. This situation is shared with others (*GA* 56/57: 74). The “situation-I” is the “historical I,” as it participates in, and is concerned with, common concerns around it (*GA* 56/57: 206). The “historical I,” being embedded in a shared, particular historical situation with others, takes precedence over the solipsism of the “transcendental I” of the philosophical tradition.

Arguing from the primacy of the historical I, Heidegger holds that the theoretical or transcendental I amounts to a veritable “de-historicization of the I” (*Entgeschichtlichung des Ich*; *GA* 56/57: 206). In reality, the transcendental I is derivative. The original “I” is the historical I. The original experience is “historical experience” through and through (*GA* 60: 169). It is the hallmark of early Heidegger to make “factual life experiences” the primary ground from which all higher-level thought and philosophy emerge (*GA* 60: 10). These factual life

19. Jakob Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1956), 18.

experiences are historical experiences. Against the Kantian picture of a multitude of intuitions that have to be brought under categories, Heidegger insists on the primacy of historical experience in factual life. Into this stream of historical experiences all solid things are dissolved and recognized as having their reality within a given historical situation only.

Following Yorck and historians like Droysen and Burkhardt, early Heidegger eschews philosophical or ontic definitions of the “historical I” in terms of an essence (or a genus, etc.). In fact, much of early Heidegger’s work is directed at providing an account of the historical I outside the traditional ontological or theoretical approach. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that “Dasein is never to be understood ontologically as a case and exemplar of a genus of things objectively present” (GA 2: 57). Rather, Dasein’s “essence” lies in its “to-be” (GA 2: 56); that is, Dasein exists historically in a particular historical situation.

The historical situation is always embedded within an overarching historical reality; that is, the historical past and future (see quotation on page 5). More specifically, it is a generational connection. To act historically is to devise a future direction on the basis of our coming to terms with our past (inherited from past generations) in the present situation that we share with contemporaries (GA 64: 94). This requires that we pay attention to the whole range of our historical reality. Heidegger calls authentic historicity the historical awareness that recognizes this whole range (i.e., the “simultaneity” of past, present, and future in the historical action one resolves to undertake;²⁰ GA 64: 58, 94). One blinds oneself to historical reality, if one restricts it to the past (antiquarianism), or clings to the present (presentism), or plunges headlong into the future without remembering and recollecting the past (forgetfulness; GA 64: 63–5). However, since we live “forwards,” and not “backwards,” Heidegger accords some primacy to “futurality” (GA 64: 94; also GA 2: 563). But this is never done at the expense of the present and the past.

In fact, despite his acknowledgement of the significance of futurality, early Heidegger goes out of his way to argue that Dasein “is” its past. Because Dasein grows up and into a tradition that historically precedes it, Dasein cannot but “live” its own past (GA 64: 89). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger holds that Dasein, in its factual being, “is” “what” it has been already in the past (GA 2: 26). This comes out even clearer when Heidegger argues that Dasein “is” always its generation (GA 64: 88; WD: 175; GA 2: 508). As a historical being, Dasein is always integrated into the overall historical continuity of the preceding generations, as well as the contemporaneous generation. And it is out of historical deference to future generations that Heidegger is critical of the philosophical temptation to legislate for them ahead of their time, leaping in for them, as it were, to spare them their

20. This “simultaneity” in the moment of action is far less paradoxical than the “non-successive” or “not-sequential time” that Blattner finds in *Being and Time*. William D. Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89–98. We could not act without such collected and synthesized temporal awareness. Heidegger develops his views on time on the basis of our historical being, not some prior ontology of time as such. It is quite significant that Blattner abstracts from Heidegger’s concept of historicity altogether.

own cares (*GA* 64: 94). There is a whole ethics of historical life involved here. For instance, against historicism and the alleged epistemological walls that separate us from earlier generations, making them alien, unreachable, and irrelevant to our situation, Heidegger emphatically insists on the possibility of empathetic understanding of past Dasein, not on the grounds of a shared nature, but on grounds of their openness to their historical situation, of which we are the direct descendants.²¹ History is open; it builds a bridge to the past and the future.

In conclusion, for Heidegger “Dasein is history” (*GA* 64: 86), which does indeed echo Yorck’s statement that “I am history.” Again like Yorck, Heidegger’s factual life is “history” in the sense that it is embedded in an overarching inter-generational context. Therefore, it cannot be reduced to a punctual, isolated, and non-relational “now.” Dasein is always already outside itself—in the midst of history.

It is true that in *Being and Time* Heidegger shifts his earlier position because he approaches the problem of historical being through the *prior* clarification of the “meaning of being as such.”²² However, it is quite important to recall that the suggested “horizon” for being is “time,” or, in concrete, ontic terms, history (*GA* 2: 1). In other words, being itself (as opposed to entities or the ontic) is intelligible only in “temporal” or “historical” terms. According to Heidegger, being cannot be “reduced” to what is present or always present (i.e., present to the ocularity of theory). In other words, on the level of the “idea” of being as such, Heidegger reintroduces the concept of historical being, in order to distinguish being from the mere presence of ontical, present-at-hand things (i.e., beings). This is of course the “ontological difference” between being and beings (*GA* 24: 32). But if being *is* historical itself, then we can detect underneath Heidegger’s “ontological difference” nothing other than Yorck’s generic ontico-historical difference. Odo Marquard is entirely correct when he suggests that Heidegger’s “ontological difference” is “much easier to understand” if one recognizes in it “the quotation” of the generic difference between the ontic and the historical as put forward by Yorck.²³ The project of *Being and Time* continues and transforms the line of thought first articulated by Dilthey and, in particular, Yorck.

21. Heidegger writes: “The issue of empathy will not make any headway as long as one takes it as an epistemological problem. For the motive behind the question of empathy is not at all epistemological. Empathy appears in factual life experiences, that is, what is at stake here is an original-historical phenomenon, which cannot be solved without the phenomenon of *tradition* taken in an original sense.” *GA* 60:85.

22. Heidegger writes: “How else can we get hold philosophically of historicity as distinguished from the ontical, ..., except by bringing both the ‘ontical’ and the ‘historical’ into a *more primordial unity*, so that they can be compared and distinguished? ... The idea of being embraces both the ‘ontical’ and the ‘historical.’ It is *this idea* which must be ‘generically differentiated.’” *GA* 2: 532.

23. Odo Marquard, *Skeptische Methode im Blick auf Kant* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1958), 36. Odo Marquard has reaffirmed this position in his recent postscript to “Der Schritt in die Kunst: Über Schiller und Heidegger,” in Martin Heidegger, *Schiller’s Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen: Wintersemester 1936/37*, ed. Ulrich von Bülow (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergemeinschaft, 2005), 198.

Nevertheless, Georg Misch is certainly right in arguing that Heidegger's shift in *Being and Time* from historical factual life experiences to so-called "pre-ontological" experiences indicates a significant new departure.²⁴ But one should not exaggerate the material consequences of this shift. In fact, early Heidegger's breakthrough to a hermeneutic–historical "methodology" in philosophy—centered on the ideas of the hermeneutical situation and *Destruktion*—is achieved by way of his adaptation of the historical sensitivity in Dilthey and Yorck, and it has left its mark on *Being and Time*, as well as his later works.

For instance, early Heidegger puts forward the general principle that because factual life is intrinsically historical (i.e., part of a continuous historical line), philosophy is historical too. In 1922 he writes: "To the extent that philosophical research grasps the reality and kind of being of that which is its subject matter (the facticity of life) it is 'historical' knowledge in a radical sense" (*GA* 62: 368). This is not an isolated statement,²⁵ and it is consistent with early Heidegger's generally anti-metaphysical and anti-transcendental position. For "historical knowledge" means two things. First and foremost, it means that philosophy is not in possession of "absolute" knowledge.²⁶ Philosophy is always finite knowledge, bound to its historical situation (having its own historical genesis and potential openness towards the future and the past).²⁷

Because early Heidegger emphasizes the historicity of philosophy, he also argues that the then (and today) customary division of philosophy into an independent "systematic" and "historical" approach is untenable, because any "historical" account of philosophy is seen through the "systematic" assumptions prevalent in each present time (however differently articulated in the various philosophical systems), whereas the "systematic" side of any philosophy is of course a historical product based on the achievements of past philosophies (past research strategies and their results, as communicated from one generation to the next). Consequently, Heidegger discards this systematic/historical division as "deceptive" and argues that philosophy must be historical and systematic at the same time²⁸ (*GA* 56/57: 125). Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" could not be formulated better.²⁹ Moreover,

24. Georg Misch, *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie*, 3rd edn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 38.

25. "The ontology of Dasein is historical knowledge [*historisches Erkennen*], because the basic constitution of Dasein is historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*], which determines the scope of Dasein's interpretations at any given time." *GA* 64: 103. "Philosophy is historical knowledge (that is, historically performed understanding) of factual life." *GA* 61: 2.

26. Thus Heidegger writes: "As historical knowledge [*historisches Erkennen*], philosophy not only cannot, but also must not, entertain any such "dream" concerning "absolute knowledge." *GA* 61: 163.

27. "Philosophy *as such*—in some general, pacified atemporality—which one somehow conjures up, does not exist at all." *GA* 61: 66.

28. This is also Heidegger's view after *Being and Time*. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* he writes: "'Philosophy as science' entails 'history of philosophy.'" *GA* 24: 31.

29. Thus Heidegger writes: "There is no genuine history of philosophy, unless it is for a historical consciousness which practices genuine philosophy. Every history, and especially the history of

this is in full agreement with Yorck's statement that "it is intrinsically wrong to separate systematic philosophy from the philosophy of history" (*BW*: 251).

Two other methodological concepts are directly linked to Heidegger's project of a historically sensitive philosophy: the so-called *hermeneutic situation*, and *Destruktion*. Heidegger developed both ideas in the early 1920s and never abandoned them. To begin with the concept of the hermeneutic situation, we need to recall that when early Heidegger rejects aspirations of philosophy to absolute or supra-historical knowledge as "fantastical objectivity" (*GA* 62: 372), his ultimate reason is "historical." Philosophy must clarify and make transparent, as much as that is possible, "the contemporary situation," instead of searching after a chimerical truth *sub specie aeternitatis* (*GA* 61: 61; *GA* 59: 13). Heidegger considers this search as a flight from the historical situation and one's historical responsibility. Therefore, he claims: "What philosophy can be, it can be only as philosophy of its time"³⁰ (*GA* 61: 64). Heidegger calls this contemporary horizon "the hermeneutic situation," and it is important to recognize it as a genuinely historical category.³¹ The hermeneutic situation is the shared, contemporary interpretational space in which philosophy takes place. This interpretational space is "invested" by the various historically inherited pre-conceptions, and it is "open" for future departures (*GA* 64: 92/93; *GA* 62: 347/48; *GA* 59: 29). But because the prevalent pre-conceptions are oftentimes merely operative and not thematic as such, it takes a special effort to make the hermeneutic situation as transparent as possible. This is what Heidegger calls the task of "appropriating" (*Aneignung*) the hermeneutic situation (*GA* 62: 347; see also *GA* 61: 161). In other words, the preconceptions—what early Heidegger calls the fore-conception, fore-sight, and fore-concept—are not simply freely chosen interpretational decisions of one's own. They are the historical sediments and operative "conditions" and "presuppositions" in the contemporary, historical situation.³² Without first gaining clarity about them, one cannot hope to explore the full range of new possibilities that can be opened up from out of the given contemporary situation.

philosophy, is constituted as such and for itself in life that is historical—in an absolute sense." *GA* 56/57: 21.

30. Holding that philosophy cannot steal itself away from its contemporary situation in which it stands, Heidegger writes: "Beginning has its 'time.' To begin for another age is meaningless." *GA* 61: 186.
31. In a marginal note to his so-called Natorp-Report, Heidegger writes: "The hermeneutical situation takes shape by *seizing* the factual 'conditions' and 'presuppositions' of philosophical research. Genuine presuppositions are there, not in order to be 'regretted' and 'to be conceded as unavoidable', as phenomena of imperfection. Rather, they are there to be '*exercised*,' that is, one is not to ignore them 'unthinkingly', or to avoid them, but rather to *seize them as such*, that is, to push oneself into the *historical*." *GA* 62: 347.
32. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger gives a much more formal account of the "hermeneutic situation" (*GA* 2: 308), making it almost indistinguishable from the "hermeneutic circle" as an inevitable structure present in any interpretational project whatsoever (*GA* 2: 202/203). Before *Being and Time*, however, the "hermeneutic situation" is historically understood as the contemporary interpretational space that defines the "intellectual situation." *GA* 61: 161.

The only way to come to a comprehensive grasp of the historically effective and operative fore-concepts and fore-conceptions in the hermeneutical situation is criticism, historical *and* systematic criticism to be precise. By investigating the historical genesis of the relevant concepts and conceptions, that is, by tracing them back to what Heidegger calls “the sources” of the tradition (*GA* 62: 368, 371; *GA* 2: 29), namely the original writings of the relevant philosophers, it is possible (i) to revive and re-appropriate the original meaning of these sources, and thereby (ii) to correct the occlusions, deformations, and defective interpretations inherent in every tradition (since traditions are prone to routinization, normalization, self-immunization, etc.), and thus (iii) to evaluate the genuineness and authenticity of the various traditional presuppositions and pre-conceptions operative in the contemporary hermeneutic situation. This historical criticism is what Heidegger calls de-sedimentation (*Abbau*) or *Destruktion*.³³ It is important to note that historical criticism of the tradition and the current preconceptions in the contemporary situation presupposes what Heidegger calls “the continuity of intellectual history” (*GA* 59: 29).

Already in 1920, Heidegger writes: “It is naïveté to think that, today or at any time, one could begin from scratch in philosophy and be so radical as to abandon all so-called tradition” (*GA* 59: 29). This dependency on the past, which is the methodological reflection of the fact that Dasein “is” its past, becomes a direct methodological principle in 1922 when Heidegger argues: “A genuine approach [*echter Ansatz*; i.e., in philosophy] is possible only by stepping back into the decisive approaches [*entscheidenden Ansätze*] of that philosophy in which faded tradition [*verschütteter Tradition*] we still stand” (*GA* 62: 174). Heidegger’s point is that philosophy, rightly understood, is conscious “repetition” of opportunities that have been adumbrated in the past and which can be reawakened in one’s own time. This allows one to develop the potential that has been overlooked in that tradition and to critique the way these results have been handed down to the present time (*GA* 62: 350).³⁴ It is quite obvious that early Heidegger follows his own methodological rule when in his lectures he critically revisits Aristotle, Plato, Paul, Augustine, and Schleiermacher, among others. In discussing the relevance of Augustine and neo-Platonism for his time, Heidegger writes that their historical reality “hits home,” because “we are it” (*GA* 60: 173). We still live and think in

33. Of course, Heidegger knows that every *Destruktion* has its own set of pre-conceptions (*GA* 59: 35). Hence, what we take to be “basic experiences” in the sources and how we interpret them depends on the “basic experiences” we are able to articulate and hold onto in the present. This is a hermeneutical circle in historical life indeed. The way we understand ourselves in the present opens up ways of understanding the past, and vice versa. The past is not a fixed and “objective” yard-stick. It is “authorized” and authoritative only through the ever-renewed confrontation of the past with the present, contemporary situation.

34. Needless to say, this inner-philosophical “method” of going back and “repeating” the “decisive approaches” functions as the model for the idea of Dasein’s historicity in *Being and Time*, which centers on the “repetition” of “existential possibilities” that Dasein has inherited from the past (*GA* 2: 509).

categories of past philosophies. We still stand in “the effective dimension” of this tradition.³⁵

In short, Heidegger’s trademark hermeneutical philosophizing, including the fusion of horizons, the desedimentation of the tradition to its original sources, and the idea of an effective history can all be traced to his appropriation of the breakthrough of historical criticism in the nineteenth century and, particularly, his original continuation of Dilthey’s and Yorck’s project to understand “historicity,” or *Geschichtlichkeit*.

However, in stark contrast to this inter-generational concept of history, early Heidegger also develops a concept of history along phenomenological–existential lines, where he locates the “original” sense of history not in tradition or the historical situation and interconnectedness of generations, but in the innermost interiority of the self alone. To this we now turn.

II. Phenomenological–Existential History

In 1920 Heidegger gave a lecture course entitled “The Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression” (*GA* 59). The first part (pages 43–86) contains a phenomenological–existential explication of the “meaning” of history and of “the historical,” issuing in the claim that the genealogical origin from which the semantic field of the word “history” emerges is the concrete self and its history, “the person in his concrete individual, historical Dasein” (*GA* 59: 86), or what we may call “existential history” for short. It is the root meaning of history; all other notions of history are merely derivatives of this. Only posthumously published in the *Gesamtausgabe* in 2007, this treatment has received relatively little attention to this day.³⁶ The singular importance of this lecture course for understanding Heidegger’s early concept of history justifies a critical, detailed exposition.

According to early Heidegger, Husserl’s phenomenology is characterized, if not to say tainted, by its “*Geschichtslosigkeit*,” its lack of historical sense (*GA* 63: 75). This sweeping, uncompromisingly negative verdict is surely unjustified and untenable in light of Husserl’s 1904/5 *Lectures on Inner Time Consciousness* and *Ideas II*, the content of which Heidegger would have known, being Husserl’s personal assistant.³⁷ Despite Heidegger’s failure to productively engage Husserl, he

35. Dilthey calls this *Wirkungszusammenhang* [effective connection] (*GS* VII: 151), whereas Gadamer calls it “effective historical consciousness” [*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*].

36. There is a recent English translation by Tracy Colony, *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* (London: New York, Continuum, 2010).

37. Suffice it to say that in *Ideas II* Husserl differentiates “material things” from persons on account of the *historical being* of the latter, which is entirely absent in the former. *Ideen Zu Einer Reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch*, Husserliana, Gesammelte Werke, vol. IV (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), 137. Henceforth, references to this volume are abbreviated as *Hua* IV. That Husserl first became alerted to temporality and history by Heidegger’s writings in the 1920s, notably *Being and Time*, is not borne out by the facts.

does pursue his study of the meaning of history along what he considers phenomenological lines of inquiry, arriving at a phenomenological–existential concept of history whose personalist impetus around self-questioning and self-responsibility is not at all at odds with Husserl, although Husserl would not share Heidegger’s extreme, anti-objectivist conclusions.

Heidegger begins his investigation with an overview of “meanings” (“*Bedeutungen*”) that are related to the word “history” (“*Geschichte*”). The aim is to find the original and “unified” (“*einheitlichen*”) meaning, as well as the original experiential basis with regard to which these meanings have their intelligibility (GA 59: 43). In other words, Heidegger attempts to survey the semantic field of the word “history” and to delineate and describe the original source where the phenomenon of historical being shows itself “originarily” and in a unified manner.³⁸ There are altogether six meanings or concepts of history that Heidegger differentiates. They are described below.³⁹

1. History as historiography (*Geschichtswissenschaft*), as it is practiced by the modern historical disciplines. It includes the always changing body of historical knowledge, which is objectively researched and taught at modern-day universities (GA 59: 49).⁴⁰

2. History as objective past (*Vergangenheit*); that is, the vast field of state of affairs (*Tatsachenfeld*) in the past (GA 59: 45). It includes facts, events, occurrences, people, civilizations and so forth, all of which “factically” existed in the totality of the past (GA 59: 50, 59).⁴¹ Heidegger notes that the objective past in this sense

38. Of course, the reduction of objectivities to the “origin” [“*Ursprung*”] and “genuine experiencing” [“*eigentliche Erfahrung*”] in the subject also guides Husserl’s phenomenological research, in the course of which he finds inner time-consciousness as the ultimate form of all experience. *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), 7.

39. I have followed Heidegger’s list of concepts with one exception, reversing the order of the ultimate and penultimate concepts. What appears as **5** in my list is the sixth meaning in Heidegger’s text, and what appears as **6** here is Heidegger’s fifth item. I have changed the order for reasons of a more streamlined exposition. (The six meanings are referred to hereafter by their numbers in bold type.)

40. Heidegger’s reference point here is the establishment of the historical sciences as proper subject matters taught at modern universities, which is the accomplishment of the nineteenth century, as history was not considered a “scientific” discipline before that time. More specifically, Heidegger does not refer to some supra-historical *idea* according to which *res gestae* are narrated in the *historia rerum gestarum*. Heidegger wants to understand the concrete and historical “situation” in which the word “history” has its genetic origin (GA 59: 44). It is for this reason that he exemplifies the meaning in question here by the sentence: “My friend studies history.” GA 59: 43.

41. As Heidegger points out, the *subject matter* [*Sachgebiet*] of historiography [*Geschichtswissenschaft*] is not necessarily identical to this objective field of the past. (It would therefore be wrong to assimilate this notion to the *res gestae* of the tradition.) Likewise, the way in which this past is experienced may very well differ from the methodological approach en courant in the histori-

always refers to human beings who either lived through these events, occurrences, etc., or brought them about, or stand in some other relation to them (*GA* 59: 51). There is an essential, human index to everything that falls under this concept of the objective past.⁴²

3. History as tradition; that is, the conscious (but by no means objective, or scientific, or otherwise “autonomous” or “specialized”) remembrance and cultivation of, as well as the ongoing orientation gleaned from, past achievements, events, and examples within one’s *own* community (*Gemeinschaft*) or people (*Volk*). It is the shared heritage and manifest “culture” (*Kultur*) which—and this is the important qualification for Heidegger—is *owned* and *appropriated* by a community or a people. It is *constitutive* of the whole being of the people or the community. As such, tradition is not antiquarian, but, rather, the ground from which the future is shaped, thus allowing for the renewal and transformation, as well as the gradual or sudden loss of what has been inherited.⁴³ Heidegger emphasizes four points. First, a tradition concerns one’s *own* past or a past to which one belongs (not an objective past *of others*, or some objective and universal field of past facts, like concept 2 above). Second, a tradition is something one lives “in;” it is “immanent” to the existence of the community or culture (*GA* 59: 53). In other words, a tradition is not the possession of an objective content established by the historical disciplines (1), but the practical *familiarity with* the effective historical life of a community or a people. Third, a tradition is not the merely passive conservation of “the past.” Instead, it first of all opens up the future *as future*, namely on the basis of coming to terms with the past, which understanding is then projected into the future. Fourth, within a tradition there is a common band that unites the “descendants” (*Spätere*) with the preceding “ancestral” generations (*die Früheren*), from which the inherited culture and tradition stems (*GA* 59: 46). In other words, history, understood as tradition, unifies or “binds” past, present, and future into a unitary and constantly renewed structure, which cannot be dissolved into discrete and separate temporal elements that could exist on their own.

4. History as *historia vitae magistra*; that is, the practical or pragmatic reflection on and the use of historical events in the past (primarily from the past events of *others*, not one’s *own* history or tradition), in order to learn from past mistakes for the sake of preventing their repetition in the current situation (*GA* 59: 43, 46–7).

cal sciences (see *GA* 59: 51). Moreover, it is clear that a historical event in the past is not to be confused with various historiological studies about it (*GA* 59: 50).

42. That “the past” always refers to the past world of *Dasein*, which no longer exists, is also argued in *Being and Time* (*GA* 2: 503).

43. Since Heidegger contrasts “having a tradition” with so-called ‘unhistorical’ tribes and peoples” (*GA* 59: 43) which have “no history” and “no tradition,” although they have an “objective past” (history 2) that we might attribute to them objectively and even study accordingly (history 1), it is clear that Heidegger equates “having a tradition” with “being historical.” But as we shall see, it is not the original sense. It is derivative.

As Heidegger points out, especially “politicians” use this concept of history as the teacher for the present (*GA* 59: 47). While this approach requires some familiarity with the relevant historical events, it is not the same familiarity that is inherent in a tradition, where one is intrinsically engaged and affected by past “mistakes,” and the ongoing effects, etc. (*GA* 59: 47).

5. History as significant “incident” (“*Vorkommnis*” or “*Vorfall*”;⁴⁴ *GA* 59: 48), in the sense of episodes (stories [*Geschichten*]⁴⁵) in one’s own life that are somehow “remarkable” because they stand out and directly “involve” and “affect” oneself as an individual (*GA* 59: 58), particularly as incidents that run counter to one’s own expectations and habits, as well as societal standards and norms (*GA* 59: 85). Heidegger’s point is twofold. First, occurring “incidents” register only because they affect one’s life and they have “significance” in this sense. One is involved and fully “there,” “engaged” and attending to the incident (*GA* 59: 48), for instance, one’s embarrassing faux pas in society. Significant incidents of this kind are no mere “passing” or “fleeting” moments without consequence, that is to say, they matter (*GA* 59: 58). However, Heidegger’s second point is that the “significance” at issue is tied to, or even defined in, terms of established routines, habits, and societal norms, that is to say, in relation to one’s role and immersion in the environing- and with-world (*GA* 59: 59, 85). A significant incident—something noteworthy that has happened (*ein Geschehen*)⁴⁶—refers to the historical ensemble of “the factual self-world, with-world, and environing world,” without an “exclusive” focus on the personal, inner self alone. It does not express, manifest, or reflect one’s own, inner historical development as a single person (*GA* 59: 59). It is something that happens to me; it is not something I make happen or what expresses me.

6. Existential history as ownmost and innermost past of a self; that is, the exclusive, own and inner history of a singular self, outside any defining immersion in and relation to the environing- or with-world. Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes that history in this sense is “within” the self; it is the history of its “innermost inwardness” (*dem Innersten*; *GA* 59: 58), or its “inmost self” (“*innersten Selbst*”; *GA* 59: 77). By way of illustration Heidegger offers the following statement: “This

44. Heidegger introduces this with two exemplifying sentences: (A) “What kind of business is this now?” (“*Was ist das nun wieder für eine Geschichte?*”) This is presumably said in the context of noticing or being told some slightly annoying event, such as another more or less mischievous trick played by kids, or some unexpected and unpleasant turn of events, etc. (B) “Something quite embarrassing happened to me” (“*Mir ist eine sehr unangenehme Geschichte passiert*”).

45. The German word *Geschichte* means also “story,” apart from historical past, and historiography. And in German, *Geschichten* (= stories) are not only narrated and recalled after the fact. They are actually encountered, as in Heidegger’s own example: “*Mir ist eine sehr unangenehme Geschichte passiert*” (“A very unpleasant thing happened to me”).

46. The German word *Geschehen* [= happening, occurring, taking place] is the root for the word *Geschichte* [= history].

person has had a sad history [*traurige Geschichte*]⁴⁷ (GA 59: 44). This statement captures the exclusive focus on the individual history of the person in question, outside all objective works, achievements, and cultural significations, all of which can only distract from understanding the inner, lived plight of this “sad” person. It is a person, we may say, who because of his failure to fully achieve his own “existence” or his promise is continuously mortified and saddened throughout his life (GA 59: 58). The point is that this individual person carries his sad history within him; it permeates all his actions and undertakings, past, present, and future. His life is lived under an unlucky star, so to speak. The sadness is “enacted,” at each moment, from within, independent of whatever external success or cultural or objective accomplishments one might attribute to the person. No matter what the person intends in the world, everything is lit up by this inner sadness, everything is carried out and performed in the mode of the always-renewed inner misery.⁴⁸ It would be wrong to understand the concept of an innermost history in “psychological terms,” even though Heidegger’s exemplifying statement may invite this mistake. But Heidegger is not interested in “psychological history,” which would abstract from the whole person and focus only on psychological processes, drives, temperaments, and so on. Instead, he wants to highlight the *personal history* as lived by a self, that is, a person’s sad course of life, as it is possessed by that person alone. In short, Heidegger aims at what one may call the historical course of the autobiographical self.⁴⁹ This covers a person’s own style of life or unique footprint in life—how he comports himself in his life, and how he understands himself

47. “It is a sad story with him” may perhaps capture better what Heidegger means. Heidegger also offers another exemplifying sentence, which reads as follows: “This city has had a very chequered history [*sehr wechselvolle Geschichte*].” GA 59: 44. Obviously, Heidegger thinks of a single city and its chequered history by abstracting from its involvement with the surrounding political and cultural environment and focusing on its exclusively internal development. However, since Heidegger’s entire exposition of the concept of an exclusively internal history makes heavy use of a person’s “self-world,” and since he never attributes a self-world to an objective institution, let alone a city, we may assume that Heidegger would have erased this example had he prepared the lecture course for publication. In any case, it plays no substantive part in Heidegger’s exposition.

48. In his 1929/1930 lecture course, Heidegger returns to the phenomenon of sadness one more time, making it an example of what he calls *Stimmung*, the state in which one finds oneself. In his description Heidegger points out how a sad person is withdrawn from the world, oddly “unapproachable,” and “cut off” from others, turned towards his inner, own sadness alone (GA 29/30: 99). Sadness is a particularly isolating and singularizing *Stimmung*, and therefore a good example for the focus on the inner self and its inner history, as opposed to the social self and its history within shared concerns of the with-world. Heidegger may be thinking of Tonio Kröger here.

49. For this, see Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 106ff. It is important to note that it is by no means anachronistic to talk about the “autobiographical” conception of the self in early Heidegger, as he extensively reviews Misch’s pioneering work on the history of autobiography in his lecture course 1919/1920 (GA 58: 56–64).

within his unfolding life. Heidegger holds that, notwithstanding one's involvement with the world and others, one's personal history is strictly one's own.

The concept of one's own history stands in contrast to the tradition of a whole group (3), or the field of objective history (2), or the investigation of objective history (1). It also differs from the various incidents that happen to oneself within the world (5), because these "incidents" do not make up a whole life story. And unlike the concept of *historia vitae magistra* (4), the focus here is squarely on one's *own* history, not as a means to avoid future mistakes, but as a part of a continuously lived life, which defines who one is oneself. In short, Heidegger has in mind one's own "how" of living and the course of one's life, as it is examined, for instance, by way of self-reflection, silent soliloquy, or "*Selbstbesinnung*," of which, as Heidegger suggests, we have an outstanding example in Augustine's *Confessions* (GA 59: 56). This existential reflection and accounting for one's life is a crucial element in Heidegger's conception of an autobiographical history. In language reminiscent of Husserl's *personalistic attitude*, Heidegger assigns philosophy the 'historical' task of alerting each and every one to his or her own, individual situation and "personal existence" ("*personale Existenz*"), which each one has to account for alone, without shifting blame to external conditions, what Heidegger calls "historical servitude" (*historische Leibeigendienerei*) to current power structures, historical trends, and so on (GA 59: 197).

But the autobiographical self and its history is only one side of Heidegger's account here. In a move that has a certain parallel with Husserl's reduction to "the sphere of ownness" (*Hua* I, §44: 124ff.), Heidegger attempts to identify an absolute, inner self, free of all determining reference to something that is not its "own," a self that is "entirely unrelated" (*ganz unbezogen*) to the environing world, or at least not determined by it (GA 59: 84). The personal, autobiographical "self-world" is still a *world*, consisting of the whole context of significations in the environing- and with-world, *in which* the self encounters *itself* with its "personal history." But Heidegger explicitly distinguishes a so-called "genuine" self from the "self-world."⁵⁰ This "genuine" self is the pure or "immanent" "self," free of all alterity whatsoever. It can be identified with what Heidegger calls the central node or "focal point" (*Zugespitztheit*; GA 58: 59–64), or, indeed, "the original sphere" (GA 58: 203), whence all acts and engagements with the world issue, by means of which they are carried out (*Vollzug*⁵¹), and towards which everything rebounds.

50. "The genuine self [*eigentliche Selbst*] is to be differentiated from the self-world [*Selbstwelt*]" (GA 60: 118). Heidegger clearly differentiates between the personal self (self-world) as it is woven into the objective fabric of the intended environing and with-world and the self at the center of all intentionality, separate from, and not determined by, the world and others, because it is that which intends them in the first place (GA 59: 57/58).

51. Heidegger borrows here familiar language from *Ideas I*, where Husserl calls the enactment of any intentionality whatsoever the "execution," or "performance" [*Vollzug*] of an intentional act. *Ideen Zu Einer Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Erster Band, Husserliana, vol. III (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 300ff.; henceforth cited as *Hua* III. For both Husserl and Heidegger, the pure process of intending [*Vollzug*] is what is purely immanent to

Even though Heidegger shies away from assigning a name to this “center of ‘intentionality,’” it is a key element in his early theory. If we steer clear of all superadded ontological or epistemological specifications associated with the works of Husserl or Brentano, we may call it, provisionally and formally, the “intentional self.” In virtue of its intentional centrality or originality, the intentional self bears the non-eliminable, non-transferable responsibility for the acts it carries out. It is non-substitutable in the acts it carries out (*Vollzug*), although what the act is directed at, the content sense or *Gehaltssinn*, is of course shared within a common world.⁵²

For Heidegger, the intentional self is no logical form or abstraction, nor is it a substance of some sort. Only in and through the (intentional) involvements with the world, is the intentional self the sole responsible center for carrying out the act. The intentional self *itself* is also inescapably *implicated* in what it intends. The acts and involvements with the world rebound to the self at the center of intentionality; they affect it and bring it into play, making all acts self-referential. Careful to avoid any hypostatization of a “self,” or any overt reference to a “transcendental subject” that could be misunderstood as standing behind or above the act it performs, Heidegger sometimes refers to the phenomenon of self-referentiality as “having-oneself” (*Sich-selbst-haben*) and even “living-oneself” (*Sich-selbst-leben*) in the performance of one’s intentional acts (GA 58: 246, 251). Sometimes he refers to the phenomenon of self-reference as “self-affectedness” or *Selbstbetroffenheit*^{53,54} (GA

intentionality, entirely free of otherness or transcendence of any sort (GA 58: 261). In fact, Heidegger holds that the actual enacting or performing [*Vollzug*] of intentional acts lies in what he calls the “the original sphere” (GA 58: 203). It is through the act or process of intending [*Vollzug*] that any objectivity, the so-called “content sense” [*Gehaltsinn*], is realized in the first place (GA 60: 62–5). And just as Husserl identifies the performance of the intentional act [*Vollzug*] with the “original production” [*ursprüngliche Produktion*] grounded in “free spontaneity and activity” (Hua III, 300), so Heidegger identifies the activity of intending [*Vollzug*] with the pure “spontaneity of the living self” (GA 58: 261). According to Heidegger, one can lose sight of, or even forget the performative sense [*Vollzugssinn*] of intentionality (i.e., that one’s own self carries out the act), for instance, through total immersion in the intended object (the content sense [*Gehaltssinn*] of intentionality). As Heidegger says, one can live in the performance of the intentional acts “without having oneself” (GA: 58, 260). This would amount to a loss of authentic existence. Conversely, Heidegger argues that the more “intensified” [*gesteigert*] or the more accentuated the performance sense is, the more “authentically” exists the self, which self he equates with “originary life” (GA 58: 260).

52. Heidegger’s distinction overlaps in part with Frege’s distinction between objective sense and subjective conception and colouring of it. The difference is that, unlike Frege, Heidegger would put a premium on the subjective performance [*Vollzug*] of an act and the non-transferable, absolute responsibility for it.
53. *Selbstbetroffenheit* is the self-conscious awareness in which one realizes one’s own implication in and responsibility for a performed or executed intentional act. In light of Heidegger’s paradigm statement: “This man has had a very sad history,” it is quite instructive that *Betroffenheit* by itself, without the prefix “*Selbst-*” is usually, and quite correctly, translated as “sadness.”
54. For a general discussion of self-referentiality, and Heidegger’s concept of “self-affectedness” in particular, see Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 73–98, 115–32. Taylor Carmen has shown the systematic place of the first-person perspective in Heidegger’s concept of authenticity, in “Authenticity,”

59: 84). In line with his preferred life-philosophical idiom at the time, Heidegger claims that when the living self engages the world or is involved with the world, life “experiences itself” and *feels itself* in and through the intentional acts it performs: it is “life experiencing itself,”⁵⁵ or “immediate aliveness”⁵⁶ (GA 60: 33). It is the *felt* immediate sentiment of the inescapable *self-implication* in whatever one happens to intend, engage, or interact with, simply because it is one’s own act.

Felt self-implication is just the other side of the coin of the self’s original and non-eliminable spontaneity in carrying out and sustaining the engagement with the world. Both sides, self-involvement in carrying out the act and felt self-implication, cannot possibly be shared with others, because they are intrinsic to the self alone. Unlike the objective attributes attached to one’s personal life story, they are entirely immanent to the self, exclusively, and inalienably its “own.”

The self, originally invested and also self-affected by the way it engages the world, is not standing behind its involvements, like a spectator of its own acts. Rather, it lives in these acts and has its history in and through these acts. All acts are “historically” connected in the intentional self. But the self can be more or less involved, foregrounded, cultivated, and acknowledged, or else recede into the background, or be forgotten altogether in the immersion in the world and its objects. In short, there is a whole range of modalities concerning how the self is invested, felt, and sustained in whatever it deals with. The self can fully grasp and accentuate itself as the focal center of its world-engagements, or it can allow itself to be eclipsed by the content it intends, and it can fluctuate between these poles. This is the inner history of the self which pertains to *how* the self is invested and affected by its engaging the world.

Compared with autobiographical history and its narrow focus on the person’s particular life story, the history of intentional life encompasses more than just personal matters. As the center point of intentionality, the intentional self encompasses or integrates the entire history of (i) *all* involvements with the world it has performed in sole responsibility, and (ii) *all* affects that this has had on it *itself*. The history of the self’s investment in its acts and its responsibility (acknowledged or unacknowledged) for these acts lie on a different plane altogether than the account

in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 285–96.

55. Heidegger explores here themes that more recently have been taken up in Michel Henry’s work, in particular the idea of a pre-intentional life which comes to pass in and through “the pathetic immediacy in which life experiences itself.” Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 3. To the extent that early Heidegger’s life philosophy subordinates “being” and, *a fortiori*, all ontology, to the primacy of life, it anticipates Henry’s move to pursue the upsurge of intentionality this side of intentional objects and it corresponding method of phenomenological reflection. See also Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 110–37.

56. In other words, the intentional self does not come into being through an act of phenomenological “reflection.” It is always already “there” in any performed intentional act. Moreover, it is not a disengaged consciousness, least of all an *eidōs*-consciousness.

of outward personal accomplishments, the trials and tribulations, the victories and defeats in life, which make up the stuff of autobiographies.

However, the two sides that we have distinguished here, the personal and the intentional history, exist only together in the concreteness of a human being. In fact, what early Heidegger calls *Dasein* or *existence* always refers to this unity of an intentional and personal or autobiographical self. Accordingly, we shall call the "history" that pertains to this existing self, "existential history."⁵⁷

Now, regarding its own past, the intentional self or *Dasein* can assume full responsibility for it and acknowledge its sole authority over it. As such, the past is never a congealed objectivity, like an abandoned or thrown away article. Heidegger writes:

I pull [my] own past towards me, such that this past is had [experienced], again and again, as if for the first time; and I am always affected anew by my own self and [I] 'exist' in this renewed performance. It is a further characteristic of this "as if for the first time" that it is entirely unrelated [*ganz unbezogen*] to the environing world. (GA 59: 84)

The past is "had" as something that still affects the singular *Dasein* in its isolation from the environing world. If *Dasein* were not able to distance itself from the ongoing concerns in the environing world, it could not attend to its own history that it shares with no one. This is not solipsism, but it does account for the separateness of *Dasein*.⁵⁸ On this account, the past is owned and intimately tied to the intentional self alone. The past does not sink back into irrelevance; it is not forgotten, but is always renewed and present, namely as something to which *Dasein* must respond. Self-affectedness or self-concernment "grows" with time (GA 59: 84). In short, the past is internalized and immanentized; it becomes part of the self. This must not be confused with clinging to the past as something fixed for all times. According to Heidegger, growing self-concernment about the past implies that the self renounces the claim that it would ever have the final word on it (GA 59: 84).

Having reviewed these six concepts of history, Heidegger then claims that *existential history* captures, or at least, comes closest to the *original meaning* of history, relative to which the other concepts of history are "derivative" (GA 59: 75). They are real, but non-original "descendants" of the original meaning and original experi-

57. As used here, this concept of existential history must not be identified with Heidegger's "existential construction of historicity" in *Being and Time* (GA 2: 499), because the angle on being and fundamental ontology in that work is absent in early Heidegger.

58. As Heidegger wrote in 1924: "The other's *Dasein* I never have in the original way, the only adequate way in which one can have *Dasein*: I never *am* the other." GA 64: 115. "The *Dasein* of others I never *am*, though I can be with them." GA 64: 47.

ence of existential history.⁵⁹ The crucial step for making this claim is Heidegger's *stipulation* of a specific criterion of originality. According to Heidegger, the performance of an intentional act is the more "original," the more it accentuates, renews, and foregrounds the very self (i.e., *existence* or *Dasein*) that is self-implicated in and self-affected by the performance of the act, or, put differently, the more the performance of the act redirects attention away from the intended object to the originary living center of the act (i.e., *existence* or *Dasein*), and thus revives and reenergizes the responsiveness, responsibility, and self-implication, or sheer thereness of the self in the midst of that which it engages⁶⁰ (GA 59: 75).

In short, Heidegger suggests an *existential* criterion of originality. If the performance of an act (a) enhances the awareness of the self's responsibility in performing it, and (b) calls for and actually initiates the coming to terms with the performed act as an integral part of one's own history as an existing self, then we can say that the performance is original. In fact, (a) and (b) specify the necessary conditions for what Heidegger calls "existence" in an emphatic sense (GA 59: 75; GA 58: 261). If the performance of an act fails to loop back onto the performing self and does not force the self's coming to terms with itself (its past, present, and future), then the act is not "originary," that is to say, "existentially" grounded in the self. It fails to acknowledge and problematize one's own *existence* in the performance of the act. In this case, the performance would be "devoid of existence," as Heidegger puts it (GA 59: 77).

Armed with this criterion of originality, it is a foregone conclusion that only existential history qualifies as original, because it alone of all canvassed concepts of history is exclusively built around the constant renewal and foregrounding of the self and its *own* past, present, and future. The scientific study of history (1), conducted as an objective discipline among the many other disciplines taught at the university, has no necessary reference to one's own self and, indeed, requires, in the name of objectivity, that one relinquishes any self-related concerns, which is why Heidegger calls it non-original and "*devoid of existence*" ("*existenzfrei*"; GA 59: 77). Objective historiography does not have any direct repercussions on one's own self-understanding, or, better put, it does not stand originally in the service of self-questioning, self-clarification, and self-involvement. For the most part, and

59. In effect, Heidegger offers here a genealogy, which is itself a "historical" investigation, in contradistinction to finding the highest genus under which one could subsume the various meanings of history.

60. In a wooden, if not to say baroque, definition, running over five lines, Heidegger states the meaning of originality: "A performance [*Vollzug*] is original [*ursprünglich*]," if and when the performance is not only directed at the act object, but is also, first, "co-directed [*mitgerichtet*]" at the intentional self, "calling for the actual renewal [*aktuelle Erneuerung*] of the self-worldly *Dasein* [*selbstweltlichen Dasein*]," such that, second, "this renewal [*Erneuerung*] ... co-constitutes self-worldly existence [*selbstweltliche Existenz mitausmacht*]." GA 59: 75.

typically, historical research at modern research universities does not issue in establishing and changing one's own *existence* or *Dasein*.^{61,62}

Next, since the concept of history as an objective field of the past (2) is constructed from the perspective "of an ideal subject," which, as disinterested "spectator" from above, is precisely un-involved and un-affected by the happenings in the past (*GA* 59: 85), Heidegger argues that this concept is unoriginal too, because it draws attention away from the self and its concerns. To the extent that we conceptualize history in this sense, we adopt a "theoretical, contemplative attitude," independently of any specialized historical research methods one may choose later on (*GA* 59:86). But the performance of such theoretical, contemplative acts, through which we put the objective past before us, is predicated on the abstraction from self-concern and self-questioning of "the concrete, individual historical *Dasein*," which alone makes up existence in the proper sense (*GA* 59: 86). Not mincing words, Heidegger holds that engaging the idea of such an objective history is not only unoriginal, but "directly destroys" existence (*GA* 59: 86).⁶³

Concerning the concept of history as tradition (3), Heidegger gives a carefully balanced evaluation of its originality relative to one's self-involvement and self-

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61. It is important to note that Heidegger has in mind the modern-day practice of studying history at a university. He does not say anything about the pre-modern forms of historical narratives, particular Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, or even Gibbon. Arguably, they all studied history with more of an existential investment than might be typical in modern research universities with the prevailing standards of objectivity. Heidegger himself may serve as an interesting case of studying history *with* much personal investment and existential repercussions. For Heidegger's intensive study of history had important implications for his self-understanding, not only for his theoretical work. According to Heidegger's own statement, he lost his personal and professional commitment to "the system of Catholicism" because of "epistemological insights" in the field of the "theory of historical knowledge." (Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* [Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1988], 106.) We have good reason to believe that Heidegger's statement is a direct reference to his extended study of Dilthey's historical and epistemological works.
 62. According to Heidegger, it is a *general characteristic* of modern research to pursue theoretical interests decoupled from questions of self-responsibility and self-involvement. However, Heidegger points out that the degree of "losing one's self" in the theoretical sciences is far greater than in the historical sciences (*GA* 59: 79; see also *GA* 56/57: 207). In any case, Heidegger expressly states that a person whose entire life is given over to scientific research would not thereby achieve "existence," even if his contributions brought about "progress and prosperity" in society (*GA* 59: 79). Instead, the habitual neglect of self-questioning and deflection of questions concerning one's self-responsibility in one's objective life work would almost necessarily bring about "loss of self" and loss of existence, according to Heidegger (*GA* 59:79).
 63. Adding an important corollary, Heidegger points out that because the various contemporary attempts to accommodate history within philosophy (Dilthey, Spengler, and Rickert) conceive it in the sense of an objective field of past events (2), they fail, contrary to their good intentions, to make room for the actual human historical standpoint, namely the standpoint of historical self-involvement and historical self-responsibility. The concept of history that is here introduced to correct or temper the one-sidedness of *a priori* philosophy turns out to be as self-distant and devoid of existence-concerns as the ahistorical cast of traditional philosophy itself (*GA* 59: 86).

affection. *On the one hand*, Heidegger concedes that since a tradition is appropriated, owned, and immanent to the life of a community or a people, and since it is geared towards the conservation of that life itself, it is not a theoretically grasped and transcendent objectivity, which is the dominant connotation in the concepts of history 1 and 2. Moreover, since a tradition is also action-guiding and geared towards facing the challenges of the future in light of the past, it encourages adaptation and constant “renewal” (*Erneuerung*; GA 59: 80). And since living in a tradition means to situate one’s own life, accomplishments, and achievements relative to preceding and succeeding generations, Heidegger concludes that one’s self is directly affected, involved and “permeated by” this ongoing historical reality, of which one is an integral part (GA 59: 80). To consciously live in a tradition forces one to confront the shared past as a potential step towards self-questioning and self-clarification of one’s own Dasein.

On the other hand, Heidegger notes that tradition is firmly anchored in the external domain (the surrounding- and with-world), expressing external standards, norms, and expectations relative to which one situates oneself (GA 59: 82). Whatever self-confrontation and self-understanding is generated in this way is tied back to one’s involvement in and for a tradition, and not based on one’s own, exclusive, singular existence and past. In other words, being enveloped in an ongoing tradition does not only not guarantee a self-responsible and self-concerned life, “self-worldly existence” (GA 59: 80, also 81–2), but it can also distract from this task by drawing one away from one’s own self into the seemingly secured and stable significations of the shared surrounding- and with-world (GA 59: 82). Therefore, tradition too is “non-original,” even though it affords a much closer relation to one’s historical self than the two preceding conceptions of history above (1 and 2) (GA 59: 83).

Compared with the complex case of the tradition, one can see right away that the concept of history as *historia vitae magistra* (4) fails to cultivate self-referentiality or foster a sense of self-questioning and renewal of self or *existence*, because it is a purely instrumental use of the history of others without existential repercussions in one’s own self or *existence*. Heidegger acknowledges that the “familiarity” with the past of others, which is required here, is indicative of a closer and more intimate relation to history than the one that is possible with the historical concepts 1 and 2. Nevertheless, it falls short of even the faint glimmer of originality that is given when engaged with one’s tradition (3).

Next, Heidegger’s evaluation of the concept of history 5, the single, significant incident, particularly a mishap (*Vorfall*), takes its point of departure from the fact that although the incident has a direct bearing on the self, which is truly affected by it, the salient reference point is not *within* the inner self and its inner life, but the given standards and norms of the surrounding with-world or the time-worn habits of the individual. If the incident results in some “renewal,” through a change of “habits, customs, or morals,” it is “always non-original,” since it is not grounded in the change of the inner self and its self-responsibility for its own life (GA 59: 85). Even though a significant “incident” may grip our attention for

the moment and jolt us out of our routine or immersion in the everyday, it does not usually issue in a heightened and radically seized awareness of self-involvement and self-responsibility for all our intentional acts as such. The “incident” is a moment that fails to be existentially “momentous.” Although Heidegger does not explicitly say so, the incident looks very much like a negative foil for the life-changing moment, where, in the blink of an eye, one’s whole life is turned around. In any case, the incident is immediately integrated into everydayness and forgotten. Hence it is non-original too.

Lastly, when Heidegger turns to the evaluation of the meaning of history as existential history (6), he points out that, in stark contrast to the concepts 1–5, the history of the inner self focuses exclusively on the self alone, abstracting, as much as possible, from its immersion in the environing- and with-world. What is at issue is the “ownmost” self itself in its “innermost” existence, its singular, purely “immanent” history (GA 59: 58), regarding which there is nothing attached to it “from outside” (GA 59: 57). Nothing accrues to it from “the detour” through the environing world, the tradition, let alone scientific accounts of history, etc. (GA 59: 58), because as intentionality’s self it is the sole responsible source for performing the intentional act through which alone the intended world appears to it.

Prima facie, existential history fits the criterion of originality well, since existential history is the practice of always relating engagements with the world back to the self, in order to question, renew, and reassert it as the original source of these engagements. Existential history revolves around *existence*; it is vigilant against falling away into what is not strictly its own.

In characterizing existential history, Heidegger makes extensive use of the language of interiority and pure immanence. The “inner” self and its history is opposed to the “outer;” the “own” and “ownmost” to the foreign and external; the “pure” to the “relational.” If one considers that at this point in his career Heidegger already rejects the Cartesian theatre of the inner mind, the apparent resurrection of inwardness on a new “existentialist” foundation comes as a surprise. It is as if Heidegger’s critique of epistemological inwardness only paved the way for the construction of a different, ontological inwardness of the existing, inner self.

It is quite symptomatic that Heidegger “ranks” the various concepts of history relative to what he considers their implied “level of immanence” (*Immanenzstufe*; GA 59: 66); that is to say, he envisions a scale of immanence, along which one can order the various ideas of history relative to how immanent or transcendent to the self or one’s *existence* the respective intended historical realities are. The concepts 1 and 2 exclusively refer to the history of others, leaving out all reference to one’s own self. Therefore, they are not immanent to the self. By contrast, concepts 3–6 are, to varying degrees, immanent to the self in the sense that they make not even sense without the participation and direct involvement of the self. As one would expect from this given scale of increasing immanence, Heidegger clearly judges that relative to the other concepts of history, existential history comes out on top.

And yet, he treads very cautiously here. But his caution only indicates his extreme care to separate out an entirely pure and unrelated self. In a carefully

qualified statement, Heidegger writes that of the six concepts of history, existential history (6) alone “comes closest” to the wholly immanent sphere of the self and its self-concernment (*GA* 59: 84). It approximates it, without, however, completely realizing it. The inner history of the existential self never fully achieves or permanently remains within the immanent sphere of self-relation, of “*pure, self-worldly significations*” (“*reine selbstweltliche Bedeutsamkeit*”; *GA* 59: 84). Heidegger’s claim is *not* that such purely immanent self-relation does not exist, but rather that accompanying significations of the envioning- and with-world all too often intrude and distract from immanent self-concernment.

In fact, Heidegger holds that the self in its immanent self-relation is never fully fortified against the re-engagement, re-insertion, or outright “fall” (“*Abfall*”) into the world, the immersion in what is transcendent or foreign to it (*GA* 59: 84).⁶⁴ According to Heidegger, the concepts of history 1–5 are expressions of the worldly declined or “fallen” interests of the self; they are derivative, seeking the historical in what is transcendent, or less immanent than the original meaning and original experience of history in the inner self (whether as intentional or as personal self). Derivation in this sense has nothing to do with a logical deduction from a principle. Rather, it describes a descending movement from an original, primary and authentic experience of historical self-involvement and self-referentiality (the experience of the living self as a historical reality) toward the more and more distant or transcendent (intentional) objects together with their devolved, secondary, and non-original historical relations.

On the one hand, Heidegger implies that the “fall” into non-original historical reality is unavoidable, simply because the self finds itself outside in the envioning- and with-world, and thus, *a fortiori*, in the historical realities that come into play there. On the other hand, Heidegger equates this fall into non-original history—whether tradition or the engagement of a so-called objective field of past events, and so on—with self-loss or forgetfulness of *existence*. On this account, we have only a “negative” or “non-original” involvement with tradition and history as an overarching reality. There is no positive connection (or re-connection) to tradition, either as a really existing band that unites human beings into communities around a common, shared historical origin, or as an authority to which one can look for guidance and assistance, because any such attempt leads away from cultivating one’s singular, historical self-relation and self-concernment.

When, in his discussion of Dilthey and Yorck, Heidegger appreciates and affirms Dasein’s insertion in an overarching tradition, and even undertakes to deconstruct this tradition to its core experiences in the *past*, because this tradition or history *is* Dasein, and necessarily so, because of Dasein’s historical situatedness and hermeneutical dependency on the past, he puts forward a conception of history as tradition, which, according to his phenomenological–existential reading, is non-

64. In winter semester 1921/22, Heidegger holds that the self is always faced with its “plunge” [*Sturz*] towards the world (*GA* 61: 144).

original and detrimental to the achievement of one's own *historical existence* as a singular individual.

The clash between the *existential history* of the individual self and the *inter-generational, historical–hermeneutical* reality of an encompassing tradition has its root in different conceptions of the nature of Dasein. In the wake of Dilthey's and Yorck's work on historicity, Heidegger emphasizes that Dasein always already finds itself "outside" and "in" history, existing ecstatically, thrown into the world, without an intrinsic nature or genus under which it can be subsumed. But when Heidegger turns to the concept of existential history, he follows and even radicalizes Husserl's inward turn to the subject. But whereas for Husserl "truth" dwells in "inner man," for Heidegger "history" defines the space of interiority.

Heidegger makes no mention of finitude or death as the ultimate horizon for history in these phenomenological–existential investigations. He develops this theme in his hermeneutical interpretation of Paul and Early Christianity.

III. Historical Life in Early Christianity and Paul

In his 1920/21 lecture course on "The Phenomenology of Religious Life," Heidegger thematizes the problem of "history" or "historical facticity" through a discussion of the Apostle Paul and the historical life in early Christianity⁶⁵ (*GA* 60: 67–156). Even though Heidegger's account of Paul is very brief, and certainly rushed and hurried,⁶⁶ it constitutes a distinct, third axis in early Heidegger's analysis of history.

Heidegger clarifies upfront what, in other contexts, he calls the "pre-conception" or "pre-understanding" of the subject matter at hand. He stipulates two "basic" interpretive guidelines for his reading of Paul's life and work, and early Christianity in general (*GA* 60: 80):

65. Heidegger's interpretation on Paul and early Christianity figures prominently in the standard works on early Heidegger, especially Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 69–116, 151–218, and his essay "Becoming a Christian: A Conceptual Picture Show," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, 175–95; as well as John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, 157–203. More recently, I have found the following very helpful: Benjamin Crowe, "Things Themselves: Heidegger, the Baden School, and Religion," *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* VI (2006), 127–47; S. J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), especially 185–208; and the edited volume *A Companion to Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. S. J. McGrath & Andrzej Wierciński (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

66. Exegetical notes, mere word explanations, unedited translation glossaries, as well as historical commentary, and methodological and philosophical points are all jumbled together in a rather disjointed fashion. Kisiel discusses some of the reasons for the overall hurried nature of this part of the lecture course in *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 171ff.

1. Early Christian religiosity is based in early Christian life experiences and is such a life experience itself.
2. Factual life experiences are historical. Christian religiosity lives temporality as such.

These are not dogmatically stipulated starting points, let alone established “objective” results. They are “hypothetical” orientations from Heidegger’s own present hermeneutical situation, relative to which the “phenomenological explication” is to proceed⁶⁷ (*GA* 60: 80). According to Heidegger, the fruitfulness of these two pre-suppositions has “to prove” itself in the actual interpretation of Paul, that is to say, by re-enacting or “performing” (*vollziehen*) his letter writing with him (*GA* 60: 82/83).

Heidegger takes Paul’s engaged and extensive letter-writing as part of Paul’s self-explication, as testimony of Paul’s own “worried, existentiell, ‘reflection’ [*Besinnung*],” which is aimed at clarifying “the situation” at hand (*GA* 60: 140). These letters are “original documents” of Paul’s “religious development,” as well as expressions of Paul’s “passionate excitement” (*leidenschaftliche Erregung*; *GA* 60: 68). In these letters, Paul achieves and articulates the “original historical understanding of his self and his *Dasein*” (*GA* 60: 74). According to Heidegger, Paul is not at all interested in expounding “a particular, theoretical doctrine,” let alone a full-blown theology. Instead, he single-mindedly focuses on the concrete, given historical situation in which he finds himself together with his fellow Christians (*GA* 60:116).

Heidegger repeats many times that Paul constantly stands in battle (*“Kampf”*), challenged to defend and fight for “the Christian life experience against the surrounding world [*Umwelt*]” (*GA* 60: 72). In throwing himself into the battle of his life, Paul has no guarantees of success for his mission. For Paul’s entire conduct of life is based on his “original experiences” in himself alone. There is no appeal to some universal truth, some inter-subjective agreement, nor the support of an authoritative “historical tradition” for that matter (*GA* 60: 69). Constantly worrying for his fellow Christians in a hostile environment and guarding against their potential relapse into the complacency of a pre-Christian mode of life, Paul is restless, without repose, peace, or safety.

At the same time, Paul is absolutely committed to his fellow believers. The Thessalonians are his full responsibility. Paul finds his identity fused with their “fate” (*“Schicksal”*; *GA* 60: 143). He is absolutely affected by how they fare (*GA* 60: 93). He has his own being in them (*GA* 60: 140). Paul is bound together with them in a common fate—*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*. Commenting on a passage in

67. McGrath correctly argues that Heidegger’s interpretative hypothesis refers to Dilthey’s account of the genetic origin of the concept of history in early Christianity (*The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, 187). But it is important to realize that Heidegger attempts to critically deconstruct Dilthey’s interpretation, in order to lay bare the original experience and articulation of life in Paul.

Paul's letter, Heidegger formulates this historical bond and commitment as follows: "Paul's life depends on the Thessalonians' standing firm in their faith. He entirely surrenders himself to the fate of the Thessalonians" (*GA* 60: 97). In short, there is a shared history that binds Paul and his followers together in one single historical trajectory. Committed to supporting the absolutely personal, individual journey of each member, and the Christian form of life in the given historical moment, Paul and his fellow believers constitute a *historical community of singular individuals*.⁶⁸

In Paul and his congregation we have an example of what Heidegger, fleetingly enough, once describes as the factual life that encompasses "personal existence and communal existence" ("*personale Existenz und Gemeinschaftsexistenz*"; (*GA* 59: 196). There is no estrangement between the private or autobiographical self-world and the common with-world because of the shared and overriding goal of a Christian life that operates in both spheres. Compared with the absolute primacy of the self-world that defines authentic history in Heidegger's phenomenological study on the "meaning" of history, his interpretation of Paul is an attempt to find an original sense of history in a common, shared form of life. However, it is important to stress that Paul's with-world is a free association of believers, which is quite different from the more comprehensive domain of an entire generation, or the political life of a whole nation in its historical situation. Moreover, it is quite conspicuous that Heidegger presents the communal existence of the followers of Paul through the first-person perspective of Paul alone. "The relation of the people to Paul is how *he* [Paul; Heidegger's emphasis] has them" (*GA* 60: 93). It is in Paul's self-world that he "has" his "with-world." Heidegger's reading invites the charge that it potentially makes the congregation an extension of Paul's self alone. And yet, Heidegger clearly states that Paul's life does not only revolve around his personal self. Each day he has to prove himself before God: "For Paul, life is not a sequence of experiences; he lives *only* insofar as he *seizes* his life. His life hangs in the balance between God and his vocation [*Beruf*]" (*GA* 60: 100). Thus, Paul lives in a consciously historical manner that includes the relation to others. His conduct of life is determined by this. This has nothing to do with having historical knowledge, or speculating about history. Rather, Paul lives the historical life from inside, what Heidegger calls "act-historical" ["*vollzugshistorisch*"].

According to Heidegger, the Christian life is fundamentally determined by (i) the proclamation, and (ii) the end-time experience. This goes hand in hand with (iii) the temporalization of the world as such, which leads to the relativisation or provisionality of all maintained relations to the external world, and the "as-if-not" ("ὡς μὴ") performative sense of intentionality, as well as the disengagement from

68. Paul experiences his with-world of followers not as a mass of faceless ciphers. It is a "living community of singular individuals" ["*lebendige Gemeinschaft der Einzelnen*"], as Heidegger once formulates it in language adopted from Schleiermacher (*GA* 60: 322). Paul's fellow believers have all broken with their past and answered the call of the proclamation individually, freeing themselves from the natural bonds in tribes and groups, or political communities, nations, and states. Paul's with-world is a community of independent believers where the gospel is individually received by each single person (*GA* 60: 143).

the world and the relocation of the center of life's gravity into the historical inner person.

(i) Proclamation

The proclamation is an eminently historical event in itself. It is a historical caesura concerning which each one has to find a response, individually and in "existential self-concernment" (*GA* 60: 144). It divides one's life into a "before" and "after."⁶⁹ As Heidegger puts it, the proclamation hits home at a particular "moment" and is then constantly renewed in the day-to-day conduct of the Christian follower (*GA* 60: 116, 132). As in Paul's own case, the conversion experience constitutes "a complete break with the preceding past" or at least a break "with every non-Christian understanding of life" (*GA* 60:69). It is a historical "overthrow of factual life" (*GA* 60: 132). According to Heidegger, we fail to understand the proper historical nature of the proclamation and its acceptance by the believer, if we take it merely as an object-historically datable event, because the Christian life is totally overturned by the proclamation. It is the historical zero-point for the subsequent life of the Christian. Relative to the proclamation, the believer comes to experience his past, as well as his break with the past, hence his own historical genesis as a constant becoming and having become (γενεθῆναι), or, in Heidegger's German, *Gewordensein* (*GA* 60: 93). The historical break is thus taken up as something lived in the immanence of the conduct of the day to day life. Factual life becomes self-consciously historical.

(ii) End-Time Experience

The future and the end of time are just as important as the proclamation in the past. According to Heidegger, "the eschatological problematic," the anticipation of the Lord's "παρουσία," constitutes "the center" of Christian life (*GA* 60: 104, also 97). Heidegger goes out of his way to argue that the Christian anticipation is "something radically different from all expectation [*Erwartung*]" (*GA* 60: 102). This is so because the end of the world or the second coming of the Lord is not an objective, datable event in the world. Hence its anticipation has not the character of expecting something in the future, which "then" would realize what one may wish for or dread in the present situation. The end of time resists integration into the linear form of time, simply because it is an absolute end.

Therefore Paul refuses to speculate about the "when," because that would exteriorize the day of the παρουσία, misunderstanding it as something that could be grasped and mastered from the present, worldly viewpoint. Instead, Paul redirects

69. Heidegger writes: "The factual life experience of the Christian is historically determined insofar as it always starts with the proclamation." *GA* 60: 116.

the “question” concerning the “when” towards the “how” of one’s entire conduct of life, how one lives one’s life in anticipation of the second coming (*GA* 60: 104, see also 106). The anticipation of the *παρουσία* is something immanent to life, constantly lived, without ever being divested of its incalculable futurity. As a certain but entirely indeterminate “event,” the *παρουσία* can come at any time, “like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonian 5, 2). Only the unsuspecting would seek “peace and safety” in this world (1 Thessalonian 5, 3). For the Christian, on the other hand, “there is no safety” (*GA* 60: 105).

At this point, Heidegger inserts a crucial comment. He claims that the Christian understanding of the lack of peace and security has universal significance for factual life as such: “This persistent insecurity is also characteristic of the basic sense of factual life. The insecurity is not accidental, but something necessary. This necessity is not of a logical or natural order. To gain clarity in this matter one must reflect on one’s own life and how one conducts it” (*GA* 60: 105). Insecurity is an integral part of the life of all mortals. At any time, death can come, “like a thief in the night.” As Heidegger puts it, “*existentiell* basic self-reflection” reveals that all life inexorably leads to its end, its death (*GA* 60: 140). Historical, factual life is lived towards its certain but indeterminate end; it is an endgame, “*endzeitliche Faktizität*” from beginning to end⁷⁰ (*GA* 60: 139). For factual life, time runs out, inexorably, necessarily. This is what Heidegger means when he writes: “Christian religiosity lives temporality as such” (*GA* 60: 80). It throws into relief one’s historical genesis, one’s beginning by way of separating oneself from one’s former past, constantly re-affirming one’s having-become, and one’s heading towards the end, in short, one’s temporal and historical being as such.⁷¹

(iii) Temporalization of the World

For Christians all things in the environing- and with-world become “temporal goods” (“*zeitliche Güter*”), just as the whole creation is seen as only temporal and transient⁷² (*GA* 60: 119). From the Christian standpoint, closing oneself off against temporality and seeking a permanent and stable support (theoretical or

70. Using an unusual formulaic abbreviation, Heidegger once jots down: “life ↔ death” (*GA* 60: 140). Of course, resurrection from the dead is a Christian concept, which, unlike, death, has no universality in factual life.

71. Thus, Heidegger’s later analysis of death or “being-towards-the-end” [“*Sein zum Tode*”] (*GA* 2: 352) articulates in ontological language what he originally opened up by his investigations into the eschatological life of the early Christians. And yet, that investigation was already aimed at understanding factual life as such, and not just Early Christianity.

72. Cf. 1 John 2: 15–17: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

practical) is tantamount to “getting bogged down in the worldly” or present-at-hand objectivity (*GA* 60: 105).⁷³

According to Heidegger, for the Christian life a certain “compressed temporality” is “constitutive” (*GA* 60: 119). There is no time left, because the end of the world can come at any moment. There is no security which would allow one to sink in roots in the world and give a contemplative, theoretical or metaphysical account of the cosmos. What we have seen above in Paul’s zeal to sort out the situation at hand has its deeper ground in the eschatological contraction of time: “Paul is in a hurry, because the end of time has already come” (*GA* 60: 70). The pressing urgency generates the need for an absolute clarification concerning one’s allegiance: either God, or the world. *Now* is the “moment” of one’s “ultimate decision,” the moment of truth where one’s fate is sealed, because the *παρουσία* can come at any moment (*GA* 60: 113).

Although all relations to the world are accentuated by temporality, the world is not given up entirely or idealistically thought away. But in light of the eschatological moment, the world is no longer engaged as a permanent or ultimate end. Christian world-involvement comes with an inbuilt break: the light of temporality or provisionality shines on all things and everything one does. The world is engaged in a temporary, always provisional way, without any pretensions to permanence (i.e., in the mode of “as if not,” *ὥς μή*). In Paul’s words, one is married to one’s wife “as if not” (*GA* 60: 119/20). The performance sense of one’s engagement of the world, the *how*, has fundamentally changed over from the pre-Christian, if not to say natural, attitude. But it certainly allows for continuous inner-worldly engagement, even though it is under the sign of the “as if not.”⁷⁴

The grip of the world has lost its power over the Christian life. Instead of a direct or naive immersion in the world, the self, through which alone the immersion is possible, becomes more and more prominent. That is to say, there is a shift away from the content sense of the world to the performance sense within the self. The overriding concern becomes how the engagement with the world reflects back onto the inner self and its history. Heidegger emphasizes that Christian life relations are all centered in the “innermost” interiority of life, “the inner man” (“*ἄνθρωπος ἔσω*”),⁷⁵ through which alone the world becomes relevant, and which

73. Therefore, Heidegger also rejects Jaspers’ contention that the Christian finds “support” in God (*GA* 60: 122). Such a search would ultimately take God as an objective presence to hold onto, as if the all-pervasive temporality of the Christian life could ever be overcome in this life.

74. Heidegger goes out of his way to reject the view that the Christian understanding leads to “quietistic” world resignation (*GA* 60: 255), or mystical reunion with an extramundane God (*GA* 60: 124). According to Heidegger, “the Christian does not step outside the world.” *GA* 60: 118.

75. For instance, Heidegger quotes 2 Corinthians 4:16. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly [*ἔσω*] we are being renewed day by day.” See *GA* 60: 124.

remains at the center of all world relations⁷⁶ (*GA* 60: 120). Due to the preeminent concern with the self and its relation to the transcendent God—"everyone stands alone before God" (*GA* 60: 112)—the world and its significations fade into the background. Consequently, Heidegger writes that "a Christian *world-view*" (my emphasis) is actually "a contradiction" (*"Widersinn"*; *GA* 60: 122).

To conclude, in his interpretation of Paul, Heidegger merges eschatological temporality and the notion of a *community* of singular believers with the core idea of *existential history* of the inner, solely responsible person. The phenomenological turn to the interiority of the intentional self is fleshed out in terms of the "inner man" standing alone before God. If anything, the turn towards inwardness is made even more prominent, since it is set against the temporality of the world, and the "expectation" of the end of times at any moment. In short, Heidegger arrives at a view of "history" that has little semblance with Dilthey's and Yorck's inter-generational concept of history and their straightforward *respect* for the *enduring* historical realities of family, state, and nation, as well as their shared sentiment concerning the *historical responsibility* to care for the continuing existence of this historical world.

Conclusion

If we want to avoid confusion about what early Heidegger means by factual life and its historical nature, we must distinguish the three distinct strands discussed above: the inter-generational, the phenomenological–existentialist, and the eschatological concept of history. Since all three strands share an anti-metaphysical, anti-objectivist, praxis-oriented angle, as well as a focus on the "immanence" and "unity" of time in the "situation," whether the historical situation of a singular self, a community, or the isolated I before God, it is easy to overlook the fundamental differences. The existential–eschatological "inwardness" of the innermost self and its "history" puts a premium on self-isolation and self-separation from the world that is antithetical to inter-generational and effective history, which puts a premium on finding oneself in a tradition transcending one's own life and life-concerns. Moreover, the eschatological emphasis on the potential end of time at any moment cannot do justice to either the existentialist projection of one's concerns into the foreseeable future or the inter-generational responsibility to plan for an enduring objective reality beyond one's individual death.

76. It is quite telling that Heidegger chose as an epigraph for his lecture course in summer semester 1920 a sentence from Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*: "Internus homo, sui ipsius curam omnibus curis antepoint." ["The inner man sets care of himself above all cares."] *GA* 59: 1.

The three concepts of history resurface in a modified form and unstable configuration in *Being and Time*. First of all, Heidegger drops all references to a transcendent God, and in lieu of the eschatological end of time, he puts the indeterminate yet certain death of the individual self, that is to say, he replaces eschatology by thanatology. In *Being and Time*, the *ground* of history is thanatological: “The genuine being towards death, i.e., the finitude of temporality, is the hidden ground of the historicity of Dasein” (GA 2: 510).

But as Heidegger himself recognizes, the problem is then how death could facilitate any specific content for Dasein’s historical being in the world. Heidegger’s answer is quite unequivocal: death *itself* cannot at all provide any historical content or orientation.⁷⁷ So, what can? Heidegger’s solution is quite baffling. For he proposes that by “appropriating” its “heritage,” its tradition, Dasein can obtain a proper foothold for its historical being in the world, essentially by way of “repeating” possibilities of existence in the past; that is to say, by “choosing” its “hero” (GA 2: 507/09).

This captures the common enough self-understanding, according to which we project into the future a past pattern of life, thus giving shape to the trajectory of an inherited past. Moreover, this idea also recalls Heidegger’s own appropriation of Dilthey’s and Yorck’s conception of the historical being of Dasein and its indebtedness to the past.

Nevertheless, in the context of *Being and Time* and Heidegger’s earlier lecture courses, there are two problems here. First, this argument relies either on the *non-original* concept of *tradition* (3) or it instrumentalizes one’s own tradition analogous to the equally *non-original* notion of *historia vitae magistra* (4), as elaborated in §II above. Second, in order to enlist the good services of history or tradition in this way, Heidegger must presuppose two things, which clash either with the existentialist concept of history or the thanatological foundation in *Being and Time*.

First, he must attribute a robust objectivity—indeed, an unmatched legitimacy or unparalleled “singular authority” (GA 2: 516)—to the past, in order to make it a compelling repository of “proven” paradigms and “authentic” heroes that can inform future actions. But that the mere facticity and weight of the past could be elevated to an “authoritative” voice for the future is a case of what one may call “normative bootstrapping.” It is as breathtaking as it is problematic. For apart from the obvious lack of a much needed criterion for distinguishing between the *relevant* different past periods, there is no intrinsic model-character inherent in past things. But if, on the other hand, we assume that the past is somehow normatively binding, it makes it impossible for the “existentialist” self to *free* itself from the traditional bonds to the environing- and with-world. In other words, if facticity or heritage as such has a singular “authority,” it is in danger of rendering existential history nugatory.

77. “However, the factically opened possibilities of existence are in no way to be gleaned from death.” GA 2: 506.

Of course, Heidegger insists that it is a mistake to consider tradition or heritage as something ready-made and present at hand. Instead, it is something assumed and taken up by Dasein. But if in consequence of this line of thought, Heidegger then states that Dasein “chooses” its hero, and “chooses” its past, he abandons (or at least weakens) the very idea of a tradition, which is not something *chosen*, but something that is “had” and perhaps something that is “found” to have been there all along.⁷⁸ With Gadamer, one might say that because we always already “belong to history,” we cannot “own” it,⁷⁹ and therefore, *pace* Heidegger, we cannot “choose” it either. However that may be, even if we grant that one’s “heritage” or the “past” could yield a criterion and content for our *choice* of engaging things in the world, because death itself leaves us empty-handed, one would *still* be at a loss how to make *that* first choice of specifying which orientation and content of the past is worthy to be followed in the course of one’s life, because *that* first choice is, on Heidegger’s own account, entirely unencumbered by tradition, because the anticipation of death comes with the total severance of all traditional ties. This original arbitrariness undercuts whatever “authority” there may lie in tradition.

Second (and this is the more important point), in order for “history” to provide answers for the orientation in the present life, Heidegger must presuppose a prior commitment to the ongoing reality of the world and a desirable future history beyond the death of the individual self. This does require belief in some form of historical continuity and posterity. However, this is difficult to accomplish within the thanatological framework of *Being and Time*. In fact, it is quite telling that, as far as I know, Heidegger never discusses the concept of posterity, which is certainly a key historical concept. It is precisely posterity (and belief in posterity), not the end of time, that makes possible (and motivates) the hero.⁸⁰ Why should that be different in the case of “choosing a hero”? But it is precisely this function of posterity that is annulled by the emphasis on the absoluteness of Dasein’s death. To conclude, Heidegger’s juxtaposition of a thanatological foundation of history with that of a robust notion of an authoritative tradition or authoritative heritage is inherently unstable.

78. Heidegger tries to accommodate both the weight of one’s heritage and the tradition to which one belongs (which is something found and discovered), and the self-determination of the inner, unencumbered, existentialist self to choose its life course in the face of its own finitude when he argues that Dasein *finds* its past through *choosing* it [*das wählende Finden*] (GA 2: 507). But in order for this to be more than just a verbal solution to the underlying problem, Heidegger would have to say much more about the “finding” that is a “choosing” or the “choosing” that is a “finding.”

79. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gesammelte Werke, Bd 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990), 281.

80. Indeed, the prototype of a hero, Achilles, accepts certain death for the prospect of “everlasting” glory (*The Illiad*, IX, 500).