

## **A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE: HUSSERL AND HEIDEGGER ON THE GROUNDING OF ETHICS**

### **UNA DIFERENCIA FUNDAMENTAL: HUSSERL Y HEIDEGGER SOBRE FUNDAMENTACIÓN DE LA ÉTICA**

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**Abstract:** This essay begins by retracing the relationship between the early Heidegger and Edmund Husserl during the period when Heidegger's thought was still closely aligned with Husserl's phenomenological project. It then shows how a fundamental difference emerged over the question of what the ultimate grounds for action. When Heidegger says that Husserl has failed to address the real question about the meaning of Being, he is referring to the meaning of Dasein. Whereas Husserl maintains that willing and action must remain grounded in the intention/fulfillment structure of reason, Heidegger comes to the view that Dasein must resolutely accept its calling as the groundless ground of significance that is ultimate source of meaning in the world.

**Resumen:** El presente ensayo empieza retrocediendo hacia la relación del Heidegger temprano con Edmund Husserl, en el periodo en el que el pensamiento heideggeriano estaba todavía alineado con el proyecto fenomenológico de Husserl. A continuación, se muestra cómo a raíz de la pregunta por el sustrato último de toda acción emerge una diferencia fundamental. Cuando Heidegger dice que Husserl no ha conseguido hacer la verdadera pregunta acerca del sentido del ser, se refiere al sentido del Dasein. Mientras Husserl mantiene que la voluntad y la acción tienen que permanecer fundamentadas en la estructura de intención/cumplimiento propia de la razón, Heidegger llega a la postura de que Dasein tiene que aceptar con determinación la llamada del fundamento abismático del significado, la última fuente del significado en el mundo.

**Key Words:** Ethics, Dasein, Grounding, Husserl, Heidegger.

**Palabras clave:** Ética, Dasein, fundamentación, Husserl, Heidegger.

### **1. BACKGROUND**

The lecture courses Heidegger gave in Freiburg and Marburg between 1919 and the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 provide a solid basis for understanding the influence of Husserl's *Ideen I* and *Ideen II* on his own work, and definitive confirmation that the *Ideen II* is one of the main texts that Heidegger

had in mind in the famous footnote where he thanks Husserl for "intensive personal guidance and the most generous access to unpublished investigations that had acquainted him with the most diverse areas of phenomenological research" (SZ, 38). Heidegger's own account in the early lectures conveys the image of two fellow researchers each pursuing phenomenology as – to use Heidegger's words – the "original science of life in itself" ("Ursprungswissenschaft vom Leben an sich") (GA 58, p. 1) or simply of "Geist" (GA 58, p. 19) not only in parallel, but also in collaboration with each other. Part of the reason for Heidegger's close identification with Husserl was not only the fundamental insights he had gained from Husserl ever since his reading of the *Logische Untersuchungen* that began with his university studies in 1909,<sup>1</sup> but also the trajectory that Husserl's work had taken after his encounter with Dilthey as articulated, for example, in the Third Part of *Ideen II* and in his lectures on "Natur und Geist".

Heidegger was certainly also well familiar with the *Ideen I*,<sup>2</sup> but, even after the appearance of the *Ideen I*, it is the *Logische Untersuchungen* that he considers the ground-breaking work that remains the basis for own phenomenological investigations (see, for example, GA 63, p. 70; GA 17, pp 49-50). He provides a positive account of both phenomenological reduction and the noesis/noema distinction that are important new additions introduced in the *Ideen I* as crucial elements of phenomenology, yet he also finds much there that is problematic and indicates that Husserl has not distanced himself as much from unquestioned assumptions of modern philosophy, especially Descartes, as Heidegger considers necessary if phenomenology is to realize its fullest potential. The two key lectures in which the *Ideen I* are discussed explicitly and in some detail are the 1923-24 lecture entitled *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (GA 17) and the 1925 lecture *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (GA 20).

<sup>1</sup>As reported in his own account of his life from the Foreword to his *Frühe Schriften* from 1972 (GA 1, 56).

<sup>2</sup> The 1914 work contains what is probably his earliest reference to Husserl's *Ideen I* in a footnote to the section on "The Negative Judgment" (GA 1, p. 181). Other references to the *Ideen I* there include a distinction between simpler forms of knowledge and knowledge that takes the form of a judgment (GA 1, pp. 268), positive appropriations of his conception of the "noematic" (GA 1, pp. 282 and 310), and a footnote that cites "the valuable statements by E. Husserl regard 'pure consciousness' [...] that provide a decisive insight into the richness of 'consciousness' [...]" (GA 1, p. 405) – all of which show that he worked through the *Ideen I* positively and soon after it appeared.

In the 1923-24 course, Heidegger introduces the object of phenomenological research by means of "Husserl's up until now furthest developed position, the 'Ideas concerning a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Research'" (GA 17, p. 47). He cites Husserl's description of phenomenology "as the *descriptive eidetic science of pure consciousness*" (ibid., p. 139), but criticizes Husserl's assumption that philosophy must be a science (ibid., pp. 79-82) and its overemphasis on theoretical knowledge as the model for experience as a whole (ibid., 82-83). Between the earliest Freiburg lectures and this lecture in Marburg, Heidegger had come to see a difference between the basic direction of Husserl's work and his own. He does not see Husserl's orientation on verifiable truths as helpful for the kinds of questions that are now in the foreground for him.

One should note above all that truth, in as far as it is interpreted as validity, hides the decisive problems of *Dasein*. The question is whether for historical knowledge in general the interpretation of truth as validity makes any sense. Even more questionable is it with regard to philosophical knowledge, most impossible is it in the case of the 'truth' of art and religion (ibid., p. 98).

He emphasizes that "... what Husserl says about evidence is vastly superior to everything else that has ever been said about it and that he placed the issue on secure footing for the first time" (GA 17, pp. 272-73), and he acknowledges – without reference to the specific passages in the *Ideen I* to this effect<sup>3</sup> – "... that Husserl sees that each domain of objects has a specific evidence corresponding to its content ..." (ibid., p. 273) but adds,

by contrast, the *authentic* question of evidence in the most fundamental sense only begins with the question about the *specific* evidence of the access to the Being and the disclosure of a being, of retaining and holding on to a Being that has become accessible. Only within the phenomenon grasped in this way does theoretical evidence have its place (ibid.).

Heidegger says that the *Ideen I* fails to move far enough beyond the tendencies within modern philosophy to categorize and scientifically determine everything including consciousness itself. He sees the project of determining

<sup>3</sup> Namely §§ 138-39 (Hua III, pp. 321-24).

life as the whole of experiences that are seen as individual facts instead of “understanding *life itself in its authentic Being* and responding to the *question concerning the character of its Being*” (ibid., p. 274-75) as deeply problematic. The fundamental character of life in its authentic Being is what he calls “temporality”, which now means above all a confrontation with one’s finitude and the fact that life is a performance (*Vollzug*) that must be understood as “call”. Life is not a fact but as something that must be accomplished. This reliance on facts is what Heidegger means by “validity” in the passage cited above. The critique of truth as validity implies that Heidegger has now sees Husserl’s project as hindered by his presumption the kinds of questions at stake in the truth of art and religion can be answered by intuitions that will provide the same kind of certainty and universal validity that is possible for theoretical questions. Heidegger’s position will eventually culminate in the famous dictum from *Sein und Zeit* that the most fundamental questions must be faced with the awareness that no one and nothing can provide Dasein with the answer to the question of the ultimate source of meaning for one’s life and that facing up to the essential indeterminacy of the proper response is essential for authentic Dasein. Hence the remarks at the end of the course where he describes the task of phenomenology as “explicating Dasein in its Being” (ibid., p. 278) and as “the exhibition (*Aufweis*) of Dasein itself” (ibid., p. 279). What Heidegger calls the “historical” here is not a set of facts, but a point of decision. His critique of Husserl, above all of the predominant tendencies still present in his work but as expressed already in the *Ideen I*, is that his orientation on reason modeled upon the search for knowledge is ill equipped to handle these sorts of questions.<sup>4</sup>

His critique of these limitations is described not so much as a difference between Husserl and himself, but as a tension within Husserl’s own phenomenological project. The countervailing tendencies that he sees as positive are articulated in the manuscripts and lectures from Husserl during precisely this period. In a footnote to the essay “The Concept of Time” from 1924, Heidegger acknowledges the debt he owed to the method of phenomenology first laid out

<sup>4</sup> If one wants to try to identify a “turning point” in this gradual development, a good candidate would be the lectures on *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (GA 60) in which the guiding model is the early Christian issue of the “conversion” to a whole different dimension of temporality – the time of eternal life versus the time of mundane existence – as articulated in the Pauline epistles. See on this issue Ted Kiesel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 176-227.

in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, but continues with the observation that phenomenology is much more than a “technique” (GA 64, p. 18). Rather it requires that

The way of investigating (*Untersuchungsart*) must be prescribed (*vorgegeben*) by the in each case specific things themselves. The author [i.e. Heidegger] owes his understanding of this fact less to that book than to intense personal guidance by Husserl himself, who familiarized him with the different content domains (*Sachgebiete*) of phenomenological research through repeated instruction and the most generous access to unpublished manuscripts. (ibid.)

One can well assume that one of the primary manuscripts Heidegger has in mind here must include the *Ideen II*, but explicit confirmation of this can only be found in the lecture course *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (GA 20) from 1925. There, Heidegger cites Scheler and Husserl as building upon insights from Dilthey that move the analysis of pure consciousness from a naturalistic to a personalistic perspective and recognize that,

the person finds herself in a specific self-sameness over against the world, which actively influences and which reacts back upon her; that in each moment the person as a whole reacts, not just in willing, feeling, and viewing, but simultaneously all of those in one; and that the connected life (*Lebenszusammenhang*) of the person in each situation is one that is in development (GA 20, p. 164).

Heidegger locates Husserl with the arc laid out by Dilthey and Scheler when he calls Husserl’s investigations into the structures of personhood a “personalistic psychology” (ibid., p. 167). Heidegger reports that Husserl’s first attempt to work out such a personalistic psychology began with intense work in 1914/15 that leads to the courses on “Nature and Spirit” that Heidegger mentions here (and had recommended earlier to his students in 1919<sup>5</sup>). More importantly, Heidegger confirms that Husserl had shared the manuscripts from the “second part” of the *Ideen* with him during the winter of 1924/25, in light of which some of the criticisms to Husserl’s approach to personhood are now “in a certain way already somewhat antiquated” (ibid., p. 168), but his final word is that still, “he hardly gets further than Dilthey, even though his [i.e., Husserl’s]

<sup>5</sup> GA 56/57, p. 165.

analyses are in particular regards superior to his" (ibid., 173). Here he probably referring to the typed manuscript that Landgrebe had just prepared based on Edith Stein's handwritten manuscripts from 1916 and 1918. However, it is possible, and even probable that Heidegger had access to the earlier handwritten manuscripts since they were one of the few comprehensive sets of manuscripts that were available when Heidegger wrote his footnote mentioning manuscripts Husserl had lent him in the summer of 1924. There is no doubt, however, that the concepts and the general direction of the analyses later published as the *Ideen II* were familiar to Heidegger soon after he arrived in Freiburg, both through conversations and through Husserl's lectures on "*Natur und Geist*". Since the early manuscripts on which the original research manuscripts of the *Ideen II* were based were composed under the heading of "*Natur und Geist*", the question is to a certain extent moot. What is beyond doubt is that Heidegger was acquainted with this area of Husserl's work, found it very promising and helpful, and incorporated much of what he learned from it into his own thinking, but that he ultimately also came to the conclusion that Husserl himself remained too much under the sway of the tradition of modern epistemology to take full advantage of the possibilities it offered. In sum, Heidegger saw in both books of the *Ideen* an important point of departure for his own work, but one which he saw himself moving beyond already in the early 20's.

## 2. THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE

The previous section described how by 1925 at the latest, Heidegger had come to the conclusion that, in spite of Husserl's contributions to phenomenology, his approach still remained too strongly oriented on the model of theoretical knowledge and a conception of truth that was not adequate to address questions about "the truth of art and religion". He also claimed that Husserl's approach was not adequate to the primary task of phenomenology, which is "understanding life itself in its authentic Being and responding to the *question concerning the character of its Being*" (ibid., p. 274-75), life not as an object of knowledge, but as something that must be enacted and accomplished.

The task of this section will be 1) to explain just what Heidegger has in mind when he criticizes Husserl's approach to life and to other issues that he believe cannot be addressed adequately using models taken from theoretical

knowledge, 2) to identify the genuine points of difference between them, and then 3) to examine the phenomenological justification for the different positions that each of them occupies with regard to those fundamental issues. Put very briefly, this section of the essay will attempt to show that the basic difference consist in their differing views on the possibility of a grounding for ethics, if by ethics we mean an inquiry into the nature and foundations for right action. Husserl contends that the very nature of reason involves the implicit claim that all sorts of position-takings, including decisions about right actions, point to the possibility of an intuition, an experience that can confirm or refute the validity of that position-taking consistent with the intention/fulfillment structure of consciousness in general. Heidegger by contrast considers this an illusion for the basic questions that provide the ultimate grounding for action, and sees this view as an illicit reliance on a model taken from theoretical reason. He contends rather that authentic Dasein recognizes Dasein itself must take on the responsibility of providing meaning to a life, but that "no one and nothing" can relieve one of the burden of that choice – which is why in authentic Dasein, the voice of conscience that calls one to face up to this fact speaks silently because it cannot tell you what the right choice is. The main sources that I will use to highlight these differences will be Heidegger's *Being and Time*<sup>6</sup> and Husserl's lectures from 1920-24 entitled "*Einleitung in die Ethik*" ("Introduction to Ethics"), published a few years ago as Volume XXVII of the *Husserliana*.<sup>7</sup> I will thereby attempt to demonstrate that the real differences lie not so much in what is actually contained in the *Ideas I* or the *Ideas II*, but that the most fundamental and important difference concerns their views about the ultimate grounding of practical life.

### 3. HEIDEGGER ON THE GROUNDLESS GROUND

Reading *Being and Time* in light of the line of thinking developed in the early lectures, it is very clear that when Heidegger criticizes earlier philosophers

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1972). All citations will be listed according to the page numbers in the Niemeyer edition, which are also listed in the margins of both of the published English translations.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Einleitung in die Ethik, Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920/1925*, *Husserliana* Band XXXVII, edited by Henning Peucker, Dordrecht: Kluwer 2004. In this essay, citations from this volume will be noted by listing the page number from this volume.

for having failed to address the question of the meaning of Being, it is the Being not of things that populate the world, but of the world itself, of Dasein that has been overlooked from his perspective. Reading the early lectures in light of the much more extensive discussion of death, conscience, resoluteness, and temporality presented in *Being and Time* allows the reader to see in much greater depth what Heidegger was thinking in the much briefer discussions of those topics with which he closes the 1925 lectures cited in the other section of this paper. The general direction of the analyses is already apparent in those lectures when he says that "Facing (*Vorlaufen*) death in each moment (*Augenblick*) of Dasein signifies Dasein's self-retrieval out of the They (*Man*) in the sense of choosing oneself" (GA 20, 440) and that, "In facing its death, Dasein can make itself responsible in an absolute sense" (GA 20, 440-41). To argue that the main topic of *Being and Time* is the possibility of grounding an ethics is at least controversial, and perhaps even provocative, but it is a thesis that I will attempt to explain and defend in the following remarks. It is, however, not completely new; for instance, Francois Raffoul claimed something quite similar at OPO II in Lima and made a good, but slightly different case for it compared to the description I will give today.

In some ways, it is easier to see how the project of *Being and Time* can appropriately be described as a non-metaphysical grounding of an ethics in light of the earlier lectures that provide some of this background to *Being and Time*. In general terms, one can see how the question that later shows up as the question of the meaning of Being of beings in general and of Dasein very specifically and its relationship to originary temporality emerges against the background of questions into the proper kind life as a practical matter, as a choice for which one must take responsibility. My claim is that in spite of the changes in terminology, the same question is still the fundamental issue at stake in *Being and Time*.

Of course, we recall that Heidegger does not begin *Being and Time* with an analysis of Dasein *per se*. Rather, in the First Division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces the notion of world by way of an analysis of how objects within the world show up for us in our daily lives. The fundamental trait that this analysis reveals is that it is part of their very nature they have *Bewandtnis* or relevance in some way to us. They are meaningful not in themselves, but in reference to what can or cannot be done with them, how they affect us in our

daily lives. "Relevance" points in two directions: something (an object within the world) is relevant for doing or accomplishing something (an activity). Hence "worldhood" is introduced by showing how things we encounter in our daily lives are organized around the way they fit into our goals and are well or ill-suited to helping us accomplish the things we want to do, "possibilities of Dasein" he calls them. "World" then is not a sum of objects within the world or a temporal-spatial realm within which objects are located, but a set of possibilities of Dasein that form the backdrop for how objects within the world appear for us.

Moreover, Heidegger also points to the fact that these "possibilities of Dasein", as ways of doing things or reacting to things we encounter in our lives, are themselves organized into interrelated "contexts of meaning" (*Bedeutungszusammenhänge*) and that there is a hierarchical relationship between the levels of meaning, where objects are not only organized according to their function as means towards some end that is a possibility of Dasein (hammers for driving in nails, and homes as places to live), but that these possibilities themselves are organized into means/ends relationships (driving in nails to make a home, having a home to provide shelter, be a good investment, or impress one's friends) in which every means (*ein Wozu*), be it an object or an activity, points to some other activity (in the broadest sense whereby even having things happen to you is an activity, a way of being ("Seinsweise"), or a "possibility of Dasein" that has meaning for us from which it derives the significance it has, until ultimately one comes upon some possibility that has meaning in itself and for no other purpose outside itself. This is the *Worumwillen*, the "for-the-sake-of-which", what one might call the ultimate end or the highest priority in light of which all other things and activities derive the significance that they have for Dasein.

But where does this *Worumwillen* come from? What provides the justification for it? Heidegger's analysis of fallenness suggests that in everyday life meanings seem just to be there "in" the things within the world or that they are social conventions whose substantiality (to use Hegel's term) consists in the fact that they seem as solid and objective as the brilliance or hardness of a diamond because there seems to be no one individual to whom they can be traced back as their source, and hence no one who could simply revoke them and their power if he or she chose to do so.

What anxiety, as Heidegger describes it, reveals is that this substantiality is an illusion. In anxiety, things lose their meanings, their relevance becomes questionable or fades away. If indeed they were as substantial as they otherwise might seem, this would be impossible. This does not necessarily mean that there is not a right or a wrong answer to the question about what really is good, and of course it does not mean that it makes no difference which answer you choose. As much as anything else within the world, the answer one accepts, decides who one is and what course one's life will take. What anxiety reveals is that no thing and no one can tell you the answer, can tell you what is really important, what the ultimate ends, the highest priorities for a life should be. If there were something or someone that could tell you that answer apart from a standard one has already accepted, in terms of which something would count as the answer, then things would once again regain the meaning that is missing in anxiety. But if no one and nothing can, then there is no firm ground from which to make a decision, but since each life is always explicitly or implicitly guided by some sense of an ultimate end or highest priority for a life, one cannot wait around to make a decision until such a firm ground emerges.

Perhaps there are other modes of access to this insight than the experience of anxiety as Heidegger describes it, but even if that is true, the basic point stays the same. No thing and no one can tell you what the ultimate norms for a life should be – or better put – no one can tell you who to listen to (people try to tell us all the time) about the ultimate norms, the highest priorities for a life, except in terms of ends or priorities that we have already accepted as valid. If those are precisely what are in question, then this is indeed a rather unsettling experience, especially if you would like to have something solid and substantial to tell you what is and is not good and important, and thereby to provide a reliable guide for action.

In everyday life, it looks like the answer is settled or at least like there is some firm ground for settling the issue. I take it that one of the main differences between authentic and inauthentic being-a-self is that in authentic being-a-self, one is aware that there is no firm ground outside of oneself to which one can appeal to find out what the ultimate end or the highest priority for a life should be. For Heidegger, the question of the good is the question of what is important *in life*. And once again, we recall the already in the First Part, Heidegger had suggested that no one (the They) and nothing (no being within

the world or any feature of it apart from the relevance we give it in light of the significance we attach to the possibilities of Dasein that it furthers or hinders) can tell us the answer. In fact, even the call of conscience that Heidegger sees as calling one to authentic existence, speaks "silently" for precisely this reason. If conscience could tell us the answer, then a force outside of ourselves other than Dasein, and not Dasein itself, would be the source of meaning and direction.

So if there is an answer, it has to be one for which I am responsible. Even if I choose an answer that I take from someone or somewhere else – revealed religion, the traditions of my ethnic background or my family, my friends, my teachers –, then it is I who have done so and no one else. The fact that I am the one who accepts this answer that sets the overall priorities in my life and has a certain view about the significance of events and things within the world for me, Heidegger terms – I don't think, inappropriately – "freedom". (*SuZ* 266, cf. *WdGr* 51), moreover not just freedom in general, but "freedom towards death".

Why does he call it "freedom towards death"? I would like to suggest that this is intimately connected with the way that Dasein is the ground of its choices through the adoption of a *Worumwillen* that, precisely because it is ultimate, cannot be grounded in anything else. It is freedom, among other things, because it involves a choice and because no one and nothing can determine this choice for Dasein. It is appropriately called "freedom" because it is about a choice, and it is about a choice that is not determined outside of Dasein. It does indeed have ontological significance because it sets the context against which things can show up as the kinds of things they are, but since what it above all concerns is the "*Worumwillen*" of a life that is Dasein's own, this is not a matter of theoretical classification as much as it is about what things matter and what things don't, and how they matter – whether they are to be embraced or avoided, valued or shunned. And it not only has practical implications, but if this is right, it is this primary or original choice that determines what one should and must do. If the examples of "ways to be" are taken simply from the everyday activities of Dasein, then the kind of practical concerns one is describing are things like "building a house" or "being a chemist" whose value is presupposed, and the predicates for objects within the world are simply utility-characteristics. But if, in authentic Dasein, what one realizes is that the question is what gives

meaning to a life, then the question goes far beyond utility and what is up for debate is not just how best to accomplish a given aim, but rather what the proper aim for a life in general is.

To say that it is "freedom towards death" is another way of stating what he calls in *WdGr* the "finitude" of human freedom. In that essay, the finitude is connected with the fact that freedom is something that "happens to us", and that our choices are "finite". This explains why he says that freedom is not only the "ground", but also the "*Ab-grund*" ("abyss") of *Dasein*, that it is the "*Ohnmacht*" (powerlessness) because it is not in *Dasein*'s control whether this originary event occurs. *Dasein* projects (*entwirft*), en-visages a *Worumwillen*, but it does so as thrown, which is the first limitation. *Dasein* does not get to decide its starting point or its circumstances. For instance, I did not choose to be born into a modern technological age any more than ancient Greeks chose not to, but our possibilities are very different nonetheless and both of us must still make choices about the ultimate priorities for our lives within each of those different contexts. Moreover, *Dasein* is also not free not to choose, *Dasein* does not get to decide whether to set a highest priority for itself or not; moreover, at any point where the moment of authentic decision arrives, *Dasein* discovers that it has already been making this basic decision all along whether it knew it or not. In *Being and Time*, the finitude that I am or rather enact at each moment (what he calls "being-towards-the-end" or "constantly dying"), is brought out by such phrases as the "impossibility of *Dasein*", or my being "*das (nichtige) Grund-sein einer Nichtigkeit*" (SuZ 285). And finally, setting an end or a goal for a life does not necessarily mean one will achieve that goal.

Heidegger stresses that *Dasein* never has complete control over its existence, making clear that even authentic *Dasein* is not synonymous with a kind of self-consciousness that is completely autonomous and transparent to itself. It is not a subject conceived of in the modern sense. Rather human life as *Dasein* is always the choice about priorities that it does not make all on its own, but rather "adopts", "appropriates", "takes on". Moreover, it is also limited through the fact that the choice, as a genuine choice, means that to choose it involves failing to choose another. If I set financial success as my highest goal, I have not made having time for my family, pursuing knowledge for its own sake, or sense pleasures my highest goal. If I adopt one of the others as my highest goal, then I have not chosen financial success as my highest priority and there-

by make it much less likely that I will actually achieve it. If I choose a balance of financial success, professional satisfaction, and contributions to my family and my community as my highest priority, I am likely to be less successful at any one of them than I would be if I made that my exclusive priority. "Freedom however exists only in the choice of the one, that means in bearing the not-having chosen, and not-having-been-able-to-choose the other". (285) The finitude of freedom also means that fallenness is not an accident because to live is to act in a concrete setting that involves interaction with things in the world (that are not under my complete control) and other people. It involves not just holding possibilities open as such, but also necessarily seizing one of them not just as a possibility but as the actual priority that guides my actions and my refraining from acting and thereby becomes part of something concrete as well – or if I fail to do so, then the abstract choice of holding open possibilities is my highest priority, whose choice prevents me from seizing upon any one of them, and this is in itself a concrete course of action or "inaction" that I have chosen.

Is there any way of knowing what will happen if I make one sort of life my ultimate priority instead of another. For Heidegger, the answer is no. Is there someone who can tell me the answer? Again, the answer is no. It is something for which each individual must take responsibility. And are there any facts in the world that can tell me what matters, what makes a life meaningful? This is for Heidegger, the most important question and what we have been suggesting is that the answer here is once again no, but that the decision about what is to count as significant is the most important question there is and that it is the ground of all other significance and relevance of events and things that happen in the world, which is to say within one's life. That is why I have been arguing that for Heidegger the most important question in ethics is one that one can only face authentically when one recognizes that Dasein is the groundless ground of all meaning in the world and that what counts as right and wrong is decided by Dasein's resolute commitment (he calls it a "projection") to the goodness of a specific form of life that it recognizes is just one possibility among many. This is then anything but a theoretical question and there is no "fact", nothing that theoretical reason or anything like it can contribute to the solution or grounding of the answer to this question.

#### 4. HUSSERL ON THE ULTIMATE GROUNDS OF ETHICS

Husserl's project in his "Introduction to Ethics" lectures from 1920 and 1924 – i.e. during the very time when Heidegger's early lectures are being composed – is to show how moral and ethical reasoning function in ways that parallel theoretical reason. The general program of a Husserlian ethics could hence be described as the programmatic attempt to show that there are structures of reason within the practical and axiological spheres that are analogous to those of within the sphere of theoretical reason, and he even provides a relatively specific example of this parallel in a passage from the lectures "Introduction to Ethics" that deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Indeed we have spoken repeatedly about a distinction within the sphere of emotional acts that we called evaluative acts of feeling that precisely parallels the distinction between judgments of opinion and judgments based on insight that are grasped as the truth. We just need to emphasize that these are not passive graspings of value, but rather acts that have been performed by the I. We can say that the so-called grasping of value, of which it is said that it is a loving grasping of value, in which the value itself is comprehended and possessed is the originary acquisition through a conscious act as opposed to a mere opining its value, this I's act of loving, looking forward to something etc. that just opines it as something to look forward to, considers it lovable, but has not appropriated the value in an originary way and in itself – or in the opposite case, has experienced a rejection, a disappointment when the I in the attempt at originary appropriation experiences that the thing that was valued is in truth not something pleasant, that the thing that was considered beautiful is a piece of awful kitsch, etc.: in the same way in the sphere of willing, there is a new kind of motivating acts for practical decisions just as there are for acts of believing and in acts of valuing". (120)

"Reason" in the practical sphere is not, therefore, a matter of theoretical calculation or of the intellect alone. It is the self's directedness towards appropriate experiences and intuitions that can serve as confirmation for the purportedly beautiful or valuable in the aesthetic or the good in the ethical sphere. It is also clear how reason is not the opposite of feelings. Rather it is the search for appropriate feelings and dispositions for acting. For Husserl, not all feelings are created equal and not every feeling is *sui generis* pathological in a Kantian sense. For him, the question is not how to have pure practical reason trump all

of our inclinations, but rather how to sort out the appropriate from inappropriate inclinations. In fact, Husserl believes that all actions are motivated by feelings: „Mere understanding is not practical. Only feelings can determine actions”, (170) and further,

Human beings' practical conduct is manifestly determined by feeling. If we attempted to extinguish all feeling from the human breast, then concepts such as end and means, good and bad, virtue and vice and all of the concepts that belong to them would lose their meaning. Human beings would not then be striving, willing, acting beings anymore. We must then have recourse to feeling and more precisely investigate them, in order to be able to clarify the sense of ethical concepts and to study human beings as ethical beings, to clarify the uniqueness of their moral conduct, and to provide a grounding for the ethical laws that explain it. (148)

Even Kant recognizes that feelings must play a central role in ethical life when he acknowledges that the awareness of the obligatory character of the moral law gives rise to the feeling of respect that motivates a person to act in a manner consistent with the law, but Husserl wants to recognize a much wider range of acceptable feelings as appropriate motivating factors for rational agents. He mentions approval and disapproval, but also love – love of oneself and love of others – and “*Seligkeit*”, two concepts that he adopts from Fichte, and some of his other examples seem to point to feelings such as pride, a sense of accomplishment, and others that could be legitimate reasons to act ethically as well.

Even though Husserl disagrees with Kant on the role and range of feelings in ethical decision-making, he does agree with him on one point, namely that fundamental concept of an ethical life as rational is duty, and that duty involves the decision-making that any rational agent should in principle be able to accept as appropriate in these specific circumstances. Husserl is not a formalist, among other things because he does believe that the specific circumstances and limitations matter in ethical decision-making, but he does believe that it is inconsistent with morality for an agent to place a higher priority on his or her own specific ends or perspective than to those of other rational agents. Here again he sees a parallel with theoretical truths. People often disagree even about fairly basic matters of fact and often have their own individual views about them, but from Husserl's perspective that does not mean that they are all

correct or that none of them are. So too in the moral realm the idea of a moral ought or duty means

that every moral judgment does not merely express a subjective feeling and not even just the general fact that every normal human beings in fact tends to feel and act this way, but rather that according to its very sense contains the claim that the particular practical conduct is correct or incorrect ... Moral truth includes just as every mathematical and every other judgment the sense that whoever decides this way, morally, mathematically or any other way, decides correctly, just as falsehood includes the sense that whoever decides this way decides incorrectly, in a way that is to be condemned (149)

He stresses a couple of pages later that there are also some significant differences between mathematical and practical truths. For instance, mathematical truths do not express norms as practical truths do. However, he does agree that the very nature of practical reason itself dictates that everyone should recognize the truth of some basic practical principles such as the principle of love of neighbor (*Nächstenliebe*) that follows from the nature of reason itself as universal and establishes an affinity to Kant's categorical imperative, in spite of Husserl's reservations about Kant's "formalism" and his refusal to recognize moral differences among the very different kinds of feelings that can legitimately motivation ethical decisions beyond mere respect for the moral law. He agrees with Kant about the universal responsibility of all human beings to recognize these principles when he says that even the moral sinner can recognize the sin and know what should have been done.

The parallels between the theoretical and practical reason for Husserl then are explicit and very clear. Just as within the theoretical sphere, for Husserl reason is universal. In a negative sense, this means that anything that could not in general be compatible with the willing of other free beings is ruled out. Positively speaking, it means that any reasonable person should be able to agree with the rightness of practical decisions under similar circumstance. Circumstances matter for Husserl, including one's historical and cultural settings against which authentically egoic acts are undertaken, including acts of valuing and willing, so different persons will reasonably choose differently, what makes the decision or act right in a given setting is not something that the individual decides but rather discovers. It is something about which the person can be

right or wrong and that the further course of experience or perhaps reflection or discussions with others can confirm or disconfirm. Although it is not theoretical insights guiding practical actions alone or even primarily, the structure of intention and fulfillment that Husserl identifies with the sphere of theoretical reason as the rational ground of theoretical judgments has parallels in notions of right valuing and right action that find confirmation or disconfirmation through the further course of experience as well.

##### 5. THE QUESTION ITSELF: GROUNDING ULTIMATE GROUNDS?

We recall Heidegger's frequent comments described in the first section about the extent to which both he and Husserl share much are common in their investigations. Both are working within the general framework of transcendental phenomenology according to which objects (along with events and actions) present themselves to us in various ways according to the meanings that they have for us. Both begin with an analysis of our everyday experience of things instead of adopting assumptions about objects and their properties from the natural sciences, maintaining rather that the natural sciences are abstractions from and derivative of the experience of things in our daily lives. Moreover, for both it is also clear that for both of them, our primary access to objects within the world in our daily lives is not primarily in terms of their mere perceptual features at all but rather in terms of the values and uses they have for us. Both recognize that these common meanings are at first taken from a shared background of understanding that has both a historical and a social dimension. For Heidegger, these issues addressed in his descriptions of *Befindlichkeit* or *Geworfenheit* and of the "They" ("*das Man*") of the self in everyday life. For Husserl, they are described in genetic accounts of the establishment of sedimented tendencies in believing, valuing, and willing throughout the course of a life and in his descriptions of the *Umwelt* as originally social in the *Ideas II*. It is also true that both Husserl and Heidegger believe that what Husserl calls persons, beings who have as their form of being that Heidegger calls *Dasein*, possess the ability and even the responsibility to move beyond these sedimented histories and shared assumptions about what is true, valuable, and good through what Husserl calls authentically egoic acts or what Heidegger calls

authentic existence. Hence for both of them, the question about the ultimate grounds of practice and values are at the heart of the philosophical concerns as of the early '20s at the latest. What are the standards to be applied when one is asking about what is truly good?

This essay has attempted to show that Heidegger correctly identifies a fundamental and important point of difference between them. When he argues that Husserl is too much oriented on the model of the science and the theoretical realm that cannot appropriately deal with questions about the truth of art and religion, I am suggesting that what is really at issue is the question about the ultimate principles for practice, action and whether they can be justified in ways that parallel justification of theoretical beliefs or not. Heidegger thinks not; Husserl believes that they must be. For Husserl, responsibility involves critical reflection and submission to the constraints of practical reason through respect for universality and the constant reexamination of sedimented values and tendencies to action through the confirmation that appropriate kinds of experiences, intuitions provide. For Heidegger, responsibility means recognizing that these are fundamental choices for which no one and nothing else can provide justification, that these choices must be resolutely faced as "projections" of *Dasein*. This is what authentic futurity entails and why he calls this originary temporality.

Heidegger not only notes the differences, but claims that Husserl is mistaken. Is there a way to decide? In the concluding section of this essay, I would like to think about our experience of accepting ultimate priorities for life and see if we cannot find examples that might lead each of them to the insights that they articulate and at the same time illustrate the problematic character of both of the alternatives as they describe them. In Plato, the common examples we find are the lives guided by their appetites, those guided by a sense of honor, and those guided by the search for truth, the philosophers. Some contemporary examples might be those with the highest priority being physical fitness and attractiveness, those whose highest priority is financial success, and those interested in learning and education. Most of the readers of this article will belong to the third group. If you picked academic philosophy as your profession, it is clear that financial success was not your highest priority. Some academics and some people with a great deal of money and leisure time might spend much of their time and efforts on physical fitness and attractiveness, but

a glance around the room at most philosophy conferences suggests that most do not. What is it that one of the three groups would tell the others that would make them come to the life that the others have chosen was inferior? My own experience suggests that the only things one could point to would be persuasive only if the audience already valued those features of a life. Academics might point to the relative autonomy of academic life or the joy of continued learning. To the extent that members of the other groups find these things attractive and important, this might help convince them of some of the virtues of academic life, but unless these are higher priorities for them than physical fitness or financial success, they are unlikely to have a significant effect on those other persons' highest priorities. To put it a different way: I think that Heidegger is correct in recognizing that there is no fact that by itself can show something is valuable or good without some other prior commitment to the goodness or value of something that this instantiates or fosters. Or to put it in philosophers' talk: you cannot derive an ought from an is without some implicit attachment to another ought. I think this is the phenomenon that Heidegger captures when he claims that "no one and no thing within the world" can tell us what are the correct priorities for a life. That is why I have over the course of the last few years during which I have had many more interactions with persons who have not chosen academia as a profession that there really is nothing that I can say that will make them come to believe that my priorities are the right ones and theirs the wrong ones; and vice-versa. So the notion of some standard or experience that could demand universal agreement about priorities seems mistaken to me. Perhaps that is one reason why, except for formal principles such as respect for other persons, Husserl himself fails to provide a normative ethics, and that where he does move in that direction by praising the virtues of the arts or learning over other more "base" activities, the case he makes for them seems to represent much more the consensus of a specific society (German) at a specific time (end of the 19<sup>th</sup>, beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) than a universal principle. At the same time, however, I do think that Husserl is correct when he emphasizes that we do not believe something is preferable because we prefer it, but that we prefer something because we find it preferable. I think it belongs to the phenomenon of seeing something as good or valuable that we sense ourselves as recognizing, not making it. I think that I recognize something about the goodness of continuing learning that I think

other people miss. They are sure that they are recognizing something about just how important and good physical fitness or wealth that I am missing. We have different priorities because we see things differently. This is I think what Husserl means when he says that recognizing values and goods are "intuitions". What I am less sure about for these ultimate priorities is what would count as "disconfirmation" or "disappointment". The obvious candidates for such examples fail, in my view. Someone might aspire to the academic life and seek a position in academic philosophy because they are convinced that it is a domain filled with persons devoted as they are to truth and the dissemination of learning. After a few years in a dysfunctional department or after several experiences with colleagues or administrators interested much more in self-aggrandizement or power than in education and learning, they might decide that their decision was a mistake. That would fit the description of an experience of disappointment that would be consistent with Husserl's claim that I can be mistaken about the value or goodness of something, namely a career in academia, but I do not think that this is a case where one becomes convinced that one's ultimate ends or priorities in life are mistaken – just one in which one learns that the means one pursued to achieve those ends was mistaken or at least less suited to them than one had expected. Perhaps there is another kind of example that really does have to do with the ends themselves. Think of the case where a young man was sure that life-long learning and education were goals worthy of a life's devotion, but later comes to wonder in light of the hardships and frustrations he experiences along the way. Maybe he then begins to reconsider whether he really is so committed to this goal that it is worth sacrificing financial opportunities he might otherwise have. This seems to be a case where the experience of the life as a whole, not just as an envisaged end in the abstract, but a very concrete goal with that no longer seems so attractive. It is not any one thing that causes this change of heart, but the experience of all the things that happen along the way. This seems more consistent with Husserl's than Heidegger account. Nonetheless, it is still true that what must be decided is not just whether a specific goal can be achieved or not, but what one's genuine priorities are now in light of all that one has learned and that is a different matter. This is not inconsistent with either Heidegger's or Husserl's account. So in the end, I am agreeing with Heidegger about the fact that ultimate ends are foundational in a way that places them outside the usual schema of confirmation.

tion/disconfirmation that Husserl claims hold for the sphere of ethics and ethical principles as well, but I disagree with him that these are mere "projections" instead of what seem to be insights. The fact that not all people share these insights does not make them seem less compelling for the person who has them. I would argue that these kinds of insights resemble theoretical insights to the extent that the act of seeing, the noesis, – in this case the recognition of the valuable and the good –, is directed to what is seen, the noema – in this case the truly valuable and the good. We prefer this over that because we really do think it is more valuable and better – a fundamentally Platonic position perhaps. But whereas Plato could claim that the recognition of the good is a kind of theorem because there is something to be seen there, it is hard to think of an example of confirmation or disconfirmation for ultimate ends that is akin to that of theoretical intentions if these ultimate ends are, to use Heidegger's language, not anything that resides within the world, but rather constitutes the meaningfulness of the world as such.