

Reading Heidegger, Reading Scotus

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Abstract: The young Heidegger finds in his early reading of Duns Scotus and Thomas of Erfurt suggestions from medieval speculative grammar for the solution to the category problem: the limited nature of the Aristotelian ten categories, and how such categories, in their application to only one domain of being, leave out the fore-theoretical sense of life. The elaboration of the fore-theoretical categories of being-in-the-world will occupy Heidegger in the writing of *Being and Time*. A reading of Heidegger's *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus* reveals not only the origins of the *Dasein Analytic* in medieval thought but also how Heidegger was from the very beginning on the search for an interpretation of life without God. For manifestly missing from his reading of Scotus is any interpretation of *ens infinitum*, or the being of God and its relation to finite being.

Keywords: Scotus, Erfurt, speculative grammar, categories, medieval logic, *haecceitas*, early Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Resumo: O jovem Heidegger encontra em suas primeiras leituras de Duns Scotus e Thomas de Erfurt sugestões da gramática especulativa medieval para a solução do problema categorial: a natureza limitada das dez categorias de Aristóteles, e como essas categorias, em sua aplicação somente ao domínio do ser, deixam fora o sentido teórico da vida. A elaboração das categorias teóricas do ser-no-mundo ocupará Heidegger na escrita de *Ser e Tempo*. Uma leitura do *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus* de Heidegger revela não somente as origens do *Dasein* analítico no pensamento medieval, mas também como Heidegger, desde o começo, estava em busca de uma interpretação da vida sem Deus. Pois é manifestadamente ausente em sua leitura de Scotus qualquer interpretação do *ens infinitum*, ou o ser de Deus e sua relação com o ser finito.

Keywords: Scotus, Erfurt, gramática especulativa, categorias, lógica medieval, *haecceitas*, jovem Heidegger, *Ser e Tempo*.

Over a century has passed since Heidegger's 1915 first book, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, was published and we have only a handful of commentaries on it, while the mountain of books dedicated to Heidegger otherwise continues to grow.¹ Why the neglect of this work by arguably "the greatest philosopher of the 20th century?" The consensus seems to be that *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus* is neither a solid work of medieval philosophy (with the disastrous confusion of authorship on Heidegger's part concerning *De modis significandi sive Grammatica speculativa*, which Heidegger assumed to be an authentic Scotistic text, to be fair, along with everyone else up until Martin Grabman proved otherwise in 1922), nor is it a particularly interesting work in phenomenology, in which Heidegger at the time was only a beginner.² Of course, phenomenology had scarcely begun, and while references to Husserl are not absent, Heidegger understood the main contribution of the work to be to the all but forgotten Neo-Kantian

¹ This essay is a revision of material that first appeared in McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, p. 88-120.

² See GRABMANN, *Entdeckung der Mittelalterlichen Sprachlogik*; ERFURT, *Grammaticaspekulativa*; HEIDEGGER, "Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus," in *Frühe Schriften*.

historical school, inaugurated by his fellow student under Heinrich Rickert, Emil Lask.³ But these historical peculiarities have obscured readers to the true power of the book. For Heidegger works here, as he never will again, in the register of the Scholastic theology and logic to which he had at one time youthfully pledged his allegiance, and if he had not yet confined himself to “the single thought” of the *Seinsfrage*, which would one day “stand still like a star in the world’s sky” (*Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*) the reader is given the rare treat of watching a great young mind find its way to his life’s work. More importantly, an unusually perspicacious and non-confessional retrieval of medieval thought occurs in the text, one which succeeds admirably in demonstrating the ongoing relevance of certain structures which came into existence in the context of medieval theology, perhaps the epoch in the history of Western thought most neglected by contemporary continental philosophy.

But the most significant feature of *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus* is its relationship to *Being and Time*. Indeed, I would hazard to say that without a knowledge of this work, a reader of *Being and Time* is prone to missing the whole point of this classic of Twentieth Century phenomenology. We have too long assumed (on the later Heidegger’s suggestion) that Heidegger’s *Habilitationsschrift* is a youthful work lacking direction, with no intrinsic connection to the great works in phenomenological ontology which followed. On the contrary, the text is shot through with a concern for what Heidegger will later call “facticity.” Heidegger explicitly suspends historical questions in the interest of a *Sache*-oriented discussion, which will allow him to expose the resonance between the philosophy of language of Scotus/Erfurt, the neo-Kantianism of the Rickert school, and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The *Habilitationsschrift* is not a historical study of medieval texts but a phenomenological treatise that draws on medieval sources. It is in fact the first of Heidegger’s many “violent” interpretations, readings in which Heidegger will wrench a text out of its received interpretation and show how it must be read differently in a new historical context. Heidegger assumes historical access to the matter at issue in the texts of Scotus and Erfurt that he selects to read, an access to be sure, that differs fundamentally from the

³ Lask died on the battlefield in the First World War. In his review of Heidegger’s *Habilitationsschrift*, Rickert wrote that Heidegger “is in particular very much obligated to Lask’s writings for his philosophical orientation as well as his terminology, perhaps more than he himself is conscious of.” Rickert’s report on Heidegger’s *Habilitationsschrift*, in DENKER (ed.), *Martin Heidegger/Heinrich Rickert. Briefe 1912 bis 1933*, p. 96. Heidegger’s letters to Rickert during the years he was writing the *Habilitationsschrift*, 1914 to 1916, are full of references to Lask. See *Ibid.*, p. 18, 19, 23. On Lask, see KISIEL, *Genesis of Being and Time*, p. 25–38; McGRATH, *The early Heidegger*, p. 93-95.

horizons of interpretation of the writers and first readers of those texts. He is not interested in determining precisely what the author said on an issue, or what he might or might not have intended in a particular text. He is not all that interested in who said it, either. He is, rather, zeroing in on the issue itself, on the assumption that it shows itself in our historical epoch differently than it did in the fourteenth century. Heidegger first elaborated his hermeneutical method in a few pages of the so called Natorp Bericht, a 1922 fragment of a proposed book on Aristotle (some say the book became *Being and Time*).⁴ The method would be developed in Heidegger's historical studies of the 20s and 30s, and formalized into a general phenomenological hermeneutics (albeit with alterations, and, it must be said, qualifications of violence) by Hans Georg Gadamer.

1 The primacy of ontology

The *Habilitationsschrift* is divided into two parts: (1) “*Die Kategorienlehre*” (“The Doctrine of Categories”), and (2) “*Die Bedeutungslehre*” (“The Doctrine of Meaning”). The first half deals with the transcendentals in Duns Scotus, drawing on *Scotus's Opus oxoniense* and the authentically Scotist commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories*, and Aristotle's *De sophisticiselenchis*. The second half, “*die Bedeutungslehre*,” is based on Thomas of Erfurt's *Grammaticaspeculativa*.⁵ There is an intrinsic affinity between Erfurt's speculative grammar and Scotus's metaphysics, which doubtlessly contributed to the mistaken authorship. Scotus and Erfurt share a proto-idealist assumption that identifies being (*ens*) with essence (*essentia*), and knowing (*scientia*) with understanding (*intellectus*). The being of the thing is wholly intelligible—no act of existence remains outside of the light of *essentia*. Consequently, ontology is fully reflected in language. Thus, in a quasi-transcendental move, Erfurt endeavors to prove how a complete account of modes of meaning coincides with a complete set of ontological categories.

Heidegger's task in the *Habilitationsschrift* is to show how Scotus and Erfurt offer contemporary philosophy resources for thinking through a total system of categories, which would reveal that Aristotle's ten are relevant only for one domain of life (theoretical life). A system of categories promises Heidegger an a priori logic of subjectivity that would allow us to find the same “living mind” operative in every domain of life, practical, every-day, fore-theoretical, as well as in

⁴ See HEIDEGGER, *Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle*, p. 111 ff.

⁵ ERFURT, *Grammaticaspeculativa*.

the worlds of the science, and even more, in every epoch of history.⁶ The categories are thus the key to overcoming the vertigo of history, the way that understanding is inescapably modulated and refracted by time, or as Gadamer will put it fifty years later, “understanding is always understanding differently.”⁷ If we always understand differently, and according to our position in time, no understanding is definitive or eternally true for all time, there is at least one way out of this truth-withering relativism: to secure an a-temporal foundation for truth in subjectivity itself. The same human rationality journeys through history and understands differently according to different times, but always by means of the same set of logical categories.⁸ This solution, which Heidegger, prompted by Rickert and Husserl pursues, is also the solution which Lonergan suggest in *Insight*.⁹ While Heidegger will abandon the emphasis on a perennial *logic* of understanding, he will not give up trying to secure an invariant ontological fore-theoretical structure of existential being in the world, what he will call the *existentials* in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger begins with an analysis of the notion of *ens logicum* as presented by Scotus in a variety of texts.¹⁰ The being of the *intentum* is both a being for consciousness and a being-in-itself. It is what it is by virtue of the *intentio*, yet it remains *objectum*, a thing in its own right, irreducible to subjectivity. Subjectivity goes out to the object; objectivity is that toward which subjectivity is directed. The intentional “form” is not a subjective imposition on matter; the intention is as much determined by the matter as it is determinative of it. *Ens logicum*, logical or ideal being, is the being common to all that is or can be. Being is the first intentional object, the objectivity in which all subsequent objects participate: *Primum objectum intellectus est ens, ut commune omnibus*. Being is the first of all things known, thus the most knowable and certain concept (*maxime scibile*). Everything thinkable is encompassed by it, privations and perfections, ideas and sense impressions, feeling and thought—the whole of our psychic life. *Ens* is a *transcendens*, a trans-categorical concept. In Heidegger’s neo-Kantian reading of the notion, *ens logicum* is “the world of sense” in which we live move and have our being.¹¹ It is transcendental, that is transcategorical, not a category distinct from substance and the nine accidents, for every substance and accident

⁶ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 408.

⁷ GADAMER, Letter to Dallmayr, p. 96.

⁸ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 408.

⁹ LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.

¹⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 277.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 280.

presupposes it. The other transcendental notions, unity, truth, goodness, are convertible with *ens*. Everything that is, is also in some sense one (undivided and unique), true (identical to itself), and good (desirable in itself).

Against Aquinas's *analogia entis*, which Scotus believes opens theology to the threat of philosophical agnosticism, Scotus makes being into a univocal concept (*univocatio entis*): it has the same meaning in every instance. Being is distinguished into two modes, infinite and finite, the first referring to the being of God, the second, to the being of creatures. On the basis of our knowledge of finite beings (Scotus remains an Aristotelian), Scotus argues that we abstract a notion of being equally applicable to the infinite, or, in his language, indifferent to the modes of finitude and infinity. *Ens logicum* applies to both infinite and finite being, indeed it applies to every possibility for being, everything thinkable. Without a real distinction between essence and existence, possibility and actuality become different degrees of being. Possibility is higher than actuality, for it embraces more of *essentia*. Existence is not really distinct from essence, nor is it accidental to essence; rather, it is a mode of essence, the fullest determination of intelligible form. This essentialist metaphysics is tempered by a certain degree of skepticism, for *ens logicum* in its fullness always eludes comprehension. We have no intuitive knowledge of being, but only an approximate knowledge, based on flawed sense experience, which attains a lower mode of being. Our common notion of being, *ens commune*, is not adequate to infinite being. It is a functional definition, which does not define the essence and fails to encompass both the highest and the lowest mode of being.

Ens logicum has two poles defining its reach, one infinite, the other finite. As the most determinate manifestation of being, Scotus's form of individuality, *haecceitas*, which qualifies every existing essence and contracts its universal form to a determinate this, is at the furthest extreme from *ens infinitum*. These two extreme poles of the universe of being define being as essence. Both are in different ways singularities: *ens infinitum* because God is one and unique (He has no other); *haecceitas* because a concrete thisness is incommunicable, it cannot be shared among a plurality of individuals. What catches Heidegger's attention is Scotus's contention that we possess a horizontal and foundational understanding of being. As the ground of every predication, *ens logicum* is not subject to further predication. Of it one can only say "it is." *Ens logicum* is the primordial that horizons all modes of being, even the being of God. On it all further determinations rest. With respect to its finite mode (and it is with the finite mode of being

that Heidegger is exclusively preoccupied, more on this below), *ens logicum* appears as neither formless matter, raw sense data, nor a schema of a priori categories; it is, rather, the whole of understandable life. Before a being belongs to any category—before it is determined as substance or accident, real or merely possible—it shows itself as unthematized logical being. Interpreting Scotus through Lask, Heidegger describes *ens logicum* as “a moment of clarity” (*Klarheitsmoment*), which makes everything initially visible. Being is the luminous field within which essences can appear. “Without this first moment of clearness, I could not experience darkness, for darkness itself only exists in clearness. Rather, it should be stated, I would have no object at all; I would live blindly in absolute darkness. I could not get myself mentally and intellectually in motion; thinking would stand still.”¹² Plainly this is an anticipation of the *logos apophansis*, which precedes predication in *Being and Time*.¹³ Being is not something we bump up against in experience but a light-filled space of *possibilitas*. *Ens logicum*, perhaps best defined as the form of being itself, is the overarching ontological determination, the *univocatio entis*, which encompasses all other senses of being. The being of physical entities (*ens reale*) is a subdivision of *ens logicum* and thus presupposes it.

2 The question of Historicism

In chapter 2 of the *Habilitationsschrift*, Heidegger explores the phenomenological significance of the Scotist doctrine of the convertibility of being and truth (*verum*). That a being is true by virtue of its being means that being has an essential relationship to intellect, for truth is relation to intellect. Scotus ultimately relates being to the divine intellect. God grounds the truth of things by willing them to be. Through an immanent reading of the convertibility of being and truth, that is, without reference to God, Heidegger interprets the Scotist convertibility of being and truth as an indication of the primordial givenness-for-a-subject of all existence. The truth that corresponds to judgments is a limited mode of truth, an island of actuality within the sea of possibility. Transcendental truth is the pre-judgmental form of that which is immediately apprehended, “trueness,” which consists in the simple and undeniable self-showing of an “object.” It has as its opposite, not falsehood, but non-cognizance.¹⁴ More than the totality of existing things, it includes everything that has an

¹² HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 224.

¹³ HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 33/29.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 33/29.

essence, all that is known and knowable. Everything that can be an object, either mental or physical, is transcendently true. By interpreting *verum transcendentale* as the givenness of the given, the objectivity of the object, the self-showing of being, rather than as Scotus (and every other Scholastic) understood it, the createdness of the creature, Heidegger reorients the whole of Scotus's metaphysics away from infinite being toward finite being. Here we touch upon Heidegger's silence on the question of God, of the *ens infinitum*, which could fairly be described as Scotus' primary concern. Without confessing it as such, Heidegger is already on the look for a "formally atheistic" interpretation of life, not a rejection of theology as such, but a deliberate effort to interpret life without it. He will perfect this method of formal atheism in *Being and Time*, which is an interpretation of Dasein as though God neither existed nor even affected human consciousness as a question.¹⁵

This resolute turn toward the finite, this scholastic immanentism, is not, however, subjectivist. Heidegger argues that subjectivism, the view that certainty is not possible because we can never guarantee that our judgments correspond to real things, is founded on an inadequate phenomenology. When I judge something to be the case, I respond to a posited possibility, a transcendently true object, which makes a claim on me. I do not need an extra-judgmental verification to guarantee my judgment. Heidegger holds that truth is immanent in thinking, yet sovereign and independent of my will.¹⁶ This argument for logical realism, against what was known at the time as "psychologism," was the subject of Heidegger's doctoral dissertation.¹⁷ The modern notion that certainty is conditional on a verification of a thing-in-itself, the correspondence of a judgment with an object—a third eye view of—is a groundless assumption. The thing receives the form of objectivity in judgment. The object known is the fullness of objectivity; nothing remains beyond it that could limit it or render it merely phenomenal. "Just as *unum* turns out to be the primordial form of the object in general, so too *verum* must be apprehended as a formal relation. The object is true object in regard to cognition. Insofar as the object is object of cognition, it can be called true object. The object shows the *fundamentum veritatis*. Transcendental philosophy has found the most precise expression for this relation: the object is only object as object of cognition: cognition is only cognition as cognition of the object. There is no object without a subject and vice

¹⁵ HEIDEGGER, *Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle*, p. 246/121.

¹⁶ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 278.

¹⁷ HEIDEGGER, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*.

versa.”¹⁸ Here we can see the young Heidegger on the cusp of becoming Husserl’s protégé and taking up the phenomenological theme of the inseparability of every *noesis* from its *noema*.

Intentional being is unthinkable apart from relation to intellect; it is by definition *ens in anima*. In Heidegger’s view, the intellect in question here is ours, not God’s. *Ens* is correlative to *Dasein*. But must we not posit being outside the soul (*ens extra anima*) to secure “objective” truth? Most Scholastics answered yes: non-intentional being is the efficient cause of sense experience. However, when Heidegger reduces the notion of being to intentional being, it becomes difficult to say what *ens extra anima* could mean. If *ens* is always permeated by meaning, it is purely intentional. Heidegger’s point is sharpened in *Being and Time*, where intentional being is replaced by the notion of the *Bewandtnisganzheit*, the meaningful whole of (historical) relations within which beings are always already understood. Suffused as it is by meaning, the world is not “independent of consciousness.” Meaning is not an *objective* property of things, even if it is neither a *subjective* projection; meaning is an indicator of the being which we are. Things are only meaningful for a being with a project to be, that is, for a human being. Because the world is a meaningful whole, it cannot be thought without *Dasein*.¹⁹ To ask about the extra-mental reality of the world makes no more sense than asking about the extra-mental reality of thinking. The “proof of the reality of the external world” presupposes a world less subject and a subject-free world, constructs annulled by the concept of *Dasein*.

What fascinates the young Heidegger, who, to be sure, had not yet broken through to the *Dasein Analytic* of 1927, is how Scotus’ theory of truth externalizes sense and intelligibility without being naively realist. More importantly, the criterion allowing us to distinguish existing being from merely imagined or conceived being is time. “Scotus does not side with ‘subjectivism,’ ‘idealism,’ or any other epistemological specter. A properly understood idea of immanence does not abolish reality, or dissolve the external world into a dream.”²⁰ What makes being ‘outside the intellect’ different from ideal being is temporality. The essence is timeless, the existent is here and now, or there and then. Scotus’s notion of *haecceitas* becomes decisive here, for it is inseparable from everything that is in any way, and it is above all a temporal determination. The intelligible structure of being is determined to concrete *haecceity* by its presence “here and now.” The merely

¹⁸ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 267-68.

¹⁹ HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, 202/188.

²⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 273.

imagined or conceived being has its own thatness, of course, but its thatness is free of concretely specified temporal instantiation. One might be able to isolate the moment at which a thought or an idea first occurred to the mind, but the thought itself is not attached to any particular moment.

A similar fascination with what we might call the timeless objectivity of the ideal (a timelessness which only underscores the determinative role of temporality in existing being) motivates the young Heidegger's reading of Thomas of Erfurt's *Grammatica Speculativa*. Heidegger is particularly interested in Erfurt's assumption that deep levels of meaning are hidden under more obvious and theoretically accessible linguistic structures. The medieval enterprise of speculative grammar shows how concealed ontological form can be decrypted by a careful analysis of semantic structure. For the Modists, the modes of signifying indicate intentional forms; intentional forms in turn indicate ontological structure. The key term here is "indicate"—as in Aristotle's ethics, the indication is rough and in outline.²¹ For the most basic level of structure cannot be exhaustively defined in the terms of founded levels of meaning. The mode of being (*modus essendi*) is never defined but only formally indicated in grammatical structure (*modus significandi*). At a certain point of analysis, definition and deduction break down and the factual ground must be shown through the said, pointed to, not named. For Heidegger will come to describe these indexical primal categories as "formal indications" (*formale Anzeige*) in the years following the *Habilitationsschrift*. The concept of formal indication plays a crucial if somewhat invisible role in *Being and Time*. The whole work, which can too easily appear as a theory of existence, is formally indicative, or indirectly communicative. It must be completed by the reader's "enactment" (*vollziehen*) of the sense of the text in his or her own life.²²

Erfurt's speculative grammar promises an exhaustive theory of meaning, a table of categories of categories, "a definite division of the whole of that which can be known, that is, that which can be determined theoretically."²³ Three modes of increasingly primordial meaning are nestled within one another like Russian dolls. Every grammatical form (*modus significandi*) is reducible to a mode of understanding (*modus intelligendi*), which can in turn be reduced to the mode of being (*modus essendi*). Grammatical form is grounded in concepts; modes of expression

²¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 B 20.

²² On formal indication in *Being and Time*, see MCGRATH, Formal indication, irony, and the risk of saying nothing; idem, The logic of indirection in Aquinas and Heidegger.

²³ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 207.

formally indicate modes of understanding. Modes of understanding in turn refer to modes of being. “[Grammatical] forms are nothing but the objective expressions of the various ways in which consciousness is intentionally related to the objective.”²⁴ While this would appear to render Erfurt a proto-idealist, Heidegger sees much more at work in this distinction of the three levels of determination. According to Erfurt, every mode has a passive and an active modality, a material and a formal moment. The active modes alone are distinguishable, for the passive modes converge. The *modus activus* and *modus passivus* of every stratum of intentionality are materially identical and formally distinct. Materially, a mode refers to the term of an intention, a content; formally, a mode refers to a way of intending, a relation. The active mode of expression (*modus significandi activus*) is the intention of an object as a bearer of a particular name. The passive mode of expression (*modus significandi passivus*) is the intended object as the bearer of the name. The active mode of understanding (*modus intelligendi activus*) is the intention of an object as an instance of a concept. The passive mode of understanding (*modus intelligendi passivus*) is the intended object as an instance of a class.²⁵ The bearer of name and the term of a concept can be materially identical, referring to the same what; nonetheless naming and conceptualizing remain distinct intentional acts. The *modus intelligendi* is the objectifying intention, the cognizing of a being as an instance of a class. Only at this stage is the object known in the full sense of the word. On the basis of the intellection of the *modus essendi*, the intellect names the object, attaches a distinct word or expression to it, and intends it under the form of the *modus significandi*.

Heidegger notices that Erfurt does not elaborate an active mode of being (*modus essendi activus*), although a distinction between an active and passive *modus essendi* is implied by the distinction of every intention into an active and passive mode. Erfurt tends to refer to the *modus essendi* only in its passive sense, as that which *receives* intentional determinations. The *modus essendi* is the mode of primordially given *ens*, the undetermined whole of the *prima intentio*. Heidegger describes it as “that which generally can be experienced (*das Erlebbare überhaupt*) [...] that which stands over and against consciousness in the absolute sense, ‘robust’ reality which irresistibly obtrudes in consciousness and can never be eliminated.”²⁶ All intentions are founded upon this original givenness, the sheer, fore-theoretical and unfathomable this-ness of being. The

²⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 319.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 317-18.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 318.

modus essendi is the universal domain of “the something in general” (*der universal Bereich des “Etwas überhaupt”*).²⁷ It is never directly grasped, for being is always mediated by the *modus intelligendi*, the mode of understanding. Yet we must assume a *modus essendi activus* if we are to distinguish it from the other intentional modes, for the passive modes are identical. The active mode of being would be the most primordial intentional act, the *prima intentio*, the intention of being as being, that is, without further determination, the fundamental directedness of *intellectus* toward the unthematized already meaningful whole of life. The existence of a *modus essendi activus* means that the given is the term of a primordial orientation of the intellect; it shows it self as given according to a basic intentional comportment. This comporting is not something that I deliberately do but a structure within which I habitually do well. It is not an attitude that I can suspend or change but the basic way in which I exist in the world. It is not theoretical but average and everyday.

What could this active mode of being be other than what Heidegger will come to describe as the primordial pre-understanding of being constitutive of Dasein? From the perspective of 1927 we cannot but note how Heidegger’s reading of Erfurt brings Dasein into question: the being who intends being as being. The ambiguity in the notion of the *modus essendi activus*, the intention of being, leads naturally to questions concerning the nature of the being who is capable of intentional relations. The key to more precise understanding of *ens* will not be found by interrogating things, but rather by interrogating the “soul.” But what more precisely is the active mode of being, the intentional relation which defines all human experiences of being? The answer is, in the terms of *Being and Time*, temporality, the temporalizing of being, which occurs by means of Dasein’s pre-understanding, a pre-understanding determined by its thrown-projection, its being towards death. Things are given to us as historical precisely because they are the passive terms of a temporalizing intention: they are given in all their *haecceity* to consciousness, and *haecceity* is the form of time itself.

A final word is needed, then, on this signature Scotistic concept, which is at the very centre of Heidegger’s *Habilitationsschrift*, *haecceitas*. For Scotus, the individual is essentially, not accidentally, individuated.²⁸ The individual exhibits a “sense species,” a materially embedded

²⁷ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 314.

²⁸ On Scotus’ notion of *haecceitas*, see MCGRATH, *The early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 110-115.

determination that makes it a distinct this. Scotus's concrete and unnameable *haecceitas* is the final determination of *essentia*, thoroughly intelligible yet undefinable. It is never known in abstraction from matter but is only grasped in a simple intuition of existence, the *simplex apprehensio*. According to Scotus, the universal definition proceeds from a simple apprehension of pre-existing intelligibility, which is nothing other than the pre-predicative intelligibility of *haecceitas*. The thing known in a universal definition is an actually intelligible singular that is never fully comprehended by the concept. The historically singularized thing speaks a primordial word to us, and this original verbum, which we might call the *verbum entis*, the word of being, makes possible the inner word of understanding, the *verbum interius*. History thus becomes a domain of fore-theoretical experience, which exhibits its own proper understandability.

Haecceitas de-limits the applicability of a certain type of Scholastic scientific knowledge, that which proceeds via deduction on the basis of universal definitions. *Haecceitas* can only be known by "acquaintance," that is, it can only be experienced or "simply apprehended." The universality of language means that *haecceitas* is always in danger of being forgotten. For Scotus, "something inexpressible remains" in every expression, "which is at best only approximated, without ever being exhausted by language."²⁹ *Totia entitas singularis non continetur sub universale*, the full being of the singular is not contained by the universal.³⁰ *Haecceitas* is never subsumed under a general concept, yet it remains intrinsically understandable. Before we conceptualize, we intuit the already meaningful "heterogenous, unobjectifiable manifold content of reality."³¹

In the 1915 Habilitation lecture "Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft," in a sentence that reveals the easily missed connection between the *Habilitationsschrift* and *Being and Time*, Heidegger called *haecceitas* the "understandable oneness and once ness" of historical life.³² If further indications are needed that the historicity of being is emerging as the predominant issue for ontology well before Heidegger enters into alliance with Husserl, we might look at the concluding chapter of the *Habilitationsschrift*, written in 1916, a year after the defence on the occasion of the publication of the dissertation. We should not be misled by the pious rhetoric in

²⁹ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre Duns Scotus*, p. 352-53.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 351.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 352-53.

³² HEIDEGGER, "Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft," p. 427.

these passages and the veneer of mysticism—more indicative of the young Heidegger’s upbringing than the trajectory of his thought—from the real point at issue. Ontology, the fore-theoretical categories which complete and contextualize Aristotle’s ten categories, will be “forms” of the “living mind,” that is, ever-changing, finite modes of apprehension and cognition, which set the parameters for what a given epoch of thought can and indeed must think. “The living mind” is the “historical mind.” It progresses towards an adequate comprehension of the absolute – indeed—but the fullness of the truth eludes it at any given moment. History is the condition and the limit of what the living mind can think. For this reason, Heidegger sees his ontology heading into a direct confrontation with Hegel, Hegel, about whom he had said nothing in the dissertation. What is most characteristic of Hegel is his solution to historicism, which did not deny the historicity of thought but made it the condition of the possibility of the experience of truth. “Historical times differ qualitatively [...]. The qualitative element in the historical concept of time means nothing other than the condensation—crystallization—of an objectification of life given in history.”³³ A cataloguing of these forms of life, these objectifications of life given in history, which Heidegger, the student of neo-Kantianism, had in view in 1915, in no way indicates a capacity of thought to transcend history or to achieve a trans-historical view, what in a medieval frame, we might call a genuinely metaphysical view. The cataloguing of forms of historical consciousness does not re-open access to perennial first principles, which could render ontology a first philosophy once again. It is not being *sub species aeternitatis* that Heidegger is after. Rather, the grasping of historical forms of consciousness will be as partial, provisional, and incomplete as the historical forms themselves. In *Being and Time*, the project of cataloguing forms of historical consciousness will be abandoned altogether in favor of an elaboration of what we might call the form of historical consciousness itself, the temporalizing pre-understanding of being constitutive of Dasein. But the assumption operative in both Heidegger’s neo-Kantian project and in *Being and Time* is the same: it is the assumption of historicity itself: thought is ineradicably situated in time and whatever it thinks is primarily reflective of its situation. Thought never transcends history.

³³ HEIDEGGER, *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre*, p. 408.

3 Methodological atheism

It was not until the 1922 article “Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle,” i.e., until after Heidegger’s Lutheran turn, which occurred between 1916 and 1919 and of which his 1917 marriage with the Lutheran Elfride was an occasion (along with Heidegger’s being rejected for the chair of Christian Philosophy at Freiburg in 1916) that Heidegger openly spoke of the necessity of atheism in philosophy. In the 30s this early notion of methodological atheism, which is to be distinguished from personal atheism (presumably one could still believe in God in some sense and yet proceed in scientific work as though he did not exist), would develop into the infamous critique of onto-theology, perhaps the single greatest legacy of Heidegger to contemporary thought. In the later critique, the reference to God in philosophy is held to be always obscurantist. Of God we can say and know nothing in philosophy, and any pretense otherwise is symptomatic of a forgetfulness of being and a flight from finitude. In 1922, Heidegger put it as follows:

If in the first place philosophy is not an artificial occupation that merely accompanies life and deals with ‘universals’ of one sort or another and arbitrarily posited principles but rather is as a knowing that questions, that is, as research, simply the explicit and genuine actualization of the tendency toward interpretation that belongs to the basic movements of life in which what is at issue is this life itself and its being; and if secondly philosophy is set on bringing into view and conceptually grasping factual life in terms of the decisive possibilities of its being, i.e., if relying upon its own resources and not looking to the hustle and bustle of worldviews, it has radically and clearly resolved to throw factual life back on itself as this is possible in this factual life itself and to let it fend for itself in terms of its own factual possibilities, i.e., if philosophy is in principle atheistic and understands such about itself—then it has resolutely chosen factual life with a view to its facticity and, in acquiring it as an object for itself, it has preserved it in its facticity. The how of its research is the interpretation of the sense of this being with respect to its basic categorical structures, i.e., the modes in which factual life temporalizes itself, unfolds itself, and speaks with it self in such temporalizing.³⁴

To unpack this passage, methodological atheism is held to be genuinely open to the true sense of life: it questions and researches life rather than assuming and imposing arbitrary principles onto it. Philosophical theism, by implication, is dogmatic and closed to the true sense of life, preferring self-serving fantasies to reality. Methodological atheism means letting factual life interpret itself on its own terms; philosophical theism overlays a gird of distorting ideological interpretation onto

³⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Phenomenological interpretations in connection with Aristotle*, English translation, p. 121.

life. Methodological atheism stays with the possibilities for interpretation immanent in life rather than importing meanings from some other realm (i.e., religion). Methodological atheism chooses factual life on its own brute terms and prefers to stay with the disquieting reality of facticity rather than substituting something else for it; philosophical theism is dishonest and unfaithful to life, i.e., basically un-philosophical. Methodological atheism follows the self-temporalizing manner in which factual life speaks, i.e., remains with the historicity of being; philosophical atheism flies from the historicity of being into fictitious eternal truths.

Contrary to appearances this turn to methodological atheism of the one-time seminarian and theology student, who had at one time committed himself and his life's work to "harnessing the intellectual and spiritual potential of scholasticism for the future struggle of the Christian-Catholic ideal" is not as abrupt as it looks.³⁵ The *Habilitationsschrift* proves that as early as 1915, Heidegger was on the track of a factual ontology that could be interpreted without God. As we have shown above, Heidegger's path began with an exploration of an ontology grounded in a Scotistic vision of *univocatio entis*, but restricted to the finite. In those areas where Scotus's theology incurs into his chosen theme, Heidegger appears deliberately to ignore it. In the many pages in which he discusses the transcendentals, for example, Heidegger never mentions that being, truth, and goodness are names of God for Scotus. Heidegger wants a Scotus whose *univocatio entis* has no infinite mode. In some ways, he becomes that kind of Scotist.

Beyond Scotus's ontological thrust, Heidegger drew two basic hermeneutical principles from Scotus, which determined all his subsequent philosophical work: (1) the conceptual and objectifiable is not coextensive with the understandable; the latter exceeds and de-limits the former; (2) the horizon of the primordially understandable is time. Scotus's view that the singular thing is intelligible in itself, yet never fully grasped in abstract cognition, confirmed Heidegger's conviction that something of the thing is always left out of categorial or theoretical knowing. Theoretical knowledge, *scientia*, is a partial and limited view of a thing, an interpretation. It was the genius of the young Heidegger to relate this Scotist/Husserlian breakthrough to primordial structure to the problem of the forgetting of history. The historical is the arena of concrete singularity prior to universalization by the intellect. To deny actual intelligibility of the singular is to deny an

³⁵ HEIDEGGER, 1915 grant application to The Constantin and Olga von Schaezler Foundation in Honour of St. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in OTT, *Biographie*, p. 91; Eng. trans., p. 90.

intelligibility proper to history. Fusing Scotus and Husserl, Heidegger turned Husserl's reflective phenomenology into the "hermeneutics of facticity," a phenomenological investigation of the precategorical manifestations of historical being. From Scotus, Heidegger learned that the "logos of the phenomenon" must be liberated from thinking that arrogates to itself the production of meaning; it must be permitted to show itself, or better, to speak itself. Against Scotus, Heidegger argued that the best way to let this self-showing of things occur is by rejecting theology. The thought of the eternal being is always at the expense of the self-showing of the historical being. If we are to think the one, we cannot think the other. We might wish to think eternal being, in which case we would write a theology, and one that has no philosophical contribution to make to understanding life as we in fact live it. If, on the other hand, we would do philosophy, that is, a descriptive ontology that permits historical being to show itself as it is in itself, we will remain silent about God.³⁶

Thus does Heidegger's Scotus study inaugurate a century of historicist, atheist, ontology, what we can call, with some exceptions, continental philosophy.

³⁶ See HEIDEGGER, "Phenomenology and Theology."

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