

## **HEIDEGGER'S STRUGGLE WITH HISTORY**

### **LA LUCHA DE HEIDEGGER CON LA HISTORIA**

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**Abstract:** In this paper I analyze early Heidegger's concept of history. First, I argue that early Heidegger makes use of three distinct concepts or spheres of history, namely (1) history as intergenerational process, (2) history as personal or autobiographical development, and (3) history as the real center and origin of all intentional acts in the intentional self. Second, I argue that an essential motif in Heidegger's discussion is the re-appropriation of what he considers the externalized and expropriated historical reality in all three spheres. I suggest that this constitutes an objective parallelism to similar moves in Marx and neo-Marxist thought, especially Lukács and the Frankfurt School. I show that Heidegger is on his way towards an ethics of time. First, in opposition to theoretical historicism and historical aestheticism or determinism of his time, early Heidegger advocates the active historical participation in history, the engagement in one's historical situation or *praxis*. Second, in opposition to the publically regimented and reified time frames, calendars and interpretations, Heidegger argues for the self-reflexive, historical shaping of one's very own and unique lifetime. Third, because Heidegger finds the origin of all history in the historical enactments of intentions in the intentional self, he ultimately argues for the self-reflexive acknowledgment of this ultimate historicity at the very heart of human intentionality, calling for the always renewed accentuation of this inevitable and ultimate historicity as a necessary condition for authentic temporality.

**Resumen:** En este artículo analizo el concepto de historia de Heidegger. Primero, argumento que el Heidegger temprano hace uso de tres conceptos distintos, o esferas, de historia, a saber, (1) la historia como proceso de interrogación, (2) la historia como desarrollo personal o autobiográfico y (3) la historia como el centro real y origen de todos los actos intencionales en el yo intencional. Segundo, argumento que un motivo esencial en la discusión de Heidegger es la re-apropiación de lo que considera la externalización y expropiación de la realidad histórica en las tres esferas. Sugiero que esto constituye un objetivo paralelo al de movimientos similares en Marx y el pensamiento neo-Marxista, especialmente Lukács y la Escuela de Frankfurt. Muestro que Heidegger está en este mismo camino hacia una ética del tiempo. Primero, en oposición al historicismo teórico y al esteticismo histórico o determinismo de su tiempo, el Heidegger temprano defiende la participación activa en la historia, el compromiso con la propia situación histórica o praxis. Segundo, en oposición a los marcos temporales, calendarios e interpretaciones regimentados y reificados, Heidegger defiende la auto-reflexión y la formación histórica del tiempo vital de uno mismo. Tercero, porque Heidegger encuentra el origen de toda historia en las realizaciones históricas de las intenciones del yo intencional, defiende en última instancia el reconocimiento auto-reflexivo de la historicidad en el núcleo íntimo de la intencionalidad humana, llamando a una siempre renovada acentuación de esta inevitable y última historicidad como una condición necesaria de la temporalidad auténtica.

**Key Words:** Husserl, Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, Historicism, Transcendental Solitude.

**Palabras clave:** Husserl, Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, Historismo, Soledad Transcendental.

## INTRODUCTION

While it is not controversial that history looms large in Heidegger's philosophical work, it is less clear what Heidegger's actual positions amounts to. Exclusively focusing on the early writings by Heidegger, I want to explore the idea that Heidegger is motivated by the phenomenon of what, with Marx and Lukács in mind, we might call the expropriation of time and the struggle for regaining it. I do not believe that this is the only motif, nor do I claim that Heidegger was interested in Marx or Lukács. Heidegger's reflections about the appropriation of time or history proceed along three different axes: (1) the historical agency in a historical situation, (2) the personal, autobiographical life story, (3) the primordial or original historicity in the intentional self that enacts all life relations.

## PART I: HISTORICAL AGENCY VERSUS HISTORICISM

Contrary to what many believe, Heidegger has never argued for historicism, let alone relativism. It is certainly true that Heidegger defends the breakthrough towards the "historical worldview" in Dilthey and Yorck von Wartenburg (GA 64: 4). But it is important to realize that Heidegger is entirely unimpressed with Dilthey's constant worry about the so-called "anarchy of systems" and the "relativism" inherent in historical consciousness. Heidegger interprets this worry as symptomatic for Dilthey's substitution of an externalized, contemplative, and theoretical form of history (GA 59: 167) – what Marx and Lukács would call a mere reflection in objective thought – for the actual historical being on the ground, which is free from any doubts about the "relativity" of a historical event. In contrast to Dilthey's contemplative and aesthetic historicism, Heidegger emphasizes the inevitably historical actuality of human life from inside, that is to say, the fact that as human beings we find ourselves in a particular *historical situation*, into which we are thrown, and which we transform and shape by and through our plans for the future, without aspiring to realizing some universal essence of humankind (Heidegger, 1993, 145). For Heidegger, "history" is not an inert being, an object that sits there to be contemplated, which might invite the meta-induction that what we assert now as true will be

overturned by future generations, as we have overturned the truths of past generations. Rather, for Heidegger history is what we shape through our actions and what affects us in the course of pursuing these actions. As humans, we cannot help but live in our particular historical situation. We interpret the past, and, in coming to terms with it, we open up a future for us. The human condition means to exist within a historical situation. Heidegger writes:

One's own epoch is experienced as a situation, in which the present time stands not only vis-à-vis the past, but also as a situation in which the future will or has been decided (Heidegger, 1993, 145).

And Heidegger implicates philosophy in this historical decision making. Philosophy does not stand above the historical strife. The "vocation" of philosophy is to sound the "wake up" call to seize one's own historical situation (Heidegger, 1993, 145). It is the task of philosophy to prepare "the appropriation" of "the [given] historical situation" (GA 61: 161). This by no means so different from Hegel, or Marx, or Lukács, or, for that matter, Adorno and Horkheimer.

In fact, what early Heidegger calls the "hermeneutical situation" is actually a historico-practical category: it refers to the horizon of understanding in our own present time, which one needs to work through in order to project a coherent historical response. It is no wonder, then, that Heidegger defines philosophy as "historical discovery," *historisches Erkennen* (GA 62: 368).

To the extent that philosophy has grasped the content and being-structure of its thematic object (the facticity of life), philosophy is "historical" discovery in a radical sense. (GA 62: 368)

Factual life is historical life. And philosophy emerges from factual life and returns back to it. There is no extra-historical standpoint outside historical factual life. We are historical agents, not walking propositions with truth values. But unlike historicism, which reflects itself outside the historical situation, Heidegger urges us to fully immerse ourselves in the historical situation and shape our lives in the active response to this situation. Against the pessimism and *taedium vitae* of historicism, Heidegger opts for historico-practical engagement, historical agency. As a historical agent, Dasein has no fixed essence; it is temporality or historicity and openness towards the future, namely

on the basis of finding itself as a past, i.e., as that which has already been thrown into the world. As Heidegger puts it succinctly, "Dasein is history" (GA 64: 86), which is quite different from saying that Dasein occurs "in" history. Just as death is something immanent to life and not some mysterious endnote to it, so history is an immanent happening in Dasein, according to Heidegger. Of course, one can deny the historical dimension of factual life, but it does not change the always historical reality of life.

In short, against the historicist hypostatization of history as a force above and beyond us, Heidegger argues for the re-appropriation of history, namely by embracing our responsibility for our historical situation. There is an undeniably "activist" element in this, in contrast to the Platonic flight from, or the blind and deterministic submission to, history (which Heidegger associates with Spengler), or the *via media* between these extreme poles (the neo-Kantian relation of transcendent values in the realization of historical forms) (GA 60: 38/39).

However, Heidegger's idea of historical activism stays clear of any voluntarism. Part and parcel of this concept of our historical situation is the idea that time or history constitutes an articulate unity that spans past, present, and future. This unity crystallizes in the historical situation. After all, the historical situation emerges from the past, and is shaped through our present projects and thus transformed into our future. As historical agents we are participating in an overarching historical reality that connects past, present, and future. This has nothing to do with what in recent research has been thematized as the supposedly "non-sequential" view of time (Blattner, 1999). Heidegger does not argue that the past, present, and future *exist* "simultaneously." Rather, his point is that any particular dimension of history or time (past, present, and future) necessarily implies a reference to the other. Factual life is actually integrated within an overall historical and always open trajectory; it is not nominalistically reduced to an isolated, naked existence in the "here," "now." Dasein is part of a tradition, but not captive to it, because Dasein takes up the tradition and interprets it in the present time and projects into the future. This "activist" conception comes with the emancipatory claim to take possession of the history or temporality that we "are," rather than to continue to live in alienation from history, by succumbing to either the aestheticism of historicism, the determinism of historical laws, or the reign of metaphysics and its love affair with a-temporal, unchanging truths, essences, etc. It is still not sufficiently rec-

ognized that early Heidegger's trademark anti-essentialism (in particular with regard to Dasein's lack of any essence), and his decidedly anti-metaphysical stance are rooted in his concept of historical life that makes our historical situation and historical experience the primary reality. Much like the Young-Hegelians and Lukács, Heidegger liberates history from its speculative superstructure and re-appropriates it as historical praxis.

## PART II: PERSONAL HISTORY VERSUS THE TYRANNY OF PUBLIC TIME

Historicism and historical determinism are not the only forms of alienation from our historical being. Blind historical enthusiasm constitutes the other extreme. In throwing oneself head over heel into historical action at every price, oblivious to one's personal historical rhythm and one's very own life story, one abdicates or expropriates one's own time for the demands of public time as such. But all forms of submission to public time, public schedules, is a form of temporal alienation and dispossession, according to Heidegger.

Without dismissing our factual immersion within a tradition and an open historical situation and the historical action that is required, Heidegger argues that the real or original historical cell is the individual, personal or existential self. It alone is what *is* historical in a strict sense. In other words, unlike the just mentioned neo-Hegelians of his time, Heidegger does not start out from a collective or general subject, such as a nation, a state, let alone class consciousness. In fact, for all his criticism of Dilthey, Heidegger follows Dilthey's view, according to which the "individual" is the "original cell" [*Urzelle*] of life and history. For Heidegger, a historical situation is not, first and foremost, public. Rather, it is characterized primarily by the personal perspective and personal investment that comes with a person's existential engagement with his or her given historical situation within the context of the person's own historical lifespan. Such a historical situation is given whenever we act within the world, and not only in the context of grand and memorable "historical" events which change the course of world history so called.

In locating the historical spark within the individual and his or her existential experiences, public time and public events, or world-historical spectacles for that matter, become secondary or, worse, foreign impositions from outside that

sidetrack us from paying attention to our personal given historical situation at hand. In 1924 Heidegger observes:

In most everyday things we do and have done to us, human life is geared towards time. It [human life, IF] is inherently regulated by time. There is time for work, meals, recreation, and diversion. The order of time takes a fixed and public form in calendars, timetables, class schedules, curfews, and the eight-hour day. (GA 64: 17)

Heidegger concedes that public time provides a much needed objective measurement in the context of living together with others. But he claims that it also subjects our lives to the techniques and commands of a temporal order which assigns us what to do at what time. Public time governs us; it dictates how we spend our own time. Temporal discipline is a public matter. Yet it is exercised and upheld by the individual subject that complies with the regulation of public time. It is no coincidence that Heidegger identifies *das Man*, the one, with time (GA 64: 76).

In being-together-with-one-another everyone more or less adheres to the common "Then." Each person has at the outset given away the "time" that he "has" in order to get it back in the form of the time regulated through our being-together-with-one-another." (GA 64: 76)

Nothing could show better what Heidegger means by "self-alienation," a term he frequently uses in his early writings. At bottom, it is temporal alienation. The time that I have, better, the time that I am – each one whiles away his or her own time, *Jeweiligkeit* (GA 64:45) – is subject to temporal rules and regulations over which I have no control. Through public time I am lived by the other, instead of living my own time. Yet public time is only "borrowed" time: it is my time that has been expropriated first and then handed back to me as an alien objectivity to which I must subject myself. Calendars and schedules are instituted in the past, but they govern the future. It is the temporal analogue to what, in the different sphere of economics, is the dominance of capital, which is nothing other than the accumulated labor of the past, which dominates, structures, and organizes labor in the present day, and beyond that, uses up the future for present purposes. Taking our cue from Marx here, we might call the rule of public time "the fetishism" of time, having its objective being in fixed

schedules, time tables, or clock time as such, while the underlying praxis of "fixing" time has been forgotten<sup>1</sup>.

The oppressiveness of objective, public time is a fundamental theme in Heidegger, even after the mid 1920s. The category of "everydayness" in *Being and Time* is of course a temporal category: it signifies the dominance of "the monotony [*Einerlei*]” (GA 64: 75), “the crushing, crushing boredom” (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011) of a flattened-out temporal order that takes its main cue from the endless repetition of the common, objective clock-time: the same 24 hours that will repeat themselves, day in, day out, turning everything new into “having already been there.” It is not a coincidence that Heidegger devoted half a lecture series to boredom in 1929/30 (GA 29/30). Boredom, as marked by the rule of public time, manifests on the personal level of lived experience what historicism is on the interpersonal level: endless repetition of the same.

In fact, early Heidegger pays much attention to what we may call the pathology of time consciousness. According to Heidegger, clinging to the past (as something “desired” right now) or pulling the future into the present (as something “useful” right now) are both modes in which time is organized around just one dimension: the present. What is repressed is “time” in its extended unity, which comes to the fore only if we let time be in its articulated structure of past, present, and future.

In other words, not only can we mistake public, objective time for our own time, in which case we literally forget ourselves by not allowing time for us, we can also mistake our own time by clinging to just one dimension of it, the present. Moreover, a distorted relation to time characterizes the whole project of metaphysics, because it glorifies what is always present, never comes into being, has no past to remember, or a future to expect. It is a grand manifestation of our tendency to foreground the present at all costs, the result of which is that we are walled up inside the prison of a never-changing present presence. And it is precisely this obsession with the permanent present which motivates the ascendancy of technology. It “promises” the constant and instantaneous availability of “the standing reserve” outside a past or future. Everything is al-

<sup>1</sup> Simmel's so-called “tragedy of culture” is based on the same idea. The original inter-subjective motive giving rise to various institutions sinks into oblivion and the sheer objectivity of the institution, decoupled from the interest it meant to serve, guarantees its enduring existence. As is well-known, Heidegger studied Simmel quite carefully.

ready opened up as what it is: raw material for use. Metaphysics and technology increase historical entropy, as one would expect from closed systems.

But if we resist the leveling of "history" and follow Heidegger's suggestion to understand "history" not by recourse to public, shared time, but with reference to our own personal time, our personal history, it follows that one's participation "in" world-history, or one's role in a collective tradition, including one's objective works, achievements, etc., all of which are governed by public or shared time, lose their role as individuating markers. What counts is how we live our own time, not how well we are placed relative to the temporal horizon of a tradition, the external standards of our national histories, or the feared or expected esteem in history books of posterity. The early Heidegger does not envision a new historical beginning, a new era, etc. Rather, the original historical dimension is always at work: in each *Dasein*.

Personal history is not without its own temporal standards. Heidegger insists that personal history must always be attentive to the whole of time, which prohibits the sacrifice of one dimension for the other, the downgrading of one, and the privileging of the other. The trick is always to keep in mind the whole of time, which assigns specific roles to the past and the future which cannot be realized by a presentist insistence on instant availability. According to Heidegger, the past is not a mere present that has moved into the no-longer. Rather, the past is its own dimension in which what is past unfolds its pastness to the full. As such, it is operative in what we plan for the future.

The past is not a *present time* that has passed by; rather, the past's being is set free only through its state of having been. The past reveals itself as that definitive state of one's having been that is characteristic of futurality, a futurality which one resolves to embrace through grappling with the past. Authentic historicity is not a matter of rendering something present, but the state of being futural, in which one readies oneself to receive the right impetus from the past in order to open it up [i.e., the future]. (GA 64: 94)

It is in this context of the unity of time that Heidegger also mentions the inevitable but as yet uncertain death that each one of us has to die at some point. It is precisely the openness of the future as genuine future (in its unavailability) that underscores his description of death. Moreover, mindful of the limits of time, Heidegger questions the philosophical enthusiasm to legislate for

future generations today (GA 64: 94). In the same vein, Heidegger questions the false quest after final and absolute truths. An ethics of time looks askance at all parading of so-called “final words” [*Endgültigkeit*] (GA 59: 84). If anything, it favors what today we call “weak thought.” Early Heidegger searches for a *humilitas temporalis*, despite his penchant for resoluteness. Resoluteness is the precondition for having a fate, that is, the possibility of failure.

In making personal historical experience of one’s own life the primary meaning of “history,” Heidegger does not give up the notion of collective history entirely. Rather, he re-calibrates it and grounds it in one’s own, personal historical being. The possibility of common historical action is subsequent to personal historical decisions that one takes in one’s life. But in committing oneself to goals or projects, one can then also share and communicate these ideas, and fight with likeminded fellows for the realization of these goals in society at large. But for Heidegger it is clear that the existential, personal self remains in the driver’s seat. No historical necessities govern it, unless, that is, it first abdicates its freedom and historical responsibility – to the public, the party, the IMF, or whatever.

### PART III: TRANSCENDENTAL HISTORY

Heidegger’s concept of history is ultimately predicated on his reading of Husserl’s theory of intentionality. According to Heidegger, all our intentional acts are performed or executed by what one might call the intentional self. It is the origin of all intentional acts and, as such, it is the *ur-historical* subject. For Heidegger, the Kantian *I that must be able to accompany all my representations* or the Cartesian *cogito* is not only a real being (with an ontology of its own), but also historical in the sense that it performs, remembers, and anticipates, and lives in its intentional acts. Strictly speaking, this intentional self is the only genuine, or original, historical “agent.” Because it temporalizes itself through the temporal structure of intentionality, it is time itself. Thus Heidegger writes: “In each case, Dasein itself is time” (GA 64: 57). All other empirical historical developments are “derivative” relative to this *ur-historicity* of intentionality or the intentional self. This original history must not be conflated with the empirical history “in” which the individual person finds itself as an object, as something intended within the world.

Notwithstanding early Heidegger's "official" stance against transcendental philosophy, he painstakingly differentiates between the personal self, as it exists within the environing- and with-world, and the intentional "inner" self that performs the intentional acts by which the world gains its meaning for the intentional self (GA 60: 62-65). This intentional self is the one and only origin and paradigm for the meaning of history in early Heidegger's thought (GA 59: 84). Moreover, Heidegger holds that authentically performed intentional acts are acts which (1) accentuate and recall their origin in the intentional self (which is a basic kind of self-responsibility), and (2) contribute and set in motion the renewal of that self (thus keeping at bay the routinization and leveling of intentional acts in everydayness and their insertion in the enveloping world) (GA 59: 75). Behind this account of originary intentionality stands the ethical imperative to care for the self before all self-less object-knowledge. Only intentional acts that foreground and renew the historicity of the intentional self are "authentic," according to Heidegger. It goes without saying that this grounding of authentic action in the inner historicity of the intentional self and its own time comes at the price of a certain transcendental solitude, for the intentional self finds itself entirely singularized.

In his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács speaks in a non-technical, yet quite evocative manner of the "transcendental homelessness" in modernity, the loss of a closed horizon. I submit that early Heidegger advances the complement to this: *transcendental solitude*. According to Heidegger, Dasein, taken as an intentional *ur-historical* subject, is possessed by it alone in its intentional acts. It is singular: it *is* the time in which each and every thing is apprehended, whereas it is not contained in that time. All intentional acts point back to this center of intentionality, which is just another way of saying that all intentionality is ineluctably self-referential<sup>2</sup>. The intentional self, however, is entirely cut off from other selves. On the ontological level, it is absolute singularity, the absolute time which inheres in no other time. Heidegger writes: "I can never *be* the Dasein of others, although I may be together with them" (GA 64: 47).

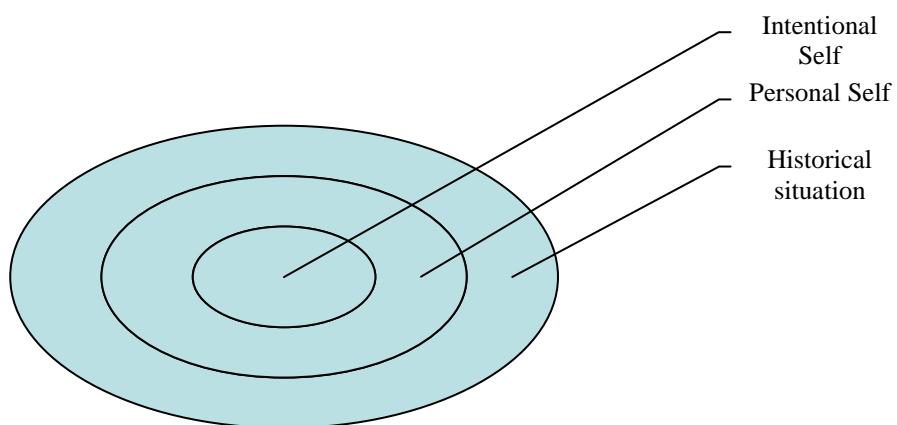
Dasein's transcendental solitude or, what amounts to the same thing, its intentional self-sufficiency is expressed and mirrored in the concrete history of an individual person, or what above we called the personal or autobiographical

<sup>2</sup> An excellent discussion of self-reference is to be found in Dan Zahavi (2005, 99-146).

history of a person within the world. Compared to collective history, one's own personal history is the closest shadow of the pure and untainted historicity of the intentional self, without which, however, there would not even be a world, let alone world-historical events.

### CONCLUSION

Early Heidegger thematizes his positive concept of history on three levels: 1) the historical situation and historical agency, 2) the existential autobiographical history of a person, 3) the history of the intentional self. Schematically we can put this in concentric circles:



In the last analysis, there is a tension between the conception of historical agency in a historical situation, according to which Dasein, at least in part, is defined in terms of a shared, overarching effective historical reality, and the transcendental view at the centre, according to which the subject is absolutely separated from others by an unbridgeable existential gap, such that Dasein and its history is defined solely in terms of Dasein's absolute singularity and self-responsibility, without any intrinsic reference to others, let alone a reference to an overarching, shared historical horizon. It would be the task of another paper to show that this problem still haunts *Being and Time* in the ensemble of the basic descriptors of Dasein: facticity, fallenness, historicity, and authenticity. Regardless of that, however, we can say that all three concepts of history canvassed here have one unifying theme. Heidegger wants to re-appropriate histo-

ry from its exteriorization in historicism, determinism, aestheticism, and reawaken us to historical self-responsibility in the face of the anti-historical tendency in the entire Western metaphysical tradition and the aftermath of it in modern technology.

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