ABSTRACT. The paper explores *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of perception, as a pervasive trait in Heidegger’s writings, and as methodological shadow of *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of the ontic-ontological difference. Forgetting perception, the paper contends, is a precondition for Being conceived as an all-encompassing presupposition for phenomenal beings, a strategy that transforms phenomenology into a logos of Being. This reversal of phenomenology is argued to disclose itself methodologically in the “towards-structure” of Heidegger’s phrasing and in the demotion of perceptual evidence. A crucial moment in this deviation from Husserl is argued to be Heidegger’s rejection of both the “vulgar” concept of phenomenon, as well as its “formal” Husserlian variety, in favor of Heidegger’s own “eminent” notion of phenomenon as a vehicle of concealment. Yet, if human suffering is experienced and witnessed at the level of perception rather than that of *Seyn*, the paper concludes, then *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit* also offers a philosophical explication of Heidegger’s political autism.

Keywords: *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit*; *Seinsvergessenheit*; Being; beings; eminent phenomenon

It is odd, is it not, to charge a phenomenologist with having forgotten perception. But then, if the charge were to stick, this would support those who prefer to regard Heidegger as the philosopher of Being *par excellence* and avoid having to argue for an alternative, Heideggerian, form of phenomenology. As such, *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit* would foreground the degree to which Heidegger distanced his thinking from that of his teacher Edmund Husserl. This is why I want to explore the theme of his forgetting of perception in contrast to his central concern, *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of Being, the ontic-ontological difference. But first, a word on the German signifier *Wahrnehmung*. Its literal meaning is “truth-taking,” that is, perception as the acceptance of the truth afforded us by our senses. This is what
Heidegger indicates with reference to Aristotle, as “the simple sense perception of something,” a lowly variant of the way in which something can appear to us, as we shall see. In this sense, the robust notion of Wahrnehmung is placed in more striking opposition to aletheia, the unconcealment of truth at the abstract level of Sein than the Latin derivative “perception” imparts. Here, two radically divergent concepts of truth meet head-on: the animal realization of the actual versus Heidegger’s anthropological meaningfulness of Dasein as a result of interpretive exploration in philosophical, poetically thoughtful contemplation. However, it is one thing to restrict perception to basic cognition and quite another to declare it a veil concealing human destiny, as does Heidegger, and furthermore hold it responsible for our blindness to our true ground, the Being of being.

Against this broad-stroke background I want to pursue two related goals. One is to provide evidence of Heidegger’s absconding of the perceptual world in favor of an abstractly distant realm of Sein and explore possible reasons for such a speculative yearning, a project defended by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann as one of “the most advanced horizons for the endeavors of thinking.” My other goal is to link this tendency with Heidegger’s political failure, without adding to an already huge pile of political readings of his work. My middle path of is sympathetic to Bourdieu’s analysis in The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger, to the extent to which it undertakes a “simultaneous political and philosophical dual reading” of his Fundamentalontologie and his self-deception. “It is perhaps,” Bourdieu concludes, “because he never realized what he was saying that Heidegger was able to say what he did say without really having to say it.” Where this paper differs from Bourdieu is in its aim to shift the emphasis towards Heidegger’s identifiable mechanisms of reasoning that strike me as likely causes for his insensitivity to the political implications of his philosophical longing. In summing these moments up under the heading of Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit I will also have ample occasion to address the methodological chasm that separates Heidegger the shaman of Being and “prophet in a spiritual wilderness” from the phenomenologist Husserl.

There is no denying the fact that Heidegger’s visionary theorizing still appears to many a promising non-metaphysical proposal of how to realize an authentic existential vision. Nor has his attractiveness to a large and still growing number of readers and writers not diminished even in the face of his now firmly confirmed Nazi past in the publication of the Schwarze Hefte. This makes the question even more pressing to what extent his philosophical method has been blinding him to political reality since the 1920s. So my paper addresses Heidegger’s forgetting of Wahr-nehmung as a radical rejection of Husserl’s meticulous attention to perceptual and quasi-perceptual acts as constitutive of the things themselves. From this perspective, it would seem that Heidegger’s leap towards Sein proved to be a philosophical and ideological trap into which he ensnared himself only too willingly, with Being and Time revealing itself as one of the “great escapes” from the
depressing realities of the Weimar Republic, when what was needed most at the
time was the kind of sobriety characteristic of the work of Edmund Husserl.

\textit{Seinsvergessenheit}

The forgetting of Being and so the difference between Being and beings, between \textit{Sein} and \textit{Seiendes}, is understood by Heidegger as “\textit{die Vergessenheit des Unterschiedes des Seins zum Seiendes}.”\textsuperscript{9} For Heidegger, this marks the beginning in Western philosophy of too narrow a conception of how to relate human Being to the cosmos. Two major philosophical events are milestones in this trajectory to the present, Plato’s focus on ideation and Aristotle’s introduction of thinking in terms of propositions. These moments are said to have produced a threat to Being (\textit{Seinsbedrohung}), and ultimately the loss of Being (\textit{Seinsverlust}). The philosophical result of this prolonged act of forgetting is metaphysics which, in the wake of Plato and Aristotle, has evolved into a discipline sealing the loss of Being.\textsuperscript{10} Yet \textit{Seinsvergessenheit} as the metaphysical oblivion of the asymmetrical relation between Being and beings is not simply a neglect but a forgetting “that has forgotten itself.”\textsuperscript{11}

In spite of the much emphasized “turn” (\textit{Kehre}) after the publication of \textit{Being and Time}, the theme of \textit{Seinsvergessenheit} continues to inform Heidegger’s arguments to the end of his life as his central ontological commitment.\textsuperscript{12} Even if we accept that there is a trajectory in Heidegger’s work from “a philosophy of will and power to one of letting-be and mindfulness,”\textsuperscript{13} the theme of the forgetting of the ontic-onto logical difference should be regarded as the base melody on top of which the tunes of all his later writings can be heard as variations. What is being deplored in this philosophical catastrophe of oblivion is our inability, philosophically and otherwise, to account for and live by the “unifying oneness” of the Being of beings, as Heidegger tells us in \textit{What are Poets for? (Wozu Dichter?)}. With reference to Parmenides, Heidegger likens the Being of beings to a “well-rounded sphere” that “is to be thought as the Being of beings in the sense of the unconcealing-clearing (\textit{entbergend-lichtenden}) oneness.”\textsuperscript{14} If we were able to grasp the nature of this oneness, we would have found the ground from which all our historical manifestations take their essential function. Arguing the oneness of Being and beings at the level of abstraction of Heidegger’s stipulation of \textit{Sein} can be regarded as an agenda with the highest possible claim to philosophical responsibility. How was it possible then that the inventor of this agenda himself failed so pathetically in recognizing the historical manifestations of German fascism for what they were from the very outset? How was it that given Heidegger’s personal aspirations, as those of so many German intellectuals, were so easily sacrificed to the low-brow promises of the “Goliath of the beer halls”? How could Heidegger’s \textit{aleathea} fail its very own test of its \textit{entbergend-lichtende} function? Or, as Bourdieu suggests, perhaps it did not fail in Heidegger’s own judgment. Addressing some of the minutiae of the way Heidegger advances his arguments will provide a better basis on which to adjudicate.
the philosophical and emotional motivation that drives his enterprise. In particular, we may wish to ask what it was that made Heidegger transform Husserl’s motto “Zu den Sachen selbst” into an away from phenomenological semblance and towards their merely functional reconstitution in his large-scale existential vision.

**Heidegger’s Discourse of Towards**

Whereas Husserl’s “to the things themselves” remains confined to the description of acts of consciousness by which we constitute them, and the generalizations we are justified in drawing from them, Heidegger’s *towards* dramatically explodes the Husserlian frame of inquiry. Instead of remaining committed to philosophy as a “science of the totality of real things” and the “formal ideality of philosophy,” Heidegger embarks, as Husserl writes, on a venture of anthropological “foundation laying,” as far removed from our “rational knowledge of whatever is.” This is why it should not come as a great surprise that when we read Heidegger from the perspective of discourse analysis, we are struck by the prominence of terms that convey an unswerving tendency “towards” something: “das zu” (the towards); “zukommen auf” (come towards; pertain to); “Zu-kunft” (coming towards vs. the standard Zukunft, future); “das Dazu” (towards-this); “das Hinzu” (towards—there as in the Hin-zu of the “Drang zu leben”; “das Wozu” (the what-for; for-which; e.g. “the towards—which of serviceability”; “das Auf-sich-zu” (the towards—oneself; towards—itself; and as a definition of the concept of the future); “vorweg” (ahead); “das Woraufhin des Entwurfs” (the upon—which of that projection); “Die Sorge ist Sein zum Tode” (Concernful care is Being—towards—death); and the “Sein—zum—Ende” (Being—towards—the-end) all conspire to carry the reader along a trajectory towards a visionary promise of Seyn. Heidegger’s gaze wanders quickly from the “present—at-hand” of mere Vorhandensein, to “readiness—to-hand,” the serviceability of Zuhandensein of Dasein. Less conspicuously, the “towards” appears in such terms as Ge-schick in the sense of destiny, that to which we are sent; in Entwurf as projection upon which; Geworfenheit as thrownness into the Da; Entwurf as projective towards the “duplication of the Self” in the construction of the Other (cf. projection as existentiale); Loswerfen as in the lines “Aber wer bist ‘Du’; Der, als den du dich loswirfst – als welcher du wirst” (But who are you? The one as whom you project yourself – the one who you will become); and the notion of Fallen as a falling towards or back onto a mode of Being unable rise above the Da.

At the level of syntax, the discursive formation of *toward* is visible in Heidegger’s fundamental mechanism of interpretation, the as-structure which, in its simplest form, is realized as a resemblance relation in understanding “something as something.” From explicit understanding to the complexities of interpretation is a step-by-step “towards,” from applications of the as-structure to placing something in the web of the “totality of involvements.” Yet resemblance hides Being in beings, a limitation overcome only by freeing ourselves from the phenomenological *Sache selbst* for the realization of its true character at the level of ultimate
transcendence. The Heideggerian vehicle that gets us there is the “towards.” From the Husserlian Sache as a thing-as-it-appears-to-me, a mere being at the lowest level, the “towards” drives every step up to the “highest level” of Being. This is why such a lofty value is bestowed on the methodological principle of “path-opening.” Only writing that has “the power of path-opening; grasping ahead into an entirely other and quite drawn-out questioning” is worth of publication, writes Heidegger about his own work. Here too we find an intense groping towards something that has not yet been seen but must be. So it is not surprising that “futural” thinking attracts his attention, as for instance the characterization of Hölderlin as “the poet of the other beginning of our futural history.” Much the same can be observed about Heidegger’s prominent signifiers “possibilities” and “potentiality.” Both represent a thinking towards something that does not as yet exist, yet has existential significance. The “towards” drives the transformation from the dissemination of the self in the “they-self” to the “authentic Self,” a transition from living as a mere Seiendes towards the realization of the potential of my Dasein at the higher level of Sein. Dasein here is conceived as a “towards” in its “potentiality-for-Being.” Inauthentic existence can be transformed into authentic Dasein by embracing the final reality of death as constitutive of human life as a whole. It makes sense then that the existential projection of my death is the most authentic “towards” of Dasein. In this sense, Being-towards-death is our greatest gift and our “ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”

In light of the charge of Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit, every “towards” reveals itself at the same time as an “away from.” As Heidegger writes, “man is the one from whom thinking must ‘think-away’ in order to think him in his ownmost. But whereunto?” Gestures of a seer rather than those of a phenomenologist. “Thinking away” is the pathway towards Being which, once comprehended as human destiny, makes us “the true guardians of the truth of Being itself.” At crucial moments, our gaze-towards as a thinking-away-from has “the necessity of venturing a leap” to reach the “decisive insight” that “Being can never be obtained from beings.” The very notion of philosophical leaps is incompatible with Husserl’s step-by-step method of descriptions and reductions “of the totality of real things” within a “universal ontology that is not just abstract and general but also concrete and regional.” As such, Husserl’s conception of being is best characterized as the “thesis of the constitutedness of that-which-is,” with “Seiendes” defined as “the correlate of the acts ‘that give something as itself’.” In Heidegger we find instead a desire for a large-scale solution to the “up-rootedness” of post-industrial society, a search for “a new grounding” as a basis for “a creative transformation wherein everything inceptual grows up into the height of its summit,” that is, Being. Being is to do its work as a spiritual remedy for “the world age of the departing gods.” Heidegger’s towards-Being as a promise of healing modern existence manifests itself in a blanket rejection of modernity in all its forms as “a sad lapse from the healthy life” and a world of quiet purpose symbolized in Heidegger’s memory by the bell tower of St. Martin in Messkirch.
Early in *Being and Time*, Heidegger warns his reader not to expect a straightforward definition of his central term Being, while at the same time averring that its “indefinability” cannot “eliminate the question of its meaning.” Not an entity, nor a derivative of any higher-level concepts, nor representable by terms at a lower category of conceptualization, Being escapes the traditional approach via definition. And yet, paradoxically, in its transcendent generality the concept is “self-evident.” After all, human cognition, assertion and attention to something takes Being for granted. They all entail the as-structure of “x is a y.” In the course of *Being and Time* the reader receives many partial answers to the question of the meaning of Being. Yet at the highest level of abstraction, Being is unambiguously defined as “transcendence pure and simple” (*transcendens schlechthin*). Defined this way as a limiting concept, we are not in a position to ask about its “mode of being” in terms of its “existential moments,” as does Ingarden, or apply Pfänder’s triple distinction of “Seinsurteil” (judgment concerning its mode of being), “Attributionsurteil” (judgment concerning essential and inessential properties), and “Bestimmungsurteil” (judgment concerning its whatness). At the discursive level of phrase construction of *Sein und Zeit*, Being reveals itself as an all-governing apex and receptacle of infinite instances of “towards.” The linguistic markers of Heidegger’s *towards* become the vehicle of transcendence that takes us away from the modest Husserlian phenomena of the “factual world” to a recommended but no longer cogently arguable promise of existential healing.

**Forms of Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit**

Where in Heidegger, then, do we come across *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit*? After all, it is not a term to be found in Heidegger’s writings. And yet, it appears consistently in his oeuvre from 1924 to 1976 in a variety of forms, as (1) rejection of the “vulgar” notion of phenomena; (2) effacement of perceptual and quasi-perceptual indication in language; (3) severance of thinking from cognition; (4) declaration of historical epochs as misreadings; (5) demotion of what is actual in favor of its “ontic causation”; and (6) moral-political autism. The elimination of phenomenological resemblance in perception in favor of Being as meaning granting ground requires the willful forgetting of taking for true what our animal senses provide, that is, *Wahrnehmung*, a move that necessitates the replacement of what Heidegger calls the “vulgar” conception of the term phenomenon, as well as its “formal” Husserlian version, by one that is “exceptional” in its preconceived potential of the hidden promise of Being. I will have occasion to return to this crucial deviation from Husserl’s phenomenology below.

Heidegger’s effacement of perception in language can be displayed best via his discussion of its function in Dasein, as elaborated in *Being and Time* and in his later writings, where language reveals its true foundational purpose in poetic speech. Whereas his early analysis sets language off from its “apophantic” and merely technical use as always already enmeshed in the totality of involvements, in
Heidegger’s later writings he foregrounds the deep roots of language in poetically meditative thought as constitutive of the human world. Yet there is no rift between the early emphasis on language as hermeneutic comprehension and Heidegger’s later conception of language as “thinging” constitution. Once we reject the atomistic, ontological starting point of language philosophy and linguistics as inappropriate, the sequence from interpretive complexity dealt with in *Sein und Zeit* to the founding function of poetic thought is a matter of course. The main shift occurs in the change from a perspective of speaking language to one in which “language speaks” and so makes us “take up our stay with language, i.e., within its speaking, not within our own,” for “language will call to us from there and grant us its nature.”

What, then, is language in *Fundamentalontologie*? The main clues we get are that “only once the word has been found for the thing, is the thing a thing. Only then is it … It is the word that grants the thing Being.” The essence of language is indicated in the cryptic phrases “Das Wesen der Sprache: die Sprache des Wesens;” the essence of language is the language of essence, and “Das Wesende der Sprache ist die Sage als die Zeige.” (The essence of language is saying as showing). Thus language is the very means of unconcealment. For unlocking its hidden secret, Husserlian phenomenology, as well as linguistics and analytical language philosophy, are the wrong tools. “Language cannot be captured by way of expression.”

Rather, “in naming, the things named are called into their thinging. Thinging, they unfold world … Thinging, things are things. Thinging, they gesture – gestate – world.” Language “calls out to the things, commending them to the world out of which they appear.” Language, “names not only things. It simultaneous names world.” Hence “things bear world” and “world grants things.” Nor do world and things “subsist alongside one another.” Rather, “they penetrate each other.” In this way Heidegger insists on the centrality of language to what it means to be human. This is why Heidegger argues for a reversal of the assumption that “there is first a nature in itself and a landscape which is then mythically coloured by poetic experience.” This simply shows that we are still “resisting the experience of beings as Being.” Instead, for Heidegger, human Being comes into existence most authentically by responding to the call of poetically thoughtful speech. By harkening to the event of language in this manner, we become part of the Ereignis, which Heidegger defines as “the relation of all relations.” In sharp contrast, “everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer.” What is deliberately forgotten here is the basis of language that Husserl attempted to unearth in the Logical Investigations. This is why in the last stanza of Heidegger’s poem “The Other Thinking,” Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit looms large: “Shelter in word the silent message of a leap over the large and small and lose the empty findings of a sudden semblance on the way to Being” (1938).

Commenting on Hölderlin’s poem “As on a Holiday,” Heidegger writes, “This is what the first stanza names, almost as if it wanted to describe a picture.” Mere semblance is certainly not the reason why he regards Hölderlin as “the poet of
poets.” What attracts Heidegger above all is Hölderlin’s idea that “what endures is founded by poets.” Nevertheless, “As on a Holiday” does take its image chain seriously as exemplification of what is later summed up as “divinely beautiful nature.” Even though Heidegger’s reading is contributing a new dimension to the reception of Hölderlin’s poetry, diminishing the quasi-perceptual side of his poetry for philosophical reasons takes away as much as it adds. Here as elsewhere, poetry is pressed into the service of Being at the expense of the immediacy of the poet’s imaginative vision. This includes Heidegger’s appraisal of George’s “Where words break off nothing may be, as it does Trakl’s, “the poet of the yet concealed evening land.” Similarly, Hölderlin’s “words like flowers” become props in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology.

Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit has left its mark also on Heidegger’s arguments in “Was heisst Lesen?” (1954; “What Is Called Reading?”), recommending as it does “authentic” reading as a “gathering, in the sense of contemplative collection,” which allows us to see “what appears and what merely seems to be.” Immediate designation is not what actually appears; it is what merely seems to be. Contemplation here once more is an “away” from the Sachen selbst and a “towards” the promised land of human potentiality. This reworking of Husserl’s phenomenology is reflected also in the redefinition of “phenomenological reduction” as guidance “from apprehension of a being” to grasping “the Being of this being.” Much the same reversal of being and Being can be observed in Heidegger’s disjunction between thinking and cognition. “Thinking is not a means of cognition,” he writes in “Das Wesen der Sprache.” Rather, “thinking draws furrows in the field of Being.” In doing so, “thinking is the poetic expression of the truth of Being in the historical conversation amongst thinkers.” In comparison with thinking as a ploughing of the field of Being, the Husserlian perceptual basis is declared inadequate. Perception, as cognitive “truth-taking” is devalued in favor of the chimera of a merely speculative quintessence. The move of the reversal of thought also informs Heidegger’s reformulation of the concept of historical epochs. Because we tend to judge history at the level of appearances, for Heidegger “every epoch of world history” turns out to be “an epoch of error.” This is so because we confuse “the emptiness of the appearance of time” with the “essence of time.” Husserlian phenomenology of inner time consciousness thus is at best merely formal, at worst “vulgar.” Here the forgetting of perception leads Heidegger to play down the specifics of the phenomena of history as it unfolds, including those that mark the rise to power and national shame of German fascism. As he readily conceded in the Spiegel interview, he was “convinced” that Hitler’s Chancellorship of the Reich would result in the “greatness and glory” of a “new dawn.” Heidegger trapped himself by his conviction that the danger could not possibly lie in the Seiendes as a threat to “Being by beings.” By confusing what he witnessed with the “ontic causation of the actual” he mistook National Socialism with a new “ground” that was bringing beings “to presencing.” And since for Heidegger the direction of causation runs from Being to beings, rather than the reverse, the dangers of the
political specifics of perceptual actuality are effaced. Nor was even the historical reality of 1945 able to dislodge his Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit. As his comparison of motorized agriculture and the corpses of Auschwitz in his letter of 1949 testifies, his long-distance gaze at a dubious Being had a blinding effect not only on his immediate but also on his later political judgment in that it produced in Heidegger an extraordinary degree of post-Holocaust insensitivity, a kind of moral political autism. The moral flaw, Trawny has recently pointed out, lies in Heidegger’s leveling the Shoah into the general process of production, a “recalcitrant refusal to acknowledge the unconditional moral meaning of the Shoah.” Here Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit sheds its technical innocuousness, disclosing its ethical implications.

**Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit as Method**

There are complex reasons why after many a rejection by the German electorate of the National Socialists, their rise to power in January 1933 and absolute power in March of that year was sealed, not the least of which was the Church-led Zentrum party having abandoned its association with the Social Democrats at the end of 1932 in favor of voting with the fascists. But this may very reflect a deeper despair. When the despair at the rift between a nation’s **Wahrnehmungswelt** and **Vorstellungswelt** becomes unbearable, one can comprehend why society does no longer care whether it will rise to cruel dominance before descending into a moral abyss. But as promised in the Introduction, the question I am pursuing here is not a political but a philosophical one. I ask whether there is something in Heidegger’s yearning for the dizzy heights of Sein that lured him away from philosophical sobriety to the degree that he was prepared to hope against all evidence that Nazi ideology would revive the culture of Deutschtum. My tentative hypothesis was that it was Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit, the forgetting of the truth-telling of perception, which set and snapped the moral trap he had inadvertently placed inside the machinery of his philosophizing. If so, the kind of transformation that Heidegger performed on Husserl’s sober philosophical goals would make sense beyond career rivalry. There seems to have lurked a peril in the allure of “potentiality” which made him turn “vulgar” phenomenal resemblance into a mere stepping stone on the way to Being. Like all Seiendes, political pronouncements and events on all sides of politics were bound to pale into insignificance before the promise of Being. While Wahrnehmungsverlust looks innocuous through much of Heidegger’s oeuvre, it reveals itself in the end as monstrous. So disappointed was Heidegger, like a majority of German intellectuals, by the “irresolute” and “inauthentic existence” of the Weimar Republic that his mental gaze became fixed on a radically alternative “futurality.” No wonder then that he was able to describe himself, his students and colleagues as inconsequential: “We are only a passage, only a sacrifice.” Authentic Dasein in the 1930s for Heidegger required sacrifice in order to allow the unfolding of the true potential of an anti-modernist and anti-technological German Being. The reality of “Dasein’s
fateful destiny” of the Germany of 1945 must have appeared to Heidegger as a cruel fulfillment of and by Being beyond his dreams. “Authentic resoluteness” gone wrong. Was “overcoming metaphysics” then premised on necessity on a methodological forgetting of the moral significance of perception? Such questions, says Heidegger in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” are “paths.” Was the replacement of the description of perceptual and quasi-perceptual evidence by its radical abstraction to the level of a more meaningful Sein then perhaps more than just an ill-conceived philosophical pathway? One that necessitated leaving the specificities of perception and their imaginative extension in the value systems of normativity by the wayside, for better or worse? How, we should ask, does Heidegger justify his initially concealed deviation from Husserl’s phenomenology? To be able to respond to these questions, we must revisit Heidegger’s Introduction to Being and Time.

Translation turns dubious in spite of the linguistic competence of translators when they have imagined the wrong world, an intentional process that will result in the wrong choice of words. As some of the passages in Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation of Sein und Zeit, as well as in Stambaugh’s, testify, this applies not only to general and literary rendition but also to the translation of theoretical discourse. The seemingly straightforward “Sein ist jeweils das Sein eines Seienden” is rendered by Macquarrie and Robinson as “Being is always the Being of an entity” and by Stambaugh as “Being is always the being of a being.” The first version narrows Seiendes to an entity, though it also refers to all appearing relations and dispositions, in short, to anything within the scope of Fundamentalontologie which, as Heidegger a little later insists, “is possible only as phenomenology.” The leveling of Being into being in Stambaugh’s version is unconvincingly defended in her Translator’s Preface as an attempt to avoid the risk of suggesting that Sein is “some kind of Super Thing or transcendent Being,” which flies in the face of Heidegger’s explicit explanation of Sein as “das transcendens schlechthin” (transcendens as such). Both in Macquarrie and Robinson and Stambaugh this is turned idiomatically into “the transcendent pure and simple,” though Stambaugh adds the qualification that we must not construe this in any traditional sense of metaphysical transcendence. Nonetheless, we must respect Heidegger’s text. However non-metaphysically conceived, Heidegger is adamant that “every disclosure of Being as transcendens is transcendental knowledge.” This not only confirms the capitalization of Being for Sein as a useful convention in English, but also neatly reflects Heidegger’s distinction of two fundamentally different levels of generality, between beings as phenomenally interpretable and Being as stipulatable potentiality, the former part of the totality of involvements, the latter a recommended, existential goal. That two major translations of Sein and Zeit, in spite of their overall, massive accomplishment, have got off to a rocky start at the very opening of the argument suggest that Heidegger scholars must pay very careful attention to the German original in light of the text of Being and Time as a whole, a suggestion that applies particularly to the way Heidegger reformulates Husserl’s concept of the phenomenon.
Heidegger’s Phenomenon

Different Zugangsarten (modes of access; approaches) produce different ways by which beings show themselves, says Heidegger. Different Zugangsarten (modes of access; approaches) produce different ways by which beings show themselves, says Heidegger. Thus, private modifications of phenomena can result in false resemblance relations, and phenomena themselves may turn out to be a mere seeming or even self-denial. A vast bulk of phenomena, such as indications, presentations, symptoms, and symbols do not show themselves but point to something else beyond themselves. Appearance appears in various forms, as that which announces something by showing; as self-announcement as that which does not show itself; as mere appearance; or as indication of something that hides in it. As such, appearance is a “Verweisungsbezug” (indicative relation) at the level of beings. But because Heidegger wants to widen the scope of phenomenology to accommodate his speculative moves concerning the potentiality of Being, he also draws a sharp distinction between appearance and phenomenon. Heideggerian phenomena show themselves as themselves and so cannot ever be a mere appearance. On the other hand, “every appearance depends on phenomena.” Now Heidegger takes a decisive step beyond Kant and Husserl by expanding the compass of phenomena as the legitimate arena of his own phenomenology. Not only does he leave behind the “vulgar concept” of the phenomenon of “empirical intuition.” As mentioned, Heidegger also sheds Husserl’s merely “formal” phenomenon, with its “tautological” signifier “descriptive phenomenology” and its maxim “To the things themselves.” This critique produces three different notions of the phenomenon, (1) a “vulgar” concept of Wahrnehmung (truth-taking via the senses); (2) the “formal” concept of Husserlian phenomenology; and (3) an “eminent,” that is, ausgezeichnetes or elevated version, Heidegger’s expanded phenomenon. It is in this third form that the phenomenon plays its pivotal role in Being and Time. Redefined, it is that which does “not show itself in the first instance and for the most part,” whereby what is concealed and yet belongs to the essence of the phenomenon, Being, is declared to constitute its “Sinn und Grund.”

To take this kind of “phenomenological” stance, Heidegger writes in 1927, is neither a “standpoint” nor a “direction.” Rather, the term phenomenology “signifies primarily a concept of method.” As the “science of phenomena,” Heidegger’s method from the outset turns into a critique of the phenomenon itself. Contrary to Husserl’s, Heidegger’s revised concept of the “phenomenological concept of phenomenon, as self-showing, means the being of Being.” Thus, Heidegger reconceives ontology as the logos of the Seinsweise of beings as Fundamental-ontologie, by which he aims to uncover the Being of beings as “transcendence pure and simple.” The leap from the modesty of Husserl’s description of phenomena to the most abstract transcendence thinkable is puzzling. So the question arises, how this commitment squares with the anchoring of phenomenology in the acts of consciousness without which we could not constitute phenomena as Sachen. In other words, how do we get from the apple-tree-as-it-appears-to-me to Heidegger’s pure transcendence? Not that transcendental operations in a Kantian sense could be avoided; they remain part and parcel of Husserl’s axis from specification to
generalization, from the apple tree in the garden to its eidetic Wesensschau and beyond, in the end to their function in the Lebenswelt as conditio sine qua non. Rather, the puzzle is how Heidegger’s radicalisation of ontology can still be subsumed under the label of phenomenology. Certainly, once Husserl had read Sein und Zeit, and he did so twice between 1927 and 1931, he realized to his deep disappointment that his protégé had turned against phenomenology, in spite of Heidegger’s protestations to the contrary.

From viewing Heidegger as “my one true student” with an “extraordinary natural talent” for and “devotion to philosophy,” Husserl realized in 1931 that Heidegger’s phenomenology was “something totally different from mine”; it had abandoned “both the method of my phenomenological research and its scientific character.” Husserl had to resign himself to the conclusion that he had “nothing to do with this Heideggerian profundity.” As we can glean from Husserl’s marginal comments in his copy of Sein und Zeit, his main objections were that while phenomenology indeed offered an access to ontology, it did so “in an entirely different sense.” Not surprisingly, Husserl is unable to follow Heidegger’s path along the notion of what has been “forgotten,” nor accept Heidegger’s existential turn, which he regarded as “questionable from the beginning.” Indeed, the entire Heideggerian project strikes Husserl as a massive form of question begging. As Husserl sees it, Sein und Zeit “presupposes” its “theory” as “guiding idea and procedure” in its “theological-ethical discourse.” As such, Heidegger’s “existential anthropology” has nothing to do with phenomenology as conceived by Husserl. Both methodologically and in terms of its findings, it stands phenomenology on its head. In a letter of December 1929 to Roman Ingarden, Husserl reiterates his reservations about Sein und Zeit. “I cannot count the work within the framework of my phenomenology, but also that to my regret I must reject it entirely as to its method and in the essentials of its content.”

In spite of calling his method phenomenological, Heidegger, unlike Husserl, concedes that Sein und Zeit “can only be one exigent pathway among other possible pathways.” By admitting alternative ways of establishing phenomena, has Heidegger not given away the game of phenomenology altogether? After all, instead of regarding the phenomenon as that which is available to us via a description of the acts of consciousness which we cannot but perform when we constitute a Sache from self-evidential givenness, Heidegger’s phenomenon “for the most part does not show itself at all”; “it is something that lies hidden.” What shows itself is at best only “proximally given.” Thus, Husserl’s phenomenon is perverted into a phenomenon “in disguise” to be replaced by the more “ausgezeichneten” (eminent) sense of what is concealed and yet belongs essentially to it as meaning and ground. The reader of Sein und Zeit, then, is guided away from the Husserlian phenomenon as the “distortion” of mere “semblance” to phenomena as pointers to the concealment of the “Sein des Seienden.” Sharpening the contrast between the diametrically opposed conceptions of the phenomenon, “Being covered up” is the very “counter-concept” to phenomena of “unreflective ‘beholding’.” In which case, we are deal-
ing with a fundamental methodological discrepancy suggesting that the philosophy of Being is poorly characterized by the label of phenomenology.

Against this background, Heidegger’s view of phenomenological description as “interpretation” makes sense also in the context of his declaration of his “phenomenology of Dasein” as “hermeneutics.” Only if beings are viewed “in the right way” will they be able to “expose Being.” The right way for Heidegger is transcendence. But whereas in Husserl transcendence is epistemic, in Heidegger it is primarily ontological. This should not be surprising if we recall that Heidegger reads Kant’s first Critique as a metaphysical ontology, while what is important for Husserl is Kant’s innovative theorization of human cognition, that is, his epistemology. The holy grail of Being predetermines the way beings are described, sorted, and evaluated. In other words, Being does not emerge as a cogently argued ontological result; throughout Being and Time, Being always already prowls behind every being as a concealed transcendental signified. As we have seen, “Sein ist das transcendens schlechthin” (Being is transcendence par excellence). Nor would Husserl describe phenomenology as the pursuit of “possibility,” even less as “potentiality.” In Husserl, phenomenological inquiry is sharply set off against the “natural attitude” of science and “free-floating” idealization, the latter of which is precisely the charge Husserl is making when he refers to Sein und Zeit as “theological-ethical discourse.” Being and Time, then, looks like a massive attempt at arguing how appearances understood as concealing approximations grant access to Being as the meaning and ground of the phenomenal, human world. Viewed from this angle, Heidegger’s masterpiece elaborates the conditions under which that ground can be re-discovered. Accepting Heidegger’s point of departure commits us to a sweeping form of Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit, a forgetting of taking for true what our bodies witness. We must give up on the truth of Aristotle’s aisthesis, as well as Husserl’s formal phenomena. But have we then not replaced Wahrnehmung (perception) by doxa, the dubious truth of a mere opinion?

In committing himself methodologically to Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit, without however spelling out this commitment, Heidegger cannot pause at the phenomenon of the apple-tree-as-it-appears-to-me. He is bound to look through the window pane, his own phenomenological constitution of the apple tree, and through all such beings towards the distant and ultimate, transcendental horizon of a stipulated, meaning endowing Being. It is hard to imagine a more decisive abandonment of Husserl’s project and method. So why is a large portion of the literature on Heidegger content with calling Heidegger’s enterprise a phenomenology, both in method and scope? Is it because it does not pay enough attention to the sleight of hand at the opening of Being and Time where Heidegger redefines the very building blocks of phenomenology in thoroughly transcendental terms? For once we have embraced Heidegger’s ultimate distance vision we have long let go of Husserl’s phenomenological precision. Running with his redefinition of the Husserlian phenomenon as a mere proxy, the thesis of Seinsvergessenheit, the grounding of “the existential-ontological constitution of Dasein’s totality” in temporality, Being-
towards-death as our “ownmost potentiality,” and Being as the meaning-endowing
ground of all beings turn out to be preconceived consequences. Husserl’s conscien-
tious bottom-up procedure is thus turned into a top-down allocation of phenomena
under the apex of Being as all-encompassing presupposition. We look in vain for
plausible assertability conditions to put the Heideggerian Being to the test. If a
phenomenology at all, then, Heidegger’s philosophy of Being could only be called
a phenomenology in reverse. In this context, Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit is no
accidental forgetting, but rather the Lynch pin in Heidegger’s magnum opus. What
its author may not have realized up to 1927 is that the very promise that showed
itself to him in this methodological choice concealed not only a profound philo-
sophical but also a broader political peril. The price he had to pay for his visionary
craving must have been painful for the agnostic philosopher, to have to concede in
post-fascist Germany that now “Only a God can help us.”

Conclusion

Heidegger’s work is not so much a phenomenology, and certainly not in Husserl’s
sense, but rather a prophetic proposal for the spiritual renewal of and a recipe for
healing human kind from the ills of a merely calculative and technological moder-
nity. Being and Time as Faustian project was stilling a strong mythological hunger
in the German political unconscious during the Weimar Republic for anti-pragmatist,
idealized, large-scale solutions, no matter what the outcome. As such, Heidegger’s
work has strong features of anti-political mythmaking. As the prevalence of the
towards-structure in Heidegger’s discursive formations demonstrates, his thinking
reveals a desire for replacing social and political reality by higher-level possibilities
organized towards an ultimate potentiality. In the political and social turmoil of the
doomed Weimar Republic in which the Wahrnehmungswelt was constantly under-
mined by a wishful Vorstellungswelt, Sein und Zeit looks like the great escape from
political reality. That Heidegger was prepared to blind himself to the facts of Nazi
politics and remained offensively insensitive to them in his post-war utterances
cannot simply be analyzed as a political failing separate from the style of his
philosophizing. This is why I have tried to demonstrate that the very deviation from
Husserl’s phenomenological method in favor of a transcendental towards-structure,
putting the largest possible distance between his teacher’s focus on Sachen and his
whole subjugation of all things to his own radical transcendence of Being, was at
least in part responsible for his moral autism.

What remains useful in Heidegger’s visionary philosophy comprises such ideas
as a certain kind of philosophical questioning as a fundamental human faculty that
requires nourishing in the education system and a thoughtful distrust of dominant
modes of thinking; Being-towards-death as a starting point for decisions on how to
conduct a meaningful life; art and a poetic-philosophical disposition as an enrich-
ment of human existence in the face of technology, bio-robotics and an increasingly
digitized world; warnings as to the well-being of the planet in a mainly calculative
and commercially exploitative conception of the world as resource; the critique of existing paradigms in the theorization of natural language, both in *Being and Time* and his later papers; and the idea of human potential as unfolding in different ways throughout history as a fundamental openness to be thoughtfully realized. Nonetheless, as the bulk of the commentary since the publication of the *Black Notebooks* testifies, Heidegger’s political choices and his insensitivity to the specifics of the Shoah now throw a deep shadow over his work as a whole. As Peter Trawny sums up Heidegger’s ethical dilemma, “The Shoah deprives us of the right to keep silent.”

Nor can we use Kierkegaard’s “teleological suspension of the ethical” as a justification of Heidegger’s refusal to engage with politically produced suffering. As the paper tried to show, having chosen the ultimate transcendence of *Seyn* as his central philosophical focus, *Wahrnehmungsvergessenheit* proved a convenient methodological device, with *Ethikverlust* (loss of ethics) as an inevitable consequence. For it is at the level of *Wahrnehmung* rather than at that of “the abysmal essence of Being” that human suffering is experienced and witnessed.

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Jacques Taminiaux, “On Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Perception,” in *Phenomenology: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, v. II, Phenomenology: Themes and Issues, ed. D. Moran and L. E. Embree (London and New York: Routledge), 90–101. Like many Heideggerians, Taminiaux rejects the thesis that “Heidegger had neglected the phenomenon of perception” (90). He does so by drawing our attention to the treatment of perception in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. However, while it is accurate to say that Heidegger here addresses the nature of perception as a phenomenon, as he had early in *Being and Time*, it is his very shift towards a new conception of perception as a form of concealment that I suspect is largely responsible for his neglect of perception in the mundane usage of the term. I suggest that his sacrifice of ordinary acts of perception to his long-distance vision of Being and its revelatory potential are at the heart of the gulf that separates Heidegger from Husserl. This is not to deny Heidegger’s insistence on the facticity of human existence.

2. A short version of this paper was offered as the Opening Address on 28 November, 2006, at the Colloquium “Philosophy and Responsibility,” organized by Dr Lubica Ucnik, Department of Philosophy, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.


12. Karsten Harries, “Nostalgia, Spite, and the Truth of Being,” in Farin and Malpas, 215; this is supported also by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann’s observation that “the one and only question” remains “the question concerning the truth of Seyn,” “The Role of Martin Heidegger’s Notebooks within the Context of His Oeuvre,” in Farin and Malpas, 89–94; 90.


26. Mindfulness, 125.
34. B&T, 62; S&Z, 38.
38. S&Z, 35.
42. Martin Heidegger, Unterwegs zur Sprache (Pfullingen Neske, 1959), 176.
43. Unterwegs zur Sprache, 164, 176, 254.
44. Unterwegs zur Sprache, 266.
46. Poetry, Language, Thought, 197; 199; 205.
47. Unterwegs zur Sprache, 267.
49. Mindfulness, 3f.
50. Erläuterungen, 77.
52. Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language, 60.
54. Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language, 100.
58. Der Spruch des Anaximander, 372.
59. Der Spruch des Anaximander, 338.
62. The End of Philosophy and the Task of Philosophy, 432.
64. Peter Trawny, “Heidegger and the Shoah,” in Farin and Malpas, 176f.
66. B&T, 463; 437.
67. Martin Heidegger, Reden, GA, v.16 (Frankfurt: Klostermann), 765.
68. B&T, 435f.
74. S&Z, 35.
75. B&TStam, xiv.
77. Detailed analyses of Heidegger’s methodological relation with Husserl’s phenomenology can be found in Franco Volpi, “Heidegger in Marburg: Die Auseinandersetzung mit Husserl,” Philosophischer Literaturanzeiger 34 (1984): 48–69, and especially in the

85. Mindfulness, 125.
86. B&T, 59; S&Z, 35; B&TStam, 31.
87. B&T, 59 and B&TStam, 31, render “vulgär” as “ordinary” and “common,” respectively, while they both employ the weaker “distinctive” for “ausgezeichnet.” While these renderings do not distort the primary message of Heidegger’s text, in both cases the contrast to Husserl’s conception of the phenomenon is diminished.
88. B&T, 60f.
89. B&T, 61f.; Heidegger’s hermeneutic “circularity” would seem to be better represented by the metaphor of the “helix”; see Horst Ruthrof, Pandora and Occam: On the Limits of Language and Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 48f.; 56; 61. In spite of its richness, Heidegger’s discussion of hermeneutics in §32 in Being and Time fails to fulfill the promise entailed in Kant’s dialectic of reflective reasoning as a bottom-up procedure, from detail toward an explanatory horizon, and teleological reasoning as top-town process, furnishing an interpretive frame within which the detail would make sense, within community constraints.
91. B&T, 63.