

The Giants and Forerunners of Phenomenology: Husserl, Heidegger, and their Predecessors

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ABSTRACT

Scholars trace phenomenology as a philosophical movement back to the early twentieth century. The origins of the phenomenological movement are mostly credited to two German philosophers: the “founding father” of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and his successor, Martin Heidegger. The pair were instrumental in creating the framework for today’s inductive qualitative phenomenological research designs. However, the roots of phenomenology spread further than these two German philosophers. This article describes the thoughts of the two phenomenological giants as well as the earlier influences on the emergence of phenomenology, stemming back to ancient Greece. Though not all-encompassing, this historical overview offers a richer and deeper look into the emergence of phenomenology as a philosophical tradition.

KEYWORDS: phenomenology, history, early influences, Husserl, Heidegger, philosophy.

Phenomenology offers a theoretical framework to scholars who seek an in-depth understanding of phenomena at the level of subjective reality. Unfortunately, some qualitative researchers have an insufficient grasp of the background of the methodology (Khankeh et al., 2015; Neubauer et al., 2019). Greater familiarity with phenomenology’s rich history and philosophical underpinnings can enrich qualitative researchers’ examinations of lived experiences in phenomenological studies. This historical overview is not all-encompassing, yet it highlights the philosophers who have contributed to the emergence of the phenomenological tradition.

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is widely regarded as the founding father of phenomenology (Kafle, 2011; Lavery, 2003). Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), an academic assistant of Husserl’s, can be remembered as Husserl’s first successor (Cerbone, 2014). Heidegger furthered and refined Husserl’s work, introducing hermeneutics to phenomenology (Patton, 2020). Despite the work of these phenomenological giants, phenomenology emerged from the foreshadowing work of multiple philosophers, dating back as far as ancient Greece. As McGaughey (1976) postulated, one does “not philosophize out of a vacuum,” and concentrating “upon the ‘sources’ of a thinker should/will facilitate the appreciation of the achievement of that thinker” (p. 331). This article will initially focus on the early influences of Husserl and Heidegger’s thinking, and then the contributions of these giants of phenomenology will be summarized.

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Predecessors

The first two influencers in this discussion are ancient Greek philosophers. Though Heidegger is more frequently associated with the integration of Greek philosophy into his own framework, Husserl's approach also connects with ancient Greek thinking (Petropoulos, 2021). The term phenomenology originates from the Greek “φαινόμενον” (phainomenon) phenomenon, meaning *that which appears* and “λογία” (logia), indicating *the study of* (E Scholarly, 2022). Thus, etymologically, phenomenology means *the study of that which appears*.

Plato

Sokolowski (2000) postulated that phenomenology “attempts to restore the sense of philosophy one finds in Plato” (p. 2). Plato (c. 428–347 BCE) may be one of the earliest precedents to Husserl's establishment of the phenomenology movement (Bossert, 1985). Plato's allegory of the cave illustrates that one's thinking may be illusory and that shifting our attention can lead to greater clarity. In the allegory, shifting attention necessitated turning the entire body “from a shadow to its source” (Church, 2013, p. 165). For Husserl, one is required to shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude. The former involves one's straightforward acceptance of the experience; the latter encompasses “the attitude of eidetically and transcendently critical reflection” (Bossert, 1985, p. 54). In other words, Husserl's transitioning to the phenomenological attitude entails engaging in a more conscious view of an experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2020).

Aristotle

According to Kontos (2018), “it is not an overstatement to say that no other figure in the history of philosophy has exercised a stronger influence on phenomenology than Aristotle” (p. 5). The texts of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) emphasized a commitment to investigating concrete experience, which closely aligns with phenomenology's approach (Petropoulos, 2021; Russon, 2021). Husserl (1900/2001) posited that Aristotle's “genius” catalyzed the “first historic awakening” of purely logical reflection (p. 105). Husserl strove to extend the discussion, stating, “even if phenomenological analysis of concrete thought-experiences does not fall within the true home-ground of pure logic, it nonetheless is indispensable to the advance of purely logical research” (p. 167).

Descartes

Others, closer to Husserl's time, also played a role in laying the foundation for phenomenology. MacDonald (1996) opined that René Descartes (1596–1650) most profoundly influenced Husserl. MacDonald referred to Descartes as the “single figure to whom Husserl accords unreserved respect, to whom he returns again and again over a thirty-year period” (p. 6). Descartes sought epistemologically certain ground by employing methodological skepticism (Lagerlund, 2020). He attempted to shed all preconceptions and thereby “never to accept anything as true” if it was not clearly known that it was so; “that is, carefully to avoid prejudice and jumping to conclusions” (Descartes, 1637/2022, Part II, para. 7). This led him to his famously reductive starting point for philosophy (a misquote, but a faithful summary): “I think, therefore I am.” Thus, Descartes presaged phenomenologists' attempts to establish a firm epistemological ground by

constraining the influence of mental prejudices (van Manen, 2014).

Kant

Rockmore (2011) argued that Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) holds the position of the first great phenomenologist, whose work was fulfilled by Hegel “but inaugurated by Plato” (Luft, 2012, para. 1). The basis for Rockmore’s (2011) stance lies in Kant’s epistemological constructivist views that veered from representationalist epistemology. Kant argued for a distinction between *noumena*, the thing-in-itself (Ding an sich) and *phenomena*, things as they are in our perception (Atlas, 1964; Kant, 1781/2021). Furthermore, he maintained that subjective perception is critical to any understanding; there must always be a subject who perceives any “objective” thing. At the very least, Kant served as an inspiration to explore the subjective examination of phenomena in the later phenomenological movement (van Manen, 2014).

Hegel

In furthering Kant’s work, Georg Hegel (1770–1831) disputed Kant’s notion of “things-in-themselves” being ultimately unknowable, arguing instead that things might be accessed through exploring how they appear in human consciousness (van Manen, 2014, p. 80). However, Hegel (1802/1979) also argued that language destroys the thing it describes by creating an alternative icon without which the thing itself is henceforth unintelligible: “The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, i.e., he nullified them as beings on their own account, and made them into ideal [entities]” (p. 221). For Hegel, language both provides access to and creates distance from the things themselves (van Manen, 2014). Hegel (1807/1976) foreshadowed the hermeneutical circle with his move through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in his work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Therefore, Hegel presaged later moves in both phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1832) advanced the theory of interpretation, or hermeneutics, to such a degree that his work is still lauded by contemporary philosophers (Forster, 2022). Considered the father of modern philosophical hermeneutics, he was concerned with bringing more intentional effort to the work of interpretation (Forster, 2022; West, 1979). Schleiermacher spoke extensively of the circular aspects of the parts and the whole within texts and thus initiated the concept of the hermeneutic circle without specifically using the term (Grondin, 2016). He advised that one must look at the whole to understand the parts and look at the parts to understand the whole (Ladkin, 2010). Furthermore, Schleiermacher argued that faithful interpretation of texts must consider the historical and rhetorical context of the author (van Manen, 2014). No text can stand alone; all text is culturally and historically embedded (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, faithful interpretation involves a circular process of interrogating the text in detail, and holistically, in itself and in its historical context, and in each pass of the circle, the interpreter is testing the possible interpretations gained in the previous cycle (Forster, 2022). Heidegger would later introduce hermeneutics to phenomenology, while philosophically transforming Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics from the conception of understanding to the meaning of Being (West, 1979).

Bolzano

The role of Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) is frequently overlooked in the general philosophy literature (Føllesdal, 2001), as well as in literature acknowledging great influencers to Husserl’s work (Casari, 2017). However, the mathematician/philosopher was a “main influence on the development of Husserl’s phenomenology” (Føllesdal, 2001, p. 67). Between 1894 and 1896, Husserl dove deeply into Bolzano’s book on logic, *Theory of Science* (Wang & Wang, 2022) and soon “started working on what was to become his first phenomenological work, the *Logical Investigations*” (Føllesdal, 2001, p. 67). In his work, Husserl (1900/2001) noted not only that “Bolzano’s thought patterns...crucially stimulated” his writing (p. 143), but also that “we must count [Bolzano] as one of the greatest logicians of all time” (p. 142). Because of Bolzano’s influence, Husserl viewed logic as always connected with the ideas of “form,” “purity,” and “reason” (Wang & Wang, 2022, p. 87). Husserl extended Bolzano’s pure logic to phenomenology, moving from “Bolzano’s ‘formal a priori’ or ‘logical a priori’ of objective truth, [to] the ‘content a priori’ or ‘material a priori’ required by phenomenology, that is, what [Husserl] called ‘the transcendental essence of ideas’” (Wang & Wang, 2022, p. 88).

Nietzsche

Despite their differences, multiple scholars have proposed a relationship between Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and phenomenology (e.g., Boubilil & Daigle, 2013; Rehberg, 2011; Torjussen, 2009). As such, he is considered an early influence on both Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology. Daigle (2013) asserts that instead, the “phenomenological turn [was] in full swing in the first chapter of [Nietzsche’s] *Human, All Too Human*” (p. 30). Ansell-Pearson (2007) proffered that by exploring the issue of consciousness, we can relate Nietzsche’s thinking to phenomenology. Nietzsche’s theory of consciousness claims that there are both conscious and unconscious mental states, with most being unconscious (Katsafanas, 2005). Unconscious states are not simply dispositions, urges, and drives; they also take the form of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions (Katsafanas, 2005). Experience, in Nietzsche’s view, is similar to Husserl’s in that it involves an interactive and dynamic encounter between an individual and the world (Daigle, 2013). Although unconscious states are shaped by conscious interaction with the world, they may yet be inaccurate representations of reality even as they shape the perception of reality (Daigle, 2013; Katsafanas, 2005). Additionally, Nietzsche (1872–1888/2010) argued that truth cannot be contained or even faithfully expressed in a merely cognitive framework but requires “a freely poetic and freely inventive” form of creative art to mediate meaning (p. 37). In this respect, Nietzsche anticipated some phenomenologists’ more artistic and less linear descriptions of the phenomenon at hand (van Manen, 2014).

Dilthey

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) was a partial contemporary of Husserl, with the two engaging in friendly dialogue and disagreement (Tillman, 1976). Dilthey contributed to what would later be known as hermeneutical phenomenology (Makkreel, 2021) by promoting and furthering Schleiermacher’s concept of the hermeneutical circle, seeking understanding through the engagement between the text itself and the social context (Grondin, 2016; Tan et al., 2009). Additionally, similarly to Husserl, Dilthey protested the dominance of the positivist paradigm in the sciences. For example, in a letter to Husserl in 1911, Dilthey wrote: “Both of us from different sides fight together against the rule of the natural sciences over philosophy; both of us are one in

the struggle for a universally valid foundation for true science...” (Tillman, 1979, p. 123). Husserl (1910–1911/2002) quoted Dilthey extensively as Husserl worked to differentiate time-bound and culture-bound worldviews from the “eternal” work of scientific philosophy. Hence, Dilthey aided Husserl’s launch into phenomenology (Makkreel, 2021; Tillman, 1979).

Brentano

Perhaps the most widely publicized influence on Husserl and the phenomenological movement remains Franz Brentano (1838–1917). The popularity of teacher-student inspiration of thought dates back to ancient times, as with Socrates-Plato, and strongly presented itself with Brentano-Husserl. Brentano, regarded as an exceptionally charismatic teacher, has been referred to as both a forerunner and a “grandfather of the phenomenological movement” (Huemer, 2019, section 7.2). Brentano (1874/1995) introduced the discipline of phenomenology as descriptive psychology, and by 1889 he used the term phenomenology interchangeably with descriptive psychology (D. W. Smith, 2018). Husserl would later adopt “the term for his new science of consciousness” (D. W. Smith, 2018, section 3). It was while studying under Brentano that Husserl took a deep interest in the concept of philosophy as the study of consciousness and the concept of intentionality (Spear, 2016).

Brentano’s notion of *intentionale inexistentz*, now known simply as intentionality, remains the most recognized of his philosophical legacy (Crane, 2017; Huemer, 2019). Brentano’s thesis held that “intentionality is the defining characteristic of the mental, i.e., that all mental phenomena are intentional and only mental phenomena are intentional” (McIntyre & Smith, 1989, p. 148). Each mental phenomenon contains an object, yet each relates to their objects in various ways “depending on whether they are mental acts of presenting something, of judging about something, or of evaluating something as good or bad” (Spear, 2016, para. 2). Brentano believed that all presentations (the most basic class of mental phenomenon) are of value, though some are more valuable than others (Huemer, 2019). Individuals experience a presentation each time they are directed towards an object; they can be imagining, seeing, remembering, or expecting it (Huemer, 2019). As such, intentionality involves an “about-ness,” directedness, or representation of something. For example, this article is *about* phenomenology; if one desires a specific make and model of a vehicle, that desire is *directed* toward the specific vehicle and the possibility that it might be obtained someday. Similarly, a self-portrait *represents* oneself (for more examples, see Byrne, 2006; O’Madagain, 2014). Interested in the philosophy of psychology, or the philosophy of the mind, Brentano foresaw that his thesis would allow the prospect of “studying the mind in terms of its relatedness to objects, the different modes or forms that this relatedness takes,” such as through “perceiving, imagining, and hallucinating” (Spear, 2016, para. 2). It also opened up the possibility of exploring the relationships between various modes of intentionality with one another, such as relationships between presentations and judgments (Spear, 2016). Led by the inspiration of Brentano, Husserl moved away from his discipline of mathematics to further Brentano’s concepts.

Giants of the Phenomenological Movement

Influenced by these forerunners to the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger can be regarded as the giants and primary catalysts of the movement (van Manen, 2014). The roots of the descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology of today originated with these two philosophers (Kafle, 2011; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Patton, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The subsequent sections will explore these two pillars of the movement.

Husserl

The precursors highlighted in the previous paragraphs helped set the stage for Husserl's launch of the phenomenological movement. His most notable contributions were in the philosophical arena. Sokolowski (2000) states that phenomenology "attempts to restore the sense of philosophy one finds in Plato" (p. 2), and he credits Husserl's two-volume book, *The Logical Investigations* (1900, 1901), as a "breakthrough into a new philosophical era" (Sokolowski, 1971, p. 318). Husserl developed the idea of inductive, transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology in part to protest the positivist paradigm (Husserl, 1900/2001; Patton, 2020; Sokolowski, 2000). Although he began his professional career in mathematics, Husserl was particularly concerned with the encroachment of psychologists and other empirical scientists into the academic field of philosophy proper (1910–1911/2002). Husserl's work is regarded as both a natural culmination of and yet a move away from Cartesian dualism and positivism (Draucker, 1999; Lavery, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Husserl (1910-11/2002) was adamant about establishing a rigorous approach to science through phenomenology. His primary aim was to solidify epistemology by freeing it from both positivism and relativism. Husserl's primary argument against scientific positivism, despite a clear appreciation for scientific progress made through empirical study, was that the positivist paradigm has insufficient philosophical foundations. Specifically, Husserl argued that all standard empirical study necessarily imports concepts already inherent in the observer's internal mental model. Thus, "naturalism cancels itself out, without even noticing it" (Husserl, 1910–1911/2002, p. 254). Similarly, Husserl argued that the "extreme skeptical subjectivism" of worldview historicism circles back on itself to cut out its own logical standing since skeptical historicism also is necessarily a time-bound relative perspective (pp. 280–283). Husserl, as well as his influencer Brentano, were disturbed by the "rising tide of relativism and historicism," and promoted a "radical reformation and renewal of philosophy as it then existed" (DeBoer, 1978, p. 494). In Husserl's (1910-11/2002) view, this dilemma has "only *one* remedy ... the philosophical science we are advocating here" (Husserl, 1910–1911/2002, p. 291). The main principles of Husserl's approach to phenomenological studies are as follows.

Intentionality. Sokolowski (2000) asserts that the central doctrine in phenomenology involves the "teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially 'consciousness of' or an 'experience of' something or other" (p. 8). Brentano revived the medieval doctrine of intentionality, but Husserl was responsible for pioneering the phenomenological approach to intentionality and providing a detailed account of its structure (Drummond, 2015). Phenomenological intentionality, to Husserl, means the exploration of "both the experience's directedness to its object and the object's being given in a particular manner or under a particular conception" (Drummond, 2015, para 1).

Intuition. According to Hintikka (2003), a chief element of the history of the concept of intuition "concerns not so much what intuitions are but how they can be justified—if they can" (p. 170). Hintikka argued that Aristotle described intuition when he theorized that knowledge is obtained through deeply inspecting the contents of one's soul. Kant's "partial revival" of the concept of intuition involves a particularity, a conscious and objective representation (Hintikka, 2003, p. 173). Kant distinguished this from sensation, which he thought of as merely a state of the subject, not a representation of a particular object, event, or property (Janiak, 2022). While "sensations do not represent anything distinct from the sensing subject (including perhaps the state of the subject's body), intuitions are objective representations" (Janiak, 2022, section 2.2). Husserl's notion of intuition is a pre-Kantian one, one that does not involve a "special capacity of the human mind;" rather, it refers to "immediate knowledge of any sort" (Hintikka, 2003, p. 173).

In other words, “intuition is not something mystical or magical; it is simply having a thing present to us as opposed to having it intended in its absence,” as in attending the party rather than anticipating the party (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 34). Similar to Descartes’ reduction to the single indubitable truth that he is, in fact, thinking, for Husserl accessing the uninhibited experience of phenomena as they appear to the conscious mind is a mechanism to achieve objective validity, and this analysis is the root of all knowledge (Husserl, 1910–1911/2002; Lavery, 2003). For Husserl (1910-11/2002), the conscious human experience of phenomena provides a direct, intuitive, and valid source of knowledge. Thus, Husserl shifted the scientific conversation by isolating subjective experience as meaningful data for research and exploration (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Phenomenological Attitude. For Husserl (1936/1970), the process by which objectivity is constituted from subjectivity involves a transformation and “reorientation of the natural mundane attitude” (p. 258). In other words, a change of attitude is necessary to properly engage in phenomenology. The natural attitude is essentially our personal default mode, “the focus that we have when we are involved in our original, world-directed stance, when we intend things, situations, facts, and any other kinds of objects” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42). This taken-for-granted experience of ourselves and the world around us – our natural attitude – fails us in that we miss the “marvelous dynamics of transcendental constitution in which the being of the world (including our being as humans in the world) is essentially grounded” (Staiti, 2015, p. 69). To counteract this complacency and to “break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking,” we must take on the phenomenological attitude, also known as the transcendental attitude (Husserl, 1913/1967, p. 39). Husserl acknowledges that the effort required for this transforming reorientation is no easy task but calls for “*a new way of looking at things...one that contrasts at every point with the natural attitude of experience and thought...to learn to see what stands before our eyes, to distinguish, to describe*” (p. 39, emphasis in original). Hence, for Husserl direct examination of human experience through the phenomenological attitude is the mechanism to uncover meaningful truths (Langdrige, 2004; Lavery, 2003).

Phenomenological Reduction. It is by the process of phenomenological reduction that we are led away “from the natural targets of our concern, ‘back’ to what seems to be a more restricted viewpoint, one that simply targets the intentionalities themselves” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 49). Engaging in phenomenological reduction involves performing what Husserl (1913/1967) refers to as the epoché, which is carried out by bracketing, suspending, or neutralizing the “general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint” (p. 99). It is here that “we look at what we normally look through” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50) and set aside pre-existing theories, data, or understandings during the period of phenomenological inquiry (Langdrige, 2008). Though the extent to which we are able to bracket was debated as far back as Husserl’s first successor, Heidegger, phenomenology in all forms carries forward Husserl’s commitment to constrain the influence of all perspectives and mental frameworks prior or external to the observed phenomena (Dahlberg, 2006; Kakkori, 2009; Vagle et al., 2009).

Essence. Through phenomenological reduction, we are able to “go back to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1900/2001, p. 168). Husserl’s now-famous quote implies that researchers take “a fresh approach to concretely experienced phenomena; an approach that is as free as possible from conceptual presuppositions” (Kakkori, 2009, pp. 20–21). In other words, we should go back to the things as they are actually given in experience (J. Smith, 2009). For Husserl, “‘intuition’ is nothing but a generic name for all modes of original givenness” (Mohanty, 1970, p. 153). It is through the persistent exploration of this original givenness that enables the researcher to identify the “universal essences or eidetic structures” of the phenomena in question (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). Jennings (1986) states that the universal essence is “eternally unchanging over time, and absolute. Conversely, essence is not relative to a given culture or historical age, is not restricted to

personal opinion, and is not dependent on logical arguments” (Jennings (1986, p. 1232). Because Husserl believed one could transcend preconceived categories and prejudices and describe the pure essence of “the things themselves,” his tradition of phenomenology is variously referred to as transcendental, pure, or descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Heidegger

Husserl introduced Heidegger to the fundamental ideas of phenomenological philosophy and the core approach of phenomenological inquiry at Freiberg University, Germany, where Heidegger served as his academic assistant and eventually his handpicked successor (Cerbone, 2014; Converse, 2012; Laverty, 2003; Quay, 2016). Husserl viewed Heidegger “as the means by which his phenomenological investigations might be continued in his eventual absence” (Cerbone, 2014, p. 40). Heidegger did not disappoint because, according to van Manen (2014), Heidegger is widely recognized as “a most important, if not the most significant and gifted philosopher of the twentieth century” (p. 104). Heidegger considered Husserl’s groundbreaking work in phenomenology to be “utterly remarkable” (Heidegger, 1910/2005, p. 39), but Heidegger took phenomenology in several new directions.

Ontology. Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences* demonstrated his phenomenological shift “from the transcendental ego and consciousness, toward the pre-reflective lifeworld of everyday experience. With Heidegger, this turn toward the lived world became an ontological rather than an epistemological project” (van Manen, 2014, p. 105). In fact, Heidegger (1910/2005) believed that Husserl sabotaged the development of phenomenology since Husserl’s fixation on epistemological certainty prevented probing more important questions regarding “the question of being” (p. 208). Both Husserl and Heidegger wanted to shift the philosophical discussion to “experience as it is lived” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24), yet for Heidegger, this was primarily a question of ontology (Patton, 2020; van Manen, 2014). Nevertheless, Heidegger (1910/2005) considered ontology and epistemology to be fundamentally married because the essence of conscious existence is knowledge of the world in which we live and the self who lives.

Hiddenness. While Husserl aimed for the near mathematical certainty of all knowledge, Heidegger (1910/2005) posited that reality can be hidden from us, writing that “things can elude us” (p. 28). All being includes an element of hiddenness, and some aspects of being can only be perceived from the other side—much as one can only understand the purpose of a door by imagining oneself having already walked through it (Wrathall, 2004). Hence, Heidegger (1926/1962) relished the mysterious humility inherent in the phenomenological attitude, calling researchers to “let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (p. 58).

Situated-ness. For Heidegger, “historicity is a basic determination of existence itself” (1910/2005, p. 218). According to Baek (2011), Heidegger believed the essence of a thing “can be properly understood only when one sees it as situated in the context of the daily life” (p. 11). Heidegger understood “positionality” as the position or situation in the world from which one perceives the world (van Manen, 2014). Aho (2022) offers the example of loneliness to explain the idea of situatedness. The experience of loneliness manifests on a continuum; the degree to which one is lonely is mediated by individuals’ positionalities. We are “always somewhere, always located and always amidst and involved with some kind of meaningful context” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 106). For Heidegger, whether we like it or not, we must face the fact that we have been “thrown” into a particular socio-historical context (Ladkin, 2010). This contrasts with the assessment of many scholars that Husserl was “an ahistorical, Cartesian, rationalist idealist, who

did not appreciate the historicity, finitude and facticity of human lived existence” (Moran, 2011, p. 74).

Fore-structure. Because we are ineluctably embedded in a particular context, we have inherent thought structures already shaped by our experiences which inescapably guide and shape our perceptions, interrogations, and interpretations of the world (Ladkin, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Therefore, Heidegger diverged significantly from Husserl on how researchers should think about limiting the influence of prior experiences and perspectives.

Believing it was impossible to completely bracket our own lived experiences, Heidegger (1910/2005) theorized that “a definite prefiguration of perspective creeps into every intentional analysis” (p. 209). As Laverty (2003) summarizes, Heidegger argued that no idea or phenomena are “encountered without reference to an individual’s background understanding” (p. 24). Heidegger (1910/2005) did not find this problematic to phenomenological inquiry; rather, fore-structure, or “already known knowledge” (p. 61), was beneficial and essential in framing relevant lines of inquiry (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

In an insightful thought experiment, Wrathall (2004) imagines a Heideggerian phenomenological inquiry into the essence of a table. To even begin, one would need a working definition of a table, which would enable such tables to be gathered and studied to understand the essential characteristics they share in common. Perhaps the working definition of a table will be expanded, contracted, or clarified as one proceeds, but some understanding of the phenomenon is essential even to start the study (Wrathall, 2004).

Bracketing Versus Care. Despite rejecting the bracketing framework Husserl promoted, Heidegger affirmed the necessary and difficult task of examining the researcher’s own prejudices and preformed ideas (Kafle, 2011; Ladkin, 2010). Sounding very Husserlian, Heidegger (1926/1962) proclaimed that phenomenology “is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated” (p. 50).

Yet, as aforementioned, Heidegger believed that it is impossible to bracket away all presuppositions both because the fore-structures frame the experience of the phenomenon and because prior knowledge is valuably complicit in the meaning-making process (Draucker, 1999; Reiners, 2012). Heidegger “spurned the notion of bracketing” (Patton, 2020, p. 282) because the observer exists with the phenomena and cannot both observe and remain neutral (Langdrige, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Objectivity and subjectivity “cannot be teased apart in any simple fashion” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 109). Countering Husserl’s “pure” phenomenology, Heidegger (1910/2005) argued, “The idea of having no prejudice is itself the greatest prejudice” (p. 2). Indeed, he believed Husserl’s phenomenological reduction was both naïve and dangerous.

Rather than simplistically attempting a radical bracketing (which will inherently fail), Heidegger proposed a humble and reflexive “care.” According to Heidegger (1910/2005), phenomenological care is “precisely the way of encountering the entity such that it has been freed up, unencumbered, from its own standpoint” (p. 43). In fact, Heidegger equates this care with a form of self-education: “*The seeing must be educated* and this is a task so difficult that it is hard for it to be overemphasized” (Heidegger, 1910/2005, p. 212, emphasis in original). Although Heidegger did not believe a researcher could ever reach the “purity” of consciousness that Husserl claimed, as Larkin and team (2006) explained, Heidegger instead advocated for an “apathetic treatment of our subject matter,” along with a willingness “to adjust our ideas and assumptions in response to the promptings of the subject matter” (p. 108). For Heidegger (1910/2005), care-full phenomenology is “not free from prejudices;” rather, a caring phenomenological attitude is “free for the possibility of giving up a prejudice at the decisive moment on the basis of a critical

encounter with the subject matter” (p. 2). Therefore, the responsibility of the phenomenological researcher is “to show that this care is in fact at work” (Heidegger, 1910/2005, p. 45).

Ontological Epistemology. The Kantian revolution reduced the opportunity for ontological knowledge as it separated “subject from thing as is evident in its legacy in both continental and analytic philosophy” (Scott, 2016, p. 249). Furthering the work of the likes of Dilthey, Husserl, and Nietzsche, Heidegger “not only consolidated the nineteenth-century reversal of the Kantian shift of emphasis from ontology to epistemology but undercut philosophy itself – including the philosophy and methodology of science – by arguing that it is an outcome of Western metaphysics gone wrong” (Strydom, 2017, p. 337). According to Wrathal (2004), Heideggerian phenomenological research involves ingesting the question so deeply into one’s own self that the inquiry lives within and emerges from one’s very being. Truth and being are co-constituting (Wrathal, 2004). Heidegger (1910/2005) argued that being and knowledge are interdependent and that effective questioning “consists in a certain maturity of existence” (p. 2).

Interactive Interpretation. Following Dilthey, Heidegger believed that hermeneutics is connected with all types of interpretation; life and experiences are living texts in perpetual cycles of interpretation (Bresler, 2001; Tan et al., 2009). For Heidegger, interpretation is a fundamental component of the human experience, including all forms of knowledge or perception (Bresler, 2001; Kafle, 2011; Reiners, 2012). Heidegger felt that separating perception from interpretation was impossible, just as a distinct sequence of high-pitched sounds may be immediately recognizable as either the ringing of a phone or the tweeting of a bird (van Manen, 2014). As a “being-in-the-world,” we interpret via engagement in internal and external dialogue in order to understand “self and world...self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein” (Heidegger, 1927/1988, p. 297). Therefore, interpretation is always present, and the being of the interpreter is interwoven with the act and product of interpretation (Larkin et al., 2006).

Because epistemology and ontology are merged by Heidegger (1910/2005), the practice of authentic questioning opens the investigator not only to new knowledge but also to new modes of being. Sometimes the subject in question turns the tables and interrogates the investigator. With truly phenomenological questioning, “The answer turns back into questioning. What we call questionableness constituted by this way questioning turns back into ever new questioning” (p. 56). Hence, for Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle, the concept initiated by Schleiermacher, becomes a spiral enriching both being and knowledge.

Disillusioned Idealist. We would be remiss if we failed to mention Heidegger’s tarnished legacy due to his affiliation with Nazism. His support for the Nazi movement tainted his philosophy and caused decades of debate among scholars (e.g., Rockmore, 1992). Researchers can only speculate as to the personal and social factors which may have drawn Heidegger to the public Nazi cause (e.g., Stolorow et al., 2010). Let it be noted that these researchers, like most phenomenologists, fervently reject racism, White supremacy, and ethnocentrism. Even so, we recognize Heidegger’s contributions to the phenomenological movement despite his own failures to resist the destructive flow of his own situated context.

Conclusion

Phenomenology, a study of the meanings of individuals’ lived experiences, emerged as a major philosophical movement in the early twentieth century with the works of Edmund Husserl and blossomed through Martin Heidegger. Less recognized are those who paved the way for the pair’s accomplishments. Ancient Greek scholars Plato and Aristotle offered thoughts on presuppositions and logic, respectively, which influenced Husserl’s ideas on phenomenological

reduction and pure logic. The idea of pure logic was further inspired by the works of Bolzano, whom Husserl credited as one of the greatest logicians of all time.

Husserl, though intentionally veering from Cartesian positivism, adhered to Descartes' position that being skeptical of reality aids in finding the ultimate truths of reality. Hence, it is through constraining our preconceptions that we can discern a more direct experience of truth. Kant, who theorized that subjective perception is critical to any understanding, served as an inspiration to explore the subjective examination of phenomena in the later phenomenological movement. Though Husserl was scornful of Hegel's philosophy, both continued Descartes' position of skepticism and agreed that it is limiting one's presuppositions that allows philosophy to be regarded as rigorous science. As such, Husserl's phenomenology employed the phenomenological attitude and phenomenological reduction in order to transcend the natural attitude and explore experiences without preconceived theories. Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Hegel laid the foundation for the hermeneutical circle – a concept that is widely recognized in connection with Heideggerian phenomenology. Heidegger was also heavily influenced by Nietzsche, partially due to the pair's interest in ontology. Finally, Brentano, sometimes regarded as the grandfather of phenomenology, inspired the early works of both Husserl and Heidegger through his thoughts on conscious intentionality. Thus, the phenomenology we employ today has its roots in ancient Greece, with multiple influences providing critical thought to the philosophy and research approach prior to the widely-recognized pillars of phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger. Understanding this historical and philosophical background enriches modern qualitative studies utilizing a phenomenological methodology. In fact, it is essential that phenomenological researchers, from the most novice to the most experienced, understand the historical and philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology. Thus, it is our hope that this manuscript serves to enlighten readers and enhance their ability to explore the lived experiences of others.

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