

Some Closing Remarks on the Power of Existential Intuition

Introduction

If there were a way to capture the depth and importance of the title in a summary that will predominantly use the concepts that have been presented during the course, it would go something like the following:

Skill instead of power

First a small correction. Instead of 'power' it might be better to talk about 'skill,' because that would better capture the idea that a certain effort is involved in acquiring this skill and that this skill can only be understood properly from within its acquisition and application. Practice engenders mastery, which is a kind of power. (See here [again] Hubert Dreyfus' paper "Could anything be more Intelligible than Everyday Intelligibility?: Reinterpreting Division I of Being and Time in the light of Division II" at <http://alpheus.org/tsclass/SpinozaLectureII.pdf>)

The objectivity of categorial intuition

Secondly the point has to be reiterated that what existential intuition sees has its own claim to objectivity, even though it is not something obvious to be seen. Because it is not obvious for most people, nor does it readily conform to their own overarching paradigm of interpretation, it is understandable that people will see this skill and its 'products' as merely another way of conceptual construct and/or speculation. Once it is seen and experienced that this kind of intuition, as well as phenomenological seeing of which it is an extension, is a very subtle way of organizing one's perception of oneself and the world and its possibilities, it will be realized that this skill is not primarily conceptual, though it has its own vocabulary, but that it is primarily perceptual and experiential and that it is perception and experience that will guide the subsequent concept-formation, though in the novice stage of learning it will be ideas and concepts that will initially will have to invoke the relevant perceptions and experiences. (See [again] "IV. The Latent Power of Categorial Intuition and Essence Intuition" of "The Relevance of Phenomenology for Theosophy" at <http://alpheus.org/html/articles/philosophy/phen&theos.htm>)

Perseverance

Thirdly it would be good to realize that the transition from phenomenological seeing to existential intuition will require a certain courage and perseverance, because one has to cope with the totally unique historical Situation of one's life and times, which includes its needs and claims and our own proper and right response to it. (See Dreyfus)

Toynbee

As a digression to make the last point more appealing to those who feel the call of conscience to deal with this world in a deeper and more effective way, the work of the historian and thinker Arnold Toynbee might be of help. He was an English historian with an amazing capacity for discerning patterns and dynamics within history based on his comparative research on the 26 civilizations he was familiar with. He was a theoretical historian with a penchant for philosophical reflection and there are some interesting parallels between him and Heidegger, who was a philosopher with a deep interest in the foundations of the historical sciences and man's appropriation of history in his own concrete life situation.

Toynbee's most relevant ideas for us are the interconnected ideas of a) challenge and response, b) withdrawal and return and c) a creative minority. The creative minority can act, through example, as the

transformative motor within the process of growth and maturation of a civilization. The key here is that this creative minority experiences its life and times as a challenge and somehow worked out a new, creative and viable response to the situation. The response itself was developed in relative seclusion from mainstream society and its dominant minority, after which the response becomes recognized as viable by the masses and the creative minority and its new way of coping goes mainstream, which will create its own set of new problems and the cycle starts all over again. Toynbee sees this as a dynamic rhythm of withdrawal and return. (For a summary of his thought see "The Argument" in Arnold Toynbee's "A Study of History")

Toynbee Heideggerized (or *visé versa*)

This idea by Toynbee of withdrawal and return might help to overcome some seeming contradictions and dichotomies within the realm of the class. The first one would be the dichotomy between existential resoluteness, as expounded in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, with its implied activism and worldly commitments, and 'releasement' or 'detachment' as brought forward by the later Heidegger, implying a more passive listening and waiting reticence. Looking at Heidegger's life it seems obvious that his teaching period from 1918 till the publication of *Being and Time* was a time of relative withdrawal and experimentation, in the sense that he did not 'come out' as other academicians would do through papers and publications. Once he did work out his philosophical and existential response he apparently came out with a bold new philosophical statement, celebrating resoluteness and authenticity and started living his ideas progressively more in the public realm, culminating in his rectorship of Freiburg University in the early thirties. After that debacle he withdrew again into teaching and wrote his other great work, *Contributions to Philosophy*, only published at his centennial. He did make a comeback in the fifties with his lectures and essays, which carried a more meditative voice. My sense here is that Heidegger did develop, in relative withdrawal, both a philosophical and political response to the challenging life and times in which he found himself in the 1920s, in such a way that his revealing and proper existential Daseins-analysis of resoluteness and authenticity as carried out in *Being and Time*, laid out the formal structure of his own improper personal response of aligning himself with the Nazis and aspiring for the role of *Philosophieführer*. After the political debacle he withdrew again and deepened and transformed his philosophy. The debate about his change of heart in his political response is still ongoing. (For those interested see especially Richard Wolin's "The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader")

I think this instance of the rhythm of withdrawal and return in the case of Heidegger would be a good example for the idea that we deal here indeed with a cyclical movement in which all parts, or moments, are arguably equally important. A danger lies in absolutizing one at the expense of the other. In absolutizing the return part you would get the frantic and cruel activism of fascist and communist revolutionaries and in absolutizing the withdrawal part you'll get the detached, ascetic, monastic lifestyle found within especially Buddhism, Hinduism and some forms of Christian monasticism. Another distinction to be made is between withdrawal as a manifestation of civilizational growth and withdrawal as a passive reaction to civilizational disintegration, a process that sets in if a creative minority fails to find a viable response to its civilizational Situation, or when its viable response is not communicated and recognized. The same nuance has to be made when looking at withdrawn individuals and institutions. Both may be either escaping a progressively tenuous situation into a tranquilized state of detached indifference, or travail in silence to work out a new paradigm of understanding and action appropriate to the situation, which can be an example for others. (Question here would be about the state of the Theosophical Society. Is its relative withdrawal an escape or are new modes of Be-ing being worked out? Or is it attaching its destiny to the Krishnamurti movement and lets that creative minority do the heavy lifting?)

BTW, Toynbee's reasoning in favor of seeing a civilization as the most comprehensive unit for doing historical research might be a proper middle way between the Enlightenment concept of Humanity, which might be too abstract, and the Heideggerian preference for a people sharing a common language, which is too parochial. On the other hand the danger here is that this thinking along civilizational lines can degenerate into the ideology of a 'clash of civilizations' as analyzed by Samuel Huntington. We have to transcend our own civilization, not by imposing an abstract standard of what we think humanity is or should be, but through dialogue finding out who the other actually is and by bringing into the discussion what we think are trans-civilizational values.

The Being of Language

The last two closing remarks are somewhat negative in the sense that they express my perception that during the class we have hardly even scratched the surface of Heidegger's understanding of the Being of Language. I think we are still mostly stuck with an understanding of language derived from the categories belonging to those aspects of language that we are most familiar with like naming, reasoning and representing (image-formation). Language is seen as instrumental and often only understood as such. Meanwhile the mysteries enabled by language and the mystery of language itself stayed covered.

Phenomenology is NOT a method

The second negative remark is negative in the sense that it states a negative about phenomenology itself. Phenomenology, though very concerned with method and with its own methodological proceeding, is itself in the last analysis not to be equated with a method, but with an attitude or style, which is not rule- or method-bound. Phenomenology tries to abide to the principle of all principles, i.e. "back to the issues themselves" as Husserl stated it, and doing so by letting the issue show itself from itself. Phenomenology at its highest level is a spontaneous expert skill that sees and acts by letting issues be seen and by letting actions flow from this seeing. This skill can be learned and acquired and certain eastern meditative practices can help, though its basis is rigorous thought based on categorial intuition. Don't think that eastern practices and teachings can either encompass, be equated with, or be substituted for phenomenology. In its own way phenomenology is more fundamental.