

# Husserl and Heidegger

### 1. Correspondence to and about Each Other, 1914–1934

Edmund Husserl was fifty-seven years old and world famous when he arrived at the University of Freiburg in April 1916. Martin Heidegger was twenty-five years old and had just received, barely nine months before, his certification (*Habilitation*) to lecture in philosophy. After a slow start, the personal and professional relationship between the old master and the young scholar warmed considerably and blossomed during the last year of the war, mostly by letter, while Heidegger was away from Freiburg serving in the military. What might have seemed an unlikely union between the founder of the most recent trend in German philosophy and the fairly conservative student of Aristotelian Scholasticism and neo-Kantianism in fact evolved into one of the great philosophical collaborations of the century, only to unravel a dozen years later and finally end in bitter estrangement and recriminations. The letters that follow offer a view, however imperfect, of the birth, growth, maturation, and decline of this famous philosophical friendship gone awry.

Heidegger's interest in phenomenology predated his personal acquaintance with Husserl. This fascination from afar simply in Husserl's books, or in Husserl as a book, is represented in the present compilation by the first letter, dated 1914, and by Heidegger's articles of 1912 (chapters

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The source for most of the letters in this compilation is Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana: Dokumente*, pt. 3, *Briefwechsel*, 10 vols., ed. Karl Schuhmann in collaboration with Elisabeth Schuhmann (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994). This work is hereafter cited as *Briefwechsel*, plus the volume and page numbers. Especially cited are vols. 4, *Die Freiburger Schüler*; 5, *Die Neukantianer*; 3, *Die Göttinger Schule*; and 2, *Die Münchener Phänomenologen*. The letters and excerpts from letters in this appendix have been compiled, translated, and introduced especially for this volume by Thomas Sheehan. The editors wish to thank Kluwer Academic Publishers for permission to publish these translations in this volume. Other sources and translators are indicated in the relevant notes. For a brief but precise presentation of the relation of the two philosophers, see Theodore Kisiel, "Husserl and Heidegger," in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 333–39.

3 and 4). From early on, the young student remained focused on the issues of intentionality, truth, and categorial intuition in *Logical Investigations* (1900–1), material which he saw as important, but finally ancillary, to reawakening and reworking the age-old question about the meaning of being. Heidegger's early studies in Catholic theology and his discreet embrace of Lutheranism during World War I led Husserl to consider him a "phenomenologist of religion," and it was as such that Husserl appointed Heidegger his teaching assistant in Freiburg after the war (1919–23). Those four years, the "first Freiburg period," were mutually enriching for both the master and his new disciple. In his courses and pro-seminars Heidegger drew heavily on Husserlian categories (even as he radically recast them) for his own very original interpretations of St. Paul, Augustine, and Aristotle, whereas Husserl opened up a bit more (though never with great enthusiasm or breadth) to hermeneutics and the history of philosophy. However, by the last year (1922–23) of this first Freiburg phase, Heidegger was very vocally taking critical distance from Husserl (see the letters of February 20, May 8, and July 14, 1922).

The five years that Heidegger spent as associate professor in Marburg (1923–28) gave him the independence and the distance he needed to work out his own philosophical position and its difference from Husserl's "transcendental constitutive phenomenology." Heidegger's increasing criticisms of Husserl for his focus on consciousness and his relentless quest for absolute certitude and mathematical scientificity found its clearest expression in Heidegger's 1925 course "History of the Concept of Time" (GA 25). Word leaked out to Husserl back in Freiburg, and Heidegger frequently, if not always convincingly, had to assure the master that they both were really about the same project. The publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 revealed the immense divide between Heidegger and Husserl, and their failed effort later that year to collaborate on the article "Phenomenology" for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* only served to convince Husserl that Heidegger was lost to the cause. Nonetheless, partially in an effort to bring Heidegger closer and perhaps back into the fold, Husserl worked hard and successfully to get his protégé appointed as his successor at Freiburg.

From Heidegger's triumphal return to Freiburg in the fall of 1928 until Husserl's death ten years later, things went from bad to worse between the two philosophers. Heidegger avoided contact with the aged Husserl, and his speech in honor of Husserl's seventieth birthday (April 8, 1929; included in this appendix) did nothing to convince the master that the torch had been successfully passed on. Husserl's intense rereading of *Being and Time* and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* during the summer

of 1929 only confirmed the obvious. The professional relation was over—Husserl began saying that publicly from 1930 onwards—and soon enough, with increasing evidence of Heidegger's anti-Semitism, the personal relationship finally snapped. Heidegger's very theatrical entrance into the Nazi Party on May 3, 1933, was, as Husserl bitterly ironized, "the perfect conclusion to this supposed bosom friendship of two philosophers" (letter of May 4, 1933).

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The Young Student and the Old Teacher, July 1914 to September 1918

#### July 14, 1914: Martin Heidegger to Engelbert Krebs

[Ott, "Der Habilitand," 148]<sup>1</sup>

*In the summer of 1914 Heidegger was deciding on the topic of his qualifying dissertation (Habilitationsschrift): either a logical treatise on the problem of the question, or a dissertation in medieval philosophy, as Freiburg professors Heinrich Finke and Engelbert Krebs (both of Seminar II, the Catholic program in philosophy) were urging him to do. He eventually chose a topic in medieval philosophy, but he read that topic through the eyes of Husserl. (Nonetheless, Heidegger did not abandon the other topic. In his July 2, 1915, letter to the Philosophy Faculty petitioning for a qualifying examination, Heidegger would mention "The Logical Problem of the Question" as a possible theme of his trial lecture [Probenvortrag] for the doctorate.)*

*Meanwhile, on June 29, 1914, Pope Pius X issued a motu proprio (a circular letter written "on his own initiative") on theological matters, entitled "Doctoris angelici." It mandated that by mid-1917 all Catholic theology schools that conferred church degrees in Italy "and the adjacent islands" (Sicily and Sardinia) would have to use Aquinas's Summa Theologiae in their dogma courses or lose the right to confer such degrees. In this letter of July 14, 1914, written to his friend Krebs, Heidegger remarks ironically on the papal document and mentions the difficulties he is having with Husserl's texts.*

Honored and esteemed Doctor,

Cordial thanks for your card. I have pulled back because I get interrupted too much in the [philosophy] department. Last week I got caught once again in my work. Wednesday [July 23] I will see Rickert to get his opinion. I have to sacrifice my vacation time because Husserl's phenomenol-

ogy is causing me a lot of trouble in the final passages, and I do not want to bring down on my head the accusation of misunderstanding him, the way Messer and Cohn recently did.<sup>2</sup> I hope to be able to send off my essay "On the Question" ["Über die Frage"]<sup>3</sup> at the end of the month. In my leisure time I pull out your lecture notes, but of course I have to familiarize myself with your current course lest the two run along on separate tracks without any connection at all. Do we too belong to the "neighboring islands"? We still do not have the *motu proprio* on philosophy. Perhaps as an "academic" you could apply for better treatment: all who succumb to having independent thoughts could have their brains taken out and replaced with Italian salad.

Philosophical demand could be met by setting up vending machines in the train station (free of charge to the poor). I have a dispensation that covers the period of my studies. But would you be so kind as to put my name on the list too?<sup>4</sup>

Before long now you will develop into a *homo phaenomenopus* ["one who sees phenomena"] and will demonstrate the metaphysics of movement *ad oculos* ["before one's very eyes"]. Maybe before long there will be an occasion to take a walk and discuss your logic course a bit. With thanks and best regards,

Cordially yours,  
M. Heidegger

**May 27, 1916: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger**

[*Briefwechsel* 4:127]

*Husserl transferred to Freiburg University in April 1916, and the first record of communication between the two philosophers is this postcard that Husserl sent Heidegger in the spring of 1916. It refers to Heidegger's qualifying dissertation, The Doctrine of Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus, which had been accepted by the Philosophy Department in the summer of 1915 and which was published early in 1916.*

Dear colleague,

I would very much like to avail myself of your kind offer to let me see your qualifying dissertation. Would you be good enough to send it on to me?

Yours truly,  
E Husserl  
27.V.16

### July 21, 1916: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger

[*Briefwechsel* 4:127]

*Heidegger did give Husserl a published copy of his qualifying dissertation, inscribed "For Professor E. Husserl, with most grateful respect." Husserl apparently perused it and passed on a few comments. Two months later, however, when Heidegger queried him about the work, Husserl did not seem to be clear on its contents, or to have much to say about it. He wrote to Heidegger:*

Esteemed colleague,

Perhaps you would have time to visit me on Sunday morning [July 23] (sometime before visiting hours, 10:00). I really have not had any possibility to go through your work [on Duns Scotus] again, and my ideas have perhaps faded a bit; I doubt I would have anything further to say that might be useful. I have had too many different things to do. Still, I would be pleased if you could come.

With cordial regards,

Yours,  
E Husserl

### September 28, 1916: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger

[*Briefwechsel* 4:127]

*A few months later Heidegger presented Husserl with an inscribed copy of his lecture "The Concept of Time in the Science of History," which he had delivered a year before (July 27, 1915) as the trial lecture for his habilitation and which had just been published.<sup>5</sup> Husserl responded:*

Esteemed Doctor,

Thank you very much for kindly sending me your qualifying lecture. Your gift has pleased me very much.

With best wishes,

Yours,  
E Husserl  
28.9.16.

**December 10, 1916: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger**[*Briefwechsel* 4:128]

*Husserl helped Heidegger get his qualifying dissertation published in 1916 by intervening with the Academic Association in Freiburg in order to obtain a publication grant for the young scholar. (See Husserl's letter of October 8, 1917, below.) Husserl also arranged for Privatdocent Heidegger to teach a course on "Basic Questions of Logic" in Seminar II (the Catholic program) of the Philosophy Department, during the winter semester of 1916. In the following letter, Husserl expresses his willingness to help Heidegger in his studies.*

Esteemed Doctor,

I too am sorry to have missed you when you dropped by—I had gone out for a short while on my usual walk along the Loretto.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, despite the demands of your military service,<sup>7</sup> you might find the opportunity to repeat your visit and perhaps let me know the time beforehand. (After the lecture course is over I want to leave for Hinterzarten, to relax for a while.)<sup>8</sup> If I am able to assist you in your studies, and if you want me to, I will not let you down in this regard.

With collegial regards,

Yours

E Husserl

10.XII.16

**September 24, 1917: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger**[*Briefwechsel* 4:128]

*As the winter semester of 1917 is about to begin, Husserl, who is still away on vacation, again offers to help Heidegger with his studies.*

Bernau 24.9.17.

Esteemed colleague,

I shall return to Freiburg from my stay in Bernau on the 30th [of September] or on October 1. I am sorry that I am unable to be of help to you before that. We can agree on the details when I return, but I will gladly help you with your studies as well as I am able. On October 4 I begin my lecture course on logic,<sup>9</sup> in an attempt to bring my work on the problem of time to some kind of conclusion.



With cordial regards to you and your wife,

Yours truly,

E Husserl

**October 8, 1917: Edmund Husserl to Paul Natorp**

[*Briefwechsel* 5:131–32]

*On October 7, 1917, Paul Natorp of Marburg University wrote Husserl to request his opinion on the possibility of listing Heidegger in first place for a teaching position in the history of medieval philosophy at Marburg. Natorp said he found Heidegger's publications quite respectable and fraught with promise, "and they impress me very much by the scope and freedom with which he grasps problems." But given Heidegger's relative youth, Natorp inquired "whether there is adequate evidence of his abilities as a teacher and whether one can be sure there is no narrowness in his religious commitment." Husserl responded on the following day. The paragraph breaks in the letter below have been added by the translator.*

Freiburg i/B. Lorettost. 40

8.X.17

Dear colleague,

I hasten to respond to your welcome inquiry. Because Dr. Heidegger is very busy with his army duties, I have not had sufficient opportunity up to this point to get to know him very well and to form a reliable judgment about his personality and character. In any case I have nothing negative to say of him.

That he is confessionally tied [to Catholicism] is quite certain, since he stands under the care, as it were, of colleague Finke, our "Catholic historian."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, last year [June 23, 1916] during committee discussions about filling the professorship in Catholic philosophy here in our Philosophy Department—a chair that we too would like to make a [strictly] professional position in the history of medieval philosophy—[Heidegger] was placed in consideration, at which point Finke discussed him as an appropriate candidate in a religious-denominational sense. (And yet, a few months ago Heidegger married a Protestant woman who as far as I know has not yet converted.)<sup>11</sup>

In the final analysis we found him to be too young and not yet mature enough for the position here, or even for a supplementary assistant professorship. His intellectual versatility and considerable talent are amply evident in his first book, the one on Duns Scotus. On my recommen-

dation the Academic Association here gave him funding for the printing costs. It is certainly a very promising beginning for a historian of medieval philosophy.

Dr. Heidegger has not yet had the opportunity to work full-time as a teacher because, as I alluded above, two years ago he was drafted into the postal service. As regards his teaching, I have heard some very favorable judgments and also some critical ones—which in any case is connected with the fact that, in order to make headway in the systematic area, he does not give historical lecture courses but systematic ones, and he strives to achieve a secure position on fundamental questions and methods.

He began as Rickert's student but is no longer comfortable with Rickert's philosophy and now seeks to come to grips with phenomenological philosophy from the inside. It seems he is doing this seriously and thoroughly.

That is all I can say at this time.

With most cordial greetings and highest esteem,

Yours,

E Husserl

**January 30, 1918: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger**

[Briefwechsel 4:129]

*In the first weeks of 1918 Heidegger was called up for service with the 4th Company of the 113th Ersatz Battalion and, apart from occasional leaves, was away from Freiburg from January 17 through late November. Of the four extant letters that Husserl wrote to him during that period, the first three are addressed to Heidegger at the army camp where he was training at Heuberg in eastern Baden, a few miles north of his home town of Messkirch. Although brief, those three letters (January 30, March 28, and May 11, 1918) are cordial and full of promise of future collaboration. The extraordinary fourth letter (September 19, 1918), written while Heidegger was at the Western front, will mark the beginning of the personal bonding between the two.*

*Apparently Heidegger wrote to Husserl from Heuberg in late January to say that he would visit Freiburg in early February while he was on leave. However, from February 1 to April 27, 1918, Husserl was to be on vacation in Bernau, near St. Blasien, some 15 miles southeast of Freiburg. Shortly before departing for Bernau, Husserl wrote to Heidegger.*



[Freiburg]

30.1.1918

Dear colleague,

I am very sorry that your postcard arrived too late. On Friday morning [February 1] we leave for Bernau (Rössle) for at least two months, and you can imagine what that has meant, and still means, in terms of packing. I am taking along an enormous quantity of manuscripts and books, and I hope to be able to do a lot of work in the mountains. I am fervently hoping for a period of quiet contemplation to work out conclusively all the initiatives whose maturation has been interrupted time and again here in Freiburg. I regret very much that we can no longer get together and enjoy our *συμφιλοσοφεῖν* [co-philosophizing].<sup>12</sup> Once again I wish you everything good and the very best for your military service.

With regards to you and your wife,

Yours,

E Husserl

[P.S.] Cordial regards to Dr. and Mrs. Rees.<sup>13</sup>

### March 28, 1918: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger

[*Briefwechsel* 4:129–30]

*Two months later Husserl answered another letter that Heidegger had written from Heuberg.*

Bernau (Baden) (until around April 25)

28.3.1918

Dear colleague,

I was immensely pleased to receive your greetings from the training camp. So now I do not have to worry about how your health is holding up under the strains of military service. The lively mood that speaks through the lines of your cordial letter is the best testimony that you are healthy and happy. The fact that you now have to put philosophy aside entirely for a while is very good. Hopefully, after the glorious victories in the West<sup>14</sup> the war will not drag on too much longer, and afterwards you can return with even greater vigor to the difficult problems you raise, and I will gladly do my part to bring you *in medias res* and to familiarize you with those *res* in *συμφιλοσοφεῖν*. I firmly hope that this period in the army will redound to your benefit. It would be a pleasure for me if from time to time you again

shared your news. Up here in this quiet mountain valley a great work is coming to fruition for me: Time and Individuation, a revival of rational metaphysics based on principles.<sup>15</sup>

With cordial regards from my wife and me,

Yours,  
E Husserl

**May 11, 1918: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger**

[*Briefwechsel* 4:131]

*Heidegger wrote Husserl again in April, and Husserl responded some weeks later, after returning from vacation in Bernau. (The paragraph break is made by the translator.)*

Freiburg, 11.V.1918

Dear colleague,

Your splendid letter was a real joy for me. The reason why I did not answer it from Bernau was that I had to make use of each and every hour, immersed as I was in some very productive work. Productivity is a power [*Kraftfülle*] that is hard to come by. How long it takes, and what enormous efforts of preparatory work, to get the *corporea moles* [the bodily mass] moving and the mental fires burning! No sooner did I get back to Freiburg than I had more to do than I expected. I found that my "Introduction to Philosophy" was not clear enough as regards the intellectual history aspect of the development of the ideal of rigorous science beginning from Plato's methodological conceptions, and so I have to work out a new lecture course.<sup>16</sup> (It is also a question of the original motivating force of the critique of reason with regard to Gorgias's second argument<sup>17</sup> and then regarding Descartes's field of pure *cogitatio*. All this is in contrast to the development [of the ideal of rigorous science] among the ancients, where it runs along logical-epistemological and ontological lines and yet nonetheless bore lasting fruit for modern times in the exact sciences.)

In the meantime your cordial and delightful postcard arrived. If only I had known that you were still here when I got back on April 26, I would have invited you over right away!<sup>18</sup> During coming Pentecost week I was thinking of going back up to Bernau with the children (if they are on vacation). The muggy spring weeks in these lower altitudes weigh me down and stifle me, and perhaps I might relax a bit after this overlong period of

work. I am glad that, just as I hoped, you are managing to get through basic training so well. You are like a houseplant that had grown languid in the stale air of a closed room but now thrives when placed outside in the open air and in the light of the open sky. It is good that you are also able to read a little, and you have made a fine choice. For you this is not the time for abstract speculations. Go a bit easier on yourself and keep in good spirits. Let your health and strength increase. Whatever grows freely from within and extends toward the heights will reach its *telos* of itself.

With cordial regards,

Yours,  
E Husserl

#### September 10, 1918: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger

[*Briefwechsel* 4:131–36]

*During the summer of 1918, Heidegger moved from Heuberg to Charlottenburg (near Berlin), where he received military training as a meteorologist. On July 21, 1918, he wrote Husserl a letter from Charlottenburg, some of the contents of which may be deduced from the body and the postscripts of Husserl's letter below. Husserl did not answer the July 21 letter. Heidegger followed up that letter with yet another, this time written from the Western front, where he had been transferred toward the end of August 1918. Husserl responded on September 10, while vacationing at Bernau. This extraordinary letter, the last of the four that Husserl wrote to Heidegger during 1918, marks the true beginning of their friendship and collaboration.*

Bernau, 10.9.1918

Dear colleague,

Today I am taking a bit of a holiday. This is the sixth week that I have been here, and what with working nine to ten hours a day, with only one full day off so far, the threat of going dense and numb in the head has finally set in. What better way to withdraw from that into the rush of a revitalizing and refreshing life than to write to you! O your youth—what a joy it is to me, and how truly heartening it is that you allow me to share in it through your letters. And yours is a true and genuine youth that can still well up and throw itself at the world, full of feeling, with clear vision, and then absorb a true image of that world deep into your soul. What is more, your soul is able to express itself honestly and find its own words to articulate

the ideas it has crafted. In that, you are “learned” as only someone *primus in prima* [first among the first-class], and yet with all that you still have eyes and heart and words.—Heaven knows this may strike you as undeserved praise and no doubt will make you blush. But no, that’s the way it is, that’s how I see you, and it will not endanger your soul’s salvation. It is impossible to imagine that you would be so foolish as to waste or squander the treasure of your pure and unspoiled youth, your soul’s clear vision, your pure heart, your clear sense of purpose with its solid diathesis [disposition] for pure and noble goals—out of an urge to become a pompously self-important “famous philosopher”—no, that is unthinkable. In fact, there is not a chance of that so long as you can still write letters full of such freedom and spiritual serenity.

Forgive me that only now am I answering your letter from Charlottenburg (dated July 21!), which made me very happy, together with your recent letter from the front. During the muggy, stormy months of June and July in Freiburg I felt quite uncomfortable and down, and I was constantly fighting this passivity, which took the form of physical lethargy. You understand what such mischief means to a man like me who is so given to intellectual activity, especially in a period of fruitful progress in my research, and how much I was looking for a few good hours to make use of. Because I finally had to take a break from working out my own all-too-difficult thoughts, I picked up with great interest [Rudolf] Otto’s book on the holy,<sup>19</sup> which in fact is an attempt at a phenomenology of a person’s consciousness of God: bold and full of promise at the beginning but very disappointing soon thereafter. It is a pity that you do not have time to write a (thoroughgoing) critique. Nonetheless, the book stands head and shoulders over the historicizing and theologizing throng, even though it has plenty enough of both, especially theologizing.

But from the first day here in Bernau I was suddenly “someone else,” my other and better self—the “winged soul,” to cite the *Phaedrus* [246d]. What saved my soul was Spranger’s article “On the Theory of Understanding and on Humanistic Psychology” (in the *Festschrift* for Volkelt).<sup>20</sup> It deals with questions that much of my *Ideas II* is concerned with and that I have wrestled with longer and more painfully than anyone alive. The influence of my phenomenological writings [on the article] was evident right from the start; moreover, the article [arrived] accompanied by a very gracious and heartfelt letter, with the result that (even though I usually am never inclined toward reading, because I am always caught in struggling with my own thoughts) I actually did read it, and with increasing interest. This contact with a profound line of thought with which I am deeply familiar *woke* me up in such a way that I was gripped by the issue. Now I am

spending whole weeks on the problems of *Ideas II* (I do not have the relevant manuscripts with me because I wanted to get back to completing the introduction to phenomenology and the elaborations and manuscripts that go with it),<sup>21</sup> especially on how psychology, at all its levels and with all its limitations, relates to "phenomenology." Finally I also took up Natorp's *General Psychology* (1912, late October), which was published just when I had finished *Ideas I*<sup>22</sup> and was still feverishly writing *Ideas II*, even before *Ideas I* was printed. Until now (apart from the first chapter, which I read on a trip in 1913) I had not read through—much less studied—this book which in many ways is directed against phenomenology (in *my* sense). I have been well acquainted with Natorp's *Introduction to Psychology* (1888),<sup>23</sup> which first developed the idea of "reconstructive" psychology. I discussed it thoroughly in a seminar around 1905 and got a very strong impression of it, as I do from everything that is *genuinely* "profound." But I could not do anything with it, I was unable to break through to an *understanding*: in places there were huge, vague intimations that I could sort of follow—and yet the whole book claimed to offer a clearly defined theory about a clearly defined set of problems.

Likewise in his *General Psychology* (which is influenced by my *Logical Investigations* and my *Logos* article ["Philosophy as a Rigorous Science"]), it is clear that Natorp was entirely incapable of grasping the clear and readily available meaning of phenomenology as an analysis of the essence of pure consciousness, prior to and independent of previous philosophy and science; and in general he was incapable of allowing for the validity of [phenomenological] seeing and of what is presented in such seeing. [For Natorp] we first have to swallow the whole of neo-Kantianism and acknowledge it as a supposedly evident, firm truth and *on that basis* allow the necessity of a (completely vague) reconstructive psychology to "prove" itself. And yet I now see that Natorp brilliantly foresaw the problematic of the phenomenological "constitution" of objectivities at all levels, and likewise I *now* understand so many perspectives on problems that are concealed by his various observations. How odd it is: Natorp, an eminently honorable man (truly an *anima candida*),<sup>24</sup> a great intellect who has seriously studied my writings and honestly takes pains to use them, nonetheless thinks that my phenomenology is an *unclarified* prelude to his own psychology, which is clear and firmly grounded on the deepest foundations! For my part, I consider his psychology not even as a prelude, but as an extremely vague *premonition*—embellished with philosophical constructs—of one problem-level in my phenomenology. So this is the situation of philosophy today: prophets to the right, prophets to the left, and in the middle oneself, also a prophet, battling the laughing fits of the worldly

wise.<sup>25</sup> And a melancholy laughter it is. This is true when I consider others as well: and so I also read (not for a year and a half have I read as much as I have in these last months) the new and thick book that Volkelt sent me on his seventieth birthday, *Certitude and Truth*,<sup>26</sup> which discusses my own phenomenology at length, and with many words of praise, but cannot see that phenomenological statements are something different from utterly commonplace "empirical psychological statements." He speaks of my intuition of essences as "the tidings of salvation" and talks about the "prophetic tone" of my discourse, etc.<sup>27</sup> He is very intelligent as regards the details, of course, but flat and not at all comparable with Natorp when it comes to genuine philosophical depth. In the final analysis, I force myself to read even texts like these in order to get to know my audience, something that none of us should forget. It is unfortunately true that once we recognize the confusion and absurdity of ways of thinking in which we too were once enmeshed as philosophical children, we back away so far from them and see them as so obviously worthless that we cannot imagine attributing them to any reasonable person; and therefore in our presentations we fail to consider that our readers could in fact hold them.

I have to close now, combining my own good wishes and friendship with the warm and cordial regards of my wife and of Dr. and Mrs. Rees (who, to our great joy, have been here for three weeks). I need not tell you how heavily the recent events of the war weigh upon our spirits.<sup>28</sup> Yet it will certainly turn out for the good. And if we want to resist—and so we do, and so we will—the good will come about in the form of a correct reaction, in which we declare our faith in the good in the only way we can—*actively*: by contributing to that good at our particular place and according to our small powers (which also count in the overall reckoning). Each must do his part as if the salvation of the world depended on it: I in phenomenology, you as a full-time weatherman and a part-time phenomenologist of religion.

NB. I too have next to me my Hölderlin, whom I love very much and yet know too little, and so you and I will be in touch as we read him. Best wishes to you.

Yours,  
E Husserl

[P.S.] I just now looked again at your first letter [of July 21, 1918]: (1) Berlin thirty years ago—the university with 1,800 students—what an intellectual atmosphere that still was, and how richly suffused with intellectual "lines of force"! The six semesters I spent there<sup>29</sup> were the most beautiful years of my life.

(2) Klose,<sup>30</sup> a good and decent man, although in those days he was



not very far-reaching *in philosophicis* [in philosophical matters]; not really my student; very competent in his field.

(3) And this is my last P.S. (I'm going on like a chattering old hag): I forgot to mention the two beautiful and invigorating volumes of Natorp's war book, which I also read this summer: *The Epochs of the Spirit* and *The Soul of the Germans*.<sup>31</sup> We have it here, and Mrs. Rees is now reading it.

The First Freiburg Period, January 1919 to Summer 1923

### March 5, 1919: Edmund Husserl to Rudolf Otto

[*Briefwechsel* 7:205–8]

*Husserl writes to Professor Rudolf Otto, author of The Idea of the Holy, to offer his impressions of his student Heinrich Ochsner (1891–1970), whose name Husserl misspells here as "Oxner." Ochsner, who had studied with Husserl and who was planning to convert from Catholicism to Protestantism, had the prospect of an assistantship with Otto at Marburg University. In the course of the letter Husserl reveals at least as much about the young Heidegger, who had become his assistant less than two months before, as he does about Ochsner, including Heidegger's shift (if not "conversion") to Protestantism.*

Freiburg i/B Lorettstr. 40

5.III.1919

Dear colleague,<sup>32</sup>

I have just heard from Pastor Katz that you want to avail yourself of my offer to give you my impressions of Mr. Oxner [*sic*].<sup>33</sup> I hasten to fulfill your wish.

Like his older friend Dr. Heidegger, Mr. Oxner was originally a philosophy student of Rickert's. Not without strong inner resistance did the two of them gradually open themselves up to my suggestions and draw closer to me personally. In that same period they both underwent radical changes in their basic religious convictions. Certainly both of them are religiously oriented personalities. In Heidegger, it is the theoretical-philosophical interest that predominates, whereas in Oxner it is the religious—and so much so in Oxner that I am inclined to characterize him straightaway as a *homo religiosus*. But he also has a specifically theological nature: he cannot and will not do without philosophy. However, it must be an honest, serious, and scientific philosophy which uses categories that re-

main faithful to the experience and which gives adequate expression to the depths of religious life and to the religious objects revealed in that life. Moreover, it must be a philosophy that is able to purify, clarify, and rationally illumine, and therefore a philosophy that offers a sure defense against skepticism. He expects a great deal from pure phenomenology in that regard, and he has already penetrated deep into its method and into the spirit of its work—that is, if all indications do not deceive. I say “indications”: it is certainly hard to break through the extraordinary shyness of this man, to guide him to free and easy conversation, even to engage him personally. For years now, whenever I ran across him (for example, after seminar meetings), I invited him to come and talk with me at length about the ideas on philosophy of religion that came up in the seminar (and that always have a lively interest for me). But only twice did he actually come, and in only one instance did we get down to a conversation of more than an hour. Hence I do not know him well in the usual sense. Inasmuch as I have often experienced some keen disappointments with my students, I would prefer to be quite reserved in my judgment. And yet in those other cases my *daimonion* frequently warned me away, whereas with Oxner it admonishes me positively to trust him entirely. Only with great difficulty can I imagine being deceived in the case of this completely unassuming man who timidly keeps himself in the background, who blushes when one simply looks at him—this man with the inwardly directed gaze, from whom only purity and goodness emanate and in whom every trace of fanaticism, maliciousness, and deception is lacking. Even to consider this possibility seems virtually an injustice. Above all I have the impression that he needs love, as if it were his life-element, but not in the sense of an embittered person whose icy armor would have to be melted. He is not like that at all, although I have heard (certainly *he* would never have told me such a thing) that he does have a very hard life. At most, dear colleague, take what I say simply as offering an occasion to approach this person and to get to know him. I suspect that he (who, by the way, was also strongly affected by your book on the holy) will give himself more freely and open himself more readily to you the theologian than to me. Yet I must say that he has enjoyed considerable respect here in my small circle of close-knit students.

I am sure that Pastor Katz has told you I would sincerely like to participate in any “relief effort” to help Oxner. But my name must not be mentioned in that connection. I must not endanger my peaceful effectiveness in Freiburg. Nonetheless, my philosophical effect does have something revolutionary about it: Protestants become Catholic, Catholics become Protestant. But I do not think about Catholicizing and Protestantizing; I want nothing more than to educate the youth to a radical intel-

lectual honesty, to a thinking that guards against obscuring and violating—whether by verbal constructions or conceptual illusions—the primordial intuitions that necessarily determine the sense of all rational thinking. In arch-Catholic Freiburg I do not want to stand out as a corrupter of the youth, as a proselytizer, as an enemy of the Catholic Church. That I am not. I have not exercised the least influence on Heidegger's and Oxner's migration over to the ground of Protestantism, even though that cannot but please me as a "non-dogmatic Protestant" and a free Christian (if one may call himself a "free Christian" when what that means to him is an ideal goal of religious longing and when, for his part, he understands it as an infinite task). For the rest, I am delighted to have an effect on any sincere person, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish.

Last summer, through Heidegger and Oxner (I no longer know who took precedence in the matter) my attention was drawn to your book *Das Heilige* [*The Idea of the Holy*], and it has had a stronger effect on me than almost any other book in years. Allow me to express my impressions as follows. It is a first beginning for a phenomenology of religion, at least regarding everything that stays within the parameters of pure description and analysis of the phenomena themselves. To put it concisely: I cannot agree with the philosophical theorizing that takes the further step: it is not at all essential for the specific task and subject matter of this book, and it would be better left out. In my opinion, a great deal more progress needs to be made in the study and eidetic analysis of the phenomena before we come up with a theory of religious consciousness as a philosophical theory. Above all, one would need to make a radical distinction between the accidental *factum* and the *eidōs*. One would need to study the eidetic necessities and possibilities of religious consciousness and its correlate. One would need a systematic eidetic typification of the levels of religious data, specifically in their eidetically necessary development. It seems to me that the metaphysician (theologian) in Herr Otto has swept up Otto the phenomenologist and carried him away on his wings. In that regard I think of the image of the angels who *cover their eyes* with their wings [Isaiah 6:2]. However that may be, this book will have a *permanent* place in the history of genuine philosophy of religion or phenomenology of religion. It is a beginning, and its significance is that it goes back to the "beginnings," the "origins," and thus, in the most beautiful sense of the word, is "original." And our age knows of no yearning higher than a desire that the true origins will finally find expression in word and then, in the higher sense, come to their Word, the Logos.

I am sure that you will not take offense at my outspoken opinions. From our Göttingen years you know how highly I esteem you and with what pleasure I seek out intellectual contact with you. Now that you have