

HUSSERL TO PFÄNDER

Translated by Burt C. Hopkins

Freiburg in Breisgau, Jan. 6, 1931
40 Loretto Street

Dear Colleague:

Your letter shook me so profoundly that I was unable to answer it as soon as I should have. I am continuously concerned with it in my thoughts. Judge for yourself whether I have not inflicted more pain on myself than on you, and whether I may not ethically regard this guilt towards you and blame towards myself as stemming from the best conscience, something I have had to accept, and still must accept, as my fate.

Clarifying the matter requires that I lay out a part of my life history.

I had quickly realized that the project for Parts II and III of my *Ideas* was inadequate, and in an effort (beginning in the autumn of 1912) to improve them and to shape in a more concrete and differentiated fashion the horizon of the problems they disclosed, I got involved in a new, quite far-ranging investigations. (These included the phenomenology of the person and personalities of a higher order, culture, the human environment in general; the transcendental phenomenology of "empathy" and the theory of transcendental intersubjectivity, the "transcendental aesthetic" as the phenomenology of the world purely as the world of experience, time and individuation, the phenomenology of association as the theory of the constitutive achievements of passivity, the phenomenology of the logos, the phenomenological problematic of "metaphysics," etc.) These investigations stretched on all through the work-filled Freiburg years, and the manuscripts grew to an almost unmanageable extent. As the manuscripts grew so too did the ever greater the apprehension about whether, in my old age, I would be able to bring to completion what had been entrusted to me. This impassioned work led to repeated setbacks and repeated states of depression. In the end what I was left with was an all-pervasive basic mood of depression, a dangerous collapse of confidence in myself.

It was in this period that Heidegger began to mature -- for a number of

years he was constantly at my side as my close assistant. He behaved entirely as a student of my work and as a future collaborator, who, as regards all the essentials of method and problematic, would stand on the ground of my constitutive phenomenology. My ever-increasing impression of his extraordinary natural talent, of his absolute devotion to philosophy, of the powerful energy of this young man's thought finally led me to an excessive assessment of his future importance for scientific phenomenology in my sense of the term. Because I realized that no one among the phenomenologists of the Göttingen and Munich tradition followed me in earnest; and because I had an absolute inner certitude that the phenomenological reduction and the transcendental constitutive structuring of philosophy would mean a "Copernican" revolution for philosophy; and because I felt overwhelmed with the burden of responsibility for securing that, it is understandable how I placed the greatest hopes in Heidegger. Yes, that was the great, up-lifting hope: to open up to him -- presumably my one true student -- the unsuspected breadth of my investigations, and to prepare him for his own discoveries, that was a great, uplifting hope. Time and again we talked of working together, of his collaboration completing my investigations. We talked of how *he* would take charge of my manuscripts when I passed away, publishing the ones that were the fully developed, and in general of how he would carry on my philosophy as a framework for all future work.

When he went to Marburg, I regarded his enormous success as a teacher as if it were my own success. His visits during [the academic] vacations were joyful events, highly prized opportunities to speak my mind with him and to inform him of my developments. To be sure, in the course of these visits, just as during the Freiburg years, he was rather vague or silent regarding the development of his own ideas. I, as usual, held firmly to my extravagant idea of his genius; inwardly I was virtually convinced that the future of phenomenological philosophy would be entrusted to him, and that he not only would become my heir but also would surpass me.

Certainly when *Being and Time* appeared in 1927 I was surprised by the newfangled language and style of thinking. Initially, I trusted his emphatic declaration: It was the continuation of my own research. I got the impression

of an exceptional, albeit unclarified, intellectual energy, and I worked hard and honestly to penetrate and appreciate it. Faced with theories so inaccessible to my way of thinking, I did not want to admit to myself that he would surrender both the method of my phenomenological research and its scientific character in general. Somehow or other the fault had to lie with me; it would lie with Heidegger only insofar as he was too quick to jump into problems of a higher level. He himself constantly denied that he would abandon my transcendental phenomenology, and he referred me to his forthcoming Volume Two. Given my low self-confidence at the time, I preferred to doubt myself, my capacity to follow and to appreciate another's movement of thought, rather than to doubt him. That explains why I entrusted to him the editing of my 1905 lectures on time (something that I afterwards had occasion enough to regret); and why I submitted to him (!) for his criticisms my rough draft of an article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and together with him (!) tried to reorganize it (which of course promptly miscarried). I might mention that I had been warned often enough: Heidegger's phenomenology is something totally different from mine; rather than furthering the development of my scientific works, his university lectures as well as his book are, on the contrary, open or veiled attacks on my works, directed at discrediting them on the most essential points. When I used to relate such things to Heidegger in a friendly way, he would just laugh and say: Nonsense!

Thus, when it came down to choosing my successor, obsessed as I was with the idea of assuring the future of the transcendental phenomenology I had founded, I saw *him* as the only one who was up to the task, and so I had to decide unconditionally in his favor. I appeased my inner misgivings with the thought that his call to Marburg may have taken him away too soon from my instruction and influence. When he would come back to my side [here in Freiburg] -- especially when he would learn about the important clarifications I had struggled to achieve in the meantime -- he would reach his full maturity and get beyond his raw brilliance, He himself readily agreed: Our common life in Freiburg would be one of profound intellectual exchange and steady philosophical continuity. -

This blindness arose from a profound exigency -- from a sense of

overwhelming scientific responsibility -- and God help me, it was blindness, caused basically by the fact that I felt so completely isolated, like an appointed leader (*Führer*) without followers, that is, without collaborators in the radical new spirit of transcendental phenomenology.

As regards you, dear colleague, what has nwever changed are my feelings of friendship, my high esteem for your professional seriousness, for the exemplary solidity of your work. But one thing has changed: I have lost the faith of earlier years that you recognized the revolutionary significance of the phenomenological reduction and of the transcendental-constitutive phenomenology that arises from it, and that you and your students would share in the immense problematic of its meaning. -- As for the rest, you should not overlook the role your age (you were 58 in 1928) had to play in the question of filling a chair. In that regard, as best you might have made the list [only] in an honorary capacity, and the way things stood it would possibly have been in third place, and even that would have been *very* unlikely. But for your own sake I could not let this happen. Your sponsor could not have been a member of the commission: In the commission, *it is true*, mention of you was made by me; but admittedly you were not considered more closely in further discussions. There was not much discussion among the faculty, since from the beginning the mood was only for Heidegger and Cassirer. Only Cassirer presented any occasion for questions (possibly N. Hartmann, too?), which I had to answer. --

However, I still have to tell you how things turned out later between Heidegger and me. After he took over the chair, our exchanges lasted about two months. Then, with complete amicability, it was over. He removed himself from every possibility of professional discussion, even in the simplest form. Clearly such discussion was an unnecessary, unwanted, uneasy matter for him.

I see him once every couple of months, even less frequently than my my other colleagues.

The success of the Paris lectures, along with *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, which were wrung from me at the same time (both in the course of four months) have given me back -- and this is a great turn-about -- the confidence in my powers. In looking back over the situation of my works since 1913 I

realized that all the major lines have sketched out now, more that I ever would have ventured to hope. [This is] enough for the writing of a concluding work whose plan has burdened me for a decade. Immediately after the printing of my last book, in order to come to a clear-headed and definitive position on Heideggerian philosophy, I devoted two months to studying *Being and Time*, as well as his more recent writings. I arrived at the distressing conclusion that philosophically I have nothing to do with this Heideggerian profundity, with this brilliant unscientific genius; that Heidegger's criticism, both open and veiled, is based upon a gross misunderstanding; that he may be involved in the formation of a philosophical system of the kind which I have always considered it my life's work to make forever impossible. Everyone except me has realized this for a long time. I have not withheld my conclusion from Heidegger.

I pass no judgment on his personality -- it has become incomprehensible to me. For almost a decade he was my closest friend; naturally this is all over: Inability to understand each other precludes friendship.¹ This reversal in professional esteem and personal relations was one of the most difficult ordeals of my life. Also in its consequences, among which belongs your changed relationship to me, owing to the insult I must have inflicted on you. Do you now understand why I failed to write as frequently as I would have wanted?

It has saddened me deeply to hear that you and your wife had to suffer so much because of illness. I reiterate my own and my wife's deeply felt best wishes. Also for the completion of your work. My relation to you is clear. Nothing will change my feelings of friendship and my high esteem for you.

Your old friend,
E. Husserl

I urge you to please treat this letter with discretion. How I may stand *scientifically* to Heidegger I have plainly expressed at every opportunity. There is now gossip enough, and my personal disappointment with Heidegger etc.

¹"Unverständlichkeit schließt Freundschaft aus."

is nobody else's business.