Visibility

GRAEME NICHOLSON

Although the scientific method has reached deeply into our intellectual and social life, there are places where it stops short, where its limitations become evident to us all. In these cases we discover that science can go about its explanations in its usual way, but that it does not tell us anything very interesting, and especially not what we most want to know. Let us think of music and painting, drama and ballet. No doubt a scientific method can tell us something about them, but nothing very important or enlightening, perhaps something about their acoustical or chromatic materials, or some sort of evolutionary background. The scientists who try to go further than that in their explanations of the arts have earned a reputation for being reductionist in the bad sense. It is also my view that the incompetence of science becomes evident when it is applied to the interpretation of law and religion, love and many other forms of human aspiration – but I shall not argue that point here. For what I hope to show is that the study of an elementary, fundamental human experience, *seeing*, is best pursued by certain philosophical methods that are not what we call scientific. The same applies to hearing. Many scientific studies have been made of seeing and hearing, but in my view they have not succeeded in the way that philosophy has in revealing the true character of these experiences. I shall devote the first two sections of this paper to outlining one philosophical approach to seeing that I regard as successful, and then, in the concluding section, point to the defects that I believe mark the approach of psychology and cognitive science.

As Aristotle said at the opening of his *Metaphysics*, seeing is important to us in several distinct ways and for several different reasons. What I shall start from is the division of this topic into two parts. (a) The very exercise of seeing is itself accomplished in different ways, ways that vary with the differences that arise in human existence; I'll sketch these differences, though only in part, in the first section. Here I shall be working from the text of Heidegger, *Being and Time*,¹ beginning with some well-known existential descriptions of seeing, and drawing out a few implications that are not stated in the text. (b) There is the visible, that which is seen; the description of this is every bit as important as the account of seeing itself. Here again I shall be quoting from Heidegger, but the main point I'll be making is one that holds for the phenomenological tradition as a whole – that the essence of seeing is the visible, rather than the subjective power of seeing; and the same for other modalities of sense. This common doctrine appears, so I believe, in the main works of Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, although the present paper will not attempt to document this reading of their texts.²

Our opening study of seeing as a factor in human existence (which should not be called "pragmatic"³) will centre on *Being and Time*, Section 31. Heidegger presents seeing as one embodiment of "understanding" (*Verstehen*), which itself is the principal element in human existence: to highlight this connection, we shall speak of "situated seeing." Understanding (or existence) is especially marked by two powers inherited by seeing. (i) Existence is the self-surpassing and self-projecting movement that Heidegger calls "ability-to-be," and so seeing becomes qualified as ability-to-see. (ii) This understanding (and therefore this seeing) has the power of penetrating to the true being of the things themselves, unveiling them as they are. After a discussion

of both these points, we shall turn, in the second section, to the visible phenomena, to seek to clarify why they can be said to "show themselves," i.e., present themselves as they are.

It is very difficult to keep the theme of seeing narrowly delimited in any philosophical discussion. One might wish to confine the discussion to the ocular physical encounter with material things in the environment, but soon one finds oneself introducing the imagination and dreaming, and then intellectual insight and discernment, and so on, in terminology that is visual in connotation. This is true of Heidegger's discussions in Section 31 and throughout the text of *Being and Time*; indeed this is true in virtually every philosophical text, phenomenological or otherwise. No doubt there are reasons for the sliding applications of all our terminology for seeing: a permanent heritage from the tradition – Platonic *noesis* and *theoria*, and the German Idealists' theme of intellectual intuition. The present paper cannot begin to take the measure of all that. We shall leave out of the discussion the possibility that discourse itself is one more realization of seeing. That is not because I wish to dispute the idea that phenomenology practices some kind of seeing – indeed, I think this is entirely true. No doubt I shall say on occasion (as everyone does) that we'll be "looking" at our themes, "focussing" on them, trying to "bring them to light," and so on. But, whatever the character of our practice, that kind of seeing and looking is not the subject to be treated here. The seeing that is our theme here is the pre-philosophical encounter with ordinary phenomena.

In our concluding comments on psychology and cognitive science, we have to call attention to the peculiar conception that authors in those fields have of a "phenomenology" that is domesticated within their science. This has no connection with the Continental tradition, and it expresses a confusion, I think. When we bring forward the thesis that seeing is the same thing as ability to see, that "you see" means exactly "you can see," we'll provide the basis for a critique of the

scientific approach. To put the matter negatively, we'll be arguing for two points: (a) seeing is not a mental event, and (b) seeing is not a physical event.

I. A Situated Seeing

The theme of seeing first becomes prominent in Section 13 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger makes some preliminary comments on the theory of knowledge and its supposed "subject-object relationship." Frequently, seeing had been investigated by philosophers under that rubric. But it is not self-evident to Heidegger that there even *is* a "subject-object problem" (61); that means that any question about our knowledge of objects, or "knowledge of the world," needs first to be placed into the context that he will establish as basic to his inquiry, our "being-in-the-world." Knowing the world is not the foundation for being in the world – it is the other way around. And in this light there is a certain conception of seeing, traditionally privileged by philosophers, that must also be regarded as derivative: that is "just looking at" something (*Nur-noch-Hinsehen*) or "studying" it, "observing" it (*Anvisieren*). Seeing of this description targets the pure look of a thing or its form (*eidos*), and is scrupulous to avoid any *use* of the thing. Philosophers have called this "perception" (*Vernehmen*), and supposed that it characteristically identifies a simple "object" (*Vorhandenes*). In this section, which anticipates a much lengthier argument made in the whole book, Heidegger traces this "perception" to a draining away of any of our concerns, goals or ends, a privation of the motives that actually belong to our primordial way of being in, or belonging to, a world, what we originally experience as "being captivated by" the world (*benommen*). He will be making the case that being-in-the-world is the very constitution of being human (Sections 12-24), so that all our knowing and perceiving have to find their place within that constitution.

One further point, though. The kind of philosophers' perception that Heidegger has mentioned in Section 13 will necessarily be derived from some other kind of seeing, one that pertains more intimately to our being-in-the-world than does objectifying perception.

As you drive your car on a country highway, your seeing is integrated with operating your instruments. If an oncoming car moves into your lane to execute a pass, you touch your brakes: "he" is intruding on "your" lane, and you prepare even to move onto the shoulder. A glimpse of danger, and a defensive move. Only because you are behind the wheel, in the car, on the road, in the country, could you accomplish that glimpse. It is a situated seeing, in motion, with your hand on the wheel, in the environment that is the immediate face of your world. Your seeing is one exercise of your being, integrated with your hand movements, and it is from this kind of seeing – which may also be found in a workshop, a shopping mall or a school – that an account of seeing should take its start, not from the supposedly unsituated, unmotivated studying (*Anvisieren*), too often chosen by philosophers.

For Heidegger's further comment, let us look at Section 15. Our being-in-the-world is penetrated through and through by care, concern, involvement, which can come in many forms. One of these forms is particularly relevant to the study of seeing: Heidegger calls it *Besorgen*, which expresses the way we deal, not with other people, or our own ends and goals in life, but with the things that surround us in everyday life, like our car and all its instruments. It's our taking care of business. Heidegger's own famous example is a workshop with hammers, nails, and all the other paraphernalia of carpentry (in which he spent his own boyhood with his father). There is a certain kind of seeing that pertains to carpentry, or to operating a car. Heidegger calls it *Umsicht*, and the translations render it literally as "circumspection," because in these practical environments we are continually looking around at the whole array of things, not merely at one object. Seeing raindrops

on the windshield, you start the windshield wipers, and glance down again at the speedometer, for you have just noticed the speed-limit sign; then you resume watching for more traffic, and so on. The shifting and rotating (*Um-sicht*) accomplishes the *disclosure* of its "environment" (*Um-welt*), where the elements all fit together into the shape of what has to be done: a project of travel or making a table. And it is vital to grasp this as genuine disclosure, for the very being of all the items in the environment is what we reveal through the *Umsicht*. It must not be thought that a truer appraisal of the speedometer would be accomplished through stopping the car, getting out, and beginning to measure and analyse the metals composing the speedometer. The very being of such things, according to Heidegger, is not the "objective presence" (*Vorhandenheit*) that might be revealed by such a perceiving (*Anvisieren*), but rather their functionality, the operational readiness that he calls their *Zuhandenheit*. As they function, so is their truth and being apparent. Thus another common word Heidegger employs here (and so does everybody else): these things are *Zeug*, that is, they are our "gear," our "stuff," our *pragmata*. No item stands alone. And we "take it all in," we "keep our eyes open," as *Umsicht* or *umsichtiges Besorgen* discloses this nearest part of our world.

It is from this practical glance that Heidegger derives the un-practical, uprooted way of seeing that he mentioned before. Concomitantly, a similar derivation must operate upon *what* is being seen. As *Umsicht* deviates into *Anvisieren*, so the *zuhanden* deviates into a derivative mode of being: *die Vorhandenheit*, the mere leftover, a mere objective presence. This appears in Section 16. Later Heidegger will have to confront certain difficult problems that arise in connection with purely scientific observation and measurement and the objects of scientific investigation: Section 69 (b).⁴

Being-in-the-world is the constitution of our being, but there is another principle that Heidegger has called the *essence* of our being, namely existence (see especially Sections 9 and 11).⁵

It is in Section 31 that this point is developed in a way that is relevant to the subject of seeing. We do not need here to enter into all the details of Heidegger's philosophy of existence, only to select the point that is central to Section 31, namely, that existence is our self-projection into the future, the self-surpassing by which we are always out beyond the current moment and its stimulations. That is one implication of regarding "care" as the core of human being. The term that Heidegger uses here for self-surpassing existence is "understanding" (*Verstehen*), a term that springs from a long historical background of hermeneutics in such authors as Wilhelm Dilthey and Emil Lask, and may not seem intuitively appropriate for the English-speaking reader.⁶ The philosophical point of it is that in the self-surpassing drive of our existence, an intelligence is contained that incorporates an "understanding of being" (*Seinsverständnis*). This can be described as a kind of "sight" (*Sicht*) (146-47), a sight that manifests itself in the "practical glimpse" (*umsichtiges Besorgen*) we have already mentioned as well as in the "regard" (*Rücksicht*) we have for other persons, and the "transparency" (*Durchsichtigkeit*) of our self-understanding. Alive to controversies over analogical, Platonic and idealist uses of all the terminology for seeing, sight, vision, etc., Heidegger says "*The only peculiarity of seeing which we claim for the existential meaning of sight is the fact that it lets the beings accessible to it be encountered in themselves without being concealed*" (147). The remarkable aspect of Heidegger's hermeneutical thought is just the combination of the two factors I've mentioned here. (a) Existential understanding is a care-driven self-surpassing being-towards something possible, so that "we have taken away from pure intuition" (another term for *Anvisieren des Vorhandenen*) "its priority" (147). Yet also (b) this understanding, and the *Sicht* that it motivates, are competent to reveal the encountered entities as they are in themselves. Section 32 will be able to clarify this point further.

Section 31's treatment of understanding, stressing its projective or forward-looking character, points out that *what* is understood is frequently marked by possibility: we understand our environment by discerning that in it which is *usable*, *applicable*, *countable*, and so on (144-45). The same must be said of such embodiments of understanding as seeing and hearing: what they target is the *visible* and the *audible*. The importance of this will become clear in the next section.

For more on the exact quality of the seeing that is projective we turn to Section 32, which builds directly on Section 31, showing that the understanding treated in Section 31 finds its full development as "interpretation" (*Auslegung*). Both understanding and interpretation are universal features of existence, at work in every experience we have, but Section 32 discusses them in one particular application: the concerned dealings with our environment presupposed in the treatment of being-in-the-world. Thus Heidegger finds in our "practical glance" (*umsichtiges Besorgen*) the type of interpretation that springs from understanding, and it is the "everyday tools, instruments and materials" (*zuhandenes Zeug*) that show up here as *the visible*, becoming understood and interpreted through our glance (148-49). As an effect of our self-surpassing *Verstehen*, our "roving glance" (*Vorsicht*) is already "pre-formed" (*Vorhabe*) by some "purposes and preliminary expectations" (*Vorgriff*) (150), which collectively constitute the "fore-structure" out of which interpretation springs. In the workshop, you want to build a table, and expect suitable materials and tools to be on hand. So now your practical glance can disclose which boards are suitable ("that one is cherry-wood"), which is to say that, given your "fore-structured" glance, you *interpret* that board *as* cherry-wood. The As-structure of interpretation completes the Fore-structure of understanding, and all this is accomplished in your seeing "What's that thing over there? It's an awl – I don't need that now – it's for boring holes."

What has been circumspectly interpreted with regard to its in-order-to as such, what has been *explicitly* understood, has the structure of *something as something*. The circumspectly interpretive answer to the circumspect question of what this particular thing at hand is runs: it is for (149).

Swerving right to avoid the oncoming car, you hear a horn behind you, and, glancing over your shoulder, you see the grille of the car to your right: "It's a Mercedes!" – so you interpret, as if that mattered! Perhaps you swerve to the left again. "Can I slow down?"

Section 13 showed that it was a myth of philosophers that there is an original encounter with "objects" through a pure, disinterested "perception." Rather, such a neutral "looking-at" is always derivative from an engaged being-with things that is visually realized as *Um-sicht* (Section 15). The same point is made in Section 32 with respect to the "As-" structure of interpretation:

The simple seeing of things nearest to us in our having-to-do with [them] contains the structure of interpretation so primordially that a grasping of something which is, so to speak, *free of the "As"* requires a kind of reorientation. When we just stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us is in fact nothing more than *a failure to understand* it any more. This grasping which is free of the "As" is a privation of *simple* seeing, which understands; it is not more primordial than the latter, but derived from it (149).

Now, continuing with the example of driving an automobile, we can bring to the fore another aspect that is fundamental for our seeing. You are en route to some destination as you guide your car on the highway. The more provisional, immediate future also pre-occupies you, for, as you approach a curve, you allow for the possible stream of cars that may yet come your way, and perhaps you visualize the intersection ahead where you will be making a turn. But that turn itself is to lead you – where? What is your destination? That does not appear in your visual field but it is the given, prior condition for all the other *zuhandene* phenomena that mark your trip. This is the projection that conditions the entire project on which you have embarked: the trip itself. It may be something momentous that you anticipate at this destination, or something quite ordinary. This study leaves that

entirely open; the account of seeing is *formal*, meaning that *what* you see and *what* you expect is left open. But if you have a destination at all, we can say that your expectations of it have set up the horizon within which the full array of your current seeing, and the proximate expectation, are laid out. Phenomenology calls this the "horizon" for your seeing because a horizon lies beyond that which you currently see. The horizon is the final limit for everything seen, the vanishing point of the perspective that operates in your current seeing. Everything currently visible to you lies within such a horizon, which is your driving destination, the reason you are headed there, etc.

Your anticipation is not only some imagined picture of the destination, but more importantly, it is what you intend to do; you anticipate your own ability to function and to be there. In Heidegger's account the anticipation is your *existence*. Existence is the "ability to be" (*Seinkönnen*), the futural functioning that you now anticipate. If, for instance, you are travelling to a railway station to pick up your mother, you must now project your own ability to be with her. And thus, even now, the anticipation of your ability to be is already an ability to be. Your current being is the ability to be in relation to the coming ability to be. This is the self-surpassing by virtue of which our being is qualified as existence (Sections 4, 9, 31).

It is existence, or ability to be, that endows our seeing with its own form, mandate or essence. Seeing is the "ability to see" (*Sehenkönnen*).⁷ Seeing has a horizon in its structure. The ability to see the oncoming car reaches into the next moment: seeing it now, you keep your eye on it. You verify again: "It's in my lane." Speeding up the highway, you study the car: "How fast is it going?" You resolve to watch it: i.e., your current seeing of it projects the continuing seeing of it, and so the current seeing *is* an ability to see. So the car that you see is the very one you will be seeing. Seeing, commanded by care, is not merely occurrent in the present. The future invades the present,

pervading the whole horizon, future, past and present – not only the futural seeing about which you continue to care, but the arriving car too, the visible. It is not merely present in the instant, but moves in from the future, for the futural danger of the car is what you're seeing now.⁸

The ability to see is reflected also in our language and discourse. A car is visible in the oncoming lane. Icebergs are visible off the coast of Newfoundland. The current seeing of them remains an ability to see. You ask me "Can you see that car?" "Can you see the icebergs now?" And I reply, "Yes, I can see it (or them)." "Can." This does not only mean that if you changed your position, you *would* see it (or them). Not as if, standing on the coastline, you were to turn around and look eastward instead of westward, so that then you would see the icebergs. It is the current seeing that contains within it the ability to see. Many more examples can illustrate this: "The ships have arrived. Can you see them?" "Yes." Vision is, *and always remains*, a possibility for us. The ability to see remains active within and constitutes the very seeing. Suppose an optometrist asks you what letters you see on the chart. Your likely reply: "I can see *A* on the top line." "Can." That does not mean an ocular potentiality on your part, as if we were ascribing it to you before you entered the optometrist's office, so that, if you *were* to enter the office, you *would* see the letter *A*. No, this expresses the act of seeing itself as "can see." This very seeing is an ability to see, but not like the ability you might ascribe to a patient still recovering from an eye-operation, whose bandages will soon be removed. That would be an Aristotelian potentiality. But this ability is different. Vision is always informed by a bond to the future, whereby seeing-*X* is never without the promise of a forthcoming seeing-*X*, the prolongation of seeing. Every seeing incorporates the ability to see further. It contains the projection of a further seeing beyond the current moment of stimulation. When I say to you that I can see a flock of birds on the wing, I mean also that my seeing will be

prolonged into the coming moments, and that they will still be visible then too, and I mean also that you too will be able to see them if you take a look.

There are then two dimensions of the "ability" or "capability" (*Können*) that lies within seeing. First, a futural seeing is projected in the current seeing: you are able to continue to see. Second, your seeing is capable of disclosing or discovering the car, the birds, the letter *A*. You can penetrate to the thing as it shows itself.

Let me confirm this account of seeing by referring to the account of hearing that Heidegger offers in Section 34. To hear is "to-be-able-to-hear" (*Hörenkönnen*). On pages 163-65, Heidegger is treating hearing as one expression of our understanding, and he intends the latter in his technical sense, being-ahead-of-self: "hearing even constitutes the primary and authentic openness of Da-sein for its ownmost ability to be" (*eigenstes Seinkönnen*) (163). That is expressed when he calls it *Hörenkönnen*. He introduces hearing in connection with discourse and language, speech and utterance, so his initial interest is how we hear and understand one another in discourse. What he emphasizes especially is that hearing is existent or self-surpassing, in being the ground for our paying heed to what is said, hearkening to it. This leads him to take issue with other psychological accounts, which we might assign, actually, to the philosophy of mind. He notes that since "hearkening" (*Horchen*) is rooted in the "ability to hear" (*Hörenkönnen*), it is "more primordial than what the psychologist 'initially' defines as hearing, the sensing of tones and the perception of sounds" (163). A further transcendence achieved by the hearer is to be brought into contact with that with which the discourse was concerned: "we are already together with the other beforehand, with the being which the discourse is about" (164). In this treatment of the hearing of discourse, Heidegger pictures us as being together in a human world – a *Mitwelt*, a shared world – so that our

ability-to-be-in-the-world can be expressed as the ability-to-hear-each-other-in-the-shared-world. More than that, we are all motivated to understand one another this way; we have the *concern* to be able to hear in the world.

Next Heidegger generalizes his treatment of hearing, going beyond the initial context of discourse, and looks at hearing in relation to our being-in-an-environing-world: "Hearkening, too, has the mode of being of a hearing that understands. 'Initially' we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire" (163). And we are *concerned* to be able to hear things. Whereas the hearing of discourse expressed our being together with others, some of these modes express our circumspective concern with the environment. In all cases, hearing has the existential structure expressed by *Hörenkönnen*. It is always the anticipation of a further hearing. The character of hearing as the existing ability to hear is also expressed in the connection between what we hear and what we do. If I can hear the wagons, I know that it is time to leave.

II. The Visible Phenomenon

What our seeing anticipates is not only a further seeing, but also *what* is to be seen. We speak of "the visible." You might suppose that "the visible" could be conceived along the same lines as "the breakable," what is called a passive potentiality: a jug is breakable because someone who has the active potentiality to break things can break it. The breakable as such is precisely not broken already. But that is not the case with the visible; most commonly the visible is already being seen. A car is visible in the oncoming lane. Icebergs are visible off the coast of Newfoundland.

It is because all current seeing is co-constituted by possibility, i.e., the ability to see, that we speak of what is currently being seen as something visible, and not merely in the normal passive voice as something seen. As we have said, every seeing incorporates the ability to see further. That is the basic reason why we use terms like "visible" and "audible" to indicate that which is seen and heard. We do not speak of a seen flock of birds (the passive of a seeing that is mine) but of a *visible* flock of birds. That signifies that they will be available to the further seeing that is anticipated in all current seeing, constituting all current seeing as "can see." It is in keeping with hearing, too, that we generally do not speak of what is heard as "the heard" but rather "the audible." When something currently being heard is called "audible," that is a reference to the possibility of a hearing that informs the current hearing. Precisely while you are detecting the heartbeat of a foetus, the heartbeat is audible.

Now this character of visibility not only confirms what Heidegger said in Section 31: that what is understood (or used, or seen) is marked by possibility. It lies at the heart of the entire conception of his phenomenological method, as discussed in Section 7.

Here Heidegger appeals at many points to the slogans of phenomenology, above all to Husserl's slogan "To the things themselves!"⁹ Yet these pages also communicate Heidegger's own characteristic mutation of phenomenology and of its main slogan. Heidegger linked his version of the phenomenological method to what he understood of the Greek language and Greek intellectual life, studying the two Greek roots of the word "phenomenology": *phainomenon* and *logos*. *Phainomenon*, the participle of the middle-passive verb *phainesthai*, has as its root *phainō*, "to show," so it means "that which shows itself, the manifest" (28). The normative and basic concept of the *phainomenon* is that something or other, anything given that name, is "manifest" (*offenbar*),

"shows itself" (*sich zeigt*), is "in its own right visible" (*an ihm selbst sichtbar*). The *phainomenon* is "the sum total of that which lies open to view" (*die Gesamtheit dessen, was am Tage liegt*), and "can be brought to light" (*ans Licht gebracht werden kann*) (28). We note here the factor of possibility in most of these German expressions: the *Phänomen* is not what is seen, but what *can* be seen.

Moreover, its showing of itself is not construed precisely as *our* achievement, as if we made it become manifest. It seems to have made itself available. There is some kind of autonomy the phenomenon has relative to us, even some kind of activity on the part of the things themselves. We must ask just what is involved in that: in what sense does the phenomenon show itself? This point is indicated when Heidegger derives from the Greek word *phainomenon* the further point that, in general, the things that have shown themselves were viewed by the Greeks as "things that *are*" (*ta onta*) (28). Self-showing pertains to the *being* of the phenomenon. What is further implied here, according to Heidegger, is that the phenomenon, in the primary Greek sense of the term, shows itself *as it is*, i.e., shows itself as what it is, so that phenomenology would be letting us see "the things themselves," precisely as they show themselves and precisely as they are. As von Herrmann comments:

Heidegger is able to establish the meaning of *phainomenon*: it is that which shows itself in itself; hence it is the manifest. He does not merely say "what shows itself," but, in establishing it more exactly as "that which shows itself in itself," he indicates that what shows itself is showing itself as itself ... [T]he addition "in itself" serves to bring out a contrast with the concept of semblance and the concept of appearance. So the phenomena are the totality of that which shows itself in itself.¹⁰

But of course some kind of seeing (*Sicht*) on our part is undoubtedly intimated when the phenomenon is characterized as "in its own right visible" (*an ihm selbst sichtbar*). As we investigate that kind of seeing, we can note that one thing already stands firm. The only kind of seeing to be discussed will be a seeing "of something," what phenomenology calls intentional seeing. Whether

there ever could be a seeing that is not "of" anything – i.e., a non-intentional seeing – needs no discussion in this context. What interests us is a seeing that is engaged in interaction with a phenomenon that shows itself.

Since the account up to here has left it wide open what sorts of things – what category of things – could fulfil this concept of *Phänomen*, Heidegger describes it as a purely formal concept (31, 35). He now proceeds to de-formalize the concept, first of all by bringing in the things accessible to ordinary perception, or, in Kant's phrase, accessible to "empirical intuition" (31). With this, we have the "common"¹¹ concept of phenomenon, which is fulfilled by living creatures, human beings and the full range of material objects, the phenomena given to everyday experience. The reader is to understand that there can be other de-formalizations of this concept, other *intenta*, phenomena that show themselves to intentionalities other than "empirical intuition." One example would be the sciences.

In Section 7 (B) Heidegger analyses the second component of the word, based on the term *logos*. In Heidegger's exegesis of *logos* and *legein*, he traces them to the kind of *dēloun* or *apophainesthai* that Aristotle, for example, defined as the characteristic work of a declarative statement. It emerges then that the *logos* of phenomenology has an inner relationship to *phainesthai* and *phainomenon*: this *logos* is nothing other than "letting that which shows itself show itself." This means that there is a double level of manifesting or disclosing that is required in phenomenology. Phenomenology accomplishes a disclosure or revealing, but what phenomenology, that is, philosophy, accomplishes cannot be the first manifesting. The phenomenon is *already* a phenomenon before philosophy goes to work. Yet it will be revealed again, in *some further way*, by phenomenology. Recalling the point that the common concept of phenomenon embraces what shows

itself in common experience, we understand now that such phenomena do not need any phenomenology to make them manifest. But in addition, there are "the phenomena of phenomenology" (36), the true subjects of Heidegger's book, which constitute a second de-formalization of the concept of phenomenon. In his initial explanation of this, Heidegger brings up Kant again: where empirical intuition gives us the ordinary phenomena, there are also the *a priori* forms of intuition, space and time. They are themes of critical philosophy, but, says Heidegger, we must acknowledge that they *are* phenomena too, they *do* show themselves, though marginally, in our everyday experience. In some way, they are manifest along with the ordinary phenomena. He sets his course later in Section 7 (C) with his claim that being too, and all its structures, as well as time and space, and especially existence, the human mode of being, are "the phenomena of phenomenology," to be especially disclosed in phenomenology.

Since our study, following Heidegger, is treating seeing as an aspect of our existence, our being, it is clear that seeing too is one of the "phenomena of phenomenology." It is not itself an object of ordinary experience, but a form of that experience, so it is accessible only to a discursive philosophical approach. But we have just noted that the ordinary phenomena also continue to be under discussion in phenomenology. They become revealed here in some further way, along with the "phenomenological phenomena." Thus a study of the visible is integral to the phenomenology of seeing, owing to the double character of phenomenology: "letting that which shows itself show itself" (*apophainesthai ta phainomena*).

There is a further complexity in the concept of the *phainomenon*, signified by a *second* sense of the term in ancient Greek. In antiquity this term also had the meaning, in some contexts, of something that shows itself *not* as it is; it fails to be what it looks like: for example something can

look good but not really be good. A patch of water on the road ahead can look like, and seem to be, an ice patch, causing a motorist to swerve. All human experience confirms that phenomena do not always "show themselves" as they really are but are capable of deceiving us, and our fellow human beings too can at times prove to be quite unlike what they have hitherto seemed to be. This is the function that Heidegger expresses in the term *Schein*, semblance or seeming (28-29). We find frequent use of the term in this sense in Plato's *Republic*, *Gorgias* and *Sophist*¹² An absolutely vital element in Heidegger's account of this is that the Greek language and thought maintained a definite order of rank for the two meanings of the term. It is an ontological point: of the two different meanings, "semblance" can never claim primacy over "the manifest," or "what shows itself." The seeming is a deviant, derivative, parasitical phenomenon. When something merely seems to be good, something else must have shown itself to be manifestly good. What is implied by this, though Heidegger does not state it directly here, is that any metaphysics that holds that the universe as a whole is "mere semblance" (*Schein*) is untenable; I believe that the doctrine that this world is Maya, illusion, would succumb to this argument, and perhaps also Schopenhauer's adaptation of this doctrine: "The ancient wisdom of the Indians declares that 'it is Maya, the veil of deception, which covers the eyes of mortals, and causes them to see a world of which one cannot say either that it is or that it is not'" (8).

The fact that the same Greek word can mean either "what is manifest" or "mere semblance" is one pointer to our perpetual frailty in matters of knowledge. The ordinary things that can count as phenomena can also be tarnished with *Schein*, as with a patch of water that seems to be ice. But the phenomena of phenomenology (being, existence, time, understanding, seeing, and so on) are equally subject to the possibility of *Schein*, indeed even more so. Philosophy always has to confront anew

the deceptions and confusions that have sprung from the application of philosophy itself. This point is stressed in Section 7 (C).

Also vital to any discussion of *Schein* is the notable and profound differentiation Heidegger points to between *Schein* and *Erscheinung*, semblance and appearance. In commenting on the word *Erscheinung*, "appearance," he uses as his example a symptom in medical practice. He says that a disease "appears" in the symptoms, so that the symptoms, which do "show themselves," indicate something that does not otherwise "show itself," the disease. Far from diminishing the reality or being of the disease, this account of it grants that it is a genuine underlying reality, underneath the phenomena, the symptoms that show themselves. And far from establishing that the gross, visible symptoms are a mere "semblance" (*Schein*) relative to the disease itself, this must accord the symptoms the status of the bona fide phenomenon: they show themselves, and must do so if the underlying disease is to "appear" in and through them. The mother of fallacies in epistemology is the confusion between *Schein* and *Erscheinung*. This complicates, for example, the position of Schopenhauer, who wants to hold, in his first book, that the world we perceive is *Schein*, but whose second book proclaims the quite different thesis that the world-in-itself, that "appears" in the phenomenal world, is Will. Heidegger's argument would hold that if the invisible Will "appears" in the visible world, the latter must be a phenomenon that shows itself, rather than a semblance or illusion; it must comprise *ta onta*.

So, to summarize, it is an important qualification, highlighting these contrasts, that the *phainomenon* is not that which is shown by another or in another, but "that which shows itself by itself and in itself as it is" (*das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*).

III. Beyond the Event

One of the descendants of empiricism is experimental psychology, and this psychology has now been submitted to intense philosophical interpretation, especially in the current version known as cognitive science.¹³ These philosophers are pre-occupied with fighting prejudices – they claim that our everyday thoughts on mind, knowledge and life are just a "folk psychology" that gets in the way of philosophical and scientific research. We'll look at two current authors who disagree on many issues, with a view to seeing whether there is some common assumption that contributed to shaping both of them: Daniel Dennett and John Searle. They do not treat existence as such, and therefore themes like our concern about our being, and our ability to be ourselves, are far from their minds. When it comes to cognitive experiences such as seeing and hearing, they do not encompass them as Heidegger did, as expressing existence, i.e., as involving the ability to see, the ability to hear, and so on. In what horizon, then, do the cognitive scientists grasp such phenomena as seeing and hearing? It is being-in-the-lab.

This philosophy has constant reference to the psychology laboratory, to experiments that seek to capture the salient aspects of our seeing, hearing, and other streams of cognitive life. Somebody becomes a "subject" of experiments and is fitted with apparatus. Already this person's connection to the world is altered – not as in a workshop or automobile – and any projects this "subject" might otherwise have are dropped in favour of the investigator's own project of discovery. It is the subject's bodily endowments and operations that are the first objects of investigation: the lab uses machinery to monitor events in the brain and other parts of the body. An experiment may project a coloured light on a screen, then, where the colour of the spot is changed, it may seem to the

subject that the spot has moved – the phi-phenomenon, it is called, reported by Dennett. The question then is to determine the neural base of this result.

Here we must note the peculiar use of the term "phenomenology" in this movement. For Dennett (44-57) and others (e.g., Nagel) phenomenology is merely the recounting of subjective experience. If an experimental subject is stimulated thus-and-so, the "phenomenology" is what the subject feels, thinks, imagines, while the neurobiologist and other scientists record what actually happened – electrodes inserted *here*, graph-output recorded *there*, etc. The scientist then gets the subject to report on his or her "phenomenology." Dennett and the others are imagining the "inner world" of a subject and, as in a planetarium, whatever show is displayed on the inside surface of the subject's mind counts as his or her "phenomenology."¹⁴ Dennett's phenomenology is ultra-subjective. It is a mere preliminary to a theory of seeing. Heidegger's phenomenology, on the other hand, is the climax of research. The difference is fundamentally that Heidegger has retained the relative autonomy inscribed in the Greek word: a phenomenon shows itself in the world, though it can also assume the status of a semblance.

Searle accommodates the "phenomenology" within organic life: he asserts the existence of mental states and events such as seeing and hearing. Dennett, however, denies the existence of mental states, processes and events. For both of them, the brain in the head is a material object, and the question is: how can the "phenomenology" be fitted into that head? Dennett says it cannot, but Searle has no difficulty here. For Searle, mental events or processes accompany the physical ones, being caused by them, and acting causally in turn, in a "naturalistic" way. Non-neural states and events like seeing are likened to such natural organic functions as digestion (115-16). That does not mean that Searle has opted for "dualism," asserting the distinct being of a mind and mental events.

He calls his position "biological naturalism" which is in his view no less materialist than Dennett's view:

Why are so many philosophers driven to deny certain common-sense claims, such as that we really do have conscious thoughts and feelings; that we do have real intentional states such as beliefs, hopes, fears, and desires; and that these are caused by processes in the brain and do themselves function causally; and that they are real intrinsic parts of the real world and as much a part of our biological life as digestion, or growth, or the secretion of bile? The answer has to be found historically (103-04).

His sketch of history is, essentially, that Cartesian dualism did not satisfy anyone because the interaction of the mind and body was incomprehensible. The only alternative was materialism, but, in Dennett's formulations, this led to the absurd extreme of denying the occurrence of seeing, believing, etc.

Dennett's central contention is that the "phenomenology" of seeing, hearing, etc., is illusory, the position that he calls the denial of *qualia*. There is a distinctive "phenomenology" of what is sweetish, lemony and yellowish when a subject is confronted with a lemon pie. There are physical stimulations transmitted to the subject by a lemon pie. Ensuing thereupon there are processes in our sensory organs and our nervous system. But we do not need to postulate any "mental" or "psychic" events over and above the physical processes. Within ourselves, the physical process is all there is. What is seen and tasted here is not strictly speaking real or actual. The *qualia* are *Schein*. But Dennett does not mean here an optical illusion, as if you had mistaken a piece of bread for a piece of pie. The semblance does not occur to the phenomenon in the ordinary sense. The semblance that is supposedly operating here is one that affects "the phenomena of phenomenology," that is, being, seeing and knowing as such. This semblance or *Schein* is a *semblance of being* that is supposedly attached to the subject's seeing and to the visible.

But the philosophical question that is to be raised applies equally to the two antagonists: is it right to accommodate seeing, hearing, believing, and so on, as mental *events*, mental *states* or psychic *processes*? Is that the right "category" for them?

There is no reason to believe that seeing a speeding car, or an iceberg, or a hammer, is an event at all, mental or otherwise. It is the laboratory situation that has introduced the mythic entity, "mental event." One way to express this is through the usual temporal articulation of events as such. Pouring out a bottle of water has a beginning state (bottle full), an end state (bottle empty), and the intervening *event* I have no reason to doubt that neural activity can be conceptualized as a chain of events: neuron 1 inert, neuron 1 firing, neuron 2 inert, neuron 2 firing, etc. The term "process" usually seems to mean a concatenation of events, and so we have the common phrase "brain processes." I have no reason to doubt that certain specific brain processes occur when we fall asleep, dream, and then wake up. And although certain brain processes no doubt occur when we are seeing a speeding car, seeing a hammer, or seeing anything else, the seeing itself is not an event or a process. And when a car in the oncoming lane pulls out into your lane and increases speed, this too is an event – but your seeing of it is not.

An event can be interrupted, and so can a process. When a bottle is only half emptied you can stop the pouring out, and so, because the event has not been completed, it has not occurred (though something has occurred). But if, when I'm seeing a flock of birds, I'm suddenly knocked out cold, the possible seeing that I anticipated (in the ability to see) was already realized. It is not rendered null and void. In the current seeing, that is yoked to a seeing yet to come, what was "yet to come" was already present even in the moment before the knockout. The seeing was already complete. There is no intermediate between seeing and not seeing as there is between "emptying the

bottle" and "not emptying the bottle." Cases such as seeing have possibility built into their constitution. Seeing is already the ability to see further. The denial that seeing is an event recalls the thesis of Aristotle that seeing (like thinking) is not a movement, *kinēsis*, but is rather an actuality, *energeia*. Seeing and thinking are temporally articulated in a different way than are events (movements) like walking and building. What has been and what is to come are not divided off from what is, so they are actualities instead.

For every movement is incomplete – making thin, learning, walking, building; these are movements, and incomplete at that. For it is not true that at the same time a thing is walking and has walked, or is building and has built, or is coming to be and has come to be, or is being moved and has been moved, but what is being moved is different from what has been moved, and what is moving from what has moved. But it is the same thing that at the same time has seen and is seeing, or is thinking and has thought. The latter, then, I call an actuality, and the former a movement (*Metaphysics* 1048 b 28-35).

The same point is evident from our consideration of the *visible* (and the *audible*, of course, and, in view of our Aristotelian quotation, "the thinkable" as well, *to noēton*). I can see the flock of birds because they are visible. My own seeing, though it might be ended by a blow on the head, was a disclosure of something in the world. If I am knocked out, the flight of birds does not cease to be visible. The flight of birds was, of course, an event, but the visual disclosure of that flight was not some further event occurring to them or occurring to me or in me. The visibility of the birds outlasts the knockout.

As with other biological functions, brain events and processes run along in time and can be interrupted (concussions, strokes, etc.). Machines can help us monitor them. But if we discover that there are no "mental events" running in concert with them, the conclusion to draw is not that seeing and hearing are illusions, but rather that they were falsely categorized as events. Dennett, unable to conceptualize a mental event such as seeing or believing, moved to the conclusion that there is no

seeing or believing. But he missed the appropriate inference: from the start, seeing and believing were wrongly categorized as events.

Notes

¹ Page references will be to the original German edition, printed in the margins of the translation.

² I have in mind Husserl's treatment of the intentional object (*noema*) in *Ideas I*, Chapters 9 - 10; Sartre's account of the imaginary in his *Psychology of Imagination*; and Merleau-Ponty's tracing of the visible, especially in his study of paintings in *Signs* and "Eye and Mind." The relevance of painting is a reminder here that our present topic, seeing, is a prototype for a treatment of the arts.

³ As in Okrent.

⁴ See Glazebrook.

⁵ On this distinction, see my article, "The Constitution of our Being."

⁶ Expositions of it, helpful for the English-language reader, can be found in Guignon and Dreyfus.

⁷ Heidegger only mentions this point on page 346 of *Being and Time*, without detailed treatment, but I think the analysis I offer here is in accord not only with *Being and Time* but many other well-known Heidegger texts. I shall confirm this interpretation below by quoting his treatment of hearing.

⁸ Note the full horizon here of both seeing and hearing: we recognize a reference backwards to our having-seen, having-known, having-heard, and having-understood. Seeing, knowing and understanding are self-projecting, always the ability to see, the ability to know, the ability to understand. But just as surely, in all their modifications they also refer to the prior disclosure accomplished merely through our being in the world.

⁹ See pages 27, 28, 34 and 35 for phrases that are reminiscent of Husserl, *Ideas I*, 191.

¹⁰ "Heidegger [hält] für *phainomenon* die Bedeutung fest: das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende, und in diesem Sinne das Offenbare. Er sagt nicht nur: das Sichzeigende, sondern er bestimmt dieses des näheren als das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende, um darauf hinzuweisen, dass das, was sich zeigt, sich selbst als es selbst zeigt ... Die Hinzusetzung "an ihm selbst" dient der Abhebung gegen den Begriff des Scheins und gegen den Begriff des Erscheinens ... [Die] Phänomene sind die Gesamtheit dessen, was sich an ihm selbst zeigt" (von Herrmann 293–94).

¹¹ The German word *vulgär* doesn't have the negative connotation of the corresponding English word.

¹² See e.g., *Republic*, 479a-d and *Sophist*, 233c-236e.

¹³ See Stich, Dennett, and Churchland.

¹⁴ Flanagan (89-93), for instance is also committed to the ultra-subjective sense of "phenomenology," but he at least reserves the term for the *accounts* of inner experience, their *logos*, rather than, with Dennett, designating thereby the inner fantasies and feelings themselves, the *phainomena* (45, 47).

Works Cited

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*.

Churchland, P. M. *The Engine of Reason, The Seat of the Soul*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995.

Dennett, Daniel. *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little Brown, 1991.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Division I. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

Flanagan, Owen. "The Robust Phenomenology of the Stream of Consciousness." *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates* Eds. N. Block, O. Flanagan, and G. Guzeldere. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997.

Glazebrook, Trish. *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Guignon, Charles. *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983.

Heidegger, Martin. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927; *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson. New York: Collier, 1937.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind." *The Primary of Perception and Other Essays*. Tr. Carleton Dallery. Ed. James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

—. *Signs*. Tr. Richard C. McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Nagel, Thomas. "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974).

Nicholson, Graeme. "The Constitution of our Being." *American Philosophical Quarterly* XXXVI (1999), 165-187; now in Richard Polt, ed., *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

Okrent, Mark. *Heidegger's Pragmatism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Plato. *Collected Dialogues*. Ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'Imaginaire*. Éditions Gallimard, 1940; *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. Tr. Jonathan Webber. Revised Edition. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*. Trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover, 1969.

Searle, John R. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Stich, S. P. *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982.

von Herrmann, F.W. *Hermeneutische Phänomenologie des Daseins*. Band 1. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1987.