

We
Interrogating a
self-evidence

Michael Eldred



Version 1.0 August-September 2018
Copyright © 2018 Michael Eldred
www.arte-fact.org

Copyright © 2018 by Michael Eldred, all rights reserved. This text may be used and shared in accordance with the fair-use provisions of copyright law, and it may be archived and redistributed in electronic form, provided that the author is notified and no fee is charged for access. Archiving, redistribution, or republication of this text on other terms, in any medium, requires the consent of the author.

Table of contents

Abstract	3
We - Interrogating a self-evidence	4
1 We the people in everyday averageness	5
2 A simple, everyday example to explicate the we-ness of ‘we’	8
3 Manifestness and hiddenness in their three-dimensional temporality	10
4 Pre-ontological vs. ontological understanding of our shared mind	14
5 Whatness and whoness	19
6 The conveniently forgotten ontological difference	21

Abstract

The phenomenon of 'we' is taken for granted as a self-evident, bare fact that simply has to be accepted, even by philosophers. Accordingly, almost all philosophers leave the fact alone and do not dare to interrogate it. By contrast, the present essay seeks what intrinsically enables 'we', i.e. its we-ness, proceeding from the example of a simple, everyday situation whose interrogation yields indications of salient ontological features of our sharing the world with one another. Without giving it a thought, we always already share an openness that, on the one hand, can be called truth (disclosure) and, on the other, time (three-dimensional temporality). The example also provides the opportunity to show how the two aspects of world-openness criss-cross each other and, indeed, intertwine. The distinction between pre-ontological and ontological understanding of the world, and the ontological distinction between whatness and whoness are made, along with that between the ontic and the ontological (ontological difference, hermeneutic As).

Key words: three-dimensional temporality, mind, psyche, pre-ontological understanding, ontological understanding, ontological difference, hermeneutic As

We - Interrogating a self-evidence

1 We the people in everyday averageness

In this essay¹ I want to interrogate the self-evidence of the innocuous little word ‘we’ or, more to the point, the phenomenality it names. Every English speaker knows this word and uses it prolifically; it cannot be done without. If you work in the media, it is obligatory for you to work with the ‘we’ in speech and writing, for it is supposed to be inclusive. To speak in terms of ‘you’ has an accusatory flavour and separates you from me, the one speaking or writing. To speak of ‘I’ in the media is likewise undesirable for it suggests some kind of subjective egoism and excludes the other. ‘We’, by contrast, envelops you and me in an inclusive ‘we’re all the same’, namely, ‘people’. In our democratic age, it is regarded as only proper throughout the media, the institutions, science and everyday life to refer incessantly to ‘people’ as the ubiquitous human social being. ‘People think this’, ‘People prefer that’, ‘People were shocked to hear’, ‘People couldn’t care less’, ‘The majority of people want better housing’, etc. etc.

The well-worn phrase, ‘We the people’, has a deeply soothing, democratic ring about it; therefore it is invoked again and again in any socio-political context to express the equality of everyman and everywoman. Apart from the equality conveyed by the all-purpose designation ‘people’, it also levels ‘us’ all to averageness and mediocrity: no one is better than anyone else. The all-too-easily-presumed ‘we’ is also a rhetorical trick employed ever since humans started discoursing with each other, and especially ever since speakers started talking to audiences of whatever kind. It can surprise nobody that the media in a democratic culture do not want to offend, and are in constant fear of offending, their audience in any way and so resort to the inclusive ‘we’ so as not to let anyone feel even faintly that he or she has been left out or is being spoken down to by a superior ‘I’. Moreover, all the troubling and not so troubling issues taken up by the media are also

¹ Many thanks to Astrid Nettling and Rafael Capurro for their critical comments.

invariably formulated in terms of ‘What should we do about it?’, thus conjuring a fake ‘we’ who somehow is responsible for what happens in the world. After all, ‘we’ are the people! All this is trivial and self-evident.

Trivial and self-evident phenomena, however, have always been the starting-point for genuine philosophical thinking. Whereas a social science such as sociology or linguistics will proceed from the positivity of given empirical facts in order to explain them somehow in terms of other given facts, or provide an overview of empirical trends, philosophical thinking’s task and challenge is to interrogate the trivial and self-evident to the point where they lose their self-evidence and open up their abyssal questionability. Such is the case with the ‘always already’ well-understood phenomenon of ‘we’, for it is unquestionably self-evident and a trivial statement that ‘we’ human beings exist on the Earth together. It is obvious to me and you and everybody else that we exist alongside many other people on Earth, and we can all easily ascertain that we humans inhabit the Earth in a plurality. Philosophically, however, I have to tease this self-evidence into questionability by asking for something resembling the essence of the ‘we’, its we-ness, where ‘essence’ is here taken to mean not the traditional quidditas, i.e. ‘whatness’, of the ‘we’, but rather that which intrinsically enables² the phenomenality of ‘we’, assuming that the little word ‘we’ covers an entire gamut of phenomena that present themselves ubiquitously in quotidian existence. This art of questioning the self-evident was first practised by the Greeks and gave rise to philosophy.

² Heidegger works with a conception of essence as “intrinsic enabling” (innere Ermöglichung) in §27 Der Entwurf der Seinsverfassung des Seienden als innere Ermöglichung... (The Cast of the Ontological Constitution of Beings as Intrinsic Enabling...) of his *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, lectures delivered in WS 1928/29 and published as Volume 27 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Otto Saame und Ina Saame-Speidel, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1996. Cf. “It [the cast of being’s make-up ME] constitutes the intrinsic possibility — possibility = essence — of the knowledge of beings as lying present-at-hand.” (Er [der Entwurf der Seinsverfassung ME] macht die innere Möglichkeit — Möglichkeit = Wesen — der Erkenntnis von Seiendem als vorliegendem aus. GA27:197).

Today, by contrast, the self-evident is taken without question as a factually given basis for positive science, and not as an abyss in view of which the cast of elementary phenomena can be reshaped.

‘We’ goes together linguistically with ‘are’, signifying a plurality of beings as distinct from a single being. But even prior to expressly saying ‘we are’, it is already well-understood tacitly as a matter of course in all sorts of situations. The ‘are’ in ‘we are’ is a conjugation, a yoking-together of a plurality with being. Teasing out the phenomenality of ‘we’ is therefore intimately related to the question of being. As is well-known, questioning being is difficult because it is hard to say what being means at all. Nietzsche is by no means alone as a philosopher when he proclaims ‘being’ to be meaningless, and the question concerning the meaning of being itself plays no role in today’s mainstream philosophy. Nevertheless, despite the pronouncements of philosophers, an understanding of being is indispensable for existing as a human being, and it is taken for granted in understanding the world in every possible situation. Even though the meaning of being itself has never, until very late, been interrogated in the philosophical tradition, the questioning of beings with regard to their being, or the beingness of beings, was practised in a deep and sophisticated way already by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle’s famous formulation for ontology is the investigation of τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν, i.e. beings as beings, beings simply insofar as they are beings, and Aristotle works out a basic concept in this ontological endeavour with οὐσία, which itself is derived from the Greek word for being, εἶναι, and means literally ‘beingness’.

In the philosophical tradition, and most famously with Socrates, the question of being has usually been posed in the form, ‘What is x?’, that is, in the third person singular. Answering the question has consisted in giving the concept of x’s being, its being-ness as whatness. Even with the advent of the modern age ushered in most explicitly by Descartes, for which the ego cogito, that is, the first person singular of being, takes centre stage, the ego is still treated as a what, namely, as a conscious subject with its representations within an interior consciousness. This transmutation of the first person back into the traditional third person singular has been maintained without budging within modern

philosophy to the present day. Heidegger's singular, valiant attempt over half a century in thorough-going phenomenological studies to shift thinking from the conscious subject as a what to the whoness of existence has so far made little headway in shaking an imperturbably complacent mainstream wedded to the status quo. I won't go into the reasons for this smug complacency and wilful incomprehension here; however, see the final section below.

2 A simple, everyday example to explicate the we-ness of 'we'

To pose the question of 'we' as a mode of being requires asking what intrinsically enables our sharing of the world with one another in some kind of togetherness. This can be facilitated by looking at the phenomenality of a simple, everyday example. Suppose we are together in a small group of four, sitting in an Indian restaurant (let's call it The Curry Hut), enjoying a meal and having a philosophical conversation. There is wine and food on the table, along with condiments, cutlery, crockery, serviettes, table cloth, etc. I am sitting next to a philosophical friend facing the wall which is painted with a picture supposed to depict the Taj Mahal, decorating the restaurant to generate some kind of faintly Indian atmosphere. Our other two interlocutors are on the other side of the rectangular table with their backs to the wall. Other patrons are enjoying meals at other tables.

Each of us is pretty much focused on the to-and-fro of the conversation whilst eating the food and taking an occasional sip of wine. The cutlery is being used to eat the Indian fare without anyone paying particular attention to it. In particular, no one is especially directing their consciousness intentionally toward the cutlery, but it is obviously disclosed to each of us in its practical usefulness. Our joint attention is focused at the moment rather on a particular expression, "ungeheure Warensammlung" (enormous accumulation of commodities), used by Marx in one of his writings. Someone says he first used it in *Das Kapital* in the first chapter of the first, 1863 edition, whereas another says the expression first appeared earlier, at the beginning of *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* published in 1859. It's a minor point and is soon

passed over. We don't have Marx's works at the table to ascertain the accuracy or otherwise of the opposing factual claims, which are easy to check if one has the books to hand. Since I have Marx's works on my bookshelves at home, I make a mental note to myself that after our meal I will look them up in my library to check where the expression factually occurs. My Marx books are thus disclosed to me *as* the useful things they are, even though they are not sensuously present, but spatially absent. Moreover, they present to me a future existential possibility that is withheld so long I am sitting in the restaurant, but nonetheless present to mind.

All this and many other details are apparent to us sitting at the table in conversation, including en passant the girl sitting patiently in silence at the next table apparently listening to her boy-friend who can't stop talking. Each of us knows without further ado how to use cutlery and wine glasses, which are disclosed to us in their usefulness. We share their disclosedness in our being together. They are sensuously present and matter-of-factly understood *as* the practical things they show themselves to be to our senses. There could hardly be any dispute over how to use knife and fork and glass, nor over the fact that they are indeed useful. Indeed usefulness for an existential purpose (our eating) characterizes their very being, their *raison d'être*. Hence the knives and forks and glasses are disclosed to us *as* the useful, practical things they are. In sharing a meal and conversation with one another, we are sharing in the sensuous present — among much else, and as matter of course, without being conscious of it — the *manifestness of cutlery in the usefulness of its practical being*. All this is tacitly self-evident, but it can be explicated, unfolded to bring out the features of manifestness or unhiddenness and understanding things as such-and-such in their practical usefulness. And this would entail embarking on a philosophical enterprise.

The painting on the wall opposite me and one of my interlocutors, Tim, depicting the Taj Mahal, is manifest to both of us sensuously in the present, whereas it is hidden to the two sitting opposite us, but nonetheless present in the present situation. One of those sitting opposite may have noticed the picture before taking a seat, whereas the other may

not have noticed it at all. When I remark that the painting is very poor, one of those sitting opposite (let's call her Anne) may recall from memory that it is indeed very poor, whereas the other (Bert) has to turn around to take a look at the picture. For Anne, the picture is manifest to her from memory, for she glanced at it before taking her seat, although now it is hidden to her in the sensuous present. She and I can both see a depiction of the Taj Mahal, albeit in different temporal modes, whereas initially for Bert, before turning round, the depiction is hidden both sensuously and also in memory. He may have glanced at it before taking a seat, but it has slipped his memory and become forgotten, i.e. hidden. Or he didn't notice it at all before. The picture itself is potentially manifest to all of us, i.e. its *ontic* manifestness can be shared. We also share without further ado an implicit understanding of its being *as* a useful thing whose purpose is to decorate the restaurant appropriately and thus enhance the patrons' eating pleasure.

The painting is of the Taj Mahal, a very large and beautiful building in India famous throughout the world. The sensuous depiction calls the Taj Mahal itself into the presence of us at the table when we look at it, even though the building is situated far away on another continent and hidden from sensuous view in the present. Its 'where' is sensuously absent, but this does not prevent us from having its 'where' in mind. Furthermore, the absent Taj Mahal is not hidden to the view of our understanding, since each of us knows very well and understands, for instance, that it is a building used for certain purposes and thus manifest to us all in its practical usefulness, among other things, even though it is absent spatially. Its 'where' is somewhere else. Anne, who has studied Indian history and also architecture, is able to tell us quite a lot about the Taj Mahal, apart from the mere fact that it is a building, imposing in its whiteness. Nevertheless, what she tells builds upon our shared understanding of the Taj Mahal *as* a building, i.e. *as* a useful thing.

3 Manifestness and hiddenness in their three-dimensional temporality

What else is manifest to us in the present sitting there at the table, enjoying our meal and conversation? Around the corner and hence out

of sight is the entrance to the restaurant's lavatories. From previous visits, each of us may know they are there, although they are not sensuously manifest (i.e. not given to the receptivity of the senses, as Kant would put it), and each of us understands what they are for, i.e. their usefulness, their being-good-for... . Hence they are manifest to us mentally in their being as useful things here in the present, but as yet spatially and sensuously absent. They are not hidden *optically* if any one of us calls them to mind, and they are not hidden *ontologically* as the things they *are*.

If Bert gets up to visit the W.C., he already has in mind the lavatory itself, whose sensuous presence is withheld for the moment, until he actually walks into it. We all share the manifest presence-in-absence of the lavatories in our mind as the potential presence of useful wash-things offering a manifest future existential possibility of relieving oneself. If Anne is visiting the restaurant for the first time, she may have to ask us where the women's lavatory is located. She expects there to be a women's lavatory available, although it is sensuously and spatially absent and its location so far is hidden to her. Insofar, it is partially hidden to her as a future existential possibility of visiting the W.C. but, of its very nature, the future possibility of using the lavatory is already shared among us, as well as the restaurant's other guests. Although some of us may not know yet where the lavatories are located, for the rest of us, their location is mentally manifest to us, albeit not sensuously manifest, in the temporal dimensions of both present and future, and even in the temporal dimension of the past, insofar as we can recall having used the W.C. on a previous occasion. A dimension is that which allows a passing-through, and in this context, the three temporal dimensions allow a passing-through of occurrences to present themselves *as* such to our mind. The W.C.s' location, their 'where', is present within the three temporal dimensions which thus can be seen to *encompass* space with its places, its locations in three *spatial* dimensions. Space requires encompassing 3D-time to be what it is, i.e. to presence *as* what it is.

The manifestness to mind of the lavatories is due to the power of imagination that is able to receive them non-sensuously in the

temporality in the present, in the future (as an existential possibility) and also in the past (as an experience of them one has already had in visiting them). Imagination does not just generate images of the lavatories ‘in the head’ (which today’s neuroscience is endeavouring to nail down as neural patterns in the brain or suchlike), but rather, the lavatories themselves present themselves to the mind; they are not doubled into sensuously ‘real’ and merely internally imagined lavatories. Traditionally, since Plato and Aristotle, this power of imagination to let presence, i.e. to call to mind, is called φαντασία, phantasy. ‘Power of imagination’ suggests a subject that has the power of *calling* to mind, and this is presumably what Kant had in mind with the concept of *Einbildungskraft*.³ But letting presence can also be conceived as a *coming* to mind not initiated by any controlling power. Since phantasy is able to imagine, i.e. let presence, without sensuous presence, but in a non-sensuous intuition (i.e. looking-at) in three-dimensional time, it has

³ “The power of imagination (*facultas imaginandi*) as a capacity for intuiting even without the object’s presence is either productive, i.e. a capacity for representing the object originally, *exhibitio originaria*, which is thus prior to experience.” (Die *Einbildungskraft* (*facultas imaginandi*), als ein Vermögen der Anschauung, auch ohne Gegenwart des Gegenstandes ist entweder produktiv, d.i. ein Vermögen der ursprünglichen Darstellung des letzteren, *exhibitio originaria*, welche also vor der Erfahrung vorhergeht. *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* §28 *Werke* Bd. VI *Wiss. Buchges.* Darmstadt 1983) Heidegger comments: “The power of imagination is a capacity for intuiting, i.e. a capacity that is capable of giving something, and indeed, the power of imagination as a view of something without that which we are viewing having to itself be present in the present.” (Die *Einbildungskraft* ist ein Vermögen des Anschauens, d.h. ein Vermögen, das etwas zu geben vermag, und zwar gibt die *Einbildungskraft* uns einen Anblick von etwas, ohne daß dasjenige, was wir anblicken, selbst gegenwärtig anwesend wäre. GA27:270). For Heidegger, the power of imagination is that power in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* that is behind the solution to the problem of how the pure intuition of *time* and the pure intuition of the categories of understanding can be unified in the schemata: “Schema = image = view. Schematism is the capacity of making an image for the pure concepts, of bringing them into a pure image.” (Schema = Bild = Anblick. Schematismus ist das Vermögen, den reinen Begriffen ein Bild zu verschaffen, sie in ein reines Bild zu bringen. GA27:271)

been regarded with great suspicion by the entire metaphysical tradition and also by modern science. After all, don't mystics have visions? The metaphysical tradition insists that what is real has to be given first and foremost to the senses in the present to be registered as empirical data. Seeing (sensuously) is believing. And empirical data comprise all that is given to the senses, either immediately, or mediatedly via apparatuses constructed to gather data. In the signification employed here, phantasy is not to be regarded merely as fanciful imagining, as a dreaming-up of something or other, but as mental eventuation in three-dimensional time that allows whats and whos in the world to present themselves without sensuous presence.

To return to the Marx example and make a further point: by discussing one of his expressions, we are calling someone, a who, from the nineteenth century to the table who nevertheless remains absent to us in the present as a living person, a presence that is now refused. Marx presences to us in our shared imagination as absent in the restaurant from the temporal dimension of the past, which itself is tacitly and self-evidently open to each of us in our shared understanding. His absence as a deceased human being from the nineteenth century does not prevent his presencing mentally now, but as temporally, not just spatially, absent. In fact we can call to presence much of his thinking as expressed in his writings; in this sense, the deceased Marx is now spatially dispersed around the globe in libraries, and not so much located as last remains in his grave in Highgate Cemetery.

In disputing a minor point regarding when Marx first used a certain expression — in 1859 or 1863 — all that has to be clarified is a simple matter of fact concerning a past event, not of interpretation, which raises hermeneutic questions here left to one side. One of us has incorrectly remembered when the expression was first used, or he was unaware of the expression altogether. In the first case, the fact manifests itself incorrectly; in the second, the ontic fact was altogether hidden, albeit potentially able to be shared with him. This example shows that, in the temporal dimension of the past or beenness, an event (Marx's publishing certain works) can be distortedly manifest (the expression itself is correctly remembered, but its temporal ordering is not) as absent. That

is, the event's presence in the present *as* present is now refused, but its presence *as* absent is not. Absence is only a temporal modification of presence, one of its modes. Alternatively, the past event can manifest itself mentally from the past only partially or distortedly. Or a past event can be entirely hidden from one of us, whilst revealing itself correctly to another. It is therefore potentially dis-coverable for us all in coming to, or being called to, mind. Individual ignorance of an ontic event is no argument against its being always already shared as disclosed.

What do these simple examples show? They show that we share an openness to the surrounding world that is three-dimensionally temporal⁴ in which both things and other human beings disclose or hide or only distortedly, partially or misleadingly disclose themselves to us. Our shared mind encompasses this three-dimensional temporality, and conversely, three-dimensional temporality is also the bounds for what can come to mind at all, since all mental events without exception are some kind of presencing. What or who is momentarily hidden to us all or one of us may become *ontically* disclosed either sensuously or non-sensuously, 'imaginatively' to our mind.

4 Pre-ontological vs. ontological understanding of our shared mind

We also understand both things and other human beings *as* such-and-such in their being, and we share this *pre-ontological* understanding of their being as a matter of course, taking it for granted without further thought. We all share a common, even commonplace, pre-ontological

⁴ In his lengthy treatment of the intrinsic possibility of truth (its essence) in WS 1928/29 (GA27), Heidegger discusses in detail the example of sharing the manifestness of beings, most notably a piece of white chalk, with his students in the situation of the lecture theatre whilst attending a lecture. Manifestness (or unhiddenness, *Unverborgenheit*) as originary truth *vis-à-vis* the derivative nature of traditional propositional truth is explicated only with regard to the sensuously present, with no attention being paid to the three-dimensional temporality of manifestness and hiddenness which under no circumstances should be confused with presence and absence, respectively, as is invariably done.

understanding of beings in their being even without ever having heard the word ‘ontology’. The pre-ontological understanding is still only implicit, i.e. folded in on itself and insofar hidden from our mind. The *whatness* of practical, useful things, for example, is understood *as* their usefulness for a certain purpose in human existence, such as cutlery to eat with. The being of useful things resides their being-good-for..., and they are valued, estimated accordingly.

The *whoness* of human beings cannot be so conveniently and compactly specified, but *one* of its essential features is our understanding each other in our individual powers and abilities which are accordingly estimated and esteemed. Human beings, too, as whos are also good-for... through the exercise of their powers. For example, Marx is estimated (highly or lowly) as a who with great powers of philosophical thinking that he exercised throughout his life in writing works which have had profound influence on posterity and are themselves estimated highly or lowly, thus reflecting on his stature as somewho. In carrying on our conversation, we also estimate each other’s powers of expression and what each of us says as a matter of course. Hence, in a certain way, human beings in their whoness are also perfectly well-understood in their being-good-for... , being *valued* all the while either appropriately or inappropriately. But here is not the place to unfold a phenomenology of whoness in the fullness of all its aspects, which requires a much longer discourse.⁵

The we-ness of our sitting at a table in an Indian restaurant enjoying a meal and conversation therefore does not consist merely in a collection of various entities, whats and whos, assembled adjacently to one another in the same physical space of the restaurant’s premises and communicating via the utterance of statements that may be true or false, or expressing beliefs, opinions, etc. ‘We’ as a phenomenon is not so self-evident, but has deeper-lying, intrinsic conditions of possibility. The

⁵ Cf. most recently M. Eldred *Social Ontology of Whoness: Rethinking core phenomena of political philosophy* deGruyter Berlin 2019, which itself is a thoroughly revised and significantly expanded third edition of my *Social Ontology: Recasting Political Philosophy Through a Phenomenology of Whoness*ontos/deGruyter Frankfurt/Berlin 2008/2011.

unhiddenness of ourselves to each other and of the surrounding things and people to us is not due merely to the electric lights blazing in the ceiling and lack of visual obstruction by walls, as if each of us were equipped with sensors able to detect the presence of objects in our shared proximity. The above example of the restaurant situation has already shown that it occurs, and can only occur, in three-dimensional temporality which, in turns, calls for thinking-through philosophically.

Furthermore, we share a pre-ontological *understanding* of our shared situation in the restaurant, including understanding the useful things as such in their specific whatness and ourselves and the others as human beings in their specific whoness. The restaurant-situation as a whole shapes up and manifests itself *as* such-and-such. Both whats and whos are valued, appreciated, esteemed in their being-good-for..., including even their being-good-for-nothing, i.e. useless, or being undervalued, unappreciated, misesteemed. Each of us brings along willy-nilly a pre-ontological understanding of beings that we always already implicitly share prior to any any ontic encounter with things and people in a restaurant or with each other. We do not first have to figure out in advance via linguistic communication how we are to understand the restaurant-situation; we simply share an understanding of it from the start.

Our shared understanding of the present situation is not tied merely to the present, but includes what may come to presence, say, by being called to presence mentally from the temporal dimension of beenness through the conversation, or presencing from the future as a possibility, for instance, of standing up, leaving the table and disappearing around the corner to relieve oneself in the lavatory. Our shared situation is therefore always already three-dimensionally temporal, as well as being marked by both manifestness (unhiddenness) and hiddenness (to the senses in the present, to memory in the past, or to eventualities in the future). With regard to the last-mentioned, we could all be aware, for instance, of the possibility of going to the restaurant's toilet, but entirely unaware of an imminent military coup against the government in an African country. Although ontically hidden to us at the moment, the military coup as an event is already shared by virtue of being potentially

manifest to each of us via the media when it occurs. We also all share a prior pre-ontological understanding of political power, even without having a clue about the ontology of political power, and therefore can understand and appreciate what a military coup means.

All the beings, both whats and whos, that are understood by each of us in a shared understanding that is taken for granted, occur in events that are occurrences in the world and occur, if they are to occur at all, in the open three-dimensionality of time, no matter whether these occurrences occur in simple manifestness, or distorted in some way, or in hiddenness. Three-dimensionality temporality itself stakes the boundaries of what can occur to our shared mind at all. Even fancifully imagining something like an elephant with drawers in its legs takes place in the present and has undeniable references to things in the quotidian world, in this case, elephants and drawers.

How we understand occurrences that come to light in some degree of manifestness is already determined by a prior, shared pre-ontological understanding of the being of beings, i.e. their beingness, whether it be the whatness of whats or the whoness of whos. We take this shared understanding of the being of beings for granted without any further thought, and yet we rely on it tacitly to enjoy a meal and a conversation together, as well as in all other existential situations and for all our existential possibilities. The bored girl sitting at the next table may overhear our conversation, but has only ever vaguely heard of someone called Marx who once lived, without even knowing in what century. The person Marx remains ontically pretty much hidden to her. Nevertheless she understands Marx ineluctably pre-ontologically *as* *some*who, for her mental understanding of the world is always already 'equipped' with the category of whoness.

Whoness as a phenomenon can be and is covered up by a modern scientific psychological understanding, according to which a human being is in the first place a conscious subject with inner thoughts and feelings (said to be located in some mysterious way in the head or in the heart) that are individually his or her own and can also be expressed individually to others in language, art, music, etc. *Interior* consciousness conceived as individual and separate is thus understood as being

expressed individually *outside* in an external world, or even as being *projected* from the inside onto the outside. These are fantastic constructions, if you think about it. Everyday understanding, and even modern-day philosophers, are convinced that you can't look inside someone else's head, i.e. their consciousness, to see their thoughts, even though today's neuroscience may dream of one day being able to perform this trick.

The conception of individual, separate, interior consciousnesses from the start posed the ticklish philosophical conundrum of how they could even come together. The genuine philosophical question, however, is the converse one of how an always-already shared mind is individualized. Subjectivist metaphysics with its conception of separate consciousnesses, does not see this. Hence, in the twentieth century, there occurred the so-called linguistic turn in mainstream philosophy, since language was taken as the obvious candidate for how individual consciousnesses could somehow share a world with each other. Such language philosophy overlooks that truth is not situated originarily, but only derivatively, in linguistic propositions, as indicated in the above example of the restaurant situation. I note in passing that only with such an ontological construction of interior consciousness is it possible to speak of *introspection* and even regard it as a philosophical method. The introspective philosopher sits in his armchair and turns his gaze inward toward his psyche located somehow and somewhere inside. In truth, all he is doing is merely directing his attention to phenomena that are not sensuously manifest.

To reiterate: the discussion of the simple example so far has shown, by contrast, that we *share* *ab ovo* three-dimensional temporality within which all events, i.e. the presencing and absencing of beings, occur ontically and within which they manifest themselves to our shared mind in a pre-ontological understanding of them *as* such-and-such. The *as* such-and-such of pre-ontological understanding is the *hermeneutic as* through which all beings and all occurrences are always already interpreted 'without a second thought'. We-ness itself is *intrinsically enabled by the open clearing of three-dimensional temporality itself* that, in turn, is *the same as our shared mind*, since all mental events, both

sensuous and otherwise, occur as presencing and absencing of some kind, and all manifestness or hiddenness also can only occur within this open temporal clearing.⁶ Our shared mind is part of our shared soul (ψυχή, psyche) that can be conceived as our shared openness to the world of occurrences *as* such, all of which are tinged moodfully one way or the other.

5 Whatness and whoness

The understanding of beings in their being *as* such-and-such, that is, the beingness of beings, bifurcates as a matter of course into an understanding of whats in their whatness and whos in their whoness. The whatness of whats can be divided roughly into the naturalness of nature, the usefulness of practical things of all kinds and the contemplability of abstract entities such as number or mathematical topological manifolds. Whatness of whats and whoness of whos as different modes of being are very well-understood pre-ontologically as a matter of course by human beings shaping their existence, but they also remain hidden in their tacit implicitness. They are not *known* as such. If implicit pre-ontological understanding is ever to come to light, it must be coaxed from hiddenness by unfolding its implicitness. This is the philosophical sense of the α -privativum in ἀλήθεια: unhiddenness of the simple phenomenon in question must be wrested by thinking from hiddenness to gain explicit ontological concepts. This is difficult and contentious, indeed, so much so that it can take centuries for key elementary phenomena to come to appropriate ontological concepts.

It is the unique hall-mark and task of phenomenological, hermeneutic thinking to bring the ubiquitous, implicit, pre-ontological understanding of whatness and whoness to their respective concepts so that they become explicit for our mind. It is an hermeneutic endeavour insofar as the understanding of whats *as* such-and-such and of whos *as* such-and-such is explicated. Such hermeneutic bringing to ontological concepts, of course, occurs necessarily in our shared, historical mind. Namely, it is

⁶ Cf. M. Eldred *A Question of Time: An alternative cast of mind* North Charlston: CreateSpace 2015.

not possible for each of us to invent his or her own ontological understanding of the beingness of beings, for each of us is thrown into an ontological cast of world not of our own making and can only make sense of it through the pre-ontological understanding that we imbibe without knowing it.

An ontological cast of world cannot be dreamed up at whim as if it were a matter of a parlour game of tiddlywinks. Rather, an ontological cast of world emerges only slowly and rarely in historical time and initially only pre-ontologically for understanding that emergent world. In taking up the phenomenologico-hermeneutic challenge of ontology, there is inevitably much strife in the interpretation of the whatness of whats and the whoness of whos once (or if) the questions relating to them are explicitly posed by philosophers. Such posing of a genuinely ontological question, of course, is an eventuality that, to say the least, is rare. Ontological questions can and do remain dormant for centuries and even millennia, including among those identifying themselves as philosophers. For the rest, the questions never even faintly surface as questions. After all, we human beings willy-nilly share an understanding of the whatness of whats and the whoness of whos without any further thought, and lead our respective existences accordingly. Ontic events in the world are what mostly attract attention.

An ontological casting — or rather, recasting — of beings as such in their beingness is itself a momentous, but quiet, historical event that tacitly underlies an historical age by (re)shaping the pre-ontological understanding which the inhabitants of that age participate in and ineluctably share. Thinkers toil underground in the boiler-room of history. Ontological recasting requires thinking to go back to the drawing board to re-vise, i.e. to re-see, key elementary phenomena. Discovering beings ontically in the world, say, through scientific experiment — in particular, their efficient-causal interconnections — has to be distinguished from bringing the pre-ontological understanding of the world in an historical age to its appropriate concepts. This includes also recasting from the hints of an alternative ontology emerging in a transitional age. The best-known and most thoroughly investigated example of this historico-hermeneutic recasting is the shift

in the pre-ontological understanding of being from the medieval to the modern age. For instance, the *ens creatum* of Christian theology, according to which God created all beings, becomes the physical being of the physical sciences. The modern age would like to convince itself that its own (pre-)ontological cast of world in terms of conscious (including unconscious) subjectivity vis-à-vis an external objective world providing empirical data were the final historical destination for how the world could possibly shape up and present itself to our shared mind. But this conviction is merely an exudation of dull-witted self-complacency and presumptuous hybris.

6 The conveniently forgotten ontological difference

Ontological concepts are won by looking closely at trivial, but elementary phenomena that are taken for granted. Phenomenology, which is not a philosophical position, is that philosophical method for bringing the *ontological difference* between beings taken ontically and beings *as* beings to thoughtful, conceptual manifestness. The hermeneutic *as* is quasi what is in between and requires explicit interpretive unfolding. Since each historical age rests on an implicit pre-ontological understanding of beings, it encapsulates the self-evident status quo for that age's mind, i.e. its 3D-Zeit-Geist or, literally, 3D-time-mind. Any attempt to interrogate the (pre-)ontological cast of an age must meet with implacable resistance from the status quo with all the counter-power of its established institutions and ingrained habits of thought that are complacently assumed to be beyond question. Coaxing the ontological cast of an age to light in well-founded phenomenological concepts thus must become also a struggle against the status quo of an historical mind that conceitedly and smugly regards itself as ontologically perfected for all time, suppresses the ontological difference and may even have already forgotten — as our present age has done — what genuine ontology is.

In this crucial regard there is astir in our age a degeneration of our shared historical mind from generation to generation, insidiously progressing behind our backs, not merely on an everyday level, but where it counts most: in the very institutions of higher learning set up

and entrusted with the task of thinking excellently. And what or who, you may ask, is responsible for this creeping degeneration, perchance some kind of malevolent, cunning demon? This supposed demon would be the opposite of what Hegel called the cunning of reason (List der Vernunft). It can be called the *will to power over movement/change of all kinds*, which is not so much a demon but stands for a great Western achievement whose seed was planted already in the opening hours of Greek metaphysical thinking. Metaphysics itself bifurcates into ontology, on the one hand, and theology, on the other, hence onto-theology. Greek ontology was unfolded on the basis of the paradigm of production (τέχνη ποιητική), and the θεός of Greek ἐπιστήμη was, from the start, the striving to master movement. This Greek beginning (as ἀρχή, principle, ‘prince’) holds our Western mind mesmerizingly in thrall to the present day. This insight we owe to Heidegger who has written copiously on the first Greek beginning and the hold it has over our historical mind today.⁷

To date, the ontological questioning of the phenomenon of ‘we’, i.e. its we-ness, has not been admitted to the philosophical agenda. Indeed, owing to the blindness to the ontological difference in today’s mainstream philosophy, such a questioning is not even comprehended. Nevertheless, even the simple example above that I have gone through to point out its salient ontological features reveals we-ness to be rooted in a sharedness of world, where world is not taken to be a being, nor a totality of beings, but as an ontologically structured openness embedded in three-dimensional temporality. This open temporal clearing can be regarded as our shared historical mind. The ontic play of manifestation and hiding only plays out within a shared historical (pre-)ontological understanding that casts the being of beings and is also criss-crossed by and entwined with the three temporal dimensions.

⁷ Apart from Heidegger’s writings, starting with his lectures in the 1920s, cf. also e.g. my *The Digital Cast of Being: Metaphysics, Mathematics, Cartesianism, Cybernetics, Capitalism, Communication*ontos/deGruyter, Frankfurt/Berlin 2009/2011; emended, revised, extended e-book edition at www.arte-fact.org Ver. 3.0 2011.

Taking the we-ness of the ‘we’ for granted has serious philosophical consequences, as when the intersubjectivity of human beings conceived *as* individual subjects each with an interior consciousness is taken for granted as self-evident, instead of being interrogated as a perplexing and beguiling phenomenon: How is the inter- of intersubjectivity at all possible? The question is stubbornly suppressed as of no consequence, as somehow absurd. Instead, today’s hegemonic mainstream philosophy in all its innumerable varieties proceeds from the pre-ontological assumption that each conscious subject has its own mind conceived as consciousness, and that these individual consciousnesses then come together by means of language and collective intentionality. But how can intentionality be collected? What intrinsically enables the sharing of language or of subjective intentionality is never raised as a delicate and demanding philosophical question, but rather their sharedness is taken as a brute fact whose contours remain vague for want of phenomenological explication.