

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

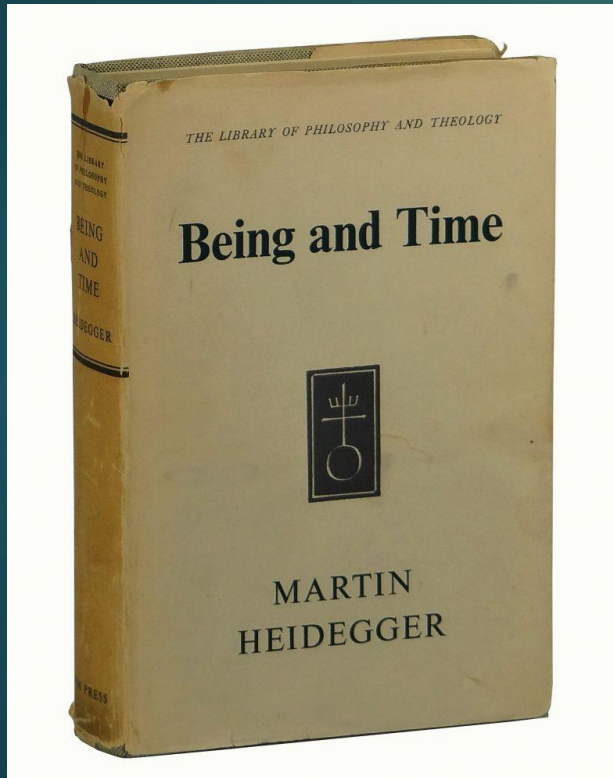
PHI-404 (CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY, PHENOMENOLOGY AND
EXISTENTIALISM)

INSTRUCTOR: SREEJITH K. K.

- ▶ Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was a German philosopher whose work is perhaps most readily associated with phenomenology and existentialism.
- ▶ His ideas have exerted a seminal influence on the development of contemporary European philosophy.
- ▶ They have also had an impact far beyond philosophy, for example in architectural theory (see e.g., Sharr 2007), literary criticism (see e.g., Ziarek 1989), theology (see e.g., Caputo 1993), psychotherapy (see e.g., Binswanger 1943/1964, Guignon 1993) and cognitive science (see e.g., Dreyfus 1992, 2008; Wheeler 2005; Kiverstein and Wheeler 2012).
- ▶ Martin Heidegger was born in Messkirch, Germany, on September 26, 1889. Messkirch was then a quiet, conservative, religious rural town, and as such was a formative influence on Heidegger and his philosophical thought.

- ▶ In 1909 he spent two weeks in the Jesuit order before leaving (probably on health grounds) to study theology at the University of Freiburg.
- ▶ In 1911 he switched subjects, to philosophy. He began teaching at Freiburg in 1915.
- ▶ Heidegger's philosophical development began when he read Brentano and Aristotle.
- ▶ Indeed, Aristotle's demand in the *Metaphysics* to know what it is that unites all possible modes of Being (or 'is-ness') is, in many ways, the question that ignites and drives Heidegger's philosophy.
- ▶ From this platform he proceeded to engage deeply with Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and, perhaps most importantly of all for his subsequent thinking in the 1920s, two further figures: Dilthey (whose stress on the role of interpretation and history in the study of human activity profoundly influenced Heidegger) and Husserl (whose understanding of phenomenology as a science of essences he was destined to reject).

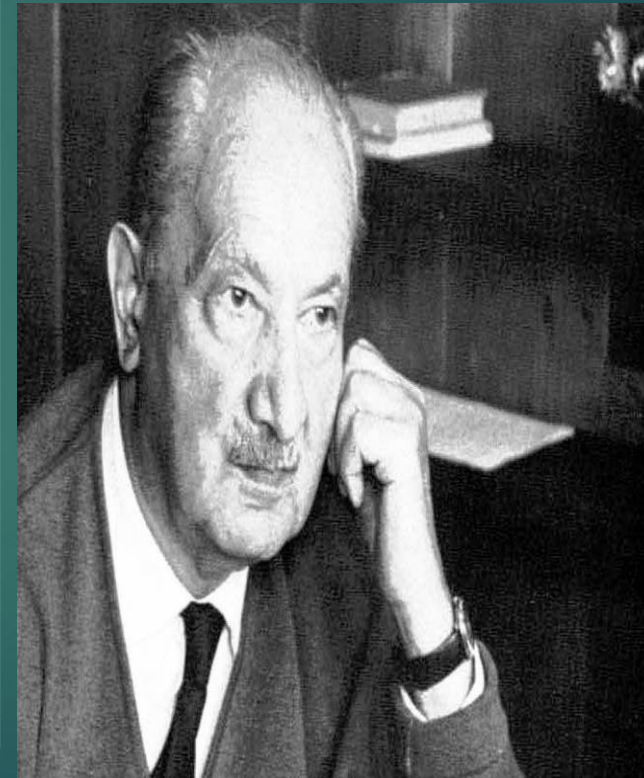
Most important work
of Heidegger



Original German
version



Heidegger



- ▶ Published in 1927, *Being and Time* is standardly hailed as one of the most significant texts in the canon of (what has come to be called) contemporary European (or Continental) Philosophy.
- ▶ (*Being and Time* was dedicated to Husserl.)
- ▶ It catapulted Heidegger to a position of international intellectual visibility and provided the philosophical impetus for a number of later programmes and ideas in the contemporary European tradition, including Sartre's existentialism, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, and Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction'.
- ▶ Moreover, *Being and Time*, and indeed Heidegger's philosophy in general, has been presented and engaged with by thinkers such as Dreyfus (e.g., 1990) and Rorty (e.g., 1991a, b) who work somewhere near the interface between the contemporary European and the analytic traditions.

- ▶ In 1933 Heidegger joined the Nazi Party and was elected Rector of Freiburg University, where, depending on whose account one believes, he either enthusiastically implemented the Nazi policy of bringing university education into line with Hitler's nauseating political programme (Pattison 2000) or he allowed that policy to be officially implemented while conducting a partially underground campaign of resistance to some of its details, especially its anti-Semitism .
- ▶ During the short period of his rectorship—he resigned in 1934—Heidegger gave a number of public speeches (including his inaugural rectoral address; see below) in which Nazi images plus occasional declarations of support for Hitler are integrated with the philosophical language of *Being and Time*.

- ▶ After 1934 Heidegger became increasingly distanced from Nazi politics. Although he didn't leave the Nazi party, he did attract some unwelcome attention from its enthusiasts.
- ▶ After the war, however, a university denazification committee at Freiburg investigated Heidegger and banned him from teaching, a right which he did not get back until 1949.

Being and Time

- ▶ *Being and Time* is a long and complex book. The reader is immediately struck by what Mulhall calls the “tortured intensity of [Heidegger’s] prose”.
- ▶ The linguistic constructions which involve hyphenations, unusual prefixes and uncommon suffixes—reveal the hidden meanings and resonances of ordinary talk.
- ▶ In any case, for many readers, the initially strange and difficult language of *Being and Time* is fully vindicated by the realization that Heidegger is struggling to say things for which our conventional terms and linguistic constructions are ultimately inadequate.
- ▶ Indeed, for some thinkers who have toiled in its wake, Heidegger’s language becomes *the* language of philosophy.

- ▶ Viewed from the perspective of Heidegger's own intentions, the work is incomplete. It was meant to have two parts, each of which was supposed to be divided into three divisions. What we have published under the title of *Being and Time* are the first two divisions of (the intended) part one.

- ▶ Consider some philosophical problems that will be familiar from introductory metaphysics classes: Does the table that I think I see before me exist? Does God exist? Does mind, conceived as an entity distinct from body, exist? These questions have the following form: does x (where x = some particular kind of thing) exist?
- ▶ Questions of this form presuppose that we already know what 'to exist' means. We typically don't even notice this presupposition. But Heidegger does.
- ▶ He raises the more fundamental question: what does 'to exist' *mean*?
- ▶ This is one way of asking what Heidegger calls the question of the meaning of Being, and *Being and Time* is an investigation into that question.

- ▶ Many of Heidegger's translators capitalize the word 'Being' (*Sein*) to mark the crucial distinction between Being and beings (entities).
- ▶ The question of the meaning of Being is concerned with what it is that makes beings intelligible as beings, and whatever that factor (Being) is, it is seemingly not itself simply another being among beings.
- ▶ For while Being is always the Being of some entity, Being is not itself some kind of higher-order being waiting to be discovered.

- ▶ According to Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being, and thus Being as such, has been forgotten by 'the tradition' (roughly, Western philosophy from Plato onwards).
- ▶ Heidegger means by this that the history of Western thought has failed to heed the ontological difference, and so has articulated Being precisely as a kind of ultimate being, as evidenced by a series of namings of Being, for example as idea, energeia, substance, monad or will to power.
- ▶ In this way Being *as such* has been forgotten.
- ▶ So Heidegger sets himself the task of recovering the question of the meaning of Being.

- ▶ Heidegger argues that we ordinarily encounter entities as (what he calls) *equipment*, that is, as being for certain sorts of tasks (cooking, writing, hair-care, and so on).
- ▶). Indeed we achieve our most primordial (closest) relationship with equipment not by looking at the entity in question, or by some detached intellectual or theoretical study of it, but rather by skillfully manipulating it in a hitch-free manner.
- ▶ Entities so encountered have their own distinctive kind of Being that Heidegger famously calls *readiness-to-hand*.

Equipmentality



- ▶ The less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific ‘manipulability’ of the hammer.
- ▶ The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call ‘readiness-to-hand’. (*Being and Time* 15: 98)

- ▶ Readiness-to-hand has a distinctive phenomenological signature. While engaged in hitch-free skilled activity, Dasein has no conscious experience of the items of equipment in use as *independent objects* (i.e., as the bearers of determinate properties that exist independently of the Dasein-centred context of action in which the equipmental entity is involved).
- ▶ Thus, while engaged in trouble-free hammering, the skilled carpenter has no conscious recognition of the hammer, the nails, or the work-bench, *in the way that one would if one simply stood back and thought about them*. Tools-in-use become phenomenologically transparent.

Collapse of the subject – object dichotomy

- ▶ Moreover, Heidegger claims, not only are the hammer, nails, and workbench in this way not part of the engaged carpenter's phenomenal world, neither, in a sense, is the carpenter.
- ▶ The carpenter becomes absorbed in his activity in such a way that he has no awareness of himself as a subject over and against a world of objects.
- ▶ Crucially, it does not follow from this analysis that Dasein's behaviour in such contexts is automatic, in the sense of there being no awareness present at all, but rather that the awareness that is present (what Heidegger calls *circumspection*) is non-subject-object in form.
- ▶ Phenomenologically speaking, then, there are no subjects and no objects; there is only the experience of the ongoing task (e.g., hammering).

Presence-at-hand

- ▶ Heidegger, then, denies that the categories of subject and object characterize our most basic way of encountering entities. He maintains, however, that they apply to a derivative kind of encounter. When Dasein engages in, for example, the practices of natural science, when sensing takes place purely in the service of reflective or philosophical contemplation, or when philosophers claim to have identified certain context-free metaphysical building blocks of the universe (e.g., points of pure extension, monads), the entities under study are phenomenologically removed from the settings of everyday equipmental practice and are thereby revealed as fully fledged independent objects, that is, as the bearers of certain context-general determinate or measurable properties (size in metres, weight in kilos etc.). Heidegger calls this mode of Being *presence-at-hand*.
- ▶ and he sometimes refers to present-at-hand entities as 'Things'.

- ▶ The final phenomenological category identified during the first phase of the existential analytic is what Heidegger calls *un-readiness-to-hand*.
- ▶ This mode of Being of entities emerges when skilled practical activity is disturbed by broken or malfunctioning equipment, discovered-to-be-missing equipment, or in-the-way equipment.
- ▶ When encountered as un-ready-to-hand, entities are no longer phenomenologically transparent. However, they are not yet the fully fledged objects of the present-at-hand, since their broken, malfunctioning, missing or obstructive status is defined relative to a particular equipmental context.

- The combination of two key passages illuminates this point:

First:

- ▶ “[The] presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand in this way is still not just a Thing which occurs somewhere. The damage to the equipment is still not a mere alteration of a Thing—not a change of properties which just occurs in something present-at-hand”. (*Being and Time* 16: 103)

And second:

- ▶ “When something cannot be used—when, for instance, a tool definitely refuses to work—it can be conspicuous only in and for dealings in which something is manipulated”. (*Being and Time* 68: 406)

- ▶ Thus a driver does not encounter a punctured tyre as a lump of rubber of measurable mass; she encounters it as a damaged item of equipment, that is, as the cause of a temporary interruption to her driving activity.
- ▶ With such disturbances to skilled activity, Dasein emerges as a practical problem solver whose context-embedded actions are directed at restoring smooth skilled activity.

Being-in-the-World

- ▶ What the existential analytic has given us so far is a phenomenological description of Dasein's within-the-world encounters with entities.
- ▶ Famously, Heidegger writes of Dasein as Being-in-the-world.
- ▶ Being-in-the-world is an essential characteristic of Dasein.

- ▶ “Being-in is not a ‘property’ which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and *without* which it could be just as well as it could be with it. It is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the ‘world’—a world with which he provides himself occasionally. Dasein is never ‘proximally’ an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only *because* Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is. This state of Being does not arise just because some entity is present-at-hand outside of Dasein and meets up with it. Such an entity can ‘meet up with’ Dasein only in so far as it can, of its own accord, show itself within a *world*.” (*Being and Time* 12: 84)

- ▶ As this passage makes clear, the Being-in dimension of Being-in-the-world cannot be thought of as a merely spatial relation.
- ▶ This is so since Dasein is never just present-at-hand within the world in the way demanded by that sort of spatial in-ness.
- ▶ Heidegger sometimes uses the term *dwelling* to capture the distinctive manner in which Dasein is in the world.
- ▶ To dwell in a house is not merely to be inside it spatially in the sense just canvassed. Rather, it is to belong there, to have a familiar place there. It is in this sense that Dasein is (essentially) in the world.

The Critique of Cartesianism

- ▶ Having completed what we might think of as the first phase of the existential analytic, Heidegger uses its results to launch an attack on one of the front-line representatives of the tradition, namely Descartes.
- ▶ The aim is to show that although the tradition takes theoretical knowledge to be primary, such knowledge (the prioritization of which is an aspect of the 'onticization' of Being mentioned earlier) presupposes the more fundamental openness to Being that Heidegger has identified as an essential characteristic of Dasein.
- ▶ According to Heidegger, Descartes presents the world to us "with its skin off" (*Being and Time* 20: 132), i.e., as a collection of present-at-hand entities to be encountered by subjects.

- ▶ The consequence of this prioritizing of the present-at-hand is that the subject needs to claw itself into a world of equipmental meaning by adding what Heidegger calls 'value-predicates' (context-dependent meanings) to the present-at-hand.
- ▶ In stark contrast, Heidegger's own view is that Dasein is in primary epistemic contact not with context-independent present-at-hand primitives (e.g., raw sense data, such as a 'pure' experience of a patch of red), to which context-dependent meaning would need to be added via value-predicates, but rather with equipment, the kind of entity whose mode of Being is readiness-to-hand and which therefore comes already laden with context-dependent significance.

- ▶ What we 'first' hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling... It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise'. The fact that motor-cycles and waggons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell proximally alongside 'sensations'; nor would it first have to give shape to the swirl of sensations to provide a springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a 'world'. Dasein, as essentially understanding, is proximally alongside what is understood. (*Being and Time* 34: 207)

- ▶ For Heidegger, then, we start not with the present-at-hand, moving to the ready-to-hand by adding value-predicates, but with the ready-to-hand, moving to the present-at-hand by stripping away the holistic networks of everyday equipmental meaning.
- ▶ . It seems clear, then, that our two positions are diametrically opposed to each other, but why should we favour Heidegger's framework over Descartes'? Heidegger's flagship argument here is that the systematic addition of value-predicates to present-at-hand primitives cannot transform our encounters with those objects into encounters with equipment. It comes in the following brief but dense passage:

- ▶ “Adding on value-predicates cannot tell us anything at all new about the Being of goods, but would merely presuppose again that goods have pure presence-at-hand as their kind of Being. Values would then be determinate characteristics which a thing possesses, and they would be present-at-hand” (*Being and Time* 21: 132).

Being-with

- ▶ Heidegger turns next to the question of “*who it is that Dasein is in its everydayness*” (*Being and Time*, Introduction to IV: 149).
- ▶ He rejects the idea of Dasein as a Cartesian ‘I-thing’ (the Cartesian thinking thing conceived as a substance), since once again this would be to think of Dasein as present-at-hand. In searching for an alternative answer, Heidegger observes that equipment is often revealed to us as being for the sake of (the lives and projects of) other Dasein.
- ▶ The boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a ‘boat which is strange to us’, it still is indicative of Others. The Others who are thus ‘encountered’ in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such ‘Things’ are encountered from out of a world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others—a world which is always mine too in advance. (*Being and Time* 26: 154)

- ▶ On the basis of such observations, Heidegger argues that to be Dasein at all means to Be-with: “So far as Dasein is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being” (*Being and Time* 26: 163).
- ▶ Being-with (*Mitsein*) is thus the a priori transcendental condition that makes it possible that Dasein can discover equipment in this Other-related fashion. And it's because Dasein has Being-with as one of its essential modes of Being that everyday Dasein can experience being alone. Being-with is thus the a priori transcendental condition for loneliness.
- ▶ It is important to understand what Heidegger means by ‘Others’, a term that he uses interchangeably with the more evocative ‘the “they”’

- ▶ “By ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too... By reason of this *with-like* Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others”. (*Being and Time* 26: 154–5)

References

- ▶ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>
- ▶ *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962 (first published in 1927).