



Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

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In Latin America and Europe, excluding, of course, the Soviet Union and her European satellites, one of the dominant contemporary philosophers is Heidegger. Heidegger's influence ranges widely over philosophers, theologians (including Paul Tillich), and certain psychotherapists.¹ In the English-speaking world, too, there are philosophers who regard Heidegger with as much respect as do his Continental and Latin-American admirers.

Heidegger was born in Messkirch, Germany. In his youth he received a thorough education in Thomistic philosophy. This may partially explain his philosophical preoccupation with "being," "non-being," and similar concepts.

In 1923, having served his apprenticeship at Freiburg — and solely on the strength of his lectures there — Heidegger was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Marburg, where, working at a furious pace, he wrote *Sein und Zeit*, Part I.² The original plan called for a book three times the length of Part I, but the project was never completed. In 1929, on Husserl's recommendation, Heidegger was appointed as Husserl's successor at Freiburg. He continued lecturing and publishing uninterruptedly until 1933, when, under the auspices of the Nazis, he was elected Rector of Freiburg University. In May 1933, he delivered his inaugural address, "Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität." Those familiar with the Germany of the thirties will recognize this address for what it is: an unconditional endorsement of Nazi ideology. It is reported that Heidegger regarded this as an unfortunate episode in his career.

Heidegger believes that the term "existentialist" does not apply to his philosophy. In "Existentialism as a Humanism,"³ Sartre attempts to give a popular account of existentialism. Reacting to this essay in his letter "On Humanism," Heidegger points out that Sartre formulates the basic principle of existentialism as "existence precedes essence." This, however, is a metaphysical statement because Sartre is using the words "existence" and "essence" in the manner of traditional metaphysics, which has been saying, since Plato, that essence (*essentia*) is prior to existence (*existentia*). But, Heidegger continues, the reverse of a metaphysical statement is another metaphysical statement and, like all metaphysical statements, Sartre's principle, too, is "oblivious of the truth of Being." Heidegger grants that "existentialism" is an apt label for what Sartre represents, but not for his own position. Heidegger is interested in Being. He approaches the problem of Being through the study of *Dasein*, Heidegger's word for human existence, "the being of what we ourselves are." But existence, which uniquely belongs to *Dasein*, is not the old *existentia*. This concept is translated as *presence* in *Being and Time*. Existence is an "existential," not a "category." Existentials are the basic features of *Dasein*. Categories are features of beings (what ordinarily we might call particular existing things). Categories never apply to *Dasein*, but only to non-*Dasein* which Heidegger divides into two segments, what is *Vorhanden* (present) and what is *Zuhanden* (at hand, usable, tool). For example, *Dasein*'s way of being-in is an existential. Non-*Dasein*'s way of being-in is a category (see below).

Heidegger's formal philosophical training began under Rickert and Windelband. From them Heidegger assimilated three convictions. First, that a thorough understanding of the

history of philosophy, beginning with the pre-Socratics, is essential for understanding what philosophy is about. Second, that the methods of inquiry and subject-matter of the natural sciences are radically distinct from those of the sciences of culture (*Geisteswissenschaften*), such as history which they defined as being the empathic understanding (*Verstehen*) of the actions and motives of men, individually and in the aggregate. Third, that philosophy is still another area of inquiry, with its own problems and methods, differing from natural science as well as from the sciences of culture. All of these convictions are reflected in Heidegger's mature work. The historical orientation is to some extent evident in his most influential work, *Sein und Zeit*, and very markedly in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.⁴ In the latter, in the light of his own unorthodox interpretations of Greek texts, Heidegger indulges in etymological speculations about the ways in which the pre-Socratics used certain key philosophical words. Heidegger proceeds from the assumption that the wisdom of the West is locked up in the fragments of the pre-Socratics.

That philosophy is neither a natural science nor a science of culture is an overt theme in Heidegger. He identifies philosophy with "fundamental ontology." He argues that philosophy must begin with the study of *Dasein*, "the being of what we ourselves are." Natural science studies "ontic" features (features belonging to particular existents). Hence it is necessarily other than fundamental ontology which is the study of the nature of being, starting with the being that *Dasein* is. Philosophy is also distinct from the science of culture. The way the latter inquire into man is quite different from the philosopher's investigations of the fundamental structure of *Dasein*. The scientist of culture wants to achieve an empathic understanding of human actions, motives, purposes, and so on. The ontologist, on the other hand, is to employ the phenomenological method, not the specialized method of *Verstehen*,⁵ and his initial task is to describe the ontology of *Dasein* or what we would call human existence. These contrasts are not merely incidental in Heidegger's philosophy. It is characteristic of his teachings that natural science and the sciences of culture must be built upon the secure foundations of fundamental ontology.

The teacher to whom Heidegger owes a great deal is Husserl. Heidegger began lecturing in Freiburg in the summer of 1915. Husserl came there as Professor of Philosophy in 1916. He had already published his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* in which the phenomenology programed in *The Idea of Phenomenology* was being worked out in more detail. This phase of Husserl's phenomenology greatly influenced Heidegger's distinctive philosophical style. However, as is usual with pupils who become masters in their own right, Heidegger eventually modified Husserl's phenomenology. Section 7 of *Being and Time* is entitled "The Phenomenological Method of Investigation." "The problem of ontology," Heidegger writes, "is to bring out into relief the being of entities, and to explain that being." He adds that the proper method for dealing with this problem is the phenomenological. The phenomenological method "is not concerned with characterizing the *what* of objects of philosophical inquiry, but rather the *how* of the inquiry itself." Husserl, as we saw earlier, identifies the objects of philosophical inquiry with intentionally in-existent essences. Accordingly, the phenomenological *method* itself has to be described in terms of objects of a single generic type. Heidegger refuses so to restrict the phenomenological method. He also differs from Husserl in that the various stages of Husserlian "reduction" are absent from Heidegger's conception of phenomenology.

In this connection we should add that some of Heidegger's sympathetic readers look upon his positive conception of phenomenology as the revealing of the being of an entity, what it really is. This is what Heidegger is trying to do in *Sein und Zeit*, not to give formal arguments, but simply to reveal what man is, not by arguments but by relevant and penetrating descriptions of care, death, conscience, time and other basic aspects of human existence. This suggests an interesting comparison between Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

With appropriate substitutions, Professor Wild's remarks about Heidegger can be plausibly applied to Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein the positive contribution of philosophy consists in ridding us of conceptual confusions not by the sorts of arguments we find characteristically in old-fashioned metaphysicians, for example, McTaggart, who propound theses in the manner of scientific hypotheses and think that they prove them by deductive arguments, but rather by relevant and penetrating descriptions of the place in the "language-game" of basic and troublesome concepts, for example, language, private language, meaning, mental concepts such as pain, sensation, intention, and so on. This is not to say that there are no profound differences between Heidegger's existential phenomenology and Wittgenstein's "therapeutic" analyses. The differences are enormous. Heidegger's main concerns are death, care, conscience, authenticity, and man's "historicity." Wittgenstein's analyses are of pain, language, meaning, private language, and so on. In short, Heidegger's central concerns are basically related to traditionally ethical, religious, and historical interests. Wittgenstein's, on the other hand, are basically related to traditionally logical, semantical, and epistemological problems. Further, whereas Heidegger invites us to "look" at extralinguistic "entities," Wittgenstein asks that we "look" at the ways in which language does its everyday work. Notwithstanding these differences, however, Heidegger and Wittgenstein in their different ways are opposed to traditional metaphysics.

Heidegger's admirers may find it inappropriate to read him as sometimes making conceptual points (points about the logic of discourse) in support of his phenomenological "insights." However, such a way of interpreting him may at least have one merit: it may help to establish communication between the "existentialists" and the English-speaking analytic philosophers, particularly those who have learned from Wittgenstein. If it is true that the "existentialists" are impatient with conceptual analysis, it is certainly true that the analysts take that sort of analysis as the essence of philosophizing. Unless Heidegger can be read at certain places as offering conceptual analyses in support of his "descriptions" — and I think he can be so read without the slightest distortion — no analytic philosopher will be interested in his work.

It was pointed out earlier that the "transcendental-phenomenological idealism" of Husserl is a kind of subjective idealism. The ego-centered subjectivism of Husserl's "idealism" has been charged with solipsism. Husserl argues that he can escape the charge (see his "Philosophy and Anthropology" δ). Heidegger, too, regards as central the problems concerning "the self," "the other," "the world," and their interconnections. But he offers an altogether different solution. Husserl rejects Descartes's formulation of the problem of knowledge because of its paradoxical character. But he adopts the subjectivism of the Cartesian method of doubt, and is eventually led into subjective idealism. Heidegger rejects the subjectivism itself. From his description of the necessary though not sufficient essential features of *Dasein* it is supposed to follow that both Husserl and Descartes are fundamentally confused, in spite of differences in detail. The alleged confusion common to both is that they take the subject-object (and correlative private-public) distinction to be fundamental rather than derivative. This supposedly false assumption leads them to pose as a problem the autonomous (ego-independent) existence of the "objective," "public," "external" world.

Heidegger has an argument that he regards as conclusive against anyone who thinks there is a need to prove the autonomous existence of the world, including the bodies and other minds presumed to be populating it (Descartes). It also applies to anyone who thinks, or thinks he can prove, that transcendental subjectivity is the only autonomous entity, all else being existentially dependent upon it (Husserl). The argument is also aimed at Kant whom, for all his subtleties, Heidegger regards as essentially a Cartesian. The argument is in Section 43 of *Being and Time*. It is as follows: any proof of the ego-independent reality

of the external world presupposes what is to be proved. To whom are we to prove that there is an external world? This is the crucial question that is not asked, says Heidegger. The answer must be that we are to prove it to *Dasein*, for it and nothing else is the ontological reality we normally know as a man. But it is a necessary although not sufficient feature of *Dasein* that it is in-the-world. We presuppose what we are to prove, for we are to prove to *Dasein*, which necessarily is in-the-world, that there is a world for it to be in.

The argument is valid formally. But Heidegger is mistaken in thinking that it is conclusive against the opponents he singles out. The crucial premise is: for the being of *Dasein* it is necessary though not sufficient that it be in-the-world. One may construe the first 175 pages of *Being and Time* as a detailed presentation of considerations in support of this premise and as an explanation of its meaning. The discussion is minute and presented in an idiom deliberately invented for the purpose by Heidegger. The forbidding unfamiliarity of the language and the sustained piling up of point upon point make it very hard to give an adequate summary of Heidegger's reasons for believing that his theory of man as being-in-the-world is true. All this makes the evaluation of the argument difficult, but perhaps not impossible.

In Section 12 of *Being and Time* we find the following sample of the reasoning Heidegger provides in support of his theory of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world:

Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of *Dasein's* Being; it is an *existentiale* [*Existenzial*], So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) "in" an entity which is present-at-hand. Nor does the term "Being-in" mean a spatial "in-one-another-ness" of things present-at-hand, any more than the word "in" originally signifies a spatial relationship of this kind. "In" is derived from "*innan*," "to reside," "*habitare*," "to dwell" [*sich aufhalten*]. "An" signifies "I am accustomed," "I am familiar with," "I take care of something." It has the signification of "*colo*" in the senses of "*habito*" and "*diligo*." The entity to which Being-in in this signification belongs is one which we have characterized in that entity which in each case I myself am [*bin*]. The expression "*bin*" is connected with "*bei*," and so "*ich bin*" ["I am"] means in its turn "I reside" or "dwell alongside" the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. "Being [*Sein*], as the infinitive of "*ich bin*" (that is to say, when it is understood as an *existentiale*), signifies "to reside alongside . . .," "to be familiar with. . . ." "Being-in" is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of *Dasein*, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.

In these passages Heidegger is contrasting two sorts of being-in. First, there is the spatial being-in of one body in another. Then there is the being-in of a man. A man may be at home in the world; or he may be in the Army. This second way of being-in is not defined in spatial terms, although it may manifest itself ontically (from the point of view of the positive sciences) in spatial ways as well. My being in the Army, for instance, is not defined in terms of my bodily presence in a definite material object. My being in the Army may manifest itself by my bodily presence in a particular Army unit. But I may also be in the Army although I am not in uniform and am bodily absent from every particular Army unit. My being-in-the-Army is thus not essentially tied to my body's being spatially related to other bodies. The second way of being-in uniquely and necessarily belongs to *Dasein*, says Heidegger: "Being-in . . . is a state of *Dasein's* being . . . 'Being-in' is . . . the formal existential expression for the Being of *Dasein*."

Heidegger supports the conclusion by reference to the following considerations: Only a man can dwell, reside, frequent, cultivate. Only a man can use the personal pronoun "I":

any locution prefaced by “I” logically implies that the subject is a person, not a brute or an inanimate object. So that even in the case of such a word as “inhabit” and a locution such as “take care of,” which can be used in sentences about brutes (Horses and cows inhabit the earth; Lions take care of their cubs), there are contexts in which these expressions characterize human activities only (I inhabit a region famous for its wines; I take care of my flowers). Moreover, “I am” is not normally a complete statement. It is normally elliptical for “I am. . . .” What is more, “I am. . . .” implies “I am alive,” “I am in the world” (I am not in a void but in some sort of environment). To be is to be in commerce with, to be immersed in, an environment (*Umwelt*).

These are perfectly valid logical points, provided that the sentences in question are being employed in their ordinary sense. In ordinary discourse, “I am in an environment” entails “There exists an environment,” and this says that there exists a reality distinct from, and existentially independent of, the ego. But the Cartesian can add; “granted that in ordinary discourse the above entailments hold.” The “critical” philosopher, however, wants to examine the claim that the usual implications of talk about an environment are warranted by the nature of things. The claim that there is an environment is a perceptual claim, and perceptual judgment depend upon observation. The familiar Cartesian move at this point is the dream argument. How can I know that I am not dreaming an environment? Heidegger’s linguistic points so far do not show any fallacy in the dream argument. Thus, contrary to Heidegger’s own estimate, *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world leaves the problem of the “external world” where it was. For all we know yet, the environment implied by “I am. . . .” may be identical with the contents of the Cartesian *cogitationes* which, if Descartes is right, could occur as events in a dream and, if Husserl is right, are the acts of the transcendental ego. We have as yet no proof that it is in principle impossible to begin with an isolated ego.

Let us then examine another possible line of argument to see whether the analysis of being-in-the-world has the implications Heidegger thinks it does. A defining feature of *Dasein*, says Heidegger, is Care (*Sorge*). This is neither a psychological nor an emotional state. Care is inseparable from *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world. Care is *Dasein*’s attentive projection of itself; to think, to desire, to plan, to wield instruments are all specific modes of care. One is tempted to attribute to Heidegger the point that all these care-ful activities and attitudes presuppose a world of objects. Otherwise there would be no way of distinguishing, as we do, wielding an instrument from imagining that we wield it or wishing that we could, or pretending that we are wielding it. But this sounds very much like a point Gilbert Ryle might make and I am reluctant to suggest that Heidegger philosophizes in the manner of Ryle (or vice versa). Moreover, even supposing that something similar to the Rylean point is here intended, the question remains as to the status of these objects. There is no doubt that Descartes recognizes that there are conceptual distinctions among waking, dreaming, pretending, and the like. And so do all subjective idealists. But there are two issues here. One concerns the manner in which the distinction is drawn among waking, dreaming, pretending, and their respective objects. In particular, once again we have to face Descartes’s challenge to provide a way of distinguishing, in the first person singular, dreaming from waking. The argument under discussion does not address itself to this challenge. Nor does it prove that even if that challenge is met, the distinction between the veridical and the illusory must not be drawn as Berkeley, for instance, attempts to draw it. Why cannot the objects of human concern or care be as Berkeley conceives them to be: systematic bundles of mind-dependent “ideas”?

The second issue is the more fundamental. It has to do with the problem of “privacy” and “publicity.” Wittgenstein’s attack on private language relates precisely to this issue. The attack is an argument against Cartesianism. By “Cartesianism” we mean the view that

takes it for granted that first person (“subjective, “private”) certainties are unproblematic. The problematic is the “public” world (and its “public” language). To render the “public” world unproblematic, we need, on this view, to reconstruct it from “private” elements. Wittgenstein’s outline of the private language argument strongly suggests that he reverses the Cartesian assumption. For him the problematic is the “private”; it is the “private” that has to be explained in terms of the “public.” This is the point that brings us back to Heidegger. It may be that both Descartes and Wittgenstein are wrong. They could be wrong if “private” and “public” were “polar” concepts, like “odd” and “even,” which would mean that they are clear together and to the same degree. Or, it may be that they are wrong for the reason that Heidegger may be trying to get at when he proposes his theory of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, the hyphens indicating organic unity, “ontological” inseparability. This would imply that the “private-public” dichotomy is derivative, and it is so in a manner that makes both the Cartesian and the opposing Wittgensteinian assumption philosophically irrelevant. The analytic philosopher would certainly agree that a central problem for philosophy, if not the central problem, is to become clear about the “private-public” distinction. Consistent with this, he would agree that insofar as Heidegger’s discussion of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world relates to this issue, it is philosophically serious and central. But if there is a clear and instructive answer in Heidegger’s discussion, it has yet to be discovered.

I shall conclude with a brief discussion of Heidegger’s analysis of death, found in Sections 46-53 of *Being and Time* and reprinted below. Not only is this an interesting analysis of death but it also adds significant points about *Dasein*’s mode of being-in-the-world. The points are that *Dasein* is possibility, and as such temporally spread out in a field, it is ahead of itself in a field, and its relation to death shows that nothingness or negativity is of the essence of *Dasein*.

Death, *Dasein*’s transition to no-longer-being-there, rules out for *Dasein* the possibility of experiencing this transition and understanding it as experienced. This implies that *Dasein* can never know its own wholeness. It is never known to itself as something finished. To its very essence belongs a not-yet, so that *Dasein* is essentially a field of possibilities spread out in time. Moreover, *Dasein*, in correctly grasping its relation to its own death, recognizes for the first time that non-being, nothingness, is as much a part of its being as is its understanding of itself as being-in-the-world. This understanding of *Dasein*’s essential involvement in nothingness is possible, says Heidegger, because anxiety (*Angst*), which is a mode of feeling, is experienced by *Dasein*. Anxiety is not the same as fear. Fear is of specific things. Anxiety has no “objects.” It underlies what ontically manifests itself as neurotic anxiety, malaise or a feeling of estrangement, of not belonging. Being an ontological feature of *Dasein*, anxiety is an existential concept, not a psychological category. In anxiety, says Heidegger, *Dasein* stands before the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence. Being-onto-death is essentially anxiety.

Heidegger’s analysis of death assumes that death is not what Plato and his Christian disciples took it to be: the separation of the mortal body from the immortal soul. Death is the absolute end, the absolute annihilation, the drop into nothingness. The “world” in which being-in-the-world is possible is a world in which God has been pronounced dead. Man is thrown (*geworfen*) into the world without any purpose or meaning, and in the very act of being so thrown he is also given over to death. Neither his coming nor his going has any sense. That all this is assumed about death is evident from Heidegger’s phenomenological account. He says that death rules out for *Dasein* the possibility of experiencing its own death and understanding it as experienced. Clearly, Heidegger cannot know this to be a fact on the basis of a phenomenological experience of death. What he says rules this out. What remains is a description of Heidegger’s own conception of death, and that conception simply assumes the falsity of the Platonic-Christian conception. But we need an argument

to the effect that the Platonic-Christian alternative is false. Otherwise we have only an unresolved dispute as to what death is.

There are familiar elements in Heidegger's conception of death, thrownness, and purposelessness. Except for the special terminology, his is essentially the view of human destiny propounded by ancient atomistic materialism and modern secularism. An example of the modern secular view is "A Free Man's Worship," an essay Bertrand Russell wrote when he was a young man. Russell agrees with Heidegger that human birth and death are purposeless from a cosmic point of view; and Russell, too, thinks of death as the absolute finish. Whereas Heidegger says that man's relation with death makes anxiety an existential feature of *Dasein*, Russell denies that anything like a feeling of anxiety in the face of the inevitability of death is either necessary or appropriate. Heidegger, on the other hand, insists that to say this sort of thing is to be "inauthentic," the implication of "inauthentic" being inappropriate to the facts themselves. But between Heidegger and Russell there is agreement as to the "facts": man is a purposeless being-unto-death. How now do we decide which of the two has the appropriate response to the "facts" — Russell who denies or Heidegger who asserts that we do, and ought to, feel anxiety in the face of death? To ask this question is to imply that Heidegger has not shown how this dispute is to be resolved.

References

1. See R. May, E. Angel, H. F. Ellenberger (eds.), *Existence*, New York, Basic Books, 1958.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Part I, in *fahrbuch für Philosophic und Phanomenologische Forschung*, Vol. 8, 1927; also separately, Halle, Niemeyer Verlag, 1927. English translation by J. Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, entitled *Being and Time*, New York, Harper & Row, 1962.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism as a Humanism," 1927.
4. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, R. Manheim (trans.), New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.
5. For an instructive discussion of Verstehen and a bibliography of basic sources, see T. Abel, "The Operation called Verstehen," *American Journal of Sociology*, 54 (1958), reprinted in H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, New York, Appleton, 1953.
6. Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy and Anthropology," translated in R. M. Chisholm (ed.), *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, New York, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960.

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