

PART ONE



What Is the Question?

INTRODUCTORY

The main body of *Being and Time* is preceded by two expository chapters in which Heidegger explains the question of being as it is to be raised and worked out in this fundamental inquiry. Everything that belongs to Heidegger's question—its motive and aim, the method of the investigation, and the conclusions at which it will arrive—is set out in these two chapters with meticulous care and a masterliness that can only be appreciated after much study. And yet, twenty and thirty years after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger still finds himself obliged to correct misinterpretations of his fundamental work and to point out confusions between his question of being and that raised by traditional ontology.¹

The difficulty of grasping a radically new problem is, of course, well known to students of philosophy. In addition, Heidegger presents his readers with unusual difficulties, the greatest of which is the fragmentary state of *Being and Time* itself. Divisions One and Two of Part I were published in 1927 as the beginning of a much larger work, consisting of two parts or halves, each containing three divisions. Heidegger intended to conclude his own investigations of the problem of being in Division Three, Part I, while the whole of Part II was to have

been a radical critique of traditional ontology. Of this monumental work, the originally published two divisions are all we have. Perhaps nothing can show the stature of *Being and Time* more impressively than the fact that, in spite of its unfinished state, it is one of those rare works whose importance can in no way be measured or foreseen.

Between 1927 and 1960 Heidegger published numerous other works, some of which clearly belonged to Part II of *Being and Time* (see especially *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*). On the whole, it may be said that, except for a treatise on Aristotle's interpretation of time, the ground assigned to Part II has been fully covered by Heidegger, although not in the way in which it had been originally planned. In the preface to the seventh German edition of *Sein und Zeit* (1953), Heidegger announced that the second half would definitely not be added to the work.

This announcement still left open the question of the crucially important Division Three of Part I, which was to have borne the suggestive subtitle of "Zeit und Sein" ("Time and Being"). The absence of this division contributed more than any other single factor to the difficulty of the whole treatise. As far as one can judge, it was to have brought not only the solution of Heidegger's final problem, but also the explicit and detailed answer to what might be called his penultimate question. The absence of two sets of answers from *Sein und Zeit* makes its central problem extremely difficult to grasp and even leaves it open to doubt which of the questions raised by Heidegger is the more fundamental.

In 1961, however, Heidegger delivered a lecture on "Zeit und Sein" at the University of Kiel, which was subsequently broadcast in Germany. Despite this, great efforts are demanded from the reader to grasp the central theme of *Being and Time*. Among its many difficulties, the following call for mention here.

First, there is the special use of the word *Sinn* (sense, or meaning), which enters importantly into Heidegger's problem as it is formulated in *Sein und Zeit*. This word is confusing and even positively misleading to readers who are unfamiliar with phenomenology. This difficulty, however, is comparatively easy to overcome.

Second, there is the confusion between Heidegger's and the metaphysical question of being. This difficulty is recurrent and not at all easy to overcome.

Third, the failure to see that there is any difficulty at all. Our familiarity with, and constant use of, the *is* and *am* and *to be*, make it incomprehensible that anyone should find our ability to understand these words astonishing and problematic. This difficulty is chronic and

hardest to overcome, because it is not primarily a matter of intellect and thinking. A. E. Housman is reported to have said that the only way in which he could recognize great poetry was by a certain feeling in his stomach. It might equally well be said that the first time one truly understands Heidegger's questions one knows it by a cold shiver running down one's spine.

These difficulties will be specially kept in view in the exposition of Heidegger's central theme, which will be developed as follows.

In sections 1 and 2 the precise meaning of Heidegger's question is explained and illuminated by a discussion of the aims set in Part I of *Being and Time*.

Section 3. A brief summary is given of Heidegger's interpretation of the question of being as it has been asked and worked out in traditional philosophy, in contrast to his own question.

Section 4. The unique nature of the concept of being, and the attempted solutions of the problem of its unity, most notably by Aristotle, are discussed. This leads to a consideration of Heidegger's own attempt to solve the same problem.

Section 5. The concrete working out of Heidegger's problem in *Being and Time* is the main subject. The difficulties inherent in the problem itself are discussed, concluding with a brief indication of the place of *Being and Time* in Heidegger's thought as a whole.