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Heidegger's Project

In his 1935 summer semester lecture course at the University of Freiburg, entitled "Introduction to Metaphysics," Heidegger asks a seemingly innocuous question: "How does it stand with being?," or, translated in a colloquial sense: "How's it going with being?" (IM, 41)[1] The answer is: not well. Today, humankind is consumed by an instrumental relationship with beings; we have closed off other world-views, forcing all beings—including humans—to show up or reveal themselves in only one way, as objects to be efficiently manipulated and controlled. The prognosis, according to Heidegger, is bleak. In an oft-quoted passage from these lectures, he gives his assessment:

> The spiritual decline of the earth has progressed so far that people are in danger of losing their last spiritual strength, the strength that makes it possible even to see the decline and to appraise it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with cultural pessimism—nor with any optimism either, of course; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings into a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free has already reached such proportions throughout the whole earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have become laughable. (IM, 40–41)

Heidegger refers to this modern predicament as "nihilism." Nihilism shows itself when the "question of being" (*Seinsfrage*) is forgotten and humankind is concerned with the world only as a vast storehouse of beings to be used. Nihilism, on this view, is the "spiritual decline of the earth," where human beings "have long since fallen out of being, without knowing it" (IM, 39). The culprit for this spiritual decline is the metaphysical worldview itself.

Heidegger contends that the history of Western philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, has failed to carry out the proper task of thinking. Philosophy has occupied itself only with beings. It has, therefore, failed to ask the "question of being," a question that asks *how* and *why* beings show up *as* they do. One of the fundamental goals of Heidegger's project, in this regard, is to dismantle a core assumption in the Western philosophical tradition, an assumption that Jacques Derrida will later call the "metaphysics of presence"[2] and Dorothea Frede will call "substance ontology."[3] The history of metaphysics, as Heidegger puts it, is

> the treatment of the meaning of being as *parousia* or *ousia*, which signifies in ontologico-Temporal terms, "presence" (*Anwesenheit*). Entities are grasped in their being as "presence," that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time—the "*Present*" (*Gegenwart*). (BT, 47)

Based on this view, the being of anything that exists, including humans, must be understood in terms of enduring presence, a presence that is constant or remains the same through any change in properties. The metaphysical tradition, therefore, understands the being of beings as "substance," referring to the basic, underlying "what-ness" that is unchangeable and essential to all beings as beings.[4] In short, metaphysics is a type of reflection that is "concerned with the essence of *what is*" (AWP, 115). Throughout Western history, this metaphysical assumption prevailed, where substance has been interpreted in different epochs in terms of *eidos* (Plato), *energeia* (Aristotle), *ens creatum* by God (Christendom), *res cogitans/res extensa* (Descartes), and, today, as a material resource, a "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) that can be mastered and controlled by calculative reason (OWA, 201).

As an area of philosophical inquiry, Heidegger sees nothing inherently wrong with metaphysics. The problem is that the metaphysical worldview has become so dominant that it "drives out every other possibility of revealing" (QCT, 27). Consequently, the metaphysical worldview becomes absolute; it fails to recognize that it is merely one of many possible interpretations of the world. Although metaphysics is the prevailing historical interpretation, it has become tyrannical in the modern age, preventing any other possible horizon of disclosure. According to Heidegger, this concealment of other modes of disclosure is a "double-concealment." First, metaphysics forces all things to be contained within a substance-oriented worldview. Second, metaphysics offers itself as the only possible worldview. As a conse-

quence, beings reveal themselves only in terms of substance, and this orientation culminates in the technological age, where our relation with the world has become purely instrumental, where beings show up exclusively as resources at our disposal. But the expansion of the metaphysical worldview does not end with the Cartesian paradigm of man as subject mastering and controlling objects in the world. Man too is sucked into the vast system of objects via the totalizing effects of modern technology. Heidegger asks, "Does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing reserve?" The answer is *yes*, as a "human resource" (QCT, 18).

Dismantling Cartesian Metaphysics

Heidegger's diagnosis of the oblivion of being helps us understand his motivation for overcoming the subject/object metaphysics that "pervades all the problems of modern philosophy" (BP, 124). For Heidegger, this requires engaging the thought of René Descartes, the progenitor of this bifurcated worldview. Descartes's project was to systematically doubt the veracity of every thought and every commonsense experience in order to ground science on a foundation of absolute certainty. This method of radical doubt establishes the *res cogitans* as indubitable. The free, thinking "subject" becomes the self-enclosed first ground from which "objects" of experience can be observed. From this standpoint, the external world comes to be understood as a system of causally determined parts. Beings are no longer experienced in terms of historically embedded social meanings and values but in terms of brute, mechanistic causal relations that can be objectively researched, measured, and predicted based on scientific principles.

Heidegger was particularly troubled by Descartes's project, because it regarded humans as essentially free "individuals," as self-contained subjects with no roots to a shared, historical lifeworld. Modern man becomes the disengaged master of all things. As a consequence, the world shows up in only one way—as a storehouse of objects waiting to be manipulated by the subject. Max Weber warned of the dangers of this Cartesian worldview in his 1918 speech "Science as a Vocation" by challenging Germany's growing commitment to instrumental reason. For Weber, this "increasing intellectualization and rationalization . . . means that there are no more mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is *disenchanted*."[5] Weber claims that scientific "progress" has no meaning beyond the

"purely practical and technical." Scientific progress is endless and ulti-
mately meaningless in terms of the existential questions that are most
important: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" "How shall
we arrange our lives?" "What is the meaning of our own death?"[6] In
the modern age, life and death have no meaning. Weber writes:

> [They have] none because the individual life of civilized
> man, placed in an infinite "progress," according to its own
> imminent meaning, should never come to an end; for there is
> always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march
> of progress. . . . Because death is meaningless, civilized life
> as such is meaningless; by its very "progressiveness" it
> gives death the imprint of meaninglessness.[7]

Heidegger agrees with Weber's assessment of modern civiliza-
tion as a disenchanted "iron cage." Scientific progress, interpreted in
terms of instrumental mastery of all things, has stripped the mystery,
the existential meaning and value, from life and has forgotten death
as the "ultimate instance" of life. Yet Heidegger wants to go farther
than Weber. He seeks to "de-structure" the modern understanding of
being itself in order to uncover its origins and recover a more original,
authentic understanding of being that has been distorted and concealed
by our current objectifying tradition.

Heidegger begins his de-structuring of the history of metaphysics
by questioning the traditional interpretation of human being, which
has long been regarded as *a* being: "a rational animal, an *ego cogito*, a
subject, the 'I,' spirit, person, [and so forth]." "But these [beings]," says
Heidegger, "remain uninterrogated as to their being and its structure,
in accordance with the thoroughgoing way in which the question of
being has been neglected" (BT, 44). What is neglected in traditional
metaphysics is an inquiry into human existence itself, into the being
of human beings. In his 1927 Marburg lectures, "The Basic Problems
of Phenomenology," Heidegger suggests that Cartesian metaphysics
presupposes this existential inquiry and for this reason "continues to
work with the ancient metaphysical problems and thus, along with
everything new, still remains within the tradition" (BP, 124). Modern
philosophy, in this regard, fails to ask: What is the unique *way of
being* of the subject?

> It will be expected that ontology now takes the subject as
> the exemplary entity and interprets the concept of being by
> looking at the mode of being of the subject—that henceforth

the subject's *way of being* becomes an ontological problem. But this is precisely what does not happen. (BP, 123)

Heidegger clarifies this point in *Being and Time* when he writes:

With the cogito sum Descartes claims to prepare a new and secure foundation for philosophy. But what he leaves undetermined in this "radical" beginning is the manner of being of the *res cogitans*, more precisely, the meaning of being of the "sum." (BT, 46)

Heidegger attempts to retrieve the forgotten question of being by investigating that being that is already concerned for its being, namely, humans. Heidegger insists that, prior to any theoretical speculation about beings, we exist, a concerned existence that makes it possible to theorize in the first place. "The existential nature of man," says Heidegger, "is the reason why man can represent beings as such, and why he can be conscious of them. All consciousness presupposes . . . existence as the essential of man."[8] In the course of our workaday lives, we already embody a tacit concern for things, and this concern is mediated by a particular sociohistorical context. Thus Heidegger turns his attention to a way of being more primordial than detached theorizing, which is disclosed in our average everyday practices, our "being-in-the-world" (*In-der-Welt-sein*).

Dasein and Everydayness

Heidegger employs the method of "phenomenology" in order to give an account of our everyday way of being. Phenomenology attempts to describe how things initially show themselves immediately and directly in the course of our "lived-experience" (*Er-lebnis*). This self-showing is pretheoretical or "originary," thus the discoveries of phenomenology are prior to the objective properties and characteristics that are imposed on things by scientific theories or commonsense assumptions. Because it is an original return to the self-showing of things, phenomenology is essentially distinct from the other sciences in that it is not an explanatory "proof." "It says nothing about the material content of the thematic object of science, but speaks only . . . of *how*, the way in which something is" (HCT, 85). Phenomenology, in this regard, is not an explanation; rather, it signifies a method that describes the way human beings encounter things "proximally and for the most part,"

as they are revealed in everyday, concrete situations. Employing the phenomenological method, Heidegger begins by describing his own "average everyday" involvements. He explains:

> We must choose such a way of access and such a kind of interpretation that this entity can show itself in itself and from itself [*an ihm selbst von ihm selbst her*]. And this means that it is to be shown as it is *proximally and for the most part*—in its *average everydayness*. (BT, 37–38)

By examining his own "factical" life in this manner, Heidegger discovers that he is "always already" (*immer schon*) involved in the question of being in a specific, concrete way. On Heidegger's view, being is always already an issue for me, and I embody a unique understanding of being in the context of my everyday practices. Hence, the question of being starts with an inquiry into my own particular understanding of being, what Heidegger calls "existentiell" (*existenziell*) understanding. "The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads along this way we call *existentiell*" (BT, 33). Heidegger identifies this phenomenological starting point early on in his career. For instance, in 1921 he writes:

> I work concretely and factically from my "I am"—from my spiritual and overall factical origin—milieu—contexts of life—and from that which is accessible to me as living experience—wherein I live—this facticity, as existentiell, is no mere blind Dasein—it lies therewith in existence—that means, however that I live—this "I must" of which one talks—with this facticity of Being-so.[9]

The *existentiell* inquiry into my own particular understanding of being is to be distinguished from Heidegger's fundamental aim, namely, the "existential" (*existenzial*) inquiry into the essential structures (*Existentialia*) of any understanding of being whatsoever. I will return to this distinction later, but first we must give a more detailed account of what Heidegger means by human being (*Dasein*).

Heidegger departs from the metaphysical tradition by referring to human being not in terms of *a* being, a spirit, a subject, or material body but as Dasein, a unique self-interpreting, self-understanding *way of being*. In this regard, Heidegger is not concerned with the objective

"what-ness" of humans. In his 1925 Marburg lecture course, entitled "Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time," he explains:

> Whether [Dasein] "is composed of" the physical, psychic, and spiritual and how these realities are to be determined is here left completely unquestioned. We place ourselves in principle outside of these experiential and interrogative horizons outlined by the definition of the most customary name for this entity: *homo animal rational*. What is to be determined is not an outward appearance of this entity but from the outset and throughout *its way to be*, not the what of that of which it is composed but the *how of its being and the characters of this how.* (HCT, 154)

Thus the inquiry into the question of being begins by describing human existence as we are everyday and for the most part, as we are already involved with workaday tools and engaged in a meaningful nexus of discursive practices, institutions, and habits. I am "thrown" (*geworfen*) into this meaningful web of relations by my concrete activity, prior to detached theorizing about the properties of objects. In this regard, the essence of Dasein is not to be found in the enduring properties or characteristics of humans. Rather, "*the essence of Dasein lies in its existence*" (BT, 67).

Existence, of course, is not to be understood in the traditional sense, in terms of static, objective "presence" (*Anwesenheit*). Existence is the dynamic temporal "movement" (*Bewegung*) or "happening" (*Geschehen*) of an understanding of being that unfolds in a concrete historical world. Dasein *is* this happening of understanding, and existence refers to the unique way that a human being understands or interprets his or her life within a shared, sociohistorical context. Thus "to *exist* is essentially . . . to *understand*" (BP, 276, emphasis added). I *am*, in the course of my everyday social activity, what I understand or interpret myself to be.[10] I have a pretheoretical or "preontological" understanding of a background of social practices.[11] I am not born with this understanding; I "grow" into it through a process of socialization, whereby I acquire the ability to interpret myself, to "take a stand" on my life (BT, 41).[12] My acts and practices, in this regard, take place within a meaningful public space or "clearing" (*Lichtung*) on the basis of which I make sense of my life and things show up for me *as* the kinds of things that they are. This context "governs" any possible interpretation that I can have of myself (HCT, 246).

Interpreting Dasein in terms of activity or movement allows us to make some preliminary remarks on the role of the body in Heidegger's project. The conception of the body as understood by mainstream Anglophone philosophy has been handed down to us from Cartesian and empiricist epistemologies, where human being is understood in terms of objective matter, of static corporeal substance (*res extensa*). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes it clear that one cannot think of Dasein in this way, "as a being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' an entity that is present-at-hand" (BT, 79). This remark can be clarified by distinguishing between two senses of the body in the German language, the quantifiable "material body" (*Körper*) and the "lived-body" (*Leib*). The lived-body is not a reference to a Cartesian/Newtonian body, not a corporeal mass with measurable attributes. According to the Cartesian interpretation, bodies are defined in terms of (1) measurable weight, mass, and shape, (2) occupying a specific spatial-temporal location, and (3) having determinate boundaries.[13] Thus rocks, trees, cultural artifacts, and human beings are all instances of *Körper*, but this definition does not help us understand how humans live as embodied agents in the world. The objectifying, quantifiable approach to understanding the body is itself derived from the everyday experiences of the lived-body. In his 1936–1937 Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger articulates his rejection of the dominant naturalistic interpretation of the human body in the following way.

> We do not "have" a body in the way we carry a knife in a sheath. Neither is the body a natural body that merely accompanies us and which we can establish, expressly or not, as being also "at hand." We do not "have" a body; rather, we "are" bodily. . . . Our being embodied is essentially other than merely being encumbered with an organism. Most of what we know from the natural sciences about the body and the way it embodies are specifications based on the established misinterpretation of the body as a mere natural body. (N1, 99–100)

Heidegger fortifies this point in his 1947 "Letter on Humanism" when he writes:

> The fact that physiology and physiological chemistry can scientifically explain man as an organism is no proof that in this "organic" thing, that is, in the body scientifically explained

the essence of man consists. . . . The "essence" of man—lies
in ek-sistence [being-in-the-world]. (LH, 228–29)

The essence of Dasein, therefore, is not to be found in physiological
attributes but in existence. Thus "everything we call our bodiliness,"
says Heidegger, "down to the last muscle fiber and down to the
most hidden molecule of hormones, [already] belongs essentially to
existing" (ZS, 232). In this regard, Dasein is a term that is meant to
capture the way in which we are already concretely involved in the
world, in an average sociohistorical understanding of things, and
we can never disengage from or get clear of it. "[I] already stand in
an understanding of the 'is' [being] without being able to determine
conceptually what 'is' means. . . . This *vague average* understanding of
being is still a fact" (BT, 25). Hence, existence is not to be understood
in terms of an encapsulated body or a self-enclosed consciousness
but in terms of what Heidegger calls "*ec-stasis*" or "*ek-sistence,*" of
already "standing outside" and thereby *in* a sociohistorical world.
"Dasein has always already *stepped out beyond itself*, ex-sistere, it is
in a world. Consequently, it is never anything like a subjective inner
sphere" (BP, 170).

My *existentiell* understanding of being is not only mediated by
the fact that I have been arbitrarily thrown into a communal web of
social relations. As a temporal unfolding, my self-interpreting activity
is also finite. Because my existence is always pressing forward into
future possibilities that ultimately end with death, my understand-
ing of being is "unfinished." As long as I exist, I am a "not yet," a
"no-thing." "[Dasein] must always, as such a potentiality, *not yet be*
something" (BT, 276). In this sense, Dasein's existence is interpreted
as a kind of nullity, because the social projects that give my life a
sense of permanence and stability are penetrated by contingency
and finitude. Heidegger is rejecting the interpretation of life as a
sequentially ordered stream of experiences that ultimately ends in
death. Life, rather, is a "movement" or "happening" that is struc-
turally determined by the ever-present possibility of death. Death,
as a structural component of life, reveals the finitude and forward
directionality of life; it points to the possibility of my fulfillment,
even though such fulfillment is impossible.

My being, in this regard, is always unfinished or incomplete. I
can always press into other possibilities—change careers, get divorced,
or quit my job—right up until the moment of death. I only become
something when I *am no longer*, when my life is finished because I can
no longer press forward into the future. For this reason, Heidegger

identifies the primary temporal mode of life as futural. My life is structurally "on the way" (*unterwegs*), always "ahead of itself." Dasein, in this regard, is a "potentiality" that can never attain completeness or "wholeness."

> [This structural factor] tells us unambiguously that something is always *still outstanding* in Dasein, which, as a potentiality-for-being for Dasein itself, has not yet become "actual." It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something still to be settled*. Such a lack of totality signifies that there is something still outstanding in one's potentiality-for-being. (BT, 279)

So in order to approach the question of being, I must begin with an inquiry into my own *existentiell* way of being, and this approach is determined by (1) my being arbitrarily thrown into a context of social relations that already matter to me and shape my life choices in certain ways and (2) my contingency and finitude, indicating the futural, forward-directed incompleteness of my life.

If Heidegger were merely emphasizing the priority of a finite, historically situated worldview, then this would seem to result in another form of historical or cultural relativism.[14] But this is not his aim. Heidegger's goal is to overcome relativism or "historicism" by revealing the essential structures of meaning itself, invariant a priori conditions for the possibility of any existence, any understanding of being whatsoever. For Heidegger, human existence always has a common structure:

> In this everydayness there are certain structures which we shall exhibit—not just any accidental structures, but essential ones which, in every kind of being that factical Dasein may possess, persist as determinative for its being. (BT, 38)

Thus Heidegger wants to "press on" beyond the mundane dealings of the concrete subject, to unearth "transcendental structures" that cannot be derived from any "anthropological-psychological" assumptions (KPM, 165–166). This requires what Heidegger calls "fundamental ontology," an inquiry into the "meaning of being," which "[prepares] for the question of being in general" (BT, 364). At this point, we need to address Heidegger's distinction between three types of inquiry—"ontic," "ontological," and "fundamental ontology."

Ontic investigations are concerned with particular beings (*Seiendes*). These are the investigations that can address the specific roles, attributes, or qualities of humans (being a professor, a man, a father, etc.) or the determinate properties and characteristics of nonhuman beings (being warm-blooded, carbon-based, prime, etc.). The regional sciences (mathematics, biology, theology, physics, psychology, etc.) are ontic investigations. Regional sciences often undergo ontological "crises" when there is disagreement or confusion concerning the being of the beings studied. For instance, a "crisis" takes place when theoretical physicists disagree about the being of the most elemental substances in the universe, whether or not they are particles, waves, strings, and so on. Ontological investigations can address these crises.[15]

Ontology is concerned with the being (*Sein*) of the beings studied in the regional sciences. Ontology, in this regard, addresses the essence (*essentia*) of things ("*what* something is") and the existence (*existentia*) of things ("*that* something is") (WCT, 161). According to Heidegger, the ontic sciences already operate under the tacit understanding that they grasp the ontological status of the beings that they study. Heidegger explains this problem in the following way:

> Ontic sciences in each case thematize a given entity that in a certain manner is always already disclosed prior to scientific disclosure. We call the sciences of entities as given—of a *positum*—positive sciences. . . . Ontology, or the science of being, on the other hand, demands a fundamental shift of view: From entities to being.[16]

For example, botany relies on the ontological understanding of "the vegetable character of plants," physics on "the corporeality of bodies," zoology on "the animality of animals," and so forth. Every positive science has a regional ontology, a background understanding of the being of beings it studies.[17] However, Heidegger contends that traditional ontology presupposes an understanding of being in general; it fails to ask: "What is it *to be* at all?" What is being?" According to Heidegger, this type of investigation is "*ontology taken in the broadest sense*" (BT, 31, emphasis added). Ontology in the broadest sense requires one to ask about the *meaning* of being. When we begin to question the meaning of being we are doing what Heidegger calls "fundamental ontology."

Fundamental ontology is concerned with *how* and *why* beings are intelligible or how they make sense to us in the first place. Or, more

broadly conceived, it is concerned with how "meaning" (*Sinn*) itself is possible. Because humans already embody a tacit understanding of being in their everyday activities, fundamental ontology requires a phenomenological analysis of human existence, an "analytic of Dasein" or "existential analytic."[18]

> The question of the meaning of being becomes possible at all only if there is something like an understanding of being. Understanding of being belongs to the kind of being which we call "Dasein." The more appropriately and primordially we have succeeded in explicating this entity, the surer we are to attain our goal in the further course of working out the problem of fundamental ontology. (BT, 244)

"Thus *fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*" (BT, 34).

For Heidegger, meaning is not generated by the mental activity of a self-enclosed consciousness. Meaning emerges from the sociohistorical world that I have been thrown into and *on the basis of which* things can show up in an intelligible way. In order to grasp Heidegger's conception of meaning in terms of a context of worldly relations, it is important to understand that Dasein does not fundamentally refer to an individual. Dasein is not a self, a "pure I" (*reinen Ich*) or consciousness that is separate and distinct from surrounding objects (BT, 272). From Heidegger's perspective, human beings are not disengaged spectators but are "being-in-the-world," always already engaged in a public situation, a "*common* totality of surroundings" (HCT, 188). However, focusing on the concrete, situated activity of humans does not mean one should interpret Heidegger's conception of Dasein in terms of the framework of "existentialism" or even "existential phenomenology."[19]

Critics of Heidegger, including Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alphonse de Waelhens, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and many contemporary commentators, often misinterpret Heidegger's use of Dasein as a reference to *a* being, that is, a subject that is concretely involved in or with its everyday social situation prior to mental reflection. These critics mistakenly label Heidegger an existentialist or a philosophical anthropologist who is primarily concerned with a descriptive analysis of situated human experience. However, this interpretation fails to appreciate Heidegger's efforts to overcome Cartesian subjectivity. For the existentialists, subjectivity was simply recast. The detached theoretical perspective that provided the Cartesian subject with an

impartial "God's-eye view" of the world was replaced with an involved, situated subject whose perspective on the world was fundamentally ambiguous and contingent due to the finitude of the subject and the arbitrariness of historical conditions.

Heidegger agreed with existentialism's preliminary move away from abstract speculation, but he was continually misunderstood by existentialists for interpreting his project as a subjectivist endeavor. Sartre, in particular, is notorious for placing Heidegger within the terrain of subjectivism. Sartre insists in "Existentialism Is Humanism" (1946):

> There is at least one being whose existence comes before essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. . . . What [Heidegger and the French existentialists] have in common is simply the fact that they believe that existence comes before any essence—or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective.[20]

However, Sartre's claim that philosophy must begin with the subjective, in the sense that concrete "existence" precedes all theoretical reflection about "essences," is not Heidegger's primary concern. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger reminds Sartre that it is inappropriate to think of Dasein in terms of a concrete subject. Rather, "man occurs essentially in such a way that he is the 'there' [das 'Da'], that is, the lighting of being" (LH, 240). Heidegger explains his departure from Sartre and traditional translations of Dasein in the following way:

> In the philosophic tradition, the term "Dasein" means presence-at-hand, existence. In this sense, one speaks, for instance, of proofs of God's existence. However, Da-sein is understood differently in *Being and Time*. To begin with, French existentialists failed to pay attention to it. That is why they translated Da-sein in *Being and Time* as *être-la*, which means being here and not there. The *Da* in *Being and Time* does not mean a statement of place for a being, but rather it should designate the openness where beings can be present for the human being. (ZS, 120)[21]

Heidegger insists that Dasein is not to be interpreted as a concrete subject that is *être-la*, "here" in a determinate place. Dasein is "there" prior to the practical involvements of the subject. Dasein refers to a

historical space or clearing of meaning on the basis of which things emerge-into-presence *as* the kinds of things they are. Conceiving of humans in terms of a space of intelligibility is crucial to understanding the aims of fundamental ontology.

In Chapter IV of Division I of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains why Dasein should not be interpreted in terms of the concrete actions of a "subject" or "I." According to Heidegger, Dasein is more like a "mass" term that captures the way human activity is always shared, communal; "being-in-the-world" is already "being-there-with-others" (*Mit-dasein*) (BT, 152). Dasein, in this regard, is properly understood in terms of "what it does," going about its daily life, "taking a stand on itself," handling equipment, talking to friends, going to work, and getting married (BP, 159). "For the most part," as Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, "everyday Dasein understands itself in terms of that which it is customarily concerned. 'One *is*' what one does" (BT, 283). Heidegger is stressing the fact that our prereflective everyday dealings are shared. I am engaged in the acts and practices that "They" are or "Anyone" (*das Man*) is engaged in. And if I am what I do, then I *am* an indistinguishable "Anyone." When Heidegger asks "Who is it that Dasein is in everydayness?," the answer is "Anyone." "[The anyone] is the 'realist subject' of everydayness" (BT, 166). In my everyday life, I am a teacher, a husband, or a father because I have been "absorbed" (*aufgehen*) and "dispersed" (*zerstreuen*) into the discursive roles, habits, gestures, and equipment of others (BT, 167). Others assign meaning to my life. They make me who I am. Thus Dasein is "existentially" or structurally being-with-others, a "They-self" (BT, 155). But who are "They"? Heidegger explains:

> The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*man selbst*], not some people [*einige*], and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "They" [*das Man*]. (BT, 164)

The anonymous "They" or "Anyone" refers to a totality of interconnected relations: customs, occupations, practices, and cultural institutions as embodied in gestures, artifacts, monuments, and so forth. This totality of relations gives meaning to beings; it is on the basis of these relations that things can show up or count in determinate ways. Thus "Anyone" determines in advance the possible ways that I can understand or interpret the world (BT, 167).

Heidegger uses the analogy of activity in a "work-shop" to explain this meaningful referential context. In a workshop I do not encounter individual tools in isolation. I encounter a "totality of

equipment" (*Zeugganze*) (BT, 97). My use of a hammer, for instance, is already bound to a nexus of relations, to boards, nails, a workbench, windows, lights, doors, and gloves. And I must already be familiar with the totality of equipment, as a unified context of relations, in order to encounter the hammer *as* a hammer, the nails *as* nails. This familiarity allows entities to be meaningfully disclosed *as such*.

In my everyday activities, I am already familiar with this meaningful referential context. For instance, I do not encounter my computer in isolation. The computer is significant to me only in terms of its relation to other equipment as well as to cultural institutions, future projects, and past events that have already been made available by the "Anyone." The computer sits on my desk near a lamp, and it is being used to compose an article. The article will be sent to a university and will be read by an editor of a journal. If published, this article may help me get promoted, which will secure my job and fill out my self-interpretation as a college professor. The computer means something to me only in terms of its place in a network of relations, and I have grown into this shared network by means of public norms, habits, and roles that are already there (HCT, 246). It is on the basis of this common understanding that entities are meaningful or make sense to me. Heidegger writes, "When [beings] have come to be understood—we say that they have *meaning* [*Sinn*]" (BT, 192).

> Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] of something maintains itself. Meaning is the "upon which" of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something. (BT, 193)

The public context of intelligibility always accompanies me in my various concrete engagements with entities. Thus the being of entities is always meaningful, and the context or clearing of intelligibility "nourishes" being; "it gives" (*Es gibt*) the meaning.

> If we say that entities "have meaning," this signifies that they have become accessible *in their being*. Entities "have" meaning only because they become intelligible in the projection of that being—that is to say, in terms of the "upon which" of that projection. The primary projection of the understanding of being "*gives*" the meaning. (BT, 371–72)

As a condition for the possibility of an understanding of being, meaning is a structure of Dasein (BT, 193). Human existence alone

is structured by meaning, because we are thrown into a disclosive horizon that allows beings to be understood. It is for this reason that "Dasein [alone] 'has' meaning."

> Only Dasein can be meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or meaningless [*sinnlos*]. That is to say, its own being and the entities disclosed with its being can be appropriated in understanding, or can remain relegated to non-understanding. (BT, 193)

Interpreting Dasein in terms of a shared space of meaning helps explain why Heidegger rarely speaks of *a* Dasein. Dasein is a mass term that indicates a public "*Spielraum*" or "there" on the basis of which beings show up *as such*.[22] My embodied agency, in this regard, is always shaped and guided by a familiar public context. I take on roles, deal with others, and use equipment in a particular way because Dasein has opened up a meaningful network of cultural relations into which I have been absorbed.

Temporality as the Meaning of Being

Heidegger identifies a number of essential interconnected structures that constitute Dasein as a space of intelligibility. To gain access to the structures of Dasein, Heidegger begins by describing his own *existentiell* understanding of being. As a "factical" ontic being, his understanding is necessarily incomplete due to his own structural "finitude" and "thrownness." Thus the structures of understanding that Heidegger seeks are not conceptually fixed, universal "essences," ideas, or categories (FCM, 293). The structures can never be fully captured in formal concepts; we can only discover these structures by paying careful phenomenological attention to our own prereflective life experiences.[23] Thus the structures are "fundamentally undetermined"; they merely "indicate" or "point to" (*anzeigen*) general conditions that are concretely lived out by each factical Dasein (BT, 152).

These existential conditions are not "accidental" or "arbitrary"; they are "essential" because they can be concretely demonstrated in our own everyday acts and practices (BT, 37–38). For this reason, the existential analytic must start by describing one's own *existentiell* ways of being. Early on in *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains:

> The roots of the existential analysis are ultimately *existentiell*—that is *ontical*. Only when philosophical research is itself

> seized upon in an *existentiell* manner as a possibility of the being of each existing Dasein does it become at all possible to disclose the [structural] *existentiality* of existence. (BT, 34, emphasis added)

And later, he writes:

> Unless we have an *existentiell* understanding all analysis of *existentiality* will remain groundless. (BT, 360, emphasis added)

However, focusing on one's own *existentiell* understanding is problematic, precisely because our everyday ways of living "cover over" or "close off" genuine access to the structures of Dasein (BT, 359). Our individual understanding of things is always shaped in advance by the prejudices and assumptions characteristic of the social world into which we are thrown.[24]

Because human beings always already interpret themselves in terms of a background of socio-historical assumptions and prejudices, there is "circularity" to existence (BT, 363). The hermeneutic circle is not a logical problem at all. It refers to a structure of any and all self-interpreting, self-understanding activity (BT, 195). This circularity of understanding reveals that fundamental ontology has two inter-related limitations due to the "finitude" and "thrownness" of our own *existentiell* understanding. First, because our understanding is finite, fundamental ontology can never arrive at a secure, Archimedean foundation that provides an exhaustive description of what it means to be human. Second, because our understanding is thrown into a particular situation, it is constantly "corrupted" and "misleading" due to a "fore-structure," an a priori framework of historically mediated assumptions and expectations projected in advance of any individual interpretation. Hence, fundamental ontology is determined by a "hermeneutic situation" that indicates that there is no objective ground from which the essential structures of understanding become transparent (BT, 275).

Thus "[the] 'circle' belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein—that is, in the understanding which interprets" (BT, 195). It is the hermeneutic situation that serves as the horizon or space of meaning, allowing beings to show up or reveal themselves *as such*. And, if there is no way to theoretically disengage or get clear of the circularity of understanding, then one must "leap into this circle primordially and

wholly, so that even at the start of the analysis of Dasein we make sure that we have a full view of Dasein's circular being" (BT, 363). This "leap" has a threefold purpose. First, it enables us to become aware of the contingency and arbitrariness of our hermeneutic situation. Second, it allows us to call into question the current way that things are understood or disclosed. And finally, it opens us up to the possibility of recovering a horizon of disclosure that is more "original" or "primordial" than the objectifying worldview of metaphysics (BT, 44). This "authentic" recovery is the ultimate aim of fundamental ontology.

By mapping out the structures of understanding, fundamental ontology reveals how these structures "conceal" and "obscure" an authentic understanding of being and points us in the direction of recovering an authentic understanding. This recovery can take place if we grasp the "meaning of being of Dasein" itself, which is "temporality" (*Zeitlichkeit*). Thus "time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of being, and in terms of temporality as the being of Dasein, which understands being" (BT, 39). For Heidegger, beings are disclosed only in relation to time, hence, the source of our "forgetfulness" of an authentic understanding of being in the West is to be found in Dasein's own temporal constitution.

Again, fundamental ontology begins with phenomenological descriptions of the way things show themselves in the course of our everyday acts and practices. But these descriptions are merely "preparatory." The "primordial" aim of Heidegger's project is to uncover essential structures of Dasein that determine the ways in which beings show up (BT, 38). The results of this deeper, ontological inquiry will reveal that Dasein has a meaning: "temporality." Heidegger explains:

> Our analysis of Dasein is not only incomplete; it is also, in the first instance, *provisional*. It merely brings out the being of this entity, without interpreting its meaning. It is rather a preparatory procedure by which the horizon for the most primordial way of interpreting being may be laid bare. Once we have arrived at this horizon, this preparatory analytic of Dasein will have to be repeated on a higher and authentically ontological basis. . . . We shall point to *temporality* as the meaning of the being of that entity which we call "Dasein." (BT, 38)

Thus the structures of Dasein must now be "interpreted over again as modes of temporality" (BT, 38).

On the traditional view, according to Heidegger, time has been understood in Aristotelian terms as a successive sequence of "now points," which endlessly follow one after another, where one "now" is "earlier and another later" (CT, 4). This view yields "clock-time," which measures and organizes these "now points" in terms of hours, days, months, and years. And this measurement is always accomplished in reference to the "present" (CT, 17). Against this view, Heidegger argues that sequential clock-time is itself derived from and made possible by "primordial temporality." For Heidegger, this means the question "What is time?" is itself ill conceived. The more appropriate question is "Who is time?" (CT, 22).

For Heidegger, primordial temporality must be understood in terms of human existence, and existence stretches in three dimensions, from out of the "present" (*Gegenwart*), into the "future" (*Zukunft*), and back to the "past" (*Gewesenheit*). Primordial time is, therefore, understood as a holistic, nonsuccessive manifold of three dimensions or "ecstasies." In the present, I "fall prey" (*verfallen*) to the habits, roles, and assumptions of the public world as I go about my everyday life. However, my everyday involvement with things is always mediated by the "past" and the "future," by the temporal structures of "situatedness" (*Befindlichkeit*) and "projection" (*Entwurf*). Situatedness refers to the way in which I am arbitrarily thrown into a shared world, with a shared history that attunes or affects me in terms of particular dispositions or "moods" (*Stimmung*). Projection refers to the way I prereflectively understand my workaday activities as I press forward into future goals and projects, into the "for-the-sake-of-which" (*das Worumwillen*). It is only on the basis of this disclosive horizon—one that, out of the present, simultaneously reaches *forward* into social possibilities and projects that are "not yet" and *backward* into a shared situation that allows things to count and matter in particular ways—that beings can emerge-into-presence *as such*.

Although we will return to this question in later chapters, we can see how the body might initially be implicated in the structure of *Befindlichkeit*, because the experience of our socio-historical situation is disclosed to us in terms of embodied moods.[25] If this is true, then it appears that the body should be interpreted as an essential structure of meaning.[26] However, this suggestion puts too much emphasis on the role of the individual subject in terms of mood formation, and it fails to distinguish between my own embodied agency and the disclosive horizon that is already "there," a horizon that already gives meaning to my activities.

Heidegger's use of *Stimmung* is not to be understood subjectively where the world meaningfully affects me in terms of my own psychological "states of mind," being depressed, afraid, bored, or excited. Rather, *Stimmung* is the condition for the possibility of any individual disposition or mood. The mood is not in *me,* in the body; I am already in a mood by virtue of my public involvements, by being thrown into a shared social context that determines in advance the way things affect me. In short, mood is "like an atmosphere," already "there" prior to the emergence of the body, and it is by means of this atmosphere that my embodied engagements are tuned or disposed in one way or another toward things. In his 1929–1930 lectures, Heidegger says:

> Moods are *not side-effects*, but are something which in advance determines our being with one another. It seems as though moods [are] in each case already there, so to speak, like an *atmosphere* in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through. (FCM, 67)

Hence, moods are both a priori and public, making it possible for me, as an embodied agent, to be in a mood.

> The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a [mood]—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world "matter" to it. (BT, 213)

For Heidegger, moods reveal the way communal events, roles, occupations, and equipment already matter to us. For instance, the practices of a teacher, husband, or father matter to me because they are part of the world with which I am familiar, whereas the practices of a shaman, witch doctor, or tribal chief do not show up in terms of this familiar nexus of social relations, and therefore they do not shape the future course of my life. Thus moods disclose a basic temporal structure of Dasein, the structure of "alreadiness," that is prior to my own embodied agency. Heidegger puts it in the following way:

> Why can I let a pure thing of the world be encountered at all in bodily presence? Only because the world is *already there* in thus letting it be encountered. . . . I can see a natural thing in its bodily presence only on the basis of this being-in-the-world. (HCT, 196, emphasis added)