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A Companion to Heidegger

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Explanatory Note

With the publication of Heidegger’s collected works in the Gesamtausgabe (Complete Edition) (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), a more or less standard system of reference is finally possible. Most English translations of Heidegger’s works now include references to the pagination of the Gesamtausgabe volume in the header, footer, or body of the translated work. Thus, for many of Heidegger’s writings, a reference to the Gesamtausgabe page number suffices to find readily the page in translation. The Gesamtausgabe also includes marginal references to the pagination of the original German edition of Heidegger’s work, so that it is possible with the reference to the Gesamtausgabe to find the reference to other German versions.

For this reason, we have elected to list only references to the Gesamtausgabe pagination except in those cases where the author is using an English translation that does not list the Gesamtausgabe page numbers. For those volumes, we list the Gesamtausgabe page number followed by the page number in translation. For example, (GA 9: 330/252) refers to page 330 in Wegmarken and its translation on page 252 in Pathmarks (for bibliographic information on the translations used, please refer to the list of works cited section below).

In two cases – Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe volume 2), and Introduction to Metaphysics (Einführung in die Metaphysik, Gesamtausgabe volume 40) – the English translations include no references to the Gesamtausgabe pagination, but they do list marginal references to prior German language editions. The Gesamtausgabe editions of those volumes also include this marginal reference. Thus, references to Being and Time (SZ) and Introduction to Metaphysics (EM) list only the marginal numbers.

Several of Heidegger’s collections of essays – most prominently GA 7 and GA 12 – have not been translated as a collection, although the essays are available in other collections of essays. In those cases, or when the author of a particular chapter has preferred not to refer to the translations listed in the Works Cited section, we list the Gesamtausgabe reference followed by a separate reference to the translated source. In those cases, bibliographic information to the translation will be found in the chapter-specific References and further reading section. For example, (GA 12: 7/Heidegger 1971: xiii)
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GA 6.1 Nietzsche I. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996.

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Martin Heidegger: An Introduction to His Thought, Work, and Life
HUBERT DREYFUS AND MARK WRATHALL

Martin Heidegger is one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. His work has been appropriated by scholars in fields as diverse as philosophy, classics, psychology, literature, history, sociology, anthropology, political science, religious studies, and cultural studies.

At the same time, he is a notoriously difficult philosopher to understand. The way he wrote was, in part, a result of the fact that he is deliberately trying to break with the philosophical tradition. One way of breaking with the tradition is to coin neologisms, that is, to invent words which will, in virtue of their originality, be free of any philosophical baggage. This is a method that Heidegger frequently employed, but at the cost of considerable intelligibility. In addition, Heidegger believed his task was to provoke his readers to thoughtfulness rather than provide them with a facile answer to a well defined problem. He thus wrote in ways that would challenge the reader to reflection.

Our hope is that this book will be of assistance in making Heidegger more accessible as a writer and thinker. The chapters in this volume review the main formative influences on and developments in his philosophy, tackle many of the central elements in Heidegger’s thought, and address his relevance to ongoing issues and concerns in the field of philosophy, broadly construed. By way of introduction to the chapters that follow, we would like to offer here a brief overview of Heidegger’s life, thought, and work.

Heidegger’s Early Life and Early Work

For all Heidegger’s emphasis on the history of philosophy, he had little interest in the historiographical details about the lives of the philosophers he studied. In his introduction to a lecture course on Schelling, for example, he claimed that “the life’ of a philosopher remains unimportant,” at least where we have access to his work, or even “pieces and traces of his work.” This is because, he explained, “we never come to know the actuality of a philosophical existence through a biography” (GA 42: 7). For him, philosophers were of interest because of what they could contribute to our own efforts to grapple with philosophical problems. He thus refused “to fill the hours with stories
of the lives and fortunes of the old thinkers,” because that “does not add anything to the understanding of the problem” (GA 22: 12).

He did, however, occasionally offer “some rough indications of the external course of life” of the thinker (in the Schelling lecture course, for example), in order to “place this course of life more clearly into the known history of the time” (GA 42: 7). In a similar way, we think that Heidegger’s notorious involvement in his historical time justifies some such indication of the “external course of his life.”

Heidegger was born on September 26, 1889, in Meßkirch in Baden, a staunchly Catholic region of Germany. He always felt rooted in this region, and its native practices and modes of speech (see, for example, “Dank an die Heimatstadt Messkirch,” in GA 16, and “Vom Geheimnis des Glockenturms,” “Der Feldweg,” “Schöpfersiche Landschaft: Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?” and “Sprache und Heimat” in GA 13). He spent most of his career living and teaching in Freiburg, with as much time as possible in his ski hut in a rural mountain valley in Todtnauberg. Indeed, he went so far as to claim that his “whole work is supported and guided by the world of these mountains and their farmers” (GA 13: 11). Heidegger died on May 26, 1976 and was, according to his wishes, buried in Meßkirch on May 28.

His father, Friedrich Heidegger, was a craftsman – a master cooper – and a sexton. Religious and theological studies played a central role in his early education. He studied at Gymnasia in Constance (1903–6) and Freiburg (1906–9), and he entered the Jesuit Novitiate of Tisis, Austria, in the fall of 1909, before being dismissed on health grounds. He commenced theological studies at the University of Freiburg in 1909, but eventually left theology, briefly pursuing the study of mathematics and then philosophy. By 1919, Heidegger broke with “the system of Catholicism,” which he now found “problematic and unacceptable.” The rejection of the system did not, however, include a rejection of “Christianity and metaphysics” (“Letter to Father Engelbert Krebs,” Heidegger 2002: 69), and Heidegger lectured often on the phenomenology of religion and metaphysics in the ensuing years (see, for example, “Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion” (1920/1) and “Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus” (1921), both found in GA 60, as well as “Phänomenologie und Theologie” (1927) in GA 9). In later years, he returned often to the importance of fostering a sense for the sacred (see, for example, Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,” GA 39; GA 4; Hölderlins Hymne ‘Andenken,” GA 52; “Wozu Dichter?,” in GA 5: “Der Fehl heiliger Namen.” in GA 13).

In the meantime, Heidegger had received his doctoral degree in philosophy (1913), from the University of Freiburg, with a dissertation on the “Theory of Judgment in Psychologism” (GA 1). He completed a habilitation dissertation on “The Theory of Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus” (GA 1) in 1915, and began lecturing in Freiburg in Winter Semester 1915–16. His early interest in both logic and medieval thought continued in later years, and Heidegger lectured frequently on philosophical logic (for example, Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit, GA 21; Logik. Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz, GA 26; Über Logik als Frage nach der Sprache, GA 38; see Käufer, this volume, chapter 9) and medieval philosophy (GA 60).

Edmund Husserl’s arrival at the University of Freiburg in 1916 allowed Heidegger, as he expressed it himself, “the occasion, which I had desired since my first semesters,
to systematically work my way into phenomenological research” (GA 17: 42; see Crowell, this volume, chapter 4). Heidegger worked for a time as Husserl’s assistant, but gradually made a break with Husserlian phenomenology as he began teaching his own courses on phenomenology at Freiburg and then at Marburg University following his appointment to a professorship in 1923. The break became public with the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, although it was only recognized by Husserl himself following Heidegger’s appointment to Husserl’s chair at the University of Freiburg in 1928.

For a more thorough account of Heidegger’s thought leading up to the publication of *Being and Time*, see Van Buren (this volume, chapter 2).

**Being and Time**

In his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertakes an ambitious ontological project – the central task of the book is to discover the meaning of being, i.e. that on the basis of which beings are understood (see SZ: 150). Although Heidegger never completed the project he had outlined for elucidating the meaning of being, he did manage to articulate a revolutionary approach to thinking about the problem in terms of time as the “horizon of all understanding of being” (see SZ: 17 and Blattner, this volume, chapter 19). Most of *Being and Time* itself is concerned with “preparing the ground” for understanding the meaning of being by carrying out a subtle and revolutionary phenomenology of the human mode of existence (see Sheehan, this volume, chapter 12).

When it comes to thinking about ontology, Heidegger argues that traditional treatments of being have failed to distinguish two different kinds of questions we can ask: the ontic question that asks about the properties of beings, and the ontological question that asks about ways or modes of being. *Being and Time* focuses on three ontological modes and three kinds of beings – Dasein, the available (or ready to hand), and the occurrent (or present at hand). If one investigates an item of equipment, say a pen, ontologically, then one asks about the structures in virtue of which it is available or ready to hand. These include, for example, its belonging to a context of equipment and referring or pointing to other items of equipment. In an ontic inquiry, on the other hand, one asks about the properties or the physical relations and structures peculiar to some entity – in the pen’s case, for example, we might make the following ontic observations about it: it is black, full of blue ink, and sitting on top of my desk. Heidegger’s critique of the tradition comes from the simple observation that the ontological mode of being cannot be reduced to what we discover in an ontic inquiry, no matter how exhaustively we describe the entity with its properties. This is because no listing of, for example, a pen’s properties can tell me what it is to be available rather than occurrent.

An ontological inquiry into human being, then, will not look at the properties possessed by humans, but rather at the structures which make it possible to be human. One of Heidegger’s most innovative and important insights is that the essence of the human mode of existence is found in our always already existing in a world. He thus named the human mode of existence “Dasein,” literally, being-there. Dasein means existence in colloquial German, but Heidegger uses it as a term of art to refer to the peculiarly
human way of existing (without, of course, deciding in advance whether only humans exist in this way). Translators of Heidegger have elected to leave the term untranslated, and so it has now passed into common parlance among Heidegger scholars.

Using his account of what is involved in human existence so understood, Heidegger argues that the philosophical tradition has overlooked the character of the world, and the nature of our human existence in a world. Dasein, for instance, is not a subject, for a subject in the traditional sense has mental states and experiences which can be what they are independently of the state of the surrounding world. For Heidegger, our way of being is found not in our thinking nature, but in our existing in a world. And our being is intimately and inextricably bound up with the world that we find ourselves in. In the same way that the tradition has misunderstood human being by focusing on subjectivity, it also failed to understand the nature of the world, because it tended to focus exclusively on entities within the world, and understood the world as merely being a collection of inherently meaningless entities. But attention to the way entities actually show up for us in our everyday dealings teaches us that worldly things cannot be reduced to merely physical entities with causal properties. *Worldly* things, in other words, have a different mode of being than the causally delineated entities that make up the *universe* and which are the concern of the natural sciences. To understand worldly entities – entities, in other words, that are inherently meaningfully constituted – requires a hermeneutic approach (see Lafont, this volume, chapter 16).

We first encounter worldly things, Heidegger argued, as available rather than as causally delineated. Equipment is paradigmatic of the available. Something is available when (1) it is defined in terms of its place in a context of equipment, typical activities in which it is used, and typical purposes or goals for which it is used, and (2) it lends itself to such use readily and easily, without need for reflection. The core case of availableness is an item of equipment that we know how to use and that transparently lends itself to use.

The other primary mode of being is “occurrence” or “presence-at-hand.” This is the mode of being of things which are not given a worldly determination – that is, things constituted by properties they possess in themselves, rather than through their relations to uses and objects of use. Most available things can also be viewed as occurrence, and in breakdown situations (i.e. situations in which our easy fluid dealings with the environment encounter some sort of difficulty – a tool breaks, a new or unanticipated situation presents itself, etc.), the occurrence of an available object will obtrude.

Once we free ourselves of the idea that everything is “really” occurrence, we are open to the phenomenon of the world as something other than a mere collection of entities. The world, properly understood, is that on the basis of which entities can be involved with one another. And it is our familiarity with the world so understood which makes it possible for us to act on, think about, experience, etc. things in the world. This idea, in turn, allows Heidegger to address skeptical worries about truth and the reality of the “external” world. Since we always already find ourselves involved with entities in a world, worries that there is no world are ungrounded and unmotivated.

Once we see that human beings are inherently and inextricably in a world within which entities and activities are disclosed as available to us, we are in a position to ask
about what is involved in the structure of this world and its disclosure to us. In philosophical accounts of human beings, moods are often dismissed as merely subjective colorings of our experience of the world. But, Heidegger argues, moods actually reveal something important about the fundamental structure of the world and our way of being in it. First of all, Heidegger notes that “moods assail us.” In other words, it is not wholly up to us how we will be affected by the situations we find ourselves in. This shows that we are delivered over to, or “thrown” into, a world not of our own making. Second, while it is clear that moods are not objective properties of entities within the world, it is also clear that moods in fact are not merely subjective either. A boring lecture really is boring, a violent person really is frightening. This shows that the subjective–objective distinction fails to capture the interdependence of our being with the world and the entities around us. In addition, moods in fact make it possible for us to encounter entities within the world by determining how those entities will matter to us. Finally, Heidegger argues that moods are not private, inner phenomena, but can be shared. We often speak, for example, of the mood of the party, or the mood of the nation.

So, being-in-the-world means that we always find ourselves in the world in a particular way – we have a “there,” that is, a meaningfully structured situation in which to act and exist – and we are always disposed to things in a particular way, they always matter to us somehow or other. Our disposedness is revealed to us in the way our moods govern and structure our comportment by disposing us differentially to things in the world. So disposedness is an “attunement,” a way of being tuned in to things in the world.

But this attunement necessarily goes with an understanding of what things are. Heidegger describes Dasein’s understanding of the world as a kind of “projecting onto possibilities,” rather than the cognitive and conceptual grasp of things that one normally thinks of as understanding. He argues, however, that a projective existential understanding of the world grounds our cognitive grasp of and explicit experiences of things. To see what Heidegger has in mind with the term “understanding,” one needs to focus primarily on practical contexts and practical involvements with things in an organized and meaningful world. I am in the world understandingly when I am doing something purposively, for example, making an omelet in my kitchen. In doing so, I “let” the things in my kitchen be “involved with” each other – the eggs are involved with the mixing bowl, which is involved with the wire whisk and the frying pan and the spatula. As I heat the frying pan in order to melt the butter in order to fry up the omelet in order to feed my children, I am ultimately acting for the sake of some way of being a human being – for the sake of being a father, for example. All of these connections between activities and entities and ways of being are constitutive of the understanding of the world I possess. In the process of acting on the basis of that understanding, in turn, I allow things and activities to show up as the things and activities that they are (frying pans as frying pans, spatulas as spatulas, etc.) (see, for example, SZ: 86).

In acting in the world, then, I understand how things relate to each other – that is to say, I understand in the sense of “knowing how” everything in the world hangs together. Heidegger is clear that this understanding is not normally a cognitive mastery of roles and concepts – “grasping it in such a manner would take away from what is
projected in its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents
which we have in mind” (SZ: 145). In other words, “understanding” as a cognitive state
would prevent the understanding from doing its job. Why is this? Because the under-
standing, as Heidegger shows, works not simply by having an abstract idea of how
things hang together, but rather in so far as we are “projecting” or “pressing” into the
possibilities for action opened up by how they hang together.

Heidegger is using the term “possibility” here in a specific sense. Sometimes we use
“possible” to mean “empty logical possibility” – that is, there is no contradiction in
things being thus and so. But the possibilities for the world, in the logical sense, are
much broader than what we ever know how to deal with. Sometimes we use “possible”
to mean “the contingency of something occurring” – that is, this is just one way it could
be, but there are other ways too. But this also doesn’t capture our understanding of the
world – we understand our world not simply as one way the world can be, but as that
way in which everything makes sense. A possibility in Heidegger’s sense is a way of
dealing with things that shows them as the things they are. For example, because I am
able to deal with wire whisks and frying pans in an omelet-making way, they show up
as wire whisks and frying pans. Being used in the making of omelets is a possibility for
such things.

When Heidegger describes understanding as showing us the possible, then, what he
means is that it shows us the available range of ways to be, it shows us our can-be or
ability-to-be (Seinkönnen) (see, for example, SZ: 143–4). These possibilities are con-
strained, and not indifferent. It is not the case that anything goes, as we do indeed care
about the fact that things are going or not going in a particular direction. So, for
example, there are lots of possible ways for me to pursue being a professor. But I can’t
do just anything in the name of being a professor; I am constrained by the possible ways
of professorial being available in my world. In being a professor, in other words, I project
or press into the possibilities opened up by my world. Together, understanding and dis-
posedness show us the possibilities available to us, and give them a way of mattering
to us.

In summary, then, one of the distinguishing features of Heidegger’s analysis of
Dasein is the priority he accords to non-cognitive modes of being-in-the-world. The
propositional intentional states that the philosophical tradition has seen as constitutive
of Dasein are, on Heidegger’s analysis, derivative phenomena. In understanding
human comportment in the world, Heidegger argues that we need to focus first on skill-
ful, practical coping.

But, as we have just noted, Heidegger’s conception of the world accords a constitutive
role to others as somehow determining what possibilities are available for me to pursue.
Heidegger offers a trenchant analysis of the role that social relations play in constitut-
ing who we are (see Schatzki, this volume, chapter 14). It is a constitutive feature of
our way of being that we take over our understanding of ourselves and the world
around us from those others with whom we exist. This means that who I am cannot be
understood in terms of a subject who could be constituted as he is, independently of
any relationship to other human beings. Even seemingly contrary examples – human
beings who are alone, or indifferent to their fellows, or misfits and outcasts – confirm
this since they are human beings who are alone or indifferent or rejected by society. A
chair can’t be alone, or indifferent to other chairs, or a social outcast from the fellow-
ship of chairs. In a similar way, the care we take for people is even manifest in deficient modes – when I am indifferent to another person, my indifference as an attitude is constituted in part by the fact that it is another person to whom I am indifferent. If I stand by and indifferently watch as you die, this has a very different character as an act than if I stand by, unconcerned that a pen has ceased functioning.

It is thus clear that we are (to a significant degree) constituted as the beings that we are by the fact that we always inhabit a shared world, and the way we exist in this world is always essentially structured by others. This has important consequences when we turn to the question “who am I,” for it turns out that, at least in the everyday existence which immediately structures my world, my essence is not dictated by me, but by others.

Heidegger calls the fact that we are constantly concerned about and taking measure of how we differ from others or relate to them “distantiality.” In our everyday existence, our distantiality takes the form of “standing in subjection to others” (SZ: 126). That is, we simply accept unthinkingly the ways in which one does things. But the “one” who decides how things ought to be done is no definite person or group: “the ‘who’ is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The ‘who’ is the neuter, the ‘one’” (SZ: 126).

A few tendencies result. First, there is a tendency toward levelling down to the lowest common denominator, or toward the average. The norms that govern things are the norms available to anyone – thus there is an inescapable public character to the intelligibility of the world. I understand what everybody else also understands. Next, there is a tendency toward “disburdening” – that is, by doing what one does, we free ourselves from the burden of responsibility for the decisions we make. This disburdening, and even the publicness and levelling, are not necessarily a bad thing. It would be a disaster if one constantly had to decide on every little thing to do (what to wear, what to eat, which side of the road to drive on, etc.). Conformity thus provides the ground – the organization of our common world – against which we are freed to make important decisions. But Heidegger does see these features of the one as tending to consequences that we might not wish to accept – namely, a conformism in which it is all too easy never to take a stand for oneself. Heidegger calls this sort of conformism “inauthenticity.” In my ordinary, everyday being, I am not myself at all, I am the “one.” It takes a great effort of “clearing-away concealments and obscurities” if I am to “discover the world in my own way” (SZ: 129).

This leaves open the question exactly how to be my own self in inhabiting the world. This is the problem of authenticity. The possibility of authentic self-determination arises from the fact that, unlike occurrent entities, the way that Dasein takes up its residence in the world is not fixed or necessitated. That is to say, the relationships that Dasein enjoys with other things, and the significance that other things hold for Dasein, are contingent, and it is always possible for us to change them. Heidegger makes this point by saying that for Dasein, “in its very being, that being is an issue for it” (SZ: 12).

A consequence of this is that any particular way of existing in the world is necessarily ungrounded – “Dasein is the null basis of its own nullity” (SZ: 306). This is a disquieting fact, and one that Dasein disguises from itself – primarily by taking up societal norms as if they somehow revealed the ultimate truth about how one should live. But
anxiety in the face of death, Heidegger argues, if faced up to, can open the door to an authentic existence: “Anxiety,” Heidegger explains, “liberates one from possibilities which ‘count for nothing’, and lets one become free-for those which are authentic” (SZ: 344).

In being toward death, we acknowledge that our way of being must inevitably come to an end, meaning that it will become impossible at some point to continue in our familiar kind of worldly existence. Death is the “the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing” (SZ: 262). To say it is a possibility, however, doesn’t mean that it is not necessary, that is, that we might not die. Death is impending, and it can’t be gotten around. It is rather a possibility in the sense that we have already discussed – the way we relate to death is a fundamental kind of dealing in the world, one that affects the character of the way things show up at a very basic level. Thus, it is not an empirical certainty, but instead certain because it is the basis for disclosing ourselves to us. That is, our experience of everything is an experience in the light of the fact that we are mortal and temporal beings (see Hoffman, this volume, chapter 20), and thus at some point we will no longer be able to be in the world.¹

There are, of course, different ways of trying to deal with death. We can flee from it, distract ourselves by absorbing ourselves in the world of concern, submit ourselves to what are publicly taken as urgent, possible, necessary, and so on. Such are, of course, the responses of everydayness, and they tranquilize us to our death by giving us practices for dealing with it, thus offering us the illusion that we can cope with death after all. By contrast, an authentic being towards death means taking death as a possibility – that means, not thinking about it or dwelling on it, but rather taking it up in the way it shapes all our particular actions and relations. In fact, it requires anticipating it as a possibility. That is, we are ready for the world in light of the fact that each decision has consequences, and will someday culminate in our not being able to get by any longer. This, in turn, makes it possible for me to live my life as my own. Death shows me that all forms of concern and solicitude “will fail me” – common norms of intelligibility won’t relieve me from the fact that my being will become impossible. That means that I must henceforth shoulder the responsibility for my decisions. This taking of responsibility is supported by my living anxiously, for in such a way of being disposed for the world, it is revealed as lacking any inherent, unchanging meaning or purpose² (for more on death, see Mulhall, this volume, chapter 18).

Because authenticity is a way of relating to our existence, there is no specific content to authenticity, nothing that every authentic Dasein does. But we can say some general things about it. First, it does not surrender itself to the interpretation of the “one,” although it is dependent on it. Second, it discloses the specific situation rather than the general situation. Within the general situation, one sees the meaning things seem to have thanks to the public’s banalized, levelled off understanding. Authentic Dasein, by contrast, is open to the particular needs of the situation. Having recognized the fact that its being is at issue, it responds appropriately to the particular situation before it. So, in authenticity, I take up the public understanding of my world, and I make it my own by projecting on my own possibilities. I do this through anxiously seeing the uncanniness of myself in my world (including the ungroundedness of this world) (for more on authenticity, see Carman, this volume, chapter 17).
Being and Time advanced no further than the preparatory temporal analysis of Dasein. In returning in the final section of the book to the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger could do no more than ask: “is there a way which leads from primordial time to the meaning of Being? Does time itself manifest itself as the horizon of Being?” (SZ: 488). In fact, in the years that followed its publication, Heidegger became convinced that there was no way to go on to answer these questions on the basis of the foundation he had laid through an analysis of Dasein. This conviction, in turn, produced fundamental changes in the aim, method, and style of his thought. As a consequence, his later works are in many respects different than Being and Time.

After Being and Time

In the past, it has been commonplace to subdivide Heidegger’s work into two (early and late) or even three (early, middle, and late) periods. While there is something to be said for such divisions – there is an obvious sense in which Being and Time is thematically and stylistically unlike Heidegger’s publications following the Second World War – it is also misleading to speak as if there were two or three different Heideggers. The bifurcation, as is well known, is something that Heidegger himself was uneasy about, and scholars today are increasingly hesitant to draw too sharp a divide between the early and late.

Heidegger’s phenomenological method provides an example of the complications involved in dividing his work into periods. Heidegger’s early philosophy was profoundly shaped by his study of the phenomenological works of Husserl and, to a lesser degree, Scheler. But he broke very early on with any formal “phenomenological method” as such, and eventually largely dropped the term “phenomenology” as a self-description, worried that representing his thought as phenomenology would cause him to be associated with Husserl’s substantive philosophical views. But despite his break with the phenomenological movement, Heidegger considered his work throughout his life to be “a more faithful adherence to the principle of phenomenology” (in his own loose sense of the term; for more on Heidegger and phenomenology, see Boedeker, this volume, chapter 10). For Heidegger, phenomenology is an “attitude” or practice in “seeing” that takes its departure from lived experience. It aims at grasping the phenomena of lived involvement in the world, before our understanding of the world becomes determined and altered in “thematic” or reflective thought. In this respect, Heidegger’s work is in marked contrast to the method of conceptual analysis that has come to dominate philosophy in the English-speaking world following the “linguistic turn” of the early twentieth century. For Heidegger, our concepts and language presuppose our unreflective involvement, and have a different structure than our pre-propositional way of comporting in the world. It is thus not possible to discover the most fundamental features of human existence through an analysis of language and concepts. Instead, a constant feature of his work is the effort to bring thought before the phenomena of existence – in this sense, his “method” is always that of phenomenology.

Another constant in Heidegger’s thought is his notion of unconcealment. Heidegger first discusses unconcealment in his 1924 lectures on Plato (GA 19), and for the next
two decades nearly every book or essay Heidegger published, and nearly every lecture
course he taught, includes a significant discussion of the essence of truth under the
headings of “unconcealment” or “alêtheia” (the Greek word for truth). The later
Heidegger continued his research into unconcealment through his writings on the
clearing or opening of being – a topic that preoccupied Heidegger for the last three
decades of his life. Thus, one could safely say that the problem of unconcealment was
one of the central topics of Heidegger’s life work. Throughout, Heidegger consistently
insisted that many traditional philosophical problems need to be understood against
the background of a more fundamental account of the way we are open to the world,
the way in which the world opens itself and makes itself available for thought, and how
we thoughtfully respond.

A prime case in point is the problem of truth. Heidegger recognized that any inquiry
into propositional truth quickly leads to some of the most fundamental issues addressed
in contemporary philosophy – issues such as the nature of language, and the reality or
mind-independence of the world. He held that the philosophical discussion of truth can
only be pursued against the background of assumptions about the nature of mind (in
particular, how mental states and their derivatives like linguistic meaning can be so
constituted as to be capable of being true or false), and the nature of the world (in par-
ticular, how the world can be so constituted as to make mental states and their deriv-
atives true). Heidegger’s focus on unconcealment in his discussions of the essence of
truth is intended to bring such background assumptions to the foreground. The claim
that unconcealment is the essence of truth, then, is motivated by the recognition that
we have to see truth in the context of a more general opening up of the world, i.e. in
the context of an involvement with and comportment toward things in the world that
is more fundamental than thinking and speaking about them (see Wrathall, this
volume, chapter 21).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger analyzed the unconcealment that grounds truth in
terms of the disclosedness of Dasein, that is, the fact that Dasein is always in a mean-
ingful world. Heidegger did not shy away from the consequences of this: “Before there
was any Dasein,” he argued, “there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is
no more” (SZ: 226). He illustrated this claim with an example drawn from physics – the
best candidate for discovering independent truths about the universe: “Before Newton’s
laws were discovered, they were not ‘true’ ” (SZ: 226). The controversial nature of such
a claim is a little diminished by the qualifications Heidegger immediately adds. To make
it clear that he is not claiming that Newton’s laws are somehow completely dependent
for their truth merely on their being believed, he notes: “it does not follow that they
were false, or even that they would become false if ontically no discoveredness were any
longer possible” (SZ: 226). And he further explains, “to say that before Newton his laws
were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities
as have been uncovered and pointed out by those laws. Through Newton the laws
became true and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein. Once
entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which before-
hand already were” (SZ: 226).

In such passages, Heidegger is clearly trying to walk a fine line between realism and
constructivism about truths, and the status of scientific entities. But where exactly that
line falls has been subject to considerable debate (see Rouse, chapter 11, and Han,