

Heidegger I

PHIL410

There are several key points that I wish to draw from Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

- First is the concept of epistemic *transparency*. This is a concept that we have encountered before, both in the positive (Descartes, Plato with regard to reason) and in the negative (Nietzsche with regard to reason, others with regard to sense). The question here is whether any means of representation is capable of representing reality in exactly the form reality consists in. (Note that Kant accepts transparency for empirical reality but not for reality in itself.)
- The second main point I wish to draw from Heidegger is that of *discursive reality*. This is a form of reality special to humans (and, perhaps, any other creature with conscious linguistic representation like ours). Discursive reality consists in phenomenal states informed by linguistic meaning. The idea draws on Kant (recall his account of the logical structure of our experience in terms of the Categories), though if correct then we could say that Plato and others have been attempting to describe it. However, the concept of discursive reality, as formulated by the phenomenologists, represents a departure from the representation/reality dichotomy of the Moderns. Where Kant preserves a mind/reality distinction (in his empirical v. in-itself), Heidegger releases the mind-independent, in-itself and is thus left with only the terms of linguistically informed "being there."
- Consequently, a third important point to draw from Heidegger is the rejection of the representation/reality distinction. Already implicit in Nietzsche's perspectivalism ("we cannot look around our own corner"), Heidegger would argue that Nietzsche doesn't go far enough: our "comparison" of our mental states with "the world" is necessarily a self-contained system. We never escape our own "representations". "The world" is a way we have of thinking and acting; "our mind" is a way we have of thinking and acting; "comparison" – i.e., *truth* – is a further way of our thinking and acting. Heidegger's phenomenological study attempts to describe these features of our experience (of our *being*).
- Finally, this means that reason – discursive thought – for Heidegger is always *pragmatic* and never (wholly or at bottom) *theoretic*. Theoretical rationality implies the representation/reality distinction: a certain theory (rational construct, concept, proposition) is or is not true. That is the question of theoretical reason. Pragmatical reason concerns not the question whether *P* is true, but rather the question how to proceed. That is, for Heidegger, the question is always how do we come to *this* particular state of awareness? How does our conscious experience evolve to the point of raising the question that I am raising with this very sentence, for example? Such questions must be raised along with and prior to the theoretical questions that typically overshadow them. Their answer concerns not an abstracted "proposition" and its relation to "reality", but rather a *history* of our present concerns and activity and an account of their informing the present moment (along with attention to the next and other future moments). Where Nietzsche denies that we can escape this (temporal, bodily) perspective, Heidegger attempts to describe it and thereby to resolve certain difficult epistemological and metaphysical questions (including, notice, Nietzsche's Modernist notion of "escape").