

Notes on Dreyfus' Heidegger Podcast
Seth Paskin, The Partially Examined Life
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Being

[The first 30 minutes or so cover syllabus/class related issues, you can fast forward]

The most important philosopher in the 20th century. Calls into question so much of traditional philosophy (like Wittgenstein).

Standing on the shoulders of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, radically doubting the whole that the whole philosophical project makes any sense. Heidegger understands both of them very well and in B&T, systematizes them.

Why is this important? Arguing that there is something wrong with the whole tradition trying to get a 'theoretical' understanding of what it means to be a human being. This isn't right – treating human beings as some special kind of 'object'. The scientific view of what it means to be a human being is wrong as well – science is just another human activity. The 'science' of human activity needs to be done differently. [side discussion about how cognitive science is mis-guided. If anything looks like a computer model of how we think, act, etc., Heidegger will think it's wrong]

This is why he's important to analytic (anglo-american) philosophy. But he's also influential to continental philosophy.

- Sarte – brilliant mis-understanding of Heidegger. Heidegger is anti-Cartesian, Sarte reworks him into a Cartesian
- Merleau-Ponty – addresses two big gaps in B&T: perception and the body (Heidegger says nothing about these in B&T)
- Pierre Bordieu – made a reputation denouncing Heidegger after Derrida picked him up. But he's a secret Heideggerian per personal discussions with Dreyfus.
- Foucault – main influence was Heidegger (on his deathbed he admitted it), but Nietzsche won out in the end.

When Heidegger published old lectures in the 50s acknowledging the 'inner truth and greatness of National Socialism' it caused great anguish in the academic community.

- Jurgen Habermas – hated Heidegger b/c he was a Nazi, but said that B&T was the greatest work in philosophy since Phenomenology of Spirit.
- Levinas – first book was on Heidegger.
- Derrida – my enterprise was made possible by Heidegger.

What about the American scene? Good people in good places are working on him.

- Charles Taylor
- Richard Rorty

“Being” in Being and Time. It’s hard to understand what is even meant by the question concerning the meaning of Being, much less what Being is.

Going back to Aristotle, Plato: the understanding is that Being = Substance. The way of Being is to be substance.

Substance is a self-sufficient thing with *properties*. The table is the thing, it is *brown*, it is *heavy*, etc. And the properties have a kind of self-sufficiency as well (shared across things). Heidegger will reject this approach to thinking of Being ‘atomistically’. I.e. self-sufficient and divorced from context, world, intention, etc. The opposite way of looking at this would be ‘holistically’.

So, Heidegger calls this way of Being, the being of **substances**,

- **Vorhandenheit** – Presence at Hand [side discussion about importance of translations and differences in terminology] Everything is self-sufficient in this way, trees, the sun, a table, etc.

Carried through the history of philosophy. Since you have a substance with properties, led to the concept of a subject with predicates. So in our day, you get the Predicate Calculus as the ‘formal structure’ of subjects and predicates. And buying into the ontology, if you know all the subjects, predicates and logical relations, you’d be able to describe anything.

[Side discussion how AI people are the inheritors and futile practitioners of this. Substance ontology got turned into a research program and it failed.]

It doesn’t work because things exist holistically, not atomistically. Heidegger shows this with the simplest of examples (“genius”). He points out there is another way of Being, that of **equipment**. Take for example a hammer. A hammer’s way of being necessarily entails nails, wood, houses, people who want to build houses, etc. You can’t describe the being of a hammer without involving these things – holistic view vs. just looking at the hammer and it’s properties – atomistic.

If you try to describe it in the substance/property ontology – has the property of ‘being for hammering’, then things get messy (can’t you use a rock for this? what happens when you use it to open a can of paint?). The key is that it has a ‘for which’ or ‘towards which’ which is a different way of being and not a property.

- **Zuhandenheit** – Readiness to Hand. What it is about equipment is that it has a cultural use, intention, accepted use, etc.

Equipment or being as equipment (Zuhandenheit) isn’t a self-sufficient way of being. But equipment can be simply present at hand (when it’s sitting in a drawer, not being used), and it can also be Unzuhandenheit – not ready to hand – if it’s too heavy, doesn’t have a proper head, etc.

There is a third way of Being which isn’t being a substance or being equipment. Being “us” – being a **human being**. We can be treated as substance or equipment, but when we are being ourselves, we are being neither. This is the big issue, as far as the philosophical

tradition is concerned. Philosophers for 2000 years have treated human beings as substances. Descartes – res cogitans. Leibniz – monads. Kant – transcendental substance. All of these are self-sufficient substances. Dreyfus points out that Searle is the same – we are ‘minds’ with intentional states. Self-sufficient substances. [side discussion about how hard Husserl is and that he thinks Husserl and Searle are similar]

If you have a description of human existence that permits doubt about the existence of the external world, you have a substance ontology that is making this mistake. The Heideggerian understanding of being a human being is that it is a kind of activity – in a way, you are what you do – you give yourself an identity by a set of activities. I pick up a hammer and build a house and do that because I am a carpenter. By doing these things I identify myself as a carpenter. This is something that substances and equipment can’t/don’t do.

- **Dasein** – the way of being a human being, is to take a stand on what it is to be what you are, to make what you are an issue. Don’t have to do this explicitly – “I am a carpenter!” – but by your actions you make your *existence* an issue and give yourself an interpretation of what you are.

Heidegger will use the term Existence to describe Dasein, and say that only human beings have existence. [This will be confusing for many.]

The question of Being: Each of these three ways of being is a way of making something intelligible.

- Vorhandenheit – helps you to understand objects.
- Zuhandenheit – helps you deal with equipment.
- Dasein – helps you understand what it means to be a human being.

Having this background you can kind of understand what’s at issue in the question of Being – it is the question of intelligibility. [Refers to a sentence on page 25]

Dasein

[recap of previous lecture – 3 modes of Being] Heidegger seems to suggest these are the only three, but there is a page where he mentions primitive cultures/totems and that they may have another mode Being and maybe not the same as “us”. Dreyfus points this out just to show that Heidegger isn’t making a Kantian move to universals. He’s saying that these three ways of Being exhaust the modes that Dasein encounters (i.e. if a culture experiences the world differently and isn’t ‘Dasein’, these modes may not be relevant)

So Dasein’s way of Being is to make it’s being an issue for itself. That is called **existence**. [side note about animals] Dasein ‘takes a stand’ on it’s being, has an interpretation of it’s being. Don’t assume this is active:, i.e. not actively self-reflective. Peasants example – they can be authentic, understand themselves, without being self-reflective.

Heidegger gets this from Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard defines the Self as ‘a relation that relates itself to itself’. As abstract a way to say it as you can find. In being (a) dasien, you are in some way relating to what it means to be a dasein. Dasein in its Being, has a

relationship towards that Being. 'The relationship itself is one of being. It is unique to Dasein that with and through its being, that being is disclosed to it'. Dreyfus: I'd rather say it manifests itself in its behavior, manifests in its behavior its relation to itself.

Dasein has some sense of what it is to be Dasein (its being is disclosed to it). Dreyfus wants to point at that Heidegger is trying to talk about human beings at the 'ground', unreflective level – not as thinkers or theorists, but as completely involved, totally absorbed. Going to overthrow 2000 years of philosophy by getting at what is underneath, what is the condition for doing philosophy – being human.

[note about wording – "Falling" doesn't mean fallen or failing or falling down, etc. It means totally absorbed – the ground, unreflective level of being. This is why Dreyfus like 'manifest' – you have to *do* something to *be* something.]

[side discussion about 'ontological' vs. 'pre-ontological' & theoretical]

Dasein's essence is to be the being that makes an issue of its being. Existence is Dasein's way of being. (Need to sort out the way he's using "Existence" vs. tradition. Heidegger is really saying that only human beings "exist". Trees, God, numbers, etc. do not "exist". Traditionally, existence was used to indicate *Vorhandenheit*, but Heidegger is doing away with that. The essence of Dasein lies in its existence. (Sarte takes off from there).

Lots of claims about what the essence of being human is: rational being, libido machine, creature of god, transcendent ego, etc. Heidegger's point is that our essence is simply to be the kind of being that through its activity gives itself a nature. [side discussion about how Pascal is the father of all existentialism – 'Custom is our nature'] Existence is our essence.

This means: having an 'understanding' of your nature doesn't require thinking about it or reflecting about it. You can understand your nature through your activities. You get a certain way of being even before you can think [side discussion of American vs. Japanese babies]

[side discussion about having an understanding of Being cross-culturally. How Heidegger goes from 1 to 3 to 7 ways of understanding Being in our culture throughout his work]

Returning to the text, in B&T there is 1 understanding of Being with 3 aspects.

[Question from a student] Formal indication (Formale Anzeige) – methodological approach. You've got to start somewhere with a claim but make it provisional, so further investigation can call it into question and only at the end do you discover whether you got it wrong or right.

Dreyfus compares this to Kripke's rigid designations. You assign a property to something which you think is its essential property, but you have to keep examining it to

figure out if in fact you do have the essential property or not. [contrast this to Descartes radical doubt that gives you the cogito?]

Heidegger's concern is determine the essence of Dasein and methodologically what he is doing in B&T is provisionally saying that Dasein's essence is existence, but he won't know whether he got it right until he gets to the end of the investigation/book. Late in Division I he indicates the provisional nature of the investigation, even though he's pretty sure he 'lucked' into the right one.

[Side note that Heidegger thinks that we have a tendency to cover up the essential nature of things, particularly if it is disturbing to us.]

Because he's trying to talk about the essential nature of Dasein, following Kripke's approach, we would say that he needs to show that existence is its essence by fully exploring all of the aspects of Dasein's being to make sure that there isn't something more essential that he's missed. That was the project of B&T, even though he didn't actually complete it.

Terminology:

- **existenziell** – what some particular dasein's stand is on its being, that's existenziell
- **Existenzial** – when talking about the general structure of Dasein, that's Existenzial

B&T is an existenzial analytic. An attempt to lay out the entire structure of the way of Being of Dasein.

Getting back on track: We get socialized into our way of being, and the style of our understanding of being, or whether we think we do or don't have a nature, etc. We pick this up from the culture (broadly and locally). The everyday way of our understanding of being is something we are grown into from the start. We operate in it and out of it – we are always in a way of interpreting Dasein. That's what it is to exist. You can't step out of it even if you may be rebelling against it.

Terminology:

- **Factuality** – things about us that don't have to do with the interpreting, e.g. being male or female. Heidegger says yes, that's the factuality about us. However, all the factuality gets taken up and interpreted by Dasein. So 'male' becomes 'masculine' and is given interpretation/value, etc.
- **Facticity** – the way of understanding yourself given that you are caught up in a culture and factuality. Awareness(?) that you manifest it all the time and it is so pervasive that you can't get rid of it. Facticity is our particular style of understanding Being – it is nearest and furthest. Nearest in that it is all around us, furthest in that it is hardest to 'separate' from and get perspective.

Terminology:

- **Ontic** – has to do with entities. Properties, characteristics of entities.

- **Ontological** – has to do with the way of Being of a being/entity (vs. properties or characteristics).
- **Pre-ontological** – the acting out of the ontological without thinking about it.

Fundamental Ontology:

- As I take a stand on my existence, I use stuff (equipment) and in using it, I *manifest* my understanding of readiness-to-hand and thereby, there *is* readiness-to-hand. Equipment isn't equipment unless we are here using it as such. Otherwise it just sits there.
- As I understand objects and their properties, I *manifest* my understanding of presence-at-hand and thereby, there *is* presence-at-hand.
- We are the being that constitutes/produces all the ways of Being. Those aren't good words – Heidegger uses 'discloses' [which will tie into his concept of Truth down the road] The other two beings don't do this and studying them is not Fundamental Ontology.
- Fundamental Ontology is the study of the being that discloses ways of Being, the being that is the basis of all ontologies. Intelligibility of the other two modes of Being depends on us. Being depends on us, but beings don't. Rocks and stones are there whether human beings are or not, but they have no Being without us. [i.e. Heidegger is not an idealist]

In Heidegger's terms, B&T = Existenzial Analytic = Fundamental Ontology.

The structure of Dasein is to make sense of itself by using and understanding things. In that process you discover the three modes of being: equipment, substance and us. Why are there these three – specifically and only these three – modes of Being? **Time** will give us the clue b/c it has three dimensions [defer this until later].

Another question, how are they all related? How are they similar? Well, they all have Temporality. Each has its own kind which is unified in itself and the three are unified together:

- **Primordial** – the temporality of the Existenzial Analytic (Dasein)
- **Pragmatic** – the temporality of coping/using (equipment)
- **“Now” time** – ‘clock’ time, moment by moment, past/present/future

Heidegger thinks what he's got provisionally is right because of this – but he owes us a big picture of how this all works. Not just how they all work individually, but how they interrelate.