

## On The Completion Of Being And Time

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As long ago as 1932 Martin Heidegger wrote that he had abandoned any plans of completing *Being and Time*, first published in 1927 as "Part One" of a larger work. Why should anyone bother, at this ludicrously late date, to speculate on what the remainder of *Being and Time* would have been like?

The flawed nature of Heidegger's great book – great at least because instrumental, in the years since its appearance, for so many schools and movements of Continental philosophy – has become irrevocably associated with the moral flaws of Heidegger's life, which in their turn have gotten confusingly mingled with his reference to a "turn" or reversal in his thought which had rendered the *Being and Time* project finally inadequate and undesirable. While he occasionally insisted that this "turn" had been heralded in *Being and Time* itself, its upshot was to make *Being and Time* a failure.

Ignoring the date given by Heidegger for this turn, 1930, several years before he joined the National Socialist Party as a condition for becoming Rector of Freiburg, critics of the early Heidegger (many of them also admirers of the "later" Heidegger) have also come to view the turn as his repudiation of his enthusiasm for Nazism and those aspects of *Being and Time* that are supposed to have "fed into" Nazism – the emphasis on resolve in the face of death, the privileged position of human beings, the picture of the world as a network of tools for human purposes, especially the plan to interpret human existence and Being in general in the light of the future, rather than (as centuries of philosophy based on Greek decisions would have us do) the present. The "later" Heidegger revives the Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* (abandonment, letting be) as the proper attitude toward our surroundings and ourselves, sees technology as our greatest danger (and he had specifically mentioned technology in connection with Nazism<sup>1</sup>), wants to reawaken the Greek experience of Being as presence/present time through a study of the poetic, pre-philosophic roots of language. Had he written *Being and Time* in his later life, he says, its title would have been *Clearing and Presence*.<sup>2</sup>

It is not my aim to deny that Heidegger's unhappy love affair with the Hitlerian idea brought about changes in his thought, nor that many of these changes represented attempts to distance himself from that love. I do make the assumption, against not only current deconstructionism but a tradition tracing as far as Plato, that a bad man can be a good philosopher, and that however we understand the pathetic postwar Heidegger, repentant nature mystic or disappointed Storm Trooper,

*Being and Time* must be evaluated on its own terms. Without *Being and Time*, no one would have cared, and no one would still care, that a respected teacher in a German university embraced a monstrous cause: many did. Without *Being and Time* no one would care how seriously he embraced it and whether or not he deserves to be forgiven. Without *Being and Time*, I venture to say, later-Heidegger sentences like "The thing is the mirroring ring-dance of the Fourfold" would be as big a joke to philosophers as the early Heidegger's "Nothing nothings" was to Rudolf Carnap.

So *Being and Time* alone makes Heidegger worth defending; but it is not my intention to defend him; I only want to defend *Being and Time*. But that requires defending the thesis *Being and Time* was meant to state, and that requires completing it. That the book as it stands entails Nazism is stark nonsense: philosophers who found nourishment for their own thought in it, and lifted from it extensively, include Sartre, a Marxist, Marcel, a Christian democrat, and Ortega, a friend of aristocracy. *Being and Time* was to be an ontology founded in an anthropology; the unwritten part is the ontology, to anyone but a Derrida the farthest removed from political commitment. It would have said that what is relies on what is not yet. Heidegger's Nazism was not yet for seven years after *Being and Time* was written, so in that sense the text is determined by who the man who wrote it would become. But so is any text. As Eliot's "Prufrock" is not called into question as an important poem because it is written by a man destined to be a Christian – though the Christian Eliot did come to renounce it – Heidegger's text is not called into question because written by a man destined to be a Nazi.

I will now briefly outline the published portion of *Being and Time*, avoiding "Heideggerese" as much as possible, then explore some clues to the content of the remainder, noting an internal difficulty that might have made Heidegger reluctant to finish the book according to the plan he had sketched out. A full statement of my argument would be book-length: I am writing one. But three anticipations may be made, which I will leave with you as bald claims and not return to here: First, Heidegger's turn has more to do with what he saw as deep misunderstandings of *Being and Time* at its initial reception than with anything in Heidegger's personal or public life;<sup>3</sup> the "Letter on Humanism" shows that later devotees like Sartre only confirmed him in this impression. Second, the turn was nothing more transcendental than a mere change of mind. Heidegger came to believe that the Greek ontology he had attacked in *Being and Time* was the correct one. Third, he was right the first time.

The project of *Being and Time* is so ambitious as to seem, by analytic standards, obtusely extravagant if not a total waste of effort: Heidegger wants to explain what it means for anything to exist. We humans are concerned with this question because we wonder what it means for *us* to exist: because we will die one

day, possibly today, and have no notion what, if anything, will happen to us after that, we wonder what we're doing here, what the point of our life is, whether the sanest approach to that sort of question isn't just to ignore it. In other words, to us the meaning of existence is not an academic issue but an urgent personal issue. Even our attitude to the issue is an urgent personal issue, a matter of getting through the day. And philosophy has attempted to address the question, "What does it mean to be?" The answer it has come up with, however, focuses on things other than ourselves, namely the objects of perception (including other people so far as they are perceptible objects). What it means for such an object to exist is to occur in my perceptual field, to be located in this present moment, available for my research. This move is made as long ago as Aristotle when he identifies the "primary instance" of being with the embodied form *present* to the senses, and as recently as symbolic logic, where the existential quantifier is read "There is an x."

For us, on the other hand, the part of our life that has value is the part that doesn't exist *yet*: the choices we will make, the experiences we will have, the emotions we will feel. Even those who (we say) "live in the past" anticipate a future devoted to memory; those who try to "live in the present" concentrate on the *next* moment, the one that has not yet appeared. For us the value of existing lies not in what is present but in what is future, yet to come, currently unavailable, be it a happy marriage, a fulfilling job, tonight's episode of my favorite TV program, even a successful suicide. If philosophy has tended to answer the question of what it means for *me* to exist by appealing to what it means for something outside me to exist, philosophy has been drastically off-target since its outset. The issue of existence, then, has two large parts: One, what kind of answer would we give to the question of what it means to be if we started with the being – ourselves – who exist for the sake of the future? Two, why has philosophy so far failed to make this move and concentrated on the presence of things in the present moment? These questions give us the themes of Part One and Part Two of *Being and Time*. The method employed in Part One is called hermeneutical phenomenology, that in Part Two "the dismantling of the history of ontology."

As it happens, Part Two was never published as such, though much of its content has appeared in other of Heidegger's books, essays, and lectures.<sup>4</sup> Heidegger's fascination with the ontology of presence was a constant till his death, though he changed his mind about its worth. Part Two would have traced the crucial decisions establishing this ontology from Kant to Descartes to Aristotle; but the answer to the large question why philosophers have committed themselves to it is offered in Part One: human beings tend to hide from the thought of death by immersing themselves in their surroundings, and philosophers, lo and behold, are human.

But when the incompleteness of *Being and Time* is referred to it is not com-

that in attempting to dissolve the philosophical division of subject and object he had merely succeeded in making the objective world dependent on subjective "lived time." Where he had intended past, present, and future to be phenomenological "givens" for understanding, he still found himself (in many people's eyes) on the near side of the Kantian divide between how things are and how we must conceive them. Perhaps the difficulty he saw – there are definite reverberations from this in his later writings – was that *Being and Time* allowed for too much human control over the shape of the world and too little openness to the world as living and lived. One is astounded that the book's constant pointing to the open future could leave this impression. But the future and possibility have ceased to be values for Heidegger. He stresses rather openness to the present, letting things be as they are, accepting one's lot. The fear of shutting off *this* kind of openness ("listening to Being") by constructing conceptual schemes which relieve us from thinking any further led him to call philosophy "the enemy of thought."<sup>8</sup>

But Heidegger's failure of faith in philosophy was a failure of faith in meaning. *Being and Time* tried to prove the meaning of being was time, but it actually would have done something more. It would have established that human life is meaningful within itself, that it contains answers to the questions we ask. The move beyond humanly comprehensible meaning to a waiting on the voice of Being – waiting for meaning to approach us from above – is seen by some as Heidegger's ascent to nobility, following on his descent to hell. It is rather a rejection of the sole nobility available to us, hope in ourselves, desire to be true to ourselves, attention to the chores and rewards of living.

### Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 199.
2. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper, 1977), 392.
3. See Ingeborg Bachman, *Die kritische Aufnahme der Existentialphilosophie Martin Heideggers* (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1985).
4. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990); "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" in *Basic Writings*, 273-282; *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), 237-256.
5. See *Basic Problems*, 324-327.
6. "Higher than actuality stands possibility." *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward

Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), 63.

7. Heidegger says that Kant "shrank back" from the insights of the first edition of the *Critique: Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 110.

8. See "The Thinker as Poet" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 8, and "What Calls for Thinking?" in *Basic Writings*, 347.