

Chapter Six

The Ethics of Place

6.1 Truth and Being

To explore Heidegger's doctrine of place and its implications for his ethics, a theme which has already been touched on both in our discussion of the existential analytic of Dasein and of the theme of ethos discussed in the Letter on Humanism, it will be useful to approach this topic through an examination of his distinctive approach to the phenomenon of truth. The existential analytic of Dasein brought a new dimension to the western philosophical tradition, in that Heidegger's emphasis on 'place' and on 'world' sought to re-orient thought to the unitary human level through a paradigmatic critique of the modern Cartesian ontology. An argument to be explored here, with special reference to Descartes, is that the framework of epistemology, which the existential analytic is especially concerned to criticise, has prevented philosophy from attaining to the real issues of ethics, because its emphasis on objective knowledge has devalued the ethical problems surrounding actual existence. Given that existential problems are key themes for Heidegger, it flows from his critique of epistemology that the new dimension he introduced was intrinsically ethical in character.

An implicit claim of Heidegger's ontology is that the doctrine of truth which seeks to systematically classify reality on the basis of theoretical representation has robbed the ideas which are at the heart of ethics of their transformative power in human action. As a consequence of the representational doctrine of truth, modern philosophy has operated on the basis of dehumanised and non-ethical notions of truth by denying the significance of involvement in relationships, and has thus been incapable of thinking coherently about ethics. The basis for this rather complex claim should become clearer as we dig further into Heidegger's critique of the scientific epistemology.

Heidegger's critique of modern philosophy was centred around his perception that philosophy since Descartes, and by this he meant the entire 'modern' world view, had allowed itself to be dominated by the theory of knowledge of the positive sciences and by the theory of space conceived as 'res extensa' (extended substance), to the exclusion of perspectives which establish their ground at the level of personal existence. By demanding such a temporal horizon, Heidegger "aimed at an existential conception of science". He said "this must be distinguished from the 'logical' conception which understands science with regard to its results . . . a fully adequate existential conception of science cannot be

carried out until the meaning of Being and the connection between Being and truth have been clarified in terms of the temporality of existence.”¹

Being and Time thus maintained a continuity with modern philosophy by seeking a foundation for thought in the notion of truth, but held that truth cannot be found through Descartes' method, which sought to find it from the free-floating constructions which arise within the act of "beholding". Against the Cartesian approach to truth, which was not confined to Descartes but also underpinned British empiricism since Locke and Berkeley by making vision the ground for the assertion of theory,² Heidegger maintained that truth is revealed, not through the systematic classification of representations, but in the disclosure of the world through an existential openness to relationships.

The modern tradition which goes back to Descartes and Kant is termed by Heidegger the 'metaphysics of subjectivity', because of the primacy it has given to the 'I think' (ego cogito). The difference between his own existential analytic, which it must be said accords a very similar central place to human thought, and the metaphysics of subjectivity, is rather subtle, but it is central to his whole project of placing philosophy on the foundation of existence rather than knowledge. In Heidegger's view modern philosophy has suffered from the belief that the primary location of truth is in the correctness of representation of knowledge in the mind of the perceiving subject, rather than in the uncovering of the existential 'truth' of Being in the world. For Heidegger, "existence is not the actuality of the ego cogito", but "dwelling in the nearness of Being".³ Being is understood in the context of the world, and "the significance-relationships which determine the structure of the world are not a network of forms which a worldless subject has laid over some kind of material".⁴ Instead of a subject classifying objective representations, Dasein is inherently involved in relationships of concern.

Since the time of Parmenides, who identified truth with its perceptive understanding⁵, truth has been closely associated with Being. For Heidegger's phenomenological method, truth is identified with disclosure, on the basis of his translation of the Greek word 'aletheia' as 'unhiddenness'. He contrasted this interpretation with the traditional definition of truth as 'correctness'. From Aristotle to Kant, the accepted explanation of truth as "the agreement of knowledge with its object" or "adequation of the intellect and the thing"⁶ held sway. However the difference between this interpretation,

¹ Sein und Zeit: 357

² Sein und Zeit: cf 96

³ Basic Writings: 222

⁴ Sein und Zeit: 366

⁵ Sein und Zeit: 212. Parmenides' saying "To gar auto noein estin te kai einai" - roughly translated 'Thought and Being are the Same' - was the axiomatic maxim at the origin of Greek ontology. See SZ note xx.

⁶ cf. Sein und Zeit: 215, where Heidegger discusses the history of the concept of truth in its permutations from Aristotle and Augustine through Aquinas and Avicenna.

which essentially understands truth as an ideal representation of a thing, and disclosure, is that disclosure does not obtain indirectly by inference, but lays the thing open to circumspection,⁷ IN ORDER TO "LET THE THING BE" as it is. The definition of truth as agreement, in Heidegger's view, is based on the theory of knowledge of the dubious schema of the subject-object relation, with its "ontologically unclarified separation of the real and the ideal". The consequence of refusing to clarify the "relation between the ideal content and the real act of judgement" is that "the actuality of knowing and judging gets broken asunder into two ways of Being - two levels which can never be pieced together".⁸

To approach truth phenomenologically, we must adopt an open and receptive bearing by looking, listening and responding. Instead of imposing a dogmatic conception upon the world, we must allow what is there to emerge. This attitude towards truth is central to Heidegger's phenomenological departure from representational epistemology, but it is not incompatible with the true critical spirit of science. Where rationalism demands that truth is a property of judgement, tested by the correctness of the correspondence between ideas and objective reality, Heidegger contends that the deeper meaning of truth as unhiddenness or disclosure is not simply agreement of judgement and object, but emerges in the relation of Dasein and the world, when assertion "uncovers the entity as it is in itself".⁹ For Heidegger such 'uncovering' does not reveal the entity as a noumenon, but as it exists in relation to human purposes. "Only on the basis of the phenomenon of the world can the Being-in-itself of entities within the world be grasped ontologically".¹⁰ The whole framework of an isolated subject comprehending truth purely in terms of objective substantial properties is thereby undermined. Heidegger therefore argued against the idea of truth as 'beyond' man, which metaphysics has made "imperishable and eternal, never to be founded on the transitoriness and fragility that belong to man's essence".¹¹

Feminist philosophy is one area in which a similar critique has been taken up. When modern feminist thinkers¹² speak about the false systematicity and the artificial unity of vision towards which philosophy has striven, they are observing the same mistake Heidegger pointed to with his critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity. The phenomenological treatment of truth, to which much feminist theory has also been indebted, is markedly different from traditional views that the absolute must be eternal, unconditioned, unchanging, etc. The phenomenological conception aims never to regard truth as above question, but continually to treat it as open to criticism, so that no

⁷ Sein und Zeit: 75

⁸ Sein und Zeit: 217

⁹ Sein und Zeit: 218

¹⁰ Sein und Zeit: 76

¹¹ Basic Writings: 126

¹² cf M. Le Doeuff: The Shameful Face of Philosophy; Operative Philosophy

assumptions or presuppositions about the actual nature of being can be retained, whether by oversight or by faith.

The basis for his criticism of the traditional perspectives on truth is Heidegger's thesis that "Being in the world is the foundation for the primordial phenomenon of truth".¹³ This central disclosive priority given to Being in the world is the ground of the systematicity of Heidegger's thought, but in a very different way from earlier systems. Ontology must be systematic, given its ultimate goal of recognising the systematic interconnectedness of all knowledge and reality, but the systematic aspect in Heidegger differs from traditional systems in that his emphasis is on how our ideas disclose Being in the world, rather than on their internal coherence or logical 'correctness'. Correct proof cannot establish significance for Dasein, but it is within such significance that the 'primordial' truth is located. Significance is the ground of meaning, and meaning is only established in relation to human purposes, so truth must be located within the horizon of the phenomena which are meaningful for Dasein, rather than solely in that which is provable.

Heidegger's doctrine of the dependence of truth on relatedness to humanity brought him to a very different conception of meaning from those of traditional philosophy. Instead of defining meaning as an objective and absolute property of substances or entities, he demanded that the role of practical human understanding in conferring meaning be acknowledged and that meaning be defined as 'relative' to Dasein. In the traditional view, meaning is a property of 'judgment' and thus adheres to concepts. However, one of the central features of Heidegger's method is his critique of the role 'the conceptual'. His definition of meaning as "that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself"¹⁴ still places meaning within the horizon of intelligibility and thus of language, and implies that entities only acquire meaning when they have come to be understood. Yet Heidegger's notion of meaning is as "an existentiale of Dasein", not as a free-floating conceptual property attaching to entities. For Heidegger, 'meaning' always signifies 'accessibility'¹⁵, a doctrine which arose from the humanist and relativist premises that conditioned his thought. Hence "only Dasein can be meaningful". Events may "break in upon us and destroy us", but this does not make them meaningful.

On the basis of his doctrine of truth, Heidegger defined understanding in terms of knowing how to do and use things¹⁶. Modern thought had allowed the notion of understanding to drift far away from human concern, but with his argument that meaning arises only when things occur for the sake of possibilities and purposes of Dasein, Heidegger demanded a necessary link between understanding and practical ends. He

¹³ Sein und Zeit: 219

¹⁴ Sein und Zeit: 151

¹⁵ cf. Sein und Zeit: 324

¹⁶ Mark Okrent: Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being and the Critique of Metaphysics, Cornell 1988, p.130, presents an interesting discussion of this topic

defined understanding as always involved in practical concern, which means abstract theory without practical consequence for Dasein is not understanding, except in a limited sense devoid of purpose and meaning. "Understanding of being . . . comes alive in any of its dealings with entities. . . . The kind of Being which belongs to such concerned dealings . . . consists in thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies".¹⁷

The highly contentious approaches to the key philosophical notions of truth and meaning just outlined shows that the sense in which Heidegger's philosophy is rigorous and fundamental must be quite different from the sorts of rigour accepted within the canons of objectivity. It is essential that any philosophy must satisfy the requirements of logic and rigour, and Heidegger recognised this in his efforts to achieve comprehension of the meaning of Being through the development of a unified interpretation of the phenomena given to perception. Yet he said that meaning is not an objective property inhering in substances, but a relation conferred by and upon human existence. Such attitudes led to some commentators charging him with irrationalism, and have bolstered the perception of a lack of rigour in his thought. However Heidegger argued that methods of research and study outside the sciences require such a relational doctrine of meaning, as they cannot bring their subject matter into view while they are restricted to the modes of exactitude demanded by science. This does not make non-scientific disciplines any less rigorous than the sciences; as Heidegger says, "mathematics is not more rigorous than history, but only narrower, because the existential foundations relevant for it lie within a narrower range".¹⁸ This is a redefinition of rigour (and of truth and meaning) away from the logic of precise observation towards existential insight into the human situation, and it must be admitted that Heidegger engaged in relentless pursuit of this latter goal. The suggestion here that ideas and things only obtain their truth, and hence their meaning, through a relation to human life, indicates the specific limitation Heidegger places on the otherwise amorphous question of method in ontology, and at the same time helps to show how his philosophy is ethical in its very heart.

6.2. Critique of the Scientific Paradigm

Heidegger's efforts to restore the links between existence and truth anticipated much of the worldview which only now is being recognised as the successor to the scientific paradigm created in the seventeenth century. In setting out to uncover the authentic foundations necessary for existential ontology to become universal, systematic, fundamental and rigorous, Heidegger articulated a framework of ideas with the potential to transform the entire project of modern philosophy, a new framework that may even be

¹⁷ Sein und Zeit 67

¹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 153

comparable to the paradigm shift of the seventeenth century, when the discovery that the earth orbits the sun helped inaugurate the scientific revolution at the foundation of the modern world view. We will now turn to an exposition of this framework.

If a method premised on the primacy of such a doctrine of truth is to establish how and where the metaphysics of science are deficient, it must show why the perspectives which arise from the absolutisation of the scientific method are unsatisfactory as a basis for ontology, and why explanation of the meaning of being requires more than empirical description of its nature from an imagined objective standpoint shorn of all subjectivity. To be successful, the critique of scientific epistemology must demonstrate that science has proved incapable of giving an adequate account of meaning. The issue is paradigmatic; Heidegger advocated a shift from the notion of physics as fundamental to an approach based on human existence as the basic ground of thought. Science, in its function as the theory of reality, is necessary for human life, but theory is not sufficient as a basis for understanding the truth of Dasein's involvement in the world. So for example Heidegger's denial that there are any "eternal truths" is made on the basis that "there is truth only in so far as man is".¹⁹ He claims Newton's laws are not eternal, they only became 'true' when Newton made them humanly accessible: "Because the kind of Being that is essential to truth has the character of human existence, all truth is relative to human existence".²⁰

Heidegger's efforts to restore the links between existence and truth anticipated much of the worldview which only now is being recognised as the successor to the scientific paradigm created in the seventeenth century. In setting out to uncover the authentic foundations of ontological understanding in the analysis of existence, Heidegger articulated a framework of ideas with the potential to transform the entire project of modern philosophy, a new framework that may even be comparable to the paradigm shift of the seventeenth century, when the discovery that the earth goes round the sun helped inaugurate the scientific revolution at the foundation of the modern world view. Heidegger's doctrine of truth is not merely an interesting epistemological point; it is the key to his critique of the modern mechanistic ontology. His transformation of thought is nevertheless designed to build on modern achievements, not to overturn them, despite his talk of destroying traditions and of the pervasive modern neglect of Being. Before considering his understanding of the meanings of world and space, as a way of developing our characterisation of the new ethical paradigm to which Heidegger contributed, we shall outline some salient features of the dominant worldview he criticised.

The success of the sciences in developing comprehensive understanding of the physical universe is an ontological factor of the utmost importance for modern thought. The wealth of knowledge and information that has been accumulated about everything from

¹⁹ Sein und Zeit:226

²⁰ Sein und Zeit 227

quasars to quarks to rainforests must be recognised for the objective insight it provides into the nature of Being. Any attempt to discuss the philosophical merit of modern science must begin by recognising the practical benefits wrought by technologies grounded in scientific theory. The philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century, in which modern science was born, gave rise to an entire new vision of the world, through the work of such scientists as Newton, Descartes and Galileo. The assumptions of these men became decisive for the spirit of the modern age; hence Heidegger remarks that Descartes was responsible for constructing "an ontology which, in principle, is still the usual one today".²¹ The ontology often spoken of as the scientific revolution amounted, as Thomas Kuhn²² and Fritjof Capra²³ have argued, to a new paradigm which still governs modern thought. A transformation in the whole human project of the advancement of learning occurred as the incompatible philosophies of Aristotle and Newton fought out their differences. Within the framework of physics, a decisive advance occurred as mechanics was put on a mathematically accurate foundation. 'Body' was replaced by 'mass', 'place' by 'position', 'motion' by 'inertia', and 'tendency' by 'force'.²⁴

Since the scientific revolution, much Western philosophy has accepted as a basic premise that the rigorous determination of the universal laws of mechanistic causality is the most important task facing the attempt to provide secure foundations for ontology. Despite decreasing levels of lip service, the old idea that science is only a part of philosophy has gone into near-terminal decline, as the discipline of physics has defined the paradigm of scientific truth. With its demands that enquiry be confined to physical things that can be measured and investigated according to empirical methods and to the mathematical theory regulating the behaviour of physical entities, physics uses mathematical theory to explain the regularity of phenomena by finding timeless physical laws and patterns obeyed by all objects. The laws of gravity, the theorem of the conservation of energy, the systematic descriptions of the elemental atomic composition of matter, are examples of such 'eternal truths' discovered by the scientific method. The enormous success of this method, explaining the nature of truth in terms of the truths of nature, has been amply demonstrated, to such an extent that some modern philosophy²⁵ has been based on the premise that there is no knowledge outside of science. However the central problem now is that the philosophy of modern science cannot explain how the scientific reality of masses in motion can account for human experience, let alone human aspirations, as it lacks the language to even talk about the issues in question.

²¹ Sein und Zeit: 100

²² The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962

²³ The Tao of Physics, p.10

²⁴ cf Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics (MSMM) in Basic Writings

²⁵ e.g. Rudolf Carnap: Erkenntnis (1929)

Heidegger's attitude to science is complex: while maintaining that the limitations of the modern world view arise directly from the primacy it has given to science and technology, he does not seek to impugn the practical value of scientific discovery. Recognising that "science is the theory of the real",²⁶ he is "not passing judgement on the positive work of these disciplines" but seeking to show that their "ontological foundations can never be ... derived from empirical material" and that these foundations are "problematic in a more radical sense than any thesis of positive science can ever be".²⁷ His argument is that the modern world view based on the attitude of science and technology, and with roots going back to ancient logic, is responsible for the loss of our primordial openness to Being, an openness which is essential to the integrity and authenticity of human life.

Heidegger is far enough removed from the time of the scientific revolution that he can set the old and the new side by side and compare them, without the fascination or the arrogance which led to the proclamation of new absolutes in the works of Newton, Hegel and Darwin. He writes,

"the ground swells evoked by the principle of eccentricity (discovered by Kepler), which led to a new era more than four hundred years ago, have become exceedingly broad and flat . . . Man has withdrawn so far from himself that he no longer sees himself at all. The 'modern man' - that is to say, the post-renaissance man - is ready for burial".²⁸

Despite the enormous practical and theoretical progress the ontology based on science has engendered, it suffers from the problem that its basis in mathematical objectivity is insufficient for the development of an understanding of space which will be meaningful at the existential level of human concern. As Heidegger put it, "the 'here' of Dasein's current factual situation never signifies a position in space, but signifies rather the horizon (Spielraum) of the range of that equipmental totality with which it is most closely concerned".²⁹ The ontology of the scientific revolution, through which the concept of "extension" came to be accepted as "the basic characteristic of the world",³⁰ has effectively sanctioned the neglect of the question of being by denying the value of any understanding other than that gained through exact representation. The modern world view has confined the notion of "experience" within the rigid theoretical framework of mathematics, and Heidegger suggests this has allowed a "perversion" of the problematic of ontology.³¹

²⁶ Science and Reflection: 157

²⁷ Sein und Zeit: 50

²⁸ Sein und Zeit: 401, quoting Count von Yorck.

²⁹ Sein und Zeit: 369

³⁰ Sein und Zeit: 64

³¹ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics 17

As a result of its basis in physics, science has interpreted Being within a framework bounded only by space, time and matter, while spirit, and hence human existence, has been effectively relegated to the mysterious realm of metaphysics in which there is no verification or certainty. Heidegger contended that this hostility to spirituality on the part of science has actually prevented the theory of objectivity from understanding the specifically human dimensions of meaning which arise in the context of practical involvement. Efforts on the part of the scientific worldview "to reconstruct the thing of use from the thing of nature", and so "round out the thing of nature . . . by subsequently endowing things with value predicates", arise out of a problematic which "has been perverted in principle".³² Yet the scientific worldview must employ this problematic while it regards nature as ontologically prior to the world of human concern.

An essential element of Heidegger's critique of science is his argument that the scientific split between subject and object does not cohere with human experience, and must be removed from its position as the privileged foundation of ontological truth. The epistemology of the subject/object dichotomy subordinates philosophy beneath science, just as effectively as theology can subordinate it beneath religion. However, as Heidegger points out, "real progress in research comes not from collecting results but from a crisis in its basic concepts",³³ and such progress can only occur on the basis of the breadth of vision possible within philosophy. No epistemology has the breadth of scope to occasion the sort of "real movement of the sciences" where the "relationship between enquiry and the things under investigation begins to totter",³⁴ because epistemology by its nature presupposes that this relationship is fixed in terms of subject and object. Heidegger maintains that such movement, bringing progress through transformation of the very paradigm upon which research is premised, is only possible on the basis of existential ontology. Because science locates the primary task of ontology in the objective explanation of reality according to the model of the universe as an inanimate complex of masses in motion, it has no point of access to the possibility that ontology could emerge from or adequately explain the specific difficulties of understanding the world from an authentically human perspective, from the incarnate standpoint of human being in the world. The absolutisation of science ignores the dimension of meaning which is a qualitative construct of human existence (Dasein) and which as such cannot be determined by empirical methods alone.

The method of seeking truth from facts is undoubtedly correct within its own contexts, but serious problems arise when the theoretical abstractions of science seek to provide an adequate account of human experience. For example with regard to Newton's

³² Sein und Zeit: 99

³³ Sein und Zeit 9

³⁴ Sein und Zeit 9

First Law, that "every body left to itself moves uniformly in a straight line",³⁵ Heidegger observes that "there is no experiment which could ever bring such a body to direct perception, but modern science, in contrast to the mere dialectical poetic conception of mediæval Scholasticism and science, is supposed to be based on experience. Instead it has such a law at its apex".³⁶ If we now try to find practical applications for Newton's discovery, which at least until the time of Einstein was held to be the absolute and universal truth, it becomes apparent that living terrestrial bodies operate and move in a chaotic manner, despite the 'fact' that they are theoretically governed by the laws of physics. The sort of 'beholding' of moving entities that is possible in a laboratory is found to bear only indirect relation to the actual world of circumspection. Heidegger develops this observation into the perhaps extreme argument that because "no one would presume to maintain that Shakespeare's poetry is more advanced than that of Aeschylus, it is impossible to say that the modern understanding of whatever is, is more correct than that of the Greeks".³⁷ Similarly he contends³⁸ that Galileo's work, far from being based on experience, or for that matter on 'facts' alone, was just as conceptual and theory-determined as the physics of Aristotle. For example, in the actual conduct of the famous experiment of the dropping of the weights from the leaning tower of Pisa, the two bodies did not arrive at precisely the same time. "In spite of these differences, and therefore really against the evidence of experience, Galileo upheld his proposition".³⁹

Within the disciplines of the humanities, where culture rather than nature provides the parameters for scholarship and learning, the scientific worldview is sometimes regarded as doctrinaire and narrow. Logical positivism, with its denial of meaning outside the bounds of scientific verification, has been widely criticised on this basis. If we define the truth as only that dimension of our experience which can be formulated in exact universal lawlike propositions not subject to change, the truth of particular human experience is denied. This is one reason why Heidegger seeks to change the meaning of truth from correctness to disclosure, because things can be disclosed as existentially true without corresponding to any conceptual representation.

If it is a methodologically valid step to consider being in the world or Dasein as a totality, as a phenomenon that must always be interpreted as an indissoluble whole, Heidegger is not undermining the authentic goal of science but providing the key to attaining the scientific ideal of bringing all the phenomena given to perception into a unified synthetic relation. He defines science as "the totality established through an

³⁵ Basic Writings: 262

³⁶ Basic Writings: 265

³⁷ Age of the World Picture: 117

³⁸ in Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics

³⁹ Basic Writings: 266

interconnection of true propositions",⁴⁰ but if such a totality is to be brought into view, it must be done through analysis of the being who investigates truth. It becomes a matter not of just binding propositions together or separating them out, but of relating them to each other so judgement can exercise a co-ordinating function.⁴¹ He therefore suggested that,

"Laying the foundations for the sciences is different in principle from the kind of logic which limps along after, investigating the status of some science as it chances to find it, in order to discover its method. Laying the foundations, as we have described it, is rather a productive logic, in the sense that it leaps ahead, as it were, into some area of being and discloses it for the first time in the constitution of its being".⁴²

Heidegger's critique of the mechanistic ontology built upon the foundations of modern science has far reaching consequences, because it brings into question the basis of the entire scientific philosophy that has been adumbrated since the time of Newton and Descartes. The implications of Heidegger's critique of Cartesian positivism, if that is what we may call this overall shift in perspective he advocates, are especially significant for the understanding of place. Part of the problem of "forgetfulness of Being", which Heidegger links closely to the triumph of the Cartesian cogito, is that older ideas of place have been superseded in the modern world view by the scientific concept of position, with the result that the world has been divested of its meaning.

Being, which is the destiny of history, is neglected, because the mainstream of western culture prefers to subordinate all such universal questioning to commercial, technological and military priorities. One of Heidegger's key assertions is that such mistaken priorities can only arise because of the pervasive domination of modern thought by the metaphysics of subjectivity. As mentioned above, this is the practice of accepting subjective beliefs as the final truth, a way of thought Heidegger saw as common in modern politics, technology and religion.

6.4 Worldhood

Heidegger's criticism of scientific absolutism is summed up in his statement that "the homogeneous space of nature shows itself only when entities . . . are deprived of their worldhood".⁴³ For Heidegger's ontology, world is prior to nature, but for science, nature is prior to world: "the world is not present-at-hand in space; yet only within a world does space let itself be discovered".⁴⁴ To understand Heidegger's critique of the placelessness, the

⁴⁰ Sein und Zeit: 11

⁴¹ Sein und Zeit: 159

⁴² Sein und Zeit: 10

⁴³ Sein und Zeit: 112

⁴⁴ Sein und Zeit: 369

'never-dwelling-anywhere', of modern thought, it is essential to understand his analysis of worldhood, which is a key to his epistemology. 'World' cannot be simply identified with the planet Earth, with Nature or Reality, because it is principally Dasein's context of involvement and meaning. Speaking of the Cartesian interpretation of the world in terms of Nature, Heidegger wrote that "a glance at the previous ontology shows that if one fails to see Being-in-the-world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likewise gets passed over".⁴⁵ Due attention to the doctrine of worldhood is therefore an essential component of our efforts to display an ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought.

"Worldhood" is defined as "the structure of that to which Dasein assigns itself",⁴⁶ as "the ontical condition which makes it possible for entities within the world to be discovered at all"; and "as significance, which can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations".⁴⁷ The word 'world' is reserved for "that wherein a factual Dasein can be said to live", including "the public we-world, or one's own closest domestic environment".⁴⁸

Worldhood is to be distinguished from such ideas as "Nature" and "Reality", because its meaning is established in relation to human life. In describing nature as "an entity which is encountered within the world",⁴⁹ Heidegger sought to re-orient ontology to give priority to "that world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it, the environment".⁵⁰ Concern for the world of everyday Dasein is thus placed within an ontological framework which relates Dasein to Being as a whole. Environment is not meant here as a designation of the entities of Nature, existing without any relationship to Dasein, but as something which is encountered pragmatically in equipment,⁵¹ in the context of human life. "Ontologically, 'world' is not a way of characterising those entities which Dasein essentially is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself".⁵²

Heidegger analysed this epistemic relatedness of worldhood and Dasein in terms of another new set of conceptual tools, the Being of things understood as "ready-to-hand"⁵³ and the Being of things understood as "present-at-hand"⁵⁴. This distinction, introduced in Chapter 3 of Being and Time,⁵⁵ provides the principal categories⁵⁶ of his new

⁴⁵ Sein und Zeit: 65

⁴⁶ Sein und Zeit: 86

⁴⁷ Sein und Zeit: 88

⁴⁸ Sein und Zeit: 65.

⁴⁹ Sein und Zeit: 63

⁵⁰ Sein und Zeit: 6

⁵¹ Sein und Zeit: 68

⁵² Sein und Zeit: 64

⁵³ (zuhanden)

⁵⁴ (vorhanden)

⁵⁵ entitled "The Worldhood of the World"

⁵⁶ Sein und Zeit: 88

framework for understanding space and truth. Put simply, the ready-to-hand is the way of relating to things encountered at the everyday level of human experience, while the present-at-hand is the way of relating to things characteristic of science. Understanding Heidegger's use of these categories is essential because they are central to his philosophy of place. Furthermore, they are basic to the whole project of showing a way forward to a more accurate metaphysics of human experience, a metaphysic able to integrate the ethical dimension into philosophy, instead of merely 'tacking it on' as a sort of necessary afterthought.

The things we come into contact with and use in daily life, which must be accounted for in any systematic ontology that starts from the point of view of human Being in the world, can only be validly interpreted in terms of the ready-to-hand, the mode of apprehension found in everyday circumspection. We experience life in the context of a totality of involvements, where significance, reference and meaning are historical constructions made by human subjects. The ready-to-hand has to do with "equipment constituted by various ways of the 'in-order-to', such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability".⁵⁷ It emerges in the context of the purposes 'towards-which' we 'assign or refer' (verweisen) entities we may come across. By contrast, the present-at-hand presupposes that the only truth is found in "Thinghood and Reality, which discovers such characteristics of Being as substantiality, materiality, extendedness, side-by-side-ness, and so forth".⁵⁸

The new categories of the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand are contrasting ways of understanding the Being of things, although both are equally meaningful and significant. The ready-to-hand considers things in terms of their use value as equipment, not only in an economic sense but in such a way as to encompass the whole range of ways people relate to things that are important to them or that affect them. Of course this does not exclude the possibility that ready-to-hand things may be considered scientifically; indeed Heidegger remarks that "the context of equipment that is ready-to-hand in an everyday manner, its historical emergence and utilisation, and its factual role in Dasein - all these are objects for the science of economics".⁵⁹ The present-at-hand is the mode of cognition that operates when things are conceptualised theoretically as facts, recognising that "a 'fact' is only what it is in the light of the fundamental conception".⁶⁰ As we shall see, a major part of the claim that there is an ethical dimension to his critique of Descartes is bound up with Heidegger's doctrine that the present-at-hand is the way of understanding found in the Cartesian view of the world as *res extensa*.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Sein und Zeit: 68

⁵⁸ Sein und Zeit: 68

⁵⁹ Sein und Zeit: 361

⁶⁰ Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics: 248

⁶¹ extended substance

The claim inherent in this schema, that there is a separation between science and experience, marks Heidegger's departure from positivism.⁶² There are several examples given in Being and Time to illustrate the contrast between the scientific objectivism of Being present-at-hand and the existential reality of Being ready to hand, all of which illuminate the paradigmatic ethical dimension of his thought and his critique of positivism. Perhaps the best example of the contrast between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand is Heidegger's discussion of the relationship between the earth and the sun. The correct scientific view, which understands the earth as a cosmic speck within a stellar system on an outer arm of the Milky Way galaxy, is the only truth in terms of the present at hand. In terms of the ready-to-hand however, the pre-Copernican view that the sun goes round the earth is just as true. As Heidegger puts it,

"the sun, whose light and warmth are in everyday use, has its own places - sunrise, midday, sunset, midnight Here we have something which is ready-to-hand with uniform constancy. . . . The house has its sunny side and its shady side; the way it is divided up into rooms is oriented towards these, and so is the arrangement within them, according to their character as equipment. Churches and graves, for instance, are laid out according to the rising and the setting of the sun - the regions of life and death, which are determinative for Dasein itself with regard to its ownmost possibilities of Being in the world".⁶³

In terms of human access, the sky is not principally an object of study for climatologists and a hindrance for astronomers, it is "the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether".⁶⁴ For farming,⁶⁵ or for the laying out of churches and graves,⁶⁶ it is irrelevant that the earth "actually" goes round the sun. The same distinction applies to other practical concerns;

"the south wind may be meteorologically accessible as something which just occurs, but it is never present-at-hand directly in such a way as this On the contrary, only by the circumspection with which one takes account of things in farming is the south wind discovered in its Being".⁶⁷ "The botanist's plants

⁶² see especially *Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics*

⁶³ *Sein und Zeit*: 103

⁶⁴ *Poetry, Language, Thought* p.149

⁶⁵ *Sein und Zeit*: 415

⁶⁶ *Sein und Zeit*: 104

⁶⁷ *Sein und Zeit*: 81

are not the 'flowers in the hedgerow', the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale'.⁶⁸

These examples show how the Being of the same entity can be understood from the divergent perspectives of the scientific and the existential, each of which is meaningful. For the scientific theory that only the present-at-hand qualifies as true knowledge, the 'springhead in the dale' is not however acceptable as a description of the source of the river. As merely ready-to-hand, a dale is no more than a subjective æsthetic perception and not something that can be expressed in terms of mathematics and geometry. Heidegger contrasts the perspectives of the cartographer and the lover of nature, suggesting it may even be that an extreme version of the cartographic representational understanding of knowledge would attribute more reality to the map designation than to the actual place. In the case of the flowers in the hedgerow, whose being is disclosed in the whiff of scent or the flash of colour, the scholars criticised by Heidegger would understand them according to the catalogue, and any moods the flowers may have inspired in us are dismissed as merely subjective and without truth value. We can only know the flower as present at hand once it has been dissected or pressed and the Latin name has been determined; while it remains an unruly wild object and no more than a source of delight for children, its Being has not yet been adequately clarified.

To always drag being back from the abstract purity of theory to the necessary mediation of human use may appear to destroy the beauty of speculation; but it replaces it with a beauty more valuable because it discloses the world as related to human concerns. In The Origin of the Work of Art, Heidegger discusses the implications of his epistemology for æsthetics, using as an example the well known Van Gogh painting of a pair of peasant shoes. In terms of the present at hand, they are "leather soles and uppers, joined together by nails and thread . . . matter and form". But as ready to hand, the "tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the field. . . . In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain. . . . This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment is in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealedness of its Being".⁶⁹

The approach of the present-at-hand (the Cartesian ontology), according to which "entities can have their 'properties' defined mathematically in 'functional concepts'",⁷⁰ seeks to ignore consideration of things in terms of the value invested in them by human concern in favour of a supposedly 'rational' approach, yet this 'rationality' is based on a definite worldview which excludes meaningful realities such as love, beauty, moods and

⁶⁸ Sein und Zeit: 70

⁶⁹ Basic Writings: 163

⁷⁰ Sein und Zeit: 88

values from its intellectual horizon. So the question "What is the world?"⁷¹ is far from trivial, because our answer to this basic question will determine our attitude to the whole range of issues covered within the horizon of the meaningful. Both ways of relating to the things in the world, the ready-to-hand and the present at hand, are necessary and valid, but they must be clearly distinguished.

In order to provide an ethical grounding for human life as it is lived, philosophy must develop a way of thought which recognises that meaning is found in all relationships and involvements. A new framework is needed which can place the theoretical cognition obtained through scientific experiment and observation on a level with other meaningful ways human beings disclose the truth. An ontology constructed on the basis of the ready-to-hand alone would be groundless: without the discipline of scientific analysis of structure and function it would remain in a primitive myth world of belief. However by the same token, an ontology constructed on the basis of the present-at-hand alone would be meaningless: there would be no basis for saying why any of the numerous facts discovered should matter to anybody, which is the only situation in which meaning, and hence ethics, can arise. Understanding requires both grounds and meaning, so both approaches are necessary.

Clearly such a philosophy requires a new understanding of the world, in terms of its nature and our relation to it, so this is what Heidegger tried to provide through the existential analytic of Dasein. Fundamental to this task is the idea that "subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world".⁷² The notion of 'being in' presupposes a historical immersion in a context of significance entirely different from the way an isolated subject can theorise about a world present at hand. The central point is that the philosophy of Being must be meaningful at the human level, it must relate to people in their activities and relationships, rather than as the objects of detached scientific enquiry. It is this demand that makes Heidegger's philosophy ethical, because exploration of the primacy of the human level, a primacy which flows directly from his conception of Dasein as being in the world, must consider the ethical issues surrounding our involvements with all the people and things we contact.

The ontology of worldhood and engagement brought into question the whole scientific understanding of space; Heidegger formalised this with his claim that the correct starting point for fundamental ontology is with what he terms 'concernful circumspection'.⁷³ In the activity of circumspection we become immersed in the world of our concern, and human involvement becomes the criterion of spatiality. If circumspection is taken as a genuine possible perspective, the geometrical theory of dimensionality is thrown into

⁷¹ Sein und Zeit: 63

⁷² Sein und Zeit: 60

⁷³ Sein und Zeit: 69

disarray: above and below now refer to the ready to hand, the ceiling and the floor, rather than to some abstract placeless grid; we encounter the room "not as something 'between four walls' in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing".⁷⁴ This novel approach to the problem of space departed from Kant's doctrine of space as "the form of all phenomena of the external sense",⁷⁵ because it was developed upon the basic premise that the questions posed in fundamental ontology must be answered in the context of the existential analytic of Dasein.⁷⁶ For Heidegger, "all 'wheres' are discovered and circumspectively interpreted as we go our ways in everyday dealings; they are not ascertained and catalogued by the observational measurement of space".⁷⁷ Equipment encountered and used in the environment provides the context of human involvement and existential truth, not abstract geometry.

The best example of this approach is Heidegger's treatment of the man in the street. Nothing like Descartes' radical doubt about whether the man is an automaton even enters his mind, because Heidegger is concerned to argue that even though the street itself may seem to be the closest and realest of things as one feels it sliding beneath the feet at every step, when one encounters an acquaintance at a distance of twenty paces, the friend is closer than the street in terms of circumspection. It is concern as such that "decides as to the nearness and farness of what is proximally ready-to-hand environmentally".⁷⁸ FOR EXAMPLE, the clothes I am wearing are physically closer to me than the person with whom I am conversing, but this spatial closeness is meaningless in existential terms because only the priorities of concern determine distance for Dasein as Being in the world.

"Being in" means to reside, to dwell, to inhabit, and in this context our 'being-alongside'⁷⁹ has the sense of being *absorbed* in our context. Dasein's Being in the world is never 'in' in the way water is *in* a glass or chairs are in a room, in the sense of 'side-by-side-ness'⁸⁰, because "if the chair could touch the wall, this would presuppose that the wall is the sort of thing 'for'; which a chair would be *encounterable*".⁸¹ Encountering is something only an entity with Dasein's mode of Being can do. We can only understand the disclosure of Being through existential involvement. In the context of spatiality, disclosure at the human level takes the form of 'deseverance', by which Heidegger meant "making the farness vanish",⁸² and 'directionality', a word he coined to indicate the capacity to "orient

⁷⁴ Sein und Zeit: 68

⁷⁵ Kant: Critique of Pure Reason: A26

⁷⁶ Sein und Zeit: 13

⁷⁷ Sein und Zeit: 103

⁷⁸ Sein und Zeit: 107

⁷⁹ Sein und Zeit: 54

⁸⁰ Sein und Zeit: 55

⁸¹ Sein und Zeit: 55

⁸² Sein und Zeit: 105

myself both in and from my being already alongside a world which is familiar".⁸³ Objective measurement "is inclined to pass off such estimates as subjective",⁸⁴ but Heidegger argues "this 'subjectivity' perhaps uncovers the 'Reality' of the world at its most real".⁸⁵

In marked contrast to the Cartesian doctrine of the human subject as a thinking substance, with its corollary that the external world can only be understood objectively in terms of extension, Heidegger maintained that extension is not the same as spatiality, despite attempts to pass it off as such by claiming universal application for the method that understands space in terms of analytic-algebraic relations.⁸⁶ Instead of such theoretical reduction, human spatiality must be understood in terms of where it 'dwells',⁸⁷ in such a way that it is intrinsically connected to its environment in a way that is impossible for either the subject perceiving an external object, or for inanimate objects. He suggests it is "because Dasein is spiritual, and only because of this, that it can be spatial in a way which remains essentially impossible for any extended corporeal thing".⁸⁸

The understanding of human spatiality as dwelling within the spiritual horizon of concern was developed in his later essay Building, Dwelling, Thinking into the doctrine that "man is insofar as he dwells". Dwelling "also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for".⁸⁹ The four elemental constituents of Being as dwelling are earth and sky, mortals and Gods. With these four, a thing, whether a jug, a bridge or a pair of shoes, comes to dwell on the earth. Dwelling, "that wherein something becomes"⁹⁰ can be understood by returning to the primordial Greek experience. "The Greeks had no word for 'space'. This is no accident; for they experienced the spatial on the basis not of extension but of place; . . . as that which is occupied by what stands there. The place belongs to the thing itself. Each of all the various things has its place".⁹¹ "Accordingly, spaces receive their being from locations and not from 'space'".⁹²

6.4 Descartes

The ethical essence of Heidegger's thought comes into sharp focus in his opposition to the metaphysics of subjectivity, exemplified in the Cartesian philosophy, which, he says,

⁸³ Sein und Zeit: 109

⁸⁴ Sein und Zeit: 68

⁸⁵ Sein und Zeit: 106

⁸⁶ Poetry, Language, Thought p.155

⁸⁷ see also the discussion on the theme of 'dwelling' in section 5.4, on The Letter on Humanism, where 'ethos' is interpreted as the 'dwelling place' of humanity.

⁸⁸ Sein und Zeit: 368

⁸⁹ Poetry, Language, Thought p.149

⁹⁰ Introduction to Metaphysics: 66

⁹¹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 66

⁹² Poetry, Language, Thought p.154

is "at the opposite extreme"⁹³ from his own thinking. Since it was first propounded, Descartes' method of systematic doubt has been regarded as the basis of rational ontology and the decisive step in the process of opening the way to unfettered scientific discovery and freeing thought from the dogmatic stagnation of mediaeval scholasticism. Starting with the 'cogito ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am'), as a synthetic axiom able to provide a secure foundation for philosophy to proceed with logical clarity and precision towards the understanding of truth, Descartes, with whom "modern philosophy is usually considered to have begun",⁹⁴ put the rational activity of the human intellect in the centre of his philosophy by regarding all other phenomena as quite possibly illusory. Yet because "mathematical knowledge is regarded by Descartes as the one manner of apprehending entities which can give assurance that their Being has been securely grasped",⁹⁵ the Cartesian worldview is incapable of appreciating ordinary reality without imposing upon it a rigid dichotomy between the isolated subject doing the perceiving and the object perceived. The essence of Heidegger's attack on Descartes is that he presented the subject as seeking to attain the eternal and placeless standpoint of pure reason, while the object remains an inert thing to be measured.

Central to Descartes' system is the dualist presupposition that mind and matter are the two categorially distinct substances constituting reality, with the identifying characteristic of mental substance being thought (*res cogitans*) and that of material substance being extension (*res extensa*). This framework is partly the revival in an altered form of the classical dualist metaphysics of Augustine's *City of God* and Plato's divided line. Indeed, Heidegger notes that "the transformation of the essence of place into a 'space' defined by extension was initiated by the Platonic philosophy in the interpretation of being as idea".⁹⁶ Descartes' split between mind and matter is also parallel to the Christian doctrine of the priority of the spirit over the flesh. However its greater significance is in the support it has given to the mechanistic scientific perspective that originated with the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo.

The transcendent ego denying its own bodily incarnation has been a major theme of Western philosophy, but the oppressive role this belief has played in traditional thought has often been denied. From Socrates' vision in the *Phaedrus* of the soul as a heavenly charioteer, to Augustine's split between the city of God and the city of man; from Descartes' dualism between mental and extended substances, to Sartre's theory of the unconditional freedom of the transcendent 'for-itself', this wishful dualist thinking pervades the history of metaphysics. To reveal the presuppositions of this tradition is to deconstruct metaphysics,

⁹³ *Sein und Zeit*: 88

⁹⁴ *MSMM*, F2. *Basic Writings*: 273

⁹⁵ *Sein und Zeit*: 95

⁹⁶ *Introduction to Metaphysics*: 66

but this is the task that must be accomplished if the language of philosophy is to overcome its alienation from the earth and from the body.⁹⁷

Descartes' philosophy looms large within the schema of Being and Time, for Heidegger's outlook remained gripped by the Copernican problematic to which Descartes gave impetus and which led to the overthrow of the mediæval cosmology. In Heidegger's view, Descartes decisively opened the way to the reductionist errors committed in the name of the positivist belief that there is no knowledge outside of science. Against the pervasive methodology of modern thought, which holds that the being of an object can only be understood by the mathematical comprehension of its components, Heidegger called for a perspective more in tune with normal human experience, or as he put it, a perspective attuned to Being in the World. For Heidegger considered that experience as a whole, as distinct from particular experiences, could only be understood by establishing the transcendental foundation provided by the idea of Being,⁹⁸ even though his discussion of Being is designed to criticise all metaphysical systems.⁹⁹

Heidegger's doctrine that Dasein finds its meaning in care created a worldview which dismantles essential features of Descartes' mechanistic picture. The priority given to care, with its close relation to temporal Being in the World, helps to dismantle the framework set up by Descartes' theoretical model of truth, where the isolated subject seeks to objectively perceive a completely external reality. The subject/object epistemology of the cogito, which Heidegger derides as an example of the "metaphysics of subjectivity", must give way to a more fluid and alive perspective, in which people are inextricably involved with and concerned for the world.

Although his genius was recognised by Heidegger, Descartes typifies much of the erroneous philosophy that has led to the dehumanisation of contemporary thought, so Heidegger's critique of Descartes was an important part of the ethical dimension of his thought. A significant factor giving rise to the postulation of an ethical element in the treatment of Descartes is that the incarnational dimension of Heidegger's philosophy¹⁰⁰ comes into operation here. A major part of the criticism of Descartes' is that mind/body dualism splits theoretical truth from everyday existence and so fails to provide a sufficient basis for a well rounded philosophy of Being. While ever the ontological foundation of the opposition between nature and spirit remains unclarified, Descartes' ontology cannot be

⁹⁷ Recent thinkers have taken some of the consequences of this critique for the practice of philosophy much further than Heidegger ever did, particularly in terms of the recognition that authentic philosophy must speak from an embodied perspective, but also in terms of the need to oppose the oppressive and exploitative norms of our society.

⁹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 3

⁹⁹ Sein und Zeit: 22

¹⁰⁰ discussed below with reference to care

truly fundamental, especially considering that this opposition was a premise for his entire world view.¹⁰¹

Against this dichotomous logic, Heidegger set the thesis that human being must be understood as a fundamentally unitary phenomenon: "human being is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather existence".¹⁰² Descartes assumed that philosophical truth must be expressed only in the precise language of logic and mathematics, rather than in terms of experience as it is lived, so Heidegger characterised Descartes' system of thought as ontologically deficient. The analysis of the ontological significance of such negative aspects of experience as fear, anxiety and death is basic to the development of the theme of disclosing Dasein as unitary and involved. Heidegger attempted to show that Descartes is incapable of fitting such existential moods, or even the recognition of mortality, into the logic of his method.

Heidegger's critique of Descartes was not in the manner of a narrow dismissal of his thinking, but sought rather to recognise the profundity and broad effects as well as the limitations of his rationalist method. The shortcomings of this belief system are real and pervasive, and they become apparent once it is examined from the perspective of the existential analytic. It is in the context of the widespread acceptance of the scientific orthodoxy which the Cartesian philosophy sought to underpin that Heidegger reopened in Being and Time the issue of how it is possible to determine the true foundations of authentic ontology. The achievements of the specific sciences in explaining the nature of Being must be recognised each within their own domain, but the question of whether that domain could possibly extend to the systematic and universal comprehension of Being as a whole, which is what the pretensions of the Cartesian philosophy amount to, ought to be a source of much perplexity.¹⁰³

Physics holds that the nature of Being can be comprehended only through the transformation of the raw data given to sensibility into its abstract mathematical representation. The theory of substance which underpins this approach is the Cartesian notion of extension. Yet when this doctrine is put under critical scrutiny, it does not correspond to actual experience, but only to a theory of what experience would be if the idealised picture of the world that arises within mathematics were absolute. Heidegger says "what is decisive for its developments does not lie in its rather high esteem for the observation of 'facts', nor in its 'application' of mathematics in determining the character of natural processes; it lies rather in the *way in which Nature itself is mathematically projected*".¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Sein und Zeit: 89

¹⁰² Sein und Zeit: 117

¹⁰³ as Heidegger noted in the very first words of Being and Time taken from Plato's Sophist

¹⁰⁴ Sein und Zeit: 362

The being of an entity understood as *res extensa* consists of its objective mathematical representation as a thing of such and such a size, shape, displacement, atomic composition, etcetera, rather than its place in a human context of culture and history. Heidegger, at least as I read him, is not seeking to deny all validity to this doctrine of the nature of Being, which he characterised as the metaphysics of subjectivity; nor did he want to diminish the objective achievements of science, but only to question whether the truths discovered according to this method can be really universal, as much of the orthodox scientific worldview would appear to suggest.

The Cartesian metaphysics of subjectivity treats our relation to the world in terms of perception, regarding it as always a detached 'beholding' of things given present at hand. Its deficiency is that it thereby devalues the perception of things as it occurs ready-to-hand in everyday circumspection. Heidegger argues that there is more to life than the scientific method alone can discover, because human existence, the only possible standpoint for philosophy, does not experience the world according to the Cartesian model of an isolated subject interpreting the phenomena given to perception as merely present at hand. As finite existent beings, we are involved from the start in a world of personal, as distinct from theoretical, significance and meaning.

To claim that all Being can be comprehended in terms of the present-at-hand alone is to accept as absolute a partial ontology premised on the assumption that it is possible to isolate the subject who thinks from his or her worldly context. In Heidegger's opinion, Descartes' solipsistic method of isolating the individual from his or her practical involvements effectively prevents the inquirer from gaining any real access to Being in the world: "if one fails to see Being in the world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likewise gets passed over".¹⁰⁵ This is the basis for Heidegger's devastating critique of the problem of other minds as it has commonly been expressed in modern philosophy: the debate which keeps getting raised about whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved is not a genuine question but a scandal of philosophy. The question "makes no sense if it is raised by Dasein as Being in the world, and who else would raise it?".¹⁰⁶

Rather than simply reworking the methods and perspectives of Descartes, Heidegger sought to take the Cartesian philosophy as the basis for a radical and critical reappraisal of the purpose and direction of thought. The decisive break is that by taking the existential analytic of Dasein as the clue to entering the domain of fundamental ontology, Heidegger opened the way to restoring philosophy as an intellectual discipline in its own right. It is precisely the ordinary everyday truth of Being in the world that suits it to function as an axiomatic first principle for a universally systematic ontology, even if this ordinary

¹⁰⁵ Sein und Zeit: 65

¹⁰⁶ Sein und Zeit: 202

world is then open to criticism for its inauthenticity. For Descartes however, Being is never something given as the context into which thought is thrown, because truth can only be established by logical proof. Because his theory of substance is founded on the dichotomy between the mental subject and the extended object, Descartes took as a basic premise that the primary mode of access to Being is through mathematical knowledge, rather than through existence. The cogito fails to determine "the meaning of the Being of the 'sum'", so "the seemingly new beginning which Descartes proposes for philosophy has revealed itself as the implantation of a baleful prejudice".¹⁰⁷

The possibility of openness to Being must be presupposed if philosophy is to be true to itself, but the Cartesian point of departure, the worldless subject, actively prevents such openness by its methodical doubt. It produces both an epistemology and an ethics which leave fundamental ontology out of account, thereby restricting its scope to an artificial construction upon reality rather than a genuine reflection of what is really there. The position to which thought is then inevitably consigned is one where it can only secure its legitimacy by trailing along behind the pioneering work of the natural empirical sciences. But if the existential analytic is to be the starting point for ontology, and for that matter if there is to be any autonomous purpose for philosophy, this schema must be seriously questioned.

¹⁰⁷ Sein und Zeit: 25