

Being and Martin Heidegger

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Martin Heidegger is widely considered to be the father of modern atheistic existentialism. He is the author of some 70 works. His writings (particularly his later writings) have also been influential in the development of postmodern thought, but a detailed discussion of that connection is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, for the purposes of this paper we will focus on his connection to existentialism.¹

The format of this paper will be first, to present some background information about Martin Heidegger – biographical information and major influences – and the basics of his thought. Second, we will present a critique of his position. Lastly we will offer an apologetic approach to answer this position.

Background

Martin Heidegger was born into a poor Roman Catholic family, on September 26, 1889, in Messkirch, Germany.

In 1907, while a student at a secondary school in Konstanz, Heidegger was given a book by the parish priest. That book was the dissertation of Franz Brentano, titled, *On the Manifold Meaning of Being according to Aristotle*. Martin Heidegger said it was, “the

¹ For an excellent analysis of Heidegger’s influence on, and the implications of that influence for post-modern thought we recommend two works by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossways Books, 1994) and *Modern Fascism: The Threat to the Judeo-Christian Worldview* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993).

chief help and guide of my first awkward attempts to penetrate into philosophy.”²
“Brentano succeeded in demonstrating that the question of being captivated Aristotle as the single most important question.”³

On September 30, 1909, Heidegger entered the seminary with plans to become a Jesuit priest. However, his novitiate into the Jesuit order lasted just two weeks. On October 13th, he withdrew without taking minor orders.

In 1911, he began to study theology at Freiberg University under Carl Braig, and read his book, *On Being: An Outline of Ontology*.⁴

Some months later [he] learned of a multivolume work that a student of Franz Brentano had published a decade earlier – Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*...Husserl’s own project, which his second volume called a “phenomenology,” intrigued the young Heidegger.⁵

This calls for a brief explanation of Phenomenology. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.”⁶ Simply put, Phenomenology is a method of describing phenomena in terms of our perception of them. It focuses, not on the nature of the objects perceived, but with our experience of perceiving them. It rejects the subject-object distinction, and emphasizes instead what goes on inside of the observer. In other words, it internalizes observation. This will prove to be an important concept for Heidegger.

² Martin Heidegger, “My Way to Phenomenology,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) p. 74, quoted in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 3.

³ David Farrell Krell, ed. *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 5.

⁴ Krell, *Basic Writings*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2005 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/phenomenology/>.

It was also in 1911 that Heidegger switched his major from theology to philosophy.

He read widely in philosophy and in the human and natural sciences, studied the German poets Hölderlin, Rilke, and Georg Trakl, read the novels of Dostoevsky and the works of Søren Kierkegaard, and encountered the newly expanded edition of unpublished notes by Friedrich Nietzsche collected under the title *The Will to Power*.⁷

In 1913, He defended his doctoral dissertation: *The Doctrine of Judgment in Psychologism: A Critical-Positive Contribution to Logic*. Following the outbreak of World War I, Heidegger enlisted in the army in August, 1914. However, after just two months he was discharged from the service as unfit for combat due to health problems. He returned to the university and in 1915 he received his diploma. He then became an unsalaried teacher at the University.

In 1916, Edmund Husserl accepted the chair of Philosophy at Freiberg University, and Heidegger began working as his assistant. Husserl became a major influence on the development of Heidegger's thought.

In 1919, Heidegger officially broke with the Catholic Church. It is not certain exactly what precipitated this break. However it may have had something to do with disgust over the church's handling of the Modernist controversy.⁸

From 1922 to 1928, Heidegger was associate professor of philosophy at Marburg University. It was during this period, in 1927 that Heidegger's most significant work, *Being and Time* was published. Owing to the circumstances of its publication, the work was unfinished. The book was originally conceived to consist of two parts, each with

⁷ Krell, *Basic Writings*, p. 7.

⁸ Cf. Victor Fariás, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. 52-53.

three divisions. Only the first two divisions of the first part were completed before it was published. In his introduction to *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, professor of philosophy at DuPaul University recounts the somewhat humorous details of the publication of Heidegger's major work:

One morning during the winter semester of 1925-26 the dean of Marburg's philosophy faculty burst into Heidegger's office.

"Professor Heidegger, you have to publish something, right now. Do you have a manuscript?"

He did.

The faculty had nominated him for the chief philosophical *Lehrstuhl* at Marburg, held previously by Hartmann, but the ministry of culture in Berlin refused the appointment since in the past decade Heidegger had not published a book. Through Edmund Husserl in Freiberg, Heidegger's manuscript, an unfinished treatise with the title *Sein und Zeit*, *Being and Time*, dedicated to Husserl, found a publisher. Two copies of the page proofs were mailed to the ministry. They were returned marked "Inadequate." When *Being and Time* appeared in February of 1927 the ministry withdrew its disapprobation and granted Heidegger the Marburg chair.⁹

In 1928, Heidegger accepted the philosophy chair at Freiberg University, which had just been vacated by his old master Husserl. He held this position until May 1933 when he joined the Nazi Party and was appointed to the post of Rector of Freiberg University. He resigned this position in January, 1934. This period of Heidegger's life and career has generated much disagreement over his membership in the Nazi Party, and the nature and extent of his collaboration with the Nazis. The position taken by his supporters is that Heidegger's active collaboration with the Nazis lasted just 10 months, and was an error by someone who was politically naïve. They sometimes assert that he only accepted the position of rector to protect the university, and that once he realized the hopelessness of the situation he resigned his position and began openly criticizing the

⁹ Krell, *Basic Writings*, pp. 16-17.

Nazi's racial doctrines. They also point out that he was criticized by party adherents and that he was subsequently put under many restrictions.¹⁰

However, Victor Farías, in his book, *Heidegger and Nazism*¹¹ has documented compelling evidence that Heidegger's philosophical support of Nazism predates his joining the party in 1933, and that he not only maintained his membership in the party until the end of the war, but he continued to collaborate with the party even after he stepped down as Rector of Freiberg University. He contends that Heidegger's resignation as Rector, and subsequent criticism of the Nazi Party had to do with the fact that he had been politically and ideologically aligned with that faction of the Nazi Party represented by Ernst Röhm and the SA. When that faction was purged in the *Night of the Long Knives* Heidegger lost his political support. But even subsequent to that he continued to speak out in favor of National Socialism.

After the war Heidegger was briefly forbidden to teach by the French Occupation Authority due to his connection with the Nazi Party. This decision was rescinded in 1951, and he taught regularly until 1958, and then until 1967 by invitation. He died on May 26th, 1976 at the age of 87, was given a Catholic funeral¹² and is buried in Messkirch. We now turn our attention to an analysis of Heidegger's thought.

Position

The focus of Heidegger's work is an understanding of what we mean by "Being." He is not asking what we mean by this or that particular being. Rather, what is Being

¹⁰ See for example Krell, *Basic Writings*, pp. 27f. See p. 28, n. 31 for an attempt at a balanced approach.

¹¹ Op. Cit.

¹² Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 432.

itself? He asserts that, “This question has today been forgotten.”¹³ Yet this question, “is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from then on *as a theme for actual investigation*” (p. 21). This is not to say that no one has since pondered the nature of Being. However, since Plato and Aristotle, the issue has been the nature of the different types of beings, and not Being itself. According to Heidegger, all of the great philosophers of the Western tradition (until Heidegger, that is!) have failed to wrestle with the primary question. He writes:

What these two men (Plato and Aristotle) achieved was to persist through many alterations and ‘retouchings’ down to the ‘logic’ of Hegel. And what they wrestled with the utmost intellectual effort from the phenomena, fragmentary and incipient though it was, has long since become trivialized (p. 21).

He says there are, “presuppositions and prejudices which are constantly reimplanting and fostering the belief that an inquiry into Being is unnecessary” (p. 22). There are three such presuppositions that he lays out and attempts to refute. He writes, “First, it has been maintained that ‘Being’ is the ‘most universal’ concept... ‘An understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in entities’” (p. 22). He then rehearses some of the history of the philosophical discussions on the subject of Being and concludes, “So if it is said that ‘Being’ is the most universal concept, this cannot mean that it is the one which is clearest or that it needs no further discussion. It is rather the darkest of all” (p. 23). He continues:

It has been maintained secondly that the concept of ‘Being’ is indefinable... ‘Being’ cannot indeed be conceived as an entity; nor can it acquire such a character as to have the term “entity” applied to it. “Being” cannot be derived from higher concepts by definition, nor can it be presented through lower ones. But does this imply that ‘Being’ no longer offers a problem? Not at all. We can infer only that ‘Being’ cannot have the character of an entity (p. 23).

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1962), p. 21. (Subsequent citations from this work will be by page number in parentheses.)

From this he concludes, “The indefinability of Being does not eliminate the question of its meaning; it demands that we look that question in the face” (p. 23). Lastly, he writes:

[I]t is held that ‘Being’ is of all concepts the one that is self-evident. Whenever one cognizes anything or makes an assertion, whenever one comports oneself towards entities, even toward oneself, some use is made of ‘Being’; and this expression is held to be intelligible ‘without further ado’, just as everyone understands ‘The sky *is* blue’; ‘I *am* merry’, and the like (p. 23).

He responds, “The very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again” (p. 23).

So, if we are going to ask the question, “What is meant by ‘Being’?” We have first to figure out how the question is to be asked so that we can find an answer. He writes, “If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophical step consists in...not defining entities as entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entity” (p. 26). In other words, we cannot appeal to any supreme being for the source of understanding all other beings. We must look elsewhere. ‘In so far as Being constitutes what is asked about, and “Being” means the Being of entities, then entities themselves turn out to be *what is interrogated*. These are, so to speak, questioned as regards their Being’ (Heidegger’s italics) (p. 26). But which beings are to be interrogated? There are lots of kinds of beings. Which one is capable of disclosing the meaning of Being? Heidegger writes:

Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it – all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity – the inquirer – transparent in his own Being...This entity which each of us is himself

and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term “*Dasein*” (Heidegger’s italics) (pp. 26-27).

Man is thus thrown back on himself. Human being, which Heidegger calls *Dasein*, literally “being there,” alone of all beings, has the ability to inquire as to its own being. In fact it is “distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it” (Heidegger’s italics) (p. 32). Therefore, *Dasein* must be our starting point. By examining *Dasein* as it actually exists, specifically how it exists in its everyday fashion, we will gain the necessary understanding to allow us to inquire into the meaning of Being in general.

Heidegger rejects the legitimacy of the statement of propositional truths to understand Being. “The answer to the question of Being cannot lie in any proposition that is blind and isolated” (p. 40). Nor is truth is not to be found in correspondence to fact. “But here everything depends on our steering clear of any conception of truth which is construed in the sense of ‘agreement’. This idea is by no means the primary one in the concept of *alethia*” (the Greek word for truth). Rather, Heidegger defines truth as “unconcealedness.” He also claims that we must go beyond the realm of logic:

If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of “logic” in philosophy is decided. The idea of “logic” itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning.¹⁴

Heidegger suggests a different approach:

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular *Dasein* decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through

¹⁴ Heidegger, *What Is Metaphysics?* In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 105.

existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads *along this way* we call “*existentiell*.” (Heidegger’s italics) (p. 33).

Simply put, it is only in our experience of living our lives, either realizing (“authentic” existence) or ignoring (“inauthentic” existence) our possibilities, that an understanding of existence (what Heidegger calls “*existentiell*”) can be gained. (Heidegger is fond of coining terms.) This emphasis on personal experience over against propositional truth, entails the rejection of the subject-object distinction, and reflects the influence of Husserl’s phenomenology on Heidegger.

An essential aspect of *Dasein* is that it always exists in a “world” (p. 33). This Being-in the world is part of our existence and is not of our choosing. We are, so to speak, thrown into this world in which we exist. Heidegger puts it this way:

It is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being toward the ‘world’ – a world with which he provides himself occasionally. *Dasein* is never ‘proximally’ an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world. Taking up relationships toward the world is possible only *because* *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is (Heidegger’s italics) (p. 84).

This “world” is understood, not as the physical world of objects, but in the sense in which we might speak of the “world of sports,” or the “business world,” or the “world of politics.” It is a context, a relationship to the things in that world (p. 93). This world is unique to each *Dasein*. It is “my” world and *Dasein* interprets itself always in relation to this world. We have according to Heidegger the tendency or inclination to be ensnared in this world (p. 42). In fact, in our everyday existence in-the-world we are tempted by the world to focus on the things that present themselves at-hand, and thus to lose ourselves, rather than to see Being as it really is. In living out our daily existence we become

alienated from our true selves. Heidegger refers to this as having fallen, not in the sense that we have fallen from a purer moral state to a lesser one, but as a falling away from our true selves (p. 220). This for Heidegger is to exist inauthentically. In our average day to day Being-in-the-world, a true, authentic Being remains hidden.

How can this hidden, true, authentic Being be revealed to us so that we can realize it in our existence? What is the critical aspect of Being which will disclose its true nature to us, and how does this aspect become known to us? The answer for Heidegger is time, or temporality. “Within the horizon of time the projection of a meaning of Being in general can be accomplished” (p. 278). We exist in time. We had a beginning. We exist in the present. We will have an end. *Dasein* exists with, and over against the possibility of its not existing. Our Being as a whole encompasses our not existing. As long as we exist, we have not yet reached the fullness of our “potentiality-for-Being” (p. 279). There is always something ahead, i.e., our non-existence. “As long as *Dasein is* as an entity, it has never reached its ‘wholeness’” (p. 280). This is what ultimately defines our Being. *Dasein*, human being is a Being-towards-death (p. 294).

However, the average everyday manner of Being-towards-death does not face it squarely. Rather,

It talks of it in a ‘fugitive’ manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, “One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us.” (p. 297).

It is only when we face the enormity of the possibility of our non-existence, not merely intellectually, but on the level of personal experience – my death – that authentic Being is disclosed. How can we move from the average everyday (inauthentic) Being-towards-death to an authentic Being-towards-death?

Heidegger points to the moods that characterize the condition of the individual at various times. Moods such as boredom and joy reveal the wholeness of Being.¹⁵ This revealing that these moods enable he calls, appropriately enough, attunement. Is there then a mood *par excellence* which supremely reveals Being in its wholeness? Yes:

This can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety. By this anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect. Fear in the face of something is also in each case a fear for something in particular. Because fear possesses this trait of being “fear in the face of” and “fear for,” he who fears and is afraid is captive to the mood in which he finds himself. Striving to rescue himself from this particular thing, he becomes unsure of everything else and completely “loses his head.”...Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a peculiar calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of..., but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of...is always anxiety for..., but not for this or that. ... Anxiety reveals the nothing...We “hover” in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole...In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there.¹⁶

It is here that Heidegger’s dependence on Søren Kierkegaard is most plainly seen.

This anxiety enables *Dasein* to exist in an authentic Being-towards-death which in turn allows us to exist in openness to Being. For Heidegger that is what it means to live authentically.

We turn now to a critique of his position.

Critique

In his books *The God Who is There* (a very appropriate title in connection with a discussion of Heidegger) and *Escape From Reason*, Francis Schaeffer details the change

¹⁵ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics?* In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

that has taken place in man's concept of truth. He calls this change "the line of despair." Above the line of despair men operated with the belief that they could, through the use of reason work out the answers to knowledge, meaning and value in life.¹⁷ Below the line, men "have given up all hope of achieving a rational unified answer to knowledge and life."¹⁸ The situation modern man finds himself in can be somewhat humorously summed up in the following song from *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*:

Whenever life gets you down Mrs. Brown,
And things seem hard or tough,
And people are stupid, obnoxious or daft
And you feel that you've had quite enough...

Just remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving
And revolving at nine hundred miles an hour,
That's orbiting at nineteen miles a second, so it's reckoned,
A sun that is the source of all our power.
The sun and you and me and all the stars that we can see
Are moving at a million miles a day
In an outer spiral arm, at forty thousand miles an hour,
Of the galaxy we call the 'Milky Way'.

Our galaxy itself contains a hundred billion stars.
It's a hundred thousand light years side to side.
It bulges in the middle, sixteen thousand light years thick,
But out by us it's just three thousand light years wide.
We're thirty thousand light years from galactic central point.
We go round every two hundred million years,
And our galaxy is only one of millions of billions
In this amazing and expanding universe.

The universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding
In all of the directions it can whizz
As fast as it can go, the speed of light, you know,
Twelve million miles a minute and that's the fastest speed there is.
So remember, when you're feeling very small and insecure,
How amazingly unlikely is your birth,

¹⁷ Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, Second Edition, Vol. I: *The God Who is There* (Westchester: Crossways Books, 1985), p. 9.

¹⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, p. 23.

And pray that there's intelligent life somewhere up in space,
'Cause there's bugger all down here on Earth.¹⁹

Schaeffer says this change began in the 19th Century with Søren Kierkegaard.

Reacting against the spiritual idealism of Hegel, Kierkegaard came, “to the conclusion that you could not arrive at synthesis by reason. Instead, you achieve everything of real importance by a leap of faith.”²⁰ This leap of faith, because it is completely subjective, is a leap into the non-rational. As John Warwick Montgomery has stated:

Kierkegaard rightly saw that Hegel’s confidence that, unaided by revelation, he could understand the Essence of all history was sheer bombast.

However, when Kierkegaard offered the Existential answer (that we can never know more than our own existential condition and that “truth is subjectivity”), he went from one false solution to another.

As finite and fallen creatures, we cannot obtain a valid total picture of the world or its history, but we certainly can arrive at objective truth on a limited scale (cures for lumbago; the construction of bridges; the determination that Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March and the Jesus rose again on Easter morning).²¹

This non-rational approach to finding meaning is seen quite clearly in Heidegger’s rejection of propositional statements of truth, the use of logic, and the subject-object distinction in favor of subjective experience to determine the meaning of being.

Furthermore, at an even more fundamental level it must be pointed out that Heidegger’s system of thought is therefore logically self-contradictory. For, as John Warwick Montgomery has pointed out:

Like logic itself, both the subject-object distinction and propositional thinking must be presupposed in all sensible investigations. Why? Because to argue against their necessity is to employ them already! When one asserts: “Personal

¹⁹ *Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life*, filmscript by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, Hollywood, CA (Universal Studios, 1983).

²⁰ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, p. 15.

²¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, [Culture and Science Publ.] 2003), 5.221, 5.2211, 5.2212, p.160.

encounters, not propositions, yield truth,” one is in fact stating a proposition (though a meaningless one).²²

This points the way to another criticism of Heidegger, which is stated by Alasdair MacIntyre in his article on “Existentialism” in Paul Edwards’ *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

When existentialists come to construct their own systems, the most obvious criticism they are subject to is that they are insensitive to the syntactic and semantic properties of the language they employ. So Kierkegaard spoke of a dread of nothing in particular as though this implied that dread had an object whose name was “Nothing.” So Heidegger hypostatizes Being and Nothing as substantial entities.²³

This problem is prevalent throughout Heidegger’s works. Not only does Heidegger redefine many terms from their common understanding in order to prove whatever point he is trying to make (the example above of “truth” as unconcealedness is but one instance) he constantly creates terms (often hyphenated) and then speaks of them as if they were things. In the citations I used above I tried to pick the clearest ones I could find to present his position. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have understood him at all, and it’s not because you’re stupid. Here is a typical example:

But in general the “whither”, to which the totality of places for a context of equipment gets allotted, is the underlying condition which makes possible the belonging-somewhere of an equipmental totality as something that can be placed (p. 136).

Not only is this incomprehensible, it is, according to Analytic philosophy meaningless.

According to Analytic philosophy, in order for a proposition to have meaning, it must fit into one of two categories. It must be either a) *analytic* (i.e., its truth must be able to be determined by an analysis of its meaning) such as the statements of logic, pure

²² John Warwick Montgomery, “Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure,” in *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), p. 32.

²³ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Existentialism” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, gen. ed. Paul Edwards, (New York: The Macmillan Company & Free Press, 1967), Vol. III, 147.

mathematics and tautologies, or b) *synthetic* (i.e., its truth or falsehood is capable of being shown by a comparison with facts in the world). In other words, they must be subject to verifiability tests, or at least falsifiability (Karl Popper). If a proposition doesn't fit into one of these two categories, it is formally meaningless. As John Warwick Montgomery has written:

And what is the result when existentialist affirmations are subjected to verifiability tests? An excellent illustration has been provided in Rudolf Carnap's examination of the following typical argument in Heidegger's *Was Ist Metaphysik?*

What is to be investigated is being only and – *nothing* else; being alone and further – *nothing*; solely being, and beyond being – *nothing*. *What about this Nothing? ... Does the Nothing exist only because the Not, i.e., the Negation, exists? Or is it the other way around? Does the Negation and the Not exist only because the Nothing exists? ... We assert: the Nothing is prior to the Not and the Negation. ... Where do we seek the Nothing? How do we find the Nothing? ... We know the Nothing. ... Anxiety reveals the Nothing. ... That for which and because of which we were anxious, was "really" – nothing. Indeed: the Nothing itself – as such – was present. What about this Nothing? – The Nothing itself nothings.*

The argument, asserting the primacy of existence (the "Nothing") over essence ("the Negation and the Not") and the necessity of embracing it through personal recognition of estrangement ("anxiety"), is shown by Carnap to consist of analytically meaningless "pseudo-statements," whose "non-sensicality is not obvious at first glance, because one is easily deceived by the analogy with ... meaningful sentences." To assert that "the rain rains" is meaningful; but to argue that "the Nothing nothings" is something else again!²⁴

This isn't profound. It's language gone on a holiday! How tragic it is then that

"[Heidegger] brought one of the first printed copies of [*Being and Time*] to his mother's sickbed nine days before her death on May 3, 1927."²⁵

Finally, as if all this weren't enough, Heidegger's position proves to be self-defeating. For, if it is true, as he states, that *Dasein* always exists in a world and is

²⁴ Montgomery, *Crisis*, p. 31. Cf. Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. Ayer, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 69-73.

²⁵ Krell, *Basic Writings*, p. 23.

ensnared in this world, and this world is its own, and *Dasein* interprets itself in light of this world, then there is no point to his even writing about it for others to read. If I'm in my world, and you're in yours, and each of us interprets in terms of this world, everything is hopelessly subjective and communication itself is impossible. However, in point of fact, there is concrete evidence that at least in some respects our internal subjective experience is shared. On the basis of the analysis of the dreams of his patients, when compared to the dreams of the patients of other psychoanalysts in other countries, the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung discovered that there are universal symbols (he called them archetypes) that are common to the dream life of each of us. This common psychic experience he called "the collective unconscious."

My thesis, then, is as follows: In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.²⁶

As John Warwick Montgomery has written:

These common psychic patterns cannot be explained away as the product of cultural borrowing; they evidently "bubble up" from the depths of the human consciousness, regardless of race or geography.

What the patterns make clear is that your inner needs are essentially the same as my inner needs—and those of the human race as a whole—and that those needs are the very ones for which biblical religion offers a solution.

Over against existentialism and postmodernism, which, like Leibniz, view each individual as a "monad without windows," it becomes evident that when I tell you my story, you are listening to your own story.²⁷

²⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 60.

²⁷ Montgomery, *Tractatus*, 6.35, 6.36, 6.361, p. 186

So, there is at least one sense in which *Dasein* does exist in a shared world common to all. This takes us into our last section which is to present an apologetic to the existentialism of Heidegger.

Apologetic Response

How might we respond to someone who comes to us from this point of view? Along the lines we've just demonstrated we would want to show that Heidegger's system is untenable. As we showed, not only is it self-contradictory and self-defeating, but is ultimately meaningless (the very opposite of what it purports to provide to the individual). But beyond that, is there no common ground that we can appeal to? Certainly there is.

The existentialist is quite right that any ultimate truth must be more than just intellectual. It must become personal. It must be internalized. For, "As the existentialists have correctly emphasized, all life is decision, and when one refuses to make a decision, *that in itself* is a decision."²⁸ Mere intellectual assent to the objective truths of the faith is not enough. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!" (James 2:19).²⁹ We must enter into a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31). Also, the existentialist emphasis on the transitory nature of life and the need to square up to our own impending death, which can happen at any time, finds resonance in the Scriptures. In the parable of the rich fool, we hear of a man who, concerned with the daily things of life, thinks that

²⁸ Montgomery, *Tractatus*, 3.922, p. 126

²⁹ Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001).

his life will go on without end and he need not worry, only to be told, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you.” (Luke 12:20). Again James says,

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15).

Peter, quoting the psalm says, “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

And what of death? “Psychologists tell us that we are at all times conscious of our own demise; existentialist philosophers argue that the meaning of life can only be found when we face the reality of our own mortality.”³⁰ The existentialist is quite right that death is truly our ultimate problem; but are we merely left with our experience of angst? Is there no solution to this problem? What if one were to rise from the dead? What would that mean? Surely such a one would have an insight into the nature of death and its solution. Such a one could provide the answer to the ultimate meaning of life. But is there such a one? Most assuredly there is.

The four Gospels, taken not as the Word of God but merely as historical documents, are the best attested works of the ancient period. Sir Frederic Kenyon, formerly Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum, wrote,

The interval then between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general*

³⁰ Montgomery, *Tractatus*, 3.763, p. 112.

integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established (Kenyon's italics.)³¹

These well established historical documents claim to be written either by eyewitnesses to Jesus, or by the close associates of eyewitnesses such that what they wrote could be checked out by the eyewitnesses themselves. To take just a couple of examples:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

“He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you may also believe.” (John 19: 35).

There is strong external evidence corroborating these claims to eyewitness authorship. Papias and Polycarp, both of whom were disciples of the Apostle John (one of the eyewitnesses) report that he told them that the same Matthew the tax collector turned Apostle, who is mentioned in the documents, wrote the Gospel attributed to him. He told them that Mark was an associate of the Apostle Peter, and he wrote down faithfully in the Gospel attributed to him the words of Peter exactly as he heard them. He also told them that Luke, who was the traveling companion of Paul, wrote the Gospel attributed to him. As we just saw from his own account, Luke checked out the details with the eyewitnesses. And of course, the Gospel according to John was written by this same Apostle. These documents are therefore primary source evidence for the life of Jesus.

³¹ Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, [1940?]), pp. 288-89.

The picture they present of Jesus is of one who claimed to be God in the flesh. “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58). “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:34). “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9b).³² He staked this claim on his forthcoming death and resurrection after three days.

[T]he Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things? Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”...But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-19, 21-22).

“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40).

These eyewitnesses had every reason to tell the truth and no reason to lie. Their master, Jesus presents us with a life and teaching of the highest ethical quality. He taught that lying was of the devil (John 8:44). Therefore, for his disciples to fabricate claims about him would be to go against the very teachings of the man to whom they’d just dedicated three years of their lives following. Not only is there nothing in their character which would lead us to believe they were untrustworthy, they were under extreme external pressure to make sure they told the absolute truth. They were opposed and persecuted by the religious leaders of their day precisely because of their testimony. Furthermore, the presence of hostile witnesses in their audience, who also knew the facts and could easily put paid to anything they said that didn’t square with the facts, would provide yet another incentive to tell the truth. Ultimately they gave their lives for this story. It is beyond belief that they would die for something they knew to be untrue.

³² See also Mark 2:1-12 where Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic, and the scribes present rightly ask, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Their testimony is internally consistent and complementary. They do not contradict one another, and the minor differences we find between their accounts are consistent with truthful eyewitnesses who are giving testimony from each one's point of view.³³ If they agreed in every detail that would in fact be evidence of collusion. We therefore have no reason to reject their testimony.

These same primary source documents, which we've just seen are reliable, which present a picture of Jesus as one who claimed to be God in the flesh, also claim that he did in fact rise from the dead. He appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. They touched him and he ate fish with them. There is therefore no sound reason to reject this testimony either. We therefore must conclude that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, verifying His claim to be exactly who He claimed to be: God in the flesh.

Now, as the only one who rose from the dead, and who thus conquered death and proved that He is God, He alone is in the best position to explain the meaning of that event. He tells us that there is existence after death. "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:2-3). He tells us that the only way to participate in this eternal life is through Him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). He died to save you from your sins. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28).

³³ As John Warwick Montgomery points out, "In most instances, the critic is not aware of the definition of a logical contradiction, namely, two incompatible states of affairs, one of which cannot logically exist at the same time or place or under the same conditions, as the other." *Tractatus*, 3.392, p. 86.

You therefore have every reason to make an existential commitment to him as your Lord and savior. And if you do, you will find that your life has been authenticated by the very Author of the universe.

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