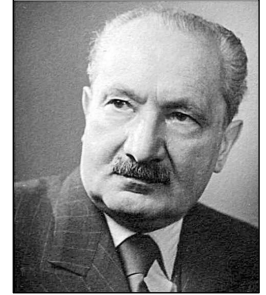




Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

Martin Heidegger was born September 26th, 1889 in the Black Forest region of Messkirch. He began gymnasium at Constance in 1903, but was later transferred in 1906 to Bertholds gymnasium in Freiberg. At this time he boarded at the archiepiscopal seminary of St. Georg. A mentor, Dr. Conrad Grober, gave him a copy of Brentano's "On the Manifold Meaning of Being According to Aristotle," and this early exposure to Brentano, who also influenced Husserl's phenomenology, made a great impression on Heidegger.



He applied to study to be a Jesuit by entering the Society of Jesus at Tisis, in Austria, but for health reasons, was rejected as a candidate. Heidegger then decided to study for his priesthood at the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiberg where he began lecturing and publishing papers. Here, he first encountered the writings of Husserl, and was directed by his superiors to change his studies from theology to mathematics and philosophy. Heidegger embraced the change in direction, studying closely the work of Husserl and he completed his doctorate, "The Doctrine of Judgement in Psychologism," in 1914. The following year he completed his habilitation with his dissertation, "The Doctrine of Categories and Signification in Duns Scotus." He married Elfride Petri in March 1917, and shortly thereafter joined the German army. In 1919, Heidegger, in a letter to a colleague, confessed that he had decided to break with "the dogmatic system of Catholicism."

Under the guidance of Husserl, Heidegger soon gained a reputation as a phenomenologist, becoming Husserl's assistant in 1919 (and would later succeed him as professor of philosophy at Freiburg University). By 1924, Heidegger was promoted to become an associate at the University of Marburg, where he would write his most recognized work, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927; trans. 1962).

In his most important and influential work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger is concerned with what he considered the essential philosophical (and human) question: What is it, to be? To even ask the question, remarked Heidegger, implies that at some level the answer is already understood. Heidegger felt that Husserl's thinking was trapped by its relationship to a concept of God and the transcendent. Heidegger shifted the mode of the subject undergoing phenomenological investigation by immersing it into its own contemplation as a being both within language (time) and within the world, hence, between a concept of being and time. Heidegger argued that ontology as phenomenology must necessarily be hermeneutic or interpretive. Truth is always both concealing and revealing. When one interpretation is opened up, other interpretations are necessarily closed off. In this sense, ontology is always provisional.



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Heidegger described the quality of Being in the concept of Dasein. The subject is thrown into a world that consists of potentially useful things, cultural and natural objects. Because these objects and artifacts come to humanity from the past and are used in the present for the sake of future goals, Heidegger posited a fundamental relation between the mode of being of objects and of humanity and the structure of time. Dasein is a consciousness of the thrown quality of being between concepts that form the reality of the present, and the concern for the safety of the subject into the future. Dasein in this sense is a consciousness of consciousness. Being comes into existence at the limit of the thrown-ness of everyday existence between past and future.

After writing *Being and Time*, Heidegger later had a turn in his thought. This work anticipated hermeneutics (i.e., Gadamer) and post-structuralism (i.e., Foucault, Derrida, Levinas). In works such as *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953; trans. 1959), Heidegger turned to the interpretation of particular Western conceptions of Being. He felt that in contrast to the reverent ancient Greek conception of Being, modern technological society had fostered an instrumentalizing attitude that had deprived Being and human existence of meaning, a condition he called nihilism.

Through his lectures at Marburg, Heidegger influenced many thinkers, including Herbert Marcuse, who would become a primary figure in Critical Theory. Heidegger's conception of *Gelassenheit* (releasement) was influenced by Lao Tzu, whose writings on "wu wei" (non-action) held similarities to Heidegger's releasement-toward-things. With releasement, the human being enters meditative thinking, often characterized by a profound humility, which understands Being as a "gift" and holds itself open to the "call" of language. With *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger turned toward the difficult nature of the subject of language, the logos, by which beings are gathered and named. Although in naming, Being remains concealed.

In 1933, Heidegger was appointed the rector of the University of Freiburg. At this time, he also joined the National Socialist Party. One year later, Heidegger would resign as rector due to disputes with faculty and local Nazi officials. Heidegger continued his involvement with the National Socialist Party until 1945, although the degree of his involvement is still under debate. With the de-nazification hearing in 1945, Heidegger was banned from lecturing and teaching at any university by the French Military Government, and furthermore ruled that the university refuse Heidegger Emeritus status and pension him off, stripping him of his professorship. Though he continued to write and speak, he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1946. He applied for, and was granted, emeritus status, providing that he would refrain from teaching. In 1947 he published *On Humanism* to distinguish his phenomenology from French existentialism. By 1950, Heidegger was reinstated to his teaching position, and one year later he was made professor Emeritus by the Baden government. During the next decade he published a number of works including: *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953, trans. 1959), *What is Called Thinking* (1954, trans. 1968), *What is Philosophy* (1956), and *On the Way to Language* (1959).



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During Heidegger's absence from teaching, he found a collaborator, Medard Boss, and began drafting "Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology," which would become a seminal work in existential psychology. Throughout his career, Boss would continue to promote a Daseinanalytic approach to psychotherapy and medicine.

In 1961 *Nietzsche I and II* were published, in 1970 *Phenomenology and Theology (Phänomenologie und Theologie)* published, and in 1975 the first transcripts of Heidegger's various lectures were published, as he wished. The completed transcripts would fill more than 100 volumes, featuring all his major lectures.

Heidegger died in Frieburg on May 26th, 1976.

Source: Adapted from the *European Graduate School (EGS)* Library holdings (www.egs.edu/library/)



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