After Being and Time was published in 1927 Heidegger found himself acclaimed throughout Germany as 'the philosopher of our time'. The 69-year-old Husserl was already recommending him as his own successor to the chair at Freiberg. This time there was no doubt in the selectors' minds, and in 1928, at the age of 39, the local boy returned in triumph as the new professor.

Husserl had hoped that when Heidegger came back he would become reconciled to his mentor's position. It soon became apparent even to Husserl that this was not to be. Relations became strained and shortly the two men ceased even to be on friendly terms. It seems that only now did Husserl read Being and Time with any care. As he read it:

"and as he read what the other reviewers had to say about it, it became more and more clear to him that Heidegger had rejected not only every fundamental doctrine of phenomenology, but had attacked its very foundations. Instead of the patient and rational search for knowledge about ideas, based upon the appearance of phenomena to consciousness, Heidegger was starting naively with man in his empirical being and making sweeping generalisations about the meaning of life. It was, thought Husserl, a reversion to the worst excesses of Lebensphilosophie which he had attacked back in 1910, or even to that very 'psychologism' whose failure had first led him to develop phenomenology."

Heidegger, for his part, seems to have had no wish to aggravate the old man. He had tried to convince him in their exchanges over the Encyclopedia Britannica articles (IP) that the central question was one of Being - that you couldn't do Husserl's style of epistemology before you had clarified the ontology within which you were operating. But there was no way that the old man was going to change his ideas at his age. What could one do then except respectfully differ, refrain from attacking the man when attacking his doctrines, and stop using the title 'phenomenology' which he had prior claim to?

Husserl, however, could not let it rest there. His life's work was being destroyed. All his hopes for a pure phenomenological movement led by his disciple Heidegger were being dashed. In 1930 he attacked Heidegger in print, and in the following year rejected him quite unequivocally in a public lecture which was reported in the Berlin press. He failed. Heidegger rode a tide of ever-rising popularity: Husserl became more isolated, 'out-of-date', and, after the Nazi accession to power, oppressed. The last decade of his life was spent trying to combat these trends. His unfinished final work, The Crisis (Cr), tries for the first time to understand the historical process and to justify his own phenomenology against Heidegger's 'irrationalism'. Fortunately for him he died in 1938.

The Nazi Rector

Heidegger's attitude towards the Nazis was quite different from that of Husserl - the old Jewish liberal. Heidegger never at any time obscured the fact that his politics were conservative and anti-democratic, but it was only with the rise of Nazism in the early 1930s that he got excited enough to take overt political action. He saw the Nazis as a new hope for decadent Germany; a spiritual force which would halt the decline of Western civilization by opposing equally the 'materialism' of America and the marxism of Russia. He began to say so in his lectures, to intersperse reflections upon contemporary politics with his thoughts about Being.

So, in a lecture 'On the Fundamental Question of Metaphysics' he could say: 'From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same; the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organisation of the average man...' (IM, p.31). It was Germany, 'the most metaphysical of nations', which had to bring the destiny of the West into 'the primordial realm of the powers of Being'.
It was spirit which had to be revived, as opposed to mere intelligence - the scientific rationality which was responsible for the mediocrity and averageness of materialism, East and West (IM, p.39).

In March 1933 the Nazi party gained the highest number of seats in the Reichstag elections. Events began to move rapidly, and down in Baden, the newly elected rector of Heidelberg university found himself removed from office for refusing to post a proclamation against Jews. Heidegger stepped in, and for a brief ten months he was the Rector of the University on a pro-Nazi ticket. He joined the party and campaigned for it during 1935. He gave a rousing rectorial address in which he attacked academic freedom as negative, exhorting his listeners to dedicate themselves to service - be it of knowledge, at work, or in the army - and concluded with the words: 'Do not let doctrines and ideas be the rules of your Being ... The Fuhrer himself and he alone is the present and future German reality and its rule' (DSI, p.271).

A few months later he resigned his post. By his own account he took on the rectorship because he hoped to effect reforms in the university: when it became clear that he would not have the support of either the faculty or the party for such changes, he resigned. Thereafter he claims to have fallen out of favour with the party, though the evidence is by no means conclusive. Whether or not he retained the party's protection, it is clear that for the rest of his life he maintained his extreme right-wing political attitudes. After the war he was banned from teaching because of his Nazi associations, a ban which was lifted shortly before he retired. He continued to write, and indeed to lecture before private and (later) public audiences. His influence on post-war German philosophy was enormous, spilling over more recently to France and even the States. He died in 1976.

Heidegger's Central themes

I want now to review briefly what seems to me the core of Heidegger's philosophy as revealed in Being and Time and elaborated in the later works. In the first place 'Being' is utterly central. Although the Heidegger of Being and Time was read by others as providing an anthropology, he himself always (that is, at least from 1911 on) saw 'Being' as the central problem. There is thus no discontinuity between his earlier and his later works.

His concern with Being is, I have argued, only intelligible on the basis of a quasi-religious experience. The form in which he casts the argument, though, needs no such experience to give it validity. Being has been neglected, he claims, because we want to forget about it. This motivated amnesia is part of our normal and inevitable inauthentic existence. The philosophical result is first a false ontology, which attempts to reduce all Being to objects; and second a concentration upon epistemology as the central area of philosophy in place of ontology. So we have an account of the world which effaces all mystery and all sense of the presence of Being in things; and an account of people as if they were objects without any essential spiritual qualities. Western ontology must therefore be re-worked, epistemology ousted from its central position and man restored to his proper dignity as that being to which Being appears. Localy, the neo-Kantianism of the hermeneuticists must be rejected, and Husserl's notion of phenomenology completely re-cast as purely a method, not an edifice of philosophical knowledge.

A second major theme concerns the falsity of everyday life - its inauthenticity. The frenzy, the chatter, the superficiality, the avoidance of real encounter with other people and with things are, for Heidegger, not some local effect of 'modern life' or 'industrial society': they are a necessary and inescapable part of being human. This is because human beings everywhere and almost always are in a desperate flight from Being and from themselves. This manifests itself as an existential guilt - a guilt at being human. It produces anxiety about one's whole existence, which becomes particularly acute in the face of death. This is because death reveals for the first time the possibility of being a whole.

Inauthenticity, however, can only be conceived on the basis of a possibility of being authentic. But authenticity is not a state. It is a momentary achievement which consists in a 'seeing' of the Being of things. In the later works Heidegger emphasises more and more the preparation for this quasi-mystical seeing which is essentially a passive experience. Nowhere is authenticity related back to our existence in a social world.

Interwoven with his notion of authenticity, however, Heidegger has certain beliefs about language, meaning and truth. Truth is an event, an appearance of Being which can be 'seen' by those humans who are able to see - that is, few people. Without people, Being cannot be seen and truth cannot happen. Being only becomes meaningful as its meaning is articulated in language (by people). It is, therefore, a secondary sense of truth, which is the articulation of the meaning of Being in language. Being 'means' itself in great works of literature, but also in other cultural artefacts. Artistic creation therefore should not be thought of as the 'self-expression' of the artist: it is the self-expression of Being 'through' the artist (OWA).

And finally there is the central theme of time. Philosophy, Heidegger claims, has been unable to deal with time because it has only the tool of 'objects' with which to think about it: in no way is time a thing. Behind this philosophical failure is the flight from death as the revelation of our own finitude. Not thinking about time enables us to avoid thinking about death. But in fact the realisation that we are going to die makes us aware that our existence is utterly permeated in every act by thepecessity of death. The way out is to return to the lived world, our home as we experience it, and rethink its temporality - which is also our own. We will then come to realise that history is a tradition which, if we read it aright, enables us to witness the self-expression of Being. History, then, is not a record of human achievement or failure, neither a pro-
gressive development of man nor an aggrega-
tion of cultural artefacts: it is the
recurrent revelation of Being through great
works of art and thought.

**Ontology versus Epistemology**

I turn now to an evaluation of Heidegger's
doctrines. 'Any epistemology arises within a
given discourse. The form of the dis-
course itself inevitably makes ontological
assumptions. Therefore an epistemology
which is ontologically neutral is not
possible. Therefore epistemology cannot be
used to found an ontology.' By this power-
ful argument of Heidegger's a central tenet
of Husserl's philosophical position is
destroyed.

'I know that I am a consciousness, there-
fore I have privileged access to a realm of
ideas; therefore I can have philosophical
knowledge about ideas irrespective of the
relationship between those ideas and reality;
the question of reality can be left till
later': so argues Husserl.

Heidegger replies 'The very terms, "con-
sciousness", "ideas", "physical reality",
occur within a discourse which is shot
through with a dualist ontology. I cannot
know what it is to be a consciousness unless
I distinguish this realm of being from some
other which is not conscious. Thus the
whole range of positions from pure idealism
to extreme realism stands condemned. They
are all trapped within a false problematic
which thus produces problems which are truly
insoluble. The "true" relationship of mind
to body (or of spirit to matter) can never
be established, because the very terms mis-
describe what actually is. A return to
practical experience will reveal that we are
beings already in a world of things together
with other people. We are not primarily
consciousnesses, which in some mysterious
way get embodied, but remain forever un-
certain about the existence of physical
things or other conscious worlds.

So Heidegger scores against epistemology
by diverting the discussion into ontology.
The implication is that ontology without
epistemology is possible: that a theory of
knowledge can only be grounded upon a prior
theory of being (B&T, p.86ff.); and that
Heidegger himself is justified in concentrat-
ing upon ontology, leaving theories about
knowledge to other people. This, I shall
argue, is false. Ontology and epistemology
stand in a dialectical relationship which is
historically changing. To argue that either
has logical priority over the other is to
construct a false origin which denies the
historical process. The result is a mysti-
fication of the status of the argument
itself: instead of being seen as a contribu-
tion to a dialogue in a tradition which is
forever unfinished, it gets interpreted as
the only and eternally true statement which
springs mysteriously from a sea of falsehood
and blindness. In Heidegger's case, whilst
he is prepared to concede that Parmenides
and a few of his contemporaries had some
obscure inklings, everyone since was disast-
rously benighted until the great Heidegger
saw with the clear light of vision.

Because he argues that a theory of know-
ledge can only be founded upon a prior ontol-
ogy, Heidegger has to maintain that what he
reveals about Being does not amount to
'knowledge'. Yet he claims to be revealing
to us truths (indeed 'necessary' truths)
about what is. And if this body of truths
does not constitute 'knowledge', then what
is the 'science of being' supposed to
amount to?

Heidegger answers in terms of that hoary
oldie 'understanding'. His ontology is the
articulation of our primordial understanding
of Being. We already 'know' the truth of
what he articulates: it is just that we have
never said it. Hermeneutics is not about
discovering what we didn't know before: it
is merely the disclosure of what was already
meant but less than fully conscious. This,
Heidegger argues, is the real sense of
Husserl's appeal to 'intuition' (Anschauung):
it is not the exercise of some rational
faculty to establish the logically necessary;
but the illumination through words of what
was already understood.

Heidegger's language of 'understanding'
versus 'knowing' invokes quite deliberately
the discourse of the 19th-century opposition
between the 'human' Geisteswissenschaften
and positivist Naturwissenschaften. The
Geisteswissenschaften are about understanding
already given 'meanings', both of man and of

God: the Naturwissenschaften are about super-
ficial causal determinations - they lead to
a manipulation of objects and men which is
fundamentally inhumane (see QT). In
Heidegger's version the opposition is res-
olved as anti-scientism: the human studies
are true and good; the natural sciences are
false and evil. The latter are an expres-
sion of the essential inauthenticity of the
social world. The truly human relationship
to things is an individual one which lets
the being of each thing present itself
individually to me, without any fear of
social contradiction. A proper understand-
ing of nature can come only through the poet
(WPF), not through the scientist, who does
not even recognise that science is essenti-
ally a human activity.

Heidegger, then, has no epistemology. It
is not just that he leaves it to others or
happens not to develop one: he is actually
opposed to it. What's more, I shall argue,
he could not develop one even if he wanted
to. His system has no basis on which to
develop an account of how we know anything
about the world, because the public realm
is, for him, essentially the realm of false-
hood and superficiality.

Which leaves the problem of the status of
Heidegger's 'ontological truths'. He has,
because he can have, no procedure for estab-
lishing their truth or falsehood. There is
no argument with Heidegger, because he
enters into no dialogue, accepts no stand-
Heidegger advances with no such open-mindedness into the world of experience. He tells us dogmatically that there are two ways of encountering things, as tools or as objects; that tools are more primordial; and that objects only appear 'in themselves' when they negate our purposes. He does not tell us how he has reached these conclusions; he does not tell us how he knows they are universally true; he does not tell us on what grounds his conclusions could be questioned or revised. He rejects the appeal to reason ('Instrumentality is logically prior to objectivity'); he rejects the reference to cultural history ('The notion of "object" arose on the basis of a prior notion of things as tools'); he even rejects the appeal to individual development ('Babies learn to manipulate things before they learn to think about them as things').

He claims to be appealing to experience, but any such appeal raises two questions: first, 'What grounds do we have for supposing this experience to be typical?'; and second, 'How can it be properly interpreted?'. Now is the time to note his tacit claims: one, 'Craftwork is typical of all experience of things'; and two 'The notion of "object" arises only when this is interfered with'. In short, there is a romantic appeal to the supposed 'organic' relationship between a crafter and his materials and tools, and a swipe at 'scientific rationality' for fouling things up with 'technology'. Yet the historical process here referred to is taken out of history and internalized as a 'necessary structure' of human being.

Ultimately the 'analysis' does not work. Theory and praxis interpenetrate as Heidegger is eventually forced to admit (B&T, p.409): the craftsman thinks about his work; the scientist actively does experiments. The dichotomy between 'tool' and 'object' breaks down and is never subsequently revived. The only possible way of making it plausible would have been to relate the theoretical distinction to the historical process at work - which Heidegger persistently fails to do.

The de-realization of the social

Rapidly, then, Heidegger passes on to characterize our being in the world as fundamentally social. Tools and functional objects refer to a meaningful totality which we share with other people. But pretty soon it transpires that our normal encounter with people is bad - inauthentic. (Heidegger does not explain why our primordial encounter with things as tools is good, but our primordial encounter with people is bad.) Before long we learn that this inauthentic social world is not just some recent historical phenomenon: it is a necessary structure of human being. The public, the social, is necessarily inauthentic. And, whilst Heidegger does allow for the possibility of 'authentic' dyadic relationships, what makes them authentic is only that one partner is leading the other towards true self-understanding, i.e. no reciprocity is involved.10

Now the phenomena which Heidegger educes as evidence for his theory are for the most
part historically specific - they are newspapers, the radio, mechanization, 'the pace of life today' etc. But these are interpreted by Heidegger as merely forms of the inherent human tendency to conceive of others and oneself as objects. Why this should be so he does not explain; and it is clear that 'objects' now is not not being used in the same sense as when it applied to things. He does not say that people are first tools, which become objects when they negate my purposes: they are first people, whom I conceive of as if they were objects. What we have here is a loose analogy, which a phenomenologist should attend very carefully to. (Heidegger's failure to do so is abetted by the non-specific use of terms like 'reification (Lukacs) and 'objectification' (Sartre).)

Heidegger's characterization of the public world as essentially the realm of falsehood and inauthenticity makes it impossible to develop any epistemology on a Heideggerian base. The potential for revising theory which has become too abstract by means of an appeal to our practical experience of the world (the 'lived-world') is thus squandered. There is a fruitful dialectic between the private and the public which Heidegger refuses to allow. My experience is 'private', but in articulating it I make it public (or at least potentially so). Once public, others can compare it with their own experience; and after a process of revision and correction, we may agree some generalisation about experiences of that sort. In practice, this is what Heidegger does in Being and Time; i.e. articulate his own (sometimes quite idiomatic) experience and present it to a public. But this is not how he thinks of it. He does not offer his interpretation of his experience for public debate: he claims to give the interpretation of how all experience necessarily must be - with no room left for revision of his theory. Theoretically he denies the dialectic of public and private, which participates in the very act of publication.

This 'de-realization' of the social leads on quite naturally to Heidegger's remarkable account of language and tradition. The dialectic between private and public, by means of which experience is adequately formulated and knowledge accumulates, is fundamentally a historical process. Equally fundamentally, it is mediated through language at every stage. An essential function of language in relation to the establishment of truth (and indeed of reality) is communication between people who would otherwise be incommunicado and inarticulate. Language is fundamentally social in its nature: it is born out of social intercourse and sustains social intercourse at every stage. Not so for Heidegger.

Heidegger's account of language is remarkable in that it denies all its essential features, i.e. everything which is to do with social intercourse. He has to argue this since he believes the social world to be essentially false. So what is left? For Heidegger is the 'House of Being' (LH), the 'speaking of Being', the 'logos' of which St John spoke (L). In other words, it is the voice of God which can only be heard with the inner ear: it is the mystical speaking which arises only out of silence, with which all forms of social intercourse interfere. The appropriate response to the social is therefore withdrawal; the appropriate attitude towards language is therefore silence.

Tradition and History

Heidegger, then, denied the possibility of knowledge, denied the function of language as public communication, and yet continued to speak in public, to write, and to read. More and more, he thought that artists and poets gave more assistance for the 'seeing of truth', or the 'hearing of the word'. And truth and the word were, of course, a-temporal, or supra-temporal. So although one could loosely speak of a 'tradition' of culture, of thought, of spiritual enlightenment, this should not be conceived of as in any way progressive, or indeed, sufficiently to justify its precedence over historical change. The essence of the tradition is eternal: that which changes through time is thus inessential.

Poets and artists have virtually cornered the market on truth, he believes, because they have addressed themselves directly to Being, as it reveals itself in things, and have not left the social world interfere with this insight. They write for themselves, for the sake of Being, and for other great spirits. They do not write for the common herd who are so immersed in inauthentic socializing that they cannot understand anyway. History, true history (that is, history as the revelation of truth) thus has little to do with the fact-grubbing of professional historians. What it is really about, says Heidegger, is listening to the word of Being speaking through the artefacts which the tradition has bequeathed to us. History is therefore true insofar as it lives in the present as revelation of the eternal. The rest is antiquarianism, and flight from death.

This grotesque account, which wilfully blinds itself to historical change, and therefore denies that there is anything to be explained, follows smoothly from Heidegger's de-realization of the social world. Since the social world is illusory and stands in the way of truth, history as social process cannot exist: its artefacts are manifestations of the eternal and unchanging; there is nothing to explain except the illusion, which we have seen arises out of the flight from death.

So Heidegger ties up another loose end, writes off another area of human experience, and waits for another eruption of Spirit into the world: in 1933 it was 'Only Hitler can save us'; in 1968 it was 'only a god can save us' (DSI).

But the drift of Heidegger's argument is obscured by Being and Time by its mediation through individual 'temporality'. Building on the analysis of what Husserl quite clearly called our 'inner consciousness of time', Heidegger again suppresses all dialectic between private and public, claiming the private as the only original source. In fact, my experience of time arises and develops in a public, social context - which can easily be observed in the way a child
acquires language: first an 'eternal' present tense, then the use of words like 'soon', 'before'; then discriminated future and past tenses. Only by suppressing such real experience can Heidegger hypostatize some essential structure of 'historicity' which supposedly 'explains' how we come to have (public) history.

It is true that I experience the future as 'not yet', which is qualitatively different from the 'has been' of the past. It is true that my experience of time is not of a series of neutral 'nows' which pass by in inexorable succession. But it is equally true that neither history nor 'objective forces' of history and, derived from it, the theoretical and practical critique of these forces.

In conclusion

It will soon be half a century since the Nazis came to power in Germany, and Heidegger became rector of Freiburg University. The passage of time does not diminish the horror of the events which followed, but it does put in perspective Heidegger's contribution to them. He can hardly be said to have changed the course of history, or personally perpetrated any atrocities. On the other hand he provided the Nazis with a support they needed from the bourgeois intelligentsia, and generally contributed to the acceptability of their 'blood and earth' ideology. Probably he inspired at least some young men to march to their own - and other people's - deaths: soon after it was delivered, one of his students said of his inaugural lecture: 'In comparison with the numerous ... speeches which professors of equal rank have given since the (Nazi) take-over of power, this philosophical and forceful speech is a little masterpiece. Service in the labour forces and in the armed forces merges with service in the realm of learning in such a way that, at the end of this speech, one no longer knows whether to study Diel's "Presocratics" or to march in the ranks of the Storm Troopers.'

What is important today, however, is the contemporary effects of Heidegger's thought. He is standard reading in philosophy in Germany and France, his reputation grows apace in North America, and even in Britain his name is now conjured with as a mysterious but profound authority. What I have tried to show here is that Heidegger is a dangerous thing. As a whole, he is a deeply reactionary thinker, but one whose writings incorporate some truly progressive elements: the appeal to phenomena as a critical method, the use of the 'life-world' as a weapon against false abstraction, the analysis of time-experience, the stress upon human interest and emotion as forces shaping the world and our conception of it, the critique of the mind/body dualism, the attack on epistemology as distorting man into a bodiless intellect - all these are positive elements in Heidegger's thought. On the other hand there is the anti-scientism, the anti-intellectualism, the elitism and the religiousism. These lead him to a superficial social analysis masquerading as eternal truths about the human kind. There is no historical process, no well-founded knowledge, no real communication, and no genuine dialectic between public and private in Heidegger's philosophy. Instead there are the mystifications of 'language', 'unconcealment', 'authentic moments of vision'; and lurking behind them all the forever mysterious, unsayable, unseeable, and utterly ineffable 'Being'.

Heidegger made quite clear where he stood, way back in 1935:

'The world is darkening. The essential episodes of this darkening are: the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the standardization of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre... 'World is always world of the spirit... Darkening of the world means emasculation of the spirit... This enfeeblement originated in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century... it is popularly called the "collapse of German Idealism". This formula is a shield behind which the already dawning spirituality... the rejection of all original enquiry into grounds... are hidden. It was not German Idealism which collapsed; rather the age was no longer strong enough to stand up to the greatness, breadth and originality of that spiritual world, i.e. truly to realize it, for to realize a philosophy means something very different from applying theorems... The lives of men began to slide into a world which lacked that depth from out of which the essential always comes to man... so compelling him to become superior and forgetting him in conformity to a rank.' (IM, pp. 37-38)

The rhetoric of romantic idealism still finds listeners.

Footnotes

1 See bibliography: Husserl, PRS & LI.
2 An interesting account of their personal relations
at this period is to be found in Boyce Gibson.


Husserl, P & A. See Heidegger's comments in DSI.

He was still attacking democracy, though mildly, in 1966 (DSI).

To give him his due there is no evidence that he was anti-semitic in his attitude or his actions. See DSI.

In Heidelberg in the summer, and again prior to the November elections.

Almost alone amongst Heidegger's published works the rectorial address, Die Selbstbehauptung des deutschen Universitdt, remains untranslated into English. The only copy I have been able to locate in England is in the Cambridge University Library.

There is here, I believe, the basis for an adequate philosophical account of what is termed 'the unconscious' - one which removes from it the mysterious status of the 'unthought thought'.

See my article in Radical Philosophy 21.

Before Husserl deflected him in 1916, Heidegger was embarked on a study of the mediaeval German mystic, Meister Eckhart. He remained interested in Eckhart throughout his life.

For this reason I once wrote (RP16) that the logical consequence of Heidegger's position should have been to keep his mouth shut. It offended Heidegger enthusiasts at the time: I hope my reasons are now explained.

The notion of 'authentic choice' collapses unless I am able to make this distinction: Heidegger's derealization of the social thus renders authentic choice impossible.

Marcuse, p.34.

Quoted by Kockelmans, p.5.

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