

## Method of Citation

All references to Heidegger’s writings are to the standard edition of *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) or to the respective volume of the *Complete Edition* (*Gesamtausgabe*) of his writings. References to *Sein und Zeit* are cited as “SZ” followed by the page number, for example, “SZ: 15”; references to volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* are cited as “GA” followed by the volume number, colon, and page number, for example, “GA55: 19.” Most English translations include the pagination of the German original, making it possible to dispense with citing the translations’ pagination. Any exceptions are flagged in footnotes, in which case the German pagination is given followed by a slash and the pagination of the English translation, for example, “GA9: 106/84.” A full list of these primary texts can be found at the beginning of the References section.

The following abbreviations are used to refer to works of Heidegger that figure centrally in the discussion:

Abbreviations	Volume	Works of Heidegger
BPP	GA58	<i>Basic Problems of Phenomenology</i> (1919/1920)
FCM	GA29/30	<i>The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics</i>
IOP	GA56/57	<i>The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview</i>
OEG	GA9	<i>On the Essence of Ground</i>
OHF	GA63	<i>Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity</i>
OWA	GA5	“The Origin of the Work of Art”
SZ	GA2	<i>Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)</i>

## Introduction

The topic of this Element is *being-in-the-world*, a central concept in the central work of Heidegger’s early philosophy: *Being and Time* (hereafter SZ), which was published in 1927.<sup>1</sup> Although Heidegger continued to think and write for nearly fifty more years after the work’s appearance (he died in 1976) and although his thinking and style of writing changed dramatically over that time, SZ remained a touchstone throughout. A case can thus be

<sup>1</sup> One indication of this centrality is its serving as the title for Dreyfus (1991), a commentary by one of the leading expositors of Heidegger’s philosophy.

made that having a good grip on this concept is crucial for understanding any phase of Heidegger's philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Although Heidegger does not use the exact phrase *being-in-the-world* until the opening pages of Division One of SZ, he alludes to it in his remarks very early on. In § 4, after noting how the sciences involve Dasein's relating to entities other than itself, Heidegger writes:

But to Dasein, being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus Dasein's understanding of being pertains with equal primordiality both to an understanding of something like a 'world', and to the understanding of the being of those entities which become accessible within the world (SZ: 13).<sup>3</sup>

That being in a world "belongs essentially" to Dasein, in effect to beings who exemplify our way of being, indicates the centrality of the concept: Being in a world is not in any way optional or contingent. The phrase "*Sein in einer Welt*" (being in a world) points toward the more canonical *In-der-Welt-sein* that appears later and that forms part of the title for the second chapter of Division One ("Being-in-the-world in General as the Basic State of Dasein"). We will have occasion shortly for considering that longer discussion (the interplay between Heidegger's talk of *a* world and *the* world will receive considerable attention). For now, I want to note how this passage connects the idea of being in a world with another central concept in SZ: Dasein. This term is generally left untranslated, which indicates its standing as a kind of technical term for Heidegger. The term *Dasein* in ordinary German simply means *existence*. That is important for Heidegger, but his more technical use of the term exploits the structural elements of the word: *Da-*, which means *there*, and *-sein*, which means *being*. So Dasein means *there-being*, which points to the idea that Dasein

<sup>2</sup> One illustration of this is Heidegger's 1947 essay, "Letter on Humanism" (in GA9), written in response to Sartre (2007), which includes him within the ranks of the then-burgeoning existentialist movement in France (Sartre there identifies Heidegger as a fellow "atheistic existentialist"). In his response to Sartre, Heidegger returns explicitly to the project of SZ and not just as a relic of his youthful thinking, but as articulating ideas with which he still identifies (and which are contrary to what Sartre claims to find there).

<sup>3</sup> While I will be citing primarily from the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*, I will throughout modify their translations, mostly without comment. I'll note here that I will not follow their convention of translating the all-important *Sein* with *Being* (with a capital "B"). All nouns are capitalized in German; retaining the capitalization just for translating *Sein* carries unwanted connotations, namely that the being of entities is some kind of big Being. Heidegger's insistence on the ontological difference – the difference between being and beings – precludes precisely that kind of construal of the notion of being.

is something for whom its existence is there for it, and for whom *being* is there more generally. To say that they are *there* for Dasein is to say that they are understood in some way. These ideas are evident in the two explicative formulations of Dasein he offers early on:

- i. Dasein has an understanding of being
- ii. Dasein is a being whose being is an *issue* for it<sup>4</sup>

Although they by no means sound equivalent, it is important not to read these as two separate claims. What I mean here is that (i) and (ii) should not be considered as independent of one another in the sense that something might be characterized by (i) without being characterized by (ii), and vice-versa. As a being with an understanding of being, Dasein – the kind of beings *we* are – can raise and pursue the question of being, which further means that it can question its own being, that is, its own being is, for it, a question.

Very roughly, we can say that Dasein can ask about itself, “Who am I?” and furthermore appreciate the *open-ended* character of that question: As long as I exist, I can continue to raise this question, and what strikes me as even a definitive answer can change over time (moreover, anything resembling a final answer to the question will only be available when I am no longer around to appreciate it, but that is a topic for another occasion). If we think further about this question that we can pose of and to ourselves, we can get a glimmer of how *being-in-the-world* is likewise not separate from (i) and (ii) in the sense that to be a being whose way of being is being-in-the-world is to be a being marked by those first two claims. Consider one thing that I might say about myself by way of trying to answer the “Who am I?” question: *I am a professor*. Understanding myself as a professor is not a matter of affixing a label to myself, or having an identification card in my wallet attesting to my being one. Beyond labels and ID cards, being a professor means having a particular institutional status. Insofar as I understand myself as a professor I understand myself as having that status with respect to an institution – the university where I work – and I understand that status as involving various obligations and responsibilities, such as teaching classes, grading papers, writing articles and books, and attending conferences. I also understand that status as intertwined with other institutional statuses: deans and provosts, for example, but also students, departmental administrators, and so on. Notice that even with

<sup>4</sup> See SZ: 12 for early formulations of both claims.

just this much we can see that understanding myself as a professor enlists an understanding of all manner of things: universities, classrooms, students, syllabi, referee requests, and so on. Self-understanding is in this way *worldly*: I cannot understand myself as a professor – I cannot *be* a professor – without a considerably wider range of understanding that locates my existence in a broader setting, that is, a world.

When I was a teenager – long before I became a professor – I went on a fieldtrip to a museum of holography in New York City (a quick Google search suggests that it is still there). A hologram is a special kind of photographic image. What is special about it is revealed when a laser is shined through the image on film, which is projected as a three-dimensional image that appears to be there, but in a ghostly way. One particularly striking thing I remember from the fieldtrip is being told – and shown – how the full three-dimensional image can be projected from even one small piece of the holographic image on film: The parts of the film image somehow manage to encode the whole. It is a good idea to keep in mind this special feature of holograms when reading Heidegger. *SZ* has a kind of holographic structure in that any particular claim Heidegger enters – any particular piece of the project he lays out – can with the proper illumination project an image of the whole. What we've just seen about Heidegger's two claims pertaining to *Dasein* and their revealing already the outline of being-in-the-world illustrates this idea. Further illustration will be made when we consider Heidegger's claim that being-in-the-world is a *unitary phenomenon* that can nonetheless be considered from different angles. In each case, the aspect under consideration – if considered properly – should lead us back to the whole phenomenon.

This Element will consider being-in-the-world from a number of different angles. Section 1 takes a genealogical approach that considers examples of Heidegger's attempt to thematize the phenomenon of world on the way to his more canonical formulations in *SZ*. Section 2 considers that formulation in more detail. I there follow Heidegger's lead in treating the phenomenon aspectually, that is, as having mutually implicating aspects or dimensions rather than independently characterizable parts. In Section 3, I step back – as Heidegger does in the last chapter of Division One – to assess the broader philosophical significance of being-in-the-world by considering its impact on our understanding of skepticism, realism, and idealism. Finally, in Section 4, I look briefly at some of Heidegger's work in the aftermath of *SZ* where he revisits the idea of being-in-the-world in ways that both correct and expand our understanding of it.

## 1 On the Way to *Being and Time*

### 1.1 Heidegger's Early Lectures

The phrase that is central to this Element – *being-in-the-world* – can be found prior to SZ. The phrase figures prominently in his 1924 *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* and close approximations appear in his 1923 *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity* lectures, where he uses “being ‘in’ the world” without hyphens, as well as “being-‘in’-a-world,” “being-‘within’-a-world,” and “to-be-‘in’-the-world.” However, the ideas that come to be condensed into this hyphenated expression can be traced back even further, to some of Heidegger’s earliest lecture courses starting in 1919. In this section, I want to examine some of Heidegger’s explorations in these very early lectures that initially point to – and begin to deploy – the notion of *being-in-the-world*. In accordance with the preliminary status of this early material – and in keeping with the brevity of this Element – this section will contain only a series of sketches to prepare the way for our examination of SZ.<sup>5</sup> But these samplings from lectures ranging from 1919 to 1923 provide important insights that will assist us in understanding his more refined ideas; of interest as well are tentative formulations that did not make the cut, so to speak. Conjecturing as to why will prove useful as well.

### 1.2 1919: *Es Weltet* (It Worlds)

At the outset of Part Two of his 1919 course, *The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview* (IOP),<sup>6</sup> Heidegger promises his students that they will “for the first time ... make the leap into the world as such” (GA56/57: 63). Heidegger’s vow follows a series of false starts and dead ends in a quest to characterize what he refers to as a “primordial science.” By *primordial*, Heidegger is trying to determine what serves as *originary* in relation to the numerous specialized sciences – natural and otherwise – such as physics, biology, and history. A primordial science “will not be a science of separate object domains, but of what is common to them all, the science

<sup>5</sup> See Kisiel (1995) for a comprehensive overview of Heidegger’s early lectures.

<sup>6</sup> Despite its containing “world,” Heidegger’s attitude toward the idea of *worldview* is anything but positive. Worldviews are perspectives or outlooks that reflect a person’s broader ideological commitments. Although a worldview in this sense might be understood as reflecting or expressing a person’s “philosophy,” Heidegger sees the goal of philosophy as getting back behind – or beneath – worldviews in this sense. From the standpoint of philosophy proper, worldviews in the popular sense are decidedly secondary.

not of a particular, but of universal being” (GA56/67: 26).<sup>7</sup> None of the special sciences has the requisite generality to account either for their own possibility or for the possibility of the others.

A great deal of the first part of the lecture course is devoted to explaining why psychology is ill-suited to serve as a primordial science. Although psychology promises a general account of *experience*, as well as of the *subject* who has experiences, Heidegger complains that psychology misconceives the character of what he calls *lived-experience*. Whereas psychology characterizes experience as a kind of *psychic process* that occurs *within* the subject, Heidegger thinks that more careful attention to the character of a subject’s lived-experience points away from anything characterizable in terms of inner processes: “When we simply give ourselves over to this experience, we know nothing of a process passing before us, nor of an occurrence” (GA56/57: 65). When we conceive of – and talk about – experience, there is a danger of *objectifying* that experience, treating “it” as a something that occurs in the manner of a process or sequence of events whose relation to anything else is obscure. As Heidegger sees it, the challenge is to describe experience without thereby objectifying it.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger’s lead-up to the leap begins with an interrogation of what presents itself as the barest, most general, and in this way, most primordial form of experience: the experience of “there is,” which he considers more expansively as “there is something.” The generality of such an interrogative gesture risks emptiness, but Heidegger’s point here is that even this bare “there is something” goes beyond the model of internal psychic processes whose connection to anything external has not been clarified. Even in the experience only of “there is something,” we can already discern something “non-thingly” about it: “The ‘relating to’ is not a thing-like part, to which some other thing, the ‘something’ is attached. The living and the lived of experience are not joined together in the manner of existing objects” (GA56/57: 69–70). Relating to is *comportment toward* something, an active encountering – and making sense – of something. In this way, it is already *beyond* any kind of internal psychic process.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger’s formulation here anticipates what he will come to refer to in SZ as “fundamental ontology.”

<sup>8</sup> The closing section of the lecture contains an extended discussion of phenomenological method, wherein Heidegger presents his idea of non-objectifying descriptions as a departure from Husserl’s notion of phenomenological *reflection*, which Heidegger sees as vulnerable to Paul Natorp’s objection that phenomenology “stills the stream” of lived-experience. At the very close of the lecture, Heidegger introduces the idea of “hermeneutical intuition,” although he does not develop it much there. For more discussion of these methodological concerns, see Von Hermann (2013), Zahavi (2003), and Westerlund (2020).

To illustrate this, Heidegger pivots to a more concrete example, which both he and the students to whom he is lecturing can enact and attend to without having to look any further than where they already are. The “there is something” can be filled in – given definite content – by considering the *lectern* Heidegger is currently using. What Heidegger wants his students to notice here is the familiarity and immediacy in play in the experience of the lectern. The experience of the lectern is not pieced together from a series of sensory processes that involve the awareness of something *less* than the lectern; he and the students do not *infer* that what they see is a lectern on the basis of something they initially discern or have, such as sensations of colors and shapes. There are, Heidegger contends, no such prior processes: The lectern is seen directly by both him and his students when they enter the room, and in more or less the same way. Both Heidegger and the students see it as the place where the lecturer stands. As the lecturer, Heidegger sees it as the place *for him*, while the students see it as the place in the classroom toward which they are expected to look. When the students enter the classroom, they take in the lectern as playing a particular role in what they are up to – attending a class meeting – and the same is true for Heidegger. They thus do not experience the lectern as an isolated thing that then might be understood as standing in relation to other things that are likewise initially experienced as isolated. The lectern is instead experienced *from out of* and *against* the backdrop of a broader environment: the classroom, the university building that houses the classroom, the university, and so on. The lectern is “given ... from out of an immediate environment” (GA56/57: 72). This environment should be understood as an “environmental milieu” that “does not just consist of things, which are then conceived of as meaning this and this.” Instead, “the meaningful [*das Bedeutsame*]<sup>9</sup> is primary” and this fullness of meaning is “immediately given to me without any mental detours across thing-oriented apprehension” (GA56/57: 73). Although the example of seeing the lectern involves attending to just one item – the lectern – seeing it *as* a lectern involves grasping its significance in relation to the environment in which it has its place. We can think of that environment both narrowly and widely: narrowly, as the immediate environment of the lecture hall and the university, but more broadly as the public realm within which the university is situated. Hence Heidegger’s characterizing the environmental

<sup>9</sup> I am here citing Sadler’s translation, but it would be more apt to render *Bedeutsame* as *significant* to preserve in English the continuity of Heidegger’s thinking on this front (most translations use *significance* and its variants (*signify*, *significant*, etc.) to translate *Bedeutsamkeit* and its variants.