

Topics in 20th Century Continental Philosophy

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (part of) division one

University of Pittsburgh, Spring Term 2006
PHIL 1230; Tuesday & Thursday 2:30-3:45

Thu 01/05	First page of <i>Being and Time</i>
Tue 01/10	§1-2: the question of <i>Being and Time</i>
Thu 01/12	§3-4: importance of the question
Tue 01/17	§5-6: ontological analysis
Thu 01/19	§7-8: phenomenology as a method
Tue 01/24	§9-11: the theme of the analytic of Dasein
Thu 01/26	§12-13: being in the world
Thu 01/31	§12-13: being in the world (again)
Tue 02/02	§14: worldliness
Thu 02/07	§15: tools
Thu 02/09	§16: use
Tue 02/14	§17: reference and signs
Thu 02/16	§18: relevance and significance
Tue 02/21	§18: Bewandtnis
Thu 02/23	§25: who is Dasein?
Tue 02/28	§26-27: the They
Thu 03/02	§26-27: the They (2)
Tue 03/14	§28-29: being-in: attunement essay draft due (3 pages)
Thu 03/16	§30: fear
Tue 03/21	§31: understanding
Thu 03/23	§31: understanding (2)
Tue 03/28	§32: interpretation
Thu 03/30	§33: statement
Tue 04/04	§34: language
Thu 04/06	§35-7: idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity
Tue 04/11	§35-7: idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity (2)
Thu 04/13	§38: falling prey and thrownness
Tue 04/18	§39: completeness of Dasein
Thu 04/20	§40: Angst essay final version due (6 pages)

Reading

The following is a very cursory survey of the available commentaries on *Being and Time*. In general, the one and only thing to do in order to understand Heidegger seems to be: read Heidegger. There are a lot of strange, mistaken, and even misleading views about Heidegger out there, and most of the commentaries contains both good and bad accounts. There is no perfect commentary. So you should keep two things in mind:

- (1) **Do not trust anyone who tells you what Heidegger thinks.** Do not even trust the late Heidegger when he talks about the early Heidegger.
- (2) **Read Heidegger first and try to find your own solutions.** As long as you are able to reach and defend your own opinion, you do not need a commentary.

First, there are two other writings by Heidegger that I find helpful.

1. *Prolegomena to a History of a Concept of Time* (english title similar), which covers several topics also covered *Being and Time*. You should not read the whole book, but you may want to look at some parallel passages when you want an alternative phrasing for a point that Heidegger makes in *Being and Time*.
2. *Zollikon Seminars*. This is a late writing, but especially comprehensible, since Heidegger here speaks to psychologists. Hence, he explains some of his basic attitudes in rather simple terms.

Now for the commentaries. Please note that what I give here are *first impressions*. The list and the comments will be updated. What I find better commentaries come first.

1. Rüdiger Safranski, Heidegger. This is a biography that also gives an account of the philosophical development of Heidegger. It is easy reading and gives a good general impressions of Heidegger's thought. It is not a line-by-line commentary to *Being and Time*, though.
2. Joseph Kockelmans, Heidegger's "Being and Time". Good commentary that starts with a brief biographical introduction and explains many details. Kockelman knows the philosophical and historical background, which is not the case with other commentators. He also correctly notices that on a closer look, *Being and Time* is not at all concerned with answering the general question of the meaning of being (p. 42). However, the commentary is neither brief nor very analytic. The real commentary starts at p. 51.
3. Hubert Dreyfus, *Being in the World*. In several respects, this is a good commentary. A lot of details are adequately explained. However, Dreyfus misrepresents the general aim of *Being and Time* (as far as I can see). He thinks that the question of being is the question that *Being and Time* answers, and hence the question about the intelligibility of our everyday background practices. This is, at any rate, a creative reading. Also, Dreyfus is a bit too much involved in contemporary discussions between Searle and the Artificial Intelligence community. But it still is one of the better commentaries.
4. Michael Gelven, *Being and Time*. This is a reasonably simple commentary. Beware of comments that Gelven makes about things other than Heidegger, e.g. Descartes or Kant. He says, for instance, that Descartes was terrified by scepticism, which is complete nonsense. But at least, he gives a good explanation of Heidegger's general aim in *Being and Time*, and he comments more or less on each paragraph.
5. Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*. This is not a line-by-line commentary but rather useful background reading. It seems to give a good account of Heidegger's general aim in *Being and Time*. King has good way of explaining what "meaning" is in the question of the "meaning of being". Sometimes, she merely paraphrases the text in an abbreviated manner, which is also helpful; e.g. Chapter VII about _7.
6. Eugene Kaelin, Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Gives a rather strange, that is, existentialist impression of the overall task of *Being and Time*. Skip the introduction. Kaelin gives a detailed commentary, but he talks a bit too much about unnecessary details. For instance, he tells us into how many sections particular bits of text divide.
7. Richard Polt, Heidegger. Polt thinks that the main question of *Being and Time* is why anything exists rather than nothing. This is fundamentally mistaken. I did not check for further mistakes.