Some of the most important connections between phenomenology and hermeneutics occur in the work of Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl. Heidegger is one of the most important European philosophers of the twentieth century, influencing thinkers from Gaston Bachelard and Hans-Georg Gadamer to Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. However, he was an active member of the National Socialist party during the 1930s and the second World War, and this has dramatically affected how his philosophy has been received and interpreted.¹

Heidegger reasserts the Kantian claim that experience is not the reception of sense impressions but a form of prospection or questioning: to have experience is to be in an active state of finding out about the world. In his principal work, *Being and Time* (1927), he asks: what is the meaning of being? What does it mean to have experience, to be located within a world, to be human? The question of being stimulated the metaphysical schemes of Plato and Aristotle but, since then, according to Heidegger, it has been forgotten. The notion of ‘being’ has become ordinary and universal, applying to anything and everything in existence. However, what is distinctive about human being, Heidegger avers, is that it is a form of being *for which being itself is an issue*.

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 its own being. The very asking of this question is an entity’s mode of *being*, and as such it gets its
essential character from what is inquired about – namely, 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’.2

‘Dasein’ is an everyday, colloquial German word meaning ‘being there’ or a human’s sense of existence. The fact that being is an issue for us is tremendously important for Heidegger’s thesis. Something’s ‘being an issue’, Heidegger writes, ‘is a constitutive state of Dasein’s being’ and this shows that Dasein ‘in its being, has a relationship towards that being – a relationship which itself is one of being’. We are not just aware of the world, but aware of the fact that we are aware of the world. ‘Understanding of being’, he asserts, ‘is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological’.3 ‘Ontic’ is Heidegger’s term for the objects and events which feature in experience, and ‘ontological’ refers to the structure of experience, that is, in Heidegger’s idiom, the structure of the ontic. What distinguishes Dasein from other kinds of being in the world is that its character, and its character alone, represents the possibility of there being other kinds of being in the world.

Heidegger is sensitive to the complexities of introducing terminology which avoids the divisions of subject–object and inside–outside metaphysics. In Being and Time, he insists that ‘subject and object are not the same as Da-sein and world’, adding in a footnote: ‘Certainly not. So little that even rejecting this by putting them together is fatal’.4 As Stambaugh notes in her 1996 translation of Being and Time, ‘it was Heidegger’s express wish that in future translations the word Dasein should be hyphenated’.5 Heidegger’s thinking, Stambaugh continues, was that, with hyphenation, the reader will be less prone to assume he or she understands it to refer to ‘existence’ (which is the orthodox translation of Dasein) and with that translation surreptitiously bring along all sorts of psychological connotations. It was Heidegger’s insight that human being is uncanny: we do not know who, or what, that is, although, or perhaps precisely because, we are it.6
With Stambaugh, the hyphen in Da-sein introduces a sense of the uncanny. Rather than having Da-sein remain as a word which refers straightforwardly to human being as a clearly circumscribed thing — to existence or to the subject — the hyphen maintains the reference to us but at the same time makes it other than us. It emphasizes that human being is distributed in a way that dualistic, Cartesian, subject–object terminology does not easily accommodate: a ‘being there’, an entity whose being is located and extended in the world. Despite the claim for the relationship between typography and ontology, this Reader will nevertheless adhere to the traditional convention of presenting ‘Dasein’ as an unhyphenated word, although readers are advised to bear in mind the warnings given here against the word performing a familiar ‘existence-’ or ‘entity-denoting’ function.

Heidegger is pursuing the Kantian project of drawing out the conditions of possibility of experience: the structures which have to be at work in and around experience for there to be any experience at all. Experience takes the form of a question, Heidegger argues, in the sense that there always has to be an opening-up of possibilities in advance of experience in order for experience to take place. Just as the kind of question asked influences the answer, he avows, so the way in which we approach reality affects how it appears. In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (1929), Heidegger shows that experience is made possible by the projection in advance of experience of the concept of an object in general as a horizon of possibility, and this opens up a ‘space’ in which objects can appear before consciousness. The ‘Kant book’ (as Heidegger refers to it) develops some of the connections implicit but never realized in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1781, 1787) and was written as preparation for the second part of Being and Time, but Heidegger never completed the project. The concept of a horizon projected prior to experience raises the question of the source of the projection, but this is one of the complexities involved in developing an ontology which does not take subject or object, or the terms of dualistic philosophy in general, as its foundation. Both Heidegger and Kant are seeking to formulate the structures which allow a world, including human subjectivity within the world, to come into being in the first place.

If the question of being has been forgotten, if being has become ordinary, then we must draw it out and make it prominent again. Phenomenology, Heidegger asserts, is the
method of enquiry whereby something is brought out ‘into the open’. He defines it as letting ‘that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’. However, this phenomenological disclosure is also hermeneutic, in two senses: (1) because it involves interpretation, and (2) because we are working towards an understanding not just of how things appear to us, but of how things appear per se. As Heidegger writes, his enquiry ‘becomes a “hermeneutic”’ to the extent ‘that by uncovering the meaning of being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein’, in other words, we work out ‘the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends’.

This is ‘hermeneutic’ in the (recent) sense of transcending one’s subjective standpoint to approach objectivity. It is reminiscent of Kant’s attempt to secure objectivity given his investment of the possibility of experience within the subject. We can make the comparison with conversation again: asking a question elicits a response and, although the response is influenced by the phrasing of the question, it nevertheless represents the willingness to approach a shared understanding which is constitutive of all communication.

Heidegger develops a new ontology – the way in which experience and the world are shaped and organized – based on processes of disclosing and concealing, opening and closing. Apart from the times when we are amazed by the extent and complexity of the universe, we ordinarily take the existence of objects for granted; we assume they are simply ‘there’, waiting for us to perceive or interact with them. The tyranny of the ordinary again. Heidegger is interested in how things come to be for us, how they are bound up with our subjective experience and the meanings, values, and dispositions which experience involves. Our everyday ontology of stable, mind-independent objects, he asserts, presupposes a prior, ‘fundamental’ ontology whereby things are disclosed or concealed. Before things can exist, the conditions that allow things to come into being, that allow the formation of the environment in which Dasein finds itself, must apply. Heidegger gives the senses as an illustration of disclosure. When we see, we are not passively receiving what is ‘out there’ in the world. Rather, the optical and neural processes that take place within us open up the world for us in a certain way, that is, they allow us to interpret the world in terms of colour and as something which is
continuously there. Hearing makes the world available to us in alternative ways, allowing us to be aware of things that are not yet visible, e.g. the person singing next door, and to be aware of things intermittently, that is, only when they are making a noise. For the blind, rain behaves like light: raindrops bouncing off different surfaces give texture and depth to an otherwise silent, featureless world.

The concept of disclosure is central to the essay representing Heidegger here, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, first given as a series of lectures in 1935 and 1936. The essay brings together some of the most complex ideas in his philosophy while at the same time trying to make art central to his fundamental ontology. As well as ‘disclosure’, other key concepts include: truth as aletheia, truth as untruth, concealment, the concept of world, and the strife of world and earth. The origin of the work of art is not the artist, nor is it the institution of art. Rather, the origin of art is truth as aletheia. The concept is the subject of extensive debate within Heideggerian scholarship. Dasein and aletheia, Heidegger asserts, are related ‘in terms of the temporality of existence’, and fathoming this arrangement is the ‘central problematic’ of Being and Time. As an initial definition, ‘aletheia’ means ‘the unconcealedness of beings’. It is a concept of truth distinct from and logically prior to the conventional, Roman notion of truth as veritas or ‘correspondence with the facts’. For there to be any objects to make up states of affairs to which our statements can correspond, there must be the ‘truth’ which lets these objects first come to be. To make aletheia the origin of the work of art is therefore to make art fundamentally ontological, to make its origin a process which is intrinsic to the organization of the world and Dasein’s being in the world. It is to position art as something which is active in shaping human being and its activity in the world.

While there is general agreement that aletheia can be translated as ‘unconcealment’ or ‘disclosure’, there is disagreement as to what is meant by truth as ‘unconcealment’ or ‘disclosure’. For example, to adapt the title of Sallis’s book, there is the suggestion that Heidegger ‘doubles truth’ by introducing a form of truth as unconcealment which stands as the originary ground of truth as veritas, that is, truth as ‘correctness’ or ‘correspondence’. Tugendhat takes Heidegger to be introducing ‘a new concept of truth’ on the grounds that the conventional notion of truth as correspondence does not
include disclosiveness as a principle. The problem here, according to Tugendhat, is that Heidegger’s concept of truth discloses a world but does not provide us with a means of testing any part of it: ‘if truth means unconcealment, in the Heideggerian sense, then it follows that an understanding of world in general is opened up but not that it is put to the test’. But these problems only arise for Sallis and Tugendhat, Wrathall maintains, because they interpret truth as unconcealment, as a form of truth distinct from correspondence. Against this, Wrathall argues, unconcealment is in fact positioned by Heidegger as a condition of the possibility of truth as correspondence. This effectively moves disclosure from being treated as an alternative form of truth to being a ground for truth as correspondence. In support of this reading, Wrathall argues, is Heidegger’s announcement in ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’ that ‘to raise the question of aletheia, of unconcealment as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason, it was immaterial and therefore misleading to call aletheia, in the sense of clearing, “truth”’. Furthermore, Wrathall asserts, irrespective of this announcement, it is possible to read Heidegger’s prior accounts of unconcealment as grounding correspondence in the sense that what is unconcealed is a situation about which a correspondence claim can be made. While the importance of these uncertainties over truth should not be dismissed, it is less questions of correctness and more matters of ‘world’ and ‘the strife between world and earth’ that are to the fore in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’.

Art is true, Heidegger claims, in that it lets us see the tension between concealment and disclosure. He calls this the ‘strife of world and earth’. ‘World’ is an ambiguous word. Heidegger in fact identifies four senses of the word in Being and Time: (1) the sum total of beings and things in existence; (2) all the possible things which fill up a life, ‘for example, when we speak of the “world” of the mathematician, we mean the region of all possible mathematical objects’; (3) similar to (2) but with more emphasis on ‘lived reality’, that ‘in which’ a factual Dasein ‘lives’, for example, the ‘public world of the we or one’s “own” and nearest (in the home) surrounding world’; and (4) ‘the ontological and existential concept of worldliness’ understood as ‘the respective structural totality of particular “worlds”, [containing] the a priori of worldliness in general’. Meanings (1) and (2) are in common usage but are not intended here. As Heidegger writes, ‘the world
is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things'. Instead, as he indicates in ‘Origin’, it is meanings (3) and (4) which are intended:

The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those utterly essential decisions of our history are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds.

With meaning (3), according to Krell, “‘world’ is that already familiar horizon upon which everyday human existence confidently moves’; it is ‘the structural whole of significant relationships that Dasein experiences – with tools, things of nature, and other human beings – as being-in-the-world’. The example of the temple from the ‘Origin’ essay helps to clarify this meaning. ‘A building, a Greek temple’, Heidegger declares, ‘portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley’. Yet, as a work, it establishes a series of relations between its own material elements, its location on rocky ground, and the lives of the ancient Greeks: ‘it fits together and at the same time gathers round itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape and destiny for human being’.

Meaning (4), ‘the a priori of worldliness in general’, I suggest, is also at work, because we have the enigmatic phrase ‘the world worlds’. This phrase, alongside others such as ‘the thing things’, ‘care cares’, ‘temporality temporalizes’, would seem to be a tautology, amounting to saying a thing is what it is or does what it does. As Schöfer indicates, it is the form of ‘natura naturans’ used by the scholastics ‘to signify divine nature, which renews itself from itself, circles in itself, and remains identical with itself, and whose activity was thought to consist in the fact that it had to create and perform for itself’.
However, with Heidegger’s phrases, Schöfer argues, more is being asserted than self-identity. By using verbs that are ‘synonymous’ with their nouns, he suggests, the verb content is ‘deconcretized’ and made ‘functional’, which is to say that what are customarily referred to as things, such as a world ‘out there’, temporality as something which ‘passes by’, in Heidegger’s phrases, become generative processes in which our being, Dasein, is set; the world is not simply ‘out there’, laid out and inactive, but is rather a state of being which is brought into being and organized through a series of operations. If you are seeking to formulate an ontology in which entities unfold through structured, articulated openings that do not break down into subject–object compartmentalization, then one way to achieve this formulation is to turn what are ordinarily ‘object’ words into ‘action’ words. The worldliness is a priori – prior to experience – in the sense that it is the articulacy or jointedness of the structure which has to be in place to allow worldly relations to open and form. So the world worlds in that the space and time in which we find ourselves are not properties of a domain that is external to us, surrounding us, but a dynamic set of relationships structuring, coursing through and making possible all the interactions which we come to think of us our locatedness in (of course, I can’t say ‘the world’ so instead I shall employ Heideggerian terminology for human existence) a series of engaged concerns.

The term ‘earth’, as in the truth of art letting us see the ‘strife of world and earth’, reinforces this sense of worldliness. ‘Earth’ for Heidegger is not simply matter conceived of as an inert substance, the stuff out of which something is made. Rather, it is a ground of potency, a condition out of which something can arise as well as a condition which that something can sink back into. Bear in mind that Heidegger is erecting an ontology in which things are drawn into being, as opposed to things already existing within an external, mind-independent realm, and so he needs to refer to a background or potent source out of which entities can arise. He often relies on the metaphor of ‘flowering’ to describe truth as disclosure. For example, modern physics, he claims in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, is dependent upon technical apparatus for the disclosure or ‘bringing-forth’ of a realm of representation beyond human visualizability – ‘the bursting of a blossom into bloom’, as he describes it – but, he warns us, unless we are we aware of the fundamentally disclosive nature of
technology, we stand to lose sight of the fact that for each realm which is revealed to us, other potential realms remain undisclosed.  

In creating a world, the truthfulness of a work resides not solely in its creating a series of relations which open onto the way someone might abide, but also in its standing or remaining as the material object which achieves the opening of a world. ‘In fabricating equipment – for example, an axe’, Heidegger observes, ‘stone is used, and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment’. In other words, the more a material ‘disappears’ or ‘perishes’ in its application, the more readily it enables the task in hand. ‘By contrast’, he continues, ‘the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work’s world’. That is to say, the ‘strife of world and earth’ in the artwork is the tension between, on the one hand, the artwork stimulating our perception of a world of possible events and interactions while, on the other hand, our remaining aware that this world has been achieved – opened up – through materials. When we use a tool successfully, we see or feel right through it; we are not aware of it. But with an artwork, our perception doesn’t just pass through the pigments, the stone, the setting. Rather, we maintain a simultaneous double-awareness of material and the lived associations which the worked material evokes. Braver makes the point well in relation to Van Gogh’s painting *Starry Night*: ‘We can look “through” the painting to what it depicts, namely, the villagers’ world – their daily routines, emotional lives, spiritual state, etc. The painting can, however, undergo a Gestalt switch into a piece of fabric with thick globs of paint on it, which would be earth’.  

Heidegger’s interpretation of one of Van Gogh’s ‘peasant shoes’ paintings in the essay has attracted criticism. According to Schapiro, Heidegger commits the very act which he warns others against: projecting a meaning onto a painting. Heidegger writes:

The artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth. It would be the worst self-deception to think that our description, as a subjective action, had first depicted everything thus and then projected it into the painting… What
happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth.

That the shoes belong to a peasant is simply an idea projected onto the painting by Heidegger, Schapiro argues, for there is biographical information on Van Gogh which indicates that the shoes depicted in actual fact belonged to the artist. Furthermore, ‘the being of the shoes’ which Heidegger claims to find in the painting, Schapiro asserts, is nothing ‘that could not have been imagined in looking at a real pair of peasants’ shoes’.25 This would appear to undermine the case Heidegger makes for the capacity for world-disclosure to lie in the work of art and not in some old shoes, some old equipment. Derrida also finds Heidegger’s interpretation of Van Gogh’s painting initially ‘ridiculous and lamentable’.26 Early in his essay ‘Restitutions of the truth in pointing’, Derrida is disappointed by Heidegger’s ‘consumer-like hurry toward the content of a representation’ and ‘the massive self-assurance of the identification: “a pair of peasants’ shoes”, just like that!’.

It is almost as if Heidegger has undergone a transition from ‘great thinker’ to tour guide ‘from the neighbouring farm’.27 But Derrida also seeks to ‘shield Heidegger from Schapiro’s verdict’ on the grounds that Schapiro makes ‘a certain number of simplifications, not to call them anything worse’.20 Perhaps the greatest ‘simplification’ is Schapiro’s assumption that Heidegger’s account is intended to be a study which draws out the content of the painting on a one-to-one correspondence relation with reality. Although Heidegger states that Van Gogh ‘painted such shoes several times’, Schapiro seeks to identify which particular painting Heidegger was looking at, assisted by personal correspondence with Heidegger, so that he can establish which pair of shoes is depicted.30 Yet, as Derrida points out, Heidegger does not chose a painting in the first instance but a piece of equipment; in Heidegger’s words, ‘a pair of peasant shoes, for instance’ (emphasis added). Furthermore, Heidegger introduces the painting as an accessory ‘to facilitate intuitive presentation (Veranschaulichung). By way of an accessory aid (Für diese Nachhilfe), a pictorial representation (bildliche Darstellung) suffices. For this purpose we choose a famous picture by Van Gogh’.31 As Derrida is all too aware, this so-called line of defence only threatens to condemn Heidegger further, since he now appears to be using an artwork
merely as a stand in for the shoes. But Heidegger is primarily interested in equipment, in objects as clusters of ways of being, the networks of lines of action through which Dasein defines its world, rather than objects as external, mind-independent items. To dismiss Heidegger’s use of the painting as an accessory overlooks the fact that the painting is introduced as part of a world: a world of the rural, the soil, the artisanal. As Derrida asks: is this ‘so alien to Van Gogh?’ On this reading, the painting serves not as a representation, an image at one remove from the world it depicts, but stands, like the temple, as a part of the world it depicts. The painting stops us in our tracks and makes us aware of the shoes. It stops them from being lost in their equipmentality, from being lost in the day-to-day pattern of use. What would help to reinforce this interpretation (but which is not given by Heidegger) is an account of how the ‘earth’ of Van Gogh’s handling of paint opens onto the world of the rural.

Ultimately, for Heidegger, ‘the nature of art is poetry’. It is not his intention to construct a hierarchy of the arts, like Hegel, with poetry at the top. Rather, he is proposing that art is truest, at its most aletheic, when it is poetic. Verbal language, Heidegger argues, is the principal form of projection whereby a space is opened, allowing an object to appear. In projection, he writes, ‘announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the Open at’. When we use words, we are drawing on the associations and significations which constitute everyday discourse. What the poet does is work with these in a way which defamiliarizes the familiar, which makes the usual unusual. An opening appears in the ordinariness of being, allowing new possibilities to come to light. In the ‘open place’ of projection, Heidegger writes, ‘everything is other than usual... everything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an unbeing’. Metaphor is a good example: two familiar but unrelated words are combined to produce a novel description, often leading to a new way of seeing the object in question, e.g. ‘time is a river’, ‘rain is the light of the blind’. Generating ‘new’ ideas from ‘old’ concepts reflects the hermeneutic principle of speakers transcending their initial perspectives through conversation. Heidegger though would not necessarily approve of making metaphor an example. He sees the figure as being bound by the divisions of traditional metaphysics; ‘the metaphorical’, he writes in The Principle of Reason, ‘only exists within metaphysics’. Our concepts apply to reality carved up in a particular way, and their combination in a metaphor, no matter how
creative or unprecedented, he thinks, only serves to reassert this metaphysical order. But Heidegger’s concept of metaphor is a limited one: he takes it to be only a device for combining terms and leaving their boundaries intact, when, as several commentators have observed, the interaction between terms in a poetic conjunction can have ontological consequences, can affect the shape of Dasein’s world.\textsuperscript{34} Metaphor, Casenave writes, ‘is a deviance in language use… which goes on to propose a new vision of things’ and, as such, is congruent with the ‘way-making [nature] of language’ sought by Heidegger.\textsuperscript{35} He does not discuss metaphor in the ‘Origin’ essay but does considers the concepts of ‘own’ (\textit{eigen}) and ‘appropriate’ (\textit{eigentlich}) – vital for the ontological task of rethinking what belongs to categories once they have been shaken up by metaphor – in the later essays ‘The Nature of Language’ and ‘The Way to Language’.\textsuperscript{36}
4 The Origin of the Work of Art
Martin Heidegger

[Insert original Heidegger essay]

Translated by Albert Hofstadter

Select bibliography of major works by Martin Heidegger in English


Further reading
For concise introductions to Heidegger’s philosophy, see Inwood, and Steiner. Fuller introductions, with commentaries on specific texts, are provide by Blattner, Braver, Dreyfus, Figal, Mulhall, Wrathall (2006), and Young (2002). Wider examinations of the nature and implications of Heidegger’s thought are conducted by Friedman, Guignon (1983, 1993), Lafont, Olafson, Rapaport, Richardson, and Rorty. Examinations of Heidegger’s concept of truth are given by Dahlstrom, Tugendhat, and Wrathall (1999), with Derrida and Sallis subjecting Heidegger on truth to a deconstructive reading.


Martin Heidegger


Notes
[to follow Editor’s introduction to Martin Heidegger]


6 Ibid.


8 Ibid., H. 37, p. 62.

9 Ibid., H. 33, p. 57.

10 Ibid., H. 357, p. 327; original emphasis.


13 Ibid., p. 238.


16 Wrathall, ‘Heidegger and truth as correspondence’, p. 78.
20 Ibid.
22 Although Heidegger employs the ‘photosynthesis’ (or ‘light’) metaphor from Plato, Rouse observes, Heidegger rejects both Plato’s ‘identification of this “lighting” with an entity (a Form)’ and the notion that it can be known through reason, since, on Heidegger’s terms, this would amount to turning the condition of the possibility of objects into an object. See J. Rouse, ‘Heidegger on science and naturalism’, in G. Gutting (ed.), *Continental Philosophy of Science*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 123-41; p. 132.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., pp. 292-93.
28 Ibid., p. 293.
29 Ibid., pp. 295, 368.
31 Quoted in Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 309. These lines, Derrida and his translators tell us, were omitted in the French and English translations of ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’.


35 Casenave, ‘Heidegger and metaphor’, p. 146.