



MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE SUBJECT-OBJECT DICHOTOMY

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ABSTRACT

The subject-object dichotomy has been a central concept in Western philosophy since Descartes. It posits a fundamental distinction between the experiencing subject (the knower) and the object of experience (the known). Martin Heidegger, a prominent 20th-century philosopher, challenged this dichotomy through his phenomenological approach. This article examines Heidegger's critique of the subject-object split, focusing on his key arguments and their implications for understanding our relationship with the world.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenology, dasein, being-in-the-world, Sorge (care), epistemology, ontology, cartesian cogito.

INTRODUCTION

Heidegger's work on the subject-object dichotomy builds upon earlier critiques from figures like Edmund Husserl, who emphasized the intentional nature of consciousness. However, Heidegger goes beyond Husserl by questioning the very foundation of the subject-centered model [1]. Other philosophers, like Martin Buber, have also explored relational ontology, suggesting a more interconnected way of understanding human experience [2]. A review of these related works helps contextualize Heidegger's unique contribution.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a textual analysis approach, drawing primarily from Heidegger's early works, such as "Being and Time" (1927) and "The Basic Problems of Phenomenology" (1927). Additionally, secondary sources on Heidegger's philosophy and phenomenology will be consulted to provide context and critical interpretations.

RESULTS

Martin Heidegger argues that the subject-object dichotomy prioritizes a detached, theoretical way of knowing. He introduces the concept of "Dasein" (being-there) to represent our situated existence in the world. Dasein is not a pre-existing subject encountering objects, but rather is constituted by its engagement with the world. Heidegger emphasizes our "being-in-the-world," where we are already involved with and care about things before any conscious reflection occurs. This "care" (Sorge) shapes our understanding and reveals the world in meaningful ways.

Martin Heidegger's critique of Descartes' famous assertion "cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) is deeply rooted in his phenomenological approach to ontology. He challenges the

Cartesian notion that the thinking subject is the foundation of knowledge and existence, arguing instead that our being is fundamentally relational and intertwined with the world in which we dwell [3].

Descartes' statement epitomizes a dualistic framework that privileges the isolated subject, the thinking ego, as the starting point of philosophical inquiry. According to Descartes, the act of thinking serves as irrefutable evidence of one's existence, thus establishing the thinking subject as the primary certainty from which all knowledge derives. Descartes' emphasis on the isolated thinking subject as the foundation of knowledge neglects the existential dimension of human existence. Existentialist philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, argue that human existence is fundamentally relational and situated within a context of freedom and responsibility. From this perspective, the Cartesian ego fails to capture the existential reality of human existence, which is inherently intertwined with others and the world. Descartes' emphasis on the thinking ego as the primary certainty reflects a historically male-centric perspective that marginalizes alternative ways of knowing and being. Feminist philosophers critique Descartes for neglecting embodied, relational, and contextual forms of knowledge that are often devalued in patriarchal societies [6].

By centering the isolated thinking subject, Descartes perpetuates a gendered hierarchy of knowledge that excludes marginalized voices and experiences. Postmodern thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, deconstruct Descartes' notion of the thinking subject as a privileged point of departure for knowledge. They argue that language, power dynamics, and social structures shape the construction of subjectivity and knowledge. From this perspective, Descartes' assertion of the thinking ego as the foundation of knowledge is seen as a product of specific historical and cultural contexts rather than an objective truth. From a psychological standpoint, Descartes' emphasis on the thinking ego can be critiqued for overlooking the complexities of human cognition and consciousness. Contemporary psychology highlights the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes, emotions, and social influences in shaping human experience and behavior. Descartes' reduction of the self to a disembodied thinking entity fails to account for the multifaceted nature of human psychology and subjectivity. Scholars from various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and neuroscience, offer critiques of Descartes' dualistic framework. Anthropologists highlight the diversity of cultural beliefs and practices that shape conceptions of selfhood and knowledge. Sociologists analyze the social construction of knowledge and power dynamics that influence the production and dissemination of knowledge. Neuroscientists investigate the neural mechanisms underlying cognition and consciousness, challenging Cartesian dualism's separation of mind and body [4].

Martin Heidegger, however, takes issue with this dualistic perspective, asserting that it fails to grasp the fundamental nature of human existence. For Heidegger, being-in-the-world precedes any isolated act of thinking. Human existence, or Dasein, is characterized by its inherent embeddedness within a world of meaningful relations and engagements. Rather than starting with the thinking subject, Heidegger emphasizes the primacy of Being-in-the-world, where the self is always already situated amidst a web of interconnections with others, objects, and environments.

In Heidegger's view, the very notion of "I think" presupposes a prior engagement with the world. Our understanding of ourselves and our existence emerges from our everyday

encounters with the world, not from an abstract, disembodied act of thinking. Therefore, the Cartesian cogito is not the foundational certainty it purports to be, but rather a derivative of our pre-reflective immersion in the world. Martin Heidegger's critique of Descartes reflects his broader project of reorienting philosophical inquiry towards an existential phenomenology that acknowledges the relational nature of human existence. By challenging the Cartesian emphasis on the isolated subject, Heidegger invites us to reconsider our understanding of selfhood, knowledge, and reality in light of our fundamental interconnectedness with the world [9].

Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein emphasizes that our primary mode of existence is being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-Sein). This means that we are not detached observers of the world but rather practical beings who are deeply engaged with it. Central to this engagement is the notion of "Zeug" or "equipment," which refers to the tools, instruments, and projects through which we encounter and interact with the world. For Heidegger, human existence is characterized by its practical engagement with the world. We do not merely contemplate the world from a distance; rather, we navigate it through our use of tools and engagement in projects. These tools are not merely objects separate from ourselves but are intimately intertwined with our existence. They extend our capabilities and shape our way of being in the world. Through our practical engagements with tools and projects, we disclose the meaning and significance of the world [7]. Our interactions with equipment are not passive but rather reveal the world's possibilities and limitations. In this sense, our existence is inseparable from our everyday activities and the tools we employ to navigate them. By emphasizing being-in-the-world and the primacy of practical engagement, Heidegger challenges the traditional Cartesian notion of the detached subject contemplating an external world. Instead, he invites us to recognize our embeddedness in the world and the ways in which our existence is shaped by our practical interactions with it. This perspective opens up new avenues for understanding human existence and our relationship to the world, emphasizing our active participation in shaping our reality.

Martin Heidegger's emphasis on practical engagement with the world resonates with pragmatic philosophy, which prioritizes action and experience over abstract speculation. From this perspective, human existence is seen as inherently practical, with our interactions with the world shaping our understanding of reality and guiding our actions. Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein underscores the importance of practical engagement as a fundamental aspect of human existence, highlighting the significance of our everyday activities and the tools we use to navigate them. Heidegger's emphasis on being-in-the-world and the interconnectedness of human existence with the environment has implications for environmental ethics. By highlighting the intimate relationship between humans and their surroundings, Heidegger challenges anthropocentric views that prioritize human interests over the well-being of the natural world. From this perspective, ethical considerations must take into account the impact of human actions on the environment and recognize the intrinsic value of non-human entities. His concept of "Zeug" or equipment invites reflection on the role of technology in shaping human existence. Heidegger warns against the tendency to view technology as neutral tools separate from ourselves, arguing instead that they are intimately intertwined with our existence and shape our way of being in the world [5]. This perspective raises questions about the ethical implications of technological development and the need for critical reflection on our

relationship with technology. Heidegger's emphasis on practical engagement and the use of tools resonates with contemporary theories of embodied cognition, which argue that cognition is deeply rooted in bodily experiences and interactions with the environment. From this perspective, our understanding of the world is not solely derived from abstract reasoning but is shaped by our bodily interactions and experiences. The concept of being-in-the-world offers insights into the embodied nature of human cognition and the role of practical engagement in shaping our perception and understanding of reality. Being-in-the-world can be understood in relation to social constructivist perspectives, which emphasize the role of social and cultural factors in shaping human experience and understanding. From this perspective, our interactions with the world are mediated by social and cultural norms, values, and practices. Martin Heidegger's emphasis on practical engagement highlights the ways in which social and cultural contexts influence our perception of reality and shape our way of being in the world.

DISCUSSION

Martin Heidegger's critique has significant implications for various philosophical areas. His critique indeed has significant implications for epistemology, particularly in challenging the traditional understanding of knowledge as a purely objective representation of reality. Instead, Heidegger's phenomenological approach emphasizes the embodied and situated nature of knowledge. In traditional epistemology, knowledge is often conceived as the result of a detached and objective process of observation and reasoning, wherein the subject seeks to represent an external reality accurately. This view is closely aligned with the Cartesian paradigm, which privileges the thinking subject as the locus of knowledge production.

However, His phenomenological critique challenges this Cartesian understanding by highlighting the inseparability of the knower from the known. According to Heidegger, human existence is fundamentally relational and situated within a context of practical engagements with the world. Therefore, knowledge is not a passive reflection of an external reality but rather an embodied and situated experience that arises from our lived interactions with the world [6]. For Heidegger, understanding and knowledge emerge from our practical engagements with the world, wherein we interact with tools, engage in projects, and navigate our everyday existence. These practical activities shape our understanding of reality and give rise to what Heidegger calls "pre-reflective understanding." This understanding is not based on abstract representations but rather on our lived experiences and interactions with the world. Heidegger's critique challenges the idea of a neutral and objective standpoint from which knowledge can be obtained. Instead, he emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge within specific historical, cultural, and existential contexts. Our understanding of reality is shaped by our particular situatedness within the world, and different perspectives may offer unique insights into the nature of being.

Martin Heidegger's critique of the subject-object dichotomy and his emphasis on being-in-the-world have profound implications for epistemology, calling into question traditional notions of objectivity and representation. By foregrounding the embodied and situated nature of knowledge, Heidegger invites us to reconsider how we understand and engage with reality, opening up new avenues for philosophical inquiry and exploration. His critique indeed carries profound implications for ontology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of being. His philosophy redirects the focus from the traditional concern with isolated objects to

a deeper exploration of the nature of being itself, which he believes is revealed through our interactions with the world.

In traditional ontology, the emphasis often lies on categorizing and analyzing the properties of individual entities or objects. Reality is conceived as a collection of separate and discrete entities, each with its own set of characteristics and properties. This atomistic view of reality, however, overlooks the deeper question of the nature of being itself. Martin Heidegger challenges this atomistic perspective by shifting the focus from isolated objects to the broader context of being-in-the-world. He argues that being is not something inherent in individual objects but is rather a relational and contextual phenomenon that emerges through our lived experiences and interactions with the world. Being is not a static property possessed by objects but is instead dynamic and contingent upon the context in which it arises [10].

The nature of being reveals itself through our everyday encounters with the world. Our practical engagements with tools, our involvement in projects, and our interactions with others all contribute to the disclosure of being. Through these interactions, we come to understand not only the properties of individual objects but also the deeper meaning and significance of being itself. Furthermore, Heidegger introduces the concept of Dasein, which refers to human existence as being-in-the-world. Dasein is not a discrete entity but rather an open and relational mode of being that is always already engaged with the world. By emphasizing being-in-the-world, Heidegger highlights the interconnectedness of human existence with the broader context of reality. In this way, Heidegger's critique of traditional ontology redirects philosophical inquiry towards a deeper exploration of the nature of being itself. By emphasizing the relational and contextual nature of being, Heidegger invites us to reconsider our understanding of reality and to explore the deeper questions of existence that lie beyond the realm of isolated objects.

CONCLUSION

Martin Heidegger's phenomenological critique of the subject-object dichotomy represents a significant departure from traditional Western philosophy, offering a profound challenge to entrenched Cartesian dualism. By emphasizing the situatedness and engagement of human existence within the world, Heidegger presents a compelling framework for reevaluating fundamental philosophical concepts such as knowledge, being, and reality. Through his emphasis on being-in-the-world, Heidegger redirects attention from isolated subjects and objects to the relational and contextual nature of human existence. This shift not only challenges traditional epistemological and ontological assumptions but also opens up new avenues for philosophical inquiry. Martin Heidegger's critique underscores the importance of understanding knowledge as an embodied and situated experience, rather than a purely objective representation of reality. Similarly, his focus on the nature of being itself, as revealed through our interactions with the world, invites us to reconsider our understanding of reality beyond the confines of isolated objects. While Heidegger's work may leave certain questions unanswered and areas for further exploration, it undeniably stands as a cornerstone of contemporary philosophy. His phenomenological approach continues to inspire scholars across various disciplines and offers valuable insights into the nature of human existence and our relationship with the world.

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