



# What On Earth Is The World!?

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## Lecture Outline

In this lecture, I will discuss one fundamental question “what on earth is the world?!”.

Throughout this series of lectures, we have discussed the crisis that has arisen from our modern understanding of terms like the ‘self’ and ‘society’. My aim today will be to offer a *new* way for us to reconsider the meaning of such terms. Perhaps on this basis we can start to *rethink* the problems that have led to our current situation.

- **In the first part of the lecture**, I will briefly detail the historical origin of our contemporary understanding of the world. One meaning of ‘world’ is scientific, and refers to the planet earth. However, my focus will be on another understanding of the world, which common sense tells us is essentially a ‘container’ that houses all the things, people and events that we encounter as ‘outside’ of ourselves.
  - My intention is to challenge this common sense understanding by tracing its historical origin, so that, on this basis, we can find a *different* way to think about the *fundamental* relation between human beings and the world around them.
  - Namely, I want to ask: Do we actually think of the world as something ‘outside’ of us? Are the things around us and the other people we live with ‘external’ to us? Or do we understand the world in quite a different way?

## Lecture Outline

- **In the second part of the lecture**, I will extend my critique of this common sense understanding by drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger. I will argue that—primarily—the world is *not* simply a container for the things that are 'outside' of our thinking. Rather, I will claim that the world is the meaningful place where we live out our lives, which we cannot readily distinguish ourselves from. This more *original* sense of the world—which is neither 'inside' or 'outside'—is what I want to discuss today
- **Finally**, I will outline what is at stake when we overlook this original sense of what the world is. To draw this out, I will discuss some of the problems that arise in regards to art and modern technology.

Before we begin, I think it is important to point out that if some of these insights seem obvious or even banal that is somewhat the point. We often have a tendency to overlook what is closest to us, and one aim of philosophy is to bring what we take for granted into question. To consider what is so close to us that it is, at once, the most distant. Only on this basis can we begin to think of different ways to approach the crisis of self and society.

To begin, it might be interesting to show you the etymology of the word 'world'. If it is as surprising to you as it was for me, then it should go some way toward highlighting the problem which I will discuss today.

## So, What *IS* the World?

- World (n.) Old English *woruld*, *worold* "**human existence, the affairs of life,**" also "**a long period of time,**" also "**the human race, [hu]mankind, humanity,**" a word peculiar to Germanic languages (cognates: Old Saxon *werold*, Old Frisian *warld*, Dutch *wereld*, Old Norse *verold*, Old High German *weralt*, German *Welt*), with a literal sense of "age of man," from Proto-Germanic *\*wer* "man" (Old English *wer*, still in *werewolf*; see *virile*) + *\*ald* "age" (from PIE root *\*al-* (2) "**to grow, nourish**").



## So, What *IS* the World?

- Compare this to any contemporary definition of the world that we find on, say, Wikipedia: "**The world is the planet Earth and all life upon it, including human civilization**". Or, as the Cambridge online dictionary states: **the "world" simply means "the earth and all the people, places and things on it"**.
- We can see that in these contemporary definitions 'earth' and 'world' have become *conflated* with one another.



## So, What *IS* the World?

- In contrast to 'world', 'Earth' is a *scientific concept*. "**Earth is the third planet from the Sun** and the only **astronomical object known to harbor life**. According to radiometric dating and other sources of evidence, **Earth formed over 4.5 billion years ago**. Earth's gravity interacts with other objects in space, especially the Sun and the Moon, Earth's only natural satellite. **Earth revolves around the Sun in 365.26 days**, a period known as an Earth year. During this time, Earth rotates about its axis about 366.26 times".



## So, What *IS* the World?

- So, on one hand, we have the older definition of the world as the '*affairs of human life*'—the meaningful world where we live. This understanding, I would suggest, is still present in everyday expressions such as "her world came crashing down", "he is dead to the world", "it meant the world to me".
- On the other hand, we have the world as the *planet earth*, an 'astronomical object' that is totally independent of human life, and which is measured and investigated by scientific research.
- Well... what has changed? Can we still think this earlier definition of the world today?

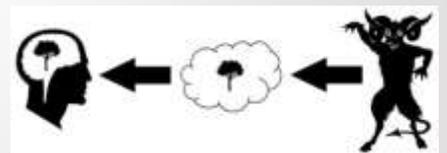
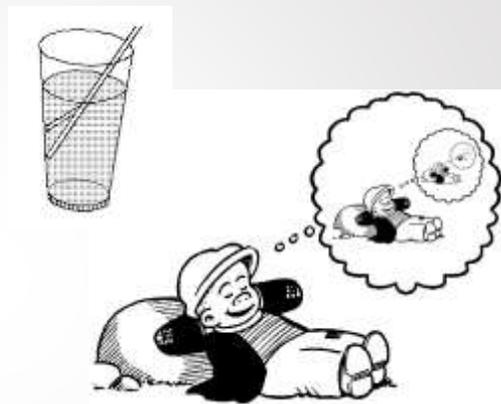
## René Descartes (1596 -1650)

- In previous lectures, we touched on the scientific transformation of the world beginning with Galileo. Today, I want to discuss this change in our understanding of the world in terms of René Descartes, who built on Galileo's insights, and who is often referred to as the 'father' of modern science and philosophy.
- It was Descartes who coined one of the most famous phrases of philosophy "**I think, therefore I am**" [*cogito ergo sum*]. But what does this mean?
- To understand the meaning of this phrase, we ought to consider Descartes' method of *doubt*.



## Doubt

- In his *Meditations*, Descartes observes that we do not always know as much as we might think we do.
- He points out how our everyday experiences can always be drawn into doubt. I observe a stick in water, it seems bent when it is actually straight.
- From within a dream I cannot tell that I am dreaming, on the contrary, the dream seems very real. How do I know I'm not in a dream right now?
- Descartes presses this point even further, he asks, how can we tell that we are not *systematically deceived* all the time—how do we know there isn't some *evil demon* manipulating us to ensure that all that we see and experience as real is in fact false?



## Can't Doubt That I'm Doubting

- Descartes' point is that we cannot trust any knowledge that is based on sensory experience, since what we see, hear, touch etc., can always be doubted in these ways.
- However, he observes that the very fact that I am doubting in the first place means that—at the very least—I must be thinking, and if I am thinking I must be something. At first, all I can know is that I must be something that thinks and which can doubt what is given to my senses. Hence, "I think, therefore I am"—our own thinking is the only thing we can truly be certain about.
- There is, then, for Descartes, a sharp distinction to be made between ourselves as something that thinks, and the things in the world that we encounter through the senses. There are minds, and there are bodies.
- "...[O]n the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. **And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.**" *Meditations* (2012), p. 54 [78].

## Can't Doubt That I'm Doubting

- It was thus Descartes who first *explicitly* formulated the distinction between immaterial minds (*res cogitans*) and material bodies (*res extensa*)—a distinction that is familiar to all of us, in that it has become a *sedimented* belief in our everyday lives.
- Descartes himself never spoke of 'objects' and 'subjects'. Nevertheless, it is this *Cartesian* distinction between **mind** and **body** that paved the way for our modern distinction between **subject** and **object**.
- Nowadays, the mind is considered to be something subjective, private and 'internal', it involves our thoughts, hopes, emotions, imaginings and so on.
- Bodies, on the other hand, are considered to be objective and publicly observable, they are things of matter with physical dimensions like length, width and depth. They exist in time and are governed by the laws of physics.

## Mind-Body Split

- Take for example, a can of peaches. On this model, the can, the label and the contents are '*res extensa*', they are bodies that are objective and publicly observable, they can be measured.
- On the other side, we have the hardness of the can, the taste and smell of the peaches, these are sensory properties and not bodies, they are considered to be subjective, private and '*internal*'.

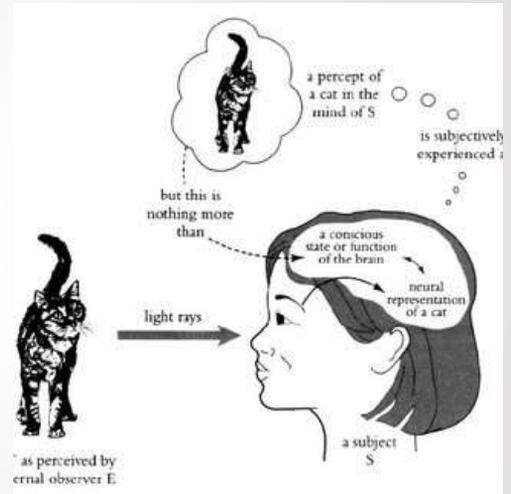


## What's the Problem?!

Ok, so there are minds and there are bodies. This doesn't seem like an issue so far. After all, you don't know what's going on inside my head, and I don't know what's going on inside yours. I am here at the front of the room facing you all, and you are all facing towards me. Clearly there is a sense that you are all '*outside*' of me, along with the tables, chairs and other things that I see in the room. So, what's the big deal?!

## Mind-Body Split

- The problem with this mind-body split is that we become *removed* from things and other people in the world. After all, how does something 'private' and 'internal' reach out to the 'external' 'public' world around us?
- If our own thinking is the only thing that we can know for certain, how can we know bodies at all? How can we have *irrefutable* knowledge about the world, things and other people?



## Descartes' Piece of Wax

- Descartes has an answer, he claims we can know the *mathematical properties* of bodies, since these properties are tied to ideas in the mind and not to our sensory experience.
- "Let us take, for example, the piece of wax. It has just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not yet quite lost the **taste** of honey; it retains some of the **scent** of the flowers from which it was gathered; its **colour**, shape and size are plain to see; it is **hard, cold** and can be handled without difficulty; if you rap it with your knuckle it makes a **sound**." (*ibid.* 20)



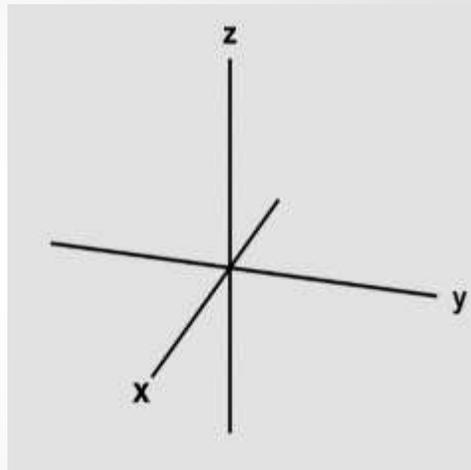
## Descartes' Piece of Wax

- He continues: "But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire, and look: **the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound**". (*ibid.*, 20)
- The *sensory qualities* of the wax can change, even though our *idea* of wax remains the same.
- For Descartes, this means that we do not know the wax by way of the senses, but by the innate ideas in our mind.



## Descartes' Piece of Wax

- Descartes observes that "Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses" are *essential* to the wax. "For whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered, yet the wax remains".
- His solution is to **"take away everything which does not belong to the wax, and see what is left"**.
- But what is left over? "merely something extended" But what is extension? It is length, width and depth in space. Accordingly, all bodies can be explained with reference to these mathematical properties, which are not given to us by the senses, but are, rather, ideas in our minds.



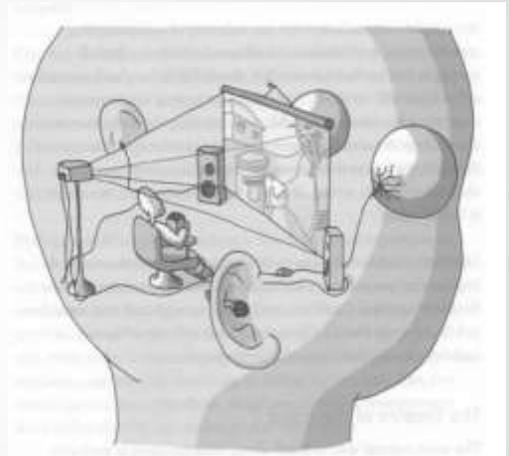
## 'Inside' and 'Outside'

- It is Descartes' philosophy that led us to our common sense understanding of the external world as a 'container' for all of the objects that are extended in physical space, as opposed to our own thinking, which is 'subjective', private and 'internal'.
- On this view, the world becomes a collection of extended things 'out there', as to be opposed to our ideas about the world 'in here'.
- The consequence is that there is a **metaphysical gulf** between ourselves and our surrounding world: human beings are conceived of as a 'thinking thing', **with no 'direct access' to the world itself.**



## 'Inside' and 'Outside'

- Instead of experiencing the world itself, we can only experience the world as it is given to our minds.
- While we can make claims on the basis of what we see, touch, hear, etc., these claims are never 'guaranteed' to say anything about the world itself. The only thing we can be certain about is our own thinking.
- Therefore, to know the world itself, we must start with the ideas in our mind. Accordingly, for Descartes, there is a **gap** between our thinking and the things around us; between the mind and the world.



But can we close this gap? Is there another way to think about our relationship to the world?

I argue that there is.

Specifically, I think it is worth considering the work of Martin Heidegger, and what he had to say about the world we live in.

## Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976)

- Nearly 300 years after Descartes' death, Heidegger aims to draw our attention to certain problems with our modern understanding of what the world *is*, which he claims is still underpinned by the Cartesian distinction between mind and body.
- For Heidegger, the 'Cartesian split' between mind and body 'passes over' the world as such, which is not an external 'thing' that houses all the other 'things', but the broader meaningful context of our everyday lives.
- Kant once said that it is the 'scandal of philosophy' that we have not yet arrived at a proof for the existence of the external world. For Heidegger, the scandal is that such a proof is required in the first place.



## Can We Think Differently About the World?

Again, today it is simply *common sense* for us to think of the things and other people in the world as 'out there' and our thinking about the world as 'in here'. But is our common sense *reliable* in this regard? Or has it been shaped by the history of thinking?

Would we still think of the world in terms of this mind-body divide if someone like Descartes didn't happen to formulate such a theory back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century?

Is anything *left out* by this Cartesian account?

What happens if we focus on our relation to the world *without* imposing a particular type of theory onto it? Is this possible? Are we able to think differently?

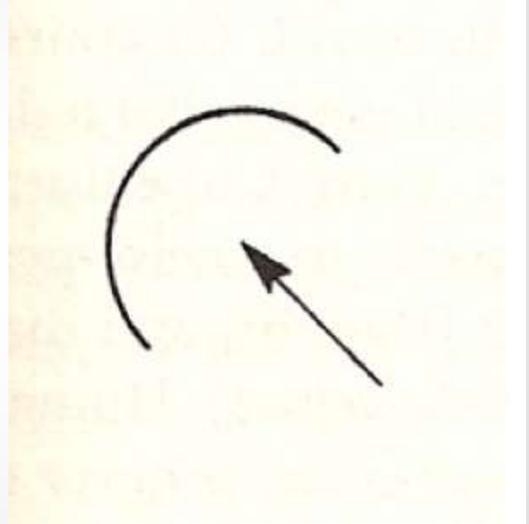
These are some of the questions that concerned Heidegger.

## Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976)

- In contrast to the Cartesian understanding, Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that we *do not* live in the world as if it were a collection of singular things lying around 'outside' of us. Rather, he claims that to live in the world is to find ourselves always already *immersed* in a meaningful context of shared human concerns.
- It takes a sort of 'interpretative somersault' for us to think of the world as a collection of objects that are perceived by a subject. Such a view is **historically constructed**. Heidegger instead wants us to return to what our experience of the world is like *before* we impose such historical constructions onto that experience.
- In other words, Heidegger wants to start from the beginning, so he puts aside Descartes' conception of the human as a thinking *thing* (*res cogitans*'). Instead, he claims that at the most basic level, to be human is to **'be here' in the world** (*Dasein*).

## What is it to 'Be Here'?

- To 'be here' simply means that human being is always living 'in' the world. Yet, this does not mean that we are a *thing* that is 'in' the world in the same way that water is 'in' the glass. Rather, to 'be here' in the world is to be *involved* or *entangled* in a world that we rarely distinguish ourselves from.
- Being here means that we are always living a life that concerns us in some way. We are always acting out of this concern for how our lives will go.
- However, our lives are always *incomplete*. We can never know how our lives will turn out, since to 'know' how our lives will go is only possible after **death**, when we are not 'here' at all.



## What is it to 'Be Here'?

- Being here means we are always concerned with our living in the world and the things and other people around us. By virtue of this concern, we take a stand toward ourselves: We take up specific 'self-interpretations' and roles that express our sense of what it is for us to be. By taking on the role of a student, teacher, partner, daughter, lazy person, coward, etc., we take a stand towards what our life is all about.
- This taking a stand towards our lives is not rooted in some inner plotting or isolated calculation, but, for the most part, is 'unreflective' and 'unthinking'. Taking a stand toward myself is not an 'internal' or 'subjective' decision, but is always shaped by the world around me: the time and place I am living, other people, and the roles that I find myself cast into.
- Given that my life is entangled by all of these circumstances, it is artificial for me to somehow disentangle myself in order to find a 'thing' or 'self' that is separate from everything else.
- The human being cannot be understood as a singular thing that is cut off from the world, and which can only experience that world by way of objects that are 'outside' of it.

## So, What is Our Relation to the World?

- On this reading, then, there is no sharp divide between 'inside' and 'outside' as there is with Cartesianism. Heidegger's conception of the human being is much more '**porous**' than this, and necessarily includes the world and other people.
- In other words, Heidegger's notion of human being does not refer to some isolated thing 'inside' of ourselves, which then has to get hooked up with the world. On the contrary, being human is only possible through living in a world that goes beyond the individual person.
- Human being is always '**being-in-the-world**' with things and other people. Specifically, 'Being-in-the-world' refers to the way we always find ourselves already relating to other people and the things around us in terms of a broader, meaningful context.
- To put it another way, at first we do not find ourselves to be an isolated 'thinking thing', but rather, for the most part, we find ourselves already *living meaningfully* in terms of the particular situation we find ourselves cast into.
- The world does not 'stand opposite' to singular acts of consciousness. Rather, as a historical human community, we all make up the meaningful place where we live, and for Heidegger, *this* is the original sense of what the world *is*.

## How Exactly Does the World Shape Who We Are ?

- For Heidegger, the way we understand our everyday lives is always shaped by our being **thrown** into the world. In other words, we are 'thrown' into a world that was here before we were born and which will be here after we die. For example, it was because I was born into 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia that one of the possibilities available to me was to be a philosophy student at Murdoch. To be a soldier in the Peloponnesian War in Ancient Greece was simply not a possibility for me, since I was born/thrown into a different (cultural, historical) world.
- The possibilities available to us are shaped by the world we are born into; it is in taking up or refusing these possibilities that we take a stand toward ourselves and become who we are. Accordingly, human being is not an unchanging, timeless 'thinking thing' that is the same for all times and places. Put simply, human being is never a *thing* that can be measured by reference to some predetermined set of criteria.
- Our being here in the world is irreducible to any essential property or pre-given category such as *animal rationale, res cogitans, Homo sapiens*, etc (BT, §9, pp. 41–43 [42–44]).

## How Do We Understand the World?

➤ For Heidegger, 'being here' means that our experience of the world does not pass in front of one's eyes 'like a picture'. Rather, we understand the world in terms of the historical situation we are thrown into, our relations to others, and the possibilities that are available to us.

➤ When I am a student walking into class, I walk in and immediately see and understand the lectern at the front of the room, *not* as an extended object but as 'the place for the teacher'. Along with it, I also understand myself as the student who sits opposite the lectern and listens to the teacher.

➤ We understand the world around us differently according to who we are and the concerns that are important to us. Likewise, we understand who we are and what our concerns are in relation to the world around us.



## How Do We Understand the World?

➤ In this way, there is a *reciprocal relation* between my understanding of myself and the world where I live. By understanding myself as a student, the classroom is 'lit up' for me in a way that determines how things like the lectern are meaningfully relevant to me.

➤ At the same time, it is in the context of the classroom that I understand myself as a student and not as a circus performer or a repairman. If I were a repairman rather than a student, then the lectern would be meaningfully relevant to me in a different way.

➤ Our understanding of the world does not take the form of objects being represented in our mind. Rather, our understanding is '**circular**'. I understand myself in relation to the world and I understand the world in relation to myself.

➤ Being-in-the-world involves constantly moving back and forth between these levels of understanding, between how we understand ourselves and the world around us.



Think of what it is you understand when you encounter a lectern. Is the first thing you see a neutral 'extended' object with length, width and depth? An idea in your mind? Is seeing a lectern always the same across different instances? Would we understand each of these lecterns differently depending on our broader situation in the world? Would I see 'the place for the teacher' if I were a repairman? Or would I see chips in the wood that to be mended, screws that need to be tightened? What would I see if I were a musician or a priest? What is 'inside' and what is 'outside' here? Are these the right terms to use?



## Are Human Beings Things?

- Given the circularity of our understanding, human being is fundamentally different to other things in the world—human being is nothing like a piece of wax or a lectern. Unlike the things around us, human beings always already understand the world in relation to the way they understand themselves, as shaped by the possibilities that are available to them.
- The possibilities available to us depend on the context of the world we are thrown into; which, in turn, shapes our understanding who we are and things around us.
- Taken together, we do not understand things as fixed 'objects' with unchanging properties like length, width and depth. Instead, to be human is to understand things as *meaningful* in relation to the world around us.
- Once again, on this view, the very boundary between our thinking and the world becomes blurred. We are not *something* that is removed from the 'outside' world, because we are always already *entangled* with the world: **"When the snail sticks his head out of the shell, he is not now entering the world, as if he did not belong to it before. Even in his shell, he is out in the world"** (GA20, p. 223).

## What is a *Thing*?

- Specifically, to conceive of things as 'objects' that are 'outside' of us is to limit our understanding of the world to ideas that are (somehow) implanted in the mind. The world itself becomes something 'external' to these ideas, and thus we cover over the world as the communal space of meaning through which our lives initially matter to us.
- An object is by definition a thing removed from this meaningful context, as per Descartes' consideration of the piece of wax, we strip away all those properties that we experience—because they can be doubted—and we are left with something that is merely extended in three dimensional space (length, width, depth).
- But is this how we *primarily* encounter something? As something extended in physical space? For Heidegger, the answer is no!
- In other words, we do not initially understand the world by merely looking at singular things that are 'outside' of us. Instead, we find ourselves *immersed* or *entangled* in an entire situation that is already *meaningful* to us in terms of our everyday living in the world.

## What Does 'Meaning' Mean?

- As Heidegger writes: **"We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises...rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen"**. (*Basic Writings* 156)
- In other words, initially I never encounter things as pure 'sounds', or 'pure objects' with mathematical properties, but only ever as *something* that is meaningful to me in relation the world I find myself in. If we were not thrown into a world with whistling chimneys and three-motored planes such phenomena could not make sense to us, they could not be *meaningful*.
- Of course, if the human race were wiped off the planet tomorrow, the things we name 'plane' or 'chimney' would still be lying around. Yet, they could not be meaningful to anyone. Meaning requires a human community who interprets the world in terms of their shared concerns.
- That is to say, primarily, the world is not simply a series of objects that are 'outside' of us, but rather the immediate context of meaning that we are thrown into, and which we can only escape when we die.

## Heidegger's Table

- Let us make this clearer with one of Heidegger's own examples, which we should compare to Descartes' piece of wax.
- Heidegger examines a table in his living room. He does not see extension in space and time, nor any other unchanging properties like length, width, or depth.
- Rather, the table is something meaningful that makes sense in relation to a broader context that exceeds the individual person.



Lennart Anderson - Still Life With Vase On Table

## Heidegger's Table

- He observes that when we look at the table we do not primarily encounter it as “a spatial thing” “with such and such a colour, such a shape” and with “this narrow side so many centimetres shorter than the other”.
- Rather, he sees the table “at which my wife sits in the evening when she wants to stay up and read, there at the table we had such and such a discussion that time, there that decision was made with a *friend* that time, there that *work* written that time, there that *holiday* celebrated that time”. (OHF, 69-70)



Lennart Anderson - Still Life With Vase On Table

## Heidegger's Table

- He continues: "Here and there [the table] shows lines—the boys like to busy themselves at the table. These lines are not just interruptions in the paint, but rather: it was the boys and it still is".
- The table cannot be considered in isolation, it refers to the "old pair of skis" leaning against it "from that daredevil trip with so and so" .. the book lying upon the table is encountered "as a gift from X" which was "bound by such and such a bookbinder, that needs to be taken to him soon.



Lennart Anderson - Still Life With Vase On Table

## What Comes First? The Table or The Wax?

- We thus have something very different to Descartes' piece of wax, which is merely a singular thing that is reduced to the idea of something 'extended', and which, as such, is totally *divorced* from the meaningful world that is closest to us.
- Instead, Heidegger's description of the table refers to his own life—ski trips he has taken, books he has read—but also to the lives of others—his sons, his wife, the bookbinder. The point for Heidegger is that this is our primary engagement with the world, *not* merely staring at objects, but living within a meaningful context, within a worldly context.



## Why Do We 'Forget' Meaning?

- It is, however, important to point out that this analysis of the table is already a description that is removed from our everyday understanding, which occurs in a manner that is immediate and 'unthinking'. We do not notice the way we understand things to be meaningful, because this meaningfulness is so close to us that we are unable to see it.
- In a sense, we do not 'see' meaning at all. Our understanding of the world is not a "bare perceptual cognition" like it is with Descartes. Rather, our living in the world takes the form of an *implicit familiarity* rather than an *explicit cognition*.
- **"When we enter through the door, we do not apprehend the seats, and the same holds for the door-knob. Nevertheless, they are there in this peculiar way: we go by them ...avoid them...stumble against them, and the like. Stairs, corridors, windows, chair and bench, blackboard and much more are not given thematically".** (*Basic Problems*, 163)
- If someone were to ask me to list the entire contents of this room, I would have to stop and think. Yet, this does not mean that I don't immediately understand where I am and what I am doing here.
- Again, the point is that we do not primarily go about *merely observing* and *measuring* singular things and the distances between them. Instead, we find ourselves living in the world, we find ourselves immediately immersed in a broader context of meaning that is *relevant* to our particular concerns at the time.

## The World as a Workshop

- Another way that Heidegger articulates this conception of the world is by the metaphor of a workshop.
- Like the workshop, the world is structured by a 'hierarchical network' of meaningful relations. The hammer is never an isolated object, but refers to the nails which it is used to fasten. Together, the hammer and nail refer to the bookcase I am building, which in turn, has the purpose of holding books.
- So, I build a bookshelf because I understand myself as a philosophy student who needs a place to store my books so they don't clutter the desks of the other people in my office.



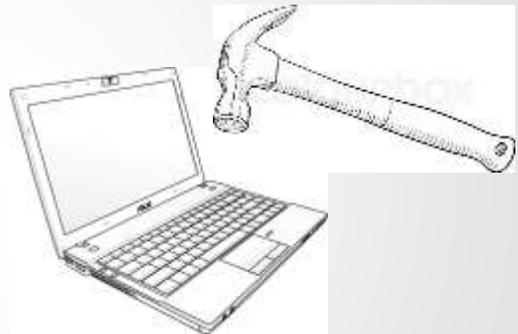
## The World as a Workshop

- In this way, things only make sense to us in terms of our broader involvements with the world.
- These involvements include all those small-scale, thoughtless acts that we are constantly engaging in. After breakfast today I made some coffee and turned on my laptop in order to go over my lecture notes—all with the 'goal' of giving you this talk today and to try and explain what Heidegger means to say about the 'world'.
- Curiously, however, when I am hammering away in the workshop or typing away at my laptop, I am not concerned with these things as singular objects that are extended. My focus is not on the hammer itself, but on the task I want to complete, which means *something* to me in relation to who I am.



## What About 'Singular' Things?

- Essentially, we are not concerned with the things we use in their singularity, because whenever we use them, we direct our concern toward some task we are already undertaking. After all, I rarely think of the hammer or the laptop while I am using it, I am simply too involved in the task of building the shelf or getting this lecture right.
- Hence, Heidegger does not consider laptops, coffee cups, etc. as isolated objects, but as '**tools**' that only make sense to us in terms of the particular way we are involved with the world around us. The problem is that we often *disregard* the tools we use, since they do not arrest our attention while we use them.



## Tools

- None of this is to say that Heidegger reduces everything to practical *utility*, however. Rather, it is *meaning* that is primary. As we saw, the table is not just a 'tool' that we use, but speaks to our involvements in the world, our concerns, our memories, those we love or hate, the way we understand ourselves., etc. The point is that we never actually consider tools while we are using them because we are focused on the *meaningful* task we are undertaking, which is meaningful to us in relation to the way we understand ourselves and the world around us.
- As a tool, the laptop I am using is, in a sense, 'invisible' to me while I go about writing the lecture, since my concern is with trying to explain Heidegger and thereby fulfil my role as the speaker. We rarely notice tools because the projects we undertake are more significant to us than the tools we use to undertake them. Only when the laptop *crashes* and my concerns are frustrated do I start to scratch my head and examine it as a singular object.

## Tools

- When this happens, *tools stop being tools*. Tools are only able to be tools in terms of my living in the world, i.e., in terms of what concerns me and the projects that I undertake on the basis of those concerns. There is no singular tool or tool-in-itself, because tools are only intelligible in terms of the workshop, i.e., the projects we undertake in the context of our living meaningfully in a historical and social world.
- Of course, it is possible to single things out and focus on them in isolation. The point is that whenever we *do* stop to examine and measure *particular* things, we have already separated them from this meaningful context and our initial involvement with them, we have already overlooked the world in the original sense.
- Overall, to consider things like laptops and hammers as singular things that are 'outside' of us is to separate them from the concerns we have and the tasks we undertake. It is to overlook the way things matter to us in relation to our lives and the world that we find ourselves thrown into.

## What About Other People?



## What About Other People?

- Just as the things we use are not isolated objects, the other people who we share the world with are not isolated objects.
- At the same time, others are not tools that we encounter and use. Instead we encounter others as 'being-with' us in the world. In other words, we understand the people around us as being concerned with their lives as we are with our own.
- **“Others” does not mean everybody else, but me—those from whom the I distinguishes itself. Others are, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one also is.** (BT, 115 [118])
- Even if one is a hermit or recluse, having retreated to a shack on the Nullarbor to escape everyone, *others still matter*. In this case, as being despicable or to be avoided. Being a recluse is an anti-social way of understanding oneself and one's relations to others.
- Other people are *necessary* to the way we understand our own living in the world. To be alone in the world is to presuppose that we share the world with others, who we feel isolated by.



## What About Other People?

- Others are always an intrinsic 'part' of our involvement with the world. We saw in Heidegger's example of the table that the lines and markings in the table are not just 'interruptions in the paint', but immediately signify his sons, and by extension, his understanding of himself as a father, both of which are 'there' when he considers the table. We also understand this, because we are in the world with him. There is no world, no meaningful things and no 'individuals' without other people.
- "The field, for example, along which we walk 'outside' shows itself as belonging to such and such a person who keeps it in good order, the book which we use was bought at such and such a place, given by such and such a person, and so on. The boat anchored at the shore refers...to an acquaintance who undertakes his voyages with it, but even as a "boat which is unknown to us" it still points to others. (BT 115 [118])
- This is another reason why the things I interact with are never singular objects, but always refer to projects that I am already concerned with, as well as to other people and the projects that they are concerned with. Using my laptop refers to my broader project of giving a lecture, which includes the audience members who I am addressing.
- Heidegger identifies the totality of these meaningful relations—which shape our understanding of who we are—as the 'original' phenomena of the world. Prior to any analysis, there is no 'inside' and 'outside', since the things around me, other people and myself are all **intermingled** with one another in terms of our 'being here' living in the meaningful world around us.

## What About Other People?

- **"When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself . . .** When a self does appear in experience it appears over against the other, and we have been delineating the condition under which this other does appear in the experience of the human animal, namely in the presence of that sort of stimulation in the cooperative activity which arouses in the individual himself the same response it arouses in the other." (George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*).
- **"...the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owed place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time."** (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52).

## World: Context of Meaning

- Consider the way we understand our current situation here at the Moon. Have we found ourselves thinking of a collection of singular things in terms of their *physical* dimensions? Or do wine glasses, table numbers and the other people around us already come together in a way that is immediately meaningful to us?
- After all, I rarely find myself *just looking* at the glass in isolation (unless I drop it), since the glass only makes sense in relation to the broader meaningful context that I find myself in
- The glass is something I find myself already using unthinkingly so that I can loosen up and give this lecture. Similarly, you might not be conscious of the glass you are holding, which you are already familiar with as something to drink from, so that you can relax and listen to a philosophy lecture.



## World: Context of Meaning

- Furthermore, as I walk into The Moon I already understand the others who are here. The bar staff are serving drinks to various patrons. The waiter might be awkwardly trying to manoeuvre down the narrow walk ways, avoiding all the audience members. I find myself already familiar with all of this, it does not spring up from some bare act of thinking.
- The Moon Café is an entire meaningful context that we already understand in relation to who we are and the concerns we have. Wine glasses, table numbers, coffee cups all have their 'place' in this worldly context.
- If I were walking along the beach and I saw a scattered array of cups, glasses and table numbers lying in the sand, these things would strike me as being out of place, as not *belonging* to the context of meaning I find myself in at that time.



## Well, Who Cares?!

- But why should we care about this understanding of the world? What are the consequences?
- Two key examples come to mind: our relation to **art** and our relation to **modern technology**. Certain difficulties begin to emerge when we forget the original sense of the world in favour of the common sense 'Cartesian' notion of the world as a container for the things that are 'outside' of us.
- Specifically, to overlook the world as the meaningful place of everyday life is to overlook the way art is initially meaningful to us. It is also to overlook how technology has shaped our understanding of who we are.

## How Do We Understand Art?

- Is the value of art objective or subjective? For Heidegger, this is the *wrong question*. In his view, the artwork is never just an 'object' perceived by a 'subject'. Rather, the work of art is an "instance of truth" that brings the meaningful world around us to the foreground of our concerns.
- In other words, the artwork is '**world revealing**'. Art gives us a way to relate another's understanding of themselves to the way we understand ourselves, both of which are shaped by the broader context of the world around us.



Vincent van Gogh - A Pair of Shoes



Andy Warhol - Diamond Dust Shoes

## How Does Art Reveal the World?

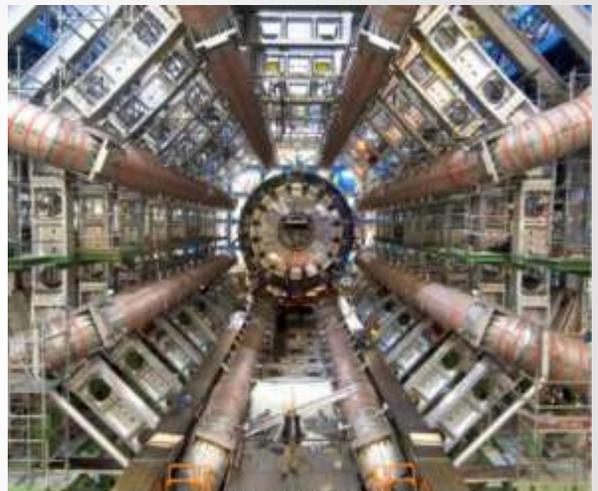
- In a sculpture, for example, the materials (stone, clay, etc) used to produce the sculpture do not withdraw from us like tools do when we use them. On the contrary, in the sculpture, the stone becomes meaningfully related to our world in a different way: the sculpture reveals the way the artist is involved and concerned with the stone.
- In the same way, the housepainter is to be opposed to the artist: while both use pigment, the latter uses pigment in such a way that colour does not withdraw, "but rather ... comes to shine forth."
- This is quickly lost if we restrict ourselves to the object-subject divide handed down by the tradition, which leaves us with all sorts of confusing theories that distract us from the way that art is initially meaningful to us in the first place.
- Instead of recognising that **the artwork reveals a meaningful world to us**, it becomes difficult for us to understand art unless we speak of our own 'subjective' impressions, or unless we have some conceptual framework (Impressionism? Postmodernism?) through which we can speak about the work in so-called 'objective' terms. In thinking of art in either 'objective' or 'subjective' terms, we overlook the way art is meaningful to us in relation to the world we find ourselves living in.



## What About Technology?

- Heidegger also warns us against the dangers of the way our view of the world has become framed by modern technology. In the context of modern technology, the world no longer becomes the meaningful place where we live, *nor* does it become a container for the things 'outside' of us.
- Rather, modern technology frames the world as a '**storehouse**' or 'standing reserve' of resources that are there for us to manipulate for our own ends. Heidegger writes that technology puts to the world "the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such".

(Basic Writings, 296)



The Large Hadron Collider

## What is the Standing-Reserve?

- Even the object-subject distinction is changed here. "Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as an object" (*ibid.* 298). Instead, the world ceases to be even a series of objects that are lying around, but is flattened out into a "**coal mining district**", opening the way to the catastrophic environmental destruction that we will no doubt eventually be facing.
- As human beings, we too are subsumed into this storehouse of raw material. For Heidegger, "the current talk about **human resources**, about the supply of patients for a clinic, gives evidence of this" (299). In other words, we *forget* our primary engagement with the meaningful world and instead consider ourselves as raw material for the modern technological enterprise (think of 'Big Data').
- This has drastic consequences for our interactions with the world, insofar that our lived experience is *leveled down* to the most common denominator in order to be rendered as raw material. On this view, technology is not a neutral agent of 'progress', but actually works to *limit* and *obscure* our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

## Conclusion

- These problems with art and technology are symptoms of the crisis we have been discussing throughout this lecture series. I have argued that these problems arise when we *forget* our primary way of relating to the meaningful world around us. We can so easily forget this original sense of the world because we are so immersed in it that we can no longer see it.
- I suggest that Heidegger's thought is a good starting point to reconsider the world, and thereby overcome these problems. After all, any rational inquiry we put forward necessarily presupposes this original sense of the world, which must be 'there' for such inquiries to be meaningful to us in the first place.
- To separate the world around us into our 'internal' self and the things and other people that are 'outside' of that internal self is an artificial way of thinking that we have inherited from the Cartesian tradition. This does not mean that the notion of the 'world' that I have discussed today is the *only* way to think. Rather, the point is that we ought to recognise that it requires an 'interpretative somersault' for us to separate ourselves from the world around us. Prior to this 'somersault', self and society are always mixed together.
- Only by reconsidering the world and the self can we forge out a path for us to overcome the crisis we are currently facing. Thus, we should never cease to ask naïve questions, like I have tried to do today.
- At any rate, hopefully this lecture has got you thinking about these questions!  
**Thank you!** ☺

“The fundamental event of the modern age is the consequent of the world as picture”.

(*Age of The World View*, p. 133)

“One can say that when the astronauts set foot on the moon, the moon as moon disappeared. It no longer rose or set. It is now only a calculable parameter for the technological enterprise of humans”.

(*Four Seminars*, p. 38)

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