Dasein is one of the most basic concepts of Heidegger’s philosophy, beginning with the phenomenology that he develops in his major work, Being and Time (Heidegger 1967), as the method necessary for fundamental ontology. Heidegger’s phenomenology aims to make explicit what is hidden, what does not show itself initially and for the most part, namely, the being of beings. To this end, it begins with an analysis of what is defined by having an understanding of being, albeit a tacit, pre-ontological understanding: Da-sein (1967, 13, 15, 35).

Although Heidegger maintains that Da-sein, as he understands it, cannot be translated (Heidegger 1989, 300), he himself exploits the term’s etymology, composed of da (typically meaning ‘here,’ ‘there,’ or ‘since’) and sein (the infinitive of ‘to be’). For this reason at least, Da-sein is often translated ‘being-here’ or ‘being-there.’ Yet Heidegger repeatedly stresses that the da (‘here’) of Da-sein (hereafter used interchangeably with ‘being-here’), far from designating a particular place – as in ‘here or there’ (da oder dort) – designates the clearing (Lichtung) in which the being of particular beings is disclosed. From the fact that Dasein itself is the clearing, Heidegger infers: “Being-here is its disclosedness” (1967, 132–3). Even if it is not a particular place, the metaphorical sense of a space persists in Heidegger’s use of da, which he designates as “an open place,” a “parameter,” a “sphere,” an “open expanse” in which things present themselves, albeit only partially and only for a time (1977, 216; 1996, 136–7; 1986, 380). As Heidegger puts it in a 1938 lecture: ”The ‘here’ signifies that clearing in which beings stand respectively as a whole, in such a way, to be sure, that in this here the historical being (Seyn) of the open beings shows itself and at the same time withdraws” (1984, 233). The passage just quoted echoes basic features of the conception of being-here articulated in Being and Time. According to the latter work, too, Dasein’s manner of being is such that it is the site in which the manners of being of this or that sort of being – itself, others, tools, things merely on hand – are disclosed.

Regardless of how the spatial metaphor is to be parsed out, Heidegger’s construal of being-here in terms of the clearing and the disclosedness of being constitutes its fundamental phenomenological significance for his thinking, early and late. Although Heidegger abandons the project of fundamental ontology after 1930, the concept of Dasein remains – as the cited passage from 1938 suggests – at the center of his subsequent efforts to think the meaning of ‘being’ in historical, non-transcendental terms. Nevertheless, with this shift in Heidegger’s thinking, he accentuates different aspects of being-here. In Being and Time the existential significance of being-here takes center stage of the analysis. In later writings Heidegger focuses on its historical significance,
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relative to his idiosyncratic conception of the history of being. The remainder of the present entry is accordingly divided into two parts: a review of the existential analysis of being-here in *Being and Time*, followed by a gloss of the historical significance of the concept in his later writings.

### 12.1. Being-here and fundamental ontology

*Dasein* enters into German philosophical terminology by the early eighteenth century as the equivalent for the Latin derivative, *Existenz*. Both terms traditionally stand for what Heidegger equates with “being on hand” or “present-at-handness” (*Vorhandensein*), typical of both naturally occurring things that, at least prima facie, appear useless or obtrusive, impediments to use, and decontextualized objects of (allegedly) purely theoretical investigations. In *Being and Time* Heidegger departs from this traditional usage, introducing both terms – *Dasein* and *Existenz* – as words of art that designate what is roughly equivalent to a human being, but cannot be identified with what philosophy or positive science (including history and theology) traditionally understand by it, namely, something occurring in nature like other things on hand. (To have an understanding of being is essential to being-here, not to being on hand.) To be sure, ‘Dasein’ and ‘human being’ may refer to similar phenomena (e.g., affectivity, understanding, conformity, the use of language, scientific research); indeed, existential analysis (analysis of being-here) can only get off the ground by presuming as much (1967, 11). Yet even when they refer to similar phenomena, they do so in quite different ways. So, too, what existential analysis uncovers is essentially different from historical investigations of human affairs, theological pronouncements on the human condition, or the results of scientific inquiry into all things human. Consequently, the tendency to substitute the meaning of one term for that of the other, as necessary as it is at the outset, is ultimately misguided.

Mention has already been made of being-here’s fundamental phenomenological significance as the clearing for the disclosedness of things’ being. This significance is intimately connected, Heidegger maintains, to the ways of existing inherent to being-here. In *Being and Time* he conceives Dasein, quite fundamentally, as the entity that exists (and, it deserves iterating, is not simply on hand) insofar as it possesses an understanding of being, an understanding that matters to it.

This passionate understanding is not to be confused with an understanding of natural kinds allegedly already on hand (e.g., animality, rationality). To the contrary, there is a decided if, to be sure, not unqualified open-endedness to this understanding, since it brings with it Dasein’s understanding of itself in terms of the possibility of being or not being itself. Dasein exists by relating itself to – or, alternatively, behaving toward (*sich verhalten zu*) – its existence as this possibility. It essentially does so, moreover, in the first person, from that standpoint that each Dasein respectively can alone call “mine.” Dasein’s passionate understanding of being is of a piece with the fact not only that its existence (“mine” or “yours” respectively) is at stake for it in all it does, but also that its existence is in a fundamental sense up to it. Existence is mine to be, yours to be, and, hence, it can be authentic or not. Or, to put the matter more formally, saying that Dasein is the entity with a passionate understanding of being is equivalent to saying that it relates to its existence as a possibility that it is its own to be. Heidegger’s conception of Dasein in terms of this mutual entailment accounts for the existential significance of Dasein.

Assuming the fundamental phenomenological significance of Dasein glossed above, Heidegger analyzes this existential significance but he does so in the service of fundamental ontology, the task of determining the meaning of ‘being’ as the necessary foundation of any other ontological investigation. Precisely because Dasein has a passionate understanding of being and relates to its existence as a possibility, it is ontically distinguished by its ontological or, better, pre-ontological
character. Being-here has this character precisely because it exists with and as an understanding of being. For this same reason (again, in tandem with its fundamental significance), being-here allegedly enjoys a privileged status as the point of departure for pursuing the objective of fundamental ontology (1967, 13). Thus, the first part of *Being and Time* is entitled “The preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein” – the first step of fundamental ontology. The analysis of Dasein aims, as he also puts it, at “freeing up the horizon for an interpretation of the sense of being in general” (1967, 15). As discussed below, that horizon is time, albeit of a particular sort.

The existential analysis unpacks several existentials, ways of existing that are disclosive of the various manners of being of beings. Among these existentials, Heidegger singles out certain “basic existentials” – attunement, understanding, talk or discourse, fallenness – that are equiprimordial. That is to say, they are joined at the hip – a point already intimated by the mention earlier of ‘passionate understanding.’ For Dasein to understand being is for being to matter to it (attunement) and vice versa. Nor is the attuned understanding isolated from the fact that being-here, we share it with others – who are also here (Mit-dasein) – by talking and listening to them. So, too, we share a heritage and a world as a complex of meanings grounded in that heritage. To be sure, for the most part, we find ourselves swept up into the modes of conforming to generally accepted attunements, ways of understanding and speaking, without questioning them. This proclivity to conformity is, as the term suggests, a way of falling prey to an anonymous, self-alienating conception of others – the They (das Man) – lending its own unity to the other basic existentials that make up being-here.

Just as traditional ontology, with its emphasis on the onhandness of things in nature, mistakenly overlooks the fundamental phenomenological significance of being-here, so, too, it “jumps over” the latter’s worldliness, epitomized by the work-world and the concerns (Besorgen) that dominate its everyday, worldly existence. Heidegger accordingly stresses the need to investigate being-here in terms of its essential constitution of being-in-the-world and with an eye to understanding ‘being-in’ existentially, i.e., not as something on hand in another thing on hand in nature (1967, 54, 65) but as a form of immersion in and engagement with the surrounding world or environment (Umwelt) – “the most proximate world of everyday being-here” – and the things within it (1967, 54, 56, 61, 66).

The analysis reveals a meaningful complex of implements, meaningful both because use of each implement complements the use of other implements and because the complex as a whole is for the sake of being-here. But what, if anything, is being-here for the sake of? In that complex there is, in principle, a suitable place for everything, but is there such a place for being-here, a place where it is “at home”? And, if not, does that not entail the lack of significance (Unbedeutsamkeit) of everything within the world (1967, 186–7)? Of course, being-here may try to avoid these questions by living in the inertia of absorption in the everyday work-world. It is aided, moreover, by the fact that, in its fallenness (its proclivity to conform), being-here has always already accepted some semblance of meaningfulness from the ideology of the crowd. But these ways of living are futile attempts to escape the truth of being-here. “The immersion in the They and the ‘world’ of concerns reveals something like a flight of being-here in the face of itself as its authentic possibility-of-being itself” (1967, 184).

Because the question of being-here’s meaning presents itself in the experience of Angst as the experience of not being at home (unheimlich), Heidegger refers to Angst as a “basic attunement” and the “eminent” form of disclosedness of being-here (1967, 184, 188–9). But Angst is also eminent because, unlike a fear of something within the world, it is precisely about being-here, about being itself and being at all. In this capacity it reveals the being of being-here as care (Sorge). Being-here, we experience Angst because we care and we care because we project something for ourselves and, in that respect, are always ahead of ourselves. But we are ahead of ourselves, not in
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the abstract, but precisely by virtue of already being in a world, thrown into it, and caught up in concerns with what is handy within the world and the possibilities that it affords us. The being of being-here is care, understood as “being-ahead-of-itself-(while)already-being-in-(the world) as being-amidst (entities encountered within-the-world)” (1967, 192).

As is often the case for Heidegger, this characterization of care as the being of being-here contains a clumsy sequence of hyphens for the sake of maintaining the unity of the existential structure. ‘Being-ahead’ is meant to capture the existential sense of the understanding, conceived as a potential-to-be (Seinkönnen) that coincides with a projection on the part of being-here (hence, too, understanding is an “overstepping,” “transcending”); ‘being already’ is meant to capture the existential sense of attunement, conceived as the thrownness of an affectivity; and ‘being-amidst’ is meant to capture the absorption in everyday life and work that Heidegger characterizes as fallenness. Being-ahead (vorweg) of oneself, being-already (schon) disposed, and being-amidst (bei) things – in obvious parallel to what’s coming, what was already but is even now, and what is present, respectively – are inseparable, inherent parts (Momente) of care as a whole.

The conclusion that care is the meaning of being for being-here serves as the pivot on which the second half of the existential analysis in Being and Time turns. Whereas the first half concentrated on “the inauthentic being of being-here,” the foundation for elaborating the ontological basic question requires an analysis of being-here “in its possible authenticity and totality” (1967, 233). To this end, Heidegger articulates existential conceptions of death (as the culminating possibility of being-here) and of conscience (as the silent discourse of being-here, calling itself to project this possibility as its ownmost possibility). Anticipating nothingness resolutely, facing rather than fleeing it, is the mark of being-here authentically. On the basis of an account of being-here authentically, Heidegger demonstrates that time-liness (Zeitlichkeit) is the ontological sense of care.3

Being-here can be resolute, anticipating its ownmost potential-to-be, only because it can come to itself and “this way of letting itself come to itself (sich auf sich Zukomen-lassen) is the primordial phenomenon of the future (Zukunft)” (1967, 325). But by coming to itself in this way, it takes over its thrownness and is its having been, while also disclosing the situation and making things present. The senses of having been and making present, together with the coming to itself in anticipation, make up the three, jointly necessary elements of time-liness (Zeitlichkeit). This time-liness – time in a primordial sense, not to be confused with clock time or world time – constitutes, Heidegger contends, “the sense of authentic care” (1967, 326). With this contention, he adds, the first crucial steps are taken toward establishing “the thesis that the sense of being-here is time” (1967, 331). The establishment of this thesis then serves as the template for the unfinished project of fundamental ontology, namely, that of demonstrating that time-liness – labeled, in this respect, temporality (Temporalität) – is the condition for understanding being at all (1975, 389).

12.2. Being-here and thinking being historically determined

In Being and Time, analysis of being-here dominates, as Heidegger attempts to demonstrate that time, suitably interpreted, underlies and ultimately gives meaning to its being. After 1930 the center of Heidegger’s focus shifts from being-here to the history of being (including, prominently, the history of ontology). However, being-here – not least as the clearing for beings and their being – remains fundamental to that history. Some of Heidegger’s most sustained treatments of being-here in the latter context are to be found in his Contributions to Philosophy, the subject of the rest of this entry.
Heidegger's attempt to think being historically in the late 1930s allegedly breaks with traditional forms of metaphysics (onto-theology) that, he submits, mistakenly think of being in terms of some particular being as the ultimate, sufficient ground of other beings. In the process they overlook the fact that even gods are in need of being and, indeed, being in a sense that is not, on pain of regress, correspondingly grounded. Heidegger frequently uses Abgrund to signify this groundlessness and Seyn, an archaic spelling of being, to characterize this sense of being that is an Abgrund, an abyss. He also uses this archaic spelling to signify the historical character of being, in contrast to any traditional reductions of it to some primary being (Seiendste, ens primum) as well as any pretensions to its transcendence or universality. I translate Seyn as ‘historical being’ to signal this difference, though it is historical in a primordial (and thus highly figurative) sense, one that underlies any other sense of history because it is what happens, in the most basic sense, in being-here at all. Underscoring this primordial sense, he characterizes historical being as Ereignis, a term ordinarily signifying an event, but here signifying, more precisely, historical being’s appropriation or owning of being-here.

Against the background of this attempt to thinking being historically, two central features of Heidegger’s later conception of being-here emerges. “Historical being appropriates being-here and yet is not its origin” (1989, 471). In turn, as what is thus appropriated (das Ereignete), being-here clears the ground, as it were, and thereby grounds the truth of the abyss of historical being (Heidegger 1989, 294–9, 447, 452, 455, 460, 470f, 485–7, 490). I designate these two features – being appropriated by historical being and grounding the truth of it (namely, its lack of ground, its abyssal character) – the ‘appropriated’ and ‘grounding’ characters of being-here, respectively.

Historical being’s appropriation of being-here is not an event in any ordinary sense of the term. Instead it coincides with historical being’s withdrawal (epoche, Entzug) and self-concealing (Sich-verbergen). If, for example, being is taken in the traditional sense of the presence of what is present, it can’t be similarly present but must withdraw in order for the entity to be present. In its withdrawal, it does a turn (a U-turn of sorts as the term Kehre often signifies) and it does so in the course of appropriating being-here, refusing itself (1989, 293). Thus, we don’t merely lack access to being in the way that we have access to entities; being is strictly speaking not “given” at all. There are hints (Winke), to be sure, and without it, beings would not be, but being itself escapes us. The emphasis is on the active voice here; being turns from us. Heidegger accordingly speaks of the “turn in the appropriation” (Kehre im Ereignis) and the appropriation characterized, in itself, by this turn (das in sich kehrende Ereignis) to which the abyss (the lack of ground mentioned earlier) belongs (1989, 185).

But there is no such turn without being-here. Being-here is, as already noted, the ground of the truth of historical being, but being this ground is necessitated “by the basic experience of historical being as the appropriation” (1989, 294). Being-here’s founding experience is that of being what historical being – as the appropriation, the primordial owning – appropriates. Insofar as it is appropriated, it guards historical being’s refusal, its self-concealing (1989, 488). Heidegger characterizes being-here accordingly as “the clearing for the self-concealing (historical being),” “the clearing … in which historical being conceals itself,” and “the clearing of the historical being itself” (1989, 298–99). In apposition to ‘clearing,’ he sometimes mentions the ‘open,’ ‘free,’ ‘unprotected’ – all metaphors of places and states. The expression “clearing for the self-concealing” in particular can appear paradoxical, but perhaps no more so than any registration of an absence. Each of these expressions re-inscribes the fundamental phenomenological significance of being-here, introduced in Being and Time (being-here as the “clearing”). In this respect, the third central, identifying feature of being-here (in addition to its appropriated and grounding characters) is a familiar one. But the difference in accentuation is also patent. Although the clearing in Being and Time encompasses both being in the truth and in the untruth,
Heidegger’s later conception of being-here stresses that it is the clearing precisely for historical being’s self-concealing.

Above I stressed the active character of historical being’s appropriation, withdrawal, and concealment. Whereas the center of gravity of the existential analysis in *Being and Time* was in many ways being-here’s projecting (*Entwerfen*), in the *Contributions* he stresses that being-here is “thrown, appropriated by historical being” (1989, 304; see also 259). By opening up an open region, the one projecting reveals that it is thrown and “achieves nothing else than taking up the swing back in historical being, i.e., moving back into the latter and thereby into the appropriation and in this way first becoming itself, the preserver of the thrown projection” (1989, 304).

Being-here participates in the appropriation’s refusal by insisting on it and renouncing any attempts to ignore it. That is to say, with its appropriation, being-here has “for its own the guardianship of the refusal.” Heidegger stresses that being-here’s appropriation takes the form of a “renunciation,” a renunciation that “allows the refusal (i.e., the appropriating) to surge into the open.” Yet far from being simply a negating and a negated, renunciation in this sense is a way of standing “primordially” as it were, “unsupported in the unprotected (the steadfastness of being-here).” Indeed, it is “the mark of being-here, so to ‘stand’ … (peering) down into the abyss and in this way to surpass the gods” (all quotations from 1989, 487).

In *Being and Time*, as noted above, Heidegger takes pains to differentiate his existential analysis, centered on being-here, from studies of human nature, whether in the form of psychology, anthropology, or biology. Still, he acknowledges that several analyses in *Being and Time* coincide with undertakings of a philosophical anthropology.5 So, while being-here is not identical to human being, it is in some contexts equivalent. In the *Contributions*, Heidegger frequently calls attention to the resulting ambiguity and faults his existential analyses for remaining in the grip of subjectivity. “In *Being and Time* being-here still stands in the guise of the ‘anthropological,’ ‘subjectivistic,’ ‘individualistic,’ and so forth, and yet with the opposite of all that in view.”6

But if Heidegger’s later conception of being-here is supposed to bracket, even more fundamentally, all traditional conceptions of the human, the question remains of how being-here relates to being human. Without completely dispelling the ambiguity of the earlier account, Heidegger introduces a new wrinkle in the form of a human transformation on the basis of the status of being-here. While being-here grounds the human being, the latter makes its essence (the guardianship of historical being) its own “insofar as it grounds itself in being-here” (1989, 489).7 True to his original insight – the way being-here is at once in the world, always already disposed to other entities and relating to them, on the basis of an understanding of being that coincides with being the clearing – both human self-understanding and understanding of beings ride on this transformation. “Only in being-here – which the human steadfastly becomes through the transitional, essential transformation – does a preservation of historical being succeed in what thereby first appears as an entity [Seiendes]” (1989, 489).

Notes

1 This inference flagrantly conflates epistemology and ontology or sagaciously locates the sweet spot where they coincide.

2 Each existential is ontologically significant, disclosing Dasein’s manner of being and whatever it encounters, in tandem with an ontic significance. For example, when I use a hammer, I understand it (ontically) as a means of fastening something; but this use and understanding coincide with understanding/disclosing it (ontologically) as being-handy or ready-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*).

3 A temporal reading of the adverbs and prepositions (*vorweg, schon, bei*) used to characterize care already suggests that some sense of time underlies being-here.
4 See Heidegger 1989, 34, 57, 64, 262, 320, 407; exploiting appositive genitives, he refers, too, to the “turn of the appropriation” and the “appropriation of the turn” (1989, 36, 64, 231, 258, 267, 269, 311, 342, 351, 354, 409); also, the turning of historical being (1989, 412).

5 These references may have abetted Husserl’s critical assessment of the work as a failed phenomenology, lapsing into anthropology (see “Martin Heidegger” entry in the Handbook). Notably, two prominent works in philosophical anthropology by Scheler and Plessner appear shortly after the publication of Being and Time, perhaps contributing to Heidegger’s subsequent attempt to distance his work unequivocally from philosophical anthropology.

6 1989, 295 and, for further such criticisms, 87–8, 300, 305, 318, 455, 489.

7 Being-here is also said to ground “future human-being” (1989, 300).

References