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Description of Module

Paper Name	Philosophy
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Objectives	To expound the epistemological tenets of Heidegger's existential phenomenology
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Heidegger's Existential Epistemology

1. Introduction

Along with Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is considered to be the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. With Nietzsche, Heidegger is also considered to be the most proximate source of existentialism, hermeneutics and postmodernism / post-structuralism. However, he is said to have had no part to play in epistemology. He tried, instead, to overcome the epistemological baggage of modern Western philosophy as instituted by Descartes, thus bringing to a close its central preoccupation with epistemology. Nevertheless, a primordial epistemology can be unearthed from Heidegger's writings when we look at epistemology broadly as an attempt to understand the ontology of the knower, known and knowledge. In this sense, Heideggerian ontology is a thoroughly anti-Cartesian, anti-representationist account of our most primary or primordial – and thus directly meaningful – encounter with phenomena. Heidegger claims that our deliberate cognitive and theoretical knowledge, or knowledge in the proper sense in the epistemological tradition, is conditioned on or is a founded mode of our in-deliberate manner of comporting ourselves towards the known. As far as the theory of knowledge is concerned, therefore, Heidegger offers a genuine alternative to Cartesian cognitivism.

Heidegger was one of the philosophers of the twentieth century who thought that modern Western intellectual culture had entered a phase of decadence and nihilism. According to him, one of the most dominant signs of decadence was the epistemological emphasis on the *subject* who *objectifies* the known as picture or representation. The modern idea of representation, for him, did not mean truthful imitation or copy but rather, a construction of the object in the terms of the subject (Heidegger 2002, 67).¹ The modern subject, thus, is the representing and producing or constructing subject. Modernity is seen as decadent because its epistemological emphasis is an aspect of its human-centrism. Heidegger claims that the modern human being is the subject, that which stands under or is the basis of the Being and truth of all beings. According to him, the modern human being is the “referential centre” of all beings (Heidegger 2002, 66-67). Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor observes that Heidegger's critical approach towards representationalism treats the modern epistemological standpoint as a step in the overall development of the paradigm of human domination and conquest of the world, which culminates in the technological society (Taylor 1995, 8). According to Heidegger, before the modern era, Westerners did not think that what is knowable is only what is representable by the human subject. However, we know that the Sautrantika Buddhists did hold such a view, though their understanding of representation was something

¹ Heidegger claims that picture or representation does not mean “a mere imitation”; it rather means “the matter itself stands in the way it stands to us, before us” (Heidegger 2002, 67).

like an exact copy. I think that Heidegger aims to put forward two claims through his attack on representationalism: (i) that it has led to a type of cultural nihilism, in turn leading to the relentless and meaningless technological manipulation of all beings, both human and non-human, and (ii) that it is an ontologically insufficient understanding of human knowing. In this lesson, we shall concentrate only on the latter claim, and that too with reference to his best-known work, *Being and Time* (1927).

2. Rejection of Cognitivism

Heidegger pictures Cartesianism as the “case at the opposite extreme” to his own theory. Descartes divided all real substances into three incompatible substances: (i) God, the only infinite substance, (ii) mind, the only non-extended but finite or created substance (*res cogitans* or the thinking thing), and (iii) matter, the only finitely extended created substance (*res extensa* or the extended thing). This absolute division plunged Descartes into the unsolvable problem of the external world and of the other minds, which Kant called the “scandal of philosophy” in the preface to *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998, 121). However, Kant also did not escape subjectivism, the founding of objectivity on the representations of the subject. He did escape Descartes’s difficulty in linking the immaterial mind with the physical world through the introduction of the transcendental categories of the intuition and understanding, which, according to him, are the conditions for human cognition. Heidegger also talks of transcendental philosophy in *Being and Time*, albeit a transcendental philosophy of the existential structures of human experience.

Why are these structures called *existential* rather than *transcendental*? Heidegger criticizes the whole Western tradition for its understanding of human existence as a constantly present substance, whether material or spiritual. His ontology of Dasein – or fundamental ontology as he calls it, since it is the basis for our understanding of the Being of everything else – is a non-substance ontology. Being-in-the-world, care, temporality etc., are not categories of the subject but are existentials of Dasein; they are essential existential *ways of Being* of Dasein, not constantly present substantial categories of an object. This is why the philosophical categories of *Being and Time* are called existentials. Let us now look at how Heidegger attacks Cartesian cognitivism.

Representationalism is a form of indirect realism. It is a theory of perception that states that what we perceive directly is never the physical object but a mental object or representation on the basis of which we are indirectly aware of the physical object. *Cognitivism* is any theory of the mind that gives credence to mental processes, such as knowing and thinking in terms of mental pictures or representations. Hence, cognitivism assumes representationalism. A typical cognitive theory of the mind does not consider it necessary to posit any deeper ground for cognition. This is what Heidegger rejects. According to him, the ontological phenomenon called Being-in-the-world is the ground of cognition.

Cognitivism understands the mind as if it were a computer that processes information through complex but logically coherent processes. For example, this assumption is at the basis of modern artificial intelligence theory. All pieces of information that the mind processes are its own representations, which increasingly need not correspond exactly with their originals. Artificial intelligence theory understands representations as symbolic forms. The representationist model of Cartesian epistemology replaces God with the human subject as the foundation for all knowable beings. Moreover, the knower subject is disengaged from the known so that this subject can keep a distance from the known and perform a theoretical abstraction in order to produce proper knowledge (Dreyfus 1991, 5).

Thus, the subject of modern epistemology is a disengaged self. The more removed the knower is from the known, the more able he/she is to produce accurate knowledge; the more entangled he/she is with the known, the less accurate is the knowledge produced. Notice that credible knowledge is not that of the actor but of the spectator or scientist, who is detached from the phenomena under study and observes them impartially and accurately. Heidegger's aim here is to bridge the gap that separates the Cartesian subject from the world without falling into subjectivism. For him, it is necessary "to prevent the splitting of the phenomenon" of the Being of humans that we experience in its wholeness (Heidegger 1962, 170). According to him, we as well as the world we experience are entangled in a single unified phenomenon, which he calls *Being-in-the-world*. Heidegger rejects Descartes's subject-object dualism. In Heidegger's epistemology, that which gets precedence is not a knower-subject but human existence, which is inextricably engaged with a world in terms of a pre-cognitive concern or interest. He does not deny cognition and representation, but argues that something other than cognition and representation, which cannot be described in terms of the subject-object dichotomy, lies at their basis. With the rejection of Cartesian dualism, Heidegger also rejects the modernist claim that we can somehow make fully intelligible and fully ground, theoretically, our involved existence through some form of scientific generalisation. Heidegger shows, instead, that the structure of our involved, engaged and non-neutral existence is not fully articulable, and comes prior to as well as is the condition for representations, cognitive knowledge and "scientific or rationalist forms of grounding" (Guignon 1983, 38). He argues that there is no ultimately intelligible ground for our involved existence like a neutral, uninvolved subject. To look for such a ground is delusionary in his view.²

² Heidegger grounds the engaged character of Dasein in the notion of "care", which means that we engage with things, others and the self primarily as that which matters and is meaningful to the self. Heidegger, however, defines care in temporal terms: "ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world". This simply means that our understanding the projection of possible ways to be is future-directed or possibility-driven, and the attuned "alreadiness" of our being affected by the world is past-based or situated. A present negotiation of these two engaged temporalisations, in fact, constructs the reality of our present existence. Our existence moves ahead, delimited by the finite point of its end in death and in terms of an already given horizon of significance. The past is made significant from "out of the future".

Heidegger undertook careful analysis of the works of important philosophers with the aim of unearthing their general understanding of the meaning of Being; that is, their ontological assumptions. From his enquiry into this in Descartes's dualism and privileging of theory over practice, he came to the conclusion that for Descartes, Being meant substantiality within which is concealed the idea of Being as constant presence (Heidegger 1962, 128–29). As such, his three substances (God, mind and matter) are permanent presences. Since the world and self are two constantly present and absolutely incompatible substances, Descartes ends up in unbridgeable dualism. For Heidegger, neither is human existence a constantly present subject-substance nor is our involved world an independent, constantly present object-substance. The two are inextricably entangled in human existence, the structure of which is not a substance but *a way of Being* of human existence. Heidegger does not aim to prove the existence of the world and other minds. His strategy is to demonstrate that these are pseudo problems. According to him, the scandal of philosophy is not the absence of these proofs but the expectations of them (Heidegger 1962, 249).

We have seen that for Heidegger, the basis of cognition is Being-in-the-world. According to him, properly understanding the ontological structure of human existence as Being-in-the-world would defy the necessity of having proof for the external world and other minds. Let us briefly understand the notion of Being-in-the-world inasmuch as it is necessary to understand how it is considered the contingent ground of cognition according to Heidegger.

3. Ground of Cognition

The ground of cognition for Heidegger is Being-in-the-world. His central philosophical preoccupation is the meaning of 'Being'. The classical expression of the question of Being is: "Why are there beings at all rather than nothing?" Heidegger's answer to this question is: "there are beings because there is Being." What, then, is Being? Being³ is the inarticulate background intelligibility of beings or entities in their totality, which determines our articulate understanding of beings in their specificity.⁴ Whenever we encounter an entity, we encounter it already in terms of a horizon of disclosure, which frees entities to appear or to be present as something rather than nothing or another. Being is the concealed horizon that allows meaningful presencing or appearance of entities, but not the meaningful presence of an entity itself. Therefore, "the Being of entities is not itself an entity". Since Being is concealed from conscious awareness

This manner of experiencing time existentially is called *temporality*. Heidegger's larger argument in *Being and Time* is that it is the experience of finite temporality that is the (ab) ground of our understanding of Being – indeed, of meaningful encounter with anything whatsoever.

³ The 'B' of 'Being' is capitalised as per the convention in Heidegger scholarship; otherwise 'being' means 'entity'.

⁴ Heidegger observes that Being is "that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which... entities are already understood" (Heidegger 1962, 25-26).

or cognitive representation, it is not itself a cognition or representation; it is not an object. If Being were an entity or object of representation, understanding it as an entity would involve a further understanding of Being, which would in turn call for a further understanding of Being... ad infinitum. Revelation of an entity is reliant upon the background understanding of “beings as a whole”, which is called Being (Pietersma 2000, 94). Being is a pre-cognitive understanding, not a cognitive representation. An object or entity is cognitively representable but Being cannot be so represented. Hence, there is always a basic difference playing between Being and beings/entities, and between beings or entities on the one hand and that which lets beings to be present or appear as beings on the other hand. This difference is called *ontological difference*.

Human beings do not create an understanding of Being since Being is invisibly there beforehand, and because it is in terms of Being that they make sense of entities. However, it is only through the openness provided by human existence in a collective sense, through language and history, that there can be an understanding of Being at all. The history of the event of Being’s manifestation draws us into it so that we to exist meaningfully, rather than us standing outside it and making use of it on requirement. We are inescapably entangled in the coming to presence and withdrawal of Being. A present understanding of Being means that many other possible understandings of Being are withheld or made absent. This is necessary for the legitimacy and truth of our presently dominant history and culture. Hence, if Being means manifestation and revealing, it also means withdrawal and absencing. However, Being does not only mean background intelligibility and its withdrawal; it also means intelligible presencing or appearance of entities in their Being. Dominant understanding of Being or horizons of disclosure or the world can be different across historical epochs and peoples, and therefore meaningful cognising of phenomena can also differ across history and context. Heidegger emphasises that there is no further ground for human cognition than the finite, temporal and yet transcendental ground provided by Being.

Heidegger agrees with the modern Western epistemological tradition that intelligibility of things, knowledge and cognition depends on the structure of the human being; however, the human being he has in mind is *not the Cartesian subject* but Dasein, or Being-there – a significant difference. Dasein signifies the following aspects of human existence: (i) *existence*, which means standing out into the world or openness of Being that is housed in the historical-linguistic traditions of peoples; (Heidegger 1998, 283-84)⁵ (ii) *mineness*, that is our manner of comporting towards a possibility that is “in each case mine”; (iii) ‘*thereness*’ or the ‘Da’ of Dasein, which is the meaningful context of the understanding of Being; and (iv)

⁵ For Heidegger, only human beings ‘ek-sist’ or stand out into the world by projecting various meaningful possibilities upon whatever they encounter, be it their own selves, external things or other humans (Heidegger 1998, 84).

the pre-understanding or an inarticulate understanding of Being that Dasein always has and on the basis of which it can make sense of entities that it encounters. The engaged entanglement of Dasein, in its historical-cultural world in a constitutive sense, is the ground for theoretical cognition and not the reverse (Aho 2009, 15).

The broadest existential structure of Dasein is Being-in-the-world. The *world* in this phrase is the “referential totality which constitutes significance”. The world is thus the understanding of the Being of beings as a whole in terms of their referential connections and unity. A somewhat total interpretation of beings or world, which is unified ontologically as an understanding of Being, is necessary for entities to show up as such and such. The world or totality of significance has to disappear from our cognitive awareness and willed control for entities to show up cognitively. However, before they do so as the known object or present-at-hand, they show up more primordially as the thing that matters to us or about which we are concerned. When we deal with things in this mode, we are getting hold of them and using them as if unaware of their character as objects. We are lost in their character as the things that matter to us. In this primordial mode of appearance, phenomena are not cognitively present-at-hand as objects but are ready-to-hand, or handy things that matter. The notion of Being-in-the-world signifies that in these mattering, engaging involvements, the world or the referential totality of significance is taken for granted.

The pre-understanding of Being enables us to existentially comport ourselves to entities in terms of fascination and lost-ness and it takes place without self-conscious decision – in short, it is “pre-cognitive”. Cognition itself is based on such a pre-understanding of Being. Inasmuch as this pre-understanding of Being – which is always taken for granted for our cognitive activities – can be articulated as a connected world, and inasmuch as we always already find ourselves *in* this world in a constitutive sense, the ground of cognition is Being-in-the-world. That is, the knower is already entangled in the world when he/she takes up a cognitive stand towards an object. He/she is not first within an inner sphere, from out of which he/she is to take up a cognitive posture against something external. Our relation with the world is not first and foremost cognitive or epistemic, but ontological (Heidegger 1962, 90). Knowing or cognising is a secondary activity of restraining our engaged comportment towards the world, observing aspects of the world closely and objectifying them. We know that knowledge-production is generally conceived to be such a detached activity. However, as we have shown, according to Heidegger the cognitive activity is based on “antecedent interests and activities of a practical nature”, and in a strong sense, cognition is a modification of the engaged perspective or “a change in the direction of one’s interest or concern” (Pietersema 2000, 96-97).

Thus, the same target of encounter can be approached in two different ways: (i) practically, meaningfully, interestedly or as ready-to-hand; and (ii) theoretically, objectively, disinterestedly or as present-at-hand. The point of significance here is that the former is the condition for the latter, and that the latter is a modification of the former. Heidegger's aim is not to relativise science but to show its basis. In *Being and Time*, he considers the theoretical approach as a legitimate way of understanding the world. His aim seems to be to show that (i) at the realm of our most meaningful engagements, theoretical constructions are secondary, (ii) there are no "bare facts"; theoretical constructions are founded on our concerned encounter with things in the world by way of de-contextualising or de-worlding them for the sake of objectification, (iii) scientific/theoretical understanding is not the only way of encountering the real and the true, and (iv) his critical-cultural project seems to be to argue that the encroachment of theoretical/scientific constructions into every aspect of human engagement leads to cultural nihilism/meaninglessness.

4. Cognition as Interpretive

Heidegger's theory of cognition is hermeneutical or interpretive. We have already seen that as Dasein, we primordially access entities of the world as handy things that matter to us, and we do this on the basis of the background structure of Being-in-the-world. But how exactly is the world disclosed to us in its unity as Being-in-the-world? Heidegger argues that human beings are naturally lighted up beings such that they are always open to the *clearing* or world of beings. Thus, the world can be disclosed to us because we are beings who are naturally open towards the world as Being-in-the-world. This existential feature of Dasein is called *disclosedness*, which happens in three ways. Firstly, the world is disclosed to us in the way it affects us one way or another, as reflected in our moods. This ontological aspect of Dasein is called *attunement* or *state-of-mind*. Heidegger emphasises that any cognitive determining has its own attunement and that a mood of poise is required for the scientific comportment. Secondly, the world is disclosed to us as that into which we have fallen, that about which we are fascinated or that in which we are lost or absorbed without conscious cognition of what is happening. This ontological aspect is called *fallenness*. Thirdly, and most importantly for the purposes of this lesson, the world is disclosed to us as that about which we have a primordial familiarity, by way of which we can stand out towards it or exist by continuously pressing forward towards possible ways to be. This ontological aspect is called *understanding*, and it is the ontological ground for all manners of making sense, including cognition. Understanding, fallenness and attunement, which mark the constitutively disclosive condition of Dasein, are also discursive conditions. This is because discourse or language in its most primordial form is co-constitutive of these conditions, and therefore of disclosiveness as such. Being-in-the-world then, which is the foundation of cognition, is also constitutively discursive.

Understanding is made more explicit in interpretation, which has a hermeneutical structure. That is, in each of Dasein's projective possibilities of its ways to be – whether in relation to things, others, events or its own self – what matters to Dasein is its own self or its ways to be in relation to these possibilities. However, at the same time its own ways to be or self, about which Dasein is always concerned, are interpreted in terms of the culturally available possibilities of its world. Dasein's most primordial or authentic understanding is never outside this structure of the self that is inextricably entangled with its world. It is conditioned on this finite hermeneutical circle alone that cognition and knowledge can be produced. For example, we hear a cuckoo's call always as the cuckoo's call first and foremost (we might as well hear it as the melodious song of a bird without knowing its name), but never as decibels of sound. This latter objectified notion of the cuckoo's call is a secondary piece of knowledge that we produce on the basis of a more primordial understanding of the sound as the melodious call of a bird.

Heidegger elaborates the *as*-structure and the *fore*-structure of interpretation. *As*-structure means that we always encounter a thing *as* something and never as a bare or pure thing. At the same time, we are able to encounter a thing *as* that thing because of the *fore*-structure of interpretation, which is the background structure for interpreting something *as* that thing. Heidegger details three elements of the *fore*-structure: (i) *fore-having* is the total context of the familiarity or world of our involvements that contextualises our more thematic interpretation of a thing or event; (ii) *fore-sight* is the specific perspective of the interpretation like the objective/scientific or the existential perspective; and (iii) *fore-conception* is the conceptuality structure with which we articulate the interpretation in its specificity. Due to the hermeneutic circle of the understanding, interpretive possibilities do not appear in the first place as neutral possibilities without any presuppositions. Instead, they have to be referred back to the interpreting self and his/her world of significance. Interpretation is “never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us” (Heidegger 1962, 191-92). According to Heidegger, perception, cognitive enterprise in general and theoretical interpretation as done in the sciences are all secondary activities based upon everyday interpretations of things, which in turn are based upon the hermeneutical structure of the understanding. The argument here is ontological; Heidegger is trying to show that traditional philosophy, which gives a non-hermeneutical theory of perception, begins from a wrong ontology of human existence, taking it to be like a physical object. His own strategy is to show that human existence is self-interpretive all the time, such that perception and cognition are also interpretive in terms of the hermeneutical structure of the self. Traditional philosophy misinterprets perception as a private experience, leading to solipsism.

5. Account of Reality

Is Heidegger's anti-Cartesian account of human existence realist or idealist? His strategy is to show that the traditional manner of posing the question of realism and idealism is inadequate and mistaken. He argues that in traditional philosophy, the meaning of the term *reality* is the pure objective character of things as a whole. However, according to his ontological adoption of the term, reality is the entities that are understood in terms of the world. Reality here means entities of the world taken as a whole in terms of Being. In this sense, handiness and objectness are both modes of reality. Heidegger distinguishes the term *real* from reality. The real means the occurrence of entities independent of our understanding of reality in terms of the world. Reality has its ontological basis in Dasein as Being-in-the-world, whereas the real has no relation to Dasein. The real is nothing but Kantian noumena. When Dasein does not exist, there is no Being and so there is no reality; without Being, there is also no question of dependence or independence from Dasein. Although the real is still there when Dasein is not there, it is not meaningful to speak about the independence of the real as there is no Dasein to be independent of (Heidegger 1962, 255).

Accordingly, Heidegger's stance is a mid-way position between realism and idealism. Reality of the objective presence of entities, the thesis of metaphysical realism, is one of the types of our encounters with the world. This is conditioned on Being-in-the-world, which science and theorisation have glorified in modern culture, but inasmuch as metaphysical realism looks for proofs for the external world, it falls short of an existential-ontological understanding. If the idealist thesis is that entities are inexplicable philosophically without "that which is transcendental for every entity", then Heidegger's position is certainly idealist, because that which is transcendental for every entity is Being. However, according to him Aristotle was as much an idealist as Kant, from this perspective. Modern idealism of Descartes and Kant are to be rejected because both these are based on the notion of a subject that is not like an extended thing but still is a substance, and therefore suffers from the ontology of thinghood, which is inappropriate for the Being of Dasein. Thus, Heidegger may be characterised as a "minimal hermeneutic realist" since he believes that entities, including nature as such, are revealed to us in their meaning on the basis of our background understanding of Being, even though entities themselves occur independent of us.

Regarding theoretical/scientific activity, Heidegger holds that we can have a mood of poise and enquire into entities in their objective presence without being biased in this enquiry by our practical needs and engagements, although our primordial encounter with entities takes place at the level of engagements and theoretical attitude is a modification of the engaged point of view. Heidegger is not an instrumentalist in his approach to theory and science. He argues that entities are independent of our experience but their meaning is disclosed in our understanding of them. That is, we can work out explanations of the operation

of nature through scientific theorising for the sake of our own coherent manner of relating with nature. However, the metaphysical realism that science generally takes for granted – the notion that science is getting at nature’s authentic and only truth – is not philosophically tenable. Outside scientific practices there is no scientific truth, and scientific truth is not the only form of truth. Different interpretations of Being throw up different types of entities or the same entity in a different light. So the question “what is the ultimate nature of reality?” is untenable, for what we have are different scientific and other explanations of nature that we believe are giving us progressively more sophisticated explanations, as well as different cultural understandings of the various aspects of reality in terms of different constellations of meaning.

Heidegger is a relativist if we consider relativism to mean that there are different understandings of reality in accordance with different cultural-historical constellations of meaning. On the other hand, he is not a relativist if we consider relativism to mean that the understanding of reality is dependent on the individual’s whims and fancies. The meaning of reality is dependent on Dasein only inasmuch as meaning as such is dependent on understanding of Being.

6. Account of Truth

Does Heidegger’s anti-Cartesian account of human existence agree with the traditional correspondence notion of truth? The question of truth is of central importance to epistemology. For Heidegger, just as reality or the way of Being of the real depends on Dasein and not the real in itself, so also “truth is dependent on Dasein but not what the truth is true of” (Heidegger 1962, 265). The major theory of truth in Western philosophy, the correspondence theory, tells us that truth is the correspondence between the content of a proposition and facts or occurrences in the world, that is, between mental representations and facts.⁶ Here too, Heidegger’s consistent position is that for the truth of correspondence to occur, there ought to be a background interpretation of Being or world. Asserting something as real or true is one of Dasein’s ways of Being towards that entity. Heidegger does not disapprove of the correspondence notion of truth, but bases it ontologically on a more primordial understanding of truth: truth as revealing, uncovering, disclosing or unconcealing something as something. The Greek term he uses for truth in this sense is *aletheia*. Assertive statements point out, discover or let an entity be seen as that entity in terms of our background familiarity or Being-in-the-world. However, primordial truth is not the agreeable likeness between knowing and the

⁶ This idea of truth is adhered to by both, Plato and Aristotle (Plato *Cratylus* 385b2 and *Sophist* 263b, and Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1011b25). Aristotle’s well-known characterisation is: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false; but neither what is nor what is not is said to be or not to be.”

object known, or likening between one entity, which is the representation of a subject, and another entity, which is the object.

Dasein as the always already cleared being is always in the truth, says Heidegger. Dasein is always already cleared as the openness for Being or intelligibility. This is the meaning of Dasein's disclosedness. It is on the basis of this existential truth alone that any sort of propositional truth, which is secondary, is possible. On the basis of the already understood world of familiarity, we can assess whether what is perceived or asserted is true or false. However, the background understanding alone makes it possible. Truth formulated in this fashion is finite truth; eternal truths cannot be demonstrated. Skepticism can neither be proven nor disproven, because the traditional skeptic has no notion of the existential ontological structure of Dasein. At the same time, as the fallen being is absorbed with its world, Dasein is also a primordial untruth because it flees away from and conceals its own-most possibilities. It should be remembered that Heidegger uses the term *truth* in the ontological and normative senses. Ontological truth is the condition for the possibility of the normative conception of truth and error as conceived in the correspondence theory of truth. The ontological conception of truth itself is not normative.

7. Conclusion

Heidegger's ontology wants to give us "an account of the birth of the cognitive attitude as such" (Pietersma 2000, 125). Being-in-the-world or an understanding of the world is presupposed in our cognitive comportment rather than our cognition constituting it. We do not cognise the world first; rather, it is with a pre-cognitive understanding of the world that we can cognise an entity in its objectivity. Heidegger's aim is to reinterpret reality and truth in terms of the pre-understanding of the world. He posits cognitive knowledge and scientific practice as a type of orientation towards entities with the world as its transcendental ground.

However, this is not all about Heidegger's epistemological project. While objective presence can be known about entities other than Dasein, Heidegger states that "our (Dasein's) own condition cannot be grasped as present-at-hand, because of the way it is crucially projecting ahead towards its ends — i.e. because of its temporal character" (Richardson 1991, 60). This is the main problem with traditional Cartesian epistemology is that it objectifies the subject, Dasein, in terms of the present as a present-at-hand entity and posits it as the ultimate foundation of knowledge, whereas Dasein, the finite openness for Being and constantly projecting possibilities of its Being towards what it encounters as, cannot be understood at all in terms of objective presence.

These problems raised by Heidegger have inspired the Continental philosophical view of knowledge and the subject of knowledge. They are reflected in the existential, hermeneutical and postmodern attack on the subject and the problem of knowledge. They do not seem to go back on the Heideggerian thesis; there is only further radicalising of the same. Without the assumption of the representing subject of consciousness, I think it is difficult to refute the Heideggerian thesis.

