

I Am This World

Oliver Bates

22 April 2022

obates@haverford.edu

Abstract

This thesis explores the idea of the self, as understood over and against observable nature as a narrative arc using Renée Descartes, Martin Heidegger, Danielle Macbeth, and Judith Butler. It will argue that one starting place for the modern conception of the self as alienated from the observable world is found with Descartes, then the self as furthered with a Heideggerian reading of Descartes and Heidegger's own contributions, followed by a Macbethian reading of Heidegger which bring the word back from alienation. It will conclude with Judith Butler who points out a new kind of alienation from the world. The bulk of this paper will be a close reading of select works of Heidegger to understand his steps beyond Descartes.

This thesis will argue the Heideggerian way of thinking about the self as capacity and the actualization of Being-in-the-world that separates thing and object to avoid idealism and the pitfalls of representationalism. It concludes with the role of the body and why there is a lack of focus on it for Heidegger as understood through Butler. It then posits a re-alienation from the socially familiar world by looking at performative acts of identity as inscriptions of discursive acts on the body.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger, Renée Descartes, Danielle Macbeth, Judith Butler, Being, Ontology, Queer Theory, Queer Heidegger

Acknowledgements: Special thanks to Professor Danielle Macbeth for everything of the last four years-- words cannot express how grateful I am to you. Thanks to Professor Berger for first showing me and helping to work through Heidegger. Thanks to Professor Yuridin for helping solidify my philosophical thinking and ignite joy in every aspect of philosophy. Thanks to Professor Miller for our conversations about life, philosophy, and philosophy prom. Finally, thanks to my peers Sofia Esner, Amolina Bhat, Edna Creelman, Angela Zhang-Xu, Ben Haile, Ryan Totaro, and Sam Aronson for the eternal and wonderful conversations about any and everything.

I Am This World

“Do it or do not do it; you will regret both.” --Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1843¹

This thesis will trace the arc of the modern notion of the self, as understood by Descartes over and against Aristotle's principles of inner motion as interpreted by Danielle Macbeth, and the relationship to the world, as a mode of being understood by Martin Heidegger. It will conclude with a section about the role of the world in alienating the modern self as understood by Judith Butler. It will start with Descartes and his ideas of mind, world, and the self. It will then argue we lose the world in his thinking, as understood by his *Meditations* and Macbeth, but that he gives us something crucial-- the ability to act over and against our observable natures. It will then argue that Heidegger, in his *Letter on Humanism*, *The Thing*, and *Being and Time* brought the world back into focus. It will then conclude with a brief explanation for why Heidegger does not focus on the body using Queer Theory as well as a new form of alienation not brought by the self but brought on by the world. This thesis does not argue that this is the only way to trace the arc of the modern self; it is one way to understand the relationship between the self and the world.

Before going any further, the question must be asked: what is the modern self? For this work, the modern self is, and this will be used throughout the essay, a being that can critically

¹ Please note this quote has nothing to do with the rest of the thesis, I just knew if I did not include it, I would regret it.

reflect both on the world and the state of laws-- it is the capacity to self-correct over and against appearances, histories, and laws.² Yet the full force of this only comes at the end of this story.

The first part of this thesis will explore Descartes-- specifically how he opened the space where essence could be prior to existence, that is how we could come to know an object as in accordance with laws that are not internal to it but as laws imposed onto them. It will conclude with how Heidegger takes up this way of thinking while rejecting most of the content of Descartes.

The second section of this thesis will explore Heidegger-- specifically how his views on what it means to be a being that questions the nature of Being helps to understand the world as accessible and not solely a removed representation. It will use three primary works of Heidegger to understand this relationship between the self and the world as posed by Descartes. It posits that Heidegger makes a move beyond Descartes, leaving a representationalist view removed from the world behind. To do this, this section will start with an understanding of Heidegger's use of the terms being and Beings; then thing, thingness, object, and objectness. Then it concludes with an understanding of a section of Heidegger's work in *Being and Time* that combines Being, thingness, and objectness while avoiding representationalism.

The final section of the thesis explores Judith Butler's idea of performativity as upholding and creating worlds that inscribe identities onto bodies. Through acts of the self that transgress

² Descartes thought we couldn't correct over and against laws because they were innately given by his god, but that is why he is not the end of the story.

social boundaries impressed on the body to form a cohesive self, the self is alienated from the world by discursive acts.³

To start, an overview of Descartes' metaphysics is needed to understand the switch from the Aristotelian nature of the self to Cartesian ideas of the self.⁴ What allows this turn is Descartes' conception of the pure intellect, which will be the main focus of this section. This section explores the nature of the content of the pure intellect and its relation to the outside world. It explores the pivot from an object-oriented world to a relational system of laws. It then explores the emergence of the modern notion of the self in metaphysics as a result of the pivot from the Aristotelian self to the Cartesian self.

This essay recognizes Descartes views the mind as a separate substance, but that point will not be addressed in detail here. It is one of the elements of his system Heidegger lets go and there is good reason to let it lie. The idea of the substance dualist is that the mind is a separate kind of substance, that is apart from the brain and body. Other than this cursory explanation of the idea of substance dualism, it is not relevant to the rest of this paper.

³ It is important to note that the conception of the world is not *the earth*. To understand a *world* please consult page 20.

⁴ The themes of this section were first seen in an essay for *Macbeth* titled *Reason Realized* by Oliver Bates, 21 February 2022. For a more thorough explanation of Descartes' mathematical system and its connection to metaphysics, please consult that essay.

According to Aristotle, one cannot know that which is not first known by the senses.⁵ Perception is the base of knowledge. For Aristotle, essence follows existence-- existence is prior to essence. To know something by perception through the senses is to know the essence of the object. The world is object-oriented, and a person's understanding of the world is of objects as they exist-- which is to know their essence. The essence of an object, as understood through a being with sensory properties, is given by experience.

Before Descartes, to understand a number was to understand that it was a collection of units. Arabic numeration only entered as a system of manipulation to express collections of units expressed in their essence as roman numerals-- this later changed. In contrast, geometry was seen as using lines and angles to construct figures, whose combination with other figures created the emergence of new figures. The content of mathematics was known by the figures and instances. This is where Descartes enters the picture-- he flips from collections of units to manipulatable operations, from instance to relation in the pure intellect.

For Aristotle to know a circle was to know an instance of a circle. It was to observe round things and draw circles-- this was to know the essence of a circle. To see the circle, or to perceive it, was to know all that it was to be a circle. The essence of the circle came from knowing the instance of the circle. What Descartes does is invert that. Descartes argues the essence of a circle is found in the law expressing the relation between two points-- or $x^2+y^2=r^2$. The motion of the points as relations, one on to the other, is what creates the circle. Regardless of the existence

⁵ This claim goes for all that is knowable as knowledge, to assume that there is knowledge not known by experience would either assume innate knowledge (which he explicitly rejects) or a modern Cartesian view of the mind.

of any actual circle, the law of relation can be known. The equation-- the expression of the law-- is known and *intelligible* outside any instance. It is intelligible in the pure intellect, removed from the world.

Yet how does his system have any bearing on anything outside the pure intellect? The content of the innate truths provides the content for the basis of his system.⁶ This is how, in his system, he can have something that is both intelligible outside any instances and applicable to instances. For example, in Aristotle, I cannot deny the roundness of a sphere-- which I know from experience-- without also denying it is a sphere.⁷ For Aristotle to claim this as true, there must be no spheres that exist that are not round, or all spheres that exist are round. This is how we come to know categorical judgments about objects according to Aristotle; now, with Descartes, we flip this. Innate truths (laws) are uncovered by experience but are not constitutive of the instances. To come to know that spheres are round with law-like conviction is to uncover an innate truth about *sphereness*.

For Aristotle, we are in the world and act according to our inner nature. As a plant grows upwards-- as its inner nature-- we exist in the world according to ours. Yet this inner nature is not fundamentally our own in that it is ubiquitous to all humans. But our expression of this inner principle of motion is uniquely our own. For Aristotle, I am and can be known by what is

⁶ This is one aspect of Descartes' system Heidegger leaves behind. As will be seen there is no innate knowledge and no appeal to a god for the truth of a proposition. But again, this is Descartes position in the story-- it is not over.

⁷ Bates, Oliver. 2022. Paragraph 6. "Reason Realized." *Philosophy of Math*, 21 February 2022.

observable in my body and actions. Descartes opens the space between our presentation to the world, and our being for ourselves.⁸

According to Descartes, this new way of conceiving of metaphysics allows for the self as our own self. We can go against our nature and are free to act in accordance with the self. For him, this capacity for self is ubiquitous to all beings of our kind, but its actualization is unique to the individual-- that is why we understand the self in terms of its relation to the concept of the individual but not a *particular* individual. To have our own self, not dedicated by inner nature, is to critically reflect on the knowledge and act according to what is most compelling to the individual-- this is freedom and comes from his fourth Meditation.⁹ For Descartes, our nature consists of our desires, so to act above and against those is to be free; plants cannot do this, they can only act in their nature.

It is in the plant's nature to grow upwards; it is in the lions to eat a lamb. For humans, that is trickier. For Aristotle, to live a good life is to live according to one's nature-- that is in the quest of knowledge or the contemplation of truths. For Descartes, to live a good life is not considered, what is considered is how to be *free*-- or act according to what the individual has the most *reason* to do.¹⁰ The world is to be understood as laws of relation and the mind as the laws of

⁸ If this point is unclear, the section on thing vs object in this paper can be used as a model of thought. For Aristotle, we are Heideggerian objects, for Descartes we are Heideggerian things. Of course, this is nothing more than a structure for a helpful thought exercise.

⁹ Macbeth, 148.

¹⁰ This comes from his Meditations, while in other works he considered the *good* life more, it is not relevant to this thesis.

freedom.¹¹ To act with reason is to critically reflect on the world and act, not by desires, but by what is most compelling as given in the pure intellect. The world is intelligible in terms of its laws, the mind in terms of the self and freedom.¹² Descartes has realized our understanding, as minded beings, of the world in terms of law and the self in accordance with freedom. I can now act over and against my nature-- such as being an omnivore-- to act instead with what I have reason to do-- be a vegetarian. This is my critical reflection on the world and acting based on reason over and against my observable makeup, such as having incisors for tearing meat.

Compare the human and a billiard ball in understanding kinds of actions. A billiard ball will never change its state of motion unless acted on by an outside force. There is no self-movement of the ball-- this is what it means to act solely according to outside forces. This is not true of plants and animals. A plant will move towards the sun, not as the sun hitting the plant, but as the plant exposing itself to the sun-- this is its inner principle of motion. This is a fundamentally different kind of movement. Yet again, it is governed by outside forces, it lives a reactionary life. Under this view, an animal lives a reactionary life of self-movement.¹³ The life of a human is, for Descartes, governed by freedom which can be contemplated in pure intellect with self-directed action.

This switch from nature to the self, object to relation, Aristotle to Descartes is embodied by Descartes' pivot in metaphysics. Aristotle started with things in the world and came to know

¹¹ Macbeth, 148.

¹² Macbeth, 148.

¹³ Please note the author of this work is not making this claim, but relaying the claim of Descartes.

them by experiencing them. Existence, for him, is prior to understanding the essence-- to understand a thing's essence is to understand its internal nature, its internal principle of motion. For Descartes, the pure intellect understands the laws or eternal truths prior to any interaction with the thing. The essence of the being is known through its laws regarding relations. Descartes comes to know the circle as a principle of motion of two unknowns based on their relation to each other-- essence is prior to existence and essence is separate from existence.

This leaves the question: what if our nature is to be a being that is as a self with reason-- to reflect, to question, and to correct? This means, not to *act* in a particular way, but instead to *be* in a particular way. This is how Heidegger picks up the story and moves beyond Descartes.

Three hundred odd years after Descartes, Heidegger enters the scene. This author recognizes the myriad of philosophers both pre and post Descartes exploring notions of the self, but for this, this thesis will pass over them in silence.¹⁴ Heidegger's advancement relating to Descartes' notion of the mind and self comes both in his *Letter on Humanism* and *Being and Time*. As a way into these ideas, a brief section of *The Introduction to Metaphysics* by Heidegger will be used to frame this discussion. Before getting into this, a distinction of his terminology will be made, starting with his motivation for understanding basic terms.

For Heidegger, the most fundamental question of metaphysics is “why are there beings at all instead of nothing?”¹⁵ The question seeks to get at the nature of beings. It is encountered in most disciplines and by most beings-- though often fleetingly. Its scope reaches all that is now,

¹⁴ This is a reference to Wittgenstein's Tractatus, for those familiar. Nothing is lost if you are not.

¹⁵ Heidegger, Martin. 2014. *Introduction to Metaphysics: Second Edition*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. N.p.: Yale University Press. Page 1.

“in the broadest sense,” as well as all that was and all that will be.¹⁶ This fundamental question is a question about the nature of being as a whole from which the question recoils and new questions emerge.¹⁷ It takes priority over all other questions.

There are two ways in which it takes priority; the first is an ontological priority. This has to do with theories-- specifically theories about the being of Beings. In this way, Heidegger argues that all other domains seek to answer sections of this question, they never get at the full picture. For example, scientific or epistemological questions are questions concerning regional domains that seek fundamental answers. Yet these domains never focus on the whole universal foundation of being-- the primal question does just that. Its ontological priority is that it seeks to understand the meaning of being beyond regional lenses.

The second form of priority the question takes is ontic priority. Ontic priority drives at what is fundamental to the being, to the individual. It is not about a theory of Being, rather it considers *specific* beings-- it is about instances. Heidegger first considers a human. In this consideration, the kind of being a human consists of is that which wonders about being. It looms around us and explains who we are-- according to Heidegger. In this sense, it is the first question in understanding ourselves. This is its ontic priority. We understand Being through the being that questions Being. To understand the question of Being is to understand the fundamental nature of who we are; it will unlock the meaning of being uncoupled from everything else. In the remainder of this paper, the ontic being-- or the individual instance of being-- will be designated

¹⁶ *Introduction to Metaphysics 2*

¹⁷ *Introduction to Metaphysics, 6*

with the word *being* in lowercase. The ontological Being, which is the nature of beings, will be referred to as *Being* with an uppercase letter.

From this ontic/ontological distinction, a new question-- rooted in the fundamental question-- arises. Found in *Being and Time* and the *Letter on Humanism* the question is: what does it mean to be a being that questions the nature of being? This question is unpacking the very fundamental question for Heidegger-- it is helping to understand existence over and against nothingness. It is not that understanding Being will tell why there is something over nothing, but it will tell what is the something that rests over the nothing. Descartes has his answer-- this being is to act as a self over and against desires. Heidegger poses a different answer, enabled by Descartes, enabled by the separation of instance and relation, observable nature and acting force, mind and body.

To question the kind of Being that we are and to come to understand it by way of the beings is how Aristotle would go about understanding the nature of the kind of Being that questions the nature of Being. Aristotle would turn to people, observe them, and conclude on their essence. Heidegger says there is an issue with this. To get at the nature of Being by way of beings is the exact wrong way to go about understanding the nature of Being. This move is made possible by the developments of Descartes. The instance does not provide the rule, the *is* of being does not provide the rule of Being. Descartes opened this space and Heidegger plunged.

For Descartes, this issue of the question of Being seems quickly answered in the *Meditations*. For Descartes, we are the kind of Being that can doubt its existence-- that is what it means to question our nature and is the starting point for his *Meditations*. His answer to the question, again, is radically separate from Aristotle's. The subject of *Meditations* one, two, and

four seek to answer the question of the nature of Being. Meditation one actualizes the doubt of what we can doubt (or call into question) -- he doubts everything. Meditation two splits the nature of the mind as distinct from the body, and four builds how we come to know beliefs to be true or false. These all tie into Heidegger's idea of the kind of being that questions the nature of Being and provides his launching point. These two diverge when Descartes' ideas about the issue of Being are inseparable from pure intellect and removed from the world.¹⁸

Heidegger wants a return to the Greeks in that traditional metaphysics has obscured the nature of Being, but with the Cartesian way of separating Being and beings,¹⁹ but while still connected to the world. Heidegger thinks the essence of Being for our kind of being cannot be known by the existence of beings—that is the Aristotelian way of coming to know the Being of beings.²⁰ His return to Greek thought comes as a return to the kind of thought, not the content. So, how does Heidegger come to understand this question of Being and bring the world back into view?

¹⁸ It is important that I am doing something more fundamental and more subtle than claiming Heidegger follows Descartes in thinking. What I am claiming is that Heidegger follows Descartes in *How* he thinks, not what he thinks. In fact, the claim of this essay is based on the knowledge that Heidegger thought Aristotle was closer to the nature of Being than Descartes.

¹⁹ Again, not the content of Descartes' claim, but how he splits open the space between Being and beings.

²⁰ Ideas of Plato's forms are relevant in that they are removed from the body and beings, but as we understand them as existing outside the body and know without experience, this is a Cartesian way of analysis and not in the purview of this essay.

To understand this, we turn to Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*. In this work, as noted before, Heidegger preoccupies himself with the distinction between Being and beings. For him, humanity is the kind of being that questions the nature of Being. For Heidegger, we must open a gap between Being and beings-- that metaphysics has closed-- for it will reveal the primordial truth of the nature of Being. Descartes began to open this space after Aristotle opened then closed it. To find Being through beings as direct links with no space has been the trajectory of metaphysics. "Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their Being, and so it thinks the Being of beings. But it does not think the difference of both."²¹ The job of metaphysics has broken down the difference between Being and beings to think of beings as Being. For Heidegger, now is a time to reopen the distance, the space between the *is* as an instance and the *is* as a kind. We must dance in this light-- the space that separates, reveals, and holds the *is*.

How can we have knowledge of this Being, if not through beings? He says that the space between the two has been closed, that this closure obscures the nature of Being, and that we must reopen it, but what does this space hold at bay? Why must it remain a space? To understand this and the relationship between ourselves and the nature of Being, he says it is both the nearest and furthest concept from ourselves. It is nearest in that it is the nature of all other questions-- that is the question of Being-- and that thinking relates beings to Being but only ever nods to Being as Being.²² It looks at the individual to see the unity of Being. In this way, the content of thought is

²¹ Heidegger, Martin. 2008. "Letter on Humanism." Edited by David F. Krell. In *Basic Writings*. N.p.: HarperCollins. Page 226.

²² *Letter on Humanism*, 234.

nearest to the question of Being. Even nearer than beings of other things, like desks, or pens.²³ Being is what is considered in thinking-- yet so far unacknowledged or aimed towards. Yet the Being of beings cannot come from the individual being-- Descartes already knew this, instance does not give kind. Being is not the sum of beings; Being is not what is common to all beings; Being is not the observable similarities of beings-- it is something fundamentally different.

Yet Being is also furthest from our being. Because the nature of Being is always passed over in traditional metaphysics, and beings assumed the nearest, the truth of Being is never revealed.²⁴ In our search for the nature of Being, we have attached ourselves to beings and thus made the nature of Being, which is the nearest -- obfuscated by the form of the path we take; we will never reach it. The nature of Being guides us like Virgil to Dante, but we leave it behind in favor of an error. The mistake of metaphysics is thinking that the nature of Being is that which is most common to beings. Because we have some inclination toward Being yet only interact with beings, we have ascribed this wrong way of thinking to the nature of Being.²⁵ Yet the very destiny of thinking is the truth of Being.²⁶ Destiny for Heidegger is based in the historical and unites the Being of beings through language and poetry into one Being. Yet how do we get at the nature of Being?

The key here, in interpreting Heidegger, is that to be a being of our kind is to be a kind of unity. This unity is necessary in that its parts are crucial in their *Being* as related to the whole.

²³ *Letter on Humanism*, 234.

²⁴ *Letter on Humanism*, 234.

²⁵ *Letter on Humanism*, 242.

²⁶ *Letter on Humanism*, 264.

The whole of *Being* is meaningful as a whole. It is also a meaningful unity in that each part of the whole has individual meaning separate from and regardless of the meaning of the whole. We are entangled in our environments and our histories-- in our bodies and the world-- in our space and in our time as necessary and meaningful unities. According to Heidegger, traditional metaphysics has stopped there. It has claimed that the essence of Being is found purely in the existence of the being and in its entanglement with its surroundings-- the Being of beings is local. It has then taken this locality and claimed its existence as ubiquitous concerning all beings of our kind-- the Being of beings. Heidegger says this is wrong. His claim is not that these are not a part of our Being, but that the Being of beings is more. It is the capacity and the actualization of Being-in-the-world that can question that is the Being of beings-- this is the Heideggerian self. However, we are still several steps away in this narrative before that conclusion can be actualized.

For Descartes, objects held very little significance in finding the laws of the mind and world. Their importance was secondary in the pure intellect. Thus far, Heidegger seems not to pay them much attention either. What then is the interaction between the Heideggerian self and objects? How can we know an object as both an instance of a kind and as an individual? Most importantly, how can we do this without either a form of representationalism detached from the world or a reduction of the world to just the observable? To answer this, we turn to his essay *The Thing in Poetry, Language, Thought*.²⁷

²⁷ Please note that while the inclusion of objects might at first seem unconnected, it will be crucial in the culmination of the understanding of Being-in-the-world.

In this essay, Heidegger makes the distinction between an object and a thing. An object is a representation of a thing in the world-- it is a representation by a being.²⁸ A thing is independent of the representation of the object and is not defined nor concerned with the objectness of the object.²⁹ A shed is an object in that it appears as a shed to its owner. The object has meaning, as a place to store tools, the objectness of the shed is in how it holds the tools and protects them from the outside environment. The thing on which the object of the shed is based is different yet connected. The thing is the wood, the nails, the paint not as objects that have meaning, but as things regardless of any being's existence. Even to describe the thing with wood, nails, paint is to describe it with objects-- that is how we communicate, but the thing is removed and independent. The thingness of a thing is its existence independent of the objectness. Objectness is dependent on thingness, but thingness is not dependent on objectness. This is crucial in understanding how Heidegger is not removed from the world.

The self-supporting nature of a thing before and against a being is the thingness of a thing that then is known to us as a representational object. To understand a thing as a thing we must first see it as a thing and not an object.³⁰ Here Heidegger explores a jug as a thing with thingness

²⁸ Yes, this sounds like representationalism, and it is, but it is not detached from the world as Descartes thought in the pure intellect-- it is still very much in the world as the mode of Being for a being that questions the nature of Being is as Being-in-the-world. But again, this is getting ahead of the narrative.

²⁹ Heidegger, Martin. 2001. "The Thing." In *Poetry, language, thought*, edited by Albert Hofstadter, translated by Albert Hofstadter. N.p.: HarperCollins. Page 165.

³⁰ *The Thing*, 165.

not as an object of representation. The thingness of a thing comes from its unity of being³¹ as standing forth in the earth. Standing forth is twofold in that the thing must stem from somewhere (self-made or otherwise) and the “unconcealment of what is already present.”³² The thingness of the vessel resides in its “being *qua vessel*.”³³ The jug is made of walls and bottom, but the wine goes in the space between the walls and bottom which are impermeable. The thing’s thingness does not consist of its material but the void inside. It stands forth as a vessel made from the sculpture that reveals what is already present in the space of the clay of the vessel that holds the wine-- this is the unconcealment, unconcealment as an object, unconcealment to another in itself.

Yet this void that is created by the jug is not a void. It is, as science says, full of air. For Heidegger, science will always get at the objectness of a thing by way of the kind of object that it already admits to as an object. Science deals with representations because to understand anything as something is to understand it as an object. Science conceals the thingness of the thing. Science understands the thing as an object, an object of thought with meaning-- this can never be a thing, only an object. To replace one substance with another (air for wine) seeks again to break down the *ness* of the thingness as something to hold wine is to view the thing as an object. For him, the atom bomb was the culmination of this tearing apart of the *thingness* to leave only objectness-- to leave only our representations of the atom as something for which we can split but not as the *thing* in itself that exists independent of its objectness. The nature of the jug is in giving-- in

³¹ Note here that *being* is used differently here, it is the existential use of the word, meaning to be.

³² *The Thing*, 166.

³³ *The Thing*, 166.

releasing that which it both took in and kept.³⁴ How the thing is used and conceived is its objectness.

So how does Heidegger avoid idealism as a form of representationalism and bring the world into view? As of now in the story, knowledge is of objects as representations filtered through the sensory experience whose properties can be known outside of the instance of the object. What is the relationship between the thing as known by its objectness and the being? It seems we are back where Descartes left us, struggling to find meaning in the world-- at least Descartes had the pure intellect and God-given truths. Heidegger seems to have no advancement of that until we turn to *Being and Time*.³⁵

The following exploration of *Being and Time* reveals how he avoids idealism by bringing the pure intellect or the mind back to the world. In the first part of the considered portion of *Being and Time*, we already see again that the nature of our kind of being is to understand the nature of Being.³⁶ This move is a break away from the Cartesian ideas of knowing first in the mind then in the world. Heidegger says the characteristics of the self as it exists, “must be seen and understood *a priori* as grounded upon that state of Being which we have called

³⁴ Heidegger notes that his use of the word *thing* is near the Kantian idea of object in-itself.

³⁵ Yes, *Being and Time* was published decades before either of the other two works looked at.

The point here is that Heidegger's contributions allow us to see the world as the world and with a Cartesian way of thinking, but based in the world and not the pure intellect.

³⁶ Heidegger, Martin. 2008. *Being and Time*. Edited by Edward Robinson. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. N.p.: HarperCollins. Page 78.

Being-in-the-world.”³⁷ We must first understand Being-in-the-world and its grounding of the characteristics of the self to understand the self and how the self exists. What then is Being-in-the-world?

To start, Being-in-the-world is a “unitary phenomenon.”³⁸ Like Kant's ideas of the separability of concepts and intuitions, the effects of the different components of Being-in-the-world cannot be pulled from the phenomenon as separate but can be examined outside of the instance of the phenomenon as individuals. As judgments are the smallest unit of cognition, so the unity of the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world is a priori with *Being-in* and *the-world* as its parts.

For Heidegger, Being-in-the-world is to be familiar with the location of the self. He says that the *Being-in* of Being-in-the-world is “the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.”³⁹ The essential state of Dasein, or the self, is to exist in its world. This might seem a little circular in that Being-in-the-world involves Being-in, which has its existential essentiality as Being-in-the-world-- it seems almost to define the phrase Being-in with Being-in-the-world. The difference here is that Being-in means to reside, to dwell, or to be accustomed to, whose contribution to Being-in-the-world is inseparable from the-world. In the phrase *I am*, the *am* is the Being-in, specifically Being-in-the-world. The object is with the world spatially, where Being-in-- as Being-in-the-world-- is a state of existence.

³⁷ *Being and Time*, 78

³⁸ *Being and Time*, 78

³⁹ *Being and Time*, 80

The major question becomes, how can this state of Being-in-the-world be a priori when it is to exist, not in relation or location to something, but as existing with an environment that is the dwelling, residence, that the being is accustomed with? Heidegger makes it very clear that Being-in-the-world is not to be explained by appealing to a realm of spirit or a realm of body where the spirit exists as Being-in while the body exists within the world.^{40, 41} This is a break from Cartesian thought where to be in the world was through the body and separate from the mind. This is not to say that we need a body to be alive in Cartesian thought, but that the body is the current medium by which we come to know the world.

In Heidegger's conception, to be both a priori and not appeal to dualism is to say that the Being-in-the-world is to be *how* the being comes to know and be, how they are connected to the world, and can make a priori claims. The a priori is known, not through the pure intellect as Descartes thought, but by the being's orientation in their Being. Again, *being-in* does not refer to locality or place in space, but instead to being as always already in the world.

Where Descartes thought essence is prior to existence and the world is known by causal laws, Heidegger thinks "not in terms of 'what we are' but 'how we are.'"⁴² Where Descartes thought of the relations as known a priori, Heidegger took that and extended it to how we are in

⁴⁰ *Being and Time*, 82

⁴¹ Both the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand are related to this topic but out of the purview of this work.

⁴² Aho, Kevin. 2020. Page 1. "Heidegger, Ek-sistence (Ek-sistenz)." *Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*. Page 1.

https://www.academia.edu/36347694/Heidegger_Ek_sistence_Ek_sistenz_?auto=download.

the world as a being as *how we are a priori*. Descartes thinks of existence in terms of the subject and everything else is represented to the subject as an object. For Heidegger, existing is about the relationship towards Being and not the individual. But this is why Heidegger is not the end of the story. A being as a self is not merely a collection of properties and inheritances,⁴³ but as something with meaningful parts and a new meaningful whole. The self is the capacity and the actualization of Being-in-the-world that can question, that is the Being of beings that is entangled with its histories and environment. So how is this not just representationalist dualism? The problem of the object vs thing in relation to Being and beings persists.

To understand this, a deeper reflection on Being-in-the-world is needed—specifically, what is meant by the word world. World, in section two of *Being and Time*, seems to refer to the way of knowing the world in terms of familiarity.⁴⁴ Emanating out from the being, the world is knit together to form a unified whole that has meaning-- it is one phenomenon. It is helpful to think here of a spiderweb, with the arachnid sitting in the middle of the web. The string closest to the being is the most significant, has been traveled the most, and is easiest for the being to navigate. Moving away from the center, the world does not lose meaning as a whole, but it is less familiar to the being. It is possible for a spider to not have a web, as a being to not have a world, but it is not whole without the web or world. The important note is that the being is not dependent on the world—this is not idealism. What still must be understood is how this is not just a representationalistic dualism-- how this world is not merely in the mind of the being and

⁴³ Thanks to Miller for a deeper understanding of what is invoked by calling this name into being.

⁴⁴ *Being and Time*, 80-81

how this brings the world separate from the being's world back into view. Both these concerns can be answered at the same time by way of conceiving of Being-in-the-world as a unitary phenomenon.

The claim of Being-in-the-world as a necessary and original orientation is not to tell a categorical or characteristic description of the self, but instead to tell of the self as it comes to be as oriented to the world as necessary to the self. The self is not the first thing, as in the *I* in *I am*, but instead that Being-in-the-world is the very faculty or potential of the self that does not assume a blank subject dropped into space. The key here is that Heidegger conceives of the being as originally in the world as familiar with it, as already in it with objects that both necessitate the being and are inseparable from the thing.

There is a return to Greek thought here in thinking about the Being as not the characteristics, but its nature or potential. For Heidegger, the Aristotelian nature of the Being of beings that question the nature of Being is to be in the world and questioning. It is not that we gain the knowledge of the world after we exist, as Descartes thought, but that we come to know our existence and our Being by our orientation towards the world. We are not separate from the world as thought by Descartes, but *of* the world. Following Heidegger, philosophers such as Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell, and Danielle Macbeth take up this claim, arguing that we gain the eyes to see the world as the world gains a face to be seen.

This way of existence avoids a representationalistic dualism for at no point is the subject removed from the world. With a Cartesian system, Heidegger's thoughts on the difference between a thing and an object may read as dualism but based on *Being and Time* and the work of those who follow, we see that it is not. Because Dasein is primordially oriented into the mode of

being of Being-in-the-world, the object is the face that can be seen, while we have the eyes to see it, as an object not removed from the world. Think here of a blossom for clarification. In the seed stages, the blossom has not been actualized, yet when it is, we say the flower was in the seed. To be in the world is the same concept, the self has the capacity to be in the world, and once it is actualized it is in the world as a world as *of* the world with intelligible and shared meaning. We are not removed from the world but enmeshed in and of it through objects.

This is how it is not representationalism. The meaning of the thing (which is its object) is how we come to know it. The objectness of the object is not removed from the thing and its thingness. The object is not an appearance, it is knowledge⁴⁵ because it is questionable and correctable *in relation to the thing*. The thingness of a thing is its truth-- this we can never know if we have aligned with its objectness, which is knowledge of it, as Heidegger points out. This is not representationalism because how we come to know the object is by the realizing of capacities of the conceptual constrained by the thing.

How does the body fit into this picture? For Descartes, the body is unnecessary to the self as the medium between the mind and world as long as there exists a medium. In the *Meditations*, Descartes seems to argue that the body provides sensory input that is worked within the mind--

⁴⁵ The difference between Truth and Knowledge is that a being of our kind, is not responsible for truth but is for knowledge. Knowledge is correctable and any part can be called into question when there is reason to doubt. Truth is radically separated in that it is unquestionable and dependent on the world. For more information on this subject, please consult *Realizing Reason* by Danielle Macbeth, section 4.5 (page 190ff).

the form of the body seems to be superfluous and of little interest.⁴⁶ For Heidegger, the role of the body is less clear. Author Das Janssen will be used to explore Judith Butler's ideas of the body as a medium relating to Heidegger and Descartes.

The motivation for using Janssen is their discussion of gender and the self as understood by Judith Butler-- specifically, they focus on Butler's work *Gender Trouble* which “speaks of laying aside the notion of the coherent subject in order to understand gender as performative.”⁴⁷ This very idea of a noncoherent and unified subject is exactly what Heidegger is talking about in the idea of Being-in-the-world and the capacities of the self. Janssen argues that coming to be in the world as a self is inextricable from the underlying structure of culture, custom, and social phenomenon-- which is to be familiar with the world.⁴⁸ How the spider comes to be familiar with its web is through its acculturation by the social constructs, Janssen argues-- that the social constructs that are the most embedded (such as gender) must be examined relating to how they actualize the self as acts of performance inscribed onto the self.

The reason Heidegger does not speak of the body in relation to the self is that it would reduce the body to its matter-- it isolates the body and puts it as “an object of discourse.”⁴⁹ The

⁴⁶ It seems like Descartes would have no problem with how humans are living in the film *The Matrix*. It doesn't seem to matter what kind of impulses are sent to the mind, either from the body or from electricity, all that matters is how the mind can think with or without these inputs.

⁴⁷ Janssen, Das E. 2013. “Queering Heidegger: An Applied Ontology.” *Radical Philosophy Review* 16:747-762. Page 749.

⁴⁸ Janssen, 750

⁴⁹ Janssen, 754-755

very idea of the body being an object is to undermine the unity of the self and the self's Being-in-the-world. To say the body is an object would land us right back in Cartesian dualism, it would treat the body as Being-*with*-the-world⁵⁰ and the mind as Being-*in*-the-world. As Janssen points out, "Dasein is *fundamentally* embodied" in its mode of Being-in-the-world where its potentials are "delineated" by the kind of body that has these experiences.⁵¹ The role of the body is not as a conduit as Descartes favored, but instead inextricable form actualization of the self. No being that questions the nature of Being's self is any less of a self, based on their body, but-- according to Heidegger and Janssen--it will delineate the potentials of the self, the body does affect the Being-in-the-world.

In considering gender, the self already has a cultured body, embedded in its historical situation. The self is already in the world-- the self both encounters and constructs the world but need not accept this way of meaning as the only way to exist.⁵² For both Butler and Heidegger, through the repetition of acts, history is made and constructions are formed simultaneously.⁵³ The upholding of the binaries through binary affirming acts both historicizes and constructs ways of Being-in-the-world. The effect of the repetition either upholds or tears down the walls that

⁵⁰ Being-with-the-world is the idea that a chair never really touches the wall because the chair is not a thing that can touch. A human can touch the wall or chair so the world then touches the human back. The body then would be no different from a table. For more information on this subject and the different ways of being, please consult *Being and Time*, Div. One, Section Two.

⁵¹ Janssen, 755

⁵² Janssen, 757

⁵³ Janssen, 760

surround us. To step away from the objectification of bodies, the self must be understood as fundamentally embodied and inextricable from social constructions.

Judith Butler affirms this point in *Gender Trouble* when they say, “within philosophical discourse itself, the notion of ‘the person’ has received analytic elaboration on the assumption that what-ever social context the person is ‘in’ remains somehow externally related to the definitional structure of personhood, be that conscious-ness, the capacity for language, or moral deliberation.”⁵⁴ The *ness* of the *personness* is removed from all context in which it already exists. Butler says this is wrong, it is to take I as the a priori state and *not* Being-in-the-world. The social context for the person is an a priori state of Being-in-the-world.

Where Descartes brought forward alienation from the world in terms of the mind, Butler brings forward a form of alienation in terms of Being-in-the-world. Where Heidegger closed one form of alienation, he helped illuminate another which Butler articulates. They describe the “many occasions in both Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s work where ‘the body’ is figured as a mute facticity, anticipating some meaning that can be attributed only by a transcendent consciousness, understood in Cartesian terms as radically immaterial... where the body is the site of cultural inscription.”⁵⁵ This is exactly what Heidegger is pushing against, the idea that the body is a priori to Being-in-the-world.

The idea is that there is no blank canvas of a body-- that there is no blank canvas to return to, but as we come into the world we are inscribed with the markings and histories of society that

⁵⁴ Butler, Judith. 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. N.p.: Routledge. Page 22.

⁵⁵ Butler, 164-165.

form us. Butler argues that for both Foucault and Nietzsche “cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body” where the body is prior as a thing that can be marked.”⁵⁶ This is exactly what both Butler and Heidegger want to avoid-- placing the body as an object of discourse as an object.

For Butler, the “body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries.”⁵⁷ Acts of perversion or “filth”⁵⁸ of and on the body act as a way to alienate a person from the social cohesion. The existence and adherence to taboos are what solidify the edges of a society and the body that must defend these to save itself. Here is the heart of the new kind of alienation. As a person comes to be by Being-in-the-world with a socially constructed familiarity-- by upholding the taboos of the society-- they both perpetuate and form their cages. To be part of the “out” group-- to bristle and rub against the bars of the cage-- is to alienate the self away from the primal state of Being-in-the-world where Being-in-the-world is a priori as sculpted in the body. The new form of alienation comes as the self is realized over and against the world known by residing in it.

In this way for Heidegger, to keep Being-in-the-world as an a priori state, he needs the taboo states to affirm the boundaries of the familiar. It is like a goldfish coming to know the boundaries of its tank by bumping it up against the clear walls of the tank. So too, to be familiar, we bump against the unfamiliar which is inherently social-- the walls of our tank are made and

⁵⁶ Butler, 166.

⁵⁷ Butler, 169.

⁵⁸ Filth is a socially dictated predicate on acts outside the boundaries of the society, according to Butler.

upheld by the act of bumping up against them-- yet by bumping against them, we alienate ourselves from the world we reside in.

To follow this line of thought further, we will use the case of the gendered body. This all uses a reading of Butler “that the gendered body is performative... [this] suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.”⁵⁹ To be familiar in the world is to know the boundaries of society where the existence of the body is as it appears. To be familiar with the body is to observe it with the knowledge that the mind is not a removed interior and is part of the world. Our being, as in the Aristotelian nature, is as a bodied being that questions the nature of Being where the body is directly observable and not removed from the mind.

The view that Butler and Heidegger point out is that we think acts of gender express internal essences of identity, but instead, they express cultural sculptures on the body that constitute its Being-in-the-world and are upheld by discursive acts. The very acts that are viewed as expressions of an inner core perpetuate and form what they are purported to report. This means that bodily acts of beings as acts of identity expression “are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.”⁶⁰ The expressions of the body do not express an internal core, gender is not internal that is expressed externally on the body. The internal core of a being is impressed on its body through corporeal and discursive actions and assumed internal in origin.

⁵⁹ Butler, 173.

⁶⁰ Butler, 173.

Put differently, “reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the ‘integrity’ of the subject.”⁶¹ We have already seen how, for Heidegger, that reality is interior-- it is unremovable from things, but it consists of knowledge and objects which are the product of the society and the self. To know an object is to take part in and uphold the social discourse surrounding it. I know the table as a table because of the discourse and publicly decreed use of it.

What happens when that is turned on the body, specifically the gendered body, is that the differentiation between the inner and outer, the familiar and the unfamiliar, I am inherently a part of the social discourse which I am then holding up. Because I am aware of the world as socially a priori (this is Being-in-the-world), to consider myself as either an affirmation or transgression of boundaries, I am upholding the socially constructed world I am familiar with.

To be familiar with the world as acts of affirmation or transgression of social boundaries is to become alienated from the world when boundaries are transgressed. By transgression, with what Butler calls filthy acts, the subject becomes alienated from the world they are familiar with, the world alienates the self by the self bumping against and transgressing its boundaries as an expression of the self that can go over and against observable acts. It is not that the self is alienated from the world as Descartes thought, but that the self is alienated from Heidegger's conception of the world by the nature of being familiar with the world the self is sculpted as the

⁶¹ Butler, 173.

self. It is important to note that the self is still not removed from the social inscriptions, but as it lives with and reacts to them as them it is alienated from the world.

Starting with the world as seen by Aristotle, we come to understand the switch Descartes made in his metaphysical thinking. In Descartes' ideas, the subject is alienated from the world-- they are fundamentally removed from the world. This way of thinking, unheard of in Aristotelian terms, carries to Heidegger with his ideas of the type of Being removed from the instance, this is similar to the conception of a Cartesian law. Heidegger builds off Descartes not in that he agrees with him, but in how Descartes thinks. In fact, Heidegger thinks Descartes is wrong about most things. The arc here is about the evolution of thought enabled by Descartes. While their content and method are similar, Heidegger frequently butts heads with Descartes. But that is not the point of this arc. The point of this is not to ascribe Cartesian views to Heidegger. The point is to understand the way of thinking enabled by Descartes, furthered by Heidegger.

We then move fully into Heidegger as continuing the arc from Descartes. Here we unpack exactly how Heidegger moved beyond Descartes. He does so by asking the question: what does it mean to be a being that questions the nature of Being? In this, he splits instances from kind. We come to understand the individual above empirical generalizations through an exploration of kind, and the kind by way of the individual. Again, this is not an empirical generalization about the kind of being that questions the nature of Being, but by the very nature of questioning as an act of Being-in-the-world which is the actualization of the nature of the self.

As Heidegger points out, this knowledge is not of things in themselves apart from the self and society's conception of them. Instead, the kind of knowledge we have is of objects which are dependent on both the thing and the perceiver. We can never get at the *thingness* of a thing

because we can never jump over our own shadow-- we can never have a view from nowhere. In this way to be familiar with the world is to be familiar with objects as both they and the self exist a priori and as socially constructed.

Because we are already in the world as familiar with it, we are never alienated from the world-- we are never removed from the world. We are already of the world. We can keep Cartesian laws thanks to our understanding of the nature of the self as a being that questions, but we are not removed from the world.

This way of thinking poses a new kind of alienation, as understood by Butler. As we come into the world as familiar with it, we establish boundaries, like the spider on the web, we are not familiar with the totality of all that exists. What we become familiar with and reside in is socially constructed with boundaries. When we transgress the social boundaries of the world which we are familiar, we are alienated from the world. We are not alienated in the same way as Descartes thought-- as totally removed-- but instead, as a spider dropping from the web. We are alienated in that we are, of, excluded, and transgressed by the world we are familiar with.

So, after all this, why the title *I Am This World*? The *I* comes from Descartes who opened the realm of going over and against observable nature. The *I* is also a nod to Aristotle from Descartes in understanding the *I* as observable and taken first. The *Am* comes from Heidegger's work on Being-in-the-world and what it means to exist as familiar with objects and the world. The *Am* is also a nod from Heidegger to Descartes in that it recognizes what Descartes presupposes. The *This* comes from Janssen as the world and body are a unitary phenomenon that is of the self. Finally, the *World* comes from Butler in their understanding of the inscriptions and

sculpting of the self by the socially familiar as acts of affirming and transgressing the world of familiarity. It is also a nod to Heidegger in the idea that the world is primal. *I Am This World*.

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