

Martin Heidegger

Second Edition

Timothy Clark



Routledge Critical Thinkers

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

‘Timothy Clark’s *Martin Heidegger* is an intelligent, highly accessible introduction to the German philosopher’s complex intellectual trajectory. In its focus on Heidegger’s engagement with art and language, Clark’s book will be of particular interest to students of aesthetics, literature, and theory.’ – Michael Eskin, *Columbia University*

‘Heidegger was a uniquely gifted practitioner of the difficult art of reading. But his achievements have been overlooked or drastically misunderstood by mainstream literary theorists and critics. Timothy Clark’s accessible, neat and reliable introduction goes a long way towards setting the record straight.’ – Jonathan Ree, *Middlesex University*

Since the publication of his mammoth work, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger has remained one of the most influential figures in contemporary thought, and is a key influence for modern literary and cultural theory.

This guidebook provides an ideal entry-point for readers new to Heidegger, outlining such issues and concepts as:

- The limits of ‘theory’
- The history of being
- The origin of the work of art
- Language
- The literary work
- Poetry and the political
- Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism.

Fully updated throughout and featuring a new section on environmental thought and ecocriticism, this guidebook clearly and concisely introduces Heidegger’s crucial work relating to art, language and poetry, and outlines his continuing influence on critical theory.

Timothy Clark is based at Durham University. He is co-editor of the *Oxford Literary Review* and author of *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida’s Notion and Practice of Literature* (1992), *The Theory of Inspiration* (2000), *The Poetics of Singularity* (2005) and *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2010).

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MARTIN HEIDEGGER



Second Edition

Timothy Clark

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First edition published 2002 by Routledge
This edition published 2011 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Clark, Timothy, 1958-

Martin Heidegger / Timothy Clark. – 2nd ed.

p. cm. – (Routledge critical thinkers)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

1. Heidegger, Martin, 1889-1976. I. Title.

B3279.H49C53 2011

193–dc22

2010047131

ISBN: 978-0-415-59089-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-59090-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-82944-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Perpetua by
Taylor & Francis Books

For Kitty

‘One can learn to ski only on the slopes and for the slopes’
(Heidegger)

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The books in this series offer introductions to major critical thinkers who have influenced literary studies and the humanities. The *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series provides the books you can turn to first when a new name or concept appears in your studies.

Each book will equip you to approach a key thinker's original texts by explaining their key ideas, putting them into context and, perhaps most importantly, showing you why this thinker is considered to be significant. The emphasis is on concise, clearly written guides which do not presuppose a specialist knowledge. Although the focus is on particular figures, the series stresses that no critical thinker ever existed in a vacuum but, instead, emerged from a broader intellectual, cultural and social history. Finally, these books will act as a bridge between you and the thinkers' original texts: not replacing them but rather complementing what they wrote. In some cases, volumes consider small clusters of thinkers, working in the same area, developing similar ideas or influencing each other.

These books are necessary for a number of reasons. In his 1997 autobiography, *Not Entitled*, the literary critic Frank Kermode wrote of a time in the 1960s:

On beautiful summer lawns, young people lay together all night, recovering from their daytime exertions and listening to a troupe of Balinese musicians.

Under their blankets or their sleeping bags, they would chat drowsily about the gurus of the time ... What they repeated was largely hearsay; hence my lunchtime suggestion, quite impromptu, for a series of short, very cheap books offering authoritative but intelligible introductions to such figures.

There is still a need for 'authoritative and intelligible introductions'. But this series reflects a different world from the 1960s. New thinkers have emerged and the reputations of others have risen and fallen, as new research has developed. New methodologies and challenging ideas have spread through the arts and humanities. The study of literature is no longer – if it ever was – simply the study and evaluation of poems, novels and plays. It is also the study of ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in any literary text and in its interpretation. Other arts and humanities subjects have changed in analogous ways.

With these changes, new problems have emerged. The ideas and issues behind these radical changes in the humanities are often presented without reference to wider contexts or as theories which you can simply 'add on' to the texts you read. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with picking out selected ideas or using what comes to hand – indeed, some thinkers have argued that this is, in fact, all we can do. However, it is sometimes forgotten that each new idea comes from the pattern and development of somebody's thought and it is important to study the range and context of their ideas. Against theories 'floating in space', the *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series places key thinkers and their ideas firmly back in their contexts.

More than this, these books reflect the need to go back to the thinkers' own texts and ideas. Every interpretation of an idea, even the most seemingly innocent one, offers you its own 'spin', implicitly or explicitly. To read only books on a thinker, rather than texts by that thinker, is to deny yourself a chance of making up your own mind. Sometimes what makes a significant figure's work hard to approach is not so much its style or the content as the feeling of not knowing where to start. The purpose of these books is to give you a 'way in' by offering an accessible overview of these thinkers' ideas and works and by guiding your further reading, starting with each thinker's own texts. To use a metaphor from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), these books are ladders, to be thrown away after you have climbed to the next level. Not only, then, do they equip you to approach new ideas, but also they empower you, by leading you back

to the theorist's own texts and encouraging you to develop your own informed opinions.

Finally, these books are necessary because, just as intellectual needs have changed, the education systems around the world – the contexts in which introductory books are usually read – have changed radically, too. What was suitable for the minority higher education systems of the 1960s is not suitable for the larger, wider, more diverse, high technology education systems of the twenty-first century. These changes call not just for new, up-to-date introductions but new methods of presentation. The presentational aspects of *Routledge Critical Thinkers* have been developed with today's students in mind.

Each book in the series has a similar structure. They begin with a section offering an overview of the life and ideas of the featured thinkers and explain why they are important. The central section of each book discusses the thinkers' key ideas, their context, evolution, and reception; with the books that deal with more than one thinker, they also explain and explore the influence of each on each. The volumes conclude with a survey of the impact of the thinker or thinkers, outlining how their ideas have been taken up and developed by others. In addition, there is a detailed final section suggesting and describing books for further reading. This is not a 'tacked-on' section but an integral part of each volume. In the first part of this section you will find brief descriptions of the thinkers' key works, then, following this, information on the most useful critical works and, in some cases, on relevant websites. This section will guide you in your reading, enabling you to follow your interests and develop your own projects. Throughout each book, references are given in what is known as the Harvard system (the author and the date of a work cited are given in the text and you can look up the full details in the bibliography at the back). This offers a lot of information in very little space. The books also explain technical terms and use boxes to describe events or ideas in more detail, away from the main emphasis of the discussion. Boxes are also used at times to highlight definitions of terms frequently used or coined by a thinker. In this way, the boxes serve as a kind of glossary, easily identified when flicking through the book.

The thinkers in the series are 'critical' for three reasons. First, they are examined in the light of subjects which involve criticism: principally literary studies or English and cultural studies, but also other disciplines which rely on the criticism of books, ideas, theories and unquestioned

assumptions. Second, they are critical because studying their work will provide you with a 'tool kit' for your own informed critical reading and thought, which will make you critical. Third, these thinkers are critical because they are crucially important: they deal with ideas and questions which can overturn conventional understandings of the world, of texts, of everything we take for granted, leaving us with a deeper understanding of what we already knew and with new ideas.

No introduction can tell you everything. However, by offering a way into critical thinking, this series hopes to begin to engage you in an activity which is productive, constructive and potentially life-changing.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* [1975: lecture course of 1927], trans. Albert Hofstadter, rev. ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- BT *Being and Time* [1927], trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- C *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* [1989, posthumously], trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- CPC *Country Path Conversations* [1944–45], trans. Bret W. Davis, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- D *Discourse on Thinking* [1955], trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- E *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* [4th edn 1971], trans. Keith Hoeller, New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- EP *The End of Philosophy* [1964], trans. Joan Stambaugh, London: Souvenir Press, 1975.
- GA *Gesamtausgabe [Collected Works, various years]* Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1975–.
- H *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* [1979: lecture course of 1925], trans. Theodore Kisiel, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

- Heb 'Hebel – Friend of the House' [1957], trans. Bruce V. Foltz and Michael Heim, *Contemporary German Philosophy* 3 (1983): 89–101.
- Her (with Eugen Fink) *Heraclitus Seminar* [1970], trans. Charles H. Seibert, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
- HK 'Der Herkunft der Kunst und Die Bestimmung des Denkens' [1967], in *Distanz und Nähe: Reflexionen und Analysen zur Kunst der Gegenwart*, ed. Petra Jaeger and Rudolf Lütke, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1983, pp. 11–22.
- IM *Introduction to Metaphysics* [1983: lecture course of 1929–30], trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Ist *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'* [1984: lecture course of 1942], trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Log 'Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)' [1951], in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, New York: Harper & Row, 1975, pp. 59–78.
- N *Nietzsche* [Various years], 4 vols., trans. David Farrell Krell, and (vol. 4) Frank A. Capuzzi, New York: Harper & Row, 1979–82.
- O *Off the Beaten Track* [1935–46], ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Only 'Only a God Can Save Us' [1966], in Richard Wolin (ed.) *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993, pp. 91–116.
- P *Pathmarks* [1967], trans. Frank A. Capuzzi *et al.*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Par *Parmenides* [1982: lecture course of 1942–43], trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Pet Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought* [Various years], trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- PR *The Principle of Reason* [1957], trans. Reginald Lilly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- QCT *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays* [Various years], trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

- Rec 'The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts' [1945], trans. Karsten Harries, *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1985): 479–502.
- Self 'The Self-Assertion of the German University' [1933], trans. William S. Lewis, in Wolin ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, pp. 29–39.
- TB *On Time and Being* [1969], trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- WL *On the Way to Language* [1957], trans. Peter D. Hertz, San Francisco, Ca.: Harper & Row, 1971.
- WT *What Is Called Thinking* [1954], trans. J. Glenn Gray, New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

WHY HEIDEGGER?

Martin Heidegger is the hidden master of modern thought. His influence on thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century, though often unspoken, is all pervasive, especially in that *mélange* in the humanities known curiously as 'theory'. Heidegger's work touches the deepest, usually unconsidered assumptions of all work of thought, forming a reassessment of the drive to knowledge itself. In the second half of the twentieth century it was often under Heidegger's direct or indirect influence that the traditional view that intellectual and scientific inquiry, the search for truth, is inherently disinterested, or even critical of unwarranted forms of authority, gave way to arguments that the drive to know is often compromised by elements of domination and control. Heidegger died in 1976 at the age of eighty-six, and his work has become even more prominent since that time, especially in continental Europe where the decline of Marxism has brought Heidegger's radical critique of Western thought to a new prominence.

Heidegger's thinking concerns things so fundamental that those coming to Heidegger for the first time should be warned that the bases of just about everything they think, assume, or take for granted are at stake in his texts. Imagine that the whole of Western thought, since the time of the first philosophers in ancient Greece, has been in the grip of a prejudice affecting all its aspects and even what seems self-evident. This is something so deep and all-pervasive that it should not even be called a

prejudice if that word implies choice and individual misjudgement rather than an unavoidable heritage into which people are born and receive their most seemingly immediate sense of themselves. This is Heidegger's massive claim, and his view of 'Western metaphysics' as being constituted in terms that call for 'deconstruction' since became amplified in the work of the French thinker Jacques Derrida (1930–2004).

Heidegger's thinking is both a profound philosophy and a radical critique of the fundamental assumptions of modernity, understanding 'modernity' with the critic Lawrence E. Cahoon as:

The positive self-image modern Western culture has often given to itself, a picture born in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment ... of a civilization founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous self-controlled work, creating a better material, political and intellectual life for all.

(Cahoon 1996: 12)

Heidegger is deeply reactionary in the proper, not necessarily condemning sense of the word. His thinking aligns him with those who 'see modernity instead as a movement of ethnic and class domination, European imperialism, anthropocentrism, the destruction of nature, the dissolution of community and tradition, the rise of alienation, the death of individuality in bureaucracy' (ibid.). Although the term post-dates him, Heidegger is also a major thinker of 'globalization'.

Heidegger was a philosopher who gave supreme importance to some poetic texts. He retained, however, a philosopher's contempt for the field of literary criticism, with its mix of moralism and amateur philosophizing. If the literary takes on a new importance for Heidegger, it is because his thinking also disputes what 'philosophy' has always meant since classical Greece. In Reiner Schürmann's words:

The responsibility traditionally incumbent on the philosopher, his true mission, consisted in securing ultimate referents or principles. Whether he analyzed substance and its attributes or consciousness and its intentional acts, he spoke as the expert on deep anchorage: an anchorage that guaranteed meaning in discourse, soundness of mind, objectivity of knowledge, value of life, if not possible redemption from infractions.

(Schürmann 1990: 286)

Heidegger pulls up the anchor. Against the aggressive drive of human reason to justify and understand human existence by reference to its authority alone, Heidegger insists on the limits and fragility of human knowledge.

Pervading all of Heidegger's work is an intense sense of crisis, of living at a grimly decisive time for the future of humanity. This sense grew initially out of the collapse and humiliation of Germany after its defeat in the First World War. Heidegger's response was one shared by many Germans at the time, a sense of the utter bankruptcy of the old civilized values and modes of life. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), who was to become Heidegger's most famous student, remembers the immense shock of first encountering Heidegger's teaching in the 1920s:

A generation shattered by the collapse of an epoch wanted to begin completely anew; it did not want to retain anything that had formerly been held valid. Even in the intensification of the German language that took place in its concepts, Heidegger's thought seemed to defy any comparison with what philosophy had previously meant.

(Gadamer 1994: 69)

Heidegger's thinking embraced not just the philosophical and social crisis of Germany at this time, but became a powerful reassessment of the most basic values and assumptions of Western civilization since ancient Greece. Gadamer describes the massive impact of Heidegger in lectures which encompassed ancient Greek thought and contemporary issues within the same powerful overview: 'It was like a new breakthrough into the unknown that posed something radically new as compared with all the movements and countermovements of the Christian Occident' (Gadamer 1994: 69). While other thinkers of crisis from this time, such as Oswald Spengler and his once famous *The Decline of the West* (1918), have become of merely historical interest, Heidegger's thought retains an impact which is still working itself out.

Many intellectual positions often labelled 'postmodern' inhabit the space opened up by Heidegger's attacks on the absolutism of modernity's drive to know. Heidegger's effect has been to release a sense of the fragility of the grounds of human thought, art and culture generally, an effect reinforced by the influence of Heidegger's most famous

follower, Jacques Derrida. It is ironic therefore that neither would endorse the relativism associated with the slogan 'postmodern' to the extent of abandoning the claims of truth and objectivity, by arguing, for example, that modern physics is no more valid or invalid than ancient Chinese astronomy, or that philosophy, science and religion all need to be thus 'relativized' as 'cultural constructs' (see Derrida 1999: 77–79; Polt 1999: 71–72, 103–6). Both are concerned to take received modes of philosophizing and thought to their limits, yet not with a view to merely discrediting or making them all on a level, but to trace the deepest assumptions of Western thought, its margins and boundaries, opening themselves in the process to what other modes of being and thinking, if any, might be conceived beyond it.

It is in this context that Heidegger turned to the poetic, not merely as one cultural discourse among others, or as an arena for competing historical forces, but as a singular mode of 'truth' and 'knowledge', meaning these no longer in the sense these have in philosophy or science traditionally understood, but precisely as modes of thought closed off and repressed by the Western tradition.

It is customary in a brief introduction like this to cover the biography of the thinker at issue. This is an approach Heidegger himself despised as a way of evading the one thing that matters in any thinker, the life of their thought. In any case, except for one issue, Heidegger's biography is pedestrian reading. He was born of a provincial Catholic family in Messkirch, in Swabia, Southern Germany in 1889. He turned from being trained as a cleric to the sciences and mathematics and then to philosophy, becoming the star pupil and then main follower of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), founder of the school known as 'phenomenology'. Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927), on which his reputation was largely based, is dedicated to Husserl, whose thought it nonetheless drastically undercuts. Heidegger became Husserl's successor, living the uneventful, slightly self-enclosed life of a professor of philosophy at Freiburg. He never left for long his native area of Germany, to which he felt deeply attached. He was buried in his home town in 1976.

The one exception to this uneventful story threatens to remain better known than anything of Heidegger's thought itself. In 1933, a few months after it had come to power in Germany, Heidegger joined the Nazi party. From 1933 to 1934 he gave the Nazis his support as rector of Freiburg University. The extent of Heidegger's involvement