

Places and Non-Places, Being and Non-Being: Main Ideas Developed from the German Idealism

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Abstract:

German Idealism profoundly impacted various fields, including philosophy, politics, and aesthetics. Its ideas influenced subsequent philosophical movements, such as existentialism and phenomenology. In philosophical discourse, one finds many perspectives that delve into the intricate relationship between human existence and the spaces we inhabit. Among these renowned thinkers, two voices emerge: Martin Heidegger and Marc Augé's who share parallel ideas concerning the absence of meaning, disorientation, loss of authenticity, and the impact of modernity on human experience. Both perspectives invite us to reflect on our existence, our spaces, and the deeper connections we seek in a rapidly changing world.

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What does German Idealism mean, actually? It refers to a philosophical movement in Germany during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is characterized by its emphasis on the primacy of the mind and the role of reason in understanding reality. Immanuel Kant sought to reconcile the rationalist and empiricist traditions.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a towering figure in German Idealism, not only developed but also expanded upon Kant's ideas. His exploration of concepts such as absolute Idealism and the dialectical method is a testament to his intellectual prowess and enduring influence. McQuillan is of the opinion that

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He continues to affirm the distinction between theory and practice and so replicates the same structural division between philosophy and the actual world proposed by those he criticises. In this way, Kant, in the terms of *The German Ideology*, remains an exemplary German theorist and the Young Hegelians may as well be Young Kantians. (McQuillan 2007: 250)

Hegel and other philosophers argued that reality is ultimately a product of the mind's activity and that human consciousness shapes the world.

Brigitte Sassen explains that *Critique of Pure Reason*, written by Immanuel Kant, is a system called *Transcendental Idealism*. It refers to the exercise of the understanding, without necessarily instructing it, and, thus, often leading to exhaustion, but aiding "them from time to time with well-chosen examples or rewarding them with unexpected and generally useful inferences." In order to complete the world system entirely, Idealism ought to encompass the spirit and matter in the same manner and matter and to transform the man and the objects in this world into *representations*, as stated by Sassen,

and lets all objects arise from appearances by having understanding connect them in one series of experience and having reason attempt, necessarily although unsuccessfully, to extend and unify them into one full and complete world system. (Sassen 2000: 53)

The cognition results from "certain modifications of ourselves," and eventually, they are called sensations. The man cannot explain the way they occur or cause. One cannot explain if they inhere as an actual thing or if the "actual things that exist independently of us, predicate of either the one or the other". We could assume these are objects because the moment we decide to talk about ourselves is when we talk about our bodies, these being an actual thing, and we naturally decide to make judgments about them. Man is able to make these judgments because we all have common features, so one can sense similarities, even when we choose to believe we are different. "What allows us to do so is that the various appearances have something in common. In view of this commonality, they unify themselves with one another and differentiate themselves from what we call *ourselves*." Eventually, intuitions are taken "outer sense as things and events outside of us" as they can occur "beside each other in a certain space and follow each

other in a certain time.” This allows us to represent ourselves “in some place and at some time.” (*Ibidem*)

In this sense, time and space cannot represent abstract concepts since “space and time themselves are not something actual outside of us. Rather, they are subjective laws of our representative capacity, forms of sensation, and subjective conditions of sensible intuition.” Subsequently, the concept of understanding creates objects out of “sensible appearances” that can be “distinguished from other representations only through the subjective condition that space and time are combined with them.” The alterations of our soul are unified through the multiplicity of its minor successive alterations and turned into sensations. “It is what then combines these complete sensations in time in such a manner that they follow each other as cause and effect.” The composure and solidity of actual things are attained through an appointed place in infinite time. By introducing an additional connection, simultaneous objects can be differentiated, standing in reciprocal “causal relations to one another, from successive objects, where one is dependent on the other in a one-sided fashion only.” (*Ibidem* 54)

Nature is created in the proper sense, and the laws of nature are determined in accord with its own by bringing together the “regularity of succession and reciprocity into sensible intuitions.” “The laws of understanding are older than the appearances to which they are applied.” Four main functions and concepts depend on understanding the author’s work further: quality, quantity, relation, and modality. Each one of these encompasses “simpler concepts.” Combining these concepts with the representations of time and space can generate the “principles of experiential knowledge.” These concepts are “principles of logic and ontology expressed in accord with the author’s idealist restrictions.” The criticism can, thus, be obtained independently of the “author’s transcendental idealism.” (*Ibidem*)

Therefore, the result of all these processes is noted by the author as follows:

The right use of pure understanding is to apply its concepts to sensible appearances to form experience through their combination, and that it is a misuse of understanding, and an undertaking that will never succeed, to try

to infer from concepts the existence and properties of those objects that we can never experience. (*Ibidem*)

German Idealism profoundly impacted various fields, including philosophy, politics, and aesthetics. Its ideas influenced subsequent philosophical movements, such as existentialism and phenomenology. German Idealism also significantly shaped German intellectual and cultural history, and its legacy can still be felt in contemporary philosophical discourse. Overall, German Idealism remains a significant and influential movement within the history of philosophy.

In philosophical discourse, one finds many perspectives that delve into the intricate relationship between human existence and the spaces we inhabit. Among these renowned thinkers, two voices emerge distinctively: Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher whose groundbreaking work on Being and Time delves into the profound meaning of being-in-the-world, and Marc Augé, the French anthropologist who explores the dichotomy of places and non-places in our contemporary society.

Martin Heidegger, one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, explored the concept of being and non-being in his existentialist philosophy. Heidegger's approach to these concepts can be understood through his notion of "Being" and his critique of traditional metaphysics. This essay explores Heidegger's philosophy, delving into his critique of traditional metaphysics, his concept of Being, and the essential role of non-being in shaping our understanding of existence. To quote Heidegger,

Giving way, as taking a direction, belongs essentially to Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Dasein is always somehow directed [ausgerichtet] and on its way; standing and waiting are only limiting cases of this directional 'on-its-way'. The sign addresses itself to a Being-in-the-world which is specifically 'spatial'. (Heidegger 1962: 110)

According to Heidegger, the Western philosophical tradition, particularly metaphysics, has neglected the fundamental question of being. He argues that philosophers have focused on beings² but have failed to

² entities that exist.

examine the nature of Being itself, which is the ground of all beings. Heidegger believes that Being is not simply a property or attribute of beings but rather the dynamic process through which beings come into existence and manifest themselves. Okoro states that

The Being that Heidegger speaks of is not any particular being; it is not this or that being. Unlike Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, by Being, Heidegger does not refer to God, who incidentally is regarded as the being of beings. Heidegger discusses a primordial ground that sustains all other grounds, including God. (Okoro 2011: 117)

Recall that Heidegger criticized Descartes for equating metaphysics with the roots of the tree, for referring to metaphysics as the science of the roots; the fallout of such criticism is to locate the ground from metaphysics, takes its roots, and also garners nourishment. Heidegger considers the location of this ground from which metaphysics and every other thing derive source and garners nourishment as the “overcoming of metaphysics” or, in a more technical sense, Fundamental Ontology. (*Ibidem*)

Heidegger asserts that the human experience of being is characterized by an inherent awareness of non-being. Non-being refers to the possibility of not existing, the nothingness surrounding and underlying our existence. Heidegger argues that our awareness of non-being gives meaning to our being. We are constantly confronted with the finitude of our existence and the possibility of our non-existence, which shapes our understanding of who we are and how we relate to the world.

Heidegger and Hegel criticize traditional metaphysics, particularly the philosophy of René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, for reducing Being to a mere object of knowledge and treating it as a separate entity from beings. He argues that this objectification of Being has led to a distorted understanding of reality and a loss of our authentic relationship with the world. In the view of Sartre,

According to Hegel the Other is an object, and I apprehend myself as an object in the Other. But the one of these affirmations destroys the other. In order for me to be able to appear to myself as an object in the Other, I would have to apprehend the Other as a subject; that is, to apprehend him

in his interiority. But in so far as the Other appears to me as object, my objectivity for him cannot appear to me. (Sartre 1969: 327-328)

Instead, Heidegger proposes a more existential approach to understanding being. He suggests that being-in-the-world (Dasein) is a fundamental mode of existence. Dasein refers to our unique mode of being as human beings, characterized by our capacity for self-awareness, intentionality, and engagement with the world. Being-in-the-world involves a holistic understanding of our existence as inseparable from our everyday experiences, relationships, and the context in which we find ourselves. Quoting Heidegger,

And what is that wherein Dasein as Being-in-the-world understands itself pre-ontologically? In understanding a context of relations such as we have mentioned, Dasein has assigned itself to an ‘in-order-to’ [Um-zu], and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is – one which it may have seized upon either explicitly or tacitly, and which may be either authentic or inauthentic. This ‘in-order-to’ prescribes a ‘towards-this’ as possible ‘in-which’ for letting something be involved; and the structure of letting it be involved implies that this is an involvement which something has – an involvement which is with something. (Heidegger 1962: 119)

Martin Heidegger’s statement, as presented above, reflects his profound exploration of the nature of Dasein, or human existence, as it engages with the world.

Heidegger begins by questioning what constitutes the pre-ontological understanding of Dasein as Being-in-the-world. It signifies an exploration into the fundamental nature of human existence before formal ontological analysis.

The “context of relations” refers to the intricate network of connections and interdependencies that characterize human existence. Heidegger emphasizes the importance of understanding Dasein in the context of these relations.

The term “Being-in-the-world” underscores Heidegger’s rejection of the Cartesian dualism that separates the self from the external world. Dasein is inherently intertwined with the world, and its understanding of itself is inseparable from this interconnectedness.

Heidegger introduces the “in-order-to” (Um-zu) concept as a critical aspect of Dasein’s understanding. It suggests that Dasein assigns itself a purpose or goal in relation to its potentiality-for-Being. The potentiality-for-Being signifies the inherent capacity of Dasein to become and unfold in various ways. He also introduces the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity in how Dasein assigns itself an “in-order-to.” The authenticity of this assignment reflects a genuine self-understanding, while inauthenticity suggests a deviation from one’s true potentiality-for-being. The “in-order-to” prescribes a “towards-this” as a possible “in-which” for letting something be involved. This intricate structure suggests a purposeful orientation towards specific goals or objectives, defining how Dasein engages with the world.

The statement highlights that involvement implies a connection or relationship with something. It stresses that Dasein’s existence is characterized by being with something in the world, reinforcing human existence’s interconnectedness and relational nature.

To conclude, Heidegger’s statement delves into the existential dimensions of human being, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between Dasein and its world. The concepts of “in-order-to,” potentiality-for-Being, authenticity, and involvement contribute to Heidegger’s exploration of the profound meaning embedded in the fabric of human existence.

Being is not separate from beings; rather, it encompasses the dynamic interplay between beings and their existence.

Dasein, a key concept in Heidegger’s philosophy, refers to human existence as experienced in the world. Heidegger explores Dasein to understand the nature of being. Dasein is an individual and an entity engaged in the world with a sense of self-awareness, time, and an inherent understanding of its mortality. Heidegger argues that understanding Dasein’s existential conditions can give us insights into the meaning of being and existence. In the words of Heidegger,

If Dasein is ontically constituted by Being-in-the-World, and if an understanding of the world – a pre-ontological understanding, which indeed can and does get along without explicit ontological insights? With those entities which are encountered within-the-world – that is to say, with

their character as within-the-world – does not something like the world show itself for concerned Being-in-the-world? (Heidegger 1962: 102)

Heidegger emphasizes the importance of “being-towards-death” as a central aspect of our existence. He argues that our awareness of our mortality and the inevitability of death is what drives us to confront the authentic possibilities of our existence and make meaningful choices. By acknowledging our finitude, we can transcend superficial distractions and societal expectations and strive for a more authentic and meaningful way of being. It is through our confrontation with non-being that we derive meaning and significance in our being. The awareness of our mortality and the potentiality of non-existence shape our understanding of ourselves and influences our choices and actions.

Heidegger perceives “being-towards-death” as a central concept in understanding Dasein’s existence. By acknowledging the inevitability of death, individuals gain a heightened awareness of their own existence. This awareness shapes one’s choices, values, and authentic engagement with life. Being-towards-death serves as a catalyst for authenticity, pushing individuals to confront the temporality of existence and live more purposefully, recognizing the finite nature of their being. In Heidegger’s view, embracing the reality of death allows for a deeper understanding of authentic living and a more profound connection with the meaning of being.

In summary, Heidegger’s notion of being and non-being goes beyond traditional metaphysics by emphasizing the importance of our existential experience and our awareness of our finitude. Being, for Heidegger, is not a static entity but a dynamic process through which beings come into existence. Our awareness of non-being and our capacity for self-awareness and engagement with the world shape our understanding of being and give meaning to our existence.

As we venture into Augé’s anthropological inquiry, we encounter a thought-provoking shift in our understanding of the spaces we inhabit. While Heidegger highlights the importance of seeking the profound meaning within our existential existence, Augé urges us to examine the impersonal landscapes of our modern society critically. Martin Heidegger and Marc Augé, though they belong to different intellectual traditions, share a common concern for understanding the nature of human existence in the

modern world. Heidegger delves into the depths of existential meaning, emphasizing the search for profound significance in our lives. In contrast, Augé directs our attention to the impersonal landscapes of contemporary society, urging us to analyse the spaces we inhabit critically. In this text, the reader can explore and face the philosophical insights of Heidegger and Augé by shedding light on their distinct perspectives and the relevance of their ideas in comprehending the complexities of the human condition.

Martin Heidegger, a prominent figure in existential phenomenology, posits that the search for meaning is intrinsic to human existence. In his seminal work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that human beings are essentially “thrown” into the world, confronted with their own mortality, and compelled to make sense of their existence. He emphasizes the importance of embracing the authenticity of one’s being instead of succumbing to societal expectations and superficial pursuits.

According to Heidegger, modernity has led to a forgetfulness of our existential condition as individuals become entangled in the mundane affairs of everyday life. Heidegger contends that the relentless pursuit of technological advancements and material success distracts us from the profound questions that define our existence. Heidegger argues that by engaging in self-reflection and embracing our individuality, we can uncover the deeper meanings that give purpose to our lives.

Marc Augé shifts the focus from the individual’s internal struggle to the external landscapes of contemporary society. In his influential work *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Augé coined the term “non-places” to describe the anonymous and impersonal spaces characteristic of modernity—airports, shopping malls, highways, and other transit zones.

The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet’s refugees are parked. (Augé 1995: 34)

Augé contends that these non-places are devoid of genuine social interactions and meaningful connections. They are spaces of transit where

individuals are reduced to mere passengers, consumers, or spectators. According to Augé, hypermodern society is marked by a proliferation of these non-places, fostering a sense of disconnection and alienation among its inhabitants.

While Heidegger's focus is on the internal, Augé directs our attention to the external aspects of the human experience. Heidegger's call for authenticity and self-reflection finds resonance in Augé's critique of the superficial and alienating nature of modern spaces. Both philosophers, in their own ways, highlight the challenges the contemporary world poses to the quest for meaningful existence. Heidegger's solution lies in a return to the authenticity of being, a reconnection with our existential roots. Augé, on the other hand, urges us to confront and critique the impersonal landscapes that shape our daily lives. The convergence of their ideas suggests that the search for meaning is not only an individual endeavour but also a collective one that involves challenging and reshaping the structures of our modern society.

When delving into the complexities of the human condition, Heidegger and Augé offer complementary insights into the quest for meaning and connection. Heidegger's existential philosophy invites us to explore the profound depths of our own existence. At the same time, Augé's anthropological critique prompts us to critically examine the impersonal landscapes that shape our contemporary world. To quote Augé,

They are like the landscapes in which we regularly watch them playing out their moves: Texas, California, Washington, Moscow, the Elysée, Twickenham, the gruelling stages of the Tour de France or the Arabian desert; we may not know them personally, but we recognize them. (Augé 1995: 32)

Together, these perspectives provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the human experience, inviting us to reflect on the interplay between the internal and external dimensions of our lives in the pursuit of a more meaningful existence. Both perspectives invite us to contemplate the spaces and non-places, shedding light on our relationship with the environments we traverse, inhabit, and ultimately call home.

Marc Augé explores the concept of non-places and their significance in contemporary society. He introduces the idea that modernity has given

rise to spaces that lack identity, history, and social connections. These non-places, such as airports, shopping malls, and highways, have become emblematic of our globalized and homogenized world.

Augé argues that non-places are spaces of transience, where individuals pass through without forming meaningful relationships or connections. They are characterized by a lack of social interactions and a sense of anonymity. Non-places are designed for efficiency, aiming to provide quick and convenient services to many people. They are often standardized and generic, offering a similar experience regardless of geographical location.

In contrast to non-places, Augé emphasizes the importance of “places” in our lives. Places are defined by their historical, cultural, and social significance. They carry a sense of identity, memory, and attachment: “These places have at least three characteristics in common. They want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history.” (Augé 1995: 52)

Places are where individuals and communities gather, form connections, and cultivate a sense of belonging. Augé suggests that the decline of meaningful places in modern society has led to the rapid increase of non-places.

Augé’s analysis of non-places raises questions about the impact of globalization, mass consumerism, and the acceleration of everyday life. He argues that non-places represent a form of social alienation and a loss of human connection. The experience of moving through non-places is often disorienting, as individuals become mere consumers and transient passengers.

However, Augé also recognizes that non-places serve a purpose in contemporary society. They fulfil practical needs, such as transportation, consumption, and communication. Non-places are functional and efficient, catering to the demands of a fast-paced world. Augé suggests that non-places can be seen as both a product and a reflection of our supermodern society. He is of the opinion that

Supermodernity (which stems simultaneously from the three figures of excess: overabundance of events, spatial overabundance and the

individualization of references) naturally finds its full expression in non-places. (Augé 1995: 109)

By examining non-places, Augé invites us to reflect on the changing nature of our social and spatial experiences. He highlights the importance of preserving meaningful places and fostering a sense of community in an increasingly globalized and fragmented world. Augé's work critiques the dehumanizing aspects of modernity, urging us to reconsider the role of places and non-places in our lives and strive for more authentic and meaningful connections in our everyday experiences. As stated by him,

When these processions and observances disappear, their memory does not simply remind us, like other childhood memories, of the passage of time or the changing individual; they have effectively disappeared – or rather, they have been transformed: the feast is still celebrated from time to time, to do things the old way, just as a little threshing is done in the old way every summer. (Augé 1995: 55)

While Martin Heidegger's notion of non-being and Marc Augé's concept of non-places may initially appear distinct, they share some parallel ideas concerning the existential and social dimensions of human experience.

Heidegger's non-being refers to the awareness of our potential non-existence, the nothingness surrounding our being. Augé's non-places, on the other hand, are spaces free from identity, history, and social connections. Both concepts highlight a lack of meaning or significance. Non-being confronts us with the question of our existence's ultimate purpose, while non-places lack the depth and attachments found in meaningful places.

Heidegger emphasizes that our awareness of non-being generates existential anxiety, particularly in the face of our mortality. In the words of Heidegger,

In anxiety in the face of death, Dasein is brought face to face with itself as delivered over to that possibility which is not to be outstripped. The "they" concerns itself with transforming this anxiety into fear in the face of an oncoming event. In addition, the anxiety which has been made ambiguous as fear, is passed off as a weakness with which no self-assured Dasein may have any acquaintance. (Heidegger 1962: 298)

Heidegger's statement on anxiety, death, and the societal response encapsulates his existential perspective on the human condition.

Heidegger contends that in the face of death, Dasein (human existence) confronts an existential anxiety beyond the ordinary fear of death. This anxiety arises from the recognition that death is an inevitable aspect of human existence, and it confronts Dasein with its own vulnerability and mortality.

The notion that death is a possibility "not to be outstripped" emphasizes its inevitability. Heidegger challenges the tendency to evade or overlook the existential reality of death. Instead, he argues for a confrontation with this profound aspect of human existence.

Heidegger notes that societal forces, represented by the impersonal "they," attempt to transform the existential anxiety of death into a more conventional fear associated with a specific impending event. This transformation mitigates the unsettling nature of existential anxiety and renders it more manageable within societal norms.

Heidegger's reference to the "they" highlights the influence of societal norms and conventions on individual experiences. The "they" represents a collective, conformist mentality that seeks to standardize and normalize individual experiences, including the profound existential anxiety associated with death. To quote Heidegger,

The Others' whom one thus designates to cover up the fact of one's belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part 'are there' in everyday Being-with one-another. The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*man selbst*], not some people [*einige*], and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the "they" [*das Man*]. (Heidegger 1962: 164)

The statement suggests that the authentic experience of existential anxiety is often obscured by societal attempts to reframe it as fear. This transformation is accompanied by an implicit judgment that associates anxiety with weakness, portraying it as a quality that a self-assured Dasein should not acknowledge.

Heidegger's perspective challenges conventional societal responses to existential anxiety. By exposing the tendency to trivialize or deny the

authentic experience of anxiety, he encourages a deeper exploration of the existential dimensions of human existence.

To sum up, Heidegger's statement illuminates the tension between the authentic experience of existential anxiety and society's efforts to transform it into more conventional and manageable forms. It underscores the philosophical challenge of confronting fundamental aspects of human existence, such as death, in a culture that often seeks to suppress or simplify these profound experiences.

Similarly, Augé argues that non-places provoke disorientation and a sense of alienation. Both notions evoke feelings of unease and challenge our sense of self and connection to the world.

For Heidegger, authentic existence involves confronting the finitude of life and making meaningful choices. Augé contends that non-places are spaces of transience and anonymity, lacking genuine human connections. Both perspectives highlight the loss of authenticity and the erosion of deep interpersonal relationships in contemporary society.

Augé's non-places are emblematic of the globalized and homogenized world of supermodernity, where spaces become standardized and lack cultural specificity. As stated by Augé,

Supermodernity, though, makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity. History and exociticism play the same role in it as the 'quotations' in a written text: a status superbly expressed in travel agency catalogues. In the non-places of supermodernity, there is always a specific position (in the window, on a poster, to the right of the aircraft, on the left of the motorway) for 'curiosities' presented as such: pineapples from the Ivory Coast; Venice – city of the Doges; the Tangier Kasbah; the site of Alesia. (Augé 1995: 110)

Similarly, Heidegger critiques modernity for reducing being to a mere object of knowledge, resulting in a loss of individuality and an increasing homogeneity in our understanding of existence.

Both non-being and non-places represent a transformation of human experience. Non-being challenges traditional metaphysical understandings of being, emphasizing its dynamic nature and existential significance. Non-

places, in contrast to meaningful places, reflect the changing nature of spatial experiences in a globalized and fast-paced world.

In summary, while Martin Heidegger's non-being and Marc Augé's non-places may originate from different philosophical contexts, they share parallel ideas concerning the absence of meaning, disorientation, loss of authenticity, and the impact of modernity on human experience. Both perspectives invite us to reflect on our existence, the spaces we inhabit, and the deeper connections we seek in a rapidly changing world.

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