

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESENTATION

First I'm going to mention three points about the Preplatonic philosopher Parmenides. The similarity between him and Descartes will help follow into Descartes's position.

Parmenides considers that sensory perception is not the way to truth because appearances can deceive us.

To get at the Truth, it can only be known through reason, that is, the intellect.

And finally, Parmenides holds the presumption that unchange is the essence of the world.

So the three substances of Cartesian ontology are the world, the mind, and god.

Now, here is the argument that Descartes gives to show that essence lies in extension.

(i) All essence is unchanging and constant throughout. This is the prejudice he acquires from tradition. So he presupposes this bias which tells him what to look for.

(ii) All phenomena reveal attributes that are prone to change.

(iii) Therefore, phenomenal attributes are not essential. The attributes we see are malleable and because they are *not* stable, they are not essential.

(iv) Number four, all entities in the world inevitably occupy space, they are extended things.

(v) Thus, the only unchanging constant of the world is extension. Extension is inseparably everywhere in the world.

(vi) And lastly, therefore, extension is the essence of the world.

In the example Descartes gives for his argument, he uses a piece of wax to show that the attributes of the piece of wax can change – by changing the temperature of the wax, the location of the piece of wax, etcetera. But what remains inextricably tied to the piece of wax is the fact that it occupies space – or, in other words, that it's an extended thing.

Now, I'm going to give another example, one that compares the world of extension to the agent's mind. Imagine yourself, trying to draw a perfect circle or even a line. There's going to be these imperfections in the circle and these imperfections in the line when you try to draw them. However, our mind can imagine a perfect circle, I can bring a perfect circle to mind and so can anyone I'm communicating with. So these mental circles are not subject to the imperfections of the world. And something such as the mind, an unextended thing, is able to conceive of perfect shapes because it is of *another* substance. And in this way the substance of mind is somewhat elevated over extended-matter.

Heidegger provides three criticisms of Descartes.

The first criticism is that Descartes has a bias toward substantiating the unchanging and eternal. This bias is something that he presupposes in his ontological study, and it sort of *forces* him toward a particular solution, instead of allowing the object of study to shape the method as needed.

Now, as Descartes's bias says, if that which *enduringly* remains, really is, and also if the entities of mathematics are therefore those *which always are what they are*, then it seems that abstract, conceptual thinking would be the appropriate means toward the truth of the world. In other words, the static and flawless way that mathematic is, with its perfect circles, aligns itself with the kind of static way Descartes requires essence to be, that is, something unchanging.

So this is the second criticism. That Descartes's inappropriate method of access to *Being* is founded on the bias of first criticism. This bias grants Descartes access to entities as substance. Entities wouldn't be considered in this way if Descartes didn't have such an expectation to find essence in the unchanging.

And the final criticism Heidegger has: when Descartes uses his concept of substance, he uses it in a very ambiguous manner. There is the substance in entities as extension, the substance of the agent as the imperfect mind, and the substance of god as a kind of more perfect mind. And Heidegger says, the expression *substantia* functions sometimes with a signification which is ontological, sometimes with one which is ontical.

The ontic usage of the term substance is one in which the agent attempts to study the *entities* in the world and gets its notion of substance by saying that the constant of the world is extension. The ontological relation is one in which the agent understands its mind as an imperfect part of a perfect god.

According to Heidegger, Descartes's hierarchically distinct uses of substance are not explicitly explained nor justified.

So on the comparative chart on the other paper there are some differences between Heidegger and Descartes.

In terms of methods, Heidegger employs the phenomenological method which is an interpretive method which forms itself to be most appropriate for the subject matter – to let things those show themselves, honestly, as they are.

Whereas, for Descartes, he has this rational method where he presupposes a structure before engaging the subject matter, and in the end, forces that structure into the conclusion of his deduction.

In terms of essence, Heidegger equates essence to existence, or our *relation* with the world as beings in the world. Whereas, for Descartes, his prejudice is so inclined to believe that essence ought to be found in the unchanging.

For the Heideggerian ontology, the way that a subject and an object relate is through readiness-to-hand. Whereas, for Descartes, entities in the world are just kind of side-by-side, both present-at-hand, and he doesn't establish a convincing subject object relationship.

In Heidegger's case we are oriented in existential space; whereas in Descartes's case with have Cartesian space.

And from these, we can see that agency for Heidegger is an embodied being-in-the-world, whereas for the Cartesian ontology, it is a disembodied, transcendent mind.

There's an example Heidegger gives about hardness to contrast his perspective with that of Descartes. For Heidegger, you need a body in order to feel something as hard. Heidegger says, hardness and resistance do not

show themselves at all unless an entity has the kind of Being which Dasein – or at least something living – possesses.

So you need an embodied agency that is interacting with the world, in a ready at hand sort of manner, in order to be able to experience things such as hardness. On the other hand, Descartes is led to think of hardness as an objective thing that does not require the experience of an agent.

Descartes takes hardness as something foremost present-at-hand, not something encountered through the ready-to-hand.

In Heidegger's words, when the experience of hardness is interpreted in the Cartesian way, the kind of being which belongs to sensory perception is obliterated, so is any possibility that the entities encountered in such a perception should be grasped *in their* being.

Indifferent analysis of entities does away with the primacy of any subject object relation, a relation required for experience to even begin.

In the Cartesian perspective of the world, things are just these indifferent physical, extended entities; whereas for Heidegger there has to be a concern, not this indifference, there has to be a concerned involvement with the world.

In the last quote, taken from a previous section, – readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are in themselves are defined ontologico-categorially. Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand is there anything ready-to-hand.

Obviously, there has to be an objective world out there for us to have anything to experience. Before humans existed, there was a world out there without anyone experiencing that world. But from a perspective of a something living, like Dasein, obviously the primacy of experiencing the world is that of engaging the world personally, and that is what gives us these mental qualities such as hardness. These qualities do not indifferently exist in themselves – they exist *in* our interaction with the world.

So the often used situation, if a tree falls in the forest does it make a sound? – It does produce objective disruptions of the air, but note of this information makes sense. In a physicalist description, those material disruptions are there, but for an entity like Dasein, such qualities like the perspective, subject oriented qualities found in sound must be explained in terms of Dasein, and can only be substantially understood in mentalistic terms, not in physicalistic terms.

From this, it seems to me that Heidegger is an emergent materialist in the sense that he believes that mental explanations of subjective experience cannot be reduced to indifferent, scientific explanations.

Heidegger ends section twenty-one with a few questions that he leaves planned to answer in the unwritten third part of division one. Mainly, he asks, why has this prejudice to substantiate the unchanging persisted in philosophy.

However, there is a way we can explain why this prejudice has existed. Looking ahead to a concept Heidegger will introduce, the idea of fleeing in the face of death explains this desire to substantiate the unchanging. Someone would feel more comfortable believing that they have an immortal soul than believing that they are transient. Humans don't want to lose their identity. This belief in an eternal, unchanging soul is a way people have repressed their fear of death.