

University Honors Program Research Project

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Heidegger: The Magic Empiricist

Abstract:

Amidst the waves of analysis concerning Martin Heidegger and his work, there have been few who have argued that Heidegger is an empiricist, one who believes that we gain knowledge primarily through experience. However, through reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and comparison of his ideas with those of the empiricist William James, I have found that Heidegger investigates the nature of human existence with a decidedly empirical method, and also that he describes humans as beings who understand themselves empirically. Ergo, I argue in this essay that Heidegger is indeed an empiricist, and that there is a potent empirical alliance between Heidegger and others like William James. This alliance is one which could bring back to the discipline of philosophy a focus on issues which deeply affect our experience and which have a significant impact on how we live our lives.

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Heidegger the Magic Empiricist

Reeves Jordan

You are only coming through in waves

Your lips move, but I can't hear what you're saying

I have become comfortably numb

– Pink Floyd

Abstract

Amidst the waves of analysis concerning Martin Heidegger and his work, there have been few who have argued that Heidegger is an empiricist, one who believes that we gain knowledge primarily through experience. However, through reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and comparison of his ideas with those of the empiricist William James, I have found that Heidegger investigates the nature of human existence with a decidedly empirical method, and also that he describes humans as beings who understand themselves empirically. Ergo, I argue in this essay that Heidegger is indeed an empiricist, and that there is a potent empirical alliance between Heidegger and others like William James. This alliance is one which could bring back to the discipline of philosophy a focus on issues which deeply affect our experience and which have a significant impact on how we live our lives.

As I set out to write this essay, a great fear envelops me. I am merely a student, after all; what chance is there that I am fit to speak on vital matters of philosophy? Is there not far more that I should know? This fear is heightened by the fact that my people, philosophers, often produce an unfortunately significant amount of bullshit, both the kind where we say things that are not true and the kind where we are not clear enough for the reader to determine what the hell is going on in the first place.¹

Philosophers have a penchant for complexity, which makes sense, as we have chosen a profession which requires chasing ideas down rabbit trails full-time. We like to make up new words, we like to redefine old words, we like to categorize and differentiate, categorize and differentiate, ad nauseam. Furthermore, these things that we do are necessary; the universe is complex sometimes, and we have taken it upon ourselves to make sense of the universe as much as we can.

Sadly, we get lost in our complexity from time to time. When we use jargon that is thoroughly inaccessible to our readers, when we remove ourselves from reality so much that we begin to count pins on the heads of angels, then we lose ourselves. What is the use of philosophy if it has no effect on life? Little, I believe. And when we remove ourselves into the wilderness of the completely abstract, then we begin to write bullshit, either because our statements are not true, when checked with reality, or because they are too abstruse for our readers to even begin to make sense of them. Meanwhile our readers,

¹ See Harry Frankfurt's *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) for a lucid discussion of how bullshit plagues us in manifest ways.

lulled into indifferent sleep by the fact that they cannot penetrate our conceptual-jargon-talk and they have no reason to try to, become comfortably numb.

What is the remedy for our malaise? I believe that if we begin to write clearly about matters that have connection to how real people live their real lives, we will find ourselves again. So despite this fear of mine, this fear that I will produce just another empty essay in the storied tradition of philosophical bullshit, I will attempt to do something better. I do not know if I will succeed; I figure it is worth a shot.

I would like to convince you, in the next fifteen pages, that Martin Heidegger is an empiricist. First, let us define *empiricism*. I will use Margaret Atherton's helpful descriptions in defining the concept. Atherton says first that empiricism is a doctrine in which "there are no mental contents that cannot be derived from sensation or reflection."² This pointedly does not include intuition as a means of gaining "mental contents," that is to say, knowledge. After all, intuition, the "just knowing" of something, would be knowledge that occurs before any element other than the individual and his or her mind enter the picture, and therefore as Peter Markie says is "knowledge gained independently of sense experience."³

Atherton also says that empiricism assumes "that knowledge is advanced through experience."⁴ This will exclude purely abstract and purely logical ways of thinking from the possibility of producing knowledge, for these, like intuition, are modes of forming knowledge which are contained in the mind alone. With intuition and pure logic

² Margaret Atherton, Introduction to *The Empiricists: Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), viii.

³ Peter Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2008 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta.

⁴ Atherton, viii.

excluded, which together make up the core of empiricism's ideological foe rationalism,⁵ what we are left with is the belief that anything that we know is developed from what we learn from the world around us, that is to say, from our *experience*.

I have one more preliminary note in the way of introducing the contents of my essay. I have a second major player, the empiricist William James, who I will include in the last few pages as an ally to Heidegger in this project of empiricism. I would like to show how both Heidegger and James are up to things that can make philosophy real again. But first I will show why Heidegger is an empiricist.

I

We have to begin by understanding Heidegger's project, method and language. I will focus my essay exclusively on Heidegger's beliefs as expressed in *Being and Time*, his magnum opus.

The project of *Being and Time* is to uncover, understand and describe being, *human* being in particular.⁶ The word that Heidegger uses for human being is *Dasein*,⁷ which as Michael Inwood points out, is simply the German *da* (there, then, since, etc.) affixed to *sein* (being), meaning "to be there, present, available, to exist," a sort of *there-being*.⁸

Heidegger's method for understanding *Dasein* is phenomenological. *Phenomenology* is what Heidegger calls "the science of *phenomena*," the word *phenomena* being Greek for everything that could appear to us, what Heidegger calls "the

⁵ Markie.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 19.

⁷ *Ibid*, 32.

⁸ Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 42.

totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to the light.”⁹ Furthermore, phenomenology is opposed to understanding phenomena through abstraction that is divorced from reality, and instead seeks to understand phenomena *as it is*. Heidegger describes it thus:

The term ‘phenomenology’ expresses a maxim which can be formulated as ‘To the things themselves!’ It is opposed to all free-floating constructions...it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated...‘phenomenology’ means...to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”¹⁰

Furthermore, as Hubert Dreyfus has noted, Heidegger is not interested in investigating *everything*, like dogs and balloons and chairs and so forth; he is interested in phenomena which require work to be shown, which are not naturally revealed, which are hidden.¹¹ For Heidegger, Dasein is just such a phenomenon, for who among us understands human being? In our abstraction about Being, Heidegger says, we have removed ourselves even farther from any real understanding.¹² Heidegger’s hope is to apply the phenomenological method to *ontology*, the study of being,¹³ for “Phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.*”¹⁴

⁹ Ibid, 50-51.

¹⁰ Ibid, 50, 58.

¹¹ Dreyfus, 32.

¹² Heidegger, 24.

¹³ See Macquarrie and Robinson, translators’ footnote on page 31: “Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with *Being*.”

¹⁴ Heidegger, 60.

Heidegger's language for describing Dasein is colorful, specialized, and largely composed of new words. There are many dozens of Heideggerian terms that I do not have time to explain, but there is time enough to look at three. The most crucial for this essay will be the concept of *Being-in-the-world*, which is what Heidegger declares to be the fact that we find ourselves unavoidably enmeshed in the world around us, "[alongside] the world in the sense of being absorbed in the world."¹⁵ A second major concept is *potentiality-for-Being*, the fact that it is central to our existence to seek new possibilities as part of our dynamic being, for "Dasein is the possibility of Being-free *for* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being."¹⁶ This potentiality-for-Being means that we are averse to removing ourselves from our cycle of continual investment in possibilities in order to understand our being, for "Dasein comports itself towards it [its Being]...even if this is only the mode of fleeing *in the face of it* and forgetfulness *thereof*."¹⁷

A third major concept is *care*. Because we are potentiality-for-Being, and because we are Being-in-the-world, we always exist in a relationship to the world and the entities in the world (people, animals, objects, etc.) that we could call *care*.¹⁸ In other words, we never act in an objective or detached fashion, as if such a thing could be more than a dream, for "no sooner has Dasein expressed anything about itself to itself, than it has already interpreted itself as *care*."¹⁹

We may now turn to the reasons for why Heidegger is an empiricist. There is a crucial distinction I must make here, for there are two different arguments I could make. I could argue that Heidegger is an empiricist because his *method* of examining Dasein is

¹⁵ Ibid, 80.

¹⁶ Ibid, 183.

¹⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹⁸ Ibid, 238.

¹⁹ Ibid, 227.

empirical; I could also argue that Heidegger is an empiricist because he describes Dasein as a phenomenon which understands itself empirically. In fact I will argue both independently.

First we will see how Heidegger describes Dasein as a being which *understands itself empirically*. I have two reasons for this: (1) Heidegger describes Dasein as a being which understands itself prior to formal analysis, and (2) Being-in-the-world requires that Dasein's understanding-of-itself is developed from sense experience.

The evidence for (1) is in the most crucial chapters of *Being and Time*, "Understanding and Interpretation"²⁰ and "The Hermeneutical Situation at which we have Arrived for Interpreting the Meaning of the Being of Care."²¹ Here Heidegger swims out of his great ocean of description for a moment in order to outline a justification for his project and method.

Heidegger responds in these chapters to the problem of the *hermeneutic circle*, which is the fact that his understanding of Dasein is not logical because he begins with Dasein, being, as he is, a part of Dasein.²² His response is to say that such circularity is inevitable for us, since we are after all seeking to understand ourselves, for "An entity for which...its Being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure."²³ He further argues that even those critics who would say that they have removed themselves into abstraction in order to have a logical understanding of Dasein are still acting as Dasein, and exhibiting *care* for themselves and their beliefs:

²⁰ Ibid, 188.

²¹ Ibid, 358.

²² Ibid, 362.

²³ Ibid, 195.

We cannot ever ‘avoid’ a ‘circular’ proof in the existential analytic, because such an analytic does not do *any* proving *at all* by the rules of the ‘logic of consistency’. What common sense wishes to eliminate in avoiding the ‘circle’, on the supposition that it is measuring up to the loftiest rigour of scientific investigation, is nothing less than the basic structure of care...the ‘charge of circularity’ itself comes from a kind of Being which belongs to Dasein.²⁴

And why is this, that even when we desire to be abstract and objective about ourselves we still act as the individual humans that we are? Heidegger’s explanation is that we understand ourselves “in a pre-ontological manner”²⁵ and only afterwards understand ourselves formally:

In indicating the formal aspects of the idea of existence we have been guided by the understanding-of-Being which lies in Dasein itself. Without any ontological transparency, it has nevertheless been revealed that in every case I am myself the entity which we call Dasein...Dasein understands itself as Being-in-the-world, even if it does so without adequate ontological definiteness...Dasein...has already *understood itself*.²⁶

Now we need the evidence for (2). As things stand it seems that Heidegger could be arguing that Dasein understands itself by intuition or by experience; the above passage, taken independently, could easily support either interpretation.

The vital factor here is *Being-in-the-world*, which denies for Heidegger the possibility of intuitive knowledge of ourselves. Being-in-the-world, as I stated above, is Heidegger’s concept for the fact that we are unavoidably enmeshed in the world. This is a

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 363.

²⁶ Ibid, 361.

concept which has massive significance in his project, for it is absolute in denying the possibility of any escape from our unity with the world:

The compound expression ‘Being-in-the-world’ indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon...It is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the ‘world’ – a world with which he provides himself occasionally. Dasein is never ‘proximally’ an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only *because* Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is.²⁷

Given that intuitive knowledge is knowledge which originates in the mind alone, as we established above, we cannot believe that Heidegger is claiming that we understand ourselves by intuition, for there is no time or space in which we could understand ourselves independently from the world. Heidegger’s *Being-in-the-world* is a phenomenon which encapsulates us mentally just as much as it does physically, for he says that “*knowing,*” in general, “*is a kind of Being which belongs to Being-in-the-world.*”²⁸ For Heidegger, there is no purely logical or intuitive knowledge of ourselves which could even be possible, which could even make any sense at all. Dasein is a being which understands itself, *before anything else*, through the basic structure of *Being-in-the-world*.

²⁷ Ibid, 84.

²⁸ Ibid, 88.

Ergo, Dasein understands itself through *sense experience*, for sense experience is all of the ways that we interact with phenomena outside of ourselves, and for Heidegger *all of our existence* is lived outside of ourselves, that is to say, as Being-in-the-world:

When Dasein directs itself toward something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always ‘outside’ alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered.²⁹

The above quote is the clearest statement of empiricism I have found in *Being and Time*, for here Heidegger baldly says that the way that Dasein knows anything begins in relation to things outside of Dasein, that is to say, begins with *sense experience*. The conclusion to all of this is that Dasein is a being which understands itself empirically.

I will now move from the sweeping claim above to the specific claim that Heidegger is empiricist in his method. I have two reasons for this. The first is that (a) Heidegger’s phenomenology excludes intuition in the understanding of Dasein because it requires knowledge to be formed in relation with the phenomenon in question, and (b) Heidegger’s application of phenomenology to Dasein always begins with experience.

It will be easiest to establish (a). As we have already seen, Heidegger’s phenomenology is concerned with revealing the phenomenon of Dasein as it is, rather than understanding it abstractly in ways that are divorced from what it really is. This approach, toward “letting something be seen, in *letting* entities be *perceived*,”³⁰ requires that the first step in investigating a phenomenon is to focus on the phenomenon and the phenomenon only, as Heidegger says, “To have a science ‘of’ phenomena means to grasp

²⁹ Ibid, 89.

³⁰ Ibid, 58.

its objects *in such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly.”³¹

If this method is carried out, it will rule out intuition right from the start, for intuition does not consult the phenomenon in question in order to gain knowledge about it. Here is Peter Markie’s definition of intuition: “Intuition is a form of rational insight. Intellectually grasping a proposition, we just “see” it to be true in such a way as to form a true, warranted belief in it.”³² Heidegger’s phenomenology has no room for this approach. In dealing with an abstract phenomenon, like $2 + 5 = 7$, there might be a form of purely abstract phenomenology which takes place, but even then there is a relating to the phenomenon which is necessary in order to reveal it. In cases where the phenomenon is in experience, the method is clearly not intuitive, for the method will begin by taking in sense experience, which has already moved beyond the mode of knowledge that marks intuition.

We will need (b) as well to see how Heidegger is empiricist. Even though intuition is no factor in phenomenology, it is possible that pure abstraction might be, as I said above. In applying phenomenology to mathematics or theology, we certainly will not be dealing with sense experience to reveal these phenomena. Is Heidegger’s investigation of Dasein cut of the same cloth?

The answer is no. Heidegger views Dasein as a being whose nature is founded in its dynamic existence, and his investigation of it is therefore focused on revealing it from its existence. He states in the opening to *Being and Time* that “*The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence...* when we designate this entity with the term ‘Dasein’, we are

³¹ Ibid, 59.

³² Markie.

expressing not its “what” (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being...In each case Dasein *is* its possibility.”³³ Furthermore, because of the “mineness” of Dasein for each of us, to begin an investigation of Dasein with Dasein is not only good but inevitable. As he says in the first lines of Division I, “We are ourselves the entities to be analysed. The Being of any such entity is *in each case mine*. These entities...comport themselves towards their Being.”³⁴ This results in the *hermeneutic circle* we saw above, the fact that “Any interpretation [of Dasein] which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted.”³⁵

Even at this point, Heidegger might be able to accept all of this and still be a rationalist, if he desired to find some way to get beyond the circle and be objective. However, Heidegger does just the opposite, and clinches his empiricism by *championing* an acceptance of the illogical circularity of this investigation of Dasein: “To deny the circle, to make a secret of it, or even to want to overcome it, means finally to reinforce this failure [to understand Dasein]. We must rather endeavour to leap into the ‘circle’, primordially and wholly, so that even at the start of the analysis of Dasein we make sure that we have a full view of Dasein’s circular Being.”³⁶ We can conclude from this that pure abstraction has no place in Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein, and since we know already that intuition plays no role, we are left to conclude that Heidegger always begins his examination of Dasein with Dasein in its essence, which is existence; that is to say, Heidegger examines Dasein empirically.

³³ Heidegger, 67-68.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 194.

³⁶ Ibid, 363.

With these words, my argument is complete. I hope I may have given some intriguing reasons to see Heidegger as an empiricist. However, you might suspect that I have emphasized the portions of *Being and Time* which are most in unison with my interpretation. Such a suspicion would be correct, for there undoubtedly are other passages in *Being and Time* which jar with my interpretation. I have not time to examine all the many counterpoints which could be made, but I would like to discuss one major conflict with my thesis which is visible many times in *Being and Time*.

The objection is Heidegger's use of the phrase *a priori* to describe Dasein. The phrase traditionally refers to knowledge which is derived prior to experience, and unless Heidegger is using the term in a radically new way, my thesis is in danger of going up in smoke. However, I do believe that Heidegger is using *a priori* in a completely different sense, and that it turns out not to conflict with his empiricism.

We will look first at the traditional meaning of *a priori*. The phrase is Latin, meaning literally "from before" or "prior to," and it is used by philosophers traditionally to refer to knowledge which is derived without or before experience, as compared to *a posteriori* knowledge, that which is derived from sense experience.³⁷ Bruce Russell says baldly that "*a priori* knowledge rests on *a priori* justification...*a priori* justification is a type of epistemic justification that is, in some sense, independent of experience."³⁸

Let us now see the phrase in the manner that Heidegger uses it. He uses *a priori* in *Being and Time* as an adjective referring to various elements of Dasein. He defines it in reference to Being-in-the-world, and says that "In the interpretation of Dasein, this

³⁷ Markie.

³⁸ Bruce Russell, "A Priori Justification and Knowledge," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2008 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta.

structure [Being-in-the-world] is something ‘*a priori*’; it is not pieced together, but is...constantly a whole.”³⁹

These two definitions, on the face of it, do not even seem related. I will argue that they indeed are not. For Heidegger, *a priori* is not a term applied to knowledge at all, but is rather an ontological term that references the kind of Being which Dasein is. The basic meaning of the phrase is also different for Heidegger; he uses the phrase to mean “whole” rather than “independent of experience.” A second example from *Being and Time* might provide further insight. Much later on in the book Heidegger discusses the *a priori* nature of *care*, and his discussion here highlights how *a priori*, for him, is an ontological term, as he says that “‘Earlier’ than any presupposition which Dasein makes, or any of its ways of behaving, is the ‘*a priori*’ character of its state of Being as one whose kind of Being is care.”⁴⁰

From these two examples, I would venture to say that Heidegger calls elements of Dasein *a priori* as a way of saying that they are foundational, holistic parts of our nature before we ever begin to exist as individuals. As he says, they are realities which are “not pieced together,” and which are “earlier than...any of its [Dasein’s] ways of behaving.”⁴¹ The point is that Dasein’s nature is not compiled or created from experience; it is an organic whole at the moment it enters experience. The phrase *a priori* does thereby retain the original meaning of “prior to,” but in reference to Dasein’s nature being *in existence* before we begin to act as Dasein, not in reference to anything that we know about Dasein prior to our acting as Dasein. As an ontological term, the phrase has nothing to do with how Dasein understands itself, which remains an empirical phenomenon because of the

³⁹ Heidegger, 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 249.

⁴¹ Ibid, 65, 249.

fact of Being-in-the-world, which “has nothing to do with any determinate character restricted beforehand to a worldless subject.”⁴²

II

I would now like to make good on my statement of interest in bringing philosophy back to reality. As my small contribution to this movement, I will discuss the power of the empiricism present in Martin Heidegger and in William James. This is a power which shines through the crucial differences between Heidegger and James, and shines through so that the two have formed an alliance which suffers none for their diversity of opinion.

Let us look briefly at James and his brand of empiricism, to provide the necessary background to discuss the two together. James, unlike Heidegger, called himself an empiricist, and he defined the word with characteristic lucidity. In the title essay to his collection *The Will to Believe*, he describes the empirical approach to truth by saying that “as empiricists...we gain an ever better position towards it by systematically continuing to roll up experiences and think.”⁴³

James’s peculiar form of empiricism is characterized well by the term *radical empiricism*, another term that he used himself. For James, to affix *radical* onto *empiricism* means to highlight the overpowering interest that he has in remaining as open as humanly possible to all possible sources of knowledge about anything at all. This, you might say, is a pursuit to find the truest form of empiricism possible, where *all* of our experience is a potential source of knowing. Here is the concept in Jamesian terms:

Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of *radical empiricism*...I say ‘empiricism,’ because it is contented to regard its

⁴² Ibid, 144.

⁴³ William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956), 17.

most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say ‘radical,’ because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and...it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square.⁴⁴

I should make a note about *monism* here. This is what James means for the idea that the universe, when it comes down to it, is a consistent, unified phenomenon; it is the idea that the confusion and ambiguity that is always evident to us is a result of this or that temporary effect, but behind it is a solidified universe, even if we cannot see it.⁴⁵ James, of course, intends to open up discussion for whether we have much reason to believe any such thing, and whether the situation might rather be that there is no foundational unity to the universe at all, what he calls *pluralism*.⁴⁶

Now we shall see where Heidegger intersects with all of this Jamesian empiricism. The great distinction between the two lies in the divide which James has called *monism v. pluralism*; Heidegger is solidly monist, and James is undoubtedly pluralist. Heidegger is concerned always with understanding Being as something universal, as made up of elements which are fundamental to the existence to all and which elements together form a great whole. We have seen this above in his interpretation of Dasein as an *a priori* whole. Inversely, James has given up hope for finding such a consistency anywhere in our existence, and rather is interested in pursuing

⁴⁴ William James, Preface to *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956), vii-viii.

⁴⁵ William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 70.

⁴⁶ James, Preface to *The Will to Believe*, ix.

the idea that maybe the world is simply not one, for we are left in our existence with “the common sense world, in which we find things partly joined and partly disjoined.”⁴⁷

We have here a universalist empiricist and a pluralist empiricist, we might say. As a Jamesian myself, I am prone to interpret Heidegger’s universalism as a form of empiricism which has not grown strong enough yet to face the realities of pluralism which James recognized. This intriguing view is presented by Richard Rorty in his *Essays on Heidegger and others*, where he interprets Heidegger as being unable, unlike thinkers like William James and John Dewey, to give up entirely the idea of a final and comprehensive interpretation of life and its meaning.⁴⁸ He characterizes Heidegger’s project of describing Dasein as “the hope that Heidegger himself, his Thinking, will be a decisive event in the History of Being,” where others like James and Dewey “hope that things may turn out well in the end, but their sense of contingency does not permit them to write dramatic narratives... They exemplify a virtue which Heidegger preached, but was not himself able to practice.”⁴⁹ I would be happy to see this interpretation be ever more popularized. Those of us who call ourselves pluralists must always remember, though, that our pluralism is never orthodoxy, for we are always empiricists; I stand with Rorty’s interpretation not because it is Biblical truth, but because it best fits the evidence that I have found thus far. As long as we maintain this stance, we maintain our empiricism undiminished.

That is enough on the contrast between Heidegger and James. I would like to end by seeing how the alliance of empiricism between the two is stronger than their

⁴⁷ James, *Pragmatism*, 71.

⁴⁸ Richard Rorty, Introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xviii.

⁴⁹ Richard Rorty, “Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism,” in *Essays on Heidegger and others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49.

divergences. This is an alliance that is founded on a simple agreement, which is the belief that we open up the possibility to live better and know better about ourselves and the world if we approach our experience open to what we can learn from it.

The alliance is *for* this full-blooded kind of empiricism, and *against* a straitjacket of rationality which both Heidegger and James believe to have clouded philosophy for too long; they are united in a desire to open up vistas of understanding which are possible only by stripping away our crusty systems of thought and approaching life as it organically *is*. Heidegger calls it a fight against the “logic of consistency,” against “technical devices” and “conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated,”⁵⁰ where James sees it as abandoning “the doctrine of objective certitude” and “scholastic orthodoxy.”⁵¹

What Heidegger and James find once they get beyond these orthodoxies is the real treasure, for it is real understanding about the real life which was hidden before. Heidegger’s weapon of revelation is the phenomenological method, which allows him to *reveal* the Dasein that has been there all along, with its Being-in-the-world, care, potentiality-for-Being, and so forth; these are realities which cannot be proven by abstraction, but are nonetheless real. James fights with the torch of radical empiricism, which moves beyond the constraints of the orthodoxy of science to open up the possibility of real interaction with such mysterious forces as “real ends, real evil, real crises...a real God, and a real moral life,” forces which we may be very real but which we eulogize far too hastily because they jar with our systems of rationality.⁵²

⁵⁰ Heidegger, 51.

⁵¹ James, “The Will to Believe,” 13-15.

⁵² James, Preface to *The Will to Believe*, ix.

Like allies who maintain their distance in the day-to-day but come together in times of crises, such are Heidegger and James. They are allied in their *empiricism*, in their unswerving faith in revealing what the world we live in can tell us about who we are. This is the lucid and powerful essence of *empiricism*, the kind of empiricism which means something real to more than just philosophers.

The power of this empiricism is the perpetual challenge it issues to the orthodoxies we build around ourselves like cocoons and to the half-truths we systematize and teach to our children. It can open our eyes to see brothers and sisters who are different as *people* where we did not before, and to listen without reservation to their stories where before their stories could not have entered in the doors of our minds, for now our minds have become broader, as James says, our empiricism “lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it...but they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it.”⁵³ It can open our eyes to see beyond the empty towers of theological rigor that we build to encapsulate God, and in so doing it can rebirth a fresh and open pursuit of the divine, what Heidegger called “a more primordial interpretation of man’s Being toward God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it.”⁵⁴ The empiricism of Heidegger and James has the power to bring us together despite our differences, to release us from our conceptual bondage so that we can see the beauty of existence, of *Dasein*, in ways we never have before.

In the end, it is up to each of us to make our choices, about what we will think and how we will live. We all know that it is difficult, to keep fighting against the absurd pressures of life, day after day, no end in sight. We will make different choices, we will

⁵³ Pragmatism, 24.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, 30.

take different paths; perhaps our paths will converge, perhaps not. I can ask of you only what I must ask of myself, and what Heidegger and James shone bright in doing: never settle for half-truths and half-lies when hope for more is still alive.

Sleeping is giving in, no matter what the time is

Sleeping is giving in, so lift those heavy eyelids

– Arcade Fire

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