

Forgotten *Dasein*

Ivo Kara-Pešić
Università di Torino

Abstract

Remembering Moore's proof of the existence of external world, it seems to me that this philosophical gesture directs us towards many fake problems that strangely enough have returned in the focus of philosophical discussions. I could not say what is new in New Realism, but the very fact that the discussion about it has become so inflamed brings us to read again the paragraphs 43 and 44 in Heidegger's work *Being and Time*, that are extremely important for the problem area of Realism. After having this done, I suggest to understand Moore's gesture in the light of Heidegger's position so that we might see that New Realism is in fact an appeal to remember that we are always being-in-the-world, that realism is a theoretical point of view, that *Lebenswelt* is something completely different from any theoretical postulate which depends on it. This becomes evident in the experience of apocalypse, which I should dedicate some analysis to.

Keywords: Reality, realism, being-in-the-world, Dasein, external world, apocalypses, world of life, body, subject, object.

Young philosophers, not accostumed to philosophical thinking, facing sceptical arguments about deceptiveness of the senses and uncertain existence of the so-called external world, become often puzzled by these arguments, as I was in my time at the University in Belgrade. The "entering into philosophy" is often accompanied by the feeling of *loosing ground under your feet*. Suddenly everything became questionable, everything could be inverted and seen from a different perspective. The feeling can be compared to that of a curious child who lifting the stones in the garden is every time amazed by the sight of abundance of life hidden quietly under the stones.

To help coming out from this “vertigo” we can consider the proof of an external world by the English philosopher George Edward Moore (1837-1958). Moore’s initial thesis is that there is a number of different evidence proving the existence of “external objects” “I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How?” asks Moore. And then he performs a *philosophical gesture*: “by holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, ‘Here is one hand’, and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, ‘and here is another’. And if, by doing this, I have proved *ipso facto* the existence of external things, you will all see that I can also do it now in number of other ways: there is no need to multiply examples” (Moore 1962). Prima facie one could argue that by the brief and clear gesture Moore wanted to say subtly that we were dealing with non-existent, irrelevant problem. I am here, in the world, where else could I be? “If you insist”, as if Moore were saying, “I will show you the proof within the subject-objects logic close to sceptics. If I am a subject, at the same time I am an object too (for other subjects), therefore my body is an object for me (in this case my hands).” To put it in Heidegger’s terms (although Heidegger would not agree with this formulation), to myself I am something present-to-hand (*zuhanden*).

There is a long philosophical tradition behind this proof and it goes back to Descartes. In my opinion, Moore’s gesture has a more complex meaning if observed from a different philosophical perspective, as I will discuss it in the second part of my paper. To support my thesis, I would like to underline some important moments:

1. Moore remains fully within the subject-object logic offering the proof which recognizes the basic postulates of the modern metaphysics according to which subjects live in the world full of objects, and they themselves, from the other subjects” perspective, are objects. This allows him to perceive himself (his body) as an object from the subject’s perspective, namely, as an object in the so-called external world.
2. What is specific for Moore’s proof is definitely the role his body plays (I will come back to this moment in more

detail). Traditional proofs of the external world existence (Descartes' for example, see Descartes 2008) use purely thoughtful arguments where our bodily nature does not play an important role. The reason for this is that the malicious deceiver could deceive us that we have a body. When talking about any kind of realism our bodily "anchoring" in the world seems to me as one of the central moments, and I would like to offer here a very important criterion: when wondering what can be realized in our lives, and what are mere mental experiments and fantasies, we just have to think about our bodies and ask ourselves "can our bodies do it?"

3. Moore's initial approach is not an every-day-life one, but a theoretical approach. Rarely we ask ourselves in our every-day life: Is my hand really here, is it really in the external world? If it is the case, I believe that they are mostly a consequence of the peculiar "craft" we do. This is the key point of this paper: realism is a theoretical attitude which depends on the world of life (*Lebenswelt*). We do not have a theoretical attitude 24 hours a day, we do not question the existence of this or that the all day long simply because that would disable us to survive. A very interesting notice by Alain Badiou (Badiou 1989) is that we can philosophize about everything; artificial insemination, mobile phones, desire or time, but we cannot philosophize *always*. We cannot philosophize at those very moments when we need to *take care* (here Heidegger appears) of pure survival; in the time of war, large-scale natural disasters like floods or earthquakes, or in a less life-threatening situations; while trying to fix something in an emergency, while making love. Soon I will come back to the very important role of experiencing war and cataclysms in life and philosophical "sober down".

Here I will focus on two paragraphs 43 and 44 of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*). Heidegger constantly insists on the basic state of *being-in-the-world*. We have all been *thrown* into the world, no one has asked us if we wanted it or not. "Even where the issue is not only one of

ontical experience but also one of ontological understanding”, says Heidegger, “the interpretation of Being takes its orientation in the first instance from the Being of entities within the world. Thereby the Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand gets passed over, and entities are first conceived as a context of Things (*res*) which are present-at-hand” (Heidegger 2008, 245). And here we are at the natural orientation towards things we come across *in the world*, orientation which Alexius Meinong called *prejudice in favor of the real* (*Vorurteil zugunsten des Wirklichen*, Meinong 1981), and along those lines also our natural orientation to physical objects as objects *par excellence*. Today we know, thanks to the encountering of Darwinism and cognitive science, that we have evolved in a surrounding full of solid objects that everyday have to be bypassed, reached for, used, and our whole perception apparatus and the whole cognitive architecture are adjusted to the level at which we distinguish objects (the so-called *basic level*). Therefore, the language reflects this picture of the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Because of this orientation towards *res*, Being, as Heidegger puts it, “acquires the meaning of “Reality”. Substantiality becomes the basic characteristic of Being.” (Heidegger 2008, 245) When talking about the ontical understanding of *Dasein*, that is of a man, he as well becomes *present-at-hand* as Real (Moore’s supported his proof by arguments literally following this, for Heidegger unacceptable, logic of a *Dasein* which is self-present-at-hand).

Here, Heidegger immediately sees a problem and an obstacle. This concept of Reality has a peculiar priority in the ontological problem area, priority which diverts the route to genuine existential analytic of *Dasein*, and also our very view of the Being of what Heidegger calls proximally ready-to-hand within-the-world. Heidegger notes that the other modes of Being become defined negatively and privatively with regard to Reality. The big thinker of *difference as difference* then notes that “under the heading ‘problem of Reality’ various questions are clustered: (1) whether any entities which supposedly “transcend our consciousness” *are* at all; (2) whether this Reality of the “external world” can be adequately *proved*; (3) how far this entity, if it is Real, is to be known in its Being-in-

itself; (4) what the meaning of this entity, Reality, signifies in general.” (Heidegger 2008, 245) I will go swiftly through Heidegger’s arguments.

The originality of Heidegger’s thought consists in a very new, ontological-existential conception and methodology. Above all, he believes, the question of the meaning of Reality was connected with the before mentioned external world problem. Beholding (*das anschauende Erkennen*) has, underlines Heidegger, always been the way to grasp Reality, as a way in which consciousness behaves. If Reality has the characteristic of independence, the question immediately arises concerning the relation between consciousness and Reality, namely Reality’s independence in relation to consciousness (Heidegger 2008, 242). Therefore, the possibility of a sufficient ontological analysis of Reality depends on the clarification of Being of *Dasein* clarification, from which it should be independent. But it should also be independent from – and this is an important Heidegger’s contribution – a decision that “*knowing*” can take over that function. In Heidegger’s perspective the whole approach to Reality as within-the-world entities is ontologically founded upon the basic state of *Dasein*, Being-in-the-world. To put it simply: I can approach things in the world, as I am myself in the world. I do not approach the world from some kind of out-of-the-world space, which would, let us not forget, according to Heidegger’s conception of the world as a space (openness) of being, also be in the world! Therefore, Heidegger’s conclusion is not surprising when he says: “The question of whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?” (Heidegger 2008, 246-7)

The world as space of Being is disclosed with the Being of *Dasein*. In that way even what is Real, claims Heidegger, may be discovered only on the bases of a prior disclosedness of the world. And only on that basis what is real may still remain concealed. In other words, the *world phenomenon* as such should be taken into consideration first. That is, according to Heidegger, the formula to untangle the ontological issues. Developing further his argument Heidegger discusses Kant’s refutation of Idealism and concludes: “The ‘scandal of

philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*. [...] It is not that the proofs are inadequate, but that the kind of Being of the entity which does the proving and makes requests for proofs has *not been definite enough*. [...] If *Dasein* is understood correctly, it defies such proofs, because, in its Being, it already *is* what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it." (Heidegger 2008, 249) This is a key point showing why every attempt "to prove the being of the external world" is destined to fail.

Heidegger's text is from 1927, Moore's gesture is from 1939. But that is an old story about a poor dialogue between the continental and analytical philosophy, so Moore has an "excuse" for not knowing Heidegger's instructions to overcome Cartesian isolation of a subject. As Heidegger later concludes: "To *have faith* in the Reality of the 'external world', whether rightly or wrongly; to '*prove*' this Reality for it, whether adequately or inadequately; to *presuppose* it, whether explicitly or not – attempts such as these which have not mastered their own basis with full transparency, presuppose a subject which is proximally *wordless* or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world." (Heidegger 2008, 250) The dubiousness of this conception has been noted in the cognitive science as a "parachutist's syndrome". Here I am suddenly in the world, and at quite mature age – considering that we do not study philosophical problems at the age of one, three or ten – where I have to do my best to get around. Does this situation sound realistic? I believe that all ontologies that remain within the Cartesian subject-object dynamics suffer from this problem and consequently from the inclination towards full "scientification" of life experience. Heidegger cleverly notices that there is a tendency to bury epistemologically the "external world" in nullity, so it would then be resurrected by proofs. Let us not forget that in a way in this type of burring also belongs Husserl's *epoché*. Existential-ontological assertion, according to Heidegger, in its origination is parallel to the thesis that the so-called external world is really present-at-hand, but it differs from any realism because it does not require any kind of proof

for the reality of the world, nor it believes the same can be proved (Heidegger 2008, 250).

However, is it possible to give, even without the existential-ontological base, some phenomenological reality characteristics of that what is Real? Heidegger claims that, within certain limitations, it is possible and he gives an example of Dilthey's work. Let us leave aside the conception of Dilthey's work and focus on one of his central thesis: *reality is resistance to our will*. Heidegger says: "Resistance is encountered in a not-coming through, and it is encountered as a hindrance to willing to come through." (Heidegger 2008, 253) At the beginning I mentioned that for Moore's proof the very role of the body is what we should pay attention to, and that the limitations imposed by our bodily nature represent a good criterion for deciding what is realistic, achievable. Trivially put, no matter how powerful your theories are, you cannot go with your head through a wall. Heidegger, in the light of his own thesis, adds:

The experiencing of resistance – that is, the discovery of what is resistant to one's endeavours – is possible ontologically only by reason of the disclosedness of the world. The character of resisting is one that belongs to entities within-the-world. Factually, experiences of resistance determine only the extent and the direction in which entities encountered within-the-world are discovered. The summation of such experiences does not introduce the disclosure of the world for the first time, but presupposes it. (Heidegger 2008, 253-4)

Therefore, I cannot go through the mountain unless there is a tunnel or I have adequate machinery, but also a *permit* for tunnelling works. We are not limited only by ontological, but also social bonds which the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris studied in detail in his synthetizing work *Documentality. Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces (Documentalità. Perché è necessario lasciar tracce)*. Exactly there he speaks about the non-theoretical background of our theories, the so-called *material difference (differenza materiale)* which he named inemendability (Ferraris 2009, 92-3). He identifies it with Eco's hard nucleus (*nocciolo duro*, Eco 1997), world of life (*Lebenswelt*, Husserl 1970), with what makes resistance to our

theories. Experience may be disharmonized and surprising, meaning that *something may suddenly ruin our plans and expectations*. Ferraris notices that those very occurrences, which from time to time interrupt series of our expectations, enable us to differentiate between imaginary and real experience.

I will dwell on this, in my humble opinion, key moment for the whole story about realism. At the beginning of the paper I spoke about the *feeling of losing ground under your feet* associated with “entering” into philosophy. There are, however, shocking experiences in our lives like war or earthquake when we literally lose ground under our feet. Such experiences are of the opposite direction, inducing a sobering up which brings us from theorizing and imagining possible worlds back to the cruel reality of that *hic et nunc*. It is no accident that such experience, the experience of earthquake in Mexico on 28 September 1999 marked the turning point in the philosophical career of Maurizio Ferraris (Ferraris 2001). I believe that such ground-losing experiences (*Grundlosigkeit*) are quite common. The world suddenly “shows its teeth”, ruins all your plans and hopes, takes away your dearest ones, objects, memories, laying bare your vulnerability. I had a similar experience in that same year of 1999, during the NATO bombing of Belgrade. The memories of those experiences made me think about the term *apocalypse*: the etymology of the word (ἀποκάλυψις) indicates taking down of a veil, discarding of that which covers, it indicates revelation and uncovering. Derrida in his work *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy* (Derrida 1983) notices that the word in Ancient Greek and Hebrew denotes taking off a veil particularly from the intimate body parts, while later on, in other languages it acquires today’s most prevailing meaning of catastrophe. In the same text, the great French thinker says that Chouraqui¹ translates the word *apocalypse* as “contemplation” (*hazon*). My intention is to draw your attention to all three meanings in the following way: *let us contemplate about what an experience of a catastrophe reveals*. It “reveals” what Martin Heidegger was always pointing out and what he put as a starting point for all his contemplations: that I’m Being-in-the-world, that I strongly depend on it, that

I'm always *in* it (*In- Sein*), in all forms of escapism I'm still in the world (even when I commit suicide, although from the phenomenologically consequent point of view after suicide the world *is not* anymore to me), and that world is a space of Being, very complex and not subjected to our theories, disclosed with our existence. And those very apocalyptical experiences of losing ground disclose Being to us in a special way. If I am, I am in the world even before I can consciously think or talk about it.

Heidegger's thesis that man is *Dasein*, that he is essentially determinate by his Being-in-the-world has been developed in Cognitive science, especially in the domain – and this is particularly interesting – that has always been “home ground” of the sceptics: in dreams. In the new interpretational perspective offered by two Italian cognitive psychologists, Antonella Carassa and Maurizio Tirassa (2005), the very dream becomes “proof” of the *world-dependence* of the human mind. According to the authors, dream is an unilateral constructed interaction, or in technical terms, conscious intentional activity. Since human mind cannot be without the world (in cognitive terminology: organism cannot be without the environment), in the dream it creates, moment after moment, the world in which it takes action, reproducing the so called total experience.² In dreams we are completely embedded in the fictional world, which makes it different from watching film or daydreaming, the experiences where the story and the world don't coincide completely. In the real world in every moment we have at disposal a great number of scenarios for possible action, its complexity largely exceeds the one of world of dreams in which the human mind reproduces only the minimum needed for action. That is, among else, the proof that we continuously use the world that we live in as a big external memory. The vividness of presence in some dreams could be explained by the fact that the mind doesn't have to deal with a huge number of *affordances* (invitations to action) at disposal in the real world, but can focus on a few aspects of the world that it has re-created in a dream.

To create the world unilaterally is very difficult, but it is even more difficult to maintain its coherence through time. The human mind is

intrinsically dynamic, and so are the real or dreamt situations it represents to itself; the fact is that the human mind has evolved to follow the changes in the world, and not to create them from nothing or from chaos. While the book writer continuously has at disposal and updates the external memory (scenario, notes) that helps him to follow the trace of what happens with characters and with the world they move in, the mind embedded in the dream can rely only on its own memory resources and capability of prediction. (Carassa and Tirassa 2005, 48, my translation)

Let's get back from the world of dreams to the real one. Heidegger is right when he insists that we cannot contemplate about reality on the basis of *res*, in a sense of pure presence-at-hand, as not every presence-at-hand is presence-at-hand of a thing. In order to adequately ontologically characterise the world and *Dasein*, Reality is not enough. Because the experience of a catastrophe reminds me that I am in the world, but also that in a blink of an eye I might not be. To put it in Heidegger's words: the substance of man is existence. That means that we can determine, contemplate and speak about Reality and realism while we are, and we are always in the world. That is the more primordial truth than any assertion on truth. Knowing is, says Heidegger, relationship of Being: that means that I am able to know because I am being-in-the-world. "*Consciousness of Reality' is itself a way of Being-in-the-world.*" (Heidegger 2008, 254)

The authenticity of the truth of existence becomes fully evident in paragraph 44 where Heidegger, at the very end, says that

the usual refutation of that scepticism which denies either the Being of "truth" or its cognizability, stops half way. What it shows, as a formal argument, is simply that if anything gets judged, truth has been presupposed. This suggests that "truth" belongs to assertion – that pointing something out is, by its very meaning, an uncovering. But when one says this, *one has to clarify why* that in which there lies the ontological ground for this necessary connection between assertion and truth as regards their Being, must be as it. [...] Moreover, one here fails to recognize that even when nobody *judges*, truth already gets presupposed in so far as *Dasein* is at all. (Heidegger 2008, 271)

Heidegger then shows that issues put in that way presuppose an "ideal subject". "Being (not entities) is something which

“there is” only in so far as truth is. And truth *is* only in so far as and as long as *Dasein* is. Being and truth “are” equiprimordially.” (Heidegger 2008, 272).

In the end, let us go back to Moore’s philosophical gesture. It returns the body in an interesting way back onto the philosophical scene, the body that for almost two thousand years, at least until Nietzsche, was not the subject of philosophical thought. That becomes more understandable if we accept Heidegger’s thesis on the history of Western philosophy as a history of metaphysics, therefore, the history of contemplating supersensible. It is clear that such orientation of thought leaves the body in a shadow. I would like a new call for realism to be also a renewal of interest for the peculiarity of the human bodily nature, our anchorage in the world which tradition has too soon sealed as the soul’s prison. There is another interesting aspect of the apocalyptic experience of losing ground, that is the “unrulebility” of the world I would like to draw your attention to: such an experience in a somewhat too crude and cruel way shows us how deep is our *falling* (*Verfallenheit*). As if the world suddenly wanted to “push us away”, and if we are lucky to survive that “pushing away”, it will inevitably result in new view, new thought. What in the above mentioned apocalyptic experiences shakes you the most are the deceased people (*corps*). It is, trust me, very hard to theorize about them. That deep silence arising above the places like Srebrenica (Bosnia) is that very uncrossable limit, the ground onto which our theories may land, but have nothing to say. At some other opportunity the closeness between apocalypse and *aletheia* should be discussed.

What is my personal view of the story about the so-called *New Realism*? I would like to enter a correction now. I believe that above all we are talking about a new stage in philosophy, a stage of sobering up being inadequately named *New Realism*. Not only that it exists, as Ferraris claims, that non-theoretical background making resistance to our theories, but I believe that today we can understand correctly Heidegger’s instruction on coveredness-uncoveredness of Being, on the need for a new contemplation of Being. No matter how you observe Heidegger’s position, because of which he was often accused of mysticism, I

believe that it is “unrealistic” to discard its great heritage: let things be, understand that Being is not totally transparent and at our disposal, that there are always “remains” of that unspoken mystery, a trace and premonition, “foundations” of a non-violent thought that resists all-mastery projects whose fatal consequences, philosophical as well as life ones, we have experienced many times on our own skin. What is real and what is not, what is realism, are theoretical questions and certain life conditions are needed to study them, as being-in-the-world is not always peace and pleasure. But we who are privileged to amaze ourselves at the Being, should not forget that that opportunity is offered to us by that same being-in-the-world. In our philosophising we are responsible to *take care* that the others also have life conditions needed for contemplating. Therefore, at the very end I would like to offer a slightly adopted saying attributed to Aristotle, which says: *Primum vivere deinde philosophari*. In the new season of thought that we have entered it could be *Dum es conatur intelligere (while being, try to understand)*.

NOTES

¹ Nathan André Chouraqui (1917-2007), French author, during his life keen on promoting dialogue between Judaism, Islam and Catholicism.

² In this way, Fichte’s dream of a subject that creates the world “becomes real” exactly in the dream.

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