

University of New Mexico, Philosophy 421/521, Fall 2025

Early Heidegger: *Being and Time*

Wed. 4–6:30 PM

Professor Iain Thomson

Office hours: Thurs. 1:45–3 PM

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) is widely considered one of the most original and important philosophers of the 20th century. This seminar will focus on his most famous and influential work, *Being and Time* (1927). Here in his early, unfinished magnum opus, Heidegger develops and deploys a phenomenological method in order to help us understand the ontological structure underlying intelligibility. The result is a revolutionary reconceptualization of existence, selfhood, and being, one which challenges—and seeks to replace—central presuppositions philosophers have inherited from the tradition of Western metaphysics (especially its “modern” age). We will read and discuss the entire work, giving special attention to his phenomenology of existential death (and its relation to mortal demise) and concluding with an investigation of the questions of why *Being and Time* remained permanently unfinished and why Heidegger’s philosophical views began to shift so profoundly soon afterward.

This course is good (indeed, indispensable) preparation for understanding most subsequent work in Continental philosophy and the other theoretical humanities, which often take Heidegger’s insights as their own point of philosophical departure. For example, Heidegger’s work decisively shaped the concepts and concerns of such major continental thinkers as Agamben, Arendt, Badiou, Baudrillard, Blanchot, Butler, Cavell, Deleuze, Derrida, Dreyfus, Foucault, Gadamer, Irigaray, Lacan, Levinas, Marcuse, Rorty, Taylor, Vattimo, and Žižek—and this remains the case even where these thinkers approach Heidegger’s thought quite critically (as they all do, in their own distinctive and interesting ways). One therefore needs to understand Heidegger in order to understand where these thinkers are coming from, even if his is a thinking they seek (more and less successfully) to move beyond, and *Being and Time* is probably the very best place to begin.

Prerequisites: Graduate standing, some background in philosophy, or consent of instructor (which will depend on your willingness to observe the following requirements). **Course Requirements:** This course will require a good deal of difficult and challenging reading. As this is a class in the art of slow reading, you will be required to do the reading ahead of time and bring the appropriate book with you to class. Meeting once a week for a class like this means that any absences can really set you back, making it difficult ever to catch up; so be there every single time. If it becomes necessary to enforce attendance or preparation (which I very much hope it

won't), that will be done with brief in-class quizzes on the reading assigned for that day's class. Grades will be based on any such quizzes (for a maximum of 10% of your grade), with the rest of your grade split between two high-quality philosophy papers or, for graduate students, one polished research paper. Please note that use of cell-phones, laptops, and other computerized devices during class is prohibited (unless my specific permission has been given to use them) because they are distracting to me and your colleagues. *You will need to come to class prepared, awake, thoughtful, and ready to think about, question, and discuss difficult philosophical and existential issues for 2.5 hours!* The required reading load will grow as the semester goes on and (I hope) the text becomes increasingly clear to you, so *do not fall behind in the reading*. (I recommend NOT taking the class if you cannot commit to doing all the reading, which is considerable but not overwhelming.)

Required text (with all ABBREVIATIONS used below): 1. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008) and 2. Thomson, *Rethinking Death in and after Heidegger*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).