Heidegger, denkwegen en dwaalwegen
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SUMMARY

This book gives a resumé of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), in the context of his life. Heidegger rejected any attention for his own biography. This study takes the position that his train of thought is indissolubly intertwined with his personal education and experiences, and also with the cultural context of Germany during his lifetime. It confronts Heidegger both biographically and as a philosopher who has contemporaries like Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Thomas Mann and especially Karl Barth and Karl Löwith.

Strictly speaking this book is not a biography. In it I draw attention to biographical facts that are necessary for understanding his thought. In the epilogue I offer a concluding portrait of Heidegger. The master-thinker presented himself as a prophet, who pointed to perspectives far beyond the horizon of the actual and the ordinary. This thinker wanted to be penetrating like a poet but he stumbled over earthly politics. I situate Heidegger's philosophy in the course of his life: his own 'playing field' (Spielraum) was Germany between 1889 and 1976, which, notwithstanding all its political and cultural turbulence, he recognised as the homeland of Being.

The first part of the book is entitled Denkwegen: 'Ways of thinking'. It offers a report of the different moments and the various ways in which Heidegger presents his analysis of Being. Commonly two phases are detected in his work, with a turning point somewhere in the early thirties. The continuity of both phases lies in the fact that Heidegger wanted to analyse Being: the problem of existence. On the one side this seems a banal problem about what is evident, but on the other side it is an expression of a fundamental astonishment. In his own words: 'Why is there Being rather than Nothing?' The difference between these two phases is that Heidegger poses this question with regard to Being at first from the stance of the human being as an observer, literally from the being-there (Dasein); he noticed, however, that this analysis was being misinterpreted. His major work, Sein und Zeit (Being and Time, 1927), was quickly after its publication seen as an existentialistic study of the human being as an observer of Being, and not as an incitement to a profound analysis of the fundamental connections of Being. The two phases in Heidegger's philosophy can be understood as different ways of reporting Being's game. In the case of 'Heidegger I' the starting point is the position of the player, while 'Heidegger II' tries to overlook the entire game. Instead of using the systematic approach of Sein und Zeit, the later Heidegger chooses for a method of writing essays, that can be seen as a form of phenomenology.
Chapter 2 offers a resume of the major work of the first period, Sein und Zeit. From this period also dates Was ist Metaphysik? (What is Metaphysics?), Heidegger’s inaugural address at Freiburg in 1929. It is accurately examined in Chapter 4, not only as an illustration of ‘Heidegger I’, but also because it was criticized by Karl Barth, the subject of Chapter 5. According to Barth, Heidegger’s concept of Being is all-embracing as well as meaningless, with a final identity of Being and Nothing (Nichts). Against this nihilism with its philosophical indetermination, Barth proposes a Christian-theological notion of the Nichtige as a really destructive principle in God’s creation. In Chapter 5, I use Barth as a dissident voice with which to understand Heidegger’s position accurately.

Chapter 6 offers themes from the later phase in Heidegger’s thinking: truth as the unconcealed and as unhidleness, art as the disclosure of Being, his criticism of the concealment of Being into a trivial way of thinking when it is delivered to technology, the notion of the ‘foursome’ (Geriert), language—each as revelations of Being. Chapter 7 deals extensively with another theme: homeland, Heimat. This is a new theme of Heidegger’s later work, that lacks a positive sense in Sein und Zeit. Heidegger himself was rooted in the area where he had been born and where he remained almost his entire life: a triangle determined by his native town Messkirch, Freiburg as the city where he studied and where he became a professor, and Todtnauberg where he build a mountain hut as a holiday resort. Such a small radius of life was enough for him, and he even used it as a medium for showing the fullness of Being. Two texts with an autobiographical tendency are analysed in this chapter: Hebel—The House-Friend (Hebel—der Hausfreund, 1957) and The Country Lane (Der Feldweg, 1949). Especially this last text, about a really existing pathway in the neighbourhood of Messkirch, on which he liked to walk with his guests, is a metaphor of how Heidegger was able to illustrate the playing field (Spielraum) of Being from ordinary situations.

The second part of the book is called Duwaalwegen, my Dutch translation of Heidegger’s Holzwege. There are many trails through a wood, not as any connection between one point and another, but each with a goal of its own or even as wandering without any goal. But the German expression ‘auf
dem Holzwege sein' also means 'being mistaken': wandering around can have as a consequence losing one's way. Heidegger's philosophical wanderings can be erroneous.

I use the term 'Dwaalwegen' in different meanings. First it is appropriate for Heidegger himself. Despite his own intentions, he had tremendous influence on two subjects: theology and politics. The term 'Dwaalwegen', however, is not appropriate only for Heidegger himself or for his wandering in both these subjects. He never wrote explicit theological or political books, but nevertheless many interpreters and commentators tried to explore Heidegger's attitude to both these subjects - with their own 'dwaalwegen' as a result.

The first subject full of 'wandering' is theology. Heidegger's views about Being raised theological questions of all kinds (e.g. is Being identical to God or to a deity?) and they were soon a source of inspiration for many important theologians (e.g. Bultmann, Jonas and Tillich). Heidegger himself saw a clear distinction between his ontologic analysis of Being and theology. In Chapter 8 some aspects of his attitude to theology are explained. Heidegger has been claimed for very divergent religious traditions: the immanent Being was eagerly seen as a transcendent or christian God, or it was recognized within a mystical framework or as Zen Buddhism. My analysis shows that Heidegger offered an indeterminate paganism.

The second subject of 'Dwaalwegen' for Heidegger was politics. Chapter 9 is an examination of the Nazi-period in his life. In view of the enormous range of Heidegger-literature and the turning of the debate since the famous book by Victor Farias, Heidegger et le nazisme (1987), I have decided to use only the most recent studies on Heidegger. Of the older studies I refer only to the most important and classical ones. Heidegger's political actions and thoughts must be viewed from the background of the so-called conservative revolution: a broad cultural and historical criticism of Western society's, humanist and democratic values, and technological achievements. His conservative-revolutionary ideas led Heidegger to support the Nazi-regime, straightforwardly at first, and later on indirectly. Thus he became a Nazi himself. After 1945 Heidegger supposed he could avoid any responsibility, direct or indirect, for the cruelty and cruelty of the Nazi-regime.