

On Being, Dasein, and Heidegger

by P.R. Mercado

We were at a friend's house warming party, and Wendy lounged about with a suspicious smoke between her fingers beside me, after a while saying, "What is Being, anyway?"

I looked at her, and said, "I just want to enjoy my chocolate-covered almonds."

"No," she said, before taking a drag, and then speaking again, so that the smoke emerged from her mouth and nose as she did: "But as an ontological thing, this being, what is it?"

I shrugged and ate a chocolate-covered almond.

"Being and Time," she said. "Have you read it?"

"No," I said. "He doesn't transliterate the ancient Greek, and I don't speak ancient Greek. Which is a pretty Nazi thing to do. He was a Nazi, you know, Heidegger. Some people say he was actually quite critical of the Nazis, but he was critical in the way that I'm critical about leftists. Doesn't mean I'm not one. Doesn't mean I don't support, you know. Their stuff."

She kept nodding, even after I was done talking, and I wondered if she heard me, but then she said, "So we say, 'Heidegger is a Nazi.' Right?"

"We do." I ate a chocolate-covered almond.

"What does is mean?"

“Don't do this,” I said. “Look at this.” I showed her the handful of chocolate-covered almonds. “I must eat all of this. If I don't eat all of this, I wouldn't know what I'd do with myself. I'd jump from the balcony. I'd eat my own severed cock.”

“That's nice, but listen.” She was pointing the two fingers holding the joint at me. “When I say, ‘That is nice,’ what am I really saying?”

“You're really saying it's so nice that I should probably be allowed to eat my chocolate-colored almonds.”

“No,” she said. “No, that's not quite it.”

“That is quite it,” I said. I ate another one.

“What is is?” she said. “What is is?”

And I knew why she was asking this question. She was asking because she found some girl who was a philosophy major on OkCupid, and they had been speaking on there for two weeks, before they finally decided to meet, and when they did Wendy liked her more than the other girl liked Wendy, and they did sleep together, that one time — Wendy called the encounter “sweaty scissoring,” and I believed her — but after that, the girl never responded to her again.

All that Wendy had left was the memory of them talking after sex about continental philosophy, about the late Wittgenstein, about psychoanalysis, about theology, and about Being and Time. It is all she had left, and I felt sorry for her, in a way, even though I know that she would easily find someone else, if she wanted to. But I also knew that Wendy is the kind of person to never want to again, and to hold on to the shards of some broken past, no matter how much she bled, because that's just the kind of person she was.

That's the kind of person she is, whatever that's supposed to mean.

And that was fine, until Yves came along, talking about how he's tired of coming to parties, and that he's getting older, which is true, because he's 33 and he's still hanging around with people who wake up in the gutter some mornings because they've had too much to drink and had a little too much fun. But the worst thing about Yves is he thinks he's a reader when he obviously doesn't read. I don't even know the mechanics of how that works.

Then, the unthinkable happened. Wendy asked Yves what Being is.

"Oh," said Yves, in that way that was supposed to show Wendy at how elementary and tepid the question is. "Being is when something is."

"We know that much," I said. "But what is is."

Now he really did think about it. "Well, when you say something is, it means it exists."

"False," I said. "What if I said: 'There is a flying pig.'"

"Well, you're just wrong," he said.

"I'm wrong, but what does the use of is say about the flying pig? You just said 'is' is supposed to mean something exists, but flying pigs don't exist."

Yves looked like he was going to say something, but he didn't say anything. Wendy was stuck in a nodding loop, so that she kept nodding for what seemed like three minutes.

And then Yves said, "Did you guys read that article in the Atlantic, about universal income?"

I said no, even if I did.

And Wendy didn't hear him. Thank God.

And I left to get some more chocolate-covered almonds.

