

## Re- Visiting of Being Through Dasein

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### ABSTRACT

The Fundamental ontology, as visualized in *Being and Time*, stood to be Heidegger's philosophical enterprise. His sole aim has been to work out the question about the meaning of Being in general. As he points out the analytic of Dasein is to prepare the way for the problematic of fundamental ontology – the question of the meaning of Being in general. But it does not mean that there are two separate stages: the study of man and the study of Being. It is not even the case that one begins with man and ends with Being, nor vice versa. We can rather say that a study of man is itself a study of Being; and to this, from Heidegger's later perspective we can add that a study of Being is itself a study of man.

### Key Words

Being, Dasein, Man, Ontology

### INTRODUCTION

Heidegger soon discovered his philosophical vocation on reading Brentano's thesis on Aristotle's inquiry into the multiple meanings of Being. In a short study entitled '*My Way to Phenomenology*' Heidegger declares:

“Ever since 1907 Brentano's dissertation, ‘on the manifold meaning of Being, according to Aristotle’ had been the first help and guide of my first awkward attempts to penetrate into philosophy. The following question concerned me in a quite vague manner: if being is predicted in manifold meanings, then what is its leading fundamental meaning: what does Being mean?” (Stassen, 2003, p.70)

Thus, for Heidegger, the chief concern of philosophy is to clarify the meaning of Being. He wants to re-open this age old question because, as Walter Biemel observes, “he challenges the tradition, and

he calls upon us to think this tradition through". (Biemel, 1977, p. 29) Therefore, he initiated his enquiry by tracing the entire history of western philosophy and saw that neither Greek nor modern and not even his teacher Husserl addressed the age old question coherently. So, in working out the question of Being Heidegger re-interpreted the history of ontology. He gave phenomenology an 'existentialist' orientation which gained it international acclaim and attracted such talented and original young minds as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Hannah Arendt, Marcuse and many others.

Heidegger revised Husserl's phenomenological method so that it might properly respond to the question of Being. He re-opened the brackets to create room for existence once again. Existence was now to be understood neither as mere subjectivity nor mere objectivity, but as a fundamental openness to the Being of beings.

Husserlian phenomenology had operated largely at the level of epistemology, that is, of an inquiry into the origin of knowledge as it is constituted by our intentional experience. This had required, Husserl believed, a suspension of the ontological question of Being in order to focus on the workings of consciousness. Heidegger goes a step beyond his master; he shifts the emphasis from the meaning of consciousness to the meaning of Being. He accepts nonetheless the overriding conviction of phenomenology that an analysis of the essential structures of meaning necessitates a movement beyond the subject-object dualism in order to lead us back to our originary experience of the world, that is, to 'the things themselves'. But where Husserl identified this originary experience as a consciousness-of-the-world, Heidegger interprets it as a being-in-the-world. Thus Heidegger graduates phenomenology from the epistemological question – what does it mean to know? – to the ontological – what does it mean to be?

Heidegger champions phenomenology as a means of recovering and restating the fundamental question of Being: why is there something rather than nothing? This question goes beyond the certainties of dogmatic speculation or science; it is not concerned with determining what things are so that they may be classified, objectified or controlled. It inquires instead into the ultimate why of being, restoring a sense of wonder that things should be at all rather than not be. While recognizing that this ontological question has become irrelevant for our contemporary culture and no longer commands our attention, Heidegger proclaims the possibility, indeed the necessity, of reviving this question by 'deconstructing' western metaphysics and thereby 'retrieving' the original existential experience of Being similar to the metaphysical questioning when it first arose.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger employs phenomenology to redirect our attention away from traditional metaphysics to the ‘fundamental ontology’ which originally founds it. The ontological question reactivated by a concrete description of man’s being there (Dasein) in the temporal world. *Being and Time* opens with the question ‘what does it mean to be?’ And it proceeds on the assumption that since man is the only being capable of asking this question, our inquiry into Being as such must first engage in a phenomenological analysis of human being as it concretely exists in the everyday world.

Thus, Heidegger states that Being can be understood only in terms of beings. Because Being reveals itself only through being. He says that in order to work out the question of Being the right entity must be picked up. “To formulate and to work out the question of Being adequately, we have first of all to make the questioning entity (Dasein) transparent in its Being”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 27) And Heidegger says that “this entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiry as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term ‘Dasein’”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 27)

Dasein is the right entity which provides the access to the question about the meaning of Being because according to Heidegger, it has some priority over other entities. He states threefold priority of Dasein over other entities. These three fold priorities are: ontological, ontical and ontico-ontological, an extremely lucid discussion of which has been made by Venus George in his book *The Experience of Being as Goal of Human Existence*.

**Ontological priority:** Dasein has an ontological priority because he is able to understand Being. Dasein (The ‘Da’ of ‘Sein’) points to the fact of how the comprehension of Being is fundamentally rooted in Dasein’s Being. And this primordial comprehension of Being constitutes Dasein’s ontological structure. That is why Heidegger remarks: “understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 32) This quality of Dasein’s comprehension of Being is that which makes Dasein ontically distinct from all other entities, even though Dasein, like any other entity, is an entity in the world. Heidegger says that “Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it [he] is ontological”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 32)

**Ontic priority :** Dasein has an ontic priority, in the sense that he is existence, i.e., he is ecstatic, stands out from and transcends other beings, besides his openness to Being. It has an ontic priority

“because its essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 32) The expression refers to the two special characteristics of Dasein that is ‘existence’ and ‘mineness’.

**Existence:** According to Heidegger “the essence of Dasein lies in its [his] existence”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 67) Dasein, as existence, is ek-static, which literally means: standing beyond the static entities of this world. For Heidegger all other things are but they do not exist. He says “Man (Dasein) alone exists. The rock is, but it does not exist. The tree is, but it does not exist. The horse is, but it does not exist. The angel is, but it does not exist. God is, but he does not exist”. (Heidegger, 1959, p. 16) But it does not mean that Heidegger deny the reality of other entities like tree, rock, horse etc. but only he points to the unique type of being which Dasein, as existence is. Dasein, as existence, “is set apart in the realms of beings as the only existing being which can undertake an enquiry into Being in terms of his peculiar existence”. Thus, according to Heidegger, Dasein is not a mere thing, but is ‘to be’ or existence. He is not something static, but a reality that is to be achieved. To exist is to be on the way. Dasein is always stretched forward towards his still-to-be-realized being. It is an existence which is “already-begun-still-to-be-achieved”. (Venus, 2003, p. 71) So, an existence, Dasein is a being which stands out above other entities present-at-hand and moves towards actualization, its possibilities, thereby ever remaining on the way.

**Mineness:** Dasein is always someone’s own existence. And it is “that entity which in its [his] being has this very being as an issue...” (Heidegger, 1973, p. 68) Therefore, unlike other entities, human existence cannot be a matter of indifference and he can never be substituted for another. So Dasein “... is in each case mine”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 68) Thus, according to Heidegger, the essence of Dasein lies in the fact “that in each case it [he] has its [his] being to be and has it as its [his] own”. (Heidegger, 1973, pp. 32-32)

Heidegger asserts that Dasein’s mineness is to be seen in relation to its ‘existence’. As Heidegger states that Dasein is primarily existence or having-to-be, it has constantly to choose from the possible ways for it to be. Dasein is never a finished product, without having to choose from its possibilities. He points out “that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, composts itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility”. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 68) And when Dasein chooses itself as its ownmost possibility, it is said to be ‘authentic’, it can have lost itself and been

'inauthentic'. As Heidegger says "As modes of Being, authenticity and inauthenticity... are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness" (Heidegger, 1973, p. 68) which means, he says "that Being which is an issue for this entity (Dasein) in its very being, is in each case mine". (Heidegger, 1973, p. 67) Thus, combining both 'existence' and 'mineness', we can say that Dasein is in each case mine-to-be in one way or another.

**Ontico-ontological priority:** Ontico-ontological priority according to Heidegger is that, Dasein by his understanding of Being, understands his own being. And not only his own being but that of other Daseins and that of entities. Heidegger says that "in such understanding Dasein provides the ontico-ontological conditions for the possibility of any other ontologies". (Heidegger, 1973, p. 34) Thus, Dasein is the worldly human being, which provides in himself an opening for Being to be revealed. Human existence is the questioner of Being and, in posing the question about Being, he creates an opening that transcendentally grounds all other realms of enquiry.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, Fundamental ontology, as visualized in *Being and Time*, stood to be Heidegger's philosophical enterprise. His sole aim has been to work out the question about the meaning of Being in general. As he points out "the analytic of Dasein ... is to prepare the way for the problematic of fundamental ontology – the question of the meaning of Being in general". (Heidegger, 1973, p. 227) But it does not mean that there are two separate stages: the study of man and the study of Being. It is not even the case that one begins with man and ends with Being, nor vice versa. We can rather say that a study of man is itself a study of Being; and to this, from Heidegger's later perspective we can add that a study of Being is itself a study of man. To quote Heidegger:

"Every philosophical – that is, thoughtful – doctrine of man's essential nature is in itself alone a doctrine of the Being of being [entities]. Every doctrine of Being is in itself alone a doctrine of man's essential nature"  
(Heidegger, 1968, p. 79)

Division I of his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, presents a "preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein", and interprets Dasein's Being as "Being-in-the-word". Being-in-the-world is the fundamental way through which, Dasein primarily shows itself. It is a unitary phenomenon, a primary datum' which 'must be seen as a whole'. We can look at this unitary phenomenon in three ways. We

can look at the side of ‘world’, that is, the idea of ‘worldhood’; or at the side of the ‘who’ of Dasein; or at the relationship between the two – the ‘Being-in’.

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