



THE PLACE OF ETHICS IN HEIDEGGER'S ONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to show, by analysis of texts including Being and Time, An Introduction to Metaphysics and the Letter on Humanism, that Heidegger's existential ontology contains a significant ethical dimension.

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Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to show, by analysis of texts including Being and Time, An Introduction to Metaphysics and the Letter on Humanism, that Heidegger's existential ontology contains a significant ethical dimension. His focus on the 'question of the meaning of Being' gives the impression that his writings had little relation to ethics, but his thought must be interpreted in ethical terms because his phenomenological analysis of human existence (Dasein) understood meaning and truth in relation to humanity.

Ethical phenomena such as decision, conscience, anxiety, guilt, authenticity, alienation and involvement are examined in order to show that the essence of humanity is found in our existence as finite temporal relational beings for whom Being is an issue. This explodes the rationalist logic based on the false subject/object dichotomy. Dasein must recognise its temporality to become authentic, which means the contrasting worldviews of religion and science require ontological deconstruction in favour of an engaged existential openness.

Beginning with a discussion of his method, this thesis will outline the problematic status of ethics in Heidegger's thought, intellectually in terms of his system and morally and historically in terms of his association with Nazism. After examining his epistemology of 'worldhood' and 'place' and his attitude to Descartes, the thesis will seek to appraise the paradigmatic significance of Heidegger's ethical ontology.

This thesis is my original work, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. It was begun under the supervision of Mr A. B. Palma, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Macquarie University, and, after his death, completed under the supervision of Professor Max Deutscher.

All sources of information are annotated in the text.

Robert Tulip

Chapter One: Introduction

The distinctive original contribution to modern thought of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is in his ontological interest in the existential question of the meaning of Being. This initial formulation of Heidegger's accomplishment contains two fundamental assertions, both highly disputable: firstly, that Being has a meaning, and secondly, that ontology must be grounded in an analysis of human existence. This thesis will explore Heidegger's philosophy with the aim of showing that the intrinsically ethical character of his ontology emerges from his treatment of these fundamental questions.

At first reading, it must however be admitted that his overwhelming focus on 'pure' ontology gives the impression that his writings have little relation to the problems of ethics. His primary interest is in fundamental ontology for its own sake: this is shown by the startling recurrent claim that the question of the meaning of Being has been forgotten by philosophy and must be rekindled. The question of the meaning of Being initially appears to focus on the realm of thought, in which understanding and interpretation are emphasised, rather than on the realm of action, where ethical applications and consequences can be addressed. Indeed, some interpreters¹ insist that the ethical is in no way germane to the problematic of his thought. Heidegger never directly broached the questions usually recognised as most pertinent to the subject matter of ethics, such as "What is the good?", or "What should I do in a moral dilemma?" He did not even consider key ethical terms such as love, happiness or justice. Indeed, if these questions were all the philosophy of ethics could discuss, Heidegger's ontological ideas could not be treated as arising primarily from an ethical impulse. As one commentator has observed,

"there is apparently no place for ethics in his philosophy. . . Heidegger hardly ever employs the term 'ethics', and when he does, it is mostly to reveal the term's inability to disclose the basic truth of Being. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in the whole of Heidegger's thought readers constantly hear ethical undertones."²

The goal of this thesis is to show how these 'undertones' mean that Heidegger's writings can and must be interpreted in ethical terms. Heidegger's pure ontology, for all its lofty abstraction and universality, was centred on humanity as the ground of interpretation. Overcoming the long-standing dualities between mind and matter, between thought and action, through the phenomenological analysis of human existence, was central to his philosophical purpose. Although his main concern was how to arrive at an understanding of Being, rather than how such an understanding should be applied, he was not interested in Being 'in itself', in the Kantian sense of some imaginary noumenal reality independent of human understanding. Instead he held that understanding the human situation is the only way to approach the wider question of the meaning of Being as such, that authentic ontology must be based on the existential analytic of Dasein.³ He thus maintained that the only sense in which the 'in itself' has meaning is in terms of relationship of things to human purposes, an argument which contains an essential ethical dimension.

Existential ethical themes such as decision, care, conscience, anxiety, guilt, authenticity, alienation and involvement are central to his work, at least in Being and Time.

¹ e.g. Richardson: Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought, 1963, p. 531

² Bernard J. Boelen: 'The Question of Ethics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger', pp 76-105 in Frings, M.S.: Heidegger and the Quest for Truth, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968

³ 'Dasein' (Being-there) is the German word for human existence. Because of the distinctive way he use this term it is commonly left untranslated.

His discussion of such themes led to his thought being widely considered⁴ as an articulation and diagnosis of the condition of an important phase in our culture, along the lines of Nietzsche's belief, reinforced more recently by Rorty,⁵ that philosophers should abandon abstract speculation and become "physicians of culture". Heidegger's use of these 'therapeutic' ideas distinguished his thought from the detached 'beholding' valued by earlier philosophies, but the ethical meaning of words like 'decision' and 'involvement' is by no means as clear as at first appears. The critique he developed of the confident rationalism and naturalism of modern thought put him among the founders of the 'post-modern' tendency in philosophy, but his own writings were devoted to consideration of the ontological implications of this critique, rather than its ethical and epistemological dimensions.

Heidegger's work is most closely associated with the modern philosophy of existentialism, the resolute confrontation of the thinking individual with a meaningless world. Despite his criticisms of some who accepted that label, Being and Time must be regarded as the greatest source-book for a comprehensive existentialist philosophy. When thinking of existentialism, the images that spring to mind include Jean-Paul Sartre stepping from the plane to inform waiting journalists that God is dead, an idea that arose out of the Nietzschean ethos which felt that since God had been murdered by science modern life had become absurd. Yet a more positive aspect of Heidegger's existentialism, and one that derives directly from his central themes, is its essential ethical dimension. Heidegger is an existentialist, and as John Passmore observes,⁶ "in so far as it has been discussed, existentialism has been taken seriously as a stimulus to ethico-religious thinking". Despite his protestations about being classified as an existentialist, Heidegger's view that finite human existence is the only possible horizon for philosophy makes this description of him correct and necessary; indeed he may well have been the most systematic and penetrating of all the philosophers of this school.

This thesis examines how and whether a distinctive ethical perspective emerges from Heidegger's primary interest in the philosophical discipline of fundamental ontology. To extract an answer to this question, Heidegger's unusual and idiosyncratic ideas must be considered in the light of how ethics is generally understood. The issue for ethics is how people ought to behave: as Bacon said,⁷ ethics seeks to ascertain firstly which practices are morally good, and secondly, how to encourage people to adopt these practices. Heidegger only approached this problem indirectly. He analysed the human situation in terms of a phenomenological analysis of human temporality, presenting the ontological structure of existence as temporal, finite and relational. In consequence he presented a profound critique of the metaphysical psychologies, such as the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul and the Cartesian doctrine of the mind as 'res cogitans', which had effectively pretended that men are infinite individuals. The ontology of Dasein is built around the observation that human existence is essentially temporal, which means that time is the only horizon within which we can understand the nature of our being and that we are thrown into a world not of our making. Heidegger sought to interpret this horizon by designating the temporal structure of our existence as 'care' (Sorge), a notion he defined as "ahead of itself Being already in a world, as being alongside entities encountered within the world".⁸ As ahead of ourselves we anticipate possibilities by projecting upon the future, as already in a world we are immersed

⁴ cf. p.12, n.29 R. May: The Meaning of Anxiety, Ronald Press, 1950

⁵ R.Rorty Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature

⁶ p. 459, A Hundred Years of Philosophy, Duckworth, 1957

⁷ p.154 The Advancement of Learning Everyman, 1934.

⁸ Sein und Zeit: 192 (Page numbers refer to the pagination of the German original - in the margin of the English text)

and engaged by factual involvements. The greater part of Heidegger's major treatise Sein und Zeit is devoted to showing how care is structured in terms of the complex historical relatedness of human temporality.

'Care' functions as a central technical term in Heidegger's existential ontology, but the ethical dimension of the doctrine of care is unclear. It certainly seeks to move philosophy towards an 'incarnational' understanding of truth by delimiting the horizon of meaning in terms of human purposes, but Heidegger's use of the term is difficult and, if care is not taken in interpretation, misleading. As the definition above indicates, and as we shall see when we return to a more detailed discussion of care, the normal understanding of care as helping and nurturing is only one part of its signification for Heidegger. He presents as virtual fact the argument that human existence (Dasein) must be understood as care. The task, at least in terms of the Humean standards of skepticism by which philosophical ethics are judged, is to examine what truth there is in the claim that the Being of Dasein is care, and to consider whether the various 'oughts' Heidegger derived from this claim, concerning such aspects of behaviour and life as empathy, conscience, authenticity and resoluteness, are justified.

The specific unifying question to be addressed in assessing the rigour and worth of Heidegger's ethics is in what sense the 'value' of authenticity can be derived from the 'fact' of temporality. If it can be shown that authenticity is fundamental to a valid practical ethics, and that Heidegger does demonstrate an organic basis for this theme in an exposition of the way things are, namely his analysis of the fact of human historicity, then it will have been shown that his contribution to ethical thought, though presented as incidental, actually indicates the way to a real advance on the dichotomous logic which had been dominant hitherto.

Heidegger himself presented the primary function of his central ideas as ontological, maintaining that any ethical importance is secondary. However, by minimising their ethical significance he may actually have hindered our understanding of his basic ideas. As we shall see, ethics is peremptorily subordinated to ontology in Heidegger's scheme of thought, but the fact remains that his ontology is profoundly ethical. To indicate why this is so, we may take as a clue his own sanctioning of this sort of imaginative interpretation. In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics he wrote that the most important thing in philosophy is that "interpretation must be animated and guided by the power of an illuminative idea. Only through the power of this idea can an interpretation risk that which is always audacious, namely, entrusting itself to the secret *élan* of a work; to penetrate through a writer's work to wrest from the actual words that which these words 'intend to say'".⁹ So just as Heidegger sought to show that Kant's "secret *élan*" is to be found in his laying of the foundations of metaphysics in the transcendental imagination, my aim is to show that the "secret *élan*" which must be 'wrested' from Heidegger's philosophy, and which illuminates its underlying intent, is his ethical message. In Plato's Doctrine of Truth, he wrote that "the 'doctrine' of a thinker is that which is left unsaid in what he says".¹⁰ Heidegger's ethical doctrines may be left unsaid, but their presence in his thought is certain.

Heidegger's principal goal of establishing and articulating our relationship to Being has a clear ethical potential by virtue of its capacity to confront the pervasive modern situation of alienation, and thereby help humanise the dominant modern worldview. However this potential can only be realised if the transformative consequences for human action of this method are thematised through the development of an ethics. Heidegger's failure to do this is surprising, considering that Being and Time points so clearly in this direction. It may be

⁹ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics : 207

¹⁰ p.1 Plato's Doctrine of Truth, in Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Volume Two, edited by W. Barrett & H.D. Aiken.

that he 'got his fingers burnt', so to speak, by his involvement with the Nazis in 1933 and as a result decided to forswear practical commitments in favour of a concern for the philosophy of language. This would at least explain the talk of a 'reversal' (Kehre) in Heidegger's thought dating from about 1935, away from the existential analytic of Dasein, the theme of his earlier writings, towards a more meditative, linguistic approach. Certainly this is borne out by his statement in 1954¹¹ that "prevailing man has for centuries now acted too much and thought too little". Perhaps this turning was wise, given his spectacular mistake of believing that any good could come from the evil of fascism, but it leaves open the question of whether an ethics implicit in Being and Time was left undeveloped. His philosophy does not exclude the possibility that a new approach to the practical questions of ethics might be implicit within it, and it is this implicit ethical dimension that I will seek to present as a natural and continuous extension of his system, in application to a network of problems he only partially addressed.¹² This thesis is based on the premise that Heidegger's efforts to ground ontology in care, and thereby reconcile being and existence, means such an ontological ethics is not only possible and necessary, but is contained implicitly in his work.

The word 'place' in the title of this thesis has a double sense; firstly, it calls us to identify the ethical presuppositions and contents, as well as the ethical implications and omissions, of Heidegger's ontology. Secondly, and more importantly, 'place' has the more general meaning of the location, both metaphysical and spatial, where philosophy resides. This second meaning has particular significance in assessing Heidegger's contemporary relevance, because of the urgency of addressing the problem of alienation - the lack of roots and the absence of a sense of meaning and belonging that characterises so much modern life. Beginning with a discussion of aspects of his method and the positive content of his approach, this thesis will outline the problematic status of ethics in Heidegger's thought, not only intellectually in terms of his system, but also morally and historically in terms of his association with Nazism. After then examining his epistemology and his attitude to Descartes, the thesis will seek to assess how Heidegger's fundamental ontology, based as it is on specific ethical themes in his philosophy including care, angst, openness, conscience and authenticity, can form a basis for a new ethics. The overall aim is therefore to appraise the paradigmatic significance of Heidegger's ethical ontology.

Unavoidably this involves a specific and partial interpretation of what Heidegger is saying, rather than a simple exposition, because especially with regard to questions such as the place and meaning of ethics or metaphysics, any attempt at exposition will be fraught with ambiguity.¹³ To illustrate this difficulty, a theme throughout Heidegger's writings is the need to overcome metaphysics, but in the early works this need remains within the context of the recognised goal that philosophy must seek to account for beings in terms of their ground. However in some later texts this whole idea of foundations becomes a problem itself, to the point that some readers, such as Richard Rorty,¹⁴ claim the critique of foundational logic is a central aspect of Heidegger's contribution to philosophy. There have been conflicts of interpretation over this issue, with the 'deconstructionist' school, notably Jacques Derrida, using Heidegger's work to support their own vision of critique without foundations, of philosophy as a fluid articulation of contingent relationships without substance or necessity. Others have accepted that Heidegger did not seek to abolish foundations per se: it is true

¹¹ Basic Writings 346

¹² cf: p. 80 John Richardson: *Existential Epistemology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986

¹³ Charles Birch, in On Purpose, xi, tells how Charles Hartshorne contrasted Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, saying Russell sought to be clear at almost any cost, while Whitehead preferred to be "adequate to the richness and many-sidedness of reality", even at the expense of neatness and clarity. Heidegger is certainly much more in line with Whitehead on this score.

¹⁴ *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

that he rejected the metaphysical theology of God as a Creator Being and eternal infinite first cause, but his purpose in criticising this old idea was to develop his central thesis of the existential analytic as the source of meaning. As such he only advocated a shift in foundations from God to existence, not the complete abolition of the need for foundations. This shift itself is however not without its own tensions and even inconsistencies, in that at one moment Heidegger appears to value 'average everydayness' as the horizon within which philosophy can find its authenticity, but at the next moment he tells us that authenticity requires the explosion of the false values of everyday life. Nevertheless, as this thesis will hopefully make clear, the doctrine that human existence is the source and judge of meaning remains the guiding theme of both the content and the method of his thought, and as such is central to the place of ethics in Heidegger's ontology.

The object of this thesis is to show that the purpose of Heidegger's ontology can only be understood in terms of basically ethical motives. The context of his thought is his perception that the question of the meaning of Being, which he understood in terms of human temporality as the finite horizon of existence, has been neglected and forgotten. The task of recollection is primarily an ontological one: setting out how the schematism of the understanding can be rigorously grounded in the framework of existence, rather than in the Kantian arena of establishing the necessary conditions for conscious knowledge. The broader perspective arrived at through explicitly restating the question of Being also has an ethical dimension. If this perspective is excluded from consideration, we very soon find that it is forgotten and repressed. Forgetting and repressing the attempt to understand Being in the world as a whole is the inevitable consequence of adopting the false ground on which all metaphysical methods have relied. Only by placing the concerns of metaphysics on the basis of a rigorous phenomenal and temporal understanding can we avoid the debasement of our ethics and values, for such an understanding is an essential foundation for the proper grounding of ethics.

Chapter Two: Content and Method

Before proceeding to a detailed examination of our ethical theme, and before any conclusions can be reached about ontological interpretation, a range of questions surrounding the content and method of Heidegger's ontology must be clarified. In summary, the content of Heidegger's ontology is the question of the meaning of Being and his method is the phenomenological hermeneutic of existence.

2.1 Content

Fundamental ontology is the general enquiry into the nature and meaning of Being. Since the time of Plato,¹⁵ when the ontological themes of truth, being and reality came to be considered the essential ground of systematic universal thought, ontology has occupied a central foundational position in the thought of the West. The inquiry into these themes has provided the content of ontology. However, the very broadness of words such as those just mentioned indicates a problem, which also applies to words like 'meaning' and 'existence'. Being has been regarded as a first principle obvious in itself and in need of no further proof, but the problem for coherent ontological analysis is that Being as such is formless and abstract and is never simply present to the understanding in an obvious and immediate way.

The fundamental question of ontology at the most basic level is the question of what can be said to exist, the question of what is. However, the varied answers to this question show its difficulty. Among other possibilities, matter, God, humanity, energy, ideas, the world, space, time, have been advanced as the fundamental reality. The word 'being' can be identified with 'life', 'emergence' and 'endurance'.¹⁶ One extreme position is the idealism of Parmenides, who Heidegger suggests claimed access to eternal divine truth by laying down that Being is an indivisible whole, with his claim that

"'is' can be said only of Being in an appropriate way, so that no individual being ever properly 'is'".¹⁷

The apparent ambiguity engendered by these numerous opinions about what exists is shown by Heidegger's statement, made with reference to Descartes, that

"in the assertions 'God is' and 'the world is', we assert Being. This word 'is', however, cannot be meant to apply to these entities in the same sense, when between them there is an infinite difference of Being".¹⁸

In the midst of these conflicting answers to the question of what exists, and in the midst of the 'infinite difference' traditional philosophy has placed between infinite eternal truth and finite temporal events, a second question, equally fundamental, and with equally problematic status, presents itself. This question is what the word 'Being' can mean; in Heidegger's terms, the question of the meaning of Being. For if the word 'Being' covers such a multitude of realms, it is so vague as to be a mere homonym and a single definite meaning may be unattainable. Being was defined in just this way by Aristotle, who said it is a transcendental universal held together only by analogy.¹⁹ Heidegger was intrigued by this problem. His reading of Brentano led him to ask:

"what is the pervasive, simple, unified determination of Being that permeates all of its multiple meanings? This question raises others: What, then, does Being

¹⁵ cf. Plato, Sophist

¹⁶ Introduction to Metaphysics:72

¹⁷ Introduction to Metaphysics p.214

¹⁸ Sein und Zeit 93

¹⁹ Richardson

mean? To what extent (why and how) does the Being of beings unfold in the four modes which Aristotle constantly affirms, but whose common origin he leaves undetermined? One need but run over the names assigned to them in the language of the philosophical tradition to be struck by the fact that they seem at first irreconcilable: Being as property, Being as possibility and actuality, Being as truth, Being as schema of the categories. What sense of Being comes to expression in these four headings? How can they be brought into comprehensible accord?"²⁰

The search for understanding of the single meaning of Being which supports these various uses is thus a metaphysical goal which is basic to Heidegger's thought, despite his criticisms of past metaphysics. As an illustration of the difficulty of knowing the meaning of this word 'is', Heidegger presents Goethe's saying, scrawled on the window ledge of a Swiss mountain hut, "Over all the summits, there is peace". The peace which 'is' over the mountains 'is' not in the sense of "is situated, is present, takes place, abides or prevails".²¹ Being is definitely 'there', but the manner and content of this definitude is elusive. The problem facing such abstract imprecision, as Nietzsche saw with his usual stark insight, is that

"the word 'Being' is no more than an empty word. It means nothing real, tangible, material. Its meaning is an unreal vapour . . . Such highest concepts as being (are) the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality. Who would want to chase after such a vapour when the very term is merely a name for a great fallacy!"²²

Even further, Nietzsche seeks to destroy this word completely; in The Twilight of the Idols he says; "Nothing indeed has exercised a more simple power of persuasion hitherto than the error of Being".²³ Yet Heidegger contends that this elusive question resolves itself into the problem of why there is anything at all, which of all questions is the broadest, deepest and most fundamental.²⁴

The problem arising from this universality is that when we attempt to study ontology, we find that Being, which initially seems the simplest of notions, is actually the most mysterious. Heidegger indicated the perplexing perennial mystery at the centre of philosophy when he began Being and Time by quoting from Plato's Sophist:

"For manifestly you have been long aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'Being'. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have become perplexed".²⁵

Hegel, who defined Being as the 'indeterminate immediate', found it just as difficult as Aristotle to articulate the meaning of Being precisely. As Heidegger observes, "Being has been regarded as the most universal and the emptiest of concepts".²⁶ Like time for Saint Augustine, being is simultaneously indefinable and self-evident.²⁷ The question of Being is "obscure and without direction"²⁸ ; its meaning is "still veiled in darkness".²⁹ So how can anything definite be said about Being? How can Being become "a theme for actual

²⁰ p. x Heidegger's Foreword to Richardson Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought, 1963

²¹ Introduction to Metaphysics.90

²² Introduction to Metaphysics:.35

²³ Introduction to Metaphysics 36

²⁴ Introduction to Metaphysics: .3

²⁵ Sein und Zeit 1

²⁶ cf. Introduction to Metaphysics.40

²⁷ Sein und Zeit 4

²⁸ Sein und Zeit 4

²⁹ Sein und Zeit 4

investigation"?³⁰ How can "a mere matter for speculation" become "of all questions, the most basic and the most concrete"?³¹

Proceeding from an initial consideration of Being in the most general and amorphous terms possible, Heidegger argued that consideration of Being as a theme for actual investigation must precede any thought about entities: "the question of Being aims at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of the sciences".³² Because, as he here recognises, pure Being performs the Kantian function of providing the rational *a priori* conditions which underpin contingent existence, the effort to understand Being must begin by recognising the universality and the abstraction inherent in this formal notion. The need for such an *a priori* basis is indicated again in the demand that before we can discuss empirical questions which arise in such disciplines as anthropology and psychology, we must seek to "make headway with . . . the task of laying bare that *a priori* basis which must be visible before the question 'What is man?' can be discussed philosophically".³³

However the pitfall of such an *a prioristic* approach in the tradition has been the neglect of actual existence. Therefore Heidegger emphasises the necessity of approaching this whole question in terms of the analytic of existence, to "lay the foundations for the sciences"³⁴ through the interpretation of entities. Such an approach does not seek an abstract and placeless universality, because its emphasis is on the need to retain an organic relation to actuality: Being, "that which determines entities as entities",³⁵ "is always the Being of an entity".³⁶

We may consider such disparate fields of human interest as astronomy, poetry, engineering, economics and agriculture, and say that all that is known and all that has happened in these fields is significant for ontology. They all deal with something that exists, but there is no further commonality between a distant star, an antelope, an ode and a bridge than the mere fact that all share existence, and the enormous differences between them must still be considered. Being may be the factor uniting divergent areas of reality for valid philosophy, but this ontological sameness tells us nothing specific about entities. The question is whether the task of formulating a systematic philosophy that will incorporate such contrasting bodies of understanding is possible, given the immensity of what it requires.

One way to begin is by recognising the place of objective meaning. Objectivity can easily be found in any simple statement of fact, for example, "The oak tree has shed its leaves"; "Alpha Centauri is four light years away from us"; "China and India share a common border"; "Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' says beauty is truth"; "energy equals mass times the square of the speed of light" ($e=mc^2$). This list of things are all possible objects for ontological enquiry because all occur within the common ground of existence, but there is a gulf of meaning between material objects, theories, political relations and poetry. For example, we can say the poem exists, but there the similarity to other entities ends. Part of the reason is that the meaning of the poem is not to be found in the empirical data of ink and paper but in its transcendent significance for the human spirit. The role of the perceptive human understanding in conferring meaning and value is thus seen to be significant and indispensable. The point of the existential analytic is that true statements only acquire value

³⁰ Sein und Zeit 1

³¹ Sein und Zeit 9

³² Sein und Zeit:11

³³ Sein und Zeit: 45

³⁴ Sein und Zeit:10

³⁵ Sein und Zeit:6

³⁶ Sein und Zeit:9

as they are situated in the human context, that meaning must be created by people if it is to exist at all.

The phenomenological insistence on establishing meaning at the personal level of human existence is a key to the human dimension, and therefore the ethical dimension, of Heidegger's thought. As Heidegger recognised by making disposition (*Befindlichkeit*) a major theme of his thought, ontology must consider such phenomena as cultural values, ethical conscience and the freedom of the will if it is to truly account for human realities. The idea that the explanation of such phenomena could require nothing more than reduction to physical components is simply false. The infinite complexity of the existential condition of human being is irreducibly plural and diverse: as Heidegger says, "it is beyond question that the totality of the structural whole is not to be reached by building it up out of elements".³⁷ This can be seen from the observation that physiology is no more proof that the essence of man consists in an organic body scientifically explained than is the essence of nature discovered in atomic energy.³⁸ The meaning people discover in a Mozart symphony can no more be found through the analysis of the molecular structure of the instruments in the orchestra or the mathematical interpretation of the structure of the sound waves produced than the intentions of Joseph Stalin or Thomas Jefferson can be explained by the methods of neuroscience, yet these human realities are unquestionably significant for the meaning of Being.

Broadly speaking, the interpretation of the nature and meaning of Being falls within the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, the generic term for enquiry which seeks to make different situations and perspectives comprehensible to each other, to understand in the most generic way the signs and messages that mediate between finite human existence and infinite eternal truth. Of course, whether Being ought to be identified with "infinite eternal truth" is disputed just as much as whether Being can be identified with God, but this question of the proper horizon for ontology is one which can only be gradually developed. The processes of textual exegesis point towards how ontology can ultimately be understood as a science, that is, a unified and systematic body of learning, but the generality of the interest of ontological hermeneutics leads to a real difference from the precise empirical sciences.

2.2 The Method of Ontology

Heidegger suggested we can only understand how the essence of humanity "belongs to the essence of Being . . . if before considering the question, What shall we do?, we ponder this: *How must we think?*".³⁹ This priority accorded to the question of thought is basic to Heidegger's whole method, given that the question of the meaning of being is directed essentially towards encouraging people to think. Heidegger contends⁴⁰ that simply giving thought to our plight sets us on the way to resolving it. Nevertheless, and despite his contention that the essence of humanity can be disclosed only if thought is given priority over action, genuine thought does have an ethical impact because of the transformation it works on our whole outlook: hence his remark, "granted that we can't do anything with philosophy, might not philosophy, if we concern ourselves with it, do something with us?".⁴¹ To think about Being in the modern context can be a disturbing and difficult thing, which if carried through can deepen and improve our whole approach to life. The need to overcome the

³⁷ *Sein und Zeit* 181

³⁸ *Basic Writings*:205

³⁹ *Die Kehre, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* : 40

⁴⁰ *Poetry, Language, Thought* : 161

⁴¹ *Introduction to Metaphysics*: 12

pervasive poverty of spirit wrought by the common unwillingness to engage in the process of genuine thought, the common tendency to focus on tangible effects, valued according to their utility, while neglecting the deeper and more profound changes signalled within the realm of ideas, is a sign of the importance of following through with a method that gives such a priority to pure thinking for its own sake.

Thinking about Being calls us to seek a deeper historical awareness of the temporal conditions of human existence, and has substantial, if indirect, ethical consequences. Given that the essence of action is accomplishment,⁴² a conclusion which follows from the observation that action which fails to accomplish anything is worthless, it may be that thought about Being actually achieves more in an ethical sense than some actions done for the best of intentions. The indirect ethical accomplishment of thought about Being is in the long-term deepening and improvement it brings to the cultural ethos which informs practical decisions. This deepening is an important, albeit implicit, goal of Heidegger's basic approach, and indicates where the ethical value of his thought may be found.

To indicate more clearly the basis of Heidegger's thought about the question of the meaning of Being, it is essential to understand his use of the method of phenomenology. Heidegger characterised phenomenology as the method of his ontology, defining it as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself". "The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a methodological conception. This expression does not characterise the what of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research".⁴³ The maxim of phenomenology, "To the things themselves!" offers the key to a fundamental criticism of the Cartesian tendency, which has assisted the estrangement of reason from practical concern by approaching things as mere material substance and thereby hiding their relation to human purposes. Phenomenology places a renewed value on the thing as it is used and encountered in actual experience. Heidegger maintained that in our dealings with the world, we employ the "kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use", rather than "a bare perceptual cognition", contending that "the achieving of phenomenological access to the entities which we encounter consists in thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies".⁴⁴ The deconstruction of these interpretative tendencies is a major part of Heidegger's philosophy; his phenomenology seeks to relate to and understand things on the basis of their relation to humanity, to concretise the amorphous and speculative study of ontology by constant reference to finite existence. The result is that the things encountered in everyday life and the experiences of ordinary people become real concerns for philosophy. The phenomenological ethic has made a significant contribution to modern thought chiefly because of this insight.

Although critical of rationalism, Heidegger's phenomenology retained a rational critical spirit. He described his method as

"opposed to all free floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated, it is opposed to those pseudo-questions which parade themselves as 'problems' often for generations at a time".⁴⁵

The perception that rationalism had atrophied, that the specialisation of the sciences had rendered them incapable of making humanity their primary concern, provided the ethical rationale for phenomenological ontology as an independent critical discipline. In pursuit of Heidegger's

⁴² cf. Basic Writings: 193

⁴³ *Sein und Zeit* 27

⁴⁴ *Sein und Zeit* 67

⁴⁵ *Sein und Zeit* 28

"burning problem of obtaining and securing the kind of access which will lead to Dasein", "we have no right to resort to dogmatic constructions and to apply just any idea of Being and actuality to this entity, no matter how 'self-evident' that idea may be; nor may any of the categories which such an idea prescribes be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration"⁴⁶ .

This commitment to critical honesty and the pursuit of truth has been an important factor in the dynamism and ethical spirit of phenomenology, both in its foundations in the thought of Husserl and in its contemporary influence. The phenomenological method of enquiry and school of thought was founded by Edmund Husserl, the teacher to whom Being and Time is dedicated "in friendship and admiration". As the original exponent of modern phenomenology as a specific way of doing philosophy, the rigour and clarity of his thought cleared the path for the work of Heidegger and many other thinkers, including, most notably, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The Cartesian Meditations and Ideas expounded a theoretical system arising from profound reflection on the modern problems of subject, object and consciousness. In his later writings,⁴⁷ which sought to address the context of the anonymous alienation brought about by technological mass society, Husserl made the relevance of the questions that are decisive for a genuine humanity a central issue within phenomenology. In the Crisis and the Vienna Lecture, Husserl turned from the formal structure of consciousness as noesis/noema to the idea of the spiritual becoming of European humanity.

The fruit of his close theoretical work in his early days emerges with the profound understanding of the social function of philosophy: he said that as soon as civilisation

"becomes consciously recognised in the development as telos, it necessarily also becomes practical as a goal of the will; and thereby a new, higher stage of development is introduced which is under the guidance of norms, normative ideas"⁴⁸ "With the first conception of ideas, . . . there grows a new sort of humanity, one which, living in finitude, lives toward poles of infinity."⁴⁹

Whereas

"culture not yet touched by science consists in tasks and accomplishments of man in finitude, . . . many infinite ideas . . . owe their analogous character of infinity to the transformation of mankind through philosophy and its idealities."⁵⁰

These statements indicate how a concern for ethical renewal was a theme in Husserl's work, but this social concern was arrived at on the basis of a doctrine of philosophy as grounded in transcendental consciousness, with which Heidegger fundamentally disagreed. Much of the influence of Being and Time arose from its effort to humanise knowledge by making Being the central theme of phenomenology, but the priority Heidegger gave to the question of the meaning of Being led to a departure from Husserl's perspective. As will become clearer as we delve further into his philosophy, there is a circularity about Heidegger's method of approach to Being as an issue that was incompatible with Husserl's ambition⁵¹ of proving that the intentionality of consciousness is the foundational ground of philosophy.

Heidegger's criticism of Husserl's method is most obvious in the remark that "we cannot ever avoid a 'circular' proof in the existential analytic, because such an analytic does not do any proving at all by the rules of the 'logic of consistency'. What common sense wishes to

⁴⁶ Sein und Zeit 248

⁴⁷ Edmund Husserl: The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, Northwestern, 1970

⁴⁸ The Vienna Lecture: Crisis Appendix p.275

⁴⁹ Sein und Zeit 277

⁵⁰ Sein und Zeit 279

⁵¹ expressed in the Ideas and the Cartesian Meditations

eliminate in avoiding the 'circle', on the supposition that it is measuring up to the loftiest rigour of scientific investigation, is nothing less than the basic structure of care"⁵². Such rules of logic would eliminate historical interpretation from the domain of rigorous knowledge, on the ground that "we may not presuppose what it is our task to provide grounds for." For Heidegger, "mathematics is not more rigorous than historiology, but only narrower, because the existential foundations relevant for it lie within a narrower range."⁵³ Instead of logical deduction, Heidegger calls for a "leap into the circle"⁵⁴ so that we may have a "full view" of understanding and of care, which together make up "Dasein's circular Being".

In calling for such a leap, Heidegger echoes Kierkegaard, who held that the philosophy of existence demands a leap into faith, rather than proofs based on rigorous logic. In fact, Heidegger went even further than Kierkegaard, suggesting that "knowing the world is a founded mode of Being in the world",⁵⁵ requiring no further justification, whether by faith or logic. Knowing the world must be presupposed, and this presupposition cannot be refuted, but once this non-logical step is taken, there is ample scope for the use of systematic logic to investigate its implications. The alternative procedure, which Heidegger calls "the modern world view",⁵⁶ is "the gnawing of an empty skepticism", and "presupposes not too much but too little". It arises when "we take our departure from a worldless "I" in order to provide this "I" with an Object"⁵⁷. The "theoretical subject" which we then "round out on the practical side by tacking on an ethic", "artificially and dogmatically curtails"⁵⁸ the ontology of Dasein. So the transcendental horizon discussed in Being and Time "is not that of the subjective consciousness; rather it defines itself in terms of the temporality of Dasein".⁵⁹ Philosophy as finite understanding must recognise its context: we are more buffeted by fate than creating our world.

Husserl's rejoinder, expressed in the Vienna Lecture⁶⁰, is that rationalism, which avows such a world-creating power for the human intellect, is essential to philosophy despite its historical failings. The origin of rationalism is in the distinctive approach to 'theoria' of Plato and Aristotle, in whose work philosophy was born. Their transcendence and critique of the mythical way of thought, contains "the spiritual *telos* of European humanity . . . thereby a new stage of development is introduced which is under the guidance of normative ideas". In science, says Husserl, man reaches toward the infinite, whereas extra-scientific culture moves within the sphere of the finitely surveyable surrounding world. Infinite ideas - the genuine good, the absolute value - enable the transformation of the human spirit. The praxis of theoria aims to elevate humanity through universal scientific reason. Such elevation is only possible when man "turns away from all practical interests and . . . strives for and achieves nothing but pure *theoria*". Only through detached isolation do we gain the resources to renovate and transform our contingent circumstances.

This is a notion of ethics which Husserl correctly derives from Plato and Aristotle and which has informed the most influential schools of philosophy, including Kantian notions of duty and utilitarian ideas about happiness. However, Heidegger suggests it has a basic flaw, that its refusal to begin from the situation of 'average everydayness' has produced an estrangement between man and his Being. One of Heidegger's best-known theses is the

⁵² Sein und Zeit 315

⁵³ Sein und Zeit 152-3

⁵⁴ Sein und Zeit 315

⁵⁵ Sein und Zeit 59

⁵⁶ cf. The Age of the World Picture, in The Question Concerning Technology

⁵⁷ Sein und Zeit 316

⁵⁸ Sein und Zeit 316

⁵⁹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 18

⁶⁰ Crisis pp 269-301

suggestion that Western thought since Plato and Aristotle has 'fallen out of Being'; that the value accorded *theoria* has allowed the forgetting of, and alienation from, the truth of Being. This should not, it must be said, indicate a hostility on Heidegger's part towards the origins of philosophy, because he draws immense inspiration from the Greeks. He is however hostile towards the derivative work which followed Plato and Aristotle, which grounded its understanding in metaphysical concepts instead of establishing an original relation with the things themselves. He says, "philosophy is one of man's few great achievements. But what is great can only begin great. . . So it is with the philosophy of the Greeks. It ended in greatness with Aristotle".⁶¹ Although the meaning of Being was "found continually disturbing" by Plato and Aristotle, for whom it was "a stimulus for research",⁶² after their time Heidegger suggests this question subsided into neglect, and it was this subsequent neglect, grounded in a failure to base theory on disclosure, that allowed alienation to grow. A principal direction of Heidegger's thought, formulated in his doctrine of care, is the claim that this alienation can only be overcome through active involvement in finite concern. And yet, as we have seen, there is a contradictory current in his thought which criticises our forfeiture to 'average everydayness', valuing conscience and anxiety for pulling us away from involvement towards authenticity. The tension between these two conceptions of the method of philosophy, the one leaping in to involved concern, the other maintaining a detached reserve, will recur in this thesis as an important dimension of the critique of Heidegger's ethics. Heidegger's aim is to articulate an authentic spirituality, but his thesis that authenticity emerges in the openness of the individual to his own being, in being true to one's ownmost potential, rather than in terms of a social validation, is another factor setting his philosophy apart from much of moral philosophy.

Arising from Heidegger's method of existential phenomenology, a further problem in assessing his method is the issue of systematicity. Systematic investigation usually focuses on a specific subject matter that can be exhaustively analysed to coherently formulate detailed particular information with precision and clarity. In the context of ontology however, systematicity refers primarily to the principle of non-contradiction, that the unity of truth is a fundamental axiom of positive logic. Despite Heidegger's criticisms of the way this theoretical principle has often smothered thought rather than encouraging it, at a more basic level he uses the principle of non-contradiction by making the disclosure of Being the ground of his system of thought.

The problem of method, however, is that Heidegger has been identified with the existentialist revolt against system, especially against Hegel. It appears contradictory to describe Heidegger both as an existentialist who recognised the alienation of human being from thought, and at the same time to assert that his thought is systematic. Existentialist philosophy has often expressed itself as the very negation of systematic reason, for example with Kierkegaard's assertion that systematic logic does not necessarily disclose anything about existence. Existential thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard held that the problem, not only with the Hegelian philosophy based on the construction of an absolute system of ideas but also with scientific materialism, is that the attempt to acquire understanding loses human relevance if it posits itself as universal by ignoring the finite constraints of human limitation. Hegel believed speculative contemplation could deduce the identity of the rational and the real and the bond between the true and the whole through a chain of reason which began from the immediate appearance of phenomena to sense perception. Yet according to the existentialists, Hegel only attained his world-historical universal comprehension by forgetting existence; the idealist demand that truth should be

⁶¹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 15

⁶² Sein und Zeit 1

objective is founded on the negation of subjectivity rather than its expression, so by neglecting the necessary task of adequately securing the connection between the absolute truth given to speculative reason and the subjective experience of life, Hegel's thought failed to attain the systematic universality it claimed. Whereas Hegel held that it is possible for the reflective theoretical mind of the philosopher to construct a total system of ideas by proceeding from the immediately given to absolute truth according to the methods of dialectical logic, existentialism begins with the demand that the only possible context of thought is a finite perspective. As Kierkegaard said of Lessing,

"I assume that anyone I may have the honour to talk with is also a human being. If he presumes to be speculative philosophy in the abstract, pure speculative thought, I must renounce the effort to speak with him; for in that case he vanishes from my sight, and from the feeble sight of every mortal".⁶³

Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript brought the problem of how thought can be grounded in truth into sharp focus with a relentless attack on the whole conception of philosophy as system, the heart of the Hegelian approach. Kierkegaard suggested that "the systematic idea is the identity of subject and object, the unity of thought and being. Existence, on the other hand, is their separation".⁶⁴ The point here is that the infinite speculative unity seen and attained through Platonic/Hegelian logic can only be connected with a finite human perspective by means of the apparent paradox that eternal truth could be manifested in time, so the only subject finally capable of grasping the ultimate system is God. Instead of such puffed up conceit, effectively claiming privileged access to the divine, Kierkegaard calls for a recognition of our mortal condition by asserting that truth is not to be found in the fantastic abstractions of systematic objectivity but in the inwardness of subjectivity. The supposed identity of subject and object postulated as the final fruit of the speculative idealist method must be reconciled with the grubby and broken details of life as an existing individual, and if it cannot be so reconciled it must be abandoned.

The alternative, as far as Kierkegaard is concerned, involves the monstrous belief that it is possible to attain a unified vision, presented in glowing terms as the absolute theory of knowledge, without this vision having any necessary consequences for ethics or practical behaviour. For such a system, "being an individual man is a thing that has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher confuses himself with humanity at large, whereby he becomes something infinitely great - and at the same time nothing at all".⁶⁵

While Heidegger was careful to explain the importance of subjective construction of meaning, and recognises that Kierkegaard "explicitly seized upon the problem of existence and thought it through in a penetrating fashion",⁶⁶ he accused Kierkegaard of being under the domination of Hegel on the grounds that the existential problematic remained completely alien to him. It is surprising that Heidegger, who aspired to such systematic universality in his thinking while articulating a thoroughly inward doctrine of conscience, should criticise Kierkegaard for being too close to Hegel, the grand master of the system, because Heidegger's method, which looks for the foundations of systematic ontology in the subjective problematic of human existence, appears to have incorporated precisely the contrasting insights found in the philosophies of these two thinkers.

Heidegger formulated this issue by saying that "for Hegel, the matter of thinking is the idea as the absolute concept. For us, formulated in a preliminary fashion, the matter of

⁶³ Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Bretall: p.196

⁶⁴ Bretall, p.205

⁶⁵ Sein und Zeit, p.206

⁶⁶ Sein und Zeit 235 n.vi.

thinking is the difference as difference".⁶⁷ The relevance to our theme is that the project of Being and Time appears to have been to develop an existentialist system, a framework of ideas that would recognise historical difference and contradiction while maintaining confidence in the *a priori* connection between thought and truth. The notion of difference is contrasted to that of 'concept', because part of Heidegger's existential purpose was to bring into question the whole framework of philosophy as conceptual systematisation. The underlying aim of this project was to overcome alienation by synthesising historical lines of thought, centred around the poles of truth and existence, that until then seemed irreconcilably antagonistic.

The central question of the existential *a priori*, the relation between truth and existence, was formalised in the ontological tradition dating back to Parmenides in terms of the prior relation between thought and being. The intrinsic difficulty of this question is shown in the fact that Heidegger suggested in Being and Time that Parmenides' doctrine of the unity of thought and being explicitly "passed over the phenomenon of the world"⁶⁸. This statement represents Heidegger's standpoint at the time of writing Being and Time towards the Greek origins of the Western ontological heritage. His standpoint changed somewhat in An Introduction to Metaphysics, where he praised Parmenides for showing that knowledge belongs to those who have seen the path to being and the path to nothingness and taken upon themselves "the arduous path of appearance".⁶⁹ Heidegger described his own earlier interpretation of Parmenides as based on neo-Kantianism:

"this familiar German view (which) works its mischief in all historical accounts of Greek philosophy... The dominance of these views has made it difficult for us to understand ... Parmenides ... (and) to appraise the change which has taken place, not only in the modern era but beginning with late antiquity and the rise of Christianity."⁷⁰

To appraise this change is the basic goal of Heidegger's method, and the ethical dimension of this goal is our subject here. To make Being an object of study assumes that I can detach myself from it as a subject in order to consider it according to the traditional logic of objectivity. Yet the problem about Being is that it defies this objectivity, and so much so that it may be validly doubted whether such logic, based as it is on the views of such thinkers as Plato, Kant and Descartes, can ever hope to speak the truth of being. But steady on. Before casting such aspersions against the greatest figures in the western heritage of philosophy, we should look into what Heidegger actually claims about them, and more to the point, what he proves about their thought. Indeed, as Heidegger warns in the Letter on Humanism, "thinking . . . that attests to its essential unfolding as destiny . . . is far from the arrogant presumption that wishes to begin anew and declare all past philosophy false".⁷¹ This is very pertinent to the question of how a contemporary philosophy wishing to understand Being should relate to the greatest thinkers of the west. In coming to terms with such subtle and profound thinkers as Plato, Descartes, Kant and Sartre, the sardonic slighting of their contribution to the human quest for truth is more likely to be ignorant and mistaken than evidence of some dramatic insight at the fundamental level. So Heidegger's startling attacks on their ideas deserve careful scrutiny. Considering how conversant he was with the tradition he rejects, namely the metaphysics of subjectivity expressed as

⁶⁷ The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics, p.47

⁶⁸ Sein und Zeit 100

⁶⁹ Introduction to Metaphysics 113

⁷⁰ Introduction to Metaphysics 137

⁷¹ Basic Writings: 217

representational dualism, it is advisable to tread cautiously in our investigations, observing before concluding and reading before rejecting.

Chapter Three: The Existential Analytic of Dasein

3.1 Dasein

Our discussion so far has helped open the way to an understanding of what the necessary starting point and direction of existential ontology must be, but the questions of where ontology should begin and how it might lead to a valid ethic are by no means so easy to resolve. Before the entire project of fundamental ontology can be further developed and justified as philosophically cogent, it will be necessary to discuss how ontology can be rigorously grounded. This issue shall now be examined, in order to support the argument of this thesis that Heidegger's method, thematised as the 'existential analytic of Dasein', contains definite ethical presuppositions and implications.⁷²

The first task facing ontology is to establish certain premises that will provide a methodical and secure groundwork for investigation into the nature of truth. Yet when these premises are sought, the serious problem comes immediately to the surface that we have no widely agreed upon method capable of providing such groundwork. For example fundamental ontology could begin with an actual discipline like physics, history, geography, psychology, economics, anthropology, religion, mathematics or some other field, as a paradigm upon which to construct a broader philosophy of Being. Each of these fields could conceivably provide a starting point for ontology by enabling a systematic framework for comprehending Being to be built upon its foundation, but the decision to begin with one science or art and exclude others needs proper consideration and sufficient reason. The secure ground provided by simple dogmas to earlier ages of Western thought is no longer adequate, because the challenge of scepticism and the critical method has irrevocably shattered the framework in which piety and religion alone could explain the human condition, but the critical method of scientific investigation itself is in danger of collapsing into the despair of nihilism while it denies the need for a positive modern ethic.

So how does Heidegger deal with this problem? Rather than claiming a ground can be located in pure consciousness or in mathematical axioms or in some other theoretical idea we might press into service as the first premise of a philosophical system, Heidegger demands that we confront the obvious fact that philosophy has no genuine ground upon which to develop except the finite existence of life on the earth, our Being in the world. The thesis that "fundamental ontology, from which all other ontologies must take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein"⁷³ is Heidegger's basic answer to the problem of method and structure in ontology.

The German word 'Dasein', which literally means 'Being There', and is normally translated as existence, is used by Heidegger to refer to human Being in the World, the grounding structural theme of his ontology. The central thesis of Being and Time is that the only way "to work out the question of Being adequately" is by "making an entity - the enquirer - transparent in his own Being". "This entity we denote by the term 'Dasein'".⁷⁴ "Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am".⁷⁵ The place of Dasein within ontology is further clarified with the statement that "Dasein has a special distinctiveness, as it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological".⁷⁶ No other entity, whether animate or inanimate, has this

⁷² The chapter "The Ethics of Place" expands on themes discussed in this chapter.

⁷³ Sein und Zeit: 13

⁷⁴ Sein und Zeit: 7

⁷⁵ Sein und Zeit: 53

⁷⁶ Sein und Zeit: 11-12

capacity for understanding or projecting itself upon its own Being, which is what Dasein's 'being ontological' amounts to, so no other entity can provide a similar, or for that matter superior, access to the problem of Being in its universal or its particular dimension. He therefore argued that fundamental ontology must be grounded in the analysis of human existence, and conversely, that existence can only become authentic if it grounds its decisions in fundamental ontology. Our distinctive capacity to consciously reflect on our being arises from the fact that the relation of Dasein to its world is structured by language, which gives a reflexivity to the relation between Dasein and its world which cannot be understood in terms of subject and object. Instead, "In the question of the meaning of Being there is no circular reasoning but rather a remarkable backward and forward relatedness of that which is questioned (Being) to the questioning itself as a mode of a being."⁷⁷ For Heidegger, "Dasein *is* its world existingly".⁷⁸ As he later says, "This thesis is not a dogma, but a formulation of a problem".⁷⁹

The understanding of Dasein's relation to the world distinguished Heidegger's method from traditional approaches to the meaning of Being. His emphasis on engagement and thrownness as the ground of meaning led him to a completely different understanding of existence from that advanced by the epistemological method of representation of objective reality. Heidegger's distinctive approach to ontology was built up around his application of the method of phenomenology to the problem of understanding existence. Hence, "all ontological investigations of such phenomena as guilt, conscience and death must start with what the everyday interpretation of Dasein 'says' about them."⁸⁰ The phenomenological approach, with its 'destruction' of the history of ontology, meant that the doctrine of Dasein as Being in the world is distinguished from "the ego cogito of Descartes, the subject, the 'I', reason, spirit, person, (which) all remain uninterrogated as to their Being and its structure, in accordance with the thoroughgoing way in which the question of Being has been neglected."⁸¹

"Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The understanding of oneself which leads *along this way* we call "existentiell". The question of existence is one of Dasein's ontical affairs".⁸² "The roots of the existential analytic are ultimately existentiell, that is, ontical. Only if the inquiry of philosophical research is itself seized upon in an existentiell manner as a possibility of the Being of existing Dasein, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of each existence and to undertake an adequately founded ontological problematic. But with this, the ontical priority of the question of Being has also become plain".⁸³ "That which is ontically so familiar in the way Dasein has been factually interpreted that we never pay any heed to it, hides enigma after enigma existential-ontologically".⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Sein und Zeit: 8

⁷⁸ Sein und Zeit: 364

⁷⁹ Sein und Zeit: 436

⁸⁰ Sein und Zeit: 281

⁸¹ Sein und Zeit: 22

⁸² Sein und Zeit: 12

⁸³ Sein und Zeit: 13

⁸⁴ Sein und Zeit: 371

To properly consider whether such a generalised enquiry into human existence, even one which is based on such an 'existentiell' specificity, can lay the basis for universally systematic ontology, it must be asked whether any other art or science can perform the required function of providing the necessary basis for comprehensive philosophy. The apparent situation is that none of the alternatives, such as physics, anthropology, biology, psychology or theology, do provide what is being sought, either because they claim privileged access to an absolute truth which effectively excludes real parts of experience from its criteria (e.g. physics, theology), or because they deny the very possibility of any absolutes at all (e.g. anthropology). The problem facing the attempt to make any physical science alone, be it atomic physics, astronomy, geology or some other, the foundation for an absolute ontological system, is that a system of thought is a finite possession of human understanding. It cannot float groundlessly, immersed in subatomic particles, Jurassic shale or Magellanic novæ, but must be situated in a specifically human context of space and time.

The point of the existential analytic is that true statements only acquire value as they are situated in the human context, that meaning must be created by people if it is to exist at all. For this reason Heidegger says of the sciences that "the scientific structure of these disciplines is today thoroughly questionable and needs to be attacked".⁸⁵ Nor can a religious fascination with trinitarian mysteries or nirvana provide foundations for ontology, while these ways of thought refuse to integrate actual existence into their systems of thought. The social sciences also fall short of what is required of such a philosophy while they confine themselves to gathering the empirical material for analysis without exploring how these facts can be integrated into a unified understanding.

Such a unified vision is essential for Heidegger. He says:

"The Being of Dasein, upon which the structural whole as such is ontologically supported, becomes accessible to us when we look all the way through this whole to a single primordially unitary phenomenon which is already in this whole in such a way that it provides the ontological foundation".⁸⁶

This ontologically unifying phenomenon, to which we shall return in more detail, is anxiety. Dasein finds its unity, and at the same time establishes the foundation for access to the meaning of Being, in the 'open region' of anxiety into which the self projects itself and is thrown. The first step towards providing some method and direction for ontology is thus to recognise that "we already live in an understanding of Being",⁸⁷ and, as we shall see, that any claim to truth must find its meaning and value in terms of this pre-existing human understanding. Whereas Descartes makes the observation of the existence of doubt his starting point, Heidegger's system of thought begins with the observation that we can look at things, understand, choose and have access to them.⁸⁸ The recognition that we, the human enquirers, exhibit these abilities, is based on the 'leap into the circle' which sees knowing as "a founded mode of Being in the world".⁸⁹ We the enquirers are the first thing which can be made transparent, but this transparency is not that of an isolated doubting subject, rather it is that of an involved person, anxious, caring and open to possibilities.

The existential analytic asks how it stands with being, so giving voice to "the authentic function of philosophy to challenge historical Dasein."⁹⁰ Another factor fitting the existential

⁸⁵ Sein und Zeit: 45

⁸⁶ Sein und Zeit: 181

⁸⁷ Sein und Zeit: 4

⁸⁸ Sein und Zeit: 7

⁸⁹ Sein und Zeit:59

⁹⁰ Introduction to Metaphysics: 11

analytic for its place at the foundation of ontology is thus that the matter for thought can be formulated in terms of the question how it stands with being. Heidegger says of this question:

“The question of how it stands with being proves to be the question of how it stands with our historical Dasein, the question of whether we stand in history or merely stagger. From a metaphysical point of view, we are staggering. We move about in all directions amid beings, and no longer know how it stands with being.”⁹¹

Such a questioning “opens up the process of Dasein in its essential relations . . . summoned to history and to a decision in history”.⁹² For this reason, its involvement with the dynamism of unfolding events, it is impossible to understand human existence by analogy with material substance, or even by analogy with other life forms. Heidegger actually rejected the ideas that the goal of philosophy is to give an account of human nature (Hume) or of consciousness (Kant), on the grounds that these doctrines continue to treat Dasein as a substance, not as a distinct mode or ‘existential’⁹³ of Being.

Many readers, notably Husserl,⁹⁴ have been unable to see the sense in which the existential analytic opens us to the question of the meaning of being in a way that is more fundamental than any possible anthropology, and have interpreted Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein as an anthropological account of human nature. However the difference between fundamental ontology and philosophical anthropology is that ontology grounded in the existential analytic of Dasein seeks to make the question of the meaning of Being its principal theme and impetus, and so requires a different approach from the more usual methods of dispassionate research into entities. Heidegger suggests the limitation of anthropology is that “it is defective in principle” as a philosophy, because “here ‘life’ itself does not become ontologically a problem”.⁹⁵ This emphasis on the radically problematic nature of ontology, emerging from the wonder that there is anything at all, recurs as a keynote, and was later expressed as the problem of the ‘ontological difference’ between Being and beings. However, this difference is not to be simply equated with the difference between the transcendental and the actual, the universal and the particular, or the theoretical and the practical. Authentic ontology must be developed on the basis of openness towards Being as a whole, and so must maintain a dynamic dialectic with everyday life, each grounding and at the same time being grounded in the other. This reciprocal relation between ontological openness and ontic concern distinguishes the existential analytic from all ontic research, including anthropology and psychology, and at the same time points towards the ethical significance of the ontological dimension in human understanding.

For Heidegger, human involvements and concerns were the ontic starting point for ontology. “Fundamental ontology, from which all other ontologies must take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein. Dasein accordingly takes priority over all other entities.”⁹⁶ Ontological understanding serves to ground our ontic discoveries “when the basic structures of Dasein have been adequately worked out with explicit orientation towards the problem of Being itself”.⁹⁷ This “ontico-ontological priority” accorded to human existence is not a new or original discovery on his part; indeed, Heidegger claimed such a priority was the basis for Aristotle’s view that “man’s soul is, in a certain way, entities” and for Saint Thomas

⁹¹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 202

⁹² Introduction to Metaphysics: 42. We will return to the defects inherent in this approach, when we consider Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis.

⁹³ Sein und Zeit 44

⁹⁴ cf.: p. 120, Roger Waterhouse, A Heidegger Critique, Harvester Press, 1981

⁹⁵ Sein und Zeit 46

⁹⁶ Sein und Zeit: 13

⁹⁷ Sein und Zeit: 16

Aquinas' doctrine that the soul "is properly suited to come together with entities of any sort whatever."⁹⁸

Heidegger's thesis that thought must be located in the context of Dasein demands the grounding of ontology in existence, by requiring all abstractions to be referred to the personal level of human existence if they are to be understood as meaningful. This doctrine has definite ethical implications, especially through the link it develops between life and truth, a link which has been a common theme in moral philosophy. It necessarily demands that life and truth be reconciled, in contrast to ways of thought which accept their estrangement. It is on this point, the relation between life and truth, that Heidegger's focus on grounding ontology in existence is both the key to his ethics and the basis of his system of thought. Indeed, by making Dasein the fundamental point of access to ontological research, Heidegger opened the way to a new ontology that will be both ethical and universal, recognising its finite embodied context while at the same time seeking to retain a relation to ultimate questions of truth.

The focus on Being in the World addresses the question of how man can see himself, and thereby addresses the ethical problem of estrangement in a fundamental way by calling us to an open disclosure of who and where we are. Instead of arising out of a primary interest in epistemology, the study of what can be known without doubt, which is the discipline that has provided the dominant framework for the analytical scientific approach, Heidegger's ethics take their origin from ontology, which asks first of all "What is?" and so deliberately opens itself to the wonder of Being in order to clear the pathway to an authentic vision of the essence of existence. Heidegger refused to distinguish clear separate domains within philosophy, preferring instead to make Being in the World the unifying synthetic ground of all thought.

Heidegger's discussion of Being always⁹⁹ referred to human Being in the world, to Being as it relates to and discloses human existence. He actually denied the possibility of establishing any relation to Being as such, conceived as a universal and objective reality or 'Nature', for the reason that Being only ever comes into relation with humanity in the context of a world, and 'world' only occurs in relation to humanity. This is implied in his statement that "when Dasein understands either itself or Being in general, it does so in terms of the 'world'".¹⁰⁰ Because there is no meaning except in relation to human involvements, the only entity able to give us access to Being as such is the human enquirer - that being for whom "Being is an *issue*".¹⁰¹ As he put it in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*,

"an inquiry into Being that is concerned not only with the being of entities but with Being itself in *its* essence calls explicitly for a grounding of Dasein in the question of Being. For this reason and only for this reason we have given this grounding the name of 'fundamental ontology'".¹⁰²

Heidegger implicitly recognised the ethical themes underlying his work in Being and Time when he said there that "the analytic of existence has made fast the guiding line for all philosophical enquiry at the point where it arises and to which it returns".¹⁰³ Philosophy arises with Dasein, the entity for whom Being is an issue, and returns to Dasein as the reality which must be faced to establish the authenticity of the self. The continually recurring idea that the ontological has its roots in the ontic, which is really the meaning of the idea that fundamental

⁹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 14

⁹⁹ At least in his early writings.

¹⁰⁰ Sein und Zeit: 22

¹⁰¹ Sein und Zeit: 12

¹⁰² Introduction to Metaphysics: 175

¹⁰³ Sein und Zeit: 38

ontology must find its ground in the existential analytic, is connected to the old idea of humanistic ethics which Dilthey expressed when he said "the method of the human studies involves the perpetual reciprocity of lived experience and concept".¹⁰⁴ With this conception of human existence Heidegger demanded a reconciliation between our ideas and our physical situation. Making Dasein the starting point is a significant departure from the tradition of metaphysics, because metaphysics has been founded on the premise that truth cannot be encountered in everyday experience but must be represented by the subject as the object of a higher consciousness. Heidegger held that this method of representation has led to philosophy forgetting the question of Being, so human being in the world is the clue which must be followed through if we are to come to any understanding of the necessary relationship between Being and humanity. He laid the blame for entrenching the pervasive modern situation of homelessness before metaphysics, because its denial of the possibility that truth could be revealed in our everyday environment has undermined the goal of philosophy to be fully at home in the place we live, able to embody the truth of our situation without suffering any alienating contradiction between our inner beliefs and our external circumstances. Heidegger's fundamental question, the question of the meaning of Being, defies the assumptions of metaphysics, because the autonomous nature of Being in itself is never subordinated to human thought about it.

While the location of truth in the everyday experience of life is central to the existential analytic, this does not mean Heidegger's focus is on the body per se, in its existence as a physical organism. As he actually says in Being and Time, "bodily nature hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here".¹⁰⁵ Rather than focussing on the biological organism, he aims to establish how life in the flesh can be related to ultimate concerns. It is never a matter of abandoning conceptual understanding completely, but rather of showing that abstract thought always relies on and refers to its preconceptual, if not simply bodily, context. The virtue of this insight is that it still leaves open the possibility of a generalised inquiry into truth while resolutely criticising the way this enquiry has been conducted by traditional western metaphysics.

3.2 The Ontological and the Ontic

'Ontic' enquiry is Heidegger's term for ordinary research into material things and events, the method of investigation employed by both the exact and the social sciences. The ontic begins from our pre-theoretical understanding of how we are and how Being is, and is exhibited both in our everyday dealings with the world and our consideration of entities in factual terms, which of course involves theoretical representation. The methods of investigation employed by the exact sciences, which limit their concern to analysis of specific characteristics falling under universal physical laws, are thus specialised investigations within the realm of the ontic.

Heidegger contended that the inability of a merely ontic approach to understand human existence arises from a factor common to all ontic research, even where it has sought metaphysical foundations, namely its neglect of the question of the meaning of Being. This question, which he considers essential to philosophy, must be 'enkindled'¹⁰⁶ through pure ontology. Only ontology can be truly existential, in the sense of being truly open to existence as such, because there are essential philosophical themes, e.g. thought, meaning and value,

¹⁰⁴ W. Dilthey, The Essence of Philosophy, transl. W.T. Emery, p.101, in The Existentialist Tradition, ed. N. Langiulli

¹⁰⁵ Sein und Zeit: 108

¹⁰⁶ Sein und Zeit: 437

which can only be understood on the basis of such an 'enkindling' of the question of the meaning of Being. Ontic methods are characterised by their denial of the possibility of methodical investigation into Being as a whole. Because ontology has this grounding purpose, the relation between ontology and the ontic is thus an important issue in Heidegger's philosophy.

As an example of what Heidegger meant by ontic research, he wrote, "we can obtain data and statistics about the longevity of plants, animals and men, and we do this by ascertaining them ontically".¹⁰⁷ In this instance the ontic research is restricted to objective biological facts, collecting information about lifespans for various organisms. Yet such information does not bring to light all there is to understand about longevity, which also contains the ontological problematic of the meaning of death. The enquiry into longevity touches directly on the issue of death, but the broader philosophical question of the meaning of death is something upon which ordinary methods cannot comment. The meaning of death is nevertheless a real and pressing question, but as something that touches the very foundation of our existence in its totality, it is not a simple problem of ascertaining facts and cannot be addressed ontically. This is why Heidegger says that "underlying the biological-ontical exploration of death is a problematic that is ontological".¹⁰⁸ The question of longevity is not simply a matter of statistics but is a personal existential question for every living thing, and especially for human beings because of our awareness of our mortality. Ontic research may have the virtues of being technical, precise and practical, but the point of Heidegger's effort to rekindle the question of the meaning of Being is that these virtues do not reach to the fundamental sources of truth, which can only be attained through ontology.

Heidegger argues that foundational access to the "primordial sources"¹⁰⁹ of thought can only be restored through ontology, the discipline which was long known as "first philosophy". In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics,¹¹⁰ he observes that "in the philosophy of the schools, comprising logic, physics, and ethics, which followed Aristotle, no discipline or framework could be found into which could be fitted what Aristotle pursued as *prote philosophia*, true philosophy, philosophy of the first rank".¹¹¹ It was in this period (the Hellenistic) that the method of using strict categories to catalogue knowledge began, and problems which could not be fitted into the framework of the categories were neglected. Heidegger claims this categorical determination goes back to an original distortion created in Plato's Academy, where for the first time logic, physics and ethics were taught as separate subjects, a methodology that he says allowed thought to slip out of its element.¹¹² If the goal of philosophy is to experience the essence of thinking purely, Heidegger claims

"we must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking, (whose beginnings) reach back to Plato and Aristotle. They take thinking itself to be a *techne*, a process of reflection in service to doing and making... but (this) is the abandonment of the essence of thinking".¹¹³

As he put it in Being and Time,

"we shall not get a genuine knowledge of essences simply by the syncretistic activity of universal comparison and classification".¹¹⁴

107 Sein und Zeit: 246

108 Sein und Zeit: 246

109 Sein und Zeit: 21

110 Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (KPM) 1929. Indiana University Press, 1962, trans. J. Churchill

111 Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 11

112 Basic Writings: 196

113 Basic Writings: 194

114 Sein und Zeit: 52

This criticism of the technical 'ontic' mode of thinking certainly has some validity, even if the account of the technological sins of Plato is misplaced, considering that the moral forms such as justice, goodness, love and beauty were placed above mathematical logic in the schema of the divided line in the Republic. The problem arising from this triumph of classificatory logic has been that too often the categories employed have been accepted as all-encompassing and as a result have degenerated into uncritical dogma. Heidegger thought this happened with philosophy when it sought to elevate itself to the rank of a science, as one discipline among many, namely the professional occupation of providing a technique for explanation from highest causes. As a result of this elevation, "one no longer thinks; one occupies himself with 'philosophy'".¹¹⁵ The problem then arises that this conception of philosophy accepts a schema in which

"thinking is judged by a standard (science) that does not measure up to it. Such judgement may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the nature and powers of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land".¹¹⁶

3.3 Logic

Belief in the absolute validity of formal logic is another target of Heidegger's critique of ontic thought. The attempt to absolutise logic is as much a part of the self-image of traditional philosophy as the attempt to make science the universal criterion of truth, but both are open to question. Such old Aristotelian nostrums as the principle of non-contradiction or the law of the excluded middle are justified by the rigorously correct inferences which can be made in accordance with them, yet Heidegger says contemporary thought is "so filled with 'logic' that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction".¹¹⁷

Heidegger's thinking, despite his occasional portentous arrogance, is the very opposite of a dogmatic proclamation from on high. He sought instead to reveal that far from there being any secure foundation for beliefs in logic, or for that matter in humanism, values or God, all these ideas confront an abyss, a dreadful nothingness, an empty absence, when we seek to establish their origin. When seriously considered, it is doubtful whether the applicability of logic can be grounded in the situated experience of life. Yet such a grounding is philosophically necessary if these ideas are to be recognised as possessing authenticity or integrity, and as more than a mere disembodied theorising.

Heidegger's actually lectured on Aristotle, "the father of logic",¹¹⁸ more than on any other thinker,¹¹⁹ and said that with Aristotle, "the philosophy of the Greeks ended in greatness".¹²⁰ His first interest in philosophy was kindled by Brentano's book On the Manifold Meanings of the Word "Being" in Aristotle, and his dissertation on Duns Scotus' Aristotelian ontology developed this interest, so it should not be construed that his criticism of logic comes from someone with no respect for the Aristotelian tradition of syllogistic reason. Heidegger undoubtedly possessed a thorough understanding of the tradition of logic, but rather than allow this this understanding to degenerate into mere repetition, he used it as the foundation for a far-reaching critique of how logic is used in modern thought. Heidegger's scepticism about the status of logic is based on the argument that when ideas are accepted as absolute, their true significance is obscured as a result, and that ontic research is able to use such

115 Basic Writings: 197

116 Basic Writings: 195

117 Basic Writings: 226

118 Sein und Zeit: 214

119 Basic Writings Introduction, pp.16,18,30

120 Introduction to Metaphysics: 15

claims as a reason for avoiding any disquieting ontological questions. The goal of his attack on logic is therefore to provoke the conventionally minded to reconsider their own beliefs and to shatter the confidence and the cheap security obtained from the plausibility of rational argument.

How could it be that the rule of logic, the very foundation of civilised rationality, is a fraud papering over an abyss? Must it not be that this questioning of logic is itself an ignorant foolishness arising out of a destructive depravity, a semantic invention concealing its own nihilism with empty words? For Heidegger, it is necessary to think against logic, because of what logic has become. He asks; "of what value are even far-reaching systems of logic to us if, without really knowing what they are doing, they recoil before the task of simply inquiring into the essence of logos?"¹²¹ The question of the essence of logos takes us to the heart of Heidegger's project. The logos is defined¹²² as the original connecting connectedness of being that emerges in language. It alone makes possible the process of binding and separating ideas and things to find their true relations,¹²³ and must be recognised before the limits of logic can be properly determined and understood. To disclose Being, logic must be grounded in logos. Heidegger maintained that the effort to ponder the most basic building blocks of human experience, such as logic, must seek to return thought to its element by thinking the truth of being, a truth that is identified with the logos.¹²⁴ Such an effort does not deserve to be called irrational, because what is really irrational is the authority that

"rules unnoticed and uncontested in the defence of 'logic', which believes it can eschew meditation on logos and on the essence of reason which it has grounded in logos".¹²⁵

This authority, whose more familiar face is modern technocratic rationality, still refuses to make this enquiry into logos, dreading the prospect of falling into a semantic emptiness, and ignoring Aristotle's view that "poetic composition is truer than exploration of beings".¹²⁶ Aristotle's suggestion of a priority for poetic insight over ontic research is often regarded as involving an inherent error of method¹²⁷ by those who regard ontology as empty universalism and see the exactness characteristic of scientific method as the only criterion of rigorous thought. But for Heidegger,

"the humanistic sciences, indeed all the sciences concerned with life, must necessarily be inexact just in order to remain rigorous. A living thing can indeed also be grasped as a spatio-temporal magnitude of motion, but then it is no longer apprehended as living. The inexactitude of the historical humanistic sciences is not a deficiency, but is only the fulfillment of a demand essential to this type of research".¹²⁸

So the first problem we encounter is that the subject matter of ontology resists any attempt to "research" it following ordinary ontic methods - measuring, certification of results, objectifying, etc. Ontology cannot be an object of specialisation, that modern phenomenon whereby "the scholar disappears and is succeeded by the researcher".¹²⁹

121 Basic Writings: 227

122 Introduction to Metaphysics: 128

123 Sein und Zeit: 159

124 cf. Introduction to Metaphysics

125 Basic Writings:228

126 Basic Writings:240

127 Sein und Zeit: 1

128 Age of the World Picture: 120

129 Age of the World Picture: 125

"Ontology can contribute only indirectly towards advancing the positive sciences. It has a goal of its own, even if, beyond the acquiring of information about entities, the question of Being is the spur for all scientific seeking".¹³⁰

3.4 Ontology and Science

Science is always based on metaphysical presuppositions of some sort, but the task for philosophy is not to deny that such presuppositions are needed, it is to find out what they are and critically assess them. Philosophy seeks to understand human existence, but to presuppose the legitimacy of isolating and detaching segments of experience for objective analysis, as ontic methods demand, is to ignore the ontological totality in which that experience gains its meaning and purpose. Such a procedure will leave us stranded in a framework where we are unable to see our existence as it is.

The determination of knowing as theoretical behaviour occurs already within the technical interpretation of thinking, but thinking is capable of accomplishing much more than the technical mindset allows. Thinking the truth of Being is not just about theories and mental concepts, let alone methods for instrumental manipulation, because it always refers to an independent reality outside of our control and comprehension, a reality that impresses itself upon us as fate. Ontological thinking about Being compels us to "conceive of philosophical cognition as something possible and necessary"¹³¹ by disclosing our relation to Being as a whole, a relation which is essentially historical and temporal. Because only ontology can disclose this totality, Heidegger says "ontological enquiry", which can only take place within philosophy, "is indeed more primordial than the ontical enquiry of the positive sciences".¹³² On the basis of this statement of the priority of the ontological over the ontic, Heidegger criticised the view that thought can be properly restricted to ontic limitations. The ontic must find its foundations in the ontological if scholarship is to

"advance further in its essential task, which is not to amass and classify bits of knowledge, but to disclose in ever-renewed fashion the entire region of truth in nature and history".¹³³

For ethics, reference to this totality, 'the entire region of truth', is the source of authenticity, but when the relation of existence to this totality is rendered invisible, our ethics inevitably become partial, alienated and inauthentic. The ethics which arise from ontic methods are confined to practical rules and procedures, a confinement which leads to their lacking any capacity for wonder about Being as a whole. A central point is that we can only establish a basis for asking any of the deeper questions of philosophy by retaining the capacity for wonder which is intrinsic to ontology. The ontological question, "Why is there anything rather than nothing?"¹³⁴ appears ontically absurd, yet it provides the motive force for openness to the interconnectedness of all Being, and must be asked if philosophy is to become authentic.

The distinction between the ontic and the ontological is of the greatest importance for understanding why Heidegger said that Being and Time does not have ethics as a primary concern, because the precise moral enquiry found in ontic ethics is far from his central ontological ambition of bringing humanity back to an understanding of the meaning of Being. All the ethical terms used by Heidegger, including authenticity, care, and resoluteness, share the feature that they are ontological qualities. They can be classed together in this way and

¹³⁰ Sein und Zeit: 52

¹³¹ Sein und Zeit: 16

¹³² Sein und Zeit: 11

¹³³ What Is Metaphysics?: 111

¹³⁴ Introduction to Metaphysics: 1

distinguished from both the transcendental virtues, such as duty, love and justice, enjoined by idealist thinkers like Plato and Kant, and the ontic virtues like prudence, magnanimity, friendship and patience, emphasised in realist systems of practical ethics such as those of Aristotle and Hobbes. The ontological nature of Heidegger's ethical ideas consists in the fact that they all refer to Being as a whole in a way which can be disclosed with phenomenological precision. Unlike the transcendental ideas, the ontological virtues are phenomenological in that they do not lend themselves to expression in terms of universal principle, because, for example, what it is to be authentic or to have a conscience can only be determined for specific circumstances. On the other hand, the ontological qualities are unlike the ontic virtues. Authenticity and conscience may not be based on universal principles, but taking them seriously impels us to consider our being as a whole. By contrast, the ontic virtues strictly limit their application to dealings with people and entities, subordinating any wider insight into Being to practical questions.

A key to the ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought is his contention that much of the nihilism of modern society is based on the acceptance of scientific materialism as the entirety of thought. Nihilism, the absence of values, is a charge that has often been levelled at Heidegger by those who equate value with the accumulation of facts and see Heidegger's difficult discussions as obscure nonsense. For example, Rudolf Carnap¹³⁵ ridiculed Heidegger's inaugural address at Freiburg,¹³⁶ in which 'nothing' was actually the theme of investigation. But Heidegger turns the charge back at his accusers, suggesting that the dominance of the modern method of positive rationality is the main evidence of the triumph of nihilism in the world at large.¹³⁷ This attitude towards positivism showed his critique of ontic thought was really directed more against the modern worldview which had its origins in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. "The rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has atrophied",¹³⁸ he argued, while positivism, itself the product of this atrophy, sets aside all ultimate questions as unanswerable. In its belief that truth is solely a matter of empirical fact, positivism atomises reality, place is reduced to mathematical position, and human values are effectively condemned to a subjectivist morass where no priorities can be determined. The concept of nihilism is then used by logic as the pit into which anything unfamiliar to the beloved positive is immediately pitched.¹³⁹ Heidegger argues positivism fails to recognise that values are annihilated by the refusal of the question of the nothing, not its acceptance. While other ways of thought are seen as a mere "against" of pure negation, positivism conceals "the refusal to subject to reflection this beloved 'positive' in which one believes himself saved, together with its position and opposition. By continually appealing to the logical one conjures up the illusion that he is entering straightforwardly into thinking when in fact he has disavowed it".¹⁴⁰

Truth cannot be simply reduced to usefulness, the good cannot be equated to pleasure and desire, and justice is not as straightforward as legal obligation. We can indeed blot from our minds the message brought by anxiety or the voice of conscience, both of which are significant ways we understand the phenomenal world, but in doing so we diminish our own humanity. There are truths about life in the modern world whose urgency is compelling; some that come to mind are the dangers of nuclear weapons, the misery of poverty and the need to conserve nature, but the perplexing difficulty we confront is that these obvious truths

¹³⁵ Carnap: *Erkenntnis* (1929)

¹³⁶ , entitled *What Is Metaphysics?*. Basic Writings 91-113

¹³⁷ (Cf. Nietzsche, Book 1)

¹³⁸ *What Is Metaphysics?*: 96

¹³⁹ Basic Writings: 226

¹⁴⁰ Basic Writings: 227

are covered over and submerged by people who accept partial or false understandings of reality as the only possibility. The ethical point is that by ignoring the ontological significance of the world we become closed off from such genuine moral questions.

In a direct challenge to such partial understanding, the method of ontology seeks to gather the various realms of research into a synthetic whole, and emphasises the unity of truth and of the understanding. "Accordingly, philosophy can never be directly learned like manual and technical skills; it cannot be directly applied, or judged by its usefulness in the manner of economic or other professional knowledge. But what is useless can still be a force . . . What is untimely will have its own times".¹⁴¹

Heidegger's statement of the value of philosophy makes a damning criticism of the technological mindset which he saw as becoming more and more dominant in the life of this century. Heidegger used the opportunity of a memorial address he was asked to deliver in his home town Messkirch, in honour of the Swabian composer Conradin Kreutzer, to express his thoughts about this issue. The danger he feared was that "the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thinking may some day come to be accepted and practised as the only way of thinking".¹⁴² He contends then, that the task of saving humanity depends on meditative thinking: only by "openness to the mystery" can we deny technology "the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse and lay waste our nature".¹⁴³ The thoughtlessness of calculative technical thought, which "never stops, never collects itself",¹⁴⁴ must be balanced by a thought which accepts its rootedness in one place, and which remains open to ponder the mystery of existence.

To uncover the essence of truth is not a research project on a par with the search for a cure for cancer or a new subatomic particle, and its worth cannot be weighed on a common scale against the investigation of a particular animal habitat or the improvement of a city transport system. Its accomplishment cannot be measured by its utility or its effects, because the action of thinking consists in "letting itself be claimed by Being so it can say the truth of Being".¹⁴⁵ The suggestion is that the technical interpretation of thinking, by subordinating all reflection to doing and making, falls short of what really takes place when philosophy becomes open to the truth of Being. In the context of this effort to stand in the truth of Being, the recognition of the inadequacy of the old procedures of technical logic may actually provide the basis for thinking to become more disciplined, even while abandoning its longstanding disciplines, and for its rigour to become more than a mere mathematically verifiable exactness.

The argument that many of society's problems stem from our thoughtlessness, which in turn is bound up with our failure and refusal to become open to Being, implies that there is a contradiction between our everyday conduct and some fundamental historical truth, and that this fundamental truth will eventually show us the error of our ways by impinging upon us as destiny. At the level of human culture, the recognition that our lives are part of a single system of Being in the world is shown in the contemporary advances towards global interdependence, but this cultural progress is the practical corollary of a more fundamental ontological unity. The growing consciousness of ecological relatedness, and also the anxiety about nuclear weapons that imperil the very survival of life on earth, are signs of this unity, and provide impetus in the modern world for the realisation of cultural interdependence. To

141 IM p.8

142 Discourse on Thinking: 56

143 Discourse on Thinking: 54

144 Discourse on Thinking: 46

145 Basic Writings: 195

neglect this basic truth is irresponsible because philosophy should exist to serve the needs of life on earth. Ontology can assume a more practical significance if we recognise that in the nuclear age there is no alternative for humanity other than to learn to live together according to the principles of peaceful coexistence, and that the philosophical commensuration of disparate fields of experience and enquiry can make a real contribution to this process. Beginning with Being in the world is far from saying that the transcendent spirit has no place in the construction of systematic ontology, indeed, Heidegger observes that “world is always world of the spirit”¹⁴⁶; the priority given to Being in the world does however imply that finite planetary reality is the unavoidable context of all human thought.

Rather than accumulating information for its own sake or putting knowledge into immediate service for technology and industry, existential ontology seeks to clarify the basic premises and values necessary for more specific research to take place, to articulate the underlying worldview that arises as the various arts and sciences are measured against a common criterion of truth. As such its purpose must be ethical, because the attempt to place different fields of knowledge within the matrix of a single universal system of ideas requires that different practices and worldviews should be measured against a common criterion, and if such a criterion is to be of any value it must include not only the true but also the good, because of the existential imperative that truth is not something isolated from life and existence but must be meaningful at a human level.

¹⁴⁶ Introduction to Metaphysics 45

Chapter Four: The Historical Context

Heidegger's ambition to articulate the historical relation between humanity and truth, expressed in his central theme of the existential analytic of Dasein understood as finite transcendence, makes it impossible to assess his thought in isolation from his relation to the political and intellectual currents of his time. Indeed, as he said in Being and Time, "the proposition, 'Dasein is historical', is confirmed as a fundamental existential ontological assertion".¹⁴⁷ It is worthwhile now to look at how his historical context shaped his thought, because the influence of the historical situation in which he wrote is a factor which must be addressed in the effort to explain his approach.

Being and Time, Heidegger's best-known work, struck a chord with the mood of Europe in the 1920's, and must be ranked as one of the most significant philosophical texts to have appeared in modern times. Described by its translators as "perhaps the most celebrated philosophical work Germany has produced this century",¹⁴⁸ all the passion, turmoil and anxiety of the 1920's find their reflection in it, despite the austere precision of the language. By the time Heidegger came to write Being and Time, the naive enthusiasm which had surrounded science and the evolution of civilization in the nineteenth century had been disrupted by the First World War and was no longer intellectually credible. The applications of the mechanistic worldview to the science of death, via machine gun and poison gas, had severely traumatised European society, and the confidence of earlier times had been thrown into radical doubt.

At the same time, art, which for Heidegger was later, in The Origin of the Work of Art and his writings on Nietzsche, to become the grounding theme of his thought, had undergone fantastic change in the move to abstraction, a move some people (especially Hitler) thought mirrored the decadence and dissolution of the times. J.J. Goux presents a useful discussion of this topic in his essay 'Politics and Modern Art - Heidegger's Dilemma'.¹⁴⁹ The archetype of the twentieth century is for Goux a series of paintings by De Chirico, which show "a fathomless mélancholy... the staging... of the funeral of classical art, and they deeply etch the metaphysical distress this burial provokes."

Heidegger's argument for an explicit effort to disclose the meaning of Being as a whole was therefore designed to restore some sense of meaning and direction out of the bleak void of destruction into which Europe had crashed, and to re-establish a sense of ground or foundation for thought in the analysis of existence, since the previous ground provided by reason and logic appeared to have failed. Being and Time expressly sought to make the real historical situation¹⁵⁰ the only possible horizon for philosophy, and in Germany of the 1920s this context gave several definite characteristics to thought.

The prewar Prussian culture was "a made state, a triumph of art over nature"¹⁵¹, in more ways than one. Heidegger's whole analysis was a rebellion against the failed rules and standards of that alienated and artificial society: he mocked the spiritual and ethical power of the fin-de-siècle West as a "worn-out make believe culture", which "expends all its powers in confusion and smothers in its own lunacy".¹⁵² There is a bleakness about Being and Time; a sense that all meaning has been shattered and must be recreated afresh on the basis of authentic openness to Being. In the new existential environment of twentieth century Europe,

¹⁴⁷ Sein und Zeit: 332

¹⁴⁸ Sein und Zeit: 13

¹⁴⁹ Diacritics 19.3-4 (1989): 10-24

¹⁵⁰ Sein und Zeit: 232

¹⁵¹ A.J.P. Taylor, The Course of German History, p.101

¹⁵² Farias p.108

constituted largely by people's efforts to come to terms with the horror of the First World War, God appeared dead because human significance alone had to create the world. Resolute anticipation of death had become the only freedom,¹⁵³ conscience issued a summons to guilt but had nothing to say,¹⁵⁴ anxiety was the pervasive mood, and any attempt to construct a social morality was branded the inauthentic work of the 'they'. Heidegger's recognition of the thematic primacy of the historical 'happening'¹⁵⁵ of Dasein, in its temporal 'stretch' along from birth to death, led, together with his statement of the need for thrown resoluteness to take over its heritage,¹⁵⁶ to one of the most concise and clear summaries of his whole philosophy:

"Only if death, guilt, conscience, freedom and finitude reside together equiprimordially in the being of an entity as they do in care, can that entity exist in the mode of fate; that is to say, only then can it be historical in the very depths of its existence".¹⁵⁷

Historical Dasein must "pull itself together from the dispersion and disconnectedness"¹⁵⁸ of its forfeiture to the public world, and resolutely seek out the authentic unity of its finite temporality, a unity defined as care. As Heidegger's reading of Karl Jaspers' Psychology of World Views¹⁵⁹ convinced him, it is not enough for philosophy to ground itself in abstract consciousness; what is needed is for philosophy to recognise the primacy of its existence in the world. In the context of tranquillised alienation, of the uncanny anxiety out of which Dasein comes "face to face with the 'nothing' of the world",¹⁶⁰ Heidegger contended that "what Marx recognised as the alienation of man has its roots in homelessness", a pervasive modern situation which "through metaphysics has been simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such".¹⁶¹ "Unheimlichkeit" translated as 'uncanniness' is based on the root 'heim' (home), and has the connotation of something weird or strange. In Heidegger's usage it refers to the rootlessness of modern life caused by forgetfulness of Being. We see here a key to the historical dimension of Heidegger's ontology, in his contention that alienation has become entrenched in the modern world as a result of the domination exercised by metaphysics. This situation has its roots both in Christian theology and in the scientific enlightenment. Heidegger considered the task of philosophy to be the destruction of these alienating traditions in favour of an engaged existential openness.

The clear political dimension to these ideas is shown in his description of the scientific revolution as "a world-creating event" whose consequences have been

"man who grasps himself as a nation, wills himself as a people, fosters himself as a race, and finally empowers himself as lord of the earth. . . In the planetary imperialism of technologically organised man, the subjectivism of man attains its peak, from which point it will descend to the level of organised uniformity".¹⁶² "To such a willing, everything turns irresistibly into material for self assertive production. The earth and its atmosphere become raw material".¹⁶³

This bleak prediction of a totalitarian blindness in rationalism, which despite its belief in reason is able to close itself off from the consequences of its actions, arose from his

153 Sein und Zeit:266

154 Sein und Zeit:273

155 Sein und Zeit: 375 - geschehen - translated in BT as 'historizing', see also Introduction to Metaphysics : 45

156 Sein und Zeit: 383

157 Sein und Zeit: 385

158 Sein und Zeit: 390

159 cf. Waterhouse: A Heidegger Critique p.46

160 Sein und Zeit: 276

161 Basic Writings: 219

162 Age of the World Picture: 152

163 Poetry, Language, Thought: 111

observation of historical developments in twentieth century Europe. The carnage of the First World War and the appropriation of the dialectic by the communist revolution had battered the standing of the enlightenment tradition of the ascendancy of reason over faith. These events were important elements of the historical context in which Being and Time was written, and the importance of the work lay partly in its efforts to shed light on how Western thought could recognise their impact while retaining a distinct identity. Given that his thought emerged out of such a historical engagement in the life of his times, even if this involvement is rarely if ever made explicit in the text, but only treated in the general context of analysis of "the 'they'", of "death" or of "fear", it should not be surprising that Heidegger has been the subject of the most extreme controversy possible for a philosopher of his repute, having been called among other things a fascist, an irrationalist, an idealist and an archaic mystic. In the eyes of critical interpreters, Heidegger's call for resolute opposition to the 'they' was just a front for Nazi opposition to liberal democracy, his critique of rationalism was a capitulation before tyranny, and the linkage he drew between the modern German and ancient Greek languages was simply racist chauvinism.

Heidegger's unfortunate association with the Nazis, the subject of a controversial recent book,¹⁶⁴ must be seen as seriously detracting from the positive value of his philosophy. Not only was he actually complicit with the greatest evil of history, but his philosophy betrays a hostility to modern technology and institutions which found common cause, even if only indirectly, with the 'blood and soil' doctrines of Nazism, even while he rejected their racist 'biological' ideas. Heidegger's naive support for Hitler was based on the mistaken belief that the Nazis would save the values of old Germany from the modern tide of mass politics represented by the USSR and the USA.¹⁶⁵ His argument, written in 1935 and published in 1953, that the "inner truth and greatness of the National Socialist movement is to be found in the encounter between global technology and modern man",¹⁶⁶ shows that Heidegger erroneously believed fascism offered an answer to the problems of rootlessness and alienation brought by modern technology. Although his support for Nazism was qualified by the description of so-called national socialist philosophies as "laborious fabrications producing nothing but confusion",¹⁶⁷ Heidegger's original peasant outlook, able to find more meaning in a pair of clogs than in the theories of theoretical physics,¹⁶⁸ remained unfortunately close to fascism. Farias discusses the provincial context of Heidegger's work at some length. Heidegger's description, in the Origin of the Work of Art, of the meaning to be found in Van Gogh's painting of peasant clogs is one indication of the level of meaning he bestowed on peasant life. Another anecdote related by Farias quotes Heidegger as listening to the silent head movement of a peasant elder in order to decide whether to accept an academic posting.

There is undeniably this dark side to Heidegger which must be considered in the effort to make a balanced appraisal of his work, because his support for fascism was rooted in his chauvinism about the German language and his metaphysical ideas about the destiny of the West and as a result is integral to his identity. It is inevitable in beginning to discuss the thought of such a man that the skeletons in his closet will emerge, and some would say that these skeletons are so damning as to warrant the dismissal of the very possibility that anything of worth could be found in his writings. I do not share this assessment, because it would be wrong to discount the entire positive contribution of a thinker because of one obvious flaw, but given that fascism remains a danger to the political stability of the world even today, this is an important

¹⁶⁴ Victor Farias, Heidegger and Nazism, 1987, Temple University Press, trans. 1989

¹⁶⁵ Introduction to *Metaphysics*: 38,199

¹⁶⁶ Introduction to *Metaphysics*: 199

¹⁶⁷ *Age of the World Picture*: 140

¹⁶⁸ Farias

problem to be considered. In the effort to develop a broad understanding of our human condition it is a real question why such an intelligent, civilized and sophisticated thinker as Heidegger should have given his support to what may well have been the most inhumane political movement in history.

Farias' work demonstrates by historical evidence that the widely believed claim that Heidegger dissociated himself from the fascists in 1934 is false. The foreword to the book observes that "against the prevailing temper of nearly half a century of discussion, Farias utterly deflates the myth of Heidegger the good Samaritan, Heidegger the conceptual resistance fighter against Nazism, Heidegger the kindly scholar, by showing that, in the final analysis, this brilliant philosopher was and must be seen to be what he always was: a convinced Nazi, a philosopher whose genuine interest in Nazism survived his apparent disillusionment with Hitler's particular form of National Socialism."¹⁶⁹

Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and remained a member until 1945, in good standing with all sections of the party except the Science Department of Alfred Rosenberg. In his opening speech as Rector of Freiburg University in 1933,¹⁷⁰ he welcomed the rise of Hitler to power, condemning academic freedom in favour of obligation to work service, military service and the "spiritual mission of the German nation."¹⁷¹ The speech was a big occasion for the Nazi movement of Freiburg and Swabia, broadcast as a cultural celebration by Freiburg Radio, and accompanied by Nazi choir, orchestra, state ministers and SA. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce called the speech "the abyss of the falsest historicism, which negates history, which it crudely and materialistically conceives as the assertion of ethnocentrism and racism."¹⁷² Meanwhile Heidegger's Rector's Address became an approved text of the Nazi censor.

Farias argues that this speech, and his subsequent activities, are indicative of Heidegger's advocacy of the position of the Rohm faction within the NSDAP, the Sturmabteilung (SA), which saw Hitler's ascendancy as the occasion for cultural revolution against liberalism, internationalism and Judaism. Heidegger's warm relationship with the Nazi regime cooled after Rohm's purge, but till the end of the war Heidegger continued to begin and end every lecture with the 'Heil Hitler' salute, and in 1943 his essay Plato's Doctrine of Truth relied on the intervention of Goebbels and Mussolini to overrule Rosenberg's denial of permission to publish.¹⁷³

So what are we to make of this apparently damning critique? The 'pastiche' method used by Farias, relying more on innuendo and guilt by association than any real evidence, must be judged an unfair picture of Heidegger. For example, there is no evidence that the circumstances of publication of Heidegger's Plato essay are at all related to any possible Nazi content in the essay itself, and reading the essay contradicts the suspicion completely. Indeed, the Nazis claimed a continuity, at least in propaganda terms, with Platonic idealism as a part of the classical heritage of Western civilisation, but Heidegger's Plato essay argued that Plato was at the source of a fundamentally erroneous doctrine of truth as ideal representation. There is no real evidence that Heidegger's relation to the Party, at least after 1933, was more than that of any German nationalist. Farias does not discuss why Heidegger's relations cooled so markedly after this date, perhaps because he is unwilling to admit that Heidegger's efforts to change the policy of the Government (der Fuhrer zu fuhren) had failed to divert them from their disastrous direction. The speculation about the linkage of Heidegger's fate to that of Ernst Rohm, based only on Heidegger's sympathy with certain Nazi students, lacks a documentary basis. The

¹⁶⁹ Farias. Foreword by Rockmore and Margolis, p.xv

¹⁷⁰ The Self Determination of the German University. Available in Radical Philosophy

¹⁷¹ Farias p.104

¹⁷² Farias p.111

¹⁷³ Farias pp.260-8

insinuation of anti-Semitism, which again suffers from a lack of evidence, is contradicted by Heidegger's dedication of *Sein und Zeit* to his teacher Husserl "in friendship and admiration" and by the absence from his writings of any prejudicial judgements. Nor does his love of the German language and its supposed Greek resonances imply prejudice, let alone hatred, against any other cultures. Certainly he thought European civilization more advanced than primitive tribes, but this is hardly evidence of some evil racist complicity.

Nevertheless there are reasons for Farias' thesis. Heidegger erased the dedication to Husserl in order to have *Sein und Zeit* republished, an erasure which Derrida called "mediocre and hideous".¹⁷⁴ Also, as Paul Ricoeur observed, "he appears to have systematically escaped confrontation with the great block of Hebraic thought"¹⁷⁵ with all its ethical dimension. Even in the absence of an explicit anti-Semitism on Heidegger's part, a heavy doubt must encircle the effort to discover an ethical dimension in his work. As J.F. Lyotard observes:

"Here lies the paradox and even the scandal: how could Heidegger's thought, a thought so devoted to remembering that a forgetting (of Being) takes place in all thought, . . . how could it possibly have ignored the thought of "the jews", which . . . tries to think nothing but that very fact?"¹⁷⁶

The charge of irrationalism is connected to these allegations of fascism. Heidegger was perceived to have rejected critical scientific rationalism in favour of historical immersion in the everyday context of ordinary experience, and this appeared to some thinkers to open the way to a denigration of the achievements of science in which fascist ideas found a basis. So for example Adorno's *Jargon of Authenticity* describes how German ideologues used Heidegger's ideas to promote a fascist orientation in culture that helped the Nazis gain their ideological ascendancy over the German people. Popper's *Poverty of Historicism* saw any assertion of privileged access to an understanding of historical destiny as inherently suspicious and the root of totalitarianism, and it was widely felt that Heidegger's intermingling of the notions of science and German fate in his Rector's Address had just this intention. On this basis Walter Kaufmann accused Heidegger of engaging in "rhapsody, not analysis": "his disparagement of logical scrutiny opens the floodgates to fanaticism, superstition, and stupidity".¹⁷⁷ Yet it must be asked if a "disparagement of logical scrutiny" is a real implication of Heidegger's critique of rationalism. It would seem instead that logical scrutiny is precisely what he applies to the idea of logic, in order to establish a rigorous grounding for it in existence. Perhaps what Kaufmann feared in Heidegger was his perceptive demonstration that what lies beneath our logical security is too often an abyss of meaninglessness and nothingness rather than any benevolent purposive ground.

Marxists have criticised Heidegger as a reactionary idealist and obscurantist who sought to sow confusion by divorcing philosophy from science. This criticism is interesting not so much for its intellectual value, but as an example of how political agendas demand that thought be ignored in the rush to affirm ideological dogmas. It is true that Heidegger was fearful of communism, but he had a more balanced attitude towards Marxism than one-sided polemics would suggest. His criticism of Husserl and Sartre, that they both "fail to recognise the importance of the historical in Being, so neither phenomenology or existentialism enters the dimension where productive dialogue with Marxism becomes possible",¹⁷⁸ exhibits his willingness to open dialogue and engagement. Heidegger wrote that "the Marxist view of history

¹⁷⁴ J. Derrida - *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Quoted by Jocelyn Dunphy : 'French Heidegger: the Question of Radicality'. p. 150, Heidegger Centenary Papers, The University of Sydney 1989.

¹⁷⁵ Dunphy: 151

¹⁷⁶ J.F. Lyotard: Heidegger and "the jews", University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Lyotard employs the term "the jews" to refer to all those who are excluded from the dominant culture.

¹⁷⁷ p. 356, "Heidegger's Castle" in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, 1959

¹⁷⁸ Basic Writings:220

is superior to that of other historical accounts",¹⁷⁹ and despite his fascist sympathies, he was an objective enough student of humanity to recognise the element of truth in Marxist historical class analysis. He was never blinded by dogma into ignoring the truth in other people's ideas, even where he disagreed with implications they drew. For example there is considerable depth in his statement that Marxism fell short of a complete openness towards truth because of its "metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the product of labour".¹⁸⁰

One prominent Marxist, Herbert Marcuse, had welcomed Being and Time as a radical critique of the problem of alienation. However in 1948, Marcuse described Heidegger as "today still identified with the Nazi regime", writing to him that

"I myself - and very many others - have revered you as a philosopher and have learned an immeasurable amount from you. But we cannot make the separation between Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the man; this even conflicts with your own philosophy. A philosopher can go astray politically, but then he ought to expose his mistakes. But he cannot go astray regarding a regime that has killed millions of Jews merely because they were Jews, a regime where terror was made the norm and everything that was connected with spirit, freedom and truth was transformed into its bloody opposite."¹⁸¹

Heidegger's reply to Marcuse merely equated Stalin and Hitler, by saying that equally bad things had happened since the war to the Germans under the communist bloc, and pointedly avoided any word of renunciation of the Nazi genocide policy, a position he was to maintain until his death. Another colleague, Rudolf Bultmann, says that when he asked Heidegger to retract his errors, as Augustine had done, "Heidegger's face became a stony mask. He left without saying anything further."¹⁸² His refusal to ever disavow Nazi horror is an astonishing truth about Heidegger. Rockmore and Margolis¹⁸³ say "Heidegger stands before us as a singular case, philosophically sui generis, the source of one of the most influential currents of philosophical thought in our century, the only major thinker to opt for Nazism, the main example of absolute evil in our time - possibly of any time. The combination is without any known precedent."

It must be accepted that this aspect of his life indicates real deficiencies in his thought. If it true that Heidegger effectively allowed Hitler to represent his own conscience, a monstrous thing in sheerly human terms, his position on this issue of total consequence was an inauthentic betrayal of his own central ideas about authentic selfhood. Certainly his answer to Marcuse displayed an element of cowardice and hypocrisy, an unwillingness to courageously come to terms with the evils of the war. The argument that Nazism and Stalinism presented an either/or question of the lesser or easier of two evils, painfully necessary as it may have been in some circumstances, can only arise from philosophical dishonesty, and in Heidegger's case, hypocrisy. How can Heidegger speak of 'openness to Being' as the ground of thought and then approach the political questions of war and peace, the clash of intractable positions, in such a closed and remorseless way? The brooding flaw of chauvinism beneath the surface of his thought, and also his inconsistency with respect to basic themes of Being and Time, comes to light in his astonishing failure on this point.

These political aspects of his thought and character obviously detract from Heidegger's stature as a philosopher, given that we may conclude from Marcuse's observation above that to make the existential analytic of Dasein the basis for a doctrine of truth is the

179 Basic Writings: 219

180 Basic Writings:220

181 Farias p.283

182 Farias p.282

183 Farias, foreword, p. ix

grossest hypocrisy when the author's own existence is an accomplice to evil. Even so, before accepting this flaw as grounds for rejecting the positive content of Heidegger's work we should give proper consideration to his ideas. It would be wrong to think such faults mean the positive contribution in the ontological achievement of Being and Time deserves to be dismissed, because the positive aspects of his philosophy are a significant achievement in modern thought and deserve sympathetic study. This thesis will continue to strike up against the problematic status of ethics in Heidegger's thought, not only morally and historically in terms of his association with Nazism, but also intellectually in terms of his system. His Nazi period is an unfortunate and diminishing factor in Heidegger's life, especially because he himself emphasised the indivisibility of life and thought, but his agreement with fascist ideas did not extend to any of their repugnant aspects such as support for racism or war. His naive support remained merely at the philosophical level of the spiritual renewal which Hitler deviously promised and then failed to deliver.

If Heidegger's ideas were an apology for fascism he would not have had the profound influence he has had, standing as one of the main theoretical antecedents of modern Continental philosophy. Jacques Derrida's comment¹⁸⁴ that while the truth of Farias' case must be conceded, his argument cannot be used as a way to measure the true significance of Heidegger's work, is a more balanced appraisal than the simplistic rejection Farias calls for. Recognising Heidegger's guilt, Derrida writes "the vigilant but open reading of Heidegger remains . . . one of the indispensable conditions . . . to tell better why, with so many others, I have always condemned Nazism".¹⁸⁵

Further than this, I will argue that despite the facts of his political involvement, there remains a clear and valid ethic within Heidegger's philosophy. Heidegger himself indirectly recognised his mistake when he said that it is an error to venture too far in one's essential attitudes and decisions.¹⁸⁶ Good thinkers have wrongly placed faith in all sorts of political movements, from communism to Catholicism to capitalism, so of itself Heidegger's political involvement is not, as Farias suggests, enough to warrant his neglect. Heidegger's efforts to restore the links between existence and truth through the development of the ontology of Dasein have a significant positive ethical potential, despite his personal dereliction of this potential in his failure to criticise fascism, a movement which drove as wide a wedge between existence and truth as any metaphysics. Despite his personal failings to follow this through with consistency and wisdom, it is on the point of its requirement that philosophy recognise its historical context, in both the immediate sense of our involvement in the world and the ultimate sense of our relation to Being, that the ethics of his philosophy transcend his political limitations.

184 Farias, foreword, p. x

185 p.8, *Diacritics*: Fall/winter 1989

186 *Basic Writings*: 136. The critique of Heidegger's ethic of involvement is taken further in the sub-section with that title in the final chapter

Chapter Five: The Place of Ethics - I

5.1 Heidegger and Traditional Ethics

As our discussion so far has intimated, there is a definite ethical undercurrent informing Heidegger's work, but it is not made explicit and remains at the level of a hidden 'élan', an impulse giving direction and meaning to his ideas. That his ethics take the form of such an unsaid élan, rather than an explicit teaching, can be attributed both to his wish to re-establish thought on the foundations of existential ontology, and to his serious criticisms of the way ethics has functioned in philosophy in the past. The nature of this ethical élan will therefore become clearer if we contrast Heidegger's approach with those of traditional ethical philosophies.

The existential analytic of Dasein, which as we have seen is central to Heidegger's ontology, is built around a fundamentally unitary vision of human existence: state of mind, understanding and language are the 'existentialia' which equiprimordially constitute our authentic being. The corresponding inauthentic modes, characteristic of forfeiture to the anonymous mass, are respectively ambiguity, curiosity and chatter. We may contrast this vision of the structure of existence with Plato's doctrine of the three parts of the soul, in which mind, spirit and appetite are presented as the distinct components of motivation. Plato's argument is that the control of passion by reason is at the foundation of ethics, so the nobility of mind, where alone thought is in its element, must harness the unruly and dangerous impulses of the lower desires. However for Heidegger, ontology is just as much concerned with states of being - how we find ourselves (Befindlichkeit) - as with the supposedly higher plane of eternal truth to which Plato would confine it. There is never any sense of one authentic existentialia requiring subordination to another; as we have said, state of mind, understanding and language are equiprimordial. As he says:

"the phenomenon of the equiprimordially of constitutive items has often been disregarded in ontology, because of a methodologically unrestrained tendency to derive everything and anything from some simple 'primal ground'.¹⁸⁷

The point is that each of the existentialia of Dasein can either be authentic or inauthentic: authentic language attends to what matters, but inauthentic chatter fastens on to whatever the day may bring; we can authentically confront an 'affect' such as anxiety, to consider what it tells us about our being, or we can inauthentically retreat to the pallid lack of mood characteristic of ambiguity.

A factor conditioning Heidegger's attitude to the problem of the relation of ethics to ontology, illustrated by this comparison with Plato, was therefore his opposition to the way the cognitive distinction between the rational and affective realms became determinate for previous philosophies. The traditional approach, clearest in Plato and Descartes, split rational ontology from what were seen as the unpredictable dispositions of human concern; the contingent nature of such phenomena as emotions and feelings was thought not to possess the 'dignity' of the supposedly eternal truths with which ontology was concerned. Heidegger's criticism of this schema, which conceived of time as a metaphysical criterion demarcating 'absolute' eternal truth from the merely contingent truth of temporal events, was based on his understanding of temporality as the horizon of ontology.

On the basis of his view that existence, rather than knowledge, is the key to understanding, his treatment of actual existence as the essential ground for any universal conceptions rejected the old dualisms. The ethical implication is that the existential analytic

¹⁸⁷ Sein und Zeit: 131

must necessarily address the wellsprings of action; in its concern about dispositions and attitudes, moods and emotion, the existential analytic immediately confronts phenomena which are key motivations of human behaviour. If these existential phenomena are excluded from the domain of philosophical truth, as demanded by traditional metaphysics, the search for truth will be forced to relegate major practical areas of ethical concern to the status of passionate opinion and will be unable to comment. The traditional separation of ontology and ethics underlying this attitude was formalised by David Hume, whose doctrine that reason is the slave of the passions implied that interest, rather than logic, was the basis of morality, and that statements of fact, the only proper concern of ontology, can provide no guidance about what we ought to do. In similar vein, Kant, who held that the twin sources of philosophy are “the starry heavens above and the moral law within”, held that these two are respectively the objects of separate critiques of pure and practical reason.

These received frameworks meant the notion that there could be an ontological ethics appeared to require the integration of two radically distinct areas of thought. The suggestion that ethics should be grounded in ontology had no apparent correlate in ethics as it was understood and practised. However it is precisely such an integration that is implied by the ethical élan which inspired Heidegger’s work. His focus on integrating the rational and the affective, bringing moods and dispositions within the horizon of thought as essential constituent ‘existentials’ of Dasein, was based on the premise that existential ontology can provide a more primordial access to the truth of existence than the usual path of logical reason. Indeed, Heidegger’s argument that rational metaphysics cannot attain to true openness to Being led him to the contention that in the existential analytic of Dasein as Being in the world, “the idea of logic disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning”.¹⁸⁸

For Heidegger, such openness to Being is the key to an authentic comportment towards life, and is only possible within the framework of the existential analytic. It involves our authentic response to existential phenomena such as engagement, anxiety and conscience. Because rational metaphysics denied the legitimacy of such phenomena for thought, it inevitably became liable to the charge of operating on the basis of a partial, and even false, representation. Heidegger formulated this critique in his discussion of ‘Being and the Ought’ in An Introduction to Metaphysics:

“For Kant that which is nature, i.e. that which can be determined in mathematical-physical thinking. To nature is opposed the categorical imperative, also determined by reason and as reason. In relating it to the mere entities of nature Kant calls it explicitly the ought. Fichte proceeded to make the opposition between being and the ought the express foundation of his system. In the course of the nineteenth century the priority passed to entities in the Kantian sense - the empirical world of the sciences which now took in the historical and economic science. This predominance of entities endangered the ought in its role as standard and criterion. The ought was compelled to bolster up its claim by seeking its ground in itself... The values as such now became the foundation of morality. But since the values are opposed to the being of entities in the sense of facts, they cannot themselves be. Therefore they were said to have validity... With the being of values a maximum of confusion and uprootedness was achieved.”¹⁸⁹

This criticism of metaphysics, based on the demand that the disclosure of truth can only occur within the unified horizon of existence, rather than the dichotomous logic of the fact/value distinction, is not to reject reason as such. Coherent discussion of any phenomena

¹⁸⁸ Basic Writings 107

¹⁸⁹ Introduction to Metaphysics:198

can only proceed within a logical structure, but our philosophical outlook about what is true (facts) always does condition both our existential states of mind and our practical decisions (values), and vice versa, whether or not we recognise an organic link. This will be explored further as a thematic key to this thesis when we come to consider how authenticity may be grounded in temporality.

Ethics can obtain an authentic foundation in actual existence only by dismantling the false views of metaphysics and moving towards an authentic perspective attuned to actual existence, which is the aim of Heidegger's temporal vision of authenticity presented in terms of the finite transcendence of Dasein. This theme of the connection between ethics and metaphysics emerges in Heidegger's definition of care in terms of temporality. Heidegger's attempts to achieve such an authentic temporal understanding, based on his efforts to overcome the alienation of modern subjectivity, sought to retain a sense of the vision of the whole which gave the impetus to traditional metaphysics, while insisting that this whole must have an organic relation to human life. The situation now is that "Being is still waiting for the time when it will become thought provoking to man".¹⁹⁰ For Heidegger it will only be when this happens that humanity will find our destiny and overcome our alienation.

Heidegger's phenomenological scepticism about the applicability of traditional philosophies, and also about the grounds of popular opinion, meant there was no question of any theoretical schema similar to those developed in previous systems of philosophy or religion occupying a central place in his thinking. His frame of reference arose partly from the influence of Nietzsche, the philosopher who had done more than anyone to express the existential tone of the period by articulating salient features of the new situation, a situation Heidegger came to understand as "the abyss of the world's night".¹⁹¹ Nietzsche's thoughts on the genealogy and social function of morality, as well as his writings on the felt experience of the death of God and the contingency of values previously considered immutable, had cast radical doubt on all previous doctrines of ethics. Common products from writers on ethics had been of the form of a code of morals, or a set of rules of conduct, or a statement of duties and obligations, premised on an ostensibly universal (or openly restricted) notion of human edification. When all values had been dismantled and shown up as mere covers for subjective will to power, as appeared to be the case after Nietzsche, the pressing need was for a new approach able to provide some basis and direction for thought. Heidegger considered that the theme of Dasein as Being in the world provided such a new approach. Hence his refusal to thematise ethics arose from the fact that he was only interested in ethical ideas in so far as they were consequential to his primary aim of uncovering the meaning of Being.

Although his perspective can appear to lack an adequate sense of values, or even, in its opposition to metaphysics, to seek to demolish such a sense of values, if we dig deeper into Heidegger's ontology the true meaning and importance of his thought reveals itself as containing a burning desire to penetrate to the authentic foundations of morality, standing in the light of Nietzsche's challenge to transform older systems of values from the viewpoint of an authentic humanity. The definition of philosophy in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* as "a thinking . . . that threatens all values"¹⁹² by breaking the paths and opening the perspectives of the dominant cultural systems of knowledge, clearly has its ethical dimension, precisely because of its criticism of the empty values of society, and indeed, the groundless values of philosophy. This thinking is developed in the essay *What are Poets For?* where Heidegger suggests that we are now living in a destitute time.

¹⁹⁰ Basic Writings:203

¹⁹¹ *What Are Poets For?* Poetry, Language, Thought: 92

¹⁹² *Introduction to Metaphysics*: 10

"Not only have the gods fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history".¹⁹³ "In the age of the world's night, the abyss of the world must be endured".¹⁹⁴ "The essential episodes of the darkening of the world are the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the standardisation of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre".¹⁹⁵ "The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality... The time is destitute because it lacks the unconcealedness of pain, death and love".¹⁹⁶

Here we see why Heidegger had to reject the traditional visions of ethics as the path of human goodness: in the traumatic and meaningless situation of the collapse of everything previous thought had relied on, it had become essential to begin anew to establish a phenomenal ground for meaning. Only by genuinely confronting indisputable truths, such as pain, death and love, can we break free from destitution and start to again become "capable of our own mortality". With this last statement, the ethical message implicit in his ontology starts to break out of the restraints he has placed around it. The disclosure of pain, death and love, the hardest truths of life, is only possible on the basis of a resolute authenticity which is at once caring, open and true to itself. An important factor for the development of a possible ethical meaning for Heidegger's ideas is thus that becoming "capable of mortality", in all its anguish and limitation, is an essential precondition for authenticity.

The discussion so far, while suggesting how Heidegger's writings may be useful for the establishment of a framework for ethics, nevertheless indicates the problematic status of his employment of ethical concepts. There is a definite ambiguity, if not a real lack of consistency, in the relation between the ethical dimension of his thought and his denial of the significance of ethics for his ontology as a whole. This tension emerges from the fact that Heidegger's existential ontology started from a broader framework than that of ethics, or of any so-called ontic discipline, alone, and that the 'place of ethics' in his philosophy is not in any mutual or equal relationship with ontology, but in service to it.

Ethics, together with "psychology, anthropology, political science, poetry, biography and history", are all only treated as side issues in the overall plan of his thought, because the traditional methods used for the study of these disciplines have "not been carried through with a primordial existentiality comparable to whatever existentiell primordiality they may have possessed".¹⁹⁷ By this he meant that these disciplines have restricted themselves to answering limited tangible questions, but that the real fundamental questions of philosophy, the questions of 'primordial existentiality', have been systematically avoided and neglected. As we have discussed above, this was the basis upon which Heidegger distinguished the 'existentiell', which is associated with the everyday and the ontic, from 'existential' or ontological questioning. Whether ethics is understood as the tabulation of codes of moral conduct or the practical application of values and principles, we are told that it is among the ontic "existentiell"¹⁹⁸ disciplines, which are defined as such because they have bypassed ontological questioning in favour of an exclusive interest in entities.

Ethics has often sought to understand the broader questions of being and life in terms of clear rules and principles, for example in the schools of deontology and utilitarianism. Kant, the principal figure of deontological ethics, held that the criterion of the moral worth of

¹⁹³ Poetry, Language, Thought: 91

¹⁹⁴ Poetry, Language, Thought: 92

¹⁹⁵ Introduction to Metaphysics: 45

¹⁹⁶ Poetry, Language, Thought: 96

¹⁹⁷ Sein und Zeit:16

¹⁹⁸ Sein und Zeit:12

an action is whether I can will that the principle on which it is based should be a universal law. He held dutiful application of this maxim, the categorical imperative, to be the foundation of the moral law of practical reason, that we should treat humanity as an end, never as a means. The utilitarians, notably Mill and Bentham, believed that maximising human happiness holds a roughly similar place at the foundation of ethics. Plato, long regarded as among the greatest of ethical thinkers, held that ethics can only be developed in the context of the recognition that pure reflective thought is the source of knowledge of absolute truth. Plato considered that pure formal intelligence possesses a divine dignity, and taught that moral ideas like the just and the good, the equal and the real, can be defined according to their true nature only through pure contemplation of their ideal essence. Traditional systems of ethics have based their prescriptions on such sources as the Word of a mythical Creator, on duty or utility, or, at least with Plato's idea of the good, on the ontological domain of pure thought. Certainly there is a strong ontic dimension to all these approaches in their concern about actual practical consequences for human action, as is the case with Heidegger's own ethics. However it is wrong to say, in Heidegger's terms, that their existentiality has always been subordinate to their existentiellity, meaning that they have all neglected the question of Being and thereby forfeited their authenticity, because this is simply untrue.

To illustrate by example, limited codes of ethics, such as those of the Institute of Engineers or the Retail Traders Association, do not base their prescriptions on disclosure of the relation of humanity to Being, because, as Heidegger says, they are exclusively concerned with practical principles governing relationships between entities. However this limitation does not apply to real ethical thinkers like Kant and Plato, whose purposes are associated more with fundamental transformations in people's inherent being. Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative and Plato's doctrines of the soul and the virtues have the establishment of a transformative relation between humanity and Being as a clear underlying theme. For Kant, duty is distinguished from inclination by its inherent nature: duty simply is, and ethics consists of discovering what our duty is and doing it. As such, the basis of Kantian ethics is no mere subjective caprice but seeks to find its ground in the structure of reality. Heidegger actually recognised this when he described Kant's metaphysics of morals as "an ontology of Dasein and existence".¹⁹⁹

For Plato, the pursuit of truth is conceived in the schema of the divided line as involving the ascent from illusion through belief and reason to absolute pure intelligence. The divided line sets out the division between illusion, concerned only with entities and images, and intelligence, whose concern is true Being, culminating in the idea of the good. Although Plato's teaching that the good does not change can be interpreted as indicating a disdain for questions of morality, the notion of a relationship between human beings and ultimate reality is nevertheless central to his system, if we credit his notion of intelligence with any validity. Similarly, Hegel's teaching that freedom is the recognition of necessity grounds the moral idea of freedom in a conception of ultimate truth.

Heidegger's contention that ethics as such does not deserve a central place in the original effort to rekindle the question of Being is therefore out of step with the way Plato, Kant and Hegel have treated similar themes. Furthermore it does not cohere with his own central argument that ontological understanding must be grounded in the existential analytic of Dasein, nor with his statement that the essence of truth is freedom.²⁰⁰ His grounding of ontology in existence, although presented as purely ontological, actually establishes a relation which is ethical in essence, because taking it seriously effects a transformation in our conduct,

¹⁹⁹ Sein und Zeit:293

²⁰⁰ Basic Writings:125

away from the false values of both metaphysics and ignorance, towards the authentic values of truth, care and openness.

5.2 The Transcendental

My characterisation of Heidegger's method as a systematic existential phenomenology can be interpreted as developing a 'middle way' for philosophy, in the spirit of the Kantian critical method, which sought to steer the fragile craft of metaphysics between the respective excesses of rationalism and empiricism. Heidegger's Scylla and Charybdis however, are rather different from Kant's; they are the ontic and the transcendental. In the attempt to create an authentic, finite and ethical ontology, Heidegger sought to distinguish his own method from traditional systems of ethics and metaphysics, attacking both the merely 'ontic' view of the function of thought and the method of transcendentalism, seeking instead to steer a way between these contrasting paths.

We have devoted attention to Heidegger's attitudes to various ontic methods, so to consider the opposite conception against which his ontology finds its reference, we shall now discuss his relation to transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is the method of idealism, philosophical and religious. Heidegger criticised this method, or at least its mythic tendencies, in many ways, although it must be said his own thought was not without its mythic dimension. A central theme of his philosophy is the analysis of the relation between human life and truth, and his efforts to deconstruct the ways this problem had been previously treated led him to a sharp critique of transcendental metaphysics. The critique of transcendentalism, not, it must be said, of transcendence, is developed in Heidegger's efforts to sustain a basis in truth, while vigorously criticising the way the relation between humanity and absolute truth has been interpreted in the past.

For example, in his treatment of the way time has been used as a criterion to distinguish 'absolute' eternal truth from the merely contingent truth of temporal events, Heidegger says that the old idea from Plato and Augustine,²⁰¹ that there is a 'cleavage' between 'timeless' eternal propositions on the one hand, and 'temporal' assertions and entities on the other, is very dubious. Time has come to have the distinctive ontological function as the criterion separating realms of Being, the transcendental and the worldly, and is therefore basic to the foundations of understanding, yet as Heidegger observes, no one has hitherto troubled to investigate how time is able to perform this function. Temporality is the phenomenon where human existence comes into view as a whole, but neither the partial glimpses given by scientific methods nor the sweeping vistas of transcendental metaphysics can enable us to secure an adequate view of it. Heidegger's thought about temporality derives from Kant in important ways, for example in his tendency to treat time as the 'form of the inner sense', but he differed from Kant by placing a new emphasis on temporality in his treatment of actual existence as more significant than any universal conceptions, on the basis of his view that existence, rather than knowledge, is the key to understanding. Heidegger was certainly interested in formulating propositions about existence that would be universally true, but his perception was that the frameworks for comprehending universal truths developed historically by philosophy, and also by both religion and science, fell short of the demands of authenticity he took as the only justifiable criterion. His own attempts to achieve such an authentic understanding, based on his efforts to overcome the alienation of modern subjectivity, sought to retain a sense of the vision of the whole which gave the impetus to

²⁰¹ Sein und Zeit: 18

traditional metaphysics, while insisting that this whole must have an organic relation to human life.

Heidegger's definition of philosophy as "universal phenomenological ontology, which takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein"²⁰² has inevitable ethical implications, because the 'hermeneutic of Dasein', or more simply, the interpretation of human existence, is a topic which cannot be pursued unless the ethical questions surrounding human freedom and action are addressed. Heidegger went close to recognising that the philosophy of Being cannot avoid the issues surrounding these themes with his statement that Being "is the incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self. The being of beings is the will".²⁰³ Such gathering can only be done by power of will, which is to say things really come into Being only in the context of human freedom and action or as something willed. The fundamentally idealist character of Heidegger's position reveals itself here, with this definition of the Being of beings in relation to human existence. Together with his claims that "it is in words and language that things first come into being and are",²⁰⁴ and that in the existential analytic "the 'substantial Being' of entities within the world (has) been volatilised into a system of relations and . . . dissolved into pure thinking",²⁰⁵ this statement of the centrality of will reinforced the mediating role of human thought he had established in the existential analytic of Being and Time. In a way which appears to contradict his claim that "the priority of Dasein . . . has obviously nothing to do with a vicious subjectivising of the totality of entities",²⁰⁶ he went on to indicate support for the idealist orientation with his argument that "only as long as Dasein is, 'is there' Being".²⁰⁷ Because "Being can never be explained by entities, . . . idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic",²⁰⁸ even if previous forms of idealism have gone astray by focussing on epistemology rather than securing their theories on the basis of an existential analytic.

The essential goal of Heidegger's method of thought is to speak the truth of Being - a mystery if ever there was one - in such a way as to comprehend and dynamically interrelate past, present and future, and then to act on the basis of this reflective knowledge. The authentic comportment towards this temporal goal is located in the resolute anticipation of finitude: "in resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one's closest concern, but it gets held in the future and in having been. That present which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is authentic itself, we call the moment of vision."²⁰⁹ For Heidegger, "the history of Being is never past but stands ever before; it sustains and defines every human condition and situation".²¹⁰ The history of Being is a whole which can only be apprehended in terms of the understanding of destiny. To "get a hold on this destiny, . . . means thoughtfully to reach and gather together what in the fullest sense of Being now is",²¹¹ recognising that no metaphysics, whether Christian, idealistic or materialistic has achieved this synthetic integration of meditative reflection on the past with active involvement in the present situation in order to shape the future destiny of the world. Ideally, such an immanent philosophy would succeed in integrating the everyday experience

202 Sein und Zeit: 38

203 Poetry Language Thought: 100

204 Introduction to Metaphysics:13

205 Sein und Zeit: 87

206 Sein und Zeit: 14

207 Sein und Zeit: 212

208 Sein und Zeit: 208

209 Sein und Zeit:338

210 Basic Writings: 194

211 Basic Writings: 221

of human nature with reflection on the divine or absolute nature, in order to establish a relationship between the message of eternal truth (if this problematic phrase can be used) and the situation of life in the here and now.

The ethical purpose underlying this project is the development of a systematic philosophical framework able to comprehend and participate in the processes of transformation occurring in the world today. Holistic philosophies have often sought to present themselves as having achieved such a developed ethical vision, but have often failed to bring enough clarity and rigour to the task or have erected barriers of prejudice or method that have prevented them from reaching their goal. Heidegger places the effort to think the truth of Being at the very centre of his understanding of what it is to be human. As such his philosophy demands recognition of the importance and meaning of ethics, but is at odds with Christianity, in that the temporal horizon of his thought contradicts the Christian notion of a God who is both eternal and personal. Heidegger characterised the beliefs at the basis of most religious ethics in terms of their transcendentalism, on account of their acceptance of 'eternal truths' and life after death. As such, religion is a part of the metaphysical tradition which his phenomenology sought to deconstruct.

To develop our discussion of Heidegger's approach to traditional metaphysics, we may consider his attitude to Christian morality as indicative of his whole attitude towards the ethics and metaphysics developed in Christian contexts. The ten commandments written on the tablets of stone brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses are accepted among Jews and Christians as the basis of ethical law; the nature of the divine commandments as moral dogma - effectively 'eternal truth' - obliges adherents to accept them without question, whatever the complexities of the situation. Heidegger's response to such systems was predicated on his existentialism, his belief that essence can only ever be understood in terms of existence. The freedom and originality of his perspective thus completely negated any dogmatic acceptance of traditional theology. From an existential point of view, the prohibitions enjoined by the ten commandments are assessed with a view to their actual consequences, which might of course turn out to be perfectly good. Their claim to divine origin may be true, but Heidegger's attitude was that such claims, based as they are on transcendental sanction, are outside any philosophical assessment and cannot be considered in the development of phenomenology.

Heidegger considered the suggestion that the so-called 'eternal truths' of religious faith could provide a foundation for thought, and therefore for action, to be an abdication of intellectual responsibility. He made numerous scathing remarks about religion, for example condemning the very contention that there could be such things as 'eternal truths', saying that this belief belongs "to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded."²¹² Because truth is bound up with disclosure, and therefore with human understanding, Heidegger contended that the idea "that there are eternal truths will not be adequately proved until someone has succeeded in demonstrating that Dasein has been and will be for all eternity",²¹³ an obvious impossibility. He brought the traditional doctrine of transcendence into radical question: the "inadequate ontological foundations"²¹⁴ of Christianity are at the root of "the idea of transcendence - that man is something that reaches beyond himself". But this dogma "can hardly be said to have made an ontological problem of man's Being".²¹⁵

²¹² Sein und Zeit:229

²¹³ Sein und Zeit:227

²¹⁴ Sein und Zeit: 48

²¹⁵ Sein und Zeit:49

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* the rejection of the doctrines of established religion was carried even further. Christian faith has its own answers to the question of Being, but to say "In the beginning God created heaven and earth", and then refuse to expose this dogma to question, is to deny the possibility of a genuinely philosophical stance. It is for this reason Heidegger described a Christian philosophy as "a round square and a misunderstanding",²¹⁶ not because there can be no thinking elaboration of faith, but because theology must be clearly demarcated from philosophy. Heidegger thought Christian theology conceals the true intellectual force of the most elemental words,²¹⁷ such as the Greek words *logos* and *aletheia*, by allowing a merely dogmatic understanding to pass off its interpretation as fundamentally correct. This argument is developed with his description of the Latin translation of the Greek language as a deformation and decay from an originally unimpaired strength.²¹⁸ The framework provided by theology, a framework closely associated with the Latin categories which inform the scholastic tradition, must therefore be rejected if philosophy is to be true to its task. The elaboration of faith by theology can never replace philosophy, because faith dogmatically prevents itself, for example with its belief that God created the world, from proceeding according to the open methods of ontology. Heidegger therefore said Being is "not God and not a cosmic ground",²¹⁹ and that it would be "the ultimate error" to explain his theories about the essence of humanity as though they were "the secularised transference to human beings of a thought that Christian theology expresses about God, namely that God is his Being"²²⁰ in the Thomist sense.

Heidegger's criticisms of Christianity tend to revolve around the otherworldliness of theology. Consider for example his comment that for Christianity, "man is not of this world, since the 'world', thought in terms of Platonic theory, is only a temporary passage to the beyond".²²¹

There are many such criticisms of religion sprinkled through Heidegger's writings, but it must be said they all ignore the ethical message at the origin of the churches' teachings by focussing on the limits of modern piety as if that were all there is to the Christian perspective. Indeed, the central doctrine of Being and Time, that the meaning of Being is care, appears to attribute precisely the sort of anthropomorphic purpose to ultimate reality that Heidegger's claims about the rigorous destruction of metaphysics are designed to counter. To say that Being is a transcendental universal providing the ground of the existence of all entities, and yet that it can be clearly distinguished from God, has been a source of much contention.²²² If Being is not identified with God it is hard to see how it can have a 'meaning'. Confinement of meaning to the framework of care excludes any reference to a beyond, a limitation against which Heidegger frequently chafes.

It should be an open question whether there is something essentially sacred about life and reality, whether the things we come into contact with are sustained by and move within a divine whole that confers meaning and value. Heidegger recognised this with his observation that the mechanistic causal view which denies any animation or purpose to being faces insurmountable difficulties. Part of the value of his work is in his efforts to establish a humanistic compromise between the opposing camps of religion and science, accepting the centrality of purpose to any coherent account of meaning while demanding that such

²¹⁶ Introduction to Metaphysics:7

²¹⁷ Sein und Zeit:220.

²¹⁸ Introduction to Metaphysics:13

²¹⁹ Basic Writings: 210

²²⁰ Basic Writings: 207

²²¹ Basic Writings: 200

²²² see for example J. Macquarrie, *An Existential Theology*, SCM 1955

purposes could only be philosophically cogent if restricted to the finite horizon of human temporality. For example in his discussion of death, he said “the existential analysis is superordinate to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy or theology of death”.²²³ Similarly with respect to conscience, “the ontological analysis . . . lies outside of any ‘biological ‘explanation’ of this phenomenon (which would mean its dissolution). But it is no less distant from a theological exegesis of conscience or any employment of this phenomenon for proofs of God”.²²⁴ With his emphasis on finitude, temporality and relativity, Heidegger was concerned to avoid speculative themes which cannot be grounded with phenomenological precision. Ethical ideas such as the good, justice, duty and love are in this category; despite all having been major concerns of traditional philosophy, none of them are discussed thematically in Being and Time.

The significance of transcendence is still a difficult issue for Heidegger. His criticism of the Christian conception of the ‘beyond’ contrasts with his own positive characterisation of the transcendence of Being in terms of the individuation of Dasein:

“Being, as the basic theme of philosophy, is no class or genus of entities; yet it pertains to every entity. Its universality is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple. And the transcendence of Dasein’s being is distinctive in that it implies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical individuation.”²²⁵

The world, Being, human existence and language are all transcendent, because Dasein has a kind of Being which is different from that of any object or thing. This does not however mean that our essence is to be found in an immortal soul to which a body is only incidentally attached, or as a mind to which spatial existence is inessential. As Heidegger says,

“on the contrary, because Dasein is spiritual, and only because of this, it can be spatial in a way which remains essential impossible for any extended corporeal thing”.²²⁶

Dasein’s transcendence of the unreflective present is achieved by existential projection upon our possibilities in the resolute anticipation of the future. The doctrine of authenticity thus treats transcendence within a finite and immanent horizon, because unlike traditional approaches, Heidegger’s conception of authentic transcendence is not towards an infinite unknown. Instead, transcendence is a finite capacity of Dasein as Being in the world. Part of the basis for the entire existential analytic is the effort to make mortality rather than immortality the context in which thought must operate. By making resolute anticipation of death the basis for the most fundamental way we can relate to the totality of being, Heidegger introduced a finite humanistic dimension that reinterpreted the Christian doctrines of transcendence and eternity in terms of the temporal horizon of human being in the world.

This finite temporal horizon is limited by death. The possible truth of life after death is consequently irrelevant to existential analysis: “the this-worldly ontological interpretation of death takes precedence over any ontic other-worldly speculation” because the “clarification of evil” in the sense of original sin, etc., “lies outside the domain of an existential analysis”.²²⁷ Heidegger’s critique of transcendence is in terms of human existence as a finite whole, which leads him to an emphasis on death as the event where this finite unity is made manifest.

223 Sein und Zeit:248

224 Sein und Zeit: 269

225 Sein und Zeit:38

226 Sein und Zeit:368

227 Sein und Zeit: 248

The Greek lawmaker Solon told the wealthy king Croesus of Lydia not to call a man happy until he is dead,²²⁸ because without the vision of the whole life it is impossible to make a just assessment. Heidegger accorded a similar role to death when he describes it as illuminating our historicity. Death is the limit in terms of which we can envisage the totality of our Being as a unity, but immortality and eternity are outside this finite limit of existential ontology because unlike death they cannot be phenomenally disclosed.²²⁹ Heidegger thereby dismissed immortality and eternity as metaphysical projections without real grounds in Being. Although Being "is the transcendens pure and simple", it is not disclosed through idealistic speculation but through the existential analytic of human being in the world.

Despite this emphasis on finite immanence, there is much in Heidegger's philosophy that compels the comparison of his ideas with the religious tradition, and the problematic nature of Heidegger's discussion of transcendence points inevitably towards a religious dimension in his thought. For example, he described his interpretation of the basic structure of care as

"an attempt to interpret the Augustinian (i.e. Helleno-Christian) anthropology with regard to the foundational principles reached in the ontology of Aristotle",²³⁰

thereby placing himself within the Catholic tradition of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a tradition whose scholastic and social ideals shaped his own upbringing as a pastor's son. Heidegger's religious dimension is most clear in his claim that illumination of Being is the only source of access to the holy:

"the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when Being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been illuminated and experienced in its truth".²³¹

This formulation is noteworthy as a strong affirmation of the significance of central religious themes. In its statement that vision of the holy must be based on experience of Being, it affirms the need for this dimension of life to be recognised, but denies the possibility that these religious ideas could have a purely transcendental meaning. For Heidegger it is only in the immanent realm of Being that talk of God and the holy can find an authentic human meaning. The understanding of human spatiality as dwelling within the spiritual horizon of concern was developed in his later essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* into the doctrine that "man is insofar as he dwells", which "also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for".²³² Heidegger developed this ethic of human life as 'dwelling' in a distinctively spiritual way. As dwelling, people's occupation of space is no mere physical subsistence, but is bound up with memory and relatedness to context. Heidegger came to understand this context in terms of the framework of earth and sky, mortals and Gods, which he called the fourfold,²³³ the elemental constituents of Being as dwelling. As seen below in our discussion of Heidegger's analysis of the Heraclitean notion of ethos, a theme which has strong connections to this idea of the fourfold, projection onto a transcendental horizon is essential to Heidegger's formulation of what it is for humanity to authentically dwell upon the earth.

²²⁸ Herodotus: the Histories 1:32.

²²⁹ cf.: Sein und Zeit:18, 227, 247

²³⁰ Sein und Zeit:199,n. vii

²³¹ Basic Writings: 218

²³² Poetry, Language, Thought p.149

²³³ Poetry, Language, Thought p.149

Yet the problem with accepting these transcendental ideas as a sufficient foundation for philosophy is that life is not authentic; people believe untrue ideas and accept the lack of any genuine relation to divinity as normal. The tendency on the part of the 'they' to cover up any expectation of death "confirms our thesis that Dasein, as factual, is in the 'untruth'".²³⁴ Heidegger felt in his own time that this inauthenticity manifested itself in terms of the age being "too late for God and too early for Being". In the essay What are Poets For he wrote of the age as needing to endure the "abyss of the world's night":

"The default of God means that no God any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The default of the Gods forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the God fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time . . . The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality. Mortals have not yet come into ownership of their own nature. Death withdraws into the enigmatic. The mystery of pain remains veiled. Love has not been learned. But the mortals are... To be a poet in a destitute time means to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods. This is why the poet in the time of the world's night utters the holy."²³⁵

One of Heidegger's own poems is worth presenting here for the concise insight it gives into the tone and goal of Heidegger's thought as finite transcendence:

"The world's darkening never reaches
to the light of Being.

We are too late for the gods and too
early for Being. Being's poem,
just begun, is man.

To head towards a star - this only.

To think is to confine yourself to a
single thought that one day stands
still like a star in the world's sky."²³⁶

5.3 Ethics as Élan: Tensions in Being and Time

Heidegger's ethics are not specifically articulated in Being and Time; indeed, he described his own interpretation as "purely ontological in its aims, and far removed from any moralising critique of everyday Dasein".²³⁷ For example, care (Sorge) is the central theme of Heidegger's whole philosophy, and the term in which Dasein finds its meaning,²³⁸ but

²³⁴ Sein und Zeit: 257

²³⁵ Poetry, Language, Thought p.91-96

²³⁶ Poetry, Language, Thought: 4

²³⁷ Sein und Zeit: 167

²³⁸ Sein und Zeit Chapter 6

perplexingly, it is a term he is at pains to divest of ethical content. So he writes that care is not to be understood primarily as a positive ethical term, along the lines of 'devotedness' or 'the cares of life', although these do come into it. Instead, 'care' is "the existential condition for their possibility".²³⁹ As he wrote in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, "if one takes the expression 'care' - despite the specific directive that the term has nothing to do with an ontic characteristic of man - in the sense of an ethical and ideological evaluation of 'human life' rather than as the designation of the structural unity of the inherently finite transcendence of Dasein, then everything falls into confusion".²⁴⁰ The reasoning behind this designation of care, as the unifying theme of Dasein's finite transcendence, is that Heidegger uses care as a technical term which can only be grasped as a whole by beginning from the temporal horizon of the ontological analytic.

The statement above that his thought is 'removed from any moralising critique' is followed by an analysis of this "everyday Dasein", about which he does not want to moralise, in terms of the concept "Verfallensein", a German word which is most accurately translated as 'forfeiture' but which also has the meanings of 'fallenness' and 'decadence'. The analysis of 'forfeiture' is presented as a basic constitutive item in the temporal structure of Dasein as the normal mode of relating to the present. His effort to present such an apparently evaluative term as without moral connotations, as part of an abstract ontological schematism, is just one example of the complex attitude Heidegger had towards the moral undertones of central themes in his work.

The everyday character of such fallen existence is constituted by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity, and is an essential part of the existential analytic of Dasein as the usual mode of being for normal social life. Heidegger maintained, perplexingly, that his interpretation of human life as having forfeited its authenticity in favour of the idle chatter and ambiguity of anonymous mass existence, "does not express any negative evaluation".²⁴¹ He says "Europe, in its ruinous blindness forever on the point of cutting its own throat" is caught between America and Russia, which exhibit "the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organisation of the average man".²⁴² Despite this apparently scathing indictment of the destitution of the age, Heidegger said we would "misunderstand" forfeiture if we thought it indicated a "bad or deplorable property of which more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves".²⁴³

Heidegger maintained that forfeiture "does not signify the Fall of Man understood in a 'moral-philosophical' way",²⁴⁴ but rather the "absorption of Dasein in the world of its concern". He says

Far from determining its nocturnal side, forfeiture constitutes all Dasein's days in their everydayness. It follows that our existential-ontological interpretation makes no ontical assertion about the 'corruption of human Nature', not because the necessary evidence is lacking, but because the problematic of this interpretation is *prior* to any assertion about corruption or incorruption. Ontically, we have not decided whether man is 'drunk with sin' and in the *status corruptionis*, whether he walks in the *status integritatis*, or whether he finds himself in an intermediate stage, the *status gratiae*.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Sein und Zeit: 199

²⁴⁰ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 245. We shall return to this quotation in our final chapter when the meaning of care will be discussed in more detail.

²⁴¹ Sein und Zeit: 175

²⁴² An Introduction to Metaphysics: 37

²⁴³ Sein und Zeit: 176

²⁴⁴ Basic Writings: 212

²⁴⁵ Sein und Zeit: 179

It is almost as though we are not to condemn Dr Faustus for having forfeited his soul to the devil. One explanation might be that here we see Heidegger's insight into the genuine predicament of modern life - having cast in our lot so completely with the means and ends of modern technology, we live in an existential condition of forfeiture against which moral denunciation is irrelevant. Forfeiture, says Heidegger, is not intended as a term of moral condemnation, but a recognition of the ontic fact that humanity exists as thrown into a world not of its own making, and that we must immerse ourselves in everyday involvements and concerns. Certainly this refusal of a moral dimension to the critique of forfeiture, based on the claim that any such moral assertions must come back to the existential analytic if they are "to make a claim to conceptual understanding",²⁴⁶ raises a whole series of complex questions for the place of philosophy. For example we may ask whether the goal of phenomenology is merely to be descriptive or whether it also has a normative imperative. It may also be asked whether authenticity, as the means to the recognition and overcoming of forfeiture, is genuinely worth striving for if it lacks such a moral dimension. The answer I shall suggest to this difficulty is that Heidegger's opposition to ethics is more methodological than fundamental: that ethics is subordinated to ontology more out of a desire to emphasise the centrality of ontology for thought than any ambivalence to questions of practical moral guidance. The discussion of forfeiture betrays the tension in Heidegger's work between its underlying ethical élan and his surface denial of this motivation. The nature of this tension will become clearer if we consider Heidegger's attitude to the public morality of those he calls the 'they'.

Rather than suggesting moral degeneracy, forfeiture indicates to Heidegger "the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the 'they'".²⁴⁷ The 'they' (das man) is Heidegger's term for the "average being of everydayness". Ideas holding currency among the 'they' are characterised by inauthenticity: we encounter 'them' when we base our values and judgements on what 'society' considers appropriate, as in commonly heard suggestions, based more on cultural acceptability than reason, that "one shouldn't do this or that". 'They' "restrict the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable - that which is fitting and proper. . . The average everydayness of concern becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquillises itself with that which is merely 'actual'. This tranquillising does not rule out a high degree of diligence in one's concern, but arouses it."²⁴⁸ "They" are the 'who' of public life, responsible for "the noiseless suppression of every kind of priority and the levelling down of all possibilities of Being".²⁴⁹ Heidegger criticises the way people get lost in "the tasks, rules and standards, the urgency and extent of concerned and solicitous Being-In-The-World", saying that if these tasks, rules and standards are not consciously chosen by the individual, "Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity".²⁵⁰ In "clinging to what is readily available and controllable even where ultimate matters are concerned, . . . man goes wrong as regards the essential genuineness of his standards".²⁵¹ "The common sense of the 'they' knows only the satisfying of manipulable rules and public norms and the failure to satisfy them. It reckons up infractions of them and tries to balance them off. It has slunk away from its ownmost being guilty so as to be able to talk more loudly about making 'mistakes'".²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Sein und Zeit: 180

²⁴⁷ Sein und Zeit: 175

²⁴⁸ Sein und Zeit: 194

²⁴⁹ Sein und Zeit: 127

²⁵⁰ Sein und Zeit 268

²⁵¹ Basic Writings: 134

²⁵² Sein und Zeit: 288

While Heidegger may claim that his existential analytic places a new value on 'average everydayness', his treatment of forfeiture to the 'they' suggests this value is hardly positive, because he blamed the 'they' as primarily responsible for the destitution of the age. Against this everyday falling existence, Heidegger presents a vision of authenticity in terms of finite existential openness: "When resolute, Dasein has brought itself back from falling, and has done so precisely in order to be more authentically 'there' in the moment of vision as regards the situation which has been disclosed."²⁵³

This gives us the rather strange picture of everyday society as having forfeited its authenticity in favour of a shallow and inauthentic alienation, but as not deserving any censure from the cool and apparently value-free ontology of the existential analytic. Presumably, this also means Heidegger's call for us to heed the voice of conscience, which he defines as the call of care²⁵⁴, is not intended to be primarily evaluative, nor to point the way towards possible advances in the level of culture. This despite the role he gives conscience, through anxiety, of impelling us toward such virtues as authenticity, openness, care, self-constancy, transparency and resoluteness. The conclusion that encouraging these practices will not require any moral evaluation of popular behaviour is untenable, but to show its error we must demonstrate a positive ethical message in Heidegger's thought. Several notions commonly associated with ethical virtue are significant structural components of Heidegger's ontology, so after inquiring further into his understanding of the relation between ethics and ontology as presented in the Letter on Humanism, we will be in a better position to consider what they each mean.

5.4 The Development of Heidegger's Ethics: The Letter on Humanism

The discussion in the Letter on Humanism²⁵⁵ about the relation of ontology to ethics provides the only direct exposition of an ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought, with its development of the existential analytic into the suggestion that ontology is itself the original ethics.²⁵⁶ The Letter was written in response to a request from the French philosopher Jean Beaufret that Heidegger answer several questions on such topics as the meaning and place of humanism, the relation of ethics to ontology, and how philosophical research could preserve its essentially adventurous nature. At the time Heidegger was under the constraint of an order from the occupying forces in western Germany forbidding him from teaching because of his involvement with the Nazi Party, so the request from Beaufret appeared as an excellent opportunity to explain his perspective on humanism, to consider its nature and validity, and to reflect on its relation to the broad questions raised by the general philosophical inquiries into ethics and truth. The specific 'humanism' in question is the philosophy of the metaphysics of subjectivity, which has exercised a pervasive historical dominance especially through the influence of Kant and Descartes.

One of the key arguments of the Letter on Humanism is a development of the thesis presented in An Introduction to Metaphysics that 'the ethical' has become the degraded modern moral counterpart of what the ancients understood as the 'ethos'. If our ethics are effectively to assist the understanding of truth and the improvement of the human situation, they cannot be only a matter of arbitrarily decided rules and norms, but must be anchored in the ground of our Being. Only ontological thought can identify such grounds, because ontological attunement to Being as a whole is indispensable to the grounding of our actions in

²⁵³ Sein und Zeit: 328

²⁵⁴ Sein und Zeit, section 57

²⁵⁵ Brief über den Humanismus, 1946. translated in Basic Writings, RKP 1978

²⁵⁶ Basic Writings : 235

the primal subsistent basis of life. For Heidegger, this primal subsistent basis is identified with the 'ethos'. He therefore suggests that ethos "denotes not mere norms, but 'mores' based on freely accepted obligations and traditions".²⁵⁷

The 'ethos' is interpreted in the Letter on Humanism as the creative foundation of authentic ethics. In his essay 'Gelassenheit',²⁵⁸ this was taken further with the statement that for "human work to flourish, man must be able to mount from the depth of his home ground up into the ether. Ether here means the free air of the high heavens, the open realm of the spirit." The notion that ethics must establish a foundation in ethos relies on the figurative paradox of finding a ground in something heavenly, in so far as the ether is the environment of the ethos. It is noteworthy that Heidegger's use of 'ethos' is designed to retain a phenomenal content for ethics, grounding it in something that can appear to us, in a way wholly transcendent ideas cannot.

The way ethics can be 'grounded' in the phenomenon of ethos, and the sense in which ethos can be phenomenal, become clearer if we consider Heidegger's analysis of Heraclitus' saying, "*ethos anthropoi daimon*", usually translated as "a man's character is his guardian angel", or more succinctly, "character is fate".²⁵⁹ The traditional lesson drawn from this aphorism is that a person's character determines his or her destiny: if you are good you will succeed but if you are bad you will fail. This interpretation brings out the ambivalence in the word 'ethos', for if 'ethos' is understood to mean character, or even the moral climate or cultural atmosphere of the place we live in, we may speak just as easily of an ethos which is noble and fair as of one which is violent and greedy. Ethos will then come to mean whatever norms or rules prevail in a particular situation.

However "*ethos anthropoi daimon*" should not be interpreted as such a straightforward moral observation, but as an admonition to live according to an ethos which truly befits human existence. Heidegger takes ethos to mean more than character, as it signifies "abode, dwelling place . . . the open region in which man dwells".²⁶⁰ The translation of ethos as 'dwelling place', which Heidegger calls the 'primordial element' of existence, introduces a positive ethical content to the saying, which remains hidden when the usual definition of ethos as character is accepted. Similarly, the word 'daimon' cannot be simply defined as 'fate'. Daimon is translated by Heidegger as 'nearness to God', to suggest the possibility that there may be some purpose acting as the driving force in human destiny, perhaps imparting some grace as a part of our essential nature. Daimon is more universal than individual destiny, as its meaning here signifies that humanity has a spiritual relation with Being as a whole.

One of the most famous instances of the 'daimon', Socrates' guiding light in the *Apology* and the *Phaedrus*, can easily be understood in accordance with Heidegger's interpretation. For Plato, Socrates' 'divine element' is 'the sign of the god'.²⁶¹ It is not a force at his disposal or the blind hand of his fate, but an external call determining his mission. It therefore appears that daimon is somewhat akin to conscience, a suggestion we will return to when we come to discuss Heidegger's treatment of that topic. For example in the *Phaedrus*,²⁶² after Socrates has spoken slightly of love, the daimon insists Socrates must make amends to the God of love by making a speech doing justice to the truth of this divinity.

²⁵⁷ Introduction to *Metaphysics*:16

²⁵⁸ *Discourse on Thinking*, Harper & Row, New York 1966, p.47

²⁵⁹ This translation has been attributed to Novalis: cf Guy Davenport, *Herakleitos and Diogenes*.

²⁶⁰ *Basic Writings*: 233

²⁶¹ *Apology* 31d & 40b

²⁶² *Phaedrus* 242c

If ethos and daimon truly impart a normative sense to the meaning of anthropoi, the usual translation of "*ethos anthropoi daimon*", which is merely descriptive, will not express the full meaning. Heidegger translates the saying as: "man dwells, insofar as he is man, in the nearness of God", from which he concludes that the final meaning is that "the familiar abode (ethos) is for man (anthropoi) the open region for the presencing of God (daimon)".²⁶³ He thus makes an essential point that reinforces the ethical dimension in his thought: if 'ethos anthropoi', the dwelling place of humanity, is bound up with the authentic spirit of truth (daimon), it must be seen as wrong to permit conduct which arises from an inhuman spirit simply to be observed without censure. Such conduct can only occur in situations where the true essence of humanity pointed to in Heraclitus' saying is unknown or denied.

Such an understanding of the ethos of humanity prevents the acceptance of inauthentic values; for example Heidegger says curiosity, which together with alienation and idle chatter make up the principal inauthentic modes of existence, gives popular beliefs the quality of rootlessness, a "never-dwelling-anywhere".²⁶⁴ From this we may infer that the curious and the ambiguous arise from modes of 'anthropoi' which deny its ethos and so prevent Dasein from hearing the voice of its 'daimon'. Heidegger argues that the overcoming of the aimless stumbling of homelessness, and the associated task of reversing the abandonment of Being by beings, can only become possible when we recognise the syndrome of never-dwelling-anywhere as symptomatic of the problem of alienation and its oblivion of Being. The main feature of this alienation is that man observes and handles only beings and thinks that is all there is to life,²⁶⁵ instead of seeking to dwell in the truth of Being.

In the light of these considerations, ethics, as the study of the ethos, must ponder the abode or dwelling place of humanity, but if this is so, ethics becomes identical with ontology: "That thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man is in itself the original ethics. However this thinking is not ethics in the first instance, because it is ontology".²⁶⁶ The goal of this new ethics is to formulate a fundamental ontology that will recognise a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual,²⁶⁷ based on the claim that "the thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of Being questions more primordially than metaphysics can".²⁶⁸ The purpose of seeking to advance thinking into the truth of Being is to "bring that wholly other dimension to language".²⁶⁹ Such a thinking is neither ethics nor ontology, as they are currently understood, so "the relation of each to the other no longer has any basis in this sphere".²⁷⁰ The effort is to stand forth "into the the open region that lights the 'between' within which a relation of subject to object can be",²⁷¹ so thinking may return to the poverty and simplicity of its origins. Such thinking will not necessarily produce anything grand or exciting, but it will ensure that philosophy is more truthful.

Consider the other story about Heraclitus related in the Letter on Humanism. Cosmopolitan travellers visited him, hoping by visiting the famous thinker to encounter evidence of the exceptional or rare to provide material for their tales, but they were astounded to find him warming his hands by the stove in his hut, in the most common and insignificant place possible. Heidegger says of the situation that "he stands there merely to warm himself.

²⁶³ Basic Writings: 233

²⁶⁴ Sein und Zeit:173

²⁶⁵ Basic Writings: 218

²⁶⁶ Basic Writings: 235

²⁶⁷ In similar fashion the interpretation of truth as disclosure in the existential analytic of Dasein presented the 'existentials' of Being in the world as more primordial than the ideas of reason.

²⁶⁸ Basic Writings: 230

²⁶⁹ Basic Writings: 235

²⁷⁰ Basic Writings: 236

²⁷¹ Basic Writings: 229

In this altogether everyday place he betrays the whole poverty of his life. The vision of a shivering thinker offers little of interest. At this disappointing spectacle even the curious lose their desire to come any closer".²⁷² But the words of the philosopher transform the situation. He says, "Here too the gods are present", to indicate that the supreme reality is manifested in the most ordinary place. As with the birth of Christ in the food trough, it is not by ascending to the eternal that thinking will find the greatest truth, but by recognising the manifest presence of that truth in ordinary life.

So too, "thinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest".²⁷³ Heidegger aims to provide a radical investigation into the foundations of metaphysics, an investigation that will critically examine the old schemas used to ground understanding and provide a way forward with more authenticity than the conceptual inventions of subjectivist metaphysics. The difficulty is not however in the ascent to the truth. "The descent, particularly where man has strayed into subjectivity, is more arduous and dangerous than the ascent. The descent leads to the poverty of the eksistence of homo humanus".²⁷⁴ To understand the humanitas of homo humanus is the essential task facing the redefined and non-metaphysical humanism Heidegger seeks to allow to emerge by showing that the essence of humanity lies in our existence as finite temporal relational beings for whom Being is an issue. Such an understanding will also explode the rationalist logic based on the false subject/object dichotomy.

An implication of this grounding of ethics in the 'ethos' is that when such popular ideas as God and value are accepted as absolute, as they must be in order to perform their public function in the 'they-world', their true significance is often obscured as a result, and people act on the basis of a partial and degraded interpretation. As Heidegger writes, "'Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivising. The bizarre effort to prove the objectivity of values does not know what it is doing. When one proclaims 'God' the altogether 'highest value', this is a degradation of God's essence".²⁷⁵ So, for example, rather than accept 'humanism' on face value as the most practical and progressive moral viewpoint, Heidegger demands that along with all other ways of thought it must be examined in terms of whether it is open to the truth of Being. Certainly he is seeking to reinforce the value of humanity, but the point is that the value of humanity is not necessarily the same thing as the values of humanism.

Heidegger's opposition to humanism is not based on support for the inhuman or the barbaric; it arises instead from the conviction that "the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realise the proper dignity of man".²⁷⁶ For humanism, man's essential worth is as the sole subject among beings, the Cartesian thinking substance who has power to decide about the correctness of propositions. Heidegger thinks this makes man "the tyrant of Being", whose arrogation of objectivity claims technocratic control over fate, whereas the real situation is that Being 'throws' us into life. "Man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the lighting of Being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being".²⁷⁷

In the Letter on Humanism the spur driving Heidegger's reflections is the question of the proper place of humanism in the philosophy of Being. He argues that because

²⁷² Basic Writings: 234

²⁷³ Basic Writings: 231

²⁷⁴ Basic Writings: 231 Heidegger's neologism 'eksistence' is discussed in Section 7.5

²⁷⁵ Basic Writings: 228

²⁷⁶ Basic Writings: 210

²⁷⁷ Basic Writings: 210

humanism as a philosophy has been blinkered by the metaphysics of subjectivity, especially through the influence of Kant and Descartes, it has failed to penetrate through its preconceptions to a full understanding of the essence of humanity. Because it has been so caught up with particular concerns, humanism has failed to realise there is Being, a truth beneath, before and above, both nearest to and furthest from the things we touch and use, but whose ultimate reality is the historical destiny of all we know and all that is beyond our knowledge. This notion of being as destiny is central to Heidegger's thought, as is the related vision of the meditative task of philosophy as opening humanity to understanding of the historical truth of being as destiny, something impossible for the calculative methods of humanism. The aspiration to understand truth is the distinctive sign of the essence of humanity, but modern humanism, the legacy of enlightenment rationalism, has failed in this aspiration by accepting subjective metaphysical preconceptions about the nature of truth as final, instead of opening itself to the disclosure of being in the world.

This limitation is not confined to modern thought: Heidegger contended that it had an ancient origin in Plato's transformation of thinking into philosophy, and of philosophy into epistemology and a matter for schools, when "science waxed and thinking waned".²⁷⁸ As thought under the ascendancy of Aristotelian logic became directed more towards the ontic goal of technical mastery than the ontological aim of pure understanding, the stringent separation of disciplines actually prevented understanding of the true foundation of ethics in ontology.

Paradoxically, the essence of humanism, which Heidegger defined as the concern that man should become free for his humanity, can only escape its confinement within the errors of metaphysics when the Aristotelian definition of man as the rational animal is discarded. Heidegger claimed that authentic understanding of human freedom and nature can only overcome the deficiencies of metaphysics if the first thing it discards is the ancient tradition that begins by defining man firstly as a rational animal, as the "*zoon logon echon*".

The problem about the definition of man as a rational animal is its context within the ontology of the present at hand which defines logos purely as assertion,²⁷⁹ and which thus lacks the openness Heidegger sought to introduce with his theme of Being in the world. As Heidegger put it, the "*zoon logon echon*" "is grounded in a metaphysics which presupposes an interpretation of Being without asking about the truth of Being".²⁸⁰ It may seem that with this claim Heidegger is joining those 'despisers of the body' for whom Nietzsche reserved such withering contempt, but this is not so. The problem with the location of our essence in the realm of 'animalitas' is its sanctioning of the neglect of the question of Being by giving pride of place to technological mastery over beings and the cult of practical reason, which according to Heidegger has been the main impediment preventing philosophy from coming to a proper appreciation of where the real essence of humanity is to be discovered.

So he regarded our "bodily kinship with the beast" as "appalling and scarcely conceivable",²⁸¹ arguing that however distant it may appear, divinity is closer to our existent essence. Even in their closeness, animals and plants are separated from our essence by an abyss, because lacking language they lack a world, as distinct from an earth or a habitat. While remaining in their environment they are unable at the same time to stand outside their being into the truth of Being. It is this capability that is the distinctive feature of the *humanitas* of *homo humanus sapiens*, that we are the only beings able to relate to a transcendent truth. The essence of humanity is located in our capacity for openness to the truth of Being, revealed

²⁷⁸ Basic Writings: 232

²⁷⁹ cf: *Sein und Zeit*:165

²⁸⁰ Basic Writings: 202

²⁸¹ Basic Writings: 206

through language. Heidegger reinforced the mediating role of human thought he had established in the existential analytic of Being and Time by relating being to language. He reveals his essential humanism, albeit a humanism quite different from that of subjectivist metaphysics, with his claim that "it is in words and language that things first come into being and are".²⁸²

A clue to what Heidegger is driving at with these ideas is his claim that the poet "Holderlin does not belong to humanism because he thought the destiny of man's essence in a more original way than 'humanism' could".²⁸³ The poet who took it upon himself to say, and thus embody, the destiny of the west, did so in the first instance by standing forth into Being, rather than by looking at the visible realities of physical nature as the primary source of the essential truth of existence. The value of this effort to understand the essence of man as *humanitas* is that our real essence emerges in our relationship to the entire context of life as a whole.

For Heidegger, Being is "the destiny that sends truth . . . heralded in poetry".²⁸⁴ As Holderlin said, "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth".²⁸⁵ Merit is the criterion of conduct often accepted by humanism, and it is usually accorded to the technical capability to get things done. Yet such merit, the sign of positive accomplishment and control, does not tell the whole story of what it is to dwell on the earth, for it is through poetry and thought, as well as action, that philosophy encounters and reflects on Being.

Heidegger's critique of humanist philosophy arose from his basic stance regarding thought; its nature, meaning, role and goal. For Heidegger it is an absolute certainty that the ultimate purpose of thought can be summed up in the statement that "thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man".²⁸⁶ The meaning of this a priori conviction is expressed in the oft-quoted aphorism; "language is the house of Being",²⁸⁷ which means that truth is only revealed to human knowledge through words, even if it is never created by them. For Heidegger, those who think and those who create with words dwell in the home of language and are its guardians.²⁸⁸ Despite the inherent ambiguity that language hides the truth as often as it brings it out of concealment, there is a fundamental authenticity about this approach to the meaning of Being.

Despite the talk about a 'turn' (Kehre) in Heidegger's thinking, dating from some time in the 1930s and marking an abrupt departure from the concerns in the early writings about the existential analytic of Dasein towards a distinctly different interest in issues arising within the philosophy of language, there is a basic continuity in his thought regarding the importance of continual recollection of the meaning of Being. The shift from a conceptual focus on existence to the focus on language is bound up with the implications of ontological hermeneutics: already in Being and Time he expressed this vision of the primacy of language when he asked the question whether, given that "the Being of the ready to hand (involvement) is definable as a context of relations, and that even worldhood may be so defined, then has not the substantial being of entities within the world been volatilised into a system of relations? And inasmuch as relations are always something thought, has not the Being of entities within the world been dissolved into pure thinking?"²⁸⁹

282 Introduction to Metaphysics:13

283 Basic Writings:201

284 Basic Writings:219

285 Basic Writings:236

286 Basic Writings:193

287 Basic Writings: 193

288 Basic Writings:193

289 Sein und Zeit:87

Such a system of relations cannot be the creation of human freedom alone, but must emerge as the framework of historical development, the truth in which freedom establishes itself. While in Heidegger's later writings pure thinking, openness to logos, became more and more a preoccupation, and talk of the role of language assumes a central function, it is always of language as "the house of Being". The question of the meaning of Being retains its centrality, although the analytic of human Being in the world sometimes retreats to the background in the later writings as the exploration of other dimensions of this multifaceted question takes priority. Man nevertheless remains on centre stage, even if Heidegger sometimes claims to have dethroned him in favour of Being, because if language is the house of Being, man is always needed to shepherd and guard this house. For Heidegger "language is the language of Being, as clouds are the clouds of the sky".²⁹⁰

5.5 Stoicism?

It may be mentioned here that Heidegger's portrait of the ideal life appears to take a lot from the ancient school of the Stoics. Like Heidegger, the Stoa resigned themselves to the impossibility of broader social change and focused their attention on the individual pursuit of excellence. Their philosophy is strongly echoed in Heidegger's doctrine that resolute anticipation of death is the ground of freedom, and his argument that authentic freedom must spring from the recognition of finite mortality rather than from imaginary myths such as the immortality of the soul.

Heidegger said that "Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological".²⁹¹ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Stoic philosopher and Emperor of Rome in the Second Century A.D, puts a similar idea in these terms: "God has distinguished man, for he has put it in his power not to be separated at all from the universal",²⁹² and calls us to "let thy intelligence also now be in harmony with the intelligence which embraces all things".²⁹³ Antoninus believed that a central task for the intellectual faculty is to observe that death is no more than "a dissolution of the elements",²⁹⁴ and "an operation of nature".²⁹⁵ It is possible on the basis of such an attitude towards death to discern "what value everything has with reference to the whole, and what value with reference to man".²⁹⁶ Such a Stoical comportment will also enable us to recognise that "all things are implicated with one another, and the bond is holy".²⁹⁷

Whether or not Heidegger's agreement with Antoninus would extend to his suggestion that "everything which happens, happens justly",²⁹⁸ there is a basic commonality regarding the place of man, and the attitude to death and the whole. For Heidegger, "Dasein is authentically itself in the primordial individualisation of the reticent resoluteness which exacts anxiety of itself".²⁹⁹ This individualisation is interpreted in terms of the constancy of the Self, which "gets clarified in terms of care",³⁰⁰ and has "the double sense of steadiness and steadfastness". While the moral connotations of this perspective are once again left implicit, it

290 Basic Writings: 242

291 Sein und Zeit: 11-12

292 VIII.34

293 VIII.54

294 II.17

295 II.12

296 III.11

297 VII.9

298 IV.10

299 Sein und Zeit: 323

300 Sein und Zeit: 322

is still possible to see the connection between Heidegger's emphasis on authentic individualisation as the ground of steadfast care, and Antoninus' view that the mind can only maintain its proper good when self-collected and unperturbed.³⁰¹ Antoninus exhorts us to "look within, for within is the fountain of the good, and it will ever bubble up, if thou wilt ever dig";³⁰² he suggests "a perpetual fountain" is to be found in "freedom conjoined with benevolence, simplicity and modesty".³⁰³

The central place given in Being and Time to Seneca's view that "the good of God is fulfilled by his nature but the good of man is fulfilled by care"³⁰⁴ also attests to the influence of the Stoics on Heidegger's thinking. So too the tracing in the Letter on Humanism of the history of humanism to its origins in the Roman Republic, where 'homo humanus' was contrasted to 'homo barbarus' through the exaltation and honouring of Roman virtue, which was embodied in the Hellenistic education consisting of scholarship and training in good conduct.³⁰⁵

Even more than these similarities, Heidegger's use of the Greek word 'physis' reveals his debt to Stoicism. While critical of the translation of physis through the Latin 'natura' as 'nature', on the ground that it "destroyed the actual philosophical force of the Greek word",³⁰⁶ he suggested there is "a desideratum which philosophy has long found disturbing but has continually refused to achieve: to work out the idea of a 'natural conception of the world'".³⁰⁷ Being in the World is a more natural idea than is commonly supposed, considering that "envirning nature is the very soil of history".³⁰⁸ Heidegger's discussion of physis indicates his debt to the Stoic ideal of living according to natural reason, which regarded life in harmony with physis as the foundation of ethics. From the time of Zeno, who founded the Stoic school in Athens in 320B.C., the stoics understood physis as the natural spirit of evolution which makes the world grow and progress.³⁰⁹ For Heidegger, physis denotes "self blossoming emergence", discovered through "a fundamental poetic and intellectual experience of Being".³¹⁰ It is the "elemental power" which can be captured for humanity by "creators, poets, thinkers, statesmen".³¹¹

301 IX.41

302 VII.59

303 VIII.52

304 Sein und Zeit: 199

305 Basic Writings: 200

306 Introduction to Metaphysics: 13

307 Sein und Zeit: 52

308 Sein und Zeit: 381

309 cf. Gilbert Murray, The Stoic Philosophy

310 Introduction to Metaphysics: 14

311 Introduction to Metaphysics: 62

Chapter Six: The Ethics of Place

6.1 Truth and Being

To explore Heidegger's doctrine of place and its implications for his ethics, a theme which has already been touched on both in our discussion of the existential analytic of Dasein and of the theme of ethos discussed in the Letter on Humanism, it will be useful to approach this topic through an examination of his distinctive approach to the phenomenon of truth. The existential analytic of Dasein brought a new dimension to the western philosophical tradition, in that Heidegger's emphasis on 'place' and on 'world' sought to re-orient thought to the unitary human level through a paradigmatic critique of the modern Cartesian ontology. An argument to be explored here, with special reference to Descartes, is that the framework of epistemology, which the existential analytic is especially concerned to criticise, has prevented philosophy from attaining to the real issues of ethics, because its emphasis on objective knowledge has devalued the ethical problems surrounding actual existence. Given that existential problems are key themes for Heidegger, it flows from his critique of epistemology that the new dimension he introduced was intrinsically ethical in character.

An implicit claim of Heidegger's ontology is that the doctrine of truth which seeks to systematically classify reality on the basis of theoretical representation has robbed the ideas which are at the heart of ethics of their transformative power in human action. As a consequence of the representational doctrine of truth, modern philosophy has operated on the basis of dehumanised and non-ethical notions of truth by denying the significance of involvement in relationships, and has thus been incapable of thinking coherently about ethics. The basis for this rather complex claim should become clearer as we dig further into Heidegger's critique of the scientific epistemology.

Heidegger's critique of modern philosophy was centred around his perception that philosophy since Descartes, and by this he meant the entire 'modern' world view, had allowed itself to be dominated by the theory of knowledge of the positive sciences and by the theory of space conceived as 'res extensa' (extended substance), to the exclusion of perspectives which establish their ground at the level of personal existence. By demanding such a temporal horizon, Heidegger "aimed at an existential conception of science". He said "this must be distinguished from the 'logical' conception which understands science with regard to its results . . . a fully adequate existential conception of science cannot be carried out until the meaning of Being and the connection between Being and truth have been clarified in terms of the temporality of existence."³¹²

Being and Time thus maintained a continuity with modern philosophy by seeking a foundation for thought in the notion of truth, but held that truth cannot be found through Descartes' method, which sought to find it from the free-floating constructions which arise within the act of "beholding". Against the Cartesian approach to truth, which was not confined to Descartes but also underpinned British empiricism since Locke and Berkeley by making vision the ground for the assertion of theory,³¹³ Heidegger maintained that truth is revealed, not through the systematic classification of representations, but in the disclosure of the world through an existential openness to relationships.

The modern tradition which goes back to Descartes and Kant is termed by Heidegger the 'metaphysics of subjectivity', because of the primacy it has given to the 'I think' (ego

³¹² Sein und Zeit: 357

³¹³ Sein und Zeit: cf 96

cogito). The difference between his own existential analytic, which it must be said accords a very similar central place to human thought, and the metaphysics of subjectivity, is rather subtle, but it is central to his whole project of placing philosophy on the foundation of existence rather than knowledge. In Heidegger's view modern philosophy has suffered from the belief that the primary location of truth is in the correctness of representation of knowledge in the mind of the perceiving subject, rather than in the uncovering of the existential 'truth' of Being in the world. For Heidegger, "existence is not the actuality of the ego cogito", but "dwelling in the nearness of Being".³¹⁴ Being is understood in the context of the world, and "the significance-relationships which determine the structure of the world are not a network of forms which a worldless subject has laid over some kind of material".³¹⁵ Instead of a subject classifying objective representations, Dasein is inherently involved in relationships of concern.

Since the time of Parmenides, who identified truth with its perceptive understanding,³¹⁶ truth has been closely associated with Being. For Heidegger's phenomenological method, truth is identified with disclosure, on the basis of his translation of the Greek word 'aletheia' as 'unhiddenness'. He contrasted this interpretation with the traditional definition of truth as 'correctness'. From Aristotle to Kant, the accepted explanation of truth as "the agreement of knowledge with its object" or "adequation of the intellect and the thing"³¹⁷ held sway. However the difference between this interpretation, which essentially understands truth as an ideal representation of a thing, and disclosure, is that disclosure does not obtain indirectly by inference, but lays the thing open to circumspection,³¹⁸ in order to "let the thing be" as it is. The definition of truth as agreement, in Heidegger's view, is based on the theory of knowledge of the dubious schema of the subject-object relation, with its "ontologically unclarified separation of the real and the ideal". The consequence of refusing to clarify the "relation between the ideal content and the real act of judgement" is that "the actuality of knowing and judging gets broken asunder into two ways of Being - two levels which can never be pieced together".³¹⁹

To approach truth phenomenologically, we must adopt an open and receptive bearing by looking, listening and responding. Instead of imposing a dogmatic conception upon the world, we must allow what is there to emerge. This attitude towards truth is central to Heidegger's phenomenological departure from representational epistemology, but it is not incompatible with the true critical spirit of science. Where rationalism demands that truth is a property of judgement, tested by the correctness of the correspondence between ideas and objective reality, Heidegger contends that the deeper meaning of truth as unhiddenness or disclosure is not simply agreement of judgement and object, but emerges in the relation of Dasein and the world, when assertion "uncovers the entity as it is in itself".³²⁰ For Heidegger such 'uncovering' does not reveal the entity as a noumenon, but as it exists in relation to human purposes. "Only on the basis of the phenomenon of the world can the Being-in-itself of entities within the world be grasped ontologically".³²¹ The whole framework of an isolated subject comprehending truth purely in terms of objective substantial properties is thereby

³¹⁴ Basic Writings: 222

³¹⁵ Sein und Zeit: 366

³¹⁶ Sein und Zeit: 212. Parmenides' saying "To gar auto noein estin te kai einai" - roughly translated 'Thought and Being are the Same' - was the axiomatic maxim at the origin of Greek ontology. See SZ note xx.

³¹⁷ cf. Sein und Zeit: 215, where Heidegger discusses the history of the concept of truth in its permutations from Aristotle and Augustine through Aquinas and Avicenna.

³¹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 75

³¹⁹ Sein und Zeit: 217

³²⁰ Sein und Zeit: 218

³²¹ Sein und Zeit: 76

undermined. Heidegger therefore argued against the idea of truth as 'beyond' man, which metaphysics has made "imperishable and eternal, never to be founded on the transitoriness and fragility that belong to man's essence".³²²

Feminist philosophy is one area in which a similar critique has been taken up. When modern feminist thinkers³²³ speak about the false systematicity and the artificial unity of vision towards which philosophy has striven, they are observing the same mistake Heidegger pointed to with his critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity. The phenomenological treatment of truth, to which much feminist theory has also been indebted, is markedly different from traditional views that the absolute must be eternal, unconditioned, unchanging, etc. The phenomenological conception aims never to regard truth as above question, but continually to treat it as open to criticism, so that no assumptions or presuppositions about the actual nature of being can be retained, whether by oversight or by faith.

The basis for his criticism of the traditional perspectives on truth is Heidegger's thesis that "Being in the world is the foundation for the primordial phenomenon of truth".³²⁴ This central disclosive priority given to Being in the world is the ground of the systematicity of Heidegger's thought, but in a very different way from earlier systems. Ontology must be systematic, given its ultimate goal of recognising the systematic interconnectedness of all knowledge and reality, but the systematic aspect in Heidegger differs from traditional systems in that his emphasis is on how our ideas disclose Being in the world, rather than on their internal coherence or logical 'correctness'. Correct proof cannot establish significance for Dasein, but it is within such significance that the 'primordial' truth is located. Significance is the ground of meaning, and meaning is only established in relation to human purposes, so truth must be located within the horizon of the phenomena which are meaningful for Dasein, rather than solely in that which is provable.

Heidegger's doctrine of the dependence of truth on relatedness to humanity brought him to a very different conception of meaning from those of traditional philosophy. Instead of defining meaning as an objective and absolute property of substances or entities, he demanded that the role of practical human understanding in conferring meaning be acknowledged and that meaning be defined as 'relative' to Dasein. In the traditional view, meaning is a property of 'judgment' and thus adheres to concepts. However, one of the central features of Heidegger's method is his critique of the role 'the conceptual'. His definition of meaning as "that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself"³²⁵ still places meaning within the horizon of intelligibility and thus of language, and implies that entities only acquire meaning when they have come to be understood. Yet Heidegger's notion of meaning is as "an existentials of Dasein", not as a free-floating conceptual property attaching to entities. For Heidegger, 'meaning' always signifies 'accessibility'³²⁶, a doctrine which arose from the humanist and relativist premises that conditioned his thought. Hence "only Dasein can be meaningful". Events may "break in upon us and destroy us", but this does not make them meaningful.

On the basis of his doctrine of truth, Heidegger defined understanding in terms of knowing how to do and use things³²⁷. Modern thought had allowed the notion of understanding to drift far away from human concern, but with his argument that meaning arises only when things occur for the sake of possibilities and purposes of Dasein, Heidegger

³²² Basic Writings: 126

³²³ cf M. Le Doeuff: *The Shameful Face of Philosophy; Operative Philosophy*

³²⁴ *Sein und Zeit*: 219

³²⁵ *Sein und Zeit*: 151

³²⁶ cf. *Sein und Zeit*: 324

³²⁷ Mark Okrent: *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being and the Critique of Metaphysics*, Cornell 1988, p.130, presents an interesting discussion of this topic

demanded a necessary link between understanding and practical ends. He defined understanding as always involved in practical concern, which means abstract theory without practical consequence for Dasein is not understanding, except in a limited sense devoid of purpose and meaning. "Understanding of being . . . comes alive in any of its dealings with entities. . . . The kind of Being which belongs to such concerned dealings . . . consists in thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies".³²⁸

The highly contentious approaches to the key philosophical notions of truth and meaning just outlined shows that the sense in which Heidegger's philosophy is rigorous and fundamental must be quite different from the sorts of rigour accepted within the canons of objectivity. It is essential that any philosophy must satisfy the requirements of logic and rigour, and Heidegger recognised this in his efforts to achieve comprehension of the meaning of Being through the development of a unified interpretation of the phenomena given to perception. Yet he said that meaning is not an objective property inhering in substances, but a relation conferred by and upon human existence. Such attitudes led to some commentators charging him with irrationalism, and have bolstered the perception of a lack of rigour in his thought. However Heidegger argued that methods of research and study outside the sciences require such a relational doctrine of meaning, as they cannot bring their subject matter into view while they are restricted to the modes of exactitude demanded by science. This does not make non-scientific disciplines any less rigorous than the sciences; as Heidegger says, "mathematics is not more rigorous than history, but only narrower, because the existential foundations relevant for it lie within a narrower range".³²⁹ This is a redefinition of rigour (and of truth and meaning) away from the logic of precise observation towards existential insight into the human situation, and it must be admitted that Heidegger engaged in relentless pursuit of this latter goal. The suggestion here that ideas and things only obtain their truth, and hence their meaning, through a relation to human life, indicates the specific limitation Heidegger places on the otherwise amorphous question of method in ontology, and at the same time helps to show how his philosophy is ethical in its very heart.

6.2. Critique of the Scientific Paradigm

Heidegger's efforts to restore the links between existence and truth anticipated much of the worldview which only now is being recognised as the successor to the scientific paradigm created in the seventeenth century. In setting out to uncover the authentic foundations necessary for existential ontology to become universal, systematic, fundamental and rigorous, Heidegger articulated a framework of ideas with the potential to transform the entire project of modern philosophy, a new framework that may even be comparable to the paradigm shift of the seventeenth century, when the discovery that the earth orbits the sun helped inaugurate the scientific revolution at the foundation of the modern world view. We will now turn to an exposition of this framework.

If a method premised on the primacy of such a doctrine of truth is to establish how and where the metaphysics of science are deficient, it must show why the perspectives which arise from the absolutisation of the scientific method are unsatisfactory as a basis for ontology, and why explanation of the meaning of being requires more than empirical description of its nature from an imagined objective standpoint shorn of all subjectivity. To be successful, the critique of scientific epistemology must demonstrate that science has proved incapable of giving an adequate account of meaning. The issue is paradigmatic; Heidegger

³²⁸ Sein und Zeit 67

³²⁹ Sein und Zeit: 153

advocated a shift from the notion of physics as fundamental to an approach based on human existence as the basic ground of thought. Science, in its function as the theory of reality, is necessary for human life, but theory is not sufficient as a basis for understanding the truth of Dasein's involvement in the world. So for example Heidegger's denial that there are any "eternal truths" is made on the basis that "there is truth only in so far as man is".³³⁰ He claims Newton's laws are not eternal, they only became 'true' when Newton made them humanly accessible: "Because the kind of Being that is essential to truth has the character of human existence, all truth is relative to human existence".³³¹

Heidegger's efforts to restore the links between existence and truth anticipated much of the worldview which only now is being recognised as the successor to the scientific paradigm created in the seventeenth century. In setting out to uncover the authentic foundations of ontological understanding in the analysis of existence, Heidegger articulated a framework of ideas with the potential to transform the entire project of modern philosophy, a new framework that may even be comparable to the paradigm shift of the seventeenth century, when the discovery that the earth goes round the sun helped inaugurate the scientific revolution at the foundation of the modern world view. Heidegger's doctrine of truth is not merely an interesting epistemological point; it is the key to his critique of the modern mechanistic ontology. His transformation of thought is nevertheless designed to build on modern achievements, not to overturn them, despite his talk of destroying traditions and of the pervasive modern neglect of Being. Before considering his understanding of the meanings of world and space, as a way of developing our characterisation of the new ethical paradigm to which Heidegger contributed, we shall outline some salient features of the dominant worldview he criticised.

The success of the sciences in developing comprehensive understanding of the physical universe is an ontological factor of the utmost importance for modern thought. The wealth of knowledge and information that has been accumulated about everything from quasars to quarks to rainforests must be recognised for the objective insight it provides into the nature of Being. Any attempt to discuss the philosophical merit of modern science must begin by recognising the practical benefits wrought by technologies grounded in scientific theory. The philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century, in which modern science was born, gave rise to an entire new vision of the world, through the work of such scientists as Newton, Descartes and Galileo. The assumptions of these men became decisive for the spirit of the modern age; hence Heidegger remarks that Descartes was responsible for constructing "an ontology which, in principle, is still the usual one today".³³² The ontology often spoken of as the scientific revolution amounted, as Thomas Kuhn³³³ and Fritjof Capra³³⁴ have argued, to a new paradigm which still governs modern thought. A transformation in the whole human project of the advancement of learning occurred as the incompatible philosophies of Aristotle and Newton fought out their differences. Within the framework of physics, a decisive advance occurred as mechanics was put on a mathematically accurate foundation. 'Body' was replaced by 'mass', 'place' by 'position', 'motion' by 'inertia', and 'tendency' by 'force'.³³⁵

Since the scientific revolution, much Western philosophy has accepted as a basic premise that the rigorous determination of the universal laws of mechanistic causality is the

³³⁰ Sein und Zeit:226

³³¹ Sein und Zeit 227

³³² Sein und Zeit: 100

³³³ The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962

³³⁴ The Tao of Physics, p.10

³³⁵ cf Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics (MSMM) in Basic Writings

most important task facing the attempt to provide secure foundations for ontology. Despite decreasing levels of lip service, the old idea that science is only a part of philosophy has gone into near-terminal decline, as the discipline of physics has defined the paradigm of scientific truth. With its demands that enquiry be confined to physical things that can be measured and investigated according to empirical methods and to the mathematical theory regulating the behaviour of physical entities, physics uses mathematical theory to explain the regularity of phenomena by finding timeless physical laws and patterns obeyed by all objects. The laws of gravity, the theorem of the conservation of energy, the systematic descriptions of the elemental atomic composition of matter, are examples of such 'eternal truths' discovered by the scientific method. The enormous success of this method, explaining the nature of truth in terms of the truths of nature, has been amply demonstrated, to such an extent that some modern philosophy³³⁶ has been based on the premise that there is no knowledge outside of science. However the central problem now is that the philosophy of modern science cannot explain how the scientific reality of masses in motion can account for human experience, let alone human aspirations, as it lacks the language to even talk about the issues in question.

Heidegger's attitude to science is complex: while maintaining that the limitations of the modern world view arise directly from the primacy it has given to science and technology, he does not seek to impugn the practical value of scientific discovery. Recognising that "science is the theory of the real",³³⁷ he is "not passing judgement on the positive work of these disciplines" but seeking to show that their "ontological foundations can never be ... derived from empirical material" and that these foundations are "problematic in a more radical sense than any thesis of positive science can ever be".³³⁸ His argument is that the modern world view based on the attitude of science and technology, and with roots going back to ancient logic, is responsible for the loss of our primordial openness to Being, an openness which is essential to the integrity and authenticity of human life.

Heidegger is far enough removed from the time of the scientific revolution that he can set the old and the new side by side and compare them, without the fascination or the arrogance which led to the proclamation of new absolutes in the works of Newton, Hegel and Darwin. He writes,

"the ground swells evoked by the principle of eccentricity (discovered by Kepler), which led to a new era more than four hundred years ago, have become exceedingly broad and flat . . . Man has withdrawn so far from himself that he no longer sees himself at all. The 'modern man' - that is to say, the post-renaissance man - is ready for burial".³³⁹

Despite the enormous practical and theoretical progress the ontology based on science has engendered, it suffers from the problem that its basis in mathematical objectivity is insufficient for the development of an understanding of space which will be meaningful at the existential level of human concern. As Heidegger put it, "the 'here' of Dasein's current factual situation never signifies a position in space, but signifies rather the horizon (Spielraum) of the range of that equipmental totality with which it is most closely concerned".³⁴⁰ The ontology of the scientific revolution, through which the concept of "extension" came to be accepted as "the basic characteristic of the world",³⁴¹ has effectively sanctioned the neglect of the question of being by denying the value of any understanding

³³⁶ e.g. Rudolf Carnap: Erkenntnis (1929)

³³⁷ Science and Reflection: 157

³³⁸ Sein und Zeit: 50

³³⁹ Sein und Zeit: 401, quoting Count von Yorck.

³⁴⁰ Sein und Zeit: 369

³⁴¹ Sein und Zeit: 64

other than that gained through exact representation. The modern world view has confined the notion of "experience" within the rigid theoretical framework of mathematics, and Heidegger suggests this has allowed a "perversion" of the problematic of ontology.³⁴²

As a result of its basis in physics, science has interpreted Being within a framework bounded only by space, time and matter, while spirit, and hence human existence, has been effectively relegated to the mysterious realm of metaphysics in which there is no verification or certainty. Heidegger contended that this hostility to spirituality on the part of science has actually prevented the theory of objectivity from understanding the specifically human dimensions of meaning which arise in the context of practical involvement. Efforts on the part of the scientific worldview "to reconstruct the thing of use from the thing of nature", and so "round out the thing of nature . . . by subsequently endowing things with value predicates", arise out of a problematic which "has been perverted in principle".³⁴³ Yet the scientific worldview must employ this problematic while it regards nature as ontologically prior to the world of human concern.

An essential element of Heidegger's critique of science is his argument that the scientific split between subject and object does not cohere with human experience, and must be removed from its position as the privileged foundation of ontological truth. The epistemology of the subject/object dichotomy subordinates philosophy beneath science, just as effectively as theology can subordinate it beneath religion. However, as Heidegger points out, "real progress in research comes not from collecting results but from a crisis in its basic concepts",³⁴⁴ and such progress can only occur on the basis of the breadth of vision possible within philosophy. No epistemology has the breadth of scope to occasion the sort of "real movement of the sciences" where the "relationship between enquiry and the things under investigation begins to totter",³⁴⁵ because epistemology by its nature presupposes that this relationship is fixed in terms of subject and object. Heidegger maintains that such movement, bringing progress through transformation of the very paradigm upon which research is premised, is only possible on the basis of existential ontology. Because science locates the primary task of ontology in the objective explanation of reality according to the model of the universe as an inanimate complex of masses in motion, it has no point of access to the possibility that ontology could emerge from or adequately explain the specific difficulties of understanding the world from an authentically human perspective, from the incarnate standpoint of human being in the world. The absolutisation of science ignores the dimension of meaning which is a qualitative construct of human existence (Dasein) and which as such cannot be determined by empirical methods alone.

The method of seeking truth from facts is undoubtedly correct within its own contexts, but serious problems arise when the theoretical abstractions of science seek to provide an adequate account of human experience. For example with regard to Newton's First Law, that "every body left to itself moves uniformly in a straight line",³⁴⁶ Heidegger observes that "there is no experiment which could ever bring such a body to direct perception, but modern science, in contrast to the mere dialectical poetic conception of mediæval Scholasticism and science, is supposed to be based on experience. Instead it has such a law at its apex".³⁴⁷ If we now try to find practical applications for Newton's discovery, which at least until the time of Einstein was held to be the absolute and universal truth, it becomes apparent that living terrestrial

³⁴² Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics 17

³⁴³ Sein und Zeit: 99

³⁴⁴ Sein und Zeit 9

³⁴⁵ Sein und Zeit 9

³⁴⁶ Basic Writings: 262

³⁴⁷ Basic Writings: 265

bodies operate and move in a chaotic manner, despite the 'fact' that they are theoretically governed by the laws of physics. The sort of 'beholding' of moving entities that is possible in a laboratory is found to bear only indirect relation to the actual world of circumspection. Heidegger develops this observation into the perhaps extreme argument that because "no one would presume to maintain that Shakespeare's poetry is more advanced than that of Aeschylus, it is impossible to say that the modern understanding of whatever is, is more correct than that of the Greeks".³⁴⁸ Similarly he contends³⁴⁹ that Galileo's work, far from being based on experience, or for that matter on 'facts' alone, was just as conceptual and theory-determined as the physics of Aristotle. For example, in the actual conduct of the famous experiment of the dropping of the weights from the leaning tower of Pisa, the two bodies did not arrive at precisely the same time. "In spite of these differences, and therefore really against the evidence of experience, Galileo upheld his proposition".³⁵⁰

Within the disciplines of the humanities, where culture rather than nature provides the parameters for scholarship and learning, the scientific worldview is sometimes regarded as doctrinaire and narrow. Logical positivism, with its denial of meaning outside the bounds of scientific verification, has been widely criticised on this basis. If we define the truth as only that dimension of our experience which can be formulated in exact universal lawlike propositions not subject to change, the truth of particular human experience is denied. This is one reason why Heidegger seeks to change the meaning of truth from correctness to disclosure, because things can be disclosed as existentially true without corresponding to any conceptual representation.

If it is a methodologically valid step to consider being in the world or Dasein as a totality, as a phenomenon that must always be interpreted as an indissoluble whole, Heidegger is not undermining the authentic goal of science but providing the key to attaining the scientific ideal of bringing all the phenomena given to perception into a unified synthetic relation. He defines science as "the totality established through an interconnection of true propositions",³⁵¹ but if such a totality is to be brought into view, it must be done through analysis of the being who investigates truth. It becomes a matter not of just binding propositions together or separating them out, but of relating them to each other so judgement can exercise a co-ordinating function.³⁵² He therefore suggested that,

"Laying the foundations for the sciences is different in principle from the kind of logic which limps along after, investigating the status of some science as it chances to find it, in order to discover its method. Laying the foundations, as we have described it, is rather a productive logic, in the sense that it leaps ahead, as it were, into some area of being and discloses it for the first time in the constitution of its being".³⁵³

Heidegger's critique of the mechanistic ontology built upon the foundations of modern science has far reaching consequences, because it brings into question the basis of the entire scientific philosophy that has been adumbrated since the time of Newton and Descartes. The implications of Heidegger's critique of Cartesian positivism, if that is what we may call this overall shift in perspective he advocates, are especially significant for the understanding of place. Part of the problem of "forgetfulness of Being", which Heidegger links closely to the triumph of the Cartesian cogito, is that older ideas of place have been superseded in the

³⁴⁸ Age of the World Picture: 117

³⁴⁹ in Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics

³⁵⁰ Basic Writings: 266

³⁵¹ Sein und Zeit: 11

³⁵² Sein und Zeit: 159

³⁵³ Sein und Zeit: 10

modern world view by the scientific concept of position, with the result that the world has been divested of its meaning.

Being, which is the destiny of history, is neglected, because the mainstream of western culture prefers to subordinate all such universal questioning to commercial, technological and military priorities. One of Heidegger's key assertions is that such mistaken priorities can only arise because of the pervasive domination of modern thought by the metaphysics of subjectivity. As mentioned above, this is the practice of accepting subjective beliefs as the final truth, a way of thought Heidegger saw as common in modern politics, technology and religion.

6.3 Worldhood

Heidegger's criticism of scientific absolutism is summed up in his statement that "the homogeneous space of nature shows itself only when entities . . . are deprived of their worldhood".³⁵⁴ For Heidegger's ontology, world is prior to nature, but for science, nature is prior to world: "the world is not present-at-hand in space; yet only within a world does space let itself be discovered".³⁵⁵ To understand Heidegger's critique of the placelessness, the 'never-dwelling-anywhere', of modern thought, it is essential to understand his analysis of worldhood, which is a key to his epistemology. 'World' cannot be simply identified with the planet Earth, with Nature or Reality, because it is principally Dasein's context of involvement and meaning. Speaking of the Cartesian interpretation of the world in terms of Nature, Heidegger wrote that "a glance at the previous ontology shows that if one fails to see Being-in-the-world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likewise gets passed over".³⁵⁶ Due attention to the doctrine of worldhood is therefore an essential component of our efforts to display an ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought.

"Worldhood" is defined as "the structure of that to which Dasein assigns itself";³⁵⁷ as "the ontical condition which makes it possible for entities within the world to be discovered at all"; and "as significance, which can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations".³⁵⁸ The word 'world' is reserved for "that wherein a factual Dasein can be said to live", including "the public we-world, or one's own closest domestic environment".³⁵⁹

Worldhood is to be distinguished from such ideas as "Nature" and "Reality", because its meaning is established in relation to human life. In describing nature as "an entity which is encountered within the world",³⁶⁰ Heidegger sought to re-orient ontology to give priority to "that world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it, the environment".³⁶¹ Concern for the world of everyday Dasein is thus placed within an ontological framework which relates Dasein to Being as a whole. Environment is not meant here as a designation of the entities of Nature, existing without any relationship to Dasein, but as something which is encountered pragmatically in equipment,³⁶² in the context of human life. "Ontologically, 'world' is not a way

354 Sein und Zeit: 112

355 Sein und Zeit: 369

356 Sein und Zeit: 65

357 Sein und Zeit: 86

358 Sein und Zeit: 88

359 Sein und Zeit: 65.

360 Sein und Zeit: 63

361 Sein und Zeit: 6

362 Sein und Zeit: 68

of characterising those entities which Dasein essentially is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself".³⁶³

Heidegger analysed this epistemic relatedness of worldhood and Dasein in terms of another new set of conceptual tools, the Being of things understood as "ready-to-hand"³⁶⁴ and the Being of things understood as "present-at-hand"³⁶⁵. This distinction, introduced in Chapter 3 of *Being and Time*,³⁶⁶ provides the principal categories³⁶⁷ of his new framework for understanding space and truth. Put simply, the ready-to-hand is the way of relating to things encountered at the everyday level of human experience, while the present-at-hand is the way of relating to things characteristic of science. Understanding Heidegger's use of these categories is essential because they are central to his philosophy of place. Furthermore, they are basic to the whole project of showing a way forward to a more accurate metaphysics of human experience, a metaphysic able to integrate the ethical dimension into philosophy, instead of merely 'tacking it on' as a sort of necessary afterthought.

The things we come into contact with and use in daily life, which must be accounted for in any systematic ontology that starts from the point of view of human Being in the world, can only be validly interpreted in terms of the ready-to-hand, the mode of apprehension found in everyday circumspection. We experience life in the context of a totality of involvements, where significance, reference and meaning are historical constructions made by human subjects. The ready-to-hand has to do with "equipment constituted by various ways of the 'in-order-to', such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability".³⁶⁸ It emerges in the context of the purposes 'towards-which' we 'assign or refer' (verweisen) entities we may come across. By contrast, the present-at-hand presupposes that the only truth is found in "Thinghood and Reality, which discovers such characteristics of Being as substantiality, materiality, extendedness, side-by-side-ness, and so forth".³⁶⁹

The new categories of the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand are contrasting ways of understanding the Being of things, although both are equally meaningful and significant. The ready-to-hand considers things in terms of their use value as equipment, not only in an economic sense but in such a way as to encompass the whole range of ways people relate to things that are important to them or that affect them. Of course this does not exclude the possibility that ready-to-hand things may be considered scientifically; indeed Heidegger remarks that "the context of equipment that is ready-to-hand in an everyday manner, its historical emergence and utilisation, and its factual role in Dasein - all these are objects for the science of economics".³⁷⁰ The present-at-hand is the mode of cognition that operates when things are conceptualised theoretically as facts, recognising that "a 'fact' is only what it is in the light of the fundamental conception".³⁷¹ As we shall see, a major part of the claim that there is an ethical dimension to his critique of Descartes is bound up with Heidegger's doctrine that the present-at-hand is the way of understanding found in the Cartesian view of the world as *res extensa*.³⁷²

363 Sein und Zeit: 64

364 (zuhanden)

365 (vorhanden)

366 entitled "The Worldhood of the World"

367 Sein und Zeit: 88

368 Sein und Zeit: 68

369 Sein und Zeit: 68

370 Sein und Zeit: 361

371 Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics: 248

372 extended substance

The claim inherent in this schema, that there is a separation between science and experience, marks Heidegger's departure from positivism.³⁷³ There are several examples given in Being and Time to illustrate the contrast between the scientific objectivism of Being present-at-hand and the existential reality of Being ready to hand, all of which illuminate the paradigmatic ethical dimension of his thought and his critique of positivism. Perhaps the best example of the contrast between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand is Heidegger's discussion of the relationship between the earth and the sun. The correct scientific view, which understands the earth as a cosmic speck within a stellar system on an outer arm of the Milky Way galaxy, is the only truth in terms of the present at hand. In terms of the ready-to-hand however, the pre-Copernican view that the sun goes round the earth is just as true. As Heidegger puts it,

"the sun, whose light and warmth are in everyday use, has its own places - sunrise, midday, sunset, midnight . . . Here we have something which is ready-to-hand with uniform constancy. . . . The house has its sunny side and its shady side; the way it is divided up into rooms is oriented towards these, and so is the arrangement within them, according to their character as equipment. Churches and graves, for instance, are laid out according to the rising and the setting of the sun - the regions of life and death, which are determinative for Dasein itself with regard to its ownmost possibilities of Being in the world".³⁷⁴

In terms of human access, the sky is not principally an object of study for climatologists and a hindrance for astronomers, it is "the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether".³⁷⁵ For farming,³⁷⁶ or for the laying out of churches and graves,³⁷⁷ it is irrelevant that the earth "actually" goes round the sun. The same distinction applies to other practical concerns;

"the south wind may be meteorologically accessible as something which just occurs, but it is never present-at-hand directly in such a way as this . . . On the contrary, only by the circumspection with which one takes account of things in farming is the south wind discovered in its Being".³⁷⁸ "The botanist's plants are not the 'flowers in the hedgerow', the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale'".³⁷⁹

These examples show how the Being of the same entity can be understood from the divergent perspectives of the scientific and the existential, each of which is meaningful. For the scientific theory that only the present-at-hand qualifies as true knowledge, the 'springhead in the dale' is not however acceptable as a description of the source of the river. As merely ready-to-hand, a dale is no more than a subjective aesthetic perception and not something that can be expressed in terms of mathematics and geometry. Heidegger contrasts the perspectives of the cartographer and the lover of nature, suggesting it may even be that an extreme version of the cartographic representational understanding of knowledge would attribute more reality to the map designation than to the actual place. In the case of the flowers in the hedgerow, whose being is disclosed in the whiff of scent or the flash of colour,

³⁷³ see especially *Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics*

³⁷⁴ *Sein und Zeit*: 103

³⁷⁵ *Poetry, Language, Thought* p.149

³⁷⁶ *Sein und Zeit*: 415

³⁷⁷ *Sein und Zeit*: 104

³⁷⁸ *Sein und Zeit*: 81

³⁷⁹ *Sein und Zeit*: 70

the scholars criticised by Heidegger would understand them according to the catalogue, and any moods the flowers may have inspired in us are dismissed as merely subjective and without truth value. We can only know the flower as present at hand once it has been dissected or pressed and the Latin name has been determined; while it remains an unruly wild object and no more than a source of delight for children, its Being has not yet been adequately clarified.

To always drag being back from the abstract purity of theory to the necessary mediation of human use may appear to destroy the beauty of speculation; but it replaces it with a beauty more valuable because it discloses the world as related to human concerns. In The Origin of the Work of Art, Heidegger discusses the implications of his epistemology for aesthetics, using as an example the well known Van Gogh painting of a pair of peasant shoes. In terms of the present at hand, they are "leather soles and uppers, joined together by nails and thread . . . matter and form". But as ready to hand, the "tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the field. . . . In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain. . . . This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment is in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealedness of its Being".³⁸⁰

The approach of the present-at-hand (the Cartesian ontology), according to which "entities can have their 'properties' defined mathematically in 'functional concepts'",³⁸¹ seeks to ignore consideration of things in terms of the value invested in them by human concern in favour of a supposedly 'rational' approach, yet this 'rationality' is based on a definite worldview which excludes meaningful realities such as love, beauty, moods and values from its intellectual horizon. So the question "What is the world?"³⁸² is far from trivial, because our answer to this basic question will determine our attitude to the whole range of issues covered within the horizon of the meaningful. Both ways of relating to the things in the world, the ready-to-hand and the present at hand, are necessary and valid, but they must be clearly distinguished.

In order to provide an ethical grounding for human life as it is lived, philosophy must develop a way of thought which recognises that meaning is found in all relationships and involvements. A new framework is needed which can place the theoretical cognition obtained through scientific experiment and observation on a level with other meaningful ways human beings disclose the truth. An ontology constructed on the basis of the ready-to-hand alone would be groundless: without the discipline of scientific analysis of structure and function it would remain in a primitive myth world of belief. However by the same token, an ontology constructed on the basis of the present-at-hand alone would be meaningless: there would be no basis for saying why any of the numerous facts discovered should matter to anybody, which is the only situation in which meaning, and hence ethics, can arise. Understanding requires both grounds and meaning, so both approaches are necessary.

Clearly such a philosophy requires a new understanding of the world, in terms of its nature and our relation to it, so this is what Heidegger tried to provide through the existential analytic of Dasein. Fundamental to this task is the idea that "subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world".³⁸³ The notion of 'being in' presupposes a historical immersion in a context of significance entirely different from the way an isolated subject can theorise about a world present at hand. The central point is that the philosophy of Being must

380 Basic Writings: 163

381 Sein und Zeit: 88

382 Sein und Zeit: 63

383 Sein und Zeit: 60

be meaningful at the human level, it must relate to people in their activities and relationships, rather than as the objects of detached scientific enquiry. It is this demand that makes Heidegger's philosophy ethical, because exploration of the primacy of the human level, a primacy which flows directly from his conception of Dasein as being in the world, must consider the ethical issues surrounding our involvements with all the people and things we contact.

The ontology of worldhood and engagement brought into question the whole scientific understanding of space; Heidegger formalised this with his claim that the correct starting point for fundamental ontology is with what he terms 'concernful circumspection'.³⁸⁴ In the activity of circumspection we become immersed in the world of our concern, and human involvement becomes the criterion of spatiality. If circumspection is taken as a genuine possible perspective, the geometrical theory of dimensionality is thrown into disarray: above and below now refer to the ready to hand, the ceiling and the floor, rather than to some abstract placeless grid; we encounter the room "not as something 'between four walls' in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing".³⁸⁵ This novel approach to the problem of space departed from Kant's doctrine of space as "the form of all phenomena of the external sense",³⁸⁶ because it was developed upon the basic premise that the questions posed in fundamental ontology must be answered in the context of the existential analytic of Dasein.³⁸⁷ For Heidegger, "all 'wheres' are discovered and circumspectively interpreted as we go our ways in everyday dealings; they are not ascertained and catalogued by the observational measurement of space".³⁸⁸ Equipment encountered and used in the environment provides the context of human involvement and existential truth, not abstract geometry.

The best example of this approach is Heidegger's treatment of the man in the street. Nothing like Descartes' radical doubt about whether the man is an automaton even enters his mind, because Heidegger is concerned to argue that even though the street itself may seem to be the closest and realest of things as one feels it sliding beneath the feet at every step, when one encounters an acquaintance at a distance of twenty paces, the friend is closer than the street in terms of circumspection. It is concern as such that "decides as to the nearness and farness of what is proximally ready-to-hand environmentally".³⁸⁹ For example, the clothes I am wearing are physically closer to me than the person with whom I am conversing, but this spatial closeness is meaningless in existential terms because only the priorities of concern determine distance for Dasein as Being in the world.

"Being in" means to reside, to dwell, to inhabit, and in this context our 'being-alongside'³⁹⁰ has the sense of being *absorbed* in our context. Dasein's Being in the world is never 'in' in the way water is *in* a glass or chairs are in a room, in the sense of 'side-by-side-ness'³⁹¹, because "if the chair could touch the wall, this would presuppose that the wall is the sort of thing 'for'; which a chair would be *encounterable*".³⁹² Encountering is something only an entity with Dasein's mode of Being can do. We can only understand the disclosure of Being through existential involvement. In the context of spatiality, disclosure at the human level takes the form of 'deseverance', by which Heidegger meant "making the farness

384 Sein und Zeit: 69

385 Sein und Zeit: 68

386 Kant: Critique of Pure Reason: A26

387 Sein und Zeit: 13

388 Sein und Zeit:103

389 Sein und Zeit:107

390 Sein und Zeit: 54

391 Sein und Zeit: 55

392 Sein und Zeit: 55

vanish",³⁹³ and 'directionality', a word he coined to indicate the capacity to "orient myself both in and from my being already alongside a world which is familiar".³⁹⁴ Objective measurement "is inclined to pass off such estimates as subjective",³⁹⁵ but Heidegger argues "this 'subjectivity' perhaps uncovers the 'Reality' of the world at its most real".³⁹⁶

In marked contrast to the Cartesian doctrine of the human subject as a thinking substance, with its corollary that the external world can only be understood objectively in terms of extension, Heidegger maintained that extension is not the same as spatiality, despite attempts to pass it off as such by claiming universal application for the method that understands space in terms of analytic-algebraic relations.³⁹⁷ Instead of such theoretical reduction, human spatiality must be understood in terms of where it 'dwells',³⁹⁸ in such a way that it is intrinsically connected to its environment in a way that is impossible for either the subject perceiving an external object, or for inanimate objects. He suggests it is "because Dasein is spiritual, and only because of this, that it can be spatial in a way which remains essentially impossible for any extended corporeal thing".³⁹⁹

The understanding of human spatiality as dwelling within the spiritual horizon of concern was developed in his later essay Building, Dwelling, Thinking into the doctrine that "man is insofar as he dwells". Dwelling "also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for".⁴⁰⁰ The four elemental constituents of Being as dwelling are earth and sky, mortals and Gods. With these four, a thing, whether a jug, a bridge or a pair of shoes, comes to dwell on the earth. Dwelling, "that wherein something becomes"⁴⁰¹ can be understood by returning to the primordial Greek experience. "The Greeks had no word for 'space'. This is no accident; for they experienced the spatial on the basis not of extension but of place; . . . as that which is occupied by what stands there. The place belongs to the thing itself. Each of all the various things has its place".⁴⁰² "Accordingly, spaces receive their being from locations and not from 'space'".⁴⁰³

6.4 Descartes

The ethical essence of Heidegger's thought comes into sharp focus in his opposition to the metaphysics of subjectivity, exemplified in the Cartesian philosophy, which, he says, is "at the opposite extreme"⁴⁰⁴ from his own thinking. Since it was first propounded, Descartes' method of systematic doubt has been regarded as the basis of rational ontology and the decisive step in the process of opening the way to unfettered scientific discovery and freeing thought from the dogmatic stagnation of mediaeval scholasticism. Starting with the 'cogito ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am'), as a synthetic axiom able to provide a secure foundation for philosophy to proceed with logical clarity and precision towards the

393 Sein und Zeit: 105

394 Sein und Zeit: 109

395 Sein und Zeit: 68

396 Sein und Zeit: 106

397 Poetry, Language, Thought p.155

398 see also the discussion on the theme of 'dwelling' in section 5.4, on The Letter on Humanism, where 'ethos' is interpreted as the 'dwelling place' of humanity.

399 Sein und Zeit: 368

400 Poetry, Language, Thought p.149

401 Introduction to Metaphysics: 66

402 Introduction to Metaphysics: 66

403 Poetry, Language, Thought p.154

404 Sein und Zeit: 88

understanding of truth, Descartes, with whom "modern philosophy is usually considered to have begun",⁴⁰⁵ put the rational activity of the human intellect in the centre of his philosophy by regarding all other phenomena as quite possibly illusory. Yet because "mathematical knowledge is regarded by Descartes as the one manner of apprehending entities which can give assurance that their Being has been securely grasped",⁴⁰⁶ the Cartesian worldview is incapable of appreciating ordinary reality without imposing upon it a rigid dichotomy between the isolated subject doing the perceiving and the object perceived. The essence of Heidegger's attack on Descartes is that he presented the subject as seeking to attain the eternal and placeless standpoint of pure reason, while the object remains an inert thing to be measured.

Central to Descartes' system is the dualist presupposition that mind and matter are the two categorially distinct substances constituting reality, with the identifying characteristic of mental substance being thought (*res cogitans*) and that of material substance being extension (*res extensa*). This framework is partly the revival in an altered form of the classical dualist metaphysics of Augustine's *City of God* and Plato's divided line. Indeed, Heidegger notes that "the transformation of the essence of place into a 'space' defined by extension was initiated by the Platonic philosophy in the interpretation of being as idea".⁴⁰⁷ Descartes' split between mind and matter is also parallel to the Christian doctrine of the priority of the spirit over the flesh. However its greater significance is in the support it has given to the mechanistic scientific perspective that originated with the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo.

The transcendent ego denying its own bodily incarnation has been a major theme of Western philosophy, but the oppressive role this belief has played in traditional thought has often been denied. From Socrates' vision in the *Phaedrus* of the soul as a heavenly charioteer, to Augustine's split between the city of God and the city of man; from Descartes' dualism between mental and extended substances, to Sartre's theory of the unconditional freedom of the transcendent 'for-itself', this wishful dualist thinking pervades the history of metaphysics. To reveal the presuppositions of this tradition is to deconstruct metaphysics, but this is the task that must be accomplished if the language of philosophy is to overcome its alienation from the earth and from the body.⁴⁰⁸

Descartes' philosophy looms large within the schema of *Being and Time*, for Heidegger's outlook remained gripped by the Copernican problematic to which Descartes gave impetus and which led to the overthrow of the mediæval cosmology. In Heidegger's view, Descartes decisively opened the way to the reductionist errors committed in the name of the positivist belief that there is no knowledge outside of science. Against the pervasive methodology of modern thought, which holds that the being of an object can only be understood by the mathematical comprehension of its components, Heidegger called for a perspective more in tune with normal human experience, or as he put it, a perspective attuned to Being in the World. For Heidegger considered that experience as a whole, as distinct from particular experiences, could only be understood by establishing the transcendental

405 MSMM, F2. Basic Writings: 273

406 *Sein und Zeit*: 95

407 Introduction to Metaphysics:66

408 Recent thinkers have taken some of the consequences of this critique for the practice of philosophy much further than Heidegger ever did, particularly in terms of the recognition that authentic philosophy must speak from an embodied perspective, but also in terms of the need to oppose the oppressive and exploitative norms of our society.

foundation provided by the idea of Being,⁴⁰⁹ even though his discussion of Being is designed to criticise all metaphysical systems.⁴¹⁰

Heidegger's doctrine that Dasein finds its meaning in care created a worldview which dismantles essential features of Descartes' mechanistic picture. The priority given to care, with its close relation to temporal Being in the World, helps to dismantle the framework set up by Descartes' theoretical model of truth, where the isolated subject seeks to objectively perceive a completely external reality. The subject/object epistemology of the cogito, which Heidegger derides as an example of the "metaphysics of subjectivity", must give way to a more fluid and alive perspective, in which people are inextricably involved with and concerned for the world.

Although his genius was recognised by Heidegger, Descartes typifies much of the erroneous philosophy that has led to the dehumanisation of contemporary thought, so Heidegger's critique of Descartes was an important part of the ethical dimension of his thought. A significant factor giving rise to the postulation of an ethical element in the treatment of Descartes is that the incarnational dimension of Heidegger's philosophy⁴¹¹ comes into operation here. A major part of the criticism of Descartes' is that mind/body dualism splits theoretical truth from everyday existence and so fails to provide a sufficient basis for a well rounded philosophy of Being. While ever the ontological foundation of the opposition between nature and spirit remains unclarified, Descartes' ontology cannot be truly fundamental, especially considering that this opposition was a premise for his entire world view.⁴¹²

Against this dichotomous logic, Heidegger set the thesis that human being must be understood as a fundamentally unitary phenomenon: "human being is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather existence".⁴¹³ Descartes assumed that philosophical truth must be expressed only in the precise language of logic and mathematics, rather than in terms of experience as it is lived, so Heidegger characterised Descartes' system of thought as ontologically deficient. The analysis of the ontological significance of such negative aspects of experience as fear, anxiety and death is basic to the development of the theme of disclosing Dasein as unitary and involved. Heidegger attempted to show that Descartes is incapable of fitting such existential moods, or even the recognition of mortality, into the logic of his method.

Heidegger's critique of Descartes was not in the manner of a narrow dismissal of his thinking, but sought rather to recognise the profundity and broad effects as well as the limitations of his rationalist method. The shortcomings of this belief system are real and pervasive, and they become apparent once it is examined from the perspective of the existential analytic. It is in the context of the widespread acceptance of the scientific orthodoxy which the Cartesian philosophy sought to underpin that Heidegger reopened in Being and Time the issue of how it is possible to determine the true foundations of authentic ontology. The achievements of the specific sciences in explaining the nature of Being must be recognised each within their own domain, but the question of whether that domain could possibly extend to the systematic and universal comprehension of Being as a whole, which is what the pretensions of the Cartesian philosophy amount to, ought to be a source of much perplexity.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁹ Sein und Zeit: 3

⁴¹⁰ Sein und Zeit: 22

⁴¹¹ discussed below with reference to care

⁴¹² Sein und Zeit: 89

⁴¹³ Sein und Zeit: 117

⁴¹⁴ as Heidegger noted in the very first words of Being and Time taken from Plato's Sophist

Physics holds that the nature of Being can be comprehended only through the transformation of the raw data given to sensibility into its abstract mathematical representation. The theory of substance which underpins this approach is the Cartesian notion of extension. Yet when this doctrine is put under critical scrutiny, it does not correspond to actual experience, but only to a theory of what experience would be if the idealised picture of the world that arises within mathematics were absolute. Heidegger says "what is decisive for its developments does not lie in its rather high esteem for the observation of 'facts', nor in its 'application' of mathematics in determining the character of natural processes; it lies rather in the *way in which Nature itself is mathematically projected*".⁴¹⁵

The being of an entity understood as *res extensa* consists of its objective mathematical representation as a thing of such and such a size, shape, displacement, atomic composition, etcetera, rather than its place in a human context of culture and history. Heidegger, at least as I read him, is not seeking to deny all validity to this doctrine of the nature of Being, which he characterised as the metaphysics of subjectivity; nor did he want to diminish the objective achievements of science, but only to question whether the truths discovered according to this method can be really universal, as much of the orthodox scientific worldview would appear to suggest.

The Cartesian metaphysics of subjectivity treats our relation to the world in terms of perception, regarding it as always a detached 'beholding' of things given present at hand. Its deficiency is that it thereby devalues the perception of things as it occurs ready-to-hand in everyday circumspection. Heidegger argues that there is more to life than the scientific method alone can discover, because human existence, the only possible standpoint for philosophy, does not experience the world according to the Cartesian model of an isolated subject interpreting the phenomena given to perception as merely present at hand. As finite existent beings, we are involved from the start in a world of personal, as distinct from theoretical, significance and meaning.

To claim that all Being can be comprehended in terms of the present-at-hand alone is to accept as absolute a partial ontology premised on the assumption that it is possible to isolate the subject who thinks from his or her worldly context. In Heidegger's opinion, Descartes' solipsistic method of isolating the individual from his or her practical involvements effectively prevents the inquirer from gaining any real access to Being in the world: "if one fails to see Being in the world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likewise gets passed over".⁴¹⁶ This is the basis for Heidegger's devastating critique of the problem of other minds as it has commonly been expressed in modern philosophy: the debate which keeps getting raised about whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved is not a genuine question but a scandal of philosophy. The question "makes no sense if it is raised by Dasein as Being in the world, and who else would raise it?".⁴¹⁷

Rather than simply reworking the methods and perspectives of Descartes, Heidegger sought to take the Cartesian philosophy as the basis for a radical and critical reappraisal of the purpose and direction of thought. The decisive break is that by taking the existential analytic of Dasein as the clue to entering the domain of fundamental ontology, Heidegger opened the way to restoring philosophy as an intellectual discipline in its own right. It is precisely the ordinary everyday truth of Being in the world that suits it to function as an axiomatic first principle for a universally systematic ontology, even if this ordinary world is then open to criticism for its inauthenticity. For Descartes however, Being is never something given as the context into which thought is thrown, because truth can only be established by

415 Sein und Zeit: 362

416 Sein und Zeit: 65

417 Sein und Zeit: 202

logical proof. Because his theory of substance is founded on the dichotomy between the mental subject and the extended object, Descartes took as a basic premise that the primary mode of access to Being is through mathematical knowledge, rather than through existence. The cogito fails to determine "the meaning of the Being of the 'sum'", so "the seemingly new beginning which Descartes proposes for philosophy has revealed itself as the implantation of a baleful prejudice".⁴¹⁸

The possibility of openness to Being must be presupposed if philosophy is to be true to itself, but the Cartesian point of departure, the worldless subject, actively prevents such openness by its methodical doubt. It produces both an epistemology and an ethics which leave fundamental ontology out of account, thereby restricting its scope to an artificial construction upon reality rather than a genuine reflection of what is really there. The position to which thought is then inevitably consigned is one where it can only secure its legitimacy by trailing along behind the pioneering work of the natural empirical sciences. But if the existential analytic is to be the starting point for ontology, and for that matter if there is to be any autonomous purpose for philosophy, this schema must be seriously questioned.

⁴¹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 25

Chapter Seven: The Place of Ethics - II

Thus far this thesis has outlined some of the contextual problems surrounding analysis of the ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought by considering the epistemological and ontological horizons within which his existential analytic developed. The purpose of the discussions up to this point, including those on such topics as the existential analytic of Dasein, the novel approach to worldhood and space, the idea of ethos, and the critique of Descartes, has been to indicate a possible ethical content, a place for ethics, in Heidegger's ontology. All these discussions so far can be considered as preparatory to this chapter, in which the thematic analysis of the place of ethics in Heidegger's ontology will be presented, through analysis of the grounding ontological themes of Being and Time.

7.1 Anxiety

To introduce our final discussion of the positive ethical content of Heidegger's ontology, we shall begin by examining his discussion of anxiety, one of his central structural themes. He presents anxiety as the "single primordially unitary phenomenon which ... provides the ontological foundation"⁴¹⁹ for Being in the world. Dasein finds its unity, and at the same time establishes the foundation for access to the meaning of Being, in the 'open region' of anxiety into which the self projects itself and is thrown. Anxiety is the state of mind Heidegger sees as the most fundamental existential mood and the distinctive theme that individualises Dasein by forcing the understanding to project itself upon its possibilities.⁴²⁰ Because "that in the face of which one has anxiety is Being in the world as such",⁴²¹ anxiety is the basic phenomenon in which existence confronts its choice whether to be authentic or to lose itself in the tranquillised chatter of ordinary life.

"Anxiety individualises. This individualisation brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being. These basic possibilities of Dasein . . . show themselves in anxiety as . . . undisguised by entities within the world, to which, proximally and for the most part, Dasein clings."⁴²²

In moods and feelings such as boredom, indifference, love and anxiety, we can be torn away from our fragmented ontic concerns into a fundamental openness towards being as a whole.⁴²³ Such moods can leave us asking who we are, and why there is anything at all, opening the way to a stark sense that besides existence there is nothing. The "repellent and oppressive" presence of the nothing, revealed most starkly in anxiety, is always there behind this ontological openness, assaulting "the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog".⁴²⁴ Jean Paul Sartre's Nausea, where the existence of a tree root prompts the narrator to experience severe existential anguish, is a particularly evocative articulation of this phenomenon. When we "hover in this rare

⁴¹⁹ Sein und Zeit: 181

⁴²⁰ Sein und Zeit: 187

⁴²¹ Sein und Zeit: 186

⁴²² Sein und Zeit: 191

⁴²³ What Is Metaphysics?: 101 These four moods are discussed specifically in this context here.

⁴²⁴ What Is Metaphysics?: 101

anxiety" which "for human existence makes possible the openedness of beings as such",⁴²⁵ "the idea of logic itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning".⁴²⁶

In such a mood, where "the world has the character of completely lacking significance",⁴²⁷ or for that matter where the contrary sensation overwhelms us and the significance of the world becomes too much for us to cope with, the ordinary tendency of forfeiture is to flee from the apparent collapse of values and standards brought on by anxiety, and take refuge in the comfort of material possessions and relationships; in order to "dwell in tranquillised familiarity . . . we flee in the face of the uncanniness which lies in Dasein".⁴²⁸

Anxiety brings us face to face with the finitude of existence, and the fact that besides existence there is nothing. Ontologically, the meaning of this observation is that we must concern ourselves with more than just the finite and tangible problems of our ontic situation. But this is what modern positive rationality refuses to do. The ontological question of the meaning of this 'nothing', strange and repellent as it may be for logic, must however be asked if we are to somehow reveal beings as a whole. In the absence of God, the nothing is the ultimate other against which being can be identified. Despite its absurdity and its "formal impossibility",⁴²⁹ we must ask, "Why is there anything and not nothing?" Only through such fundamental questioning can "the total strangeness of beings, the ground of wonder where the 'why' looms before us",⁴³⁰ become manifest. In a saying which evokes the atmosphere of Kierkegaard's Trembling Unto Death, Heidegger wrote, "This privileged question 'why' has its ground in a leap through which man thrusts away all the previous security, whether real or imagined, of his life".⁴³¹ For values to become authentic, we must "liberate ourselves from those idols to which everyone is wont to go cringing",⁴³² and genuinely interrogate each thing in terms of its place within being as a whole by becoming open to the message brought by anxiety.

Unlike fear, which always has an object, anxiety has an indeterminateness, in which "we cannot say what it is before which we feel ill at ease".⁴³³ Our whole world seems to slip away, the structures of our security disintegrate, "everyday familiarity collapses",⁴³⁴ as we seem to confront both our whole existence and nothing at all. "That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterised by the fact that what threatens is nowhere".⁴³⁵ The German word 'angst' has the meanings 'anguish and 'dread' just as much as 'anxiety', and is suggestive of this meaningless existential abyss lurking beyond the perimeters of our security. In anxiety we confront the possibility of our own death, the fact that we will some day be nothing. Although anxiety is the most individual state of mind, it is also the phenomenon where we confront being in the world, which has a fundamentally social aspect as destiny and so can never be understood on the basis of the isolation of the thinking subject.

425 What Is Metaphysics?: 106

426 What Is Metaphysics?: 107

427 Sein und Zeit: 186

428 Sein und Zeit: 189

429 What Is Metaphysics?: 100

430 What Is Metaphysics?: 111

431 Introduction to Metaphysics: 5

432 What Is Metaphysics?: 112

433 Basic Writings: 103

434 Sein und Zeit: 189

435 Sein und Zeit: 186

7.2 Conscience

Despite his statement that “in the context of the problems of this treatise the analysis of conscience is merely ancillary”,⁴³⁶ and that “it will be investigated in a purely existential manner, with fundamental ontology as our aim”,⁴³⁷ Heidegger’s discussion of the theme of conscience makes the ethical content of his ontology most apparent. Conscience is closely linked to anxiety, in that both are remote and difficult phenomena from the everyday point of view, but both disclose our being in the world as a whole in a way which is not merely ontological but also ethical, in that they demand the establishment of phenomenal grounds for the attitudes upon which ethical decisions are based.

Part of the significance of conscience for the existential analytic is its illustration of the impossibility of forcing Dasein under a present-at-hand interpretation. In keeping with his critical phenomenology, Heidegger placed the existential interpretation of conscience ‘between’ the erroneous explanations offered by biology and theology: conscience is not merely biological, because the projection it requires of us upon our guilt and our failures has an essentially spiritual dimension; yet nor is conscience a tool for theology as a valid basis for establishing proofs of the existence of God, at least while phenomenological disclosure is accepted as a criterion of truth. “Both these explanations pass over the phenomenal findings too hastily”,⁴³⁸ based as they are on the unexpressed guiding dogma that whatever is must be present-at-hand. In this context Heidegger makes reference to the danger of “blurring the boundaries between phenomenology and theology, with damage to both”.⁴³⁹ Even so, “ontological analysis . . . has no right to disregard the everyday understanding of conscience and to pass over the anthropological, psychological and theological theories of conscience which have been based upon it”.⁴⁴⁰

The guiding theme of Heidegger’s ontological understanding of conscience is expressed in his statement that

“the call of conscience has the character of an appeal to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality for being its self; and this is done by way of summoning it to its ownmost being guilty”.⁴⁴¹

Here we see several distinctive aspects of Heidegger’s treatment of this phenomenon. Conscience appeals to us as a call summoning Dasein to its potential, which for Heidegger is bound up with both an unavoidable guilt and a mood attuned by anxiety. It is only guilt that gives any momentum to the disclosure of what conscience has to reveal, even if the call only brings an uncanny anxiety about nothing in particular. As disclosive of Being, the only true conscience phenomenon is the bad conscience, the Being-guilty:

“Entities whose being is care . . . are guilty in the very basis of their Being. . . .

This essential Being-guilty is, equiprimordially, the existential condition for the possibility of the ‘morally’ good and for that of the ‘morally’ evil - that is, for morality in general”.⁴⁴²

Primordial guilt subsists beneath the surface of every situation. By this Heidegger means that we constantly make decisions about what to do in existential projection upon our future possibilities, but the decision to follow one course of action and not another brings with it a negation (Nichtigkeit - translated as nullity in BT) of the rejected path. As guilty we are all in

436 Sein und Zeit: 290

437 Sein und Zeit: 268

438 Sein und Zeit: 275

439 Sein und Zeit: Div.2, Chapter 2, note vi.

440 Sein und Zeit: 290

441 Sein und Zeit: 269

442 Sein und Zeit: 286

debt,⁴⁴³ but ordinarily guilt is asleep, and must be woken by the call of conscience. This implies that “the good conscience . . . is not a conscience phenomenon at all”.⁴⁴⁴ The supposed ‘good conscience’ consists in the Pharisaical proclamation of one’s own goodness, something the genuinely good person is unwilling to affirm.⁴⁴⁵

However, and this is the strangest and most difficult aspect of Heidegger’s teachings on this topic, the summons of authentic conscience, the ontological voice of Dasein as care, says nothing in particular; it “discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent”.⁴⁴⁶ The reason for this is that the ontological task Heidegger has set for conscience is the attestation of Dasein’s potentiality for Being, a potential envisioned in anxious openness to the whole. It is not to warn and reprove “concretely in relation to failures and omissions”.⁴⁴⁷ Such advice comes only from the ontic conscience, the public voice of the ‘they’,⁴⁴⁸ and falls short of the authentic potential to which the ontological conscience refers us. Such a potentiality for Being is not “ideal and universal”; rather conscience “discloses it as that which has been currently individualised and which belongs to that particular Dasein”.⁴⁴⁹ “Universal validity of standards and the claims to ‘universality’ which the ‘they’ and its common sense demand”,⁴⁵⁰ are, in Heidegger’s view, foreign to the authentic phenomenon of conscience. By keeping silent, conscience forces Dasein “into the reticence of itself”. Such “conspicuous indefiniteness”,⁴⁵¹ “from afar unto afar”,⁴⁵² arises from the sense in which “the call comes from me and yet from beyond me”.⁴⁵³ “This interpretation does justice to the objectivity of the appeal for the first time by leaving it its subjectivity”.⁴⁵⁴ If

“we expect to be told something currently useful about assured possibilities of taking action which are available and calculable, . . . such expectations . . . are of course disappointed by the conscience. The call of conscience fails to give any such ‘practical’ injunctions, solely because it summons Dasein to existence.”⁴⁵⁵ “In its ‘who’, the caller is definable in a ‘worldly’ way by *nothing* at all. The caller is Dasein in its uncanniness: primordial, thrown Being in the world as the ‘not at home’ - the bare that-it-is in the ‘nothing’ of the world. The caller is unfamiliar to the everyday they-self; it is something like an alien voice. What could be more alien to the ‘they’, lost in the manifold world of its concern, than the self which has been individualised down to itself in uncanniness?”⁴⁵⁶

Conscience makes itself felt when we recognise the inauthenticity of public life and drag ourselves out of our immersion in the value systems promulgated by the ‘they’. When the call comes, it passes over the everyday worldly self, and as a result “the ‘they’ collapses. . . . Precisely in passing over the ‘they’ . . . the call pushes it into insignificance”.⁴⁵⁷ If Dasein allows

⁴⁴³ The German word ‘Schuld’ covers both guilt and debt.

⁴⁴⁴ Sein und Zeit: 292

⁴⁴⁵ Heidegger refers at this point (Sein und Zeit: 291, note viii) to Max Scheler’s book ‘Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal (Material) Ethics of Value’, which appeared in the Phenomenology Year Book in 1916, and which has been an important influence within phenomenological ethics. Scheler defined ‘good conscience’ as ‘an experienced lack of bad conscience’, a definition Heidegger suspects opens the way to “the tranquillised suppression of one’s wanting to have a conscience” (292).

⁴⁴⁶ Sein und Zeit: 273

⁴⁴⁷ Sein und Zeit: 279

⁴⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion of the ‘they’, see the section entitled Ethics as Élan: Tensions in Being and Time.

⁴⁴⁹ Sein und Zeit: 280

⁴⁵⁰ Sein und Zeit: 395

⁴⁵¹ Sein und Zeit: 274

⁴⁵² Sein und Zeit: 271

⁴⁵³ Sein und Zeit: 275

⁴⁵⁴ Sein und Zeit: 278

⁴⁵⁵ Sein und Zeit: 294

⁴⁵⁶ Sein und Zeit: 277

⁴⁵⁷ Sein und Zeit: 273

itself to be carried along in the publicness of the 'they', making no choices and letting the 'they' tacitly relieve its burdens, it becomes lost and entangled, and in need of being brought back to its authentic self. It is only conscience as the call of care that can exercise this function of summoning Dasein out of its lostness, because Dasein must choose its possibilities if it is to authentically become its self. In the absence of the anxiety which makes us want to have a conscience, no other source can bring Dasein to authenticity.

There certainly are conscience phenomena which are understood by the public world, but Heidegger contended that these derivative forms of conscience are inadequate consolations for people who lack the courage to resolutely stand in the light of the truth of Being.⁴⁵⁸ Because authentic conscience is a fundamental ontological reality for the personal life of Dasein, the usual public understanding of conscience as an absolute, as a public world conscience "in the sense of a voice which is 'universally' binding, and which speaks in a way that is 'not just subjective'" like Kant's representation of it as a court of justice, is a "dubious fabrication", nothing more than "the voice of the 'they'."⁴⁵⁹ On Heidegger's account such objectivity distorts and even removes individual responsibility. Conscience is generally concealed by "the hubbub of the manifold ambiguity which idle talk possesses in its everyday newness";⁴⁶⁰ "instead of becoming authentically understood, it gets drawn by the they-self into a soliloquy in which causes get pleaded, and it becomes perverted in its tendency to disclose".⁴⁶¹

7.3 Openness

Openness is a key to specific ethical questions in Heidegger's thought, because it is a basic theme informing his ideas about anxiety, conscience and involvement in the world. The message that humanity can only achieve its potential through openness to Being is a key to Heidegger's ontology. Openness would initially appear to be just a way of knowing the world, but Heidegger's distinctive understanding of 'world'⁴⁶² as constituted by Dasein's totality of involvements means a truly phenomenological openness cannot be restricted to the kind of certainty given through cognition. Instead, the ethical significance of openness is in its functions of grounding the connection of Dasein to the world through relationships of empathy and concern. Openness is defined by Heidegger as being "constituted existentially by the attunement of a state of mind", "in such a manner that what we encounter within the world can matter to us".⁴⁶³ It is this idea of things 'mattering' that makes openness ethical, because for things to matter to us requires more than the simple knowing of an object by a subject; openness therefore requires our involvement in meaningful practical relationships. As Heidegger said, "opening oneself up or closing oneself off is grounded in Being with one another. . . . This relationship is already constitutive for one's own Dasein".⁴⁶⁴ The suggestion that the world's mattering to us is a fundamental existentials underlies Heidegger's discussions of meaning, significance and reference, as well as his critique of the Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object. Subject and object are not two separate entities between which a relation can be established, but are rather constituted, as Dasein, by a full and concrete togetherness.

⁴⁵⁸ As we have observed above, Heidegger himself failed to display such existential courage when it came to even denouncing the Nazi Holocaust.

⁴⁵⁹ Sein und Zeit: 278

⁴⁶⁰ Sein und Zeit: 271

⁴⁶¹ Sein und Zeit: 274

⁴⁶² see the section on 'worldhood' in the previous chapter for a fuller discussion.

⁴⁶³ Sein und Zeit:137

⁴⁶⁴ Sein und Zeit:124

In openness we establish relations with the factual world into which we are thrown, a world constituted by both social relationships and things of use. An open comportment does not perceive and analyse 'sense-data' as objectively given, but this is not to say our relations to that which really matters to us and affects us cannot be transformed into such an abstract representation. We are involved in relationships which go well beyond what is given to cognition, so an existential openness to situations cannot be understood simply in terms of knowledge. As Heidegger says,

“the possibilities of disclosure which belong to cognition reach far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to moods, in which Dasein is brought before its Being as ‘there’”.⁴⁶⁵

If people are truly open, their lives and actions will receive and reflect what conscience and anxiety have to tell. Conscience and anxiety are states of mind through which the situation of Dasein can be disclosed, yet the intuition of the meaning of these phenomena is not just a matter of theoretical knowledge; it depends on our recognition of our situation as thrown into the world. Openness means to experience the negativity of life as much as its positive side, to reflect on the ultimate as much as the immediate, in the effort to honestly recognise the place of the whole gamut of human experience and reflection.

A precondition of becoming open to people and the world is the ability to listen; rather than creating a solipsistic subjective system, we must recognise that

“listening-to is Dasein’s existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality for Being - as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it. Dasein hears because it understands. As a Being in the world with others, a Being which understands, Dasein is ‘in thrall’ to Dasein-with and to itself; and in this ‘thralldom’ it belongs to these. Being-with develops in listening to one another”.⁴⁶⁶ “In clarifying Being in the world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ . . . and so in the end an isolated ‘I’ without others is just as far from being given. . . . The others are already there with us in Being in the world.”⁴⁶⁷

When we encounter equipment, it is always in a context of assignment or reference to others: things show themselves as belonging. So Heidegger says “Dasein is essentially Being-with”.⁴⁶⁸ “The understanding of others is not an acquaintance derived from knowledge about them, but a primordially existential kind of Being. . . . Knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with”.⁴⁶⁹ Openness requires of us a 'concernful circumspection' operating in a "referential totality"⁴⁷⁰, and signifies a way of being,⁴⁷¹ analogous to the way the Letter on Humanism calls for the grounding of ethics in the ethos, unlike the traditional detached 'beholding' which posits truth as eternal and for which nothing and no one need ever matter.

The ethical aspect of openness is not just a matter of how we 'reach out' to others, but also emerges in the link Heidegger suggests between openness and resoluteness: "the essence of resolve lies in the opening, the coming-out-of-cover of Dasein into the clearing of Being".⁴⁷² Resoluteness, or decisiveness, is for Heidegger “that truth of Dasein which is most

465 Sein und Zeit: 134

466 Sein und Zeit: 163

467 Sein und Zeit: 116

468 Sein und Zeit: 120

469 Sein und Zeit: 123

470 Sein und Zeit:76

471 in Heidegger's term a 'comportment'

472 Introduction to Metaphysics:21

primordial because it is authentic", and is the comportment which arises from recognition of our finitude.⁴⁷³ Openness, which discloses the world together with Dasein, is closely linked to this theme of 'anticipatory resoluteness' (Entschlossenheit), the exemplary mode of authentic human comportment presented in Being and Time.

Ethics begins from living in such a way that things matter to us, which is the distinguishing feature of openness, yet it may still be possible for conflicting ethical positions to be developed on this basis. For example it may be possible to 'be open' to the realities of ecology, nuclear weapons, sexuality or economics, and still hold views about the management of these moral issues which are diametrically opposed from someone who is equally open to the realities of the situation. Ethics must seek to resolve moral dilemmas, but openness can only be a precondition for this, not a blueprint. Heidegger's goal was to lay "inconspicuous furrows in language"⁴⁷⁴ by thinking, and thereby influence practice with a profundity belying its lack of recognition. As such, Heidegger's fundamental thinking is more a guide to attitudes than to practises. Bernard Boelen commented on this aspect of Heidegger's ethics with his statement that

"virtuous behaviour begins as the will-to-Being, as the primitive ethical intention to let Being be. This primordial and eksistential ⁴⁷⁵ decision, this primitive ethical intention ethicizes our 'eksistence' in its entirety, which constitutes the authenticity of our behaviour, which endows the unitary but articulated phenomenon of our 'dynamic-Being-together-with-others-in-the-world' with ethical excellence (virtuousness). Virtue is in the whole!"⁴⁷⁶

Virtue requires openness to the whole as its foundation, because without such a ground the particular virtues lose their direction and unity. The ethical significance of Heidegger's theme of existential openness is demonstrated by the observation that the development of an authentic ethical standpoint can only occur on the basis of an attitude that is constituted by openness to the situation. To illustrate this, consider the contradiction inherent in holding an 'ethical' standpoint which is not open to its real situation. People undoubtedly do hold such standpoints, and as a result they cause many problems for themselves and others, especially when they claim a transcendental sanction for a particular moral viewpoint regardless of the consequences of its implementation.

The moral latitude provided by an ethic of openness is therefore quite limited, because to become truly open to Being we must overcome the hidden moral deficiencies besetting our society, such as alienation, selfishness and forgetfulness, all of which artificially close us off from our situation. Heidegger argued⁴⁷⁷ that simply giving thought to our plight sets us on the way to resolving it. Being open in such a way that things matter to us means understanding where they have come from and where they are going, but unethical behaviour invariably arises from an attitude that is closed off from the temporal significance of the reality with which it is dealing. A life that is closed off from any relationships to Being in the world as a whole is by definition selfish and alienated. Hence openness is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition, for ethical choice and action.

Because he demanded such an open perspective, Heidegger's thinking certainly engaged with the real world, but this does not mean he accepted the glib realist assertions about the poverty of idealism and the absolute status of scientific empiricism. His method is far from

⁴⁷³ Sein und Zeit: 297

⁴⁷⁴ Basic Writings:242

⁴⁷⁵ see 7.5 below

⁴⁷⁶ Bernard J. Boelen: 'The Question of Ethics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger', p. 98 in Frings, M.S.: Heidegger and the Quest for Truth, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968

⁴⁷⁷ Poetry Language Thought: 161

the sort of materialist philosophy that locates truth in matter alone by reducing all ideas to their function as the names of things. Instead the central consequence of his open pursuit of the truth of Being is the acceptance that "philosophising about being shattered is separated by a chasm from a thinking that is shattered".⁴⁷⁸ To be open it is necessary to be with people in their brokenness rather than just to philosophise about what this situation may be like. To be open in Heidegger's sense involves refraining from dogmatic pronouncements about what can really be said to exist; instead it is to recognise that the goal of philosophy ought to be the capacity to become open to the truth of Being itself, by letting the meaning of such human realities as care, conscience and death emerge into awareness. It is only through such openness that thought can find a way to disclose what is really there and confront it.

7.4 Ecology

On the basis of these considerations it will now be useful to consider how Heidegger's philosophy might be applied to one of the major ethical issues of the modern world, the question of ecology. Heidegger certainly recognised that the egoistic objectivism of enlightenment rationalism paved the way for the estrangement of modern society from nature and being, and that this worldview has helped create the exploitative society of the 'cash nexus' which Marx saw as the root of alienation, but it would only be partly true to consider Heidegger's relational ontology as part of the modern ecological revolt against exploitative rationalism. While his talk of man as the "shepherd of Being",⁴⁷⁹ and of Being as in some way sacred,⁴⁸⁰ indicates why such the opposite conclusion might be considered, the idea of Being as requiring human care was set in the context of an ontology which gave priority to humanity as the being for whom Being is an issue, and correspondingly devalued those beings which do not possess language.⁴⁸¹ However it must be recognised that when he said "if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless",⁴⁸² Heidegger was criticising the human desire for control; his emphasis on the meditative over the calculative⁴⁸³ also had this goal of 'letting being be'.

However Heidegger's ethic of openness cannot be regarded as obliging us to adopt a purist ecological stance, in the sense of an attitude which regards all death and destruction as evil and all life forms as having an equal right to life, because such a metaphysical stance could hardly arise from a phenomenological response to the world. While philosophy can assist us to realise what our decisions mean, and help establish an intellectual framework of attitudes within which decisions can be made, it should not dogmatically prescribe in advance what we must do. Themes which underpin Heidegger's approach, including interconnectedness⁴⁸⁴ and temporality, create a general frame of reference with some ecological dimension, but the acknowledgement of the significance of the ecological web of life cannot alone provide absolute prescriptions for public policy.

The ecological notion of sustainability can find support within the temporal dimension of openness, in that we should be open not only to what is now occurring, but also to what the

⁴⁷⁸ Basic Writings:223

⁴⁷⁹ Basic Writings:210

⁴⁸⁰ see Basic Writings:218

⁴⁸¹ See also section 5.4 above on the Letter on Humanism, for further discussion of this topic and of his critique of the definition of man as the rational animal.

⁴⁸² Basic Writings:199

⁴⁸³ see esp. *Gelassenheit* (Discourse on Thinking)

⁴⁸⁴ Relevant to this is the discussion in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (128) of logos as 'the primal gathering principle' in which all things find their unity.

origins and likely results of current policies are. Understanding where something came from and where it is going - its place in time - is the only basis upon which we can genuinely respect or value it, but without this relation to their context things become isolated from the source of their meaning and value. As with any context of openness, for the natural environment to matter to us requires us to understand where it has come from and where it is going, so the notion of sustainability is dependent on human recognition of our interdependence on each other and the natural world. For example farming and forestry practices which destroy the earth are unsustainable, so an ecological openness to the future would recommend their modification. Yet it may be the case that some forestry practices which are unattractive in purely ecological terms are nevertheless sustainable, even if they turn old growth wilderness with high biodiversity into tree farms which do not support previous animal and bird populations. Whether or not a particular resource should be exploited is a complex question, and notions of mystic significance or inherent rights of nature can only provide part of the answer. Our conclusion above, that unethical behaviour invariably arises from an attitude that is closed off from the temporal significance of the reality with which it is dealing, therefore helps to establish a frame of reference for considering the ethics of ecology, but it cannot prescribe answers.

Heidegger's attitude to the issue of ecology is complex: on the one hand he says man is not the lord of being, but its shepherd, a saying which suggests that he advocated a nurturing relation of stewardship towards nature, in opposition to the enlightenment project of rational control. The claim that world must be grounded in earth arose from the whole problematic of fundamental ontology, conceived as an overcoming of metaphysics and the destruction of the ontological tradition, based on the suggestion that the classical metaphysical ground for thought, in reason and logic, does not reach to the primordial grounds of Being. On the other hand however, his placement of the question of the meaning of being within the horizon of the existential analytic of human being in the world makes all questions of nature and its value and meaning relative to human concerns. It is therefore difficult to say, as some would want to, that Heidegger sought a 'post-anthropocentric' worldview.

For Heidegger, the meaning things acquire ready-to-hand as "stuff for use" is purely extrinsic, and cannot be conceived in isolation from its conferral by people, because meaning is always relational.⁴⁸⁵ An implication of this doctrine is that we can only posit things as possessing intrinsic value by considering them in the abstraction of the present-at-hand. Only by abstracting away from our everyday world of concerned involvement can we posit such a noumenal value as objective and absolute, which is what all talk of 'natural rights' and 'intrinsic value' requires. However there are several aspects of Heidegger's work which suggest a growing ecological consciousness in his later work. As an example of this change, the word 'physis' used in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* to define Being as 'that which emerges and endures',⁴⁸⁶ does not appear in *Being and Time*, which suggests that the lesser prominence accorded to the existential analytic in his later work did arise partly from an increased sense of nature as valuable for its own sake.

The problem with going too far in an ecological reading of Heidegger is his strongly put view that there is always a human purpose providing the context for things we come into contact with and use; examples in *Being and Time* include a needle, a boat, a forest, a breeze, a room. "The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'".⁴⁸⁷ Heidegger maintained that in each of these examples the meaning of their being can only be found in relation to human purposes, because they are always

⁴⁸⁵ In terms of the process doctrine of Whitehead, meaning for Heidegger is a function of internal relations which always involve people.

⁴⁸⁶ Introduction to Metaphysics:14 See also the discussion of Heidegger's use of the term 'physis' in subsection 5.5 on Stoicism.

⁴⁸⁷ Sein und Zeit: 70

understood in terms of a goal 'towards-which' Dasein finds meaning. In the case of Nature as a whole, he held that treating it as a "categorical aggregate"⁴⁸⁸ fails to make worldhood intelligible: "if its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this 'Nature' itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the 'Nature' which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and enthrals us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the 'flowers in the hedgerow', the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale'.⁴⁸⁹ The poetic/ romantic conception of the dale has more meaning for Heidegger than the scientific demarcation of a catchment zone, whether or not the latter is more ecologically useful. The problem of salinity may not enthrall us, but in terms of the being of the landscape (a term which is anthropocentric and æsthetic in itself), salinity is more significant than any æsthetic appearance.

This mention of 'landscape' in terms of its being leads to what is probably the most ecological aspect of Heidegger's thought, his recognition of being as the power of destiny. It is now widely held that true openness to the ecological situation of life on earth will require drastic policy changes if the human world is to be sustained. Openness to being as destiny, a key theme in Heidegger's philosophy, (and it must be said a theme in which some readers have detected an apocalyptic and messianic tone), implies a conception of Being as necessity, a conception supported by Heidegger's own analysis of 'physis' as "that which emerges and endures".⁴⁹⁰ The method of phenomenological rigour requires that whatever can be disclosed phenomenally be accepted as true. In the context of ecology, this imparts a severity, what Heidegger called a "gentle seriousness", to the search for solutions to the crises besetting us. Such a historical outlook requires us to recognise the significance of impending catastrophes such as depletion of resources caused by unsustainable consumption, rising sea levels caused by global warming and worsening solar radiation caused by the destruction of the ozone layer.

In the context of these problems, which undoubtedly reflect the finitude of human temporality, we may consider Heidegger's ethic of anticipatory resoluteness as presenting a bleak guide to salvation. One of the mistakes of metaphysical systems he criticised had been to rely on a belief in salvation without a phenomenal basis, so an ethic premised on the finitude of world, even if world can be distinguished from physical environment, requires an organic ground in physical planetary reality. The demographic time-bomb caused by increasing populations dependent on dwindling resources presents us with a stark global prospect. The need for population control is one example of how openness to the ecological realities of our situation will require particularly difficult ethical choices, and, it may be said, indicates the intellectual (and ultimately moral) failure of the Roman Catholic doctrines on the sanctity of human life. There is thus a pragmatic consequentialism about Heidegger's demand that metaphysics be grounded in the existential analytic which can be read as implying that concern for ecological problems is justified within the framework of care.

7.5 Eksistence

For Heidegger, the only way for humanity as Dasein to realise our potential is to stand forth openly into the truth, to live in destined relations sustained by care.⁴⁹¹ It is such 'standing forth' that he defined as 'eksistence', a word he coined to describe the essence of

488 Sein und Zeit: 65

489 Sein und Zeit: 70

490 The discussion in [Early Greek Thinking](#) of the theme of fate (moira) with reference to Parmenides and of Anaximander, has some bearing here.

491 Basic Writings: 211

humanity as our capacity to project upon our possibilities. This new word 'eksistence' must be distinguished from existence, which from the time of the ancient Greeks has meant actuality as contrasted against possibility. Possibility has been traditionally understood as essence, as in Plato's theory of ideas which accords priority to essence over existence. Eksistence however, is neither actuality nor possibility, but the fundamental thinking which accomplishes the relation of Being to humanity. Such thinking is intrinsically ethical: as Heidegger said, "all thinking that thinks the truth of Being as the original element of man as eksistence, is *eo ipso* original ethics."⁴⁹² In answering Jean Beaufret's question on the relation between ethics and ontology, specifically with respect to the relation subsisting between the thinking of Being and theoretical and practical behaviour, Heidegger said thinking

"exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the lighting of being in that it puts its saying of Being into language as the home of eksistence. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all praxis."⁴⁹³

Eksistence is for Heidegger a way of being that is proper only to humanity, because we are "destined to think the essence of our Being and not merely to give accounts of the nature and history of our constitution and activities."⁴⁹⁴ Only through such essentially open thinking, an openness which both provides the grounds for all ontic disciplines and at the same time receives its own foundations within their parameters, can we attain to real freedom.

A key point of the existential analytic of Dasein understood in terms of such eksistent projection is that authentic freedom can never decide in advance how the truth must be defined, but must always let Being be. For Heidegger, freedom is not in the triumph of existence over essence, but appears when we enter into the "domain of relatedness"⁴⁹⁵ towards which we comport ourselves in becoming open to Being in the world. Heidegger established this relatedness with his claim, in On the Essence of Truth, that "the essence of truth is freedom".⁴⁹⁶ Freedom is related to truth because it is not just a property of the subject, "man's moral endeavour on behalf of his 'self'",⁴⁹⁷ but rather a bearing towards Being as a whole. Freedom is defined as "letting beings be",⁴⁹⁸ and as "engagement in the disclosure of beings".⁴⁹⁹ The beginning of untruth, and hence of error, is when we imagine freedom to be just a subjective wilfulness, rather than a comportment towards Being as a whole. Freedom only becomes authentic when it takes its reference from ontology; otherwise we forget who and where we are, and our standards lose their grounds in history.

So a question arises. How can Dasein eksistingly establish any knowledge of the truth of Being, and how can it be definitely said that there is such a truth? Heidegger observed that Europe in the mid-twentieth century was certain in its belief that such talk of being and truth had been left behind by the new technological enlightenment of modern science, but this confidence was shattered by historical events. He asks: "Can thinking refuse to think Being after it has laid so long hidden in oblivion but at the same time has made itself known in the present moment of world history by the uprooting of all beings?"⁵⁰⁰ Being has this unassailable power to exercise a governance over all life, a power Heidegger sought to recognise with unrelenting rigour. It is useless to think that our scientific understanding of physiology or atomic physics can

492 Basic Writings: 235

493 Basic Writings: 239

494 Basic Writings: 204

495 Basic Writings: 124

496 Basic Writings: 125

497 Basic Writings: 128

498 Basic Writings: 127

499 Basic Writings: 128

500 Basic Writings: 232

replace a comprehension of the essence of Being revealed in the historic place of Dasein as being in the world, because such limiting ontic understandings can only construct their own security in defiance of the potential of Being to intervene in the form of fate.

Consider the statement just made about the twentieth century. Heidegger suggests here that despite all our opinions and ideologies, despite every fantastic construction people have sought to invent and exalt as the truth, there was an essential reality 'behind and beneath' all these ideas, waiting to burst forth as historical destiny. Although there are difficult problems that arise when we try to reconcile this conception of the truth of being, understood in terms of the objective nature of history, with common ideas about human freedom, there is a driving force within it that exhibits a compelling logic, a logic which exhibits some similarities to Kant's suggestion that freedom is a matter more of duty than of inclination. There is a sense in which the power of being must be admitted as the raw historical force of necessity. Heidegger continually returned to this same theme of the truth of Being as the goal of reflection and the reality of fate, in order to reinforce the necessity for philosophy to recognise and become open to this reality.

The conception of projection implicit in this doctrine of existence is markedly different from the humanism of Sartre, who made the ethical dimension of existentialism more prominent, but in a way that diverged from Heidegger's views. Sartre's celebrated claim that existentialism is defined by the reversal of Plato's statement that essence precedes existence has become a key to the existentialist idea of freedom and its critique of idealist epistemology, and the controversy engendered by this epistemological point is apparent in Heidegger's criticisms of Sartre's doctrines. Sartre's thesis, that because existence precedes essence, truth must be understood as the actuality of the present moment, appears at first to be more likely to bring philosophy to a recognition of its real embodied situation than Heidegger's ideas, but this is not the case. Heidegger saw Sartre's thesis as representative of the way the theory of knowledge arising from metaphysical thinking refuses to 'let being be', and so become open to Being as destiny, because of its eagerness to decide in advance what has priority and what doesn't. He therefore refused to follow Sartre's acceptance of an overhasty schematisation of reality.

Sartre may have been more renowned than Heidegger for his rejection of popular idols such as God and absolute value, but often his views involved a mere negation without recognition of the internal worth of the ideas he dismissed. For example Heidegger refused to accept Sartre's condemnation of idealism as the mere vestige of an archaic false consciousness, partly because he was unwilling to accept that the present is more real than the past or the future, on the ground that authentic ontology does not relate only to the here and now, but must be open to the whole of history. More importantly, Heidegger thought that idealism and realism cannot be methodically reduced and prioritised. Although he criticised the idealism which grounds entities in an indefinite and negative "un-thing-like" way, Heidegger maintained that "Idealism . . . has an advantage in principle . . . (because) Being cannot be explained through entities".⁵⁰¹

It is well known that Sartre found much of his philosophical inspiration from Being and Time, but Heidegger considered that Sartre's appropriation of his ideas involved a severe distortion. In particular, the thesis of the priority of existence over essence diverged from the intention of Heidegger's statement that our essence is found primarily in our existence, which refers instead to our capacity to project upon our possibilities and thereby become open to Being as a whole. Heidegger thought that the differentiation between existence and essence is perhaps the key issue for philosophy, as it "completely dominates the destiny of Western history and of

⁵⁰¹ Sein und Zeit: 207-8

all history determined by Europe", ⁵⁰² but it is impossible to define and prioritise this differentiation within a limited ideological scheme. Sartre is mistaken to infer that Heidegger wanted the statement in Being and Time⁵⁰³ that "the essence of man lies in his existence"⁵⁰⁴ to affirm the priority of actuality over potentiality, because Heidegger meant no such thing. Instead the statement refers to the standing forth into the light of Being formalised in the notion of eksistence.

Sartre attempted to use Heidegger's ideas as a buttress for his humanist philosophy, which has as a central doctrine the suggestion that "we are precisely in a situation where there are only human beings".⁵⁰⁵ However Heidegger felt that Sartre based this attempt on an inadequate understanding of what the phenomenological destruction of metaphysics sought to accomplish. For Heidegger, we are in a situation where principally there is Being, and Sartre remained with metaphysics in oblivion of this truth. The only way to escape from the ideological ensnarement of metaphysical delusion is to become open to the primacy of Being for thought and to undertake a rigorous and measured investigation of its meaning. Sartre refused to do this because he regards the actuality of the present moment as more important.

So whereas Sartre understood humanism as a positive political ideology, Heidegger reminds us that 'isms' have for a long time now been suspect; he says they begin to flourish only when original thinking comes to an end and when thought slips out of its proper element, the truth of Being. It is in the marketplace of mass culture that notions such as humanism find their home, where the truth of ideas is subordinated to their usefulness and "the dictatorship of the public realm decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible".⁵⁰⁶ It is in this marketplace that the metaphysics of subjectivity really comes into its own, where "language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings".⁵⁰⁷ Instead of finding our way once again into the nearness of Being, the arbiters of public truth, the 'they' of Being and Time, allow "the undermining of æsthetic and moral responsibility in every use of language".⁵⁰⁸ Against this tendency Heidegger set care as the power able to bring man back to his essence, which led him to his definition of humanism as "meditating and caring, that man be human and not inhumane".⁵⁰⁹ This ethical definition is derived from the essential goal of humanity to eksist into the truth, unlike Sartre's theory which was based on the fiction that only human beings can be properly regarded as existing.

7.6 Involvement

Although Heidegger called us to be open to beings as a necessary component of our wider openness to Being, this does not mean his ontology can be reduced to an irrational acceptance of thrown facticity as the only horizon for thought. Such an interpretation, which understood isolated detachment as the antithesis of openness, came about from the way Heidegger discussed openness to the world in contrast to the ontology of the present-at-hand. However Heidegger's doctrine of Being in the world cannot be simply equated with the sort of involved concern which is continually immersed in social activity.

⁵⁰² Basic Writings: 208

⁵⁰³ Sein und Zeit: 42

⁵⁰⁴ Basic Writings:205

⁵⁰⁵ Basic Writings:214

⁵⁰⁶ Basic Writings:197

⁵⁰⁷ Basic Writings:199

⁵⁰⁸ Basic Writings:198

⁵⁰⁹ Basic Writings:200

There is a simplistic syllogism which suggests that since ethics and morality are about questions of practical concern, and since active practical involvement is the opposite of passive theoretical detachment, therefore answers to the problems of ethics can only come from the perspective of practical involvement, not from theoretical abstraction. This sort of 'situation ethics' has some connection to Heidegger's approach, except that it leaves out of account the priority he gave to fundamental thinking. Put formally, this approach holds that ethics can be equated with practical concern, and practical concern can in turn be equated with involvement, leading to the conclusion that therefore ethics is the same as involvement. From here it is sometimes argued that ethical standards should not be developed from the isolated theoretical standpoint of detached beholding, but by Dasein in its actual existence as thrown into a world of practical concern. For example in determining policies on public issues such as fertility control or drug abuse, it would follow from this perspective that justice, duty and happiness would be served by heeding the views of those who are practically involved in actual decisions, rather than those who bring into play as the determining factor an ideal moral dogma like the sanctity of human life or the evil of drug abuse.

Heidegger's finite secular human ontology would appear to lend some support to the pragmatic, so-called progressive views on these topics, at least in the context of his discussions of such themes as facticity and absorption with equipment. It is on precisely this point, the ethical consequences of the doctrine that to become open to the world is to be thrown into involvement, that Heidegger has been most vehemently attacked. Ernst Cassirer,⁵¹⁰ one of the foremost interpreters of Kant, criticised Heidegger's notion of thrownness, which he took to be his definitive philosophy, attacking the attempt to prioritise involvement over detachment as a philosophy which "renounces its own fundamental theoretical and ethical ideals". Cassirer argued that Heidegger's refusal to admit there is something like eternal truth, a Platonic realm of ideas, is nothing more than a capitulation of reason before fatalism, enfeebling our capacity to work for change and resist tyranny. It may be true that ethical choices only need to be made in situations of involvement, but Cassirer's point is that such choices are always dependent on reference to universal a priori norms. Choices do not emerge out of the situation of themselves, in as much as values never simply arise from facts. The values upon which ethical choices are made always depend on an ideal framework, but Cassirer argued such a framework was ruled out by Heidegger's critique of theoretical reason.⁵¹¹

The cogency of this criticism is borne out by the evidence that Heidegger applied just this notion of ethics as involvement in his association with the Nazis, and that all the profundities of 'fundamental thinking' and 'eksistent projection' did not help him understand the evil to which he became an accomplice. Although he never endorsed the crude biologism or racism espoused by the Nazi ideologues, Heidegger would have concurred with some of their criticisms of 'universal' liberal ideals like justice, equality and the primacy of reason. Believing that the existential ethic demanded action and decision, he fell, albeit in a way he soon came to regret, for involvement with the grossest immorality, when he allowed himself to be used by the Nazis by accepting the Rector's position at Freiburg. Instead of maintaining the conscientious objection a different philosophy would have counselled, Heidegger was swept up with the euphoric Nazi atmosphere which was to prove so destructive. Heidegger apparently felt the modern world was no place for detached reserve; hence his description of "the inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism in terms of "the encounter between global technology and modern man".⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ The Myth of the State, p.292

⁵¹¹ The discussion on values under 5.1 "Heidegger and Traditional Ethics" is relevant to this debate, as are several points in the section on Dasein and Chapter Four, The Historical Context, which examines some facts about Heidegger's involvement with Nazism.

⁵¹² Introduction to Metaphysics: 199

As Kant argued, in support of his thesis that true morality must be grounded in the rational maxims of universal law, “a mixed theory of morals which is put together both from incentives of feelings and inclinations and from rational concepts must make the mind vacillate between motives which cannot be brought under any principle and which can lead only accidentally to the good and often to the bad”.⁵¹³ Such Kantian ideas were the basis for Cassirer’s criticisms of Heidegger. Husserl too indirectly criticised Heidegger, speaking against those who saw rationalism as “an intellectualism which loses itself in theories alienated from the world”.⁵¹⁴ Husserl suggested such objections to rationalism, certainly present in Heidegger’s work, are “misunderstandings which derive their suggestive force from fashionable prejudice”. Husserl acknowledged their justice when directed at the historical forms rationalism had taken in earlier centuries, but not when made about the “spirit of free critique and norm-giving aimed at infinite tasks” to which rational philosophy should aspire.

Heidegger’s reason for criticising rationalism was that the spirit of reason has not borne its promised fruits of liberation. Instead the domination exercised by rationalist metaphysics has led to the phenomenon of alienation becoming entrenched in the modern world. In the ‘rational’ pursuit of finite goals, people have closed themselves off from the wider questions of the meaning of Being in the world. This estrangement of humanity from our world can only be overcome through openness to the historical reality of the world. Alienation, as Heidegger saw it, has in large measure been caused by the egoistic doctrines of rationalism, with the priority given to autonomous apperception over heteronomous involvement with others. Certainly heteronomy has its pitfalls, as Heidegger’s ensnarement by Nazism shows, but the force of Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity is that the claim that rational autonomy is the foundation of ethics cannot continue to be accepted as absolute.

The emphasis Heidegger gave to involvement was based on the valid desire to prevent ideological dogma from suffocating thought and introduce a sense of engagement into the detachment of abstract philosophy, but as Cassirer saw, a doctrine of involvement without a basis in a priori principles also had the potential danger of failing to be truly objective. The most disturbing result of this failure of objectivity was his belief that openness to the existing political situation justified support for the Nazis, and that humanist opposition was closed off from this situation and ideologically motivated. This political error must be seen as detracting from the positive content of Heidegger’s philosophy, and is a signal of Cassirer’s fears about the dangers of uncritically following the path of involvement, and about the non-rational element in Heidegger’s ideas about thrownness.

7.7 Care

The ontology of Dasein is built around the observation that human existence is essentially temporal, which means that time is the only horizon within which we can understand the nature of our being and that we are thrown into a world not of our making. Heidegger sought to interpret this horizon by designating the unity of the temporal structure of our existence as ‘care’ (Sorge), a notion he defined as “ahead of itself, Being already in a world, as being alongside entities encountered within the world”.⁵¹⁵ As ahead of ourselves we are existential - anticipating possibilities by projecting upon the future, as already in a world we are factual - immersed in and conditioned by the thrown situation of our past, and as being alongside entities

⁵¹³ Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, p.412 (Akademie)

⁵¹⁴ Vienna Lecture, Crisis, p.289

⁵¹⁵ Sein und Zeit: 192 (Page numbers refer to the pagination of the German original - in the margin of the English text)

we are engaged in our current involvements. The greater part of Being and Time is devoted to showing how care is structured in terms of the complex historical relatedness of human temporality.

Care is the central theme of Heidegger's whole philosophy, and the term in which Dasein finds its meaning,⁵¹⁶ but he said it does not provide "an ethical and ideological evaluation of 'human life'". Instead, it is "the designation of the structural unity of the inherently finite transcendence of Dasein".⁵¹⁷ The reasoning behind this designation of care as the unifying theme of Dasein's finite transcendence is that Heidegger used care as a technical term which can only be grasped as a whole by beginning from the temporal horizon of the ontological analytic. Care arises from our anxiety about Being in the world and brings together our anticipation of the future, our recollection of the past and our 'Being alongside' the events and things of our present.⁵¹⁸ It is therefore defined as the temporal condition of Dasein's historical involvement, structuring the ontological schematism of human temporality in terms of the finite freedom of our Being towards death. It therefore functions to cut off any relation human life might have to the old metaphysical goals of immortality and eternity, because the horizon of care delimits the transcendence of Dasein, and hence the Being towards which Dasein can be open, as 'inherently finite'.⁵¹⁹ The phenomenological and anti-metaphysical element in Heidegger's work emerges most clearly here, with his statement that "in explicating Dasein's Being as care, we are not forcing it under an idea of our own contriving, but conceptualising existentially what has already been disclosed in an ontico-existential manner".⁵²⁰

Heidegger distinguished his own notion of Dasein as care from the Cartesian approach of the isolated subject by emphasising the engagement of Dasein with its world:

"Our theme has been the ontological constitution of the disclosedness which essentially belongs to Dasein. The Being of that disclosedness is constituted by states of mind, understanding and discourse. Its everyday kind of Being is characterised by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. These show us the movement of falling, with temptation, tranquillising, alienation and entanglement as its essential characteristics. But with this analysis, the whole existential constitution of Dasein has been laid bare in its principal features, and we have obtained the phenomenal ground for a comprehensive interpretation of Dasein's Being as care".⁵²¹

Heidegger used the Roman myth of the origin of 'cura', which presents care as the source of human existence, to show that his "existential interpretation is not a mere fabrication, but that as an ontological construction it is well grounded".⁵²² 'Care' takes some clay and moulds it. Both Jupiter (Spirit) and Earth dispute with 'Care' about who should name the formed piece. Saturn (Time) is the arbiter, and he names it *homo* after *humus* (earth), but decides that "since 'Care' first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives". This story presents the essence of humanity as care, and locates our origin in the divine moulding of the earth, like the creation of Adam by God in the Bible. A lesson to be drawn from it is that while the spirit of self-assertion (Jupiter) may try to capture the definition of humanity, a capturing which is in some way akin to the claim that rational control is our definitive feature, such a definition must always be incomplete. In our temporal struggle to achieve identity, a struggle with all the limitations of

⁵¹⁶ Sein und Zeit Chapter 6

⁵¹⁷ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 245

⁵¹⁸ Sein und Zeit: 192

⁵¹⁹ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 245

⁵²⁰ Sein und Zeit: 196

⁵²¹ Sein und Zeit: 180

⁵²² Sein und Zeit: 197

our situation as finite creatures bound to the earth, the relational involvement of care is responsible for shaping us in all our dealings within the world from the time of our birth to when we die. Encompassing both effective and deficient modes, the myth of 'cura' has as its moral that care will always retain possession of our essential nature.

Heidegger's ontological interpretation of care as the being of Dasein sought to disclose universal truths about the structure of human temporality, truths which earlier philosophy had concealed, partly through neglect of the problematic of Being. The ethical significance of these universal structures is their direct reference to the personal nature of human reality as Being in the world: "in the double meaning of care (as freedom and surrender), what we have in view is a single basic state in its essentially twofold structure of thrown projection".⁵²³ The limitations of facticity, imposed by our having been thrown into an environment not of our making or choosing, and our obligation to surrender to the constraints of this finitude, are balanced by our freedom to project upon future possibilities, to anticipate our future and choose courses of action and development.

The discussion of care is central to the whole problem, which we may refer to as the 'incarnational' element in Heidegger's ontology, of finding a way to make universal truth meaningful at a human level, to understand Being in terms of existence. It underpins his aim of creating a new sort of philosophy, a truly fundamental ontology, able to synthesise thought at the level of human experience by defining the logical foundations of transcendence in terms of the existential analytic of Dasein. The fundamental thesis that the Being of Dasein can be defined as care is the necessary foundation for comprehension of Being in the world, because "no sooner has Dasein expressed anything about itself to itself, than it has already interpreted itself as care".⁵²⁴

The problem with a purely technical, ontological/temporal use of the term 'care', seeking to subordinate any ethical meaning to ontological disclosure, is that even within Heidegger's ontological framework, care *is* an ethical term. How else could Heidegger quote Seneca's view⁵²⁵ that "the good of God is fulfilled by his nature but the good of man is fulfilled by care", in support of the thesis that "man's perfection - his transformation into that which he can be in being free for his ownmost possibilities - is accomplished by care"? Despite his stipulation that its meaning is purely ontological, Heidegger's dramatic and in some ways mysterious assertion that the meaning of Being is care brings vividly to the fore the ethical core of his claim that the purpose of philosophy is to understand Being.

The ethics possible within the framework of care are far from neutral in value. In this care is akin to openness, for which the way things and people matter to us is essential. In the understanding of ourselves that comes from care, we can achieve a knowledge of the self which Heidegger calls 'transparency',⁵²⁶ and are able to envision the examined life which Socrates famously said is the only one worth living. The traditional understanding of self-knowledge as "a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the 'self'" is therefore not the same as authentic disclosure, which seeks to see the self as transparent by "seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being in the world throughout all the constitutive items essential to it, and doing so with understanding".⁵²⁷ Heidegger developed this doctrine in terms akin to the establishment and comprehension by the self of its own identity. Simply recognising consequences of our actions is part of understanding our temporal finitude, and of the real context in which self-understanding can be attained. Transparency should prohibit such attitudes

⁵²³ Sein und Zeit: 199

⁵²⁴ Sein und Zeit:183

⁵²⁵ Sein und Zeit: 199 - Seneca, Epistle 124

⁵²⁶ Sein und Zeit: 146

⁵²⁷ Sein und Zeit:146

as gluttony and cruelty, because care necessarily brings a certain measure of sensitivity and empathy, through the recognition it requires of us that we are in a social world.

When things matter to us, we care for them in a specific way, which Heidegger terms 'solicitude'.⁵²⁸ "Concern with food and clothing, and the nursing of the sick body, are forms of solicitude",⁵²⁹ as are considerateness and forbearance. Such concern can occur in an authentic or an inauthentic way, and the difference arises from whether or not we are open to the consequences of our concern. Authentic solicitude retains the dignity and respect proper to care; it seeks to "leap ahead and liberate", by helping "the other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it", while inauthentic solicitude tends to "leap in and dominate", paternalistically making decisions to create a situation of dependency.

The idea of solicitude is the most obviously ethical theme in the existential ontology of Being and Time. In its concern for practical results, authentic solicitude, which Heidegger defines in terms of considerateness and forbearance, can make decisions on the basis of the emerging situation and flexibly consider the best course to assist mutual self-realisation. The moral implications of the phenomenological principle of being open to things as they appear emerges most clearly here. Heidegger is not content to follow Kant in advocating a morality based on application of rigid doctrines flowing from universal laws; his recognition that such an attitude has often been paternalistic and stifling (leaping in and dominating), is evidence of his attempt to overcome the ethics of metaphysics.

One would expect ethics to be central to a philosophy which seeks to develop such an understanding of the meaning of Being mediated through the "totality of involvements"⁵³⁰ in which Dasein exists as care, considering the ethical factors which contribute to this totality. And especially so, given that for such a mediation through involvement to be genuine, or as Heidegger would have it, to be authentic, which is the principal goal he sets for thought, philosophy must consider the existential ethical phenomena essential to involvement, which include not only care, but also anxiety, death, conscience, resoluteness and historicity. Whether and why care can be interpreted as an ethical term is a difficult question, and must be understood in terms of the analysis of authenticity.

7.8 Authenticity

To finally assess what contribution Heidegger's ontology made to ethics, we will now consider what he meant by 'authenticity', perhaps his most celebrated and identifiable term. Our discussion of authenticity will also afford us the opportunity of looking back over the course of the argument of this thesis, in the effort to show how all the disparate issues discussed find some unity. The final assessment of the value and place of the notion of authenticity will require us to bring together the various components of the ethical dimension in Heidegger's thought, so we shall now recapitulate and summarise the discussion so far.

The purpose of this thesis has been to show, by analysis of Heidegger's principal texts, that his existential ontology contains a significant ethical dimension. Although his ontological focus on the 'question of the meaning of Being' gives the impression that his writings have little relation to the problems of ethics, his writings must be interpreted in ethical terms because his phenomenological analysis of human existence (Dasein) understood meaning and truth in relation to humanity. Ethical phenomena such as resolve, conscience, anxiety, guilt, authenticity and involvement show the essence of humanity is located in our existence as finite

⁵²⁸ Sein und Zeit:122 - 'Fursorge'

⁵²⁹ Sein und Zeit:121

⁵³⁰ Sein und Zeit: 84

temporal relational beings for whom Being is an issue. Dasein must recognise its temporality to become authentic, but this means the contrasting worldviews of religion and science require ontological deconstruction and replacement with a world view attuned to the situation of human being in the world. Heidegger's contribution to ethical thought, though presented as incidental, actually indicates a way to achieve a real advance on the dichotomous logic which had been dominant hitherto. The "secret élan" which must be 'wrested' from Heidegger's philosophy, and which illuminates its underlying intent, is his ethical message. We have therefore sought to assess how Heidegger's fundamental ontology can form a basis for a new ethics, in order to appraise the paradigmatic significance of Heidegger's ethical ontology.

Beginning with a discussion of aspects of his method and of the positive content of his approach, this thesis struck up against the problematic status of ethics in Heidegger's thought, not only intellectually in terms of his system, but also morally and historically in terms of his association with Nazism. His Nazi period is an unfortunate and diminishing factor in Heidegger's life, especially because he himself emphasised the indivisibility of life and thought, but his agreement with fascist ideas did not extend to any of their repugnant aspects such as support for racism or war. His support remained merely at the philosophical level of the spiritual renewal which Hitler deviously promised and then failed to deliver, although once again, Heidegger's interpretation of the nature of this spirit was markedly different, as we should hope, from Hitler's, and led to considerable coolness in the relations between him and the Nazi party.

Themes in Heidegger's ontology including forfeiture, care and openness initially appear to be largely ethical in meaning, but he repeatedly disavowed this interpretation, instead asking the reader to understand these phenomena purely in terms of their illumination of the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger's phenomenology sought to directly confront such basic human realities as concern, anxiety and existence, instead of attempting to 'deduce' them as the conclusion of some path of dialectical logic. Analysis of such phenomena led him to his fundamental definition of the structure of Dasein in terms of understanding, state-of-mind⁵³¹ and language, terms he used to designate what he saw as the three universal constitutive items of authentic existence. The three corresponding inauthentic ways of being, namely curiosity, ambiguity and gossip, come into operation when Dasein forfeits its capacity to choose its own possibilities and falls into the average everydayness of the public 'they-world'. These two triadic structures of existence, the one of authenticity and the other of inauthenticity, are complemented by his presentation of the triadic temporal structure of Dasein as care; anticipating the future in existential projection, we retain the past in our thrown facticity, while in the present we decide whether to be authentic: whether to resolutely take a hold of our temporality, or to avoid our historical openness by forfeiting our being to the way things are ordinarily interpreted in the public realm. The ethical content of Heidegger's ontological schema emerges in his call to us to take stock of the historical structure of Dasein by striving towards a unified understanding of our Being. The conclusion here, which should be read as much as an assessment of the importance of Heidegger's philosophical contribution as an exegesis and commentary on his work, is that the ethical implication of his thought emerges in his call for us to choose authenticity.

The underlying ethical intent which had been present all along in his thought emerged in his discussion of ethics in the Letter on Humanism, where his call for grounding of ethics in the 'ethos' articulated his belief that existential openness to the 'dwelling place' of humanity has definite ethical meaning. An ethic which fails to root itself in this fundamental ethos lacks all dynamism and power, remaining at the level of mere doctrine and exhortation. The notion of 'dwelling' is particularly significant in Heidegger's doctrines of world and place, which present a profound critique of the epistemology of Descartes by analysing existence in terms of the three

531 'Beifindlichkeit' translated in *Being and Time* as 'state-of-mind', literally means 'how one finds oneself', or one's 'state of being'.

basic categories of the present-at-hand, Dasein and the ready-to-hand, and then showing that the latter two are systematically ignored by the Cartesian approach. The existential perspective, thematised as 'Being-in-the-World', explodes rationalist logic since Descartes, which has been based on the false dichotomy between subject and object. The problem with the scientific epistemology, which Heidegger, perhaps narrowly, identified with the mechanistic ontology of Descartes and Newton, is that it cannot attain to a truly historical authenticity, a standpoint where Dasein can recognise its historicity as a whole. The categories bound up with the metaphysics of substance and subject, in their efforts to conceal such phenomena as engagement and disposition, pass over the phenomenon of the world, and with it the phenomenon of the earth. Epistemology separates itself from ethics, which is conceived as the object of a separate 'science of values' in its crudest formulation, but this separation is itself a source of alienation. It ignores the way the reduction of the world to mathematical relations, a reduction which is characteristic of the mechanistic philosophy, leaves no place for the human subject, who "experienced himself as a useless function, if not an outright disturbing factor in this indifferent framework of functional relationships".⁵³²

Heidegger sought to re-orient thought to the unitary human level, and this led him to a distinctive approach to the themes of truth and meaning. His approach stood in contrast to the frameworks of science, because instead of mediating truth through representation by correct concepts, he sought to allow thought to become open to Being through the disclosure of phenomena, so as to let Being be. 'Letting be' emerged as the stance of the existential analytic of Dasein, but this stance held within it a tension between eksistence and involvement, the one orienting towards the transcendent horizon of Dasein's finitude and the other towards the average everydayness of involvements in the world. Eksistence and involvement are linked to each other through care, in that each of these three phenomena is a temporal comportment involving anticipation, recollection and empathy, but they differ in that eksistence relates to Being, involvement to beings, and care to both Being and beings, moving in the ontological difference between these dimensions. The themes of involvement and eksistence follow on from making openness the basis for our attitudes, and lead in contrasting ways to the recognition that care is essential to human life. However they also point to the ethical tension at the heart of Heidegger's work, namely the question of how authenticity is to be defined. Involvement, the attitude of everydayness, establishes the finite relational character of Dasein by showing that Being is proximally (zunächst) discovered in the context of absorption in equipment ready-to-hand. Eksistence, by contrast, begins from the ontological wonder that there is anything at all, moving on the transcendent plain of projection upon the possibilities of being as a whole.

At the beginning of this thesis⁵³³ I promised to show in what sense the 'value' of authenticity can be derived from the 'fact' of temporality. The German word for authenticity, 'Eigentlichkeit', is based on the root 'eigen' meaning 'own', and so authenticity requires us to genuinely take stock of who we are. Heidegger discussed authenticity in terms of our 'eigenst' (translated as 'own-most') possibility; in the reticent openness of our ownmost guilt, human life as Dasein comes to terms with who it really is. The guilt inherent in authenticity derives from the necessary recognition of our finite limitations as 'being-unto-death' rather than from a metaphysical belief in original sin. Heidegger defined authenticity as the capacity of Dasein to overcome the forfeiture inherent in anonymous mass existence; it is our capacity to understand, speak and feel on the basis of a historical relation to Being. As such, authenticity brings together understanding, speech and state-of-mind, the constitutive elements of Dasein, and relates us to the finite temporal horizon bounded by the factual thrownness of our having been in the past,

⁵³² Bernard J. Boelen: 'The Question of Ethics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger', p. 83, in Frings, M.S.: Heidegger and the Quest for Truth, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968

⁵³³ p. 4

the existential projection of resolute anticipation of the future, and the moment of vision of the authentic present. In one of the most concise descriptions of what he meant by authenticity, Heidegger said,

"anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, . . . in an impassioned **freedom towards death** - a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the 'they' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious".⁵³⁴

In resolute anticipation of death, Dasein establishes its freedom and its authentic ability to be as a whole by taking a hold of the past to anticipate the future in the moment of vision, and thus bases its ethical values on its factual situation. The finite temporal character of authenticity is therefore a central theme of Heidegger's ontology, and one with definite ethical implications. Authenticity requires of us a commitment to truth, to living in such a way that the falsehoods and illusions of the world are discerned and overcome. However we can only be true to others if we are first true to ourselves. "Dasein is authentically itself only to the extent that, as concerned being-alongside and solicitous Being-with, it projects itself upon its ownmost potentiality for Being rather than upon the possibilities of the 'they-self'."⁵³⁵ This means that care only achieves its ethical form of solicitude on the basis of existential self-realisation.

This fleeting recognition of the social aspect of the construction of personal identity explains the criticism of Heidegger made by Martin Buber in his book Between Man and Man, a criticism also made by Sartre⁵³⁶ and Levinas,⁵³⁷ that Heidegger's philosophy is too inward and lacks a social dimension. Arguing that Heidegger's "fundamental ontology does not have to do with man in his actual manifold complexity but solely with existence in itself, which manifests itself through man",⁵³⁸ Buber suggested Heidegger is only interested in "the individual's relation to himself". Conscience, according to Buber, does not come from within, but from relations to others, and Heidegger's authenticity, in its failure to recognise this, remains a closed system.

Although Heidegger's suggestion that "Dasein is essentially 'Being-with'"⁵³⁹ appears to contradict Buber's criticism, there is some basis for Buber's argument, especially considering the priority Heidegger gave to ontology over ethics. However it must be questioned whether the 'social conscience' which Buber chides Heidegger for lacking is really a more ethical form of the conscience phenomenon than the inwardness of the call of care to which Heidegger calls us. For Heidegger, authenticity depends on a reticence, a capacity to think and to listen, which is quite foreign to the involvements of the 'they' which he criticised as inauthentic. If we try to simply lose our self in social life, whether in good works or in dissipation, we will never be able to come to grips with who we are. We recognise our finitude in the resolute anticipation of death, in conscience and in anxiety, phenomena Heidegger contended can only be understood when we retreat from the hubbub of the world to establish our "ownmost non-relational" authenticity. Authentic resoluteness summons Dasein from its lostness in the 'they', but at the same time it calls us to acknowledge our thrown submission to a historical world and prevents any isolated detachment from concern.

The range of themes often covered in ethics, such as keeping promises, telling the truth, having respect for life and maintaining good habits, thus find their origin in authenticity, because the engaged and responsive understanding of our temporality which is at the essence

⁵³⁴ Sein und Zeit:266

⁵³⁵ Sein und Zeit:263

⁵³⁶ Sartre, Being and Nothingness: 288 ff

⁵³⁷ Emmanuel Levinas. 'Ethics as First Philosophy', in The Levinas Reader, Sean Hand (ed.), Basil Blackwell, 1989

⁵³⁸ Martin Buber, Between Man and Man: 199

⁵³⁹ Sein und Zeit:120

of authenticity demands that in being true to ourselves and to others we seek to maintain ethical standards across the range of practical concerns.

Heidegger understood authenticity in terms of the individual resolutely anticipating mortality. In contrast to the everyday way of life, which either evades or accepts the dictates of public opinion, authenticity openly creates its own future through the capacity of the individual Dasein to project upon its 'ownmost' possibilities. Death is the event in which our authentic being a whole first comes into view, but the average everyday attitude avoids this existential truth. The usual attitude towards death is distinguished by "temptation, tranquillisation and alienation",⁵⁴⁰ and is concealing, evasive and inauthentic. However if we are to authentically come to terms with who we really are in the Socratic sense of knowing ourselves, we must take stock of our situation, of our strengths and limitations, so our understanding of our self as Dasein can truly recognise our embeddedness in the world of our concern, and at the same time our capacity to transcend this world into consideration of the possibilities of Being.

This means, in the end, that we must learn how to love. Despite his austerity, despite the occasionally puritanical tone of his philosophy of existence, Heidegger's sense of place and of the connectedness which is at the essence of human being means the grounding ethic of his thought is ultimately love. The openness of love is the phenomenon par excellence which demonstrates the value and point of Heidegger's critique of previous philosophy. Love joins people together in a way which transcends limitations and enables an authentic understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. For this reason Heidegger said

"No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, it always deals with beings in a unity of the whole. . . Such revelation is concealed in our joy in the present existence, and not simply in the person, of a human being whom we love."⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ Sein und Zeit:254
⁵⁴¹ Basic Writings: 101

Appendix: On Idealism

Introduction

This essay was written at the same time as the thesis on Heidegger's ethics to develop some of my own ideas about ethics more fully than is done in the thesis proper. However it does approach the issues from a slightly different, perhaps more religious, perspective. Rather than seek to incorporate it into the body of the thesis, I have chosen to append it below.

1. What is idealism?

The main thesis of idealism is that philosophy accords priority to spirit over matter by using language to talk about ideas. My theme here is that adherence to the idealist scheme of priorities is correct and justified, while attempts to refute it are fundamentally flawed. The major thesis presented in this paper is that the only philosophy worthy of the venerable title "the love of wisdom" is idealism.

The goal of wisdom is to understand the meaning of life, and efforts to find meaning can only properly begin from the perspective of the human mind. The mind can only comprehend things through the medium of ideas, so the nature of philosophy as human comprehension is inherently idealistic in character. The idealism inherent in philosophy flows from the fact that human understanding deals only with ideas and with their relations to other ideas and to the world. Matter can be apprehended, but only ideas can be comprehended. Comprehension deals only with ideas because things must be interpreted and represented through language if meaning is to be discovered, understood and communicated. The centrality of language implies that definition is the soul of philosophy, because definition is the search for universals, and universals are the abstract concepts fundamental to all philosophical interpretation, coming into operation whenever things are considered in terms of ideas or represented through language.

2. Alternatives

Attempts at refutation have blamed idealism, together with metaphysics, for the ills of traditional philosophy, but such alternative ways of thought have usually ignored their own debt to idealism and at the same time falsely suggested that idealism leads to all sorts of absurd beliefs. Materialist philosophers such as Engels and Marx argued that matter, understood in terms of natural evolution, is philosophically prior to thought. They identified idealism with spiritual creationism, and saw in this distinction between nature and spirit the whole struggle between the progressive future and the reactionary past, thereby condemning idealism as a stagnant priest-ridden dogma. Other modern secular ideologies, including scientific positivism, feminism and economic rationalism, have in common with Marxism the secular view that spirit must be subordinated to matter, on the premise that anyone who advocates the primacy of spirit has torn loose from their moorings in physical reality.

Although the political worth of these various ways of thought should not be disparaged, given their well-founded critiques of prevailing social practices, secular thought is wrong in its materialistic critique of idealism. A major advantage of idealism over these alternative world views is its ability to achieve a coherent understanding of the world that begins from human experience, while at the same time maintaining a connection with a vision of ultimate reality. The limitation common to all secular thought is that it denies that human life can meaningfully relate to the transcendent and the infinite and the eternal. As a result of this denial it fails to coherently answer profound questions of philosophy, including whether the origin of values can be understood, and how systematic understanding can be absolute or fundamental.

3. Perspective and focus of idealism - ethics

To answer such questions, which appear rather extravagant and impossible from the relativistic perspective of secular science, we must begin by determining a starting point and direction, so the argument presented here in defence of idealism is mainly about priorities of focus for philosophy. The reason idealism must provide philosophy with its point of departure is that it is the only method able to speak from the distinctive situated perspective of the human soul. This means idealism is the only philosophical method that can establish a necessary relation with the linguistic and ethical foundations of our being, and it does so by focussing on the primacy of transcendent ideals from a truly human perspective. The point here is to show that the philosophy of idealism operates in normal human experience, and is not removed to some mysterious transcendental plane. All considered judgement effectively regards things primarily as ideas, as it is only when a thing is represented by an idea that it can mean something to a person. When a person says, "My family, my work, my ideals, mean something to me", it is only as the meaning is conceptualised in thought that it acquires content. Meaning emerges in the context of reference and significance, when we discern relationships between things in the world, and it is only when philosophy begins with what is closest to us, our personal experience of mind and spirit, that anything relevant to human life can be understood as meaningful.

The philosophy of idealism poses more genuine and serious questions than any Berkeleian denial of existence to matter. This has been recognised by the more weighty idealist thinkers, who I take to include Plato, Parmenides, Kant, Hegel and in some ways Heidegger. Certainly idealism contradicts materialism, but the question at issue is not the absolute existence of matter, as Berkeley had it, but what the primary focus of philosophy should be. When ethics is made the starting point of philosophy, as idealism demands, matter becomes a peripheral concern, because the effort to understand and practice ethics must of necessity deal with non-material ideas like justice, holiness and courage as the focus of its energy. Spirit is the active principle in human life, while matter is merely passive, so philosophy condemns itself to passivity when it gives matter priority over spirit.

4. Matter

I am not trying to deny any absolute reality to matter, but only questioning its priority for philosophy. Certainly, natural disasters like fire and earthquake and famine can intervene to make any wishful thinking irrelevant, and the reality of human suffering should never be minimised, but a direct focus on material assistance is not the only thing ethics and morality require of us. The foundations of ethics are transcendent and universal, and can only be clarified by the definition of the key terms, such as justice, love and the good, which constitute the ethos towards which philosophy seeks to move society. Definition of these foundations is more help in the long term than any single act of charity, so putting effort into this task of definition requires us to take time away from our obsessions about material survival to contemplate the eternal truths of philosophy.

5. Definition

The thoughts of many of the greatest minds of history have been understood in terms of idealism. So much so that the label "idealism" suffers from a looseness of definition, as it has been used to describe everything from Plato's theory of ideas to Hegel's spiritual system of rational realism, and from Saint Augustine's contrast between the city of God and the city of man to Bishop Berkeley's theories of vision and knowledge. The passionate commitment of those who believe in a cause and struggle for change is also classed as idealism, whether it be Jesus Christ and his Sermon on the Mount, or Ben Chifley and his light on the hill, or Nelson Mandela saying "the struggle is my life", or

any of the millions of people who have struggled for ideas such as human dignity and equality. The common factor shared by all these idealist philosophies is that they give priority to spirit over matter.

6. Essence and Existence

One of the first principles which must be established is how such a relation between spirit and matter can be justified. This can be explained most satisfactorily by considering it in terms of the priority of essence over existence, because essence is to spirit as existence is to matter. Whenever we seek to know what a thing really is, we invariably look for the definition of its essence. Philosophy is intrinsic to this process, because it provides the method whereby we abstract from the specific case in order to explain it as an instance of a concept, and so define its essence.

When I look at a spark plug I see firstly that it is an engine part made of ceramic and metal in this particular car. However, to know what it is I must recognise its essential function as a mechanism for igniting petrol, and to tune the engine properly I must know precisely why and how the gap must be made exact. The point of this example from a context of practical concern is that we are not just interested in its existence, the fact that the spark plug is, we need to know the definition of its essence, so we can understand precisely what it is. And even knowing what something is does not always suffice, because for understanding to be complete the question why the plug exists must be answered. To answer this question we must understand the idea 'behind' the thing, in order to know its context, where it came from and what it does. In coming to understand something we discover that it is, what it is, and why it is. Knowledge that something is gives us only the raw fact of its existence, while the more important knowledge of what and why it is point us towards the fundamental idea which is its essence.

All classification is based on the principle that we can only know what anything actually is through knowledge of the whole of which it is a part. For example a fork is an instance of the concept 'cutlery', a ghost gum is an instance of the concept 'eucalyptus', and a gift could be an instance of the concept 'love'. Now while there are definite differences between these examples of part-whole analysis (the first is a collective noun, the second is a botanical genus, and the third is something of a mystery), what they have in common is that the particular thing in question partakes of, or is a sign of, a whole or a totality, and this whole can be understood as a universal concept or essence. Even when we deal with a particular object, we can only understand it when we consider it as an instance of a concept which has more generality than the individual thing alone. Such reasoning led ancient philosophy to the conclusion that the primary concern of philosophy must be with essence rather than with existence, and this insight was the genesis of the classification of all things into categories, families, orders, genera and species.

7. Plato

Plato provided much of the conceptual framework within which idealist philosophy has dealt with the what and the why of reality, so I would like to proceed now by summarising some salient features of Plato's teachings about the meaning of ideas. Plato is the great original source for idealist philosophy, so to understand what is meant by idealism it is wise to go back to his writings and investigate his ideas as he presents them himself. As a student of Socrates, Plato believed that knowledge is virtue and that no one does evil willingly. His focus was on ethical and aesthetic ideals such as beauty and the good. Concepts such as these are at the heart of idealism; not epistemological notions like 'whiteness', which Aristotle concentrated on in his criticisms of Plato's ideas.

So to go to the centre of Plato's thought, let us now turn to the Phaedo, a classic statement of the philosophy of idealism which brings out clearly the ideas 'at the top of the line' that are most important for philosophy. The Phaedo is Plato's account of Socrates' final conversation before death, and the subject of the dialogue is the problem of life after death and how people can find absolute

truth and immortality through cultivation of the soul. One passage which illuminates the central themes of Platonic idealism is the discussion of the nature of equality.

Socrates argues, "before we began to see and hear and use our other senses, we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality; otherwise we could never have realised, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of sense are only imperfect copies" (75). We can only know that two sticks, or three boxes of apples, or two philosophy essays, are equal in quality or quantity by reference to an ideal standard, and knowledge of this standard cannot be derived from the things themselves, but must be a priori, from reason alone, because physical things never completely measure up to it. Plato maintains that this "applies no more to equality than it does to absolute beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness, and all those characteristics which we designate by the term 'absolute'."

The insistence that these characteristics can be known as absolute is distasteful to the pragmatic outlook which places beauty in the eye of the beholder, so it has been rejected by the relativistic ethos of modern thought. Plato again enters into controversy with his thesis that the ability to apprehend the absolute depends on the priority of spirit over matter, a major Platonic doctrine clearly expressed in the Phaedo. Acceptance of the priority of spirit involves a thorough renunciation of materialism, and, as mentioned above, it has been central to the spirit of idealism. Where materialism holds that the essence of humanity is found in our physical existence, for Plato the essence of the self is found in our eternal soul.

Plato established this doctrine with the argument that "so long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be Truth" (66). He maintains that the only person likely to apprehend the absolute, whether it be absolute beauty, goodness, equality, integrity, or some other basic ideal that is sought, "is the one who approaches each object, as far as possible, with the unaided intellect, without taking account of any sense of sight in his thinking, or dragging any other sense into his reckoning - the person who pursues the truth by applying his pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object, cutting himself off as much as possible from his eyes and ears and virtually all the rest of his body, as an impediment which by its presence prevents the soul from attaining to truth and clear thinking" (65). Purification is thought to "consist in separating the soul as much as possible from the body" (67), because the true moral ideal is a kind of purgation from all illusory and emotional values (69). Clarity of thought is impossible while the mind is limited to the merely physical, because true understanding only comes with the realisation that thought must transcend its empirical worldly surrounds in order to find wisdom, and it is wisdom alone that makes all the virtues possible.

This transcendental metaphysics of the Phaedo accepts the Parmenidian idea of being as a static unity, where moral forms such as the just and the good can be timelessly contemplated, but in Plato's later dialogue the Sophist, the suggestion that reality can be something not subject to change is brought into question. The departure in the Sophist from orthodox Platonism arises from the argument that when existence is taken as the starting point for investigation about the formal and the essential, the reality of being is seen to partake of and blend with both motion and rest, to confront not only identity, but also difference. Plato's true dialectical genius emerges here, because he argues that if we follow Parmenides by saying that being must be an indissoluble whole, it is impossible to ascribe any reality to opposites such as hot and cold, given that both partake of being but are completely incompatible with the other (243d).

Transcendence enables the vision of the formal ideas of "independent entities which really exist" (78), real ideas which Plato understood as absolute, constant and invariable, and as never admitting change of any kind. Ideas are eternally the same: hot can never become cold, good can never become evil, and motion can never become rest (Sophist 252). When things possessing these characteristics appear to change, as in the case of ice being melted by flame, it is not a case of the

idea itself changing, but merely of the idea, in this case of cold, 'retreating' from that location and being replaced by its opposite. So the nature of any moral ideal is an eternal constant, whether it be the idea of justice, love, truth, goodness, or some other. The purpose of education is therefore to drag people away from their beliefs in the false idols of material existence in order to incline them towards knowledge and practice of the ideals of virtue.

Education is one of Plato's major concerns in the Republic. He presents the path to enlightenment in terms of an analogy with a divided line (510), in which the pursuit of truth involves the ascent from illusion through belief and reason to pure intelligence. The simile of the cave, which develops this framework further, culminates in the vision of the idea of the good, a vision which "once seen, is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything", and which "is the controlling source of truth and intelligence" (517c). Knowledge is an innate capacity, but to realise our potential "the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good" (518d).

In the Sophist, Plato compares the effort to make sense of the world to a battle between giants and Gods, in which the difficulties of philosophy are discussed in terms of the quarrel between materialism and idealism. The giants "define reality as the same thing as body, and as soon as one of the opposite party asserts that anything without a body is real, they are utterly contemptuous and will not listen to another word", while on the other side the Gods "are very wary in defending their position somewhere in the heights of the unseen, maintaining with all their force that true reality consists in certain intelligible and bodiless Ideas" (246b). What the giants "allege to be true reality, the Gods do not call real being, but a sort of moving process of becoming" (246c).

Plato believed that both these ways of thought had something important to offer, but he attacked the materialists for being violent and uncivilised (246d) and for thinking that "whatever they cannot squeeze between their hands is just nothing at all" (247c). He says, "it is quite enough for our purposes if they consent to admit that even a small part of reality is bodiless", arguing that this must be admitted in the case of qualities of the soul like "justice and wisdom or any other sort of goodness or badness" (247b).

The Sophist is a very important dialogue for understanding Plato's mature philosophy, because it presents the five Platonic elements of existence, identity, difference, motion and rest as the central foundational concepts of systematic ontology. In his mature view the ideas retain their importance as the transcendent object of language and understanding, but the earlier view of them as completely separate from their real instances is discarded, even while their independent reality and absolute existence is affirmed. "It would be a strange doctrine to accept" if "change, life, soul and understanding had no place in that which is perfectly real" (249). So for example Plato would say that justice is revealed in just acts, but the formal idea of justice also has an eternally transcendent and objective existence. The recognition, and ultimately the recollection, of this basic truth is for Plato a decisive mark of philosophical wisdom.

Another dialogue worth mentioning briefly here is the Phaedrus, and its allegory of the charioteer with its imagery of the wings of the soul, as it contains a supremely succinct and beautiful presentation of Plato's ideas. The metaphor of ascent is always present in Plato's mind, because he believed that only the eternal Gods above can attain to the vision of the whole which is the real ideal towards which philosophy should strive. So it is only in so far as our soul is akin to the divine nature that we have the capacity to behold the truth.

Asserting that "our argument will carry conviction with the wise, though not with the merely clever" (245), Plato maintains that the ontological ideal of the apprehension and recollection of reality as a whole is the "perfect mystic vision through which a man can become perfect in the true sense of the word" (249). The ideal of human perfection is defined in the Phaedrus as the ability "to understand by the use of universals, and to collect out of the multiplicity of sense-impressions a unity

arrived at by a process of reason" (249). The part of us that has this ability is the soul, which Plato describes as "uncreated, immortal and self-moving" (245), and he calls it the "ruling power" (246) that enables us to approach and mirror the divine. Just as the ontology of the Republic presents a bifurcated horizon with reason above and sense below, the Phaedrus continues this imagery by comparing the soul to a charioteer led by two horses. "One of these horses is fine and good and of noble stock, and the other the opposite in every way" (246). "the teams of the Gods, which are well matched and tractable, go easily, but the rest with difficulty; for the horse with the vicious nature, if he has not been well broken in, drags his driver down by throwing all his weight in the direction of the earth; supreme then is the agony of the struggle which awaits the soul" (247).

One unifying feature of all Plato's ideas is that their origin is in the idealist philosophy which was later called transcendental metaphysics. Although the word 'metaphysics' originated with Aristotle's book of that name, which was so called because it came after his book on physics, the term has come to refer to any philosophy that focusses on spiritual idealism. Classical metaphysics teaches that there are two classes of things, the lower being the visible, which is discovered via the instrumentality of the body, and the higher being the invisible, the class of real substances which can only be discovered when the soul "investigates by itself, and passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, . . . a condition of the soul we call wisdom" (Phaedo 80). Just as the truth of mathematical theorems is independent of time and place, so the truths of metaphysics, the ideas of the one, the good and the true, remain constant yesterday, today and forever. Ideas are necessarily eternal because their essential meaning transcends their historical application. A feature of such eternal truths is that they are able to persist for ever through time because their content is independent of time. So metaphysics holds that eternal ideas function as a higher truth able to condition and shape the reality of the temporal things we encounter.

8. Parmenides

The thought of Parmenides of Elea is one of the foundation stones of this philosophy. Parmenides believed he could uncover the identity of being and truth by means of the pure logical apprehension of "that which is, and cannot not-be". In revealing this identity he presented a classical articulation of the nature and purpose of idealist metaphysics in the original formative period of Western civilization. Parmenides took the axiomatic tautology that "whatever exists really does exist" to be a necessary first principle of rigorous logic. He used this observation, together with the negative truth that whatever does not exist is nothing, as the basis for the idealist maxim that the same reality is given to us both for thinking and for being. He took this to mean that thinking and being are the same, and so to think is to be. As a consequence of this insight, Parmenides held that the one true being can only be identified through the reflective understanding, whereas the truth of claims derived from intuition by the senses is always dubious.

These ideas, which have influenced numerous thinkers through the centuries, mark Parmenides as one of the profoundly original thinkers in the history of philosophy. The heart of his method was the attempt to establish the foundations of correct reason by counterpoising the "way of truth", grounded in the contemplation of the necessary truths of the logic of being, against the "way of seeming", or reliance on empirical appearance, which despite its unreliability is accepted by most people as the common sense method for learning about truth. Parmenides rejected the common sense view in favour of reason by asserting a diametric difference between being, which he understood as the "unshaken heart of well-rounded truth", and both appearance and becoming, realms of experience in which continuous change destroys any possibility of certainty.

So from the earliest times Greek logic understood being as an eternally static unity, no more subject to change than are the mathematical theorems of geometry and arithmetic. For Plato, whose idealistic rationalism owed much to the logic of Parmenides, it made as much sense to think true being is to be found in the changing multiplicity of empirical belief as to suggest that two plus two

might not always equal four, because truth is found by definition rather than by observation. Because the ultimate unity of true being is abstract rather than tangible, it can only be comprehended by pure intelligence, and not by sensual intuition. The suggestion that it could involve motion and change, or that it must be sought in the unfolding process of becoming, was thought to assume a mistaken belief about what being actually is. Plato expressed this idea with classical simplicity in the dictum of the Timaeus that "being is to becoming as truth is to belief". Being and truth, the ultimate objects of correct knowledge, stand together in contrast to becoming and belief, which are linked to each other as the respective shadows of their real counterparts.

For Parmenides, the idea that the world of change cannot be a source of true knowledge is an explicit consequence of this philosophy. Parmenides devalued what is learnt through sense perception because he believed it to be impossible that any secure knowledge could be found in the changing flux of the world. Wild variations in historical fortune and the primitive development of science made it impossible to predict the future or even know for certain what was happening at the time, so he confined the acceptable truth of ontology to ideas logically derivable from axiomatic tautologies. These ideas were similar, at least in their role as logical foundations, to what Immanuel Kant was later to call the abstract a priori ideas of pure reason. The austere simplicity of his philosophy enabled Parmenides to point the way towards a vision of the total and eternal definition of reality, well summarised in the following famous fragment:

"What is' is uncreated and imperishable, for it is entire, immovable and without end. It was not in the past, nor shall it be, since it is now, all at once, one, continuous; nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it is all full of what is."

Being, that which truly is, is an indivisible and eternal whole, quite separate from any human experience except as it is imaginable in abstract reflection. The saying "it is now" does not confine the one being to the present moment alone, because as 'uncreated' it transcends time. Being includes history and potentiality as much as the actual moment, and because "what is" is outside time or eternal, Parmenides rules out the possibility that it might have been in the past or future. Parmenides held the contemplation of this unchanging universal truth of being to be the highest possible goal for philosophy, with his dichotomous logical argument that the way of truth is concerned with 'what is' while the way of seeming is satisfied with 'what is not'.

As Platonic idealism evolved from its roots in Parmenides and Socrates through its articulation by Plato into the neo-Platonism of Plotinus, physical objects continued to be regarded as mere copies or unstable images of actual ideal reality, because the dichotomy drawn between being and appearance involved the characterisation of being in terms of a totally static and eternally transcendent doctrine of truth. The devaluation of appearance is a necessary concomitant of Parmenides' idea of the unity of truth, because, so the argument went, appearances are obviously multiple and not unified, so if truth is one, appearances cannot assist us to understand it. The evolving process of change in the world was therefore regarded as the source of illusion and untruth, because the early Greek logicians thought it was impossible to discern any certainty or continuity in the data given to us by sense perception.

The immutable verities of formal philosophy alone were thought to provide certain knowledge. The theory first suggested by Parmenides and then developed to its full flowering in Platonic idealism was that we can only define the true nature of anything by contemplating how particular acts or things we may come across participate in a universal truth. Empirical objects only provide a fleeting instance, so opinions about them are always fallible, but the abstract universal idea can be the true object of certain knowledge. Plato condemned the habit of accepting what is given to sense perception as the path of illusion and mere belief (*doxa*), because the idealist method is the only guarantee of knowledge (*episteme*). This doctrine found expression in the metaphysical idea of substance (*ousia*), which held that the only real substances are universals, so only eternal essences

can be known. For example Aristotle believed that the only real substance is mind (cf. Collingwood, The Idea of History p.42) because ultimately nothing else can persist through time.

9. The Heritage of Ideas

I have dwelt on these ideas from the origin of philosophy at some length because they are central to the intellectual foundations of western civilization and are a major part of the heritage shared by all thought today. Classical idealism influences modern cultural mores and standards in ways that often go unrecognised, so contemporary philosophy needs to remember these roots if it is to understand its identity. The thoughts of the classical thinkers of antiquity remain one of the great sources of ideas for the present, even if not everything they say translates intelligibly across the millennia. Only by examining and recollecting their insights can we ensure that life is breathed again into the great ideas which are undeniably present in ancient philosophy. The method that can do this, and so derive most understanding for the present from the ideas of the great thinkers of history, is idealism.

The philosophy of idealism has a continuity of purpose with traditions of learning which are fundamental to the principles, values and achievements of our society. In fact, idealism has been instrumental to the creation of the institutions of the modern world, because imperfect as they are, our institutions owe much that is good about them to the fact that the people who created them believed in the primacy of ideas. Certainly there is need for criticism of the errors and distortions idealism has caused when it has been taken to extremes, especially in the case of some religious attitudes towards the body and the earth, but if we abandon the original insight of the primacy of spirit we risk undermining social values that are fundamental to our culture. Such values as human rights, equality before the law and freedom of speech owe their foundation to shared beliefs in spiritual ideals that originated in philosophy. Like a well of living water that will never dry up, the heritage of philosophy can sustain and invigorate life today if it is properly maintained, but if it is thoughtlessly destroyed or neglected, our culture will be put at risk.

But why, you may ask, is this word 'idealism' so crucial to the essence of philosophy? One reason arises out of the nature of philosophy as linguistic analysis. All the beliefs that were recorded and that have survived the centuries of history have been transmitted through language, and language is a human faculty whose common currency is the idea. Analysis of the ideas and concepts of language, especially those found in texts, is a central task for philosophy, so to contribute effectively to the living heritage of human consciousness, philosophy must study the writings of past philosophers assiduously, because the development of thought is more reliable and worthwhile when it builds upon the foundation of those who have examined the same problems before.

But why must linguistic analysis involve philosophical idealism? The reason is that if the words themselves of the great thinkers must be studied first before informed discussion can take place, then direct investigation of the material objects to which the ideas refer is only of secondary importance. Empirical research may be a useful preliminary or adjunct to philosophy, but it can never replace the central task of thinking about the meaning of ideas, which is the only method able to place empirical facts within the context of human priorities and values. And if ideas have priority over things as the primary focus of philosophical investigation, then the label 'idealism' is a valid description of the method and content of philosophy.

But more than this, idealism is the only way of thought that enables us to consider things in the true depth of their historical context and meaning. Only when a thing is considered as idea, as the manifestation of a universal essence, can we understand why it is what it is. We understand each thing as part of a whole complex horizon, not as a discrete entity without any connection to past and future, as positivist methods tend to do. Knowing where something came from and where it is going - its place in time - is the only basis upon which we can genuinely respect or value it, but considered

as matter alone it loses this relation to its context and thereby becomes isolated from the source of its meaning and value.

10. The Part and the Whole

In music it is not enough to know that a certain note in a melody is produced by the resonance of a column of air, and nor is it adequate to describe the note just as A440hz. To comprehend the essence of a musical note it must be heard in its context in the melody, because it will not really be understood anywhere else. By placing the note before our mind's ear within the melody as a whole, we treat it as a pure concept, an idea.

So with philosophy, when we comprehend anything as a part of a whole we consider it as pure idea. As Hegel taught in the Phenomenology of Spirit, the bud, flower and fruit of a plant are "moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole" (p.2). In order to comprehend the 'totality' of the plant, Hegel considered its changes as ideas, as 'mutually necessary' stages in the development of a reason that is immanent to the life of the plant. The question here is whether this need to understand the meaning of things in terms of the idea of the totality of which they are a part requires philosophy to call itself idealism.

By raising these problems, which all revolve around the initial difficulty of the definition and scope of idealism, I am trying to 'dust off' a word which these days is falling into disrepute and even taking on a rather shabby appearance, despite its venerable ancestry and its possibilities as a force for inspiration and development. Although some people regard any efforts to rehabilitate idealism as no more than worthless speculation, it is a necessary task if philosophy is to retain any integrity. Defining the essence of reality is the main task of philosophy, and the only philosophy able to define essences is idealism.

11. Potential

Only in idealism can we look towards the future with any hope or faith, for the simple reason that idealism is the only philosophy with any confidence about the meaning of life and any ability to understand human potential. From the time of Plato's theory of ideas, potential has been understood in terms of essence, as the ideal standard on which material objects are modelled and the goal towards which creatures graced with free will can aspire. When we say somebody or something has potential, we always refer implicitly to an ideal possibility, an essence which may have been achieved in other instances but not yet in this case. The ideal dimensions of reality are contrasted against actual existence, which is identified with the immediate material appearance, and the ideal is viewed as the source of meaning that inspires actual activity.

Recognition of potential is a key goal of the understanding, and to do this we must look deeper than the superficial appearance given in actuality, toward the essence of the thing. The conclusion we must draw from this identification of essence and potential is that idealism is the only way of thinking that has any grasp on the meaning of potential. In so far as any other philosophies depart from the mundane world of actuality to think about potential they will be engaging in idealism, and not only in a semantic sense, but because thought about possibilities is the only foundation of the idealistic hope that people can have the power to transform a situation by virtue of free will.

12. Science - Idealism, Realism and Nominalism

So why, given its distinguished history, is the philosophy of idealism so often condemned as mere sentiment devoid of reason? One partial answer I would like to explore here is the fact that ideas have only been viewed with the suspicion we are used to in the modern world since the comparatively recent domination of the intellectual life achieved by the physical sciences and their methods. Science developed the prejudice in the seventeenth century, through Descartes and

Galileo, of excluding from consideration any attitudes which lacked mathematical rigour. This tendency consolidated itself to the status of dogma with the rise of positivism.

David Hume's discovery and refutation of what Moore was to call the naturalistic fallacy, the derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is', or of a value from a fact, entrenched the positivistic separation of science from metaphysics and of logic from ethics. The main content of idealism is ethics, so as science came to regard ethics as something for personal emotion rather than objective reason, the philosophy of idealism appeared as increasingly irrelevant to progressive science. This prejudice against idealism has often meant that wholistic ideas have been neglected as unscientific, not because of any lack of truth but because they use different methods to the rigorous scientific observation and experiment demanded by positivism. Any acceptance of a role for ethical idealism in philosophy limits the explanatory power of scientific positivism, because idealism begins with words and ideas rather than with numbers or things, and so it requires a qualitatively different method of learning.

In mediæval times, by contrast, the study of ideas was the main activity of scholarship, and the philosophy now known as idealism was able to call itself realism, because it asserted the reality of abstract entities or ideas. The philosophy now known as realism was then disparaged with the title 'nominalism', and is especially associated with the fourteenth century teaching of William of Ockham that an idea is no more than the name of a thing. So Ockham's Razor, or the principle of economy of thought, is used to say that conceptual 'entities' have no reality apart from their function of naming real things. Nominalism retained Plato's distinction between knowledge and belief, but moved the moral ideals, which Plato had placed at the apex of his system, from the realm of episteme to that of doxa.

Nominalism won the struggle against realism, and its victory is reflected in the sceptical opposition of contemporary calculative thought to any speculation not founded on mathematics. The hegemony over realism now exercised by scientific method originated in this period of transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, and to give modern thought its due, it must be admitted that the transition was one from the stagnation of feudalism to the dynamism of capitalism, and from a backward looking geocentric philosophy to the outward looking mathematics of heliocentric science. Scientific realism prospered both by virtue of its explanatory achievements and because of its affinity with the emerging capitalist philosophy of individualist materialism.

The problem was that in advancing from the material deficiencies of feudalism, scientific capitalism also abandoned the old realist insights into the meaning of life, and as a result impoverished its own spirit. As Hegel put it, "it has taken a long time before the lucidity which only heavenly things used to have could penetrate the dullness and confusion in which the sense of worldly things was enveloped . . . Now we seem to need just the opposite: sense is so fast rooted in earthly things that it requires just as much force to raise it" (P.o.S.:8).

The point is that Ockham's Razor may be attractive and useful, but the question which should be more important is whether it is correct; whether its subordination of truth to usefulness has the result of pruning our conceptual baggage so far that ideas of real worth are squeezed out of consideration. The feudal worldview, although it was factually wrong, politically barbaric and economically stagnant, did have the virtue of giving the individual a place within a meaningful cosmos evolving according to a definite purpose in harmony with the will of God. This sense of meaning and purpose has been abandoned by modern thought, often to our short term advantage, but also to our long term detriment. We should not hold to modern views for the sole reason that they provide material benefits: all their implications, spiritual and emotional as well as material, should be considered in determining their worth.

The question which must be asked of the scientific subordination of truth to usefulness is whether it is the only worthwhile method of instruction. In the context of philosophy, where truth is the main goal, it is always important to step back from the practical applications of learning and

ponder some of the larger questions that inevitably arise. This obligation can create tensions within philosophy, because when modern views about how thought should proceed are used to investigate the history of ideas, a reappraisal of common negative attitudes towards the idealistic thought of pre-modern times will be warranted.

Modern methods of thought demand that philosophy should be rational, critical, systematic and fundamental. To be rational, thought must be constructed according to logical reason; to be critical it must continually examine itself and past philosophy for errors; to be systematic it must include all things in the ambit of its study; to be fundamental it must base itself on the foundation of true reality. Descartes' method of 'clear and distinct ideas', Hume's empirical theories of primary and secondary qualities, and Kant's critical philosophy are systems of thought which share these methodological guidelines.

Problems arise however, when we seek to put these methodological rules into practice. If they are to cohere with each other, then they will require a more open attitude towards the positive elements of pre-modern thought than was originally allowed. So for example David Hume attacked the innate idea of substance as mediæval superstition, but then contradicted his principle by treating 'human nature' as just such an unchanging fixed notion (cf. Collingwood, p.81). If even such a resolute opponent of idealism as Hume could not completely escape from substantialist metaphysics in his attempts to understand the world, how can anyone say now that we have nothing to learn from the philosophy of antiquity and the Middle Ages?

13. Metaphysics - Kant

There are perennial ideas that arise and must be confronted whenever philosophy makes ideas rather than things the object of study. By virtue of its essential nature as the discipline that seeks to critically and rationally explore the fundamental system of reality as a whole, philosophy must inevitably move in the spaces occupied by such difficult words as metaphysics, transcendence, and the absolute. Perhaps because of the inherent difficulty of these concepts, but also because of the real defects in the thought of those who have used them, especially Christian theologians, people dislike even thinking about such words. Such language conjures up a picture of a relation to the infinite which leaves people treading on thin air. It cannot be fitted into the finite practicality required by modern education, so any talk of transcendence or absolute truth is dismissed as obsolete and speculative.

This negative estimation of the value of metaphysics is based more on prejudice than on rational consideration of the questions metaphysics seeks to answer, because metaphysics is the core discipline of the philosophy of idealism, and idealism is ultimately the only coherent and realistic world view. The best evidence for this, apart perhaps from Plato, is found in the philosophy of Kant, who taught that the only way philosophy can be rational and systematic is by laying a foundation for thought in the recognition of the unity of the mind. Only from this basis are the priority and value of all things potentially comprehensible. Laying the foundation of metaphysics means investigating the connections between abstract concepts, what Kant called the transcendental schematism of the categories of the pure understanding. The idealist recognition that spirit has priority over matter for human understanding is based on the fact that intelligence is the capability of mind to grasp connections between different ideas. It is in perceiving connections that rational understanding is most in evidence, but the point of idealism is that connections are only ever perceived when the things in question are represented conceptually.

Kant's "inevitable problems of pure reason", which arise as soon as this task of defining conceptual relations is attempted, are the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul. "The science which with all its apparatus is really intended for the solution of these problems is called metaphysics" (Critique of Pure Reason A:3). With his doctrine that we can only know things as they appear to us (phenomena) and not as they are in themselves (noumena),

Kant retained and developed the idealist maxim that connections between things are intrinsically conceptual. He inferred from this that the laws of nature must conform to our minds rather than the reverse, because the known world is a construct of thought.

Kant also maintained that facts, which he identified with scientifically known phenomena, must be strictly separated from values, whose source, whether it be divine command or the categorical imperative to do one's duty, is in the noumenal reality of things in themselves. But if things in themselves cannot be known as facts by reason, and the authority of values derives from their basis in absolute reality in itself, then values cannot be grounded in reason. So the human faculty of reason is concerned only with phenomenal facts, while the basis for noumenal values is in faith. Although this teaching earned Kant the title of the "all-destroyer" among the pious for its demolition of St Thomas Aquinas' proofs of the existence of God, his critical philosophy clearly recognised the necessity and validity of the traditional concerns of metaphysics, but parted from scholasticism with its requirement that proofs of reason be confirmed by sense experience. This is impossible for metaphysical beliefs such as the existence of God, so Kant held metaphysical truths to be objects of faith rather than reason and disparaged the view that metaphysical truths can be proved by reason as 'subjective idealism'.

14. Fact and Value

The underlying distinction between fact and value means that while science is certainly valuable as a source of quantitative knowledge, it can provide us with no guidance when the issues at hand are qualitative, in the aesthetic and moral sense of the word 'quality'. The necessity of metaphysics, and so of idealism, arises from the fact that we must make ethical and aesthetic judgements using qualitative rather than quantitative criteria, and it is precisely such judgements that are central to philosophy.

Ludwig Wittgenstein actually sought to show this in his Tractatus, when he wrote "about that which we cannot speak, we must remain silent".⁵⁴² His argument was that "the unsayable" alone has genuine moral or aesthetic value (221), so he was saying something very different from the logical positivist insult, "metaphysicians shut your traps", which was how his words were widely interpreted. Wittgenstein sought to show that the meaning of qualitative values is "higher" than that of quantitative facts, although this higher truth cannot be expressed in normal language because it can only be indicated rather than demonstrated.

The qualitative questions of what values we should endorse stand equally alongside, and perhaps above, the quantitative problems of collection of facts, despite the fact that we are often told that only quantitative research is useful. The greatest philosophers, including Plato, Kant and Hegel, as well as Jesus Christ, Confucius and the Buddha, all agreed that the qualitative questions to which idealism alone can give any coherent answer, such as the quality of mercy, the quality of justice, and the quality of love, are of much more lasting importance than the collection of information, because they alone treat the fundamental questions of human existence. Perhaps this helps explain why the philosopher Wittgenstein insisted on reciting the poetry of the Indian mystic Tagore to the positivist Rudolf Carnap when they met to discuss mathematical logic (ibid 215).

Idealism, which is the only philosophy that can make the qualitative issues of human values central, maintains that spirit alone is truly real, despite appearances to the contrary. This is not at all to suggest that material things do not exist, but rather that their real meaning and essence, and hence their existence, can only be understood as spiritual. Reflection on the context in which philosophy operates will show why this must be so.

⁵⁴² (Wittgenstein's Vienna by Janik and Toulmin, p. 219)

15. Persistence to Eternity

The first thing we can observe about this context is the importance of philosophy avoiding preoccupation with the present moment alone. The search for truth requires a wider horizon than the instant gratification beloved by technocratic materialism, since the field of existence, which philosophy must recognise as relevant in its totality, stretches to the beginning and end of time. All eternity is potentially open to philosophical study, because the past exists as 'having been' and the future exists as 'coming to be'. So because all times are equally real, all times must be taken into account in thinking about the ultimate priorities of reality.

This leads to a logical argument: given that eternity is the ultimate context of philosophy, and given also that something which has existence and influence over thousands or millions of years obviously has more reality in the total scheme of things than a material object with a life span of ten or twenty years, it follows that real existence can be understood in terms of persistence through time. Therefore something intangible which has effects stretching over a long period of time, for instance a geological era such as the Jurassic, is more real than something tangible, like a particular dinosaur, which only affected a very small area for a short period of time. Similarly an intangible like love, which manifests itself in all ages, has more reality than one marriage, however loving that particular couple may be.

The point of these observations is that in the human context the ideas by which material objects are understood have greater capacity to persist through time than do the material things themselves, and in some cases, especially with moral values, ideas persist to the extent that they can be regarded as eternal truths. If ideas are actually more potent and creative forces for change in history than is any material thing, then we should conclude that from the genuinely human perspective ideas possess more reality than material objects. By 'genuinely human' I mean the perspective that seeks to understand things at the level of personal reflective experience by situating things in a whole context of meaning, as contrasted against the naive realism of immediate sense perception.

16. Concrete

To draw out some implications of these arguments, consider the case of concrete, a substance made of gravel and cement that has often been considered the epitome of the material. If the logic of the argument presented here is valid, especially in the case of the argument about 'persistence through time' being a criterion of reality, concrete has more real being as pure idea than as matter. The basis for this claim is the fact that human knowledge of the technology of concrete construction, which is the ultimate cause of the existence of all material concrete, has persisted through time longer than any single concrete object. Aqueducts and freeways eventually crumble, but the theoretical knowledge of how to create concrete has been a human possession since before the Roman Empire, and is likely to remain with us after most of the buildings now in use have fallen down, so this theoretical knowledge, which is the same as the universal idea of concrete, actually has more ultimate reality than any particular concrete thing. Appearances would suggest that the material existence of buildings is the most real manifestation of concrete, but when we reflect on this in more depth it becomes clear that the essence of the technique of construction is the real basis of the existence of this substance. The technique is not simply physical, but is primarily a function of human memory and understanding, which are responsible for directing and causing the practical work. Because these intellectual faculties persist through time more than their material creations, the idea has more reality than the thing.

When I see a concrete building and think about what it means to say it exists, the first questions that usually come to mind include why and how it was built, and what it is used for. I do not ordinarily ask how it is that I perceive it, because answering this question will tell me nothing about the meaning of the fact that the building exists. However its existence is clearly mind

dependent: it was created at the direction of human minds according to specific methods and for a definite purpose. So it appears that the existence of concrete does depend on the mind, but it is the mind of its creator rather than that of its perceiver. A result of these observations is that the question of what philosophy should recognise as real cannot be settled by mere empirical intuition alone, because excessive reliance on sense perception will give a distorted and even false understanding of the true nature of reality.

17. Berkeley

Far from supporting Bishop Berkeley's strange belief that matter does not exist, these arguments for idealism actually contradict his position. It is important to consider Berkeley's philosophy here, because for many people his ideas are synonymous with idealism and his errors condemn all idealism to irrelevance. Berkeley may have been correct in his claim that investigating the connections between ideas is the main task of philosophy, but he was mistaken in his conclusion from this that an idea can only be connected to another idea, and not to a thing. Most everyday ideas are connected to things, and they do represent and refer to real objects. While the idea has more reality than the matter, which is why idealism is true, it is ridiculous to suggest that matter has no reality.

Even if the only connections we can definitely discern are those between an idea and another idea, Berkeley is wrong to place such emphasis on the role of proof. The obsession with proof arises from within the framework of the scientific dichotomy between subject and object, but what is more important than such epistemological theorising is intuitive reflection about priorities and values, and the practice of ethics that follows from such reflection.

Neither being nor knowledge depend on perception, although both are essentially ideal in nature. The being of an object, like its idea, involves more than just matter, so being must be explained in idealist terms, but this does not mean that being is dependent on perception because it is an objective property of matter. Not even conscious knowledge in the mind of the subject is always dependent on perception. Much knowledge arises from the intelligent comprehension of words or numbers and has nothing to do with perception except as the eyes and ears are the media for ideas. For example in solving a mathematical problem, our knowledge is not of what we see, but of what the symbols before us represent.

So Berkeley's excessive regard for empirical perception led him to mistaken views about being and about knowledge. When it comes to meaning, which sits in the relation between subject and object and so cannot be satisfactorily explained within the dichotomous logic of science, Berkeley has no idea at all. The explanation that anything not perceived by a person must be perceived by God is no help, because it is no more than a statement of divine omniscience. His expedient use of God robs the original argument that to be is to be perceived of any significance, because if everything is perceived by God then this fact of being perceived can hardly be the distinguishing mark of existence, and Berkeley's claim that being is dependent on perception is absurd.

Difficulties arise however, when we go to the opposite extreme from Berkeley and say that ideas are only the names of things, which is the nominalist view. Many abstract concepts used in the formulation of ethical values and elsewhere in the history of ideas do not have a primary epistemological reference to a thing, because their meaning transcends their material use. Such ideas possess an independent universal significance, and as Plato saw, it is with ethical universals that the true importance of idealism emerges, because the content of the universal idea is more than the sum of its instances.

Berkeley's mistake was to confuse the relation between ideas and things by assuming a philosophical priority for epistemological speculation about the empirical nature of perception, and thereby assuming a perspective already completely dominated by the subject-object dichotomy of modern science. For example his work Principles of Human Knowledge seeks to rescue faith in God

from within the scientific model of knowledge, and completely fails to realise that the real meaning of ethical qualities such as justice and love cannot be found by using this positivistic perspective, because I cannot have a relationship of mutuality with something I am trying to dissect. Berkeley completely missed the centrality of ethics to the genuine spirit of idealism when he made God the guarantor of his epistemology: he abandoned the Biblical sense of the divine as grace and love and thereby lost the vision of holiness as a transformative power for ethical renewal.

The subject-object dichotomy is necessary for quantitative research, but is inappropriate when the qualitative ideas which underpin social values are the topic of study. To understand the meaning of ideas it is necessary to be involved as a participant in the process of their realisation, and what this requires is dynamic concern rather than detached observation. But Berkeley accepted Descartes' method of scepticism about the existence of material things, and so he expended enormous energy on a false answer to a false problem, the age old exercise of explaining how to prove the reality of the external world.

It is only from within the subject-object dichotomy that this desire for a proof of external reality can be comprehended. It assumes that the theory of empirical knowledge is the only possible starting point of philosophy, and so destroys any religious confidence in the transcendent ethical values of love and justice, values whose acceptance would undermine the need for such a proof. In the contrasting context of ethical idealism, a person's identity is partly constituted by relationship to others and to the divine, and an intimate connection to the world of human concern is a basic assumption in no need of proof. Because Berkeley is so preoccupied with the problem of how detached observation is possible, he ignores this alternative point of departure for philosophy. Instead he articulates a significant moment of confusion in the history of thought. Berkeley's schizophrenia was to genuinely hold a relationship with God to be the origin of understanding, but to then describe this understanding in terms of a theory of knowledge in which the only real instructive part played by God is to guarantee facts, but never values. So, by a trick of logic, Berkeley gave up ethics as a major concern of philosophy.

Dr Johnson attempted to refute Berkeley's idea that reality is all in the mind when he proved the reality of the external world by kicking a stone. The significance of this 'kick test' is that it demonstrates the inadequacy and confusion of Berkeley's position, but the use to which it has been put is not so constructive. Because Berkeley has been identified in the eyes of some analytical thinkers with idealism in general, Dr Johnson's method has been used by so called "common sense" to support a general denigration of spiritual reflection, and in some contexts it has been extrapolated into a total cynicism about the importance of abstract ethical ideals.

The 'kick test' is very limited in its application however, because while you can kick a person in the head, you certainly cannot kick them in the mind, let alone the soul. Rocks, cars, beds, footballs, perhaps even quasars and viruses, are all potentially kickable, but this method tells us virtually nothing about the nature of the reality we are confronting, let alone what the limits of the real are or why we should care about it. Such complex and profound issues requires a lot more thought and reflection before they can be adequately resolved. As I argued above, philosophy does not even begin until we get past realising that things exist and start asking what and why they are. The traditional view of idealism, which I am seeking to support here, is that reality must be understood in terms of a teleological purpose founded upon ethical ideals such as love and justice. The ideal qualities of the human soul, which include reason, imagination and will, are also fundamental to our world, and ultimately these manifestation of the spirit are more real than physical objects because it is through them that humanity comes into relation to the absolute.

18. Materialism

The conflicting argument, that matter alone is real, has often paraded itself as a refutation of idealism, but it does not stand up to critical analysis because of its incapacity to explain either the reality of human values or the nature of language. Materialism likes to call itself realism, and in this guise it has become the dominant ideology of modern secular society, but because its method degrades the value of the human mind and spirit to just another set of "masses in motion", it must be seriously doubted whether such a reductive philosophy is actually very realistic at all. Materialism is actually pernicious in its influence, because it sanctions the neglect of ethical values which ought to be at the centre of philosophy. These ethical values include not only the Platonic ideals of goodness, wisdom, justice, love, holiness, temperance, courage and truth, but also such varied modern ideals as ecology, progress, freedom, democracy, human rights and peace. None of these can be explained by materialism alone, because their meaning depends on an interconnectedness between things in which the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts, a paradox for materialism.

19. Christ

The refutation of materialism is the realisation that values which depend on the primacy of the human spirit are central to philosophy, and the great historic statement of these values is the Christian tradition of ethical idealism, a tradition that embodies some of the greatest achievements of the human spirit. The letters of Saint Paul are one such achievement, and they are a source well worth studying if we want to gain some understanding of how humankind has encountered the truth of life. Like those in the dialogues of Plato, the insights into the foundations of the spiritual perspective on the universe contained in Paul's Epistles display a profound understanding of the real ideals of philosophy.

In Paul's eyes, God definitely has the supremely instructive place within the human quest for understanding. At the same time, God casts light on the problems of ethics, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, in a way that completely destroys the possibility of understanding reality by means of the subject-object dichotomy of scientific materialism. Christian idealism demands a practice of justice and mercy in which the self is let go. The Christian outlook is oriented towards the possibility of an ideal transformation of the world from its current fallen state into a system where broken and alienated relationships will be restored by the love of God. This depends on the transcendent reality revealing itself by grace, rather than on the power of human beings to recover our lost harmony by our own unaided efforts. So Paul taught that in the Kingdom of Christ "God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians.15:28) when all things on earth are reconciled to God through the power of the cross (Colossians.1.20).

Immediately here we confront one of the most difficult notions at the centre of idealism, an idea anticipated by Plato and Parmenides, the monotheistic idea of God as all in all. "All in all" refers our thought to the vastest reality and the ultimate truth, whether this truth is within the history of time or beyond the universe in the eternal mind of God. In the human context, it indicates the hope for a situation where relationship with others becomes a universal reality and all artificial barriers between people are broken down. And so Paul teaches that the day will come when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This will only happen when people are turned from their ignorance and inspired by an understanding of truth, for "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). The point of these teachings is that God cannot yet be perceived as all in all, but this is only because of the inability of humanity to set our minds on the spirit. Instead, human selfishness and materialism make people rely on their own vision of reality in isolation. The true meaning and hope of Paul's idealism is that while people are now alienated from their original divine nature, if God were known as all in all, each individual would have a meaningful place within

the totality, because authentic spiritual relationships would be restored as the basis for human society.

The scientific method of complete dichotomy between subject and object is a symptom of this alienation, because science demands separation and classification rather than reconciliation. Science is a wonderful source of knowledge, but it is not absolute because it cannot satisfy the needs of the human soul for spiritual fulfillment, and because it falsely teaches that matter comes before spirit. However as Saint John taught, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." (John 1: 1&14) And so we can remain with the vision of the centrality of Christ as the greatest statement of the philosophy of idealism. If all things begin with the Word, then the spirit is the heart of truth, and the idea is the origin of all nature.

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