

## **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"<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Because "that in the face of which one has anxiety is Being in the world as such",<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Sein und Zeit: 181

<sup>2</sup> Sein und Zeit: 187

<sup>3</sup> Sein und Zeit: 186

<sup>4</sup> Sein und Zeit: 191

a whole.<sup>5</sup> 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”.<sup>6</sup> 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 anxiety” which “for human existence makes possible the openedness of beings as such”,<sup>7</sup> “the idea of logic itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning”.<sup>8</sup>

In such a mood, where “the world has the character of completely lacking significance”,<sup>9</sup> 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”.<sup>10</sup>

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”,<sup>11</sup> 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”,<sup>12</sup> 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”.<sup>13</sup> For values to become authentic, we must “liberate ourselves from those idols to which everyone is wont to go cringing”,<sup>14</sup> and genuinely interrogate each thing

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<sup>5</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 101 These four moods are discussed specifically in this context here.

<sup>6</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 101

<sup>7</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 106

<sup>8</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 107

<sup>9</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 186

<sup>10</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 189

<sup>11</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 100

<sup>12</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 111

<sup>13</sup> Introduction to Metaphysics: 5

<sup>14</sup> What Is Metaphysics?: 112

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”.<sup>15</sup> Our whole world seems to slip away, the structures of our security disintegrate, “everyday familiarity collapses”,<sup>16</sup> 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”.<sup>17</sup> 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.

## **7.2 Conscience**

Despite his statement that “in the context of the problems of this treatise the analysis of conscience is merely ancillary”,<sup>18</sup> and that “it will be investigated in a purely existential manner, with fundamental ontology as our aim”,<sup>19</sup> 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”,<sup>20</sup> based as they are on the unexpressed guiding dogma that whatever is must be

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<sup>15</sup> Basic Writings: 103

<sup>16</sup> Sein und Zeit: 189

<sup>17</sup> Sein und Zeit: 186

<sup>18</sup> Sein und Zeit: 290

<sup>19</sup> Sein und Zeit: 268

<sup>20</sup> Sein und Zeit: 275

present-at-hand. In this context Heidegger makes reference to the danger of “blurring the boundaries between phenomenology and theology, with damage to both”.<sup>21</sup> 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”.<sup>22</sup>

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”.<sup>23</sup>

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”.<sup>24</sup>

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 debt,<sup>25</sup> 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”.<sup>26</sup> The supposed ‘good conscience’ consists in the Pharisaical proclamation of one’s own goodness, something the genuinely good person is unwilling to affirm.<sup>27</sup>

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

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<sup>21</sup> Sein und Zeit: Div.2, Chapter 2, note vi.

<sup>22</sup> Sein und Zeit: 290

<sup>23</sup> Sein und Zeit: 269

<sup>24</sup> Sein und Zeit: 286

<sup>25</sup> The German word ‘Schuld’ covers both guilt and debt.

<sup>26</sup> Sein und Zeit: 292

<sup>27</sup> 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).

as care, says nothing in particular; it “discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent”.<sup>28</sup> 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”.<sup>29</sup> Such advice comes only from the ontic conscience, the public voice of the ‘they’,<sup>30</sup> 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”.<sup>31</sup> “Universal validity of standards and the claims to ‘universality’ which the ‘they’ and its common sense demand”,<sup>32</sup> 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”,<sup>33</sup> “from afar unto afar”,<sup>34</sup> arises from the sense in which “the call comes from me and yet from beyond me”.<sup>35</sup> “This interpretation does justice to the objectivity of the appeal for the first time by leaving it its subjectivity”.<sup>36</sup> 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.”<sup>37</sup> “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?”<sup>38</sup>

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”.<sup>39</sup> If Dasein

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<sup>28</sup> Sein und Zeit: 273

<sup>29</sup> Sein und Zeit: 279

<sup>30</sup> For a fuller discussion of the ‘they’, see the section entitled Ethics as Elan: Tensions in Being and Time.

<sup>31</sup> Sein und Zeit: 280

<sup>32</sup> Sein und Zeit: 395

<sup>33</sup> Sein und Zeit: 274

<sup>34</sup> Sein und Zeit: 271

<sup>35</sup> Sein und Zeit: 275

<sup>36</sup> Sein und Zeit: 278

<sup>37</sup> Sein und Zeit: 294

<sup>38</sup> Sein und Zeit: 277

<sup>39</sup> Sein und Zeit: 273

allows 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.<sup>40</sup> 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'."<sup>41</sup> 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";<sup>42</sup> "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".<sup>43</sup>

### **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'<sup>44</sup> 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

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<sup>40</sup> As we have observed above, Heidegger himself failed to display such existential courage when it came to even denouncing the Nazi Holocaust.

<sup>41</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 278

<sup>42</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 271

<sup>43</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 274

<sup>44</sup> see the section on 'worldhood' in the previous chapter for a fuller discussion.

matter to us".<sup>45</sup> 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".<sup>46</sup> The suggestion that the world's mattering to us is a fundamental existiale 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.

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'".<sup>47</sup>

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-

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<sup>45</sup> Sein und Zeit:137

<sup>46</sup> Sein und Zeit:124

<sup>47</sup> Sein und Zeit: 134

with develops in listening to one another".<sup>48</sup> "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."<sup>49</sup>

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".<sup>50</sup> "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".<sup>51</sup> Openness requires of us a 'concernful circumspection' operating in a "referential totality"<sup>52</sup>, and signifies a way of being,<sup>53</sup> 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".<sup>54</sup> Resoluteness, or decisiveness, is for Heidegger "that truth of Dasein which is most primordial because it is authentic", and is the comportment which arises from recognition of our finitude.<sup>55</sup> 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"<sup>56</sup> 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

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48 Sein und Zeit: 163

49 Sein und Zeit: 116

50 Sein und Zeit: 120

51 Sein und Zeit: 123

52 Sein und Zeit:76

53 in Heidegger's term a 'comportment'

54 Introduction to Metaphysics:21

55 Sein und Zeit: 297

56 Basic Writings:242



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 <sup>57</sup> 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!”<sup>58</sup>

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 argued<sup>59</sup> 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 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".<sup>60</sup> To be open it is necessary to be

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<sup>57</sup> see 7.5 below

<sup>58</sup> 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

<sup>59</sup> Poetry Language Thought: 161

<sup>60</sup> Basic Writings:223

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",<sup>61</sup> and of Being as in some way sacred,<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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",<sup>64</sup> Heidegger was criticising the human desire for control; his emphasis on the meditative over the calculative<sup>65</sup> 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

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<sup>61</sup> Basic Writings:210

<sup>62</sup> see Basic Writings:218

<sup>63</sup> 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.

<sup>64</sup> Basic Writings:199

<sup>65</sup> see esp. *Gelassenheit* (Discourse on Thinking)

interconnectedness<sup>66</sup> 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 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

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<sup>66</sup>Relevant to this is the discussion in the Introduction to Metaphysics (128) of logos as 'the primal gathering principle' in which all things find their unity.

is always relational.<sup>67</sup> 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 the *Introduction to Metaphysics* to define Being as 'that which emerges and endures',<sup>68</sup> 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'".<sup>69</sup> 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 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"<sup>70</sup> 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'".<sup>71</sup> 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

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<sup>67</sup> In terms of the process doctrine of Whitehead, meaning for Heidegger is a function of internal relations which always involve people.

<sup>68</sup> *Introduction to Metaphysics*:14 See also the discussion of Heidegger's use of the term 'physis' in subsection 5.5 on Stoicism.

<sup>69</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 70

<sup>70</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 65

<sup>71</sup> *Sein und Zeit*: 70

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".<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> It is such 'standing forth' that he defined as 'eksistence', a word he coined to describe the essence of 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

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<sup>72</sup> The discussion in Early Greek Thinking of the theme of fate (moira) with reference to Parmenides and of Anaximander, has some bearing here.

<sup>73</sup> Basic Writings: 211

ethics.”<sup>74</sup> 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*.”<sup>75</sup>

*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.”<sup>76</sup> 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”<sup>77</sup> 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”.<sup>78</sup> Freedom is related to truth because it is not just a property of the subject, “man’s moral endeavour on behalf of his ‘self’”,<sup>79</sup> but rather a bearing towards Being as a whole. Freedom is defined as “letting beings be”,<sup>80</sup> and as “engagement in the disclosure of beings”.<sup>81</sup> 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

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<sup>74</sup> Basic Writings: 235

<sup>75</sup> Basic Writings: 239

<sup>76</sup> Basic Writings: 204

<sup>77</sup> Basic Writings: 124

<sup>78</sup> Basic Writings: 125

<sup>79</sup> Basic Writings: 128

<sup>80</sup> Basic Writings: 127

<sup>81</sup> Basic Writings: 128

present moment of world history by the uprooting of all beings?"<sup>82</sup> 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 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 *eksistence* 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

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<sup>82</sup> Basic Writings: 232

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".<sup>83</sup>

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 all history determined by Europe",<sup>84</sup> 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 Time<sup>85</sup> that "the essence of man lies in his existence"<sup>86</sup> 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".<sup>87</sup> 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

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<sup>83</sup> Sein und Zeit: 207-8

<sup>84</sup> Basic Writings: 208

<sup>85</sup> Sein und Zeit: 42

<sup>86</sup> Basic Writings:205

<sup>87</sup> Basic Writings:214



the public realm decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible".<sup>88</sup> 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".<sup>89</sup> 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".<sup>90</sup> 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".<sup>91</sup> This ethical definition is derived from the essential goal of humanity to exist 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.

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

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<sup>88</sup> Basic Writings:197

<sup>89</sup> Basic Writings:199

<sup>90</sup> Basic Writings:198

<sup>91</sup> Basic Writings:200

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,<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup>

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".<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> The Myth of the State, p.292

<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> 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”.<sup>95</sup> 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”.<sup>96</sup> 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**

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<sup>95</sup> Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, p.412 (Akademie)

<sup>96</sup> Vienna Lecture, Crisis, p.289

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".<sup>97</sup> 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 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,<sup>98</sup> 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".<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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'.<sup>101</sup> 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".<sup>102</sup>

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:

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<sup>97</sup> Sein und Zeit: 192 (Page numbers refer to the pagination of the German original - in the margin of the English text)

<sup>98</sup> Sein und Zeit Chapter 6

<sup>99</sup> Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 245

<sup>100</sup> Sein und Zeit: 192

<sup>101</sup> Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 245

<sup>102</sup> Sein und Zeit: 196

“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”.<sup>103</sup>

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”.<sup>104</sup> ‘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 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”.<sup>105</sup> 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.

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<sup>103</sup> Sein und Zeit: 180

<sup>104</sup> Sein und Zeit: 197

<sup>105</sup> Sein und Zeit: 199

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".<sup>106</sup>

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 view<sup>107</sup> 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',<sup>108</sup> 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".<sup>109</sup> 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 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'.<sup>110</sup> "Concern with food and clothing, and the nursing of the sick body, are

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<sup>106</sup> Sein und Zeit:183

<sup>107</sup> Sein und Zeit: 199 - Seneca, Epistle 124

<sup>108</sup> Sein und Zeit: 146

<sup>109</sup> Sein und Zeit:146

<sup>110</sup> Sein und Zeit:122 - 'Fursorge'

forms of solicitude",<sup>111</sup> 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"<sup>112</sup> 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.

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<sup>111</sup> Sein und Zeit:121

<sup>112</sup> Sein und Zeit: 84

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 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 elan" 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-mind<sup>113</sup> and language, terms he used to designate what he saw as

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<sup>113</sup> 'Befindlichkeit' translated in *Being and Time* as 'state-of-mind', literally means 'how one finds oneself', or one's 'state of being'.



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 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".<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> 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

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 compartment 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 thesis<sup>115</sup> 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, 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**

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115 p. 4

**death** - a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the 'they' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious".<sup>116</sup>

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 ourself. "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'."<sup>117</sup> 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 Sartre<sup>118</sup> and Levinas,<sup>119</sup> 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",<sup>120</sup> 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'"<sup>121</sup> 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

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<sup>116</sup> Sein und Zeit:266

<sup>117</sup> Sein und Zeit:263

<sup>118</sup> Sartre, Being and Nothingness: 288 ff

<sup>119</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. 'Ethics as First Philosophy', in The Levinas Reader, Sean Hand (ed.), Basil Blackwell, 1989

<sup>120</sup> Martin Buber, Between Man and Man: 199

<sup>121</sup> Sein und Zeit:120

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 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",<sup>122</sup> 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."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Sein und Zeit:254

<sup>123</sup> Basic Writings: 101