

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.¹

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"² is Heidegger's basic answer to the problem of method and structure in ontology.

¹ The chapter "The Ethics of Place" expands on themes discussed in this chapter.

² Sein und Zeit: 13

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'".³ "Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am".⁴ 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".⁵ No other entity, whether animate or inanimate, has this 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."⁶ For Heidegger, "Dasein *is* its world existingly".⁷ As he later says, "This thesis is not a dogma, but a formulation of a problem".⁸

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."⁹ 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

³ Sein und Zeit: 7

⁴ Sein und Zeit: 53

⁵ Sein und Zeit: 11-12

⁶ Sein und Zeit: 8

⁷ Sein und Zeit: 364

⁸ Sein und Zeit: 436

⁹ Sein und Zeit: 281

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 way in which the question of Being has been neglected."¹⁰

"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".¹¹

"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".¹² "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".¹³

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

¹⁰ Sein und Zeit: 22

¹¹ Sein und Zeit:12

¹² Sein und Zeit:13

¹³ Sein und Zeit:371

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".¹⁴ 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".¹⁵

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",¹⁶ and, as we shall see, that any claim to truth must find its meaning and value in terms of this pre-existing human understanding. 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. 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.¹⁷ 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".¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ Another factor fitting the existential analytic for its place at the foundation of ontology is thus that the matter for

¹⁴ Sein und Zeit: 45

¹⁵ Sein und Zeit: 181

¹⁶ Sein und Zeit: 4

¹⁷ Sein und Zeit: 7

¹⁸ Sein und Zeit:59

¹⁹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 11

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.”²⁰

Such a questioning “opens up the process of Dasein in its essential relations . . . summoned to history and to a decision in history”.²¹ 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 ‘existentiale’²² of Being.

Many readers, notably Husserl,²³ 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”.²⁴ 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

²⁰ Introduction to Metaphysics: 202

²¹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 42. We will return to the defects inherent in this approach, when we consider Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis.

²² Sein und Zeit 44

²³ cf.: p. 120, Roger Waterhouse, A Heidegger Critique, Harvester Press, 1981

²⁴ Sein und Zeit 46

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".²⁵ 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".²⁶ 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 Aquinas' doctrine that the soul "is properly suited to come together with entities of any sort whatever."²⁷

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.

²⁵ Sein und Zeit: 13

²⁶ Sein und Zeit: 16

²⁷ Sein und Zeit: 14

Heidegger's discussion of Being²⁸ always 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'".²⁹ 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*".³⁰ As he put it in the 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'".³¹

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".³² 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 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".³³ 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

²⁸ At least in his early writings.

²⁹ Sein und Zeit: 22

³⁰ Sein und Zeit: 12

³¹ Introduction to Metaphysics: 175

³² Sein und Zeit: 38

³³ W. Dilthey, The Essence of Philosophy, transl. W.T.Emery. p.101, in The Existentialist Tradition, ed. N.Langiulli

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".³⁴ 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'³⁵ 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, 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

³⁴ Sein und Zeit: 108

³⁵ Sein und Zeit: 437

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".³⁶ 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".³⁷ 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"³⁸ of thought can only be restored through ontology, the discipline which was long known as "first philosophy". In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics,³⁹ 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".⁴⁰ 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

³⁶ Sein und Zeit: 246

³⁷ Sein und Zeit: 246

³⁸ Sein und Zeit:21

³⁹ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (KPM)1929. Indiana University Press, 1962, trans. J. Churchill

⁴⁰ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics: 11

element.⁴¹ 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".⁴²

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".⁴³

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'".⁴⁴ 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".⁴⁵

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

41 Basic Writings: 196

42 Basic Writings: 194

43 Sein und Zeit: 52

44 Basic Writings: 197

45 Basic Writings: 195

thought is "so filled with 'logic' that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction".⁴⁶

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",⁴⁷ more than on any other thinker,⁴⁸ and said that with Aristotle, "the philosophy of the Greeks ended in greatness".⁴⁹ 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 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?"⁵⁰ The question of the essence of logos takes us to the heart of Heidegger's project. The logos is defined⁵¹ as the original

46 Basic Writings: 226

47 Sein und Zeit: 214

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

49 Introduction to Metaphysics: 15

50 Basic Writings: 227

51 Introduction to Metaphysics: 128

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 relations⁵², 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.⁵³ 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".⁵⁴

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".⁵⁵ Aristotle's suggestion of a priority for poetic insight over ontic research is often regarded as involving an inherent error of method⁵⁶ 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".⁵⁷

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".⁵⁸

"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".⁵⁹

52 Sein und Zeit: 159

53 cf. Introduction to Metaphysics

54 Basic Writings:228

55 Basic Writings:240

56 Sein und Zeit: 1

57 Age of the World Picture: 120

58 Age of the World Picture: 125

59 Sein und Zeit: 52

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"⁶⁰ 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".⁶¹ 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".⁶²

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?"⁶³ appears ontically absurd, yet it provides the motive force

⁶⁰ Sein und Zeit: 16

⁶¹ Sein und Zeit: 11

⁶² What Is Metaphysics?: 111

⁶³ Introduction to Metaphysics: 1

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 distinguished from both the transcendental virtues, such as duty, love and justice, enjoyed 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 Carnap⁶⁴ ridiculed Heidegger's inaugural address at Freiburg,⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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",⁶⁷ he argued, while positivism, itself the product of this atrophy, sets aside all ultimate questions as unanswerable. In its belief that

⁶⁴ Carnap: *Erkenntnis* (1929)

⁶⁵ , entitled What Is Metaphysics?. *Basic Writings* 91-113

⁶⁶ (Cf. Nietzsche, Book 1)

⁶⁷ What Is Metaphysics?: 96

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.⁶⁸ 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".⁶⁹

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 are covered over and submerged by people who accept partial or false understandings of reality as the only possibility. The ethical point is that 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".⁷⁰

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

⁶⁸ Basic Writings: 226

⁶⁹ Basic Writings: 227

⁷⁰ IM p.8

the only way of thinking".⁷¹ 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".⁷² The thoughtlessness of calculative technical thought, which "never stops, never collects itself",⁷³ 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".⁷⁴ 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 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

⁷¹ Discourse on Thinking: 56

⁷² Discourse on Thinking: 54

⁷³ Discourse on Thinking: 46

⁷⁴ Basic Writings: 195

the transcendent spirit has no place in the construction of systematic ontology, indeed, Heidegger observes that "world is always world of the spirit"⁷⁵; 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.

⁷⁵ Introduction to Metaphysics 45