

Introduction

We are ending this chapter on Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher who followed some of the radical insinuations of Nietzsche, especially, his theory of nihilism.

The reason for ending this chapter on a brief exposition of Heidegger's rather enigmatic philosophy is both philosophical and historical. On the one hand, Heidegger is a challenging philosopher; the linguistic and rhetorical devices he employed in all his works continue to defy the best translation possible in English. Perhaps, it is mark of a genuine philosophy that inaugurates itself in the very spontaneity and originality of language akin to a poetic expression. In some of his writings, he insinuates that philosophy is about understanding the elementary expressions of poetry which is closest to the original language of life. On the other hand, Heidegger is a controversial philosopher. His collaboration and later his membership to the Nazi party were well documented. This aspect of Heidegger's life, however, can implicate philosophy itself, not only the philosopher who supported Hitler. For this reason, understanding Heidegger's thought can bring us into an awareness of how philosophy can be seduced into the exercise of absolutist power. Some of his critics detected in his works, especially, his support of the Nazi cause, a veritable fascination with Nietzsche (despite openly rejecting him) who once remarked, "I assess a man by the quantum of power and abundance of his will" (Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, p. 206). For his part, however, Heidegger would argue, dismissing the charge of bending to Nietzsche's rhetoric, that "man...is all the more mistaken the more exclusively he takes himself, as subject, to be the standard of all beings" (Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 135). Obviously, Heidegger remained ambivalent throughout his philosophical career.

Heidegger lamented the sorry condition of humanity during his time. Like Nietzsche, he attributed its moral, political and cultural corruption to nihilism. But unlike Nietzsche, he was more ambivalent toward the alternative of pursuing a transvaluative nihilism, of a kind of human intervention proposed by the Overman. This is due perhaps to the lessons he learned from his dalliance with Nazism that orchestrated the worst genocide in the history of humanity. After the defeat of the Nazis, Heidegger went back to his earlier formulations in his phenomenal book *Being and Time* and worked on a reexamination of the dangers of a philosophy of subjectivity, a philosophy placing enormous emphasis on the potential of the subject to change the world, or worst, demand the world to represent its own individualistic goals and aspirations. In his own admission the formulations he arrived in *Being and Time* abounded in subjectivist themes, according untold powers on the subject or 'being' in understanding its own history, its own participation in the stream of time. Time, therefore, may be appropriated by the subject as it wills, since Man alone can chart his own destiny, a destiny that takes shape only in time. And because Time may be an extension of being, of the subject itself, Man may usurp the place accorded God—God being the originator of Time itself, the benefactor of History.

Heidegger was born 1889 in Messkirsh, Baden. He studied theology and philosophy at the University of Freiburg where he was an assistant to Edmund Husserl, the founder of

phenomenology. Later he taught at another university, the University of Marburg. When he returned to Freiburg, he replaced Husserl's position as professor of philosophy. Heidegger's reputation was tarnished with his collaboration with the Nazis in 1933 and 1934. After the defeat of the Nazis, he was stripped of his rank and was banned to teach in 1945. He retired in 1959 and died in 1976.

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This chapter contains three unit readings on Heidegger and a contemporary philosopher (Gianni Vattimo), the American philosopher John Dewey, and Karl Marx.

Except for the unit reading on Heidegger and Vattimo, the rest of the unit essays are chosen outside of the obvious reference to Heidegger which this chapter discusses. There are reasons for this decision to take them up. As for incorporating the essay on Dewey, it is decided that an article that can accompany the seriousness and heaviness of Heidegger's philosophy is essential to give the reader a breathing space. But, this is not to create an impression that Dewey is not a credible match to the seriousness of Heidegger. If the article on Dewey is sufficient to take the reader back to the ground of reality, having made to bear with the truly enigmatic philosophy of the German thinker who is being compared to Hegel for abstruseness and high erudition, then certainly Dewey is an important route in terms of the study of the history of philosophy. For no philosophy can sustain abstruseness. A philosophy that chooses to remain abstract is not a philosophy. The article on Dewey is just enough to remind us of the tendency in Heidegger to linger in abstraction. As for the article on Marx, which is truly rewarding for the present volume for its juiciness and creative appeal, which adds a distinct flavor to the over-plan of this book, it is conceded that Marx continues to appeal to the contemporary world. It is true that Marxism has already lost its glory. But there is a resurgence of understanding Marx in contemporary philosophy owing to the fact that the same problems he exposed during his time continue to bear down on the present. The movement Marx helped established may have seen the last light of its days, but the thinker behind otherwise inherently destructible structures remains alive, especially, in the hearts of people who wish for genuine change. In the essay, the author (Mr. Ben-hur Bobis) created a fiction of Marx returning from the dead and is allowed to write his 'last note' or his observations of what is happening at present before he rejoins with his colleagues in the afterlife. The appeal of the essay rests, among other things, primarily on its attempt to resituate Marx within the current debate on the future of humankind in the midst of the wave of globalisation whose early beginnings Marx saw in his time. Lastly, the essay, without as much as declaring its affinity, relates to Heidegger's critical view of technology which, to him, had worsened the human condition.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this chapter, the students are expected to:

1. Acquire a basic knowledge of the popular contributions of Martin Heidegger to contemporary philosophy and how these contributions shape the continuing development of the concept of Man;
2. Understand important technical terms that abound in Heidegger's works constituting his major philosophical arguments, specifically, in relation to his radical concept of Man, and;
3. Be able to situate Heidegger within the continuing development of contemporary philosophy that heavily draws on his enduring works as a thinker and, to some degree, as a poet.

Unit 1 Heidegger and the Reconstruction of Philosophy

Martin Heidegger shares with Nietzsche the merit of being one of the most read, if not ambivalently praised thinkers of the 20th century. Nietzsche became controversial for his alleged, though many would say, unwitting endorsement of the ideals of German National Socialism which gave rise to the most horrible atrocity in human history performed in such an organized fashion and with a highly rationalized scheme that it made the whole enterprise of defending rationalism suspect in the period that followed World War II. There is no doubt that Hitler believed himself to be carrying out the most rationalistic solution to the problems of his own time. His ideals, however, may be found sharing some of the radical insights of Nietzsche whose declaration that *God is dead* (or the collapse of moral reason and thereof the breakdown of Optimism for the Future of Humanity) allowed for the intervention of the vanguard, forward-looking human agency that imposes on itself the mission to change the world, and 'save' Man. Nietzsche offered the solution of the *transvaluation of values* to the desperate nihilism of humanity abandoned by God, by hope. Nevertheless, with the vanguardism of the presumptive Overman, the superhuman agency (like Hitler believed himself to be) the world would instead be anticipating its final destruction, its doom, its devastation before apparently the new order would rise. But it is not difficult to imagine that this new order is a non-order owing to its profoundly utopian character. The effect would be delaying the end, the goal of reaching the threshold between the old and the new, precisely because the end is not coming. A utopia, in short, is unachievable. But for Nietzsche as for the Overman who both believe that the world can be anybody's fiction, the fiction of the new order must be continually refashioned and reinvented in the guise of the 'eternal recurrence of the same'—Nietzsche's metaphysics of the world. *Mutatis mutandis*, it is a world that cannot be changed except in the private musings of the philosopher, or the political metaphysician of the likes of Hitler, and of more contemporary figures such as Stalin, Pol Pot, and Milosevic. The result would be forcing an imagined reality to mature at the expense of a living materiality, of the objective actuality of

the real world, or the actual random contingencies that naturally preempt things from insinuating themselves into a stable congruence, an illusion of unity as endorsing a certain complacency that is taken from a false view of necessity or the inevitability of what is made to appear as true, certain or reliable.

Heidegger's *project of fundamental ontology*, the so-called destructive retrieval of the history of the development of the conception of *Being* (that fundamental concept around which all knowledge operates, such as rhetorically emphasized in the view that "Something *is*, Nothing *is not*," or the question "Why 'something' rather than 'nothing'"?), aims to address, among other concerns, the condition of humanity that has become forgetful of the fact that reality or truth is what one makes of its wish for stability and permanence. Such wish precisely informed the traditional conception of Being as the permanent foundation of all questions bearing the quest for certainty and the origin of things, of life, and the world in general. This whole tradition started with the Greek philosopher Parmenides (*Being Is, Nothing Is Not*) who was eventually opposed by another thinker arguing for the opposite—that *Being is in fact a Becoming of Itself*. Heraclitus opposed the metaphysics of permanence of Parmenides and proposed instead a metaphysics of contradiction. But, even for Heidegger, these two opposing paradigms are saying the same thing, which would have profound consequences on the way Nietzsche, for instance, viewed reality as an arbitrary fiction—whether it is fixed or eternally changing, it is the same reality that is allowed to operate on forgetfulness of its fictional nature. The task of fundamental ontology is to retrace the nihilistic or obliviousness of the origin of the conception of Being, which in the course of human progress, had been translated into the concept of God, History, and the Future. In all these derivations of the concept of Being, the idea of permanence, immutability, and stability is retained, thus with God we can achieve eternity, with History stability, and with the Future the certainty of Hope). (In Chapter I, we had discussed how, for instance, the Greek concept of *Logos* was translated in Christianity as the Word, and thereof as God. The Gospel of John can be considered an extension of the history of Being that the Greeks initiated).

Nietzsche may be viewed as a pioneer in advocating a fundamental ontology in his own so-called destructive retrieval of the history of the development of the concept of truth which ultimately he consigned to the act of will to power. It is 'destructive retrieval' in the sense that it retrieves history and destroys its presumptions which have congealed into illusions of truth. In the case of Heidegger, fundamental ontology retraces the history of how the concept of Being was utilized from the ancients up to more recent times, if only to demonstrate that it was flawed in the beginning. In the next discussion that immediately follows, we will present Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, which would lead him to almost the same predicament as Nietzsche endured.

The Project of Fundamental Ontology

In his famous work *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertook to define his project. His own subjective understanding of the purpose of his own work, however, may be obscured by the author's attachment to his own creation. But a more objective view of the purpose of Heidegger's work is not unavailable, drawing on the larger historical background within

which Heidegger assumed the task of the philosopher bent on correcting the mistakes of the tradition in which he originally belonged.

“The contemporary reader of Heidegger’s first systematic work was seized by the vehemence of its passionate protest against the secured cultural world of the older generation and the leveling of all individual forms of life by the industrial society, with its ever stronger uniformities and its techniques of communication and public relations that manipulated everything...The existential seriousness with which he brought the age-old riddle of death to the center of philosophical concern, and the force with which his challenge to the real ‘choice’ of existence smashed the illusory world of education and culture, disrupted well-preserved academic tranquility” (Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 214-215).

Intrinsic to Heidegger’s work described by Gadamer (his student) by way of situating him within the historical ferment he confronted are two basic directions: 1) Heidegger’s accusation that traditional philosophy (represented by metaphysics) had excessively preoccupied itself with discovering the nature or essence of ‘entities’ or ‘beings’ led him to recast metaphysics into the light of the fundamental difference between ‘being’ and ‘Being’ itself—the awareness of such difference metaphysics was unaware, if not purposefully ignored, which Heidegger blamed for the rise of manipulative technology, and; 2) against the background of the whole tradition of metaphysics conferring untold powers on the human being, which he called *Dasein* (in German), such as the privileged access to understanding the nature and essence of ‘being’, Heidegger sought to replace the heritage of a subject-centered West with the notion of a human being as an embodied subjectivity, which he also called a *being-in-the-world*, with emphasis on the fundamental limitation of the human subject. As for the actual employment of the second direction to which Heidegger attached his project of fundamental ontology, we have Heidegger admitting his own limitations for failing to rid even his own project of the temptations of subjectivism that he originally aimed to destroy. In fact, he promised a third part of his two-part volume *Being and Time*, tentatively titled *Time and Being*, designed to rectify the subjectivist intimations of the early parts. However, it did not come to fruition (Grondin, 1995). Had he finished the third part, Heidegger would have successfully laid out the missing link of his argument in the first work. With ‘time’ prefiguring ‘being, instead of the reverse (being prefiguring time such as the title of the book itself *Being and Time*), Heidegger thought the whole tradition of philosophy since the Greeks would give way to a new understanding of the real paradox of existence, that is, it is in the very limitation in which *Dasein* finds itself, the limitation that the world imposes on it, where it can fully exercise its power to transcend other less fundamental limitations. In other words, *Dasein* cannot transcend the world as the first and final limitation on its freedom. Nevertheless, between life and death, between Being and Nothing (in which alone an actual livable ‘life’ is possible) the human being can exercise its transcendence and chart its immediate destiny, exercise care over its own individual life-projects (care is *Sorge* in German), or gratify its existential desires but still fundamentally limited by the fact that desire knows no end. Yet, desire would meet its true end in the absence of pain, which means death, or the absolute state of nothingness.

Death, as it is with the purpose of Time, is the fundamental limitation that impinges on Dasein. Both Death and Time are analogous in terms of their common pressure on individual existence: they force Dasein to worry about its Future, or worst, worry about its true Origin, its beginning in the Past. In terms of Dasein's knowledge of its origin, Heidegger argued that Dasein can best achieve self-realization within the context of becoming aware instead of its fundamental thrown-ness, its virtually being abandoned in the world by unknown powers. (Heidegger called this condition of Dasein as a *being-thrown-into-the-world*). To exact too much demand on oneself to search for "where one came from" is for Heidegger (as for the philosopher Schopenhauer) tantamount to suicide. Rather something of a metaphysical suicide, such as in forcibly bending reality to betray its own secrets. (A learned or properly informed Dasein would choose to suffer in silence instead). This form of suicide has definable equivalent in the ambition of a dictator to force the world to kneel on its knees. In other words, a Dasein humbled by its own powerlessness in the face of the unpredictable, the unexplainable or the irretrievable, would not be tempted to impose its will on the world which in itself can cause Dasein to worry much and thereof stir inner conflicts and desperation. Dasein would rather choose to keep its distance from the world yet in a manner that encourages it to experience the world, its glory, its pain, its absurdity, all in vivid perspectives each time it tries to examine the world with the fresh eyes of a curious being. This way the world is continually re-created, but so does Dasein that creates and re-creates itself in the process of experiencing the paradox that defines its relation to the world.

Through a paradoxical staying away from the world, Dasein achieves self-realization; by taking stock of itself before nothingness, before the unpredictable and the unknown, which altogether represent the existential burden of the possibility of Death in and through Time, the human subject is left to decide for itself in which to decide is to accommodate or obey an authentic existential imperative upon Man caught in the perennial absurdity that one's decisions are not guaranteed of fruitful or positive outcomes. Still, decision-making exhibits the power of Dasein. Heidegger says:

"Dasein understands itself in its own *superior power*, the power of its finite freedom, so that in this freedom, which "is" only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment to its having done so" (*Being and Time*, p. 436).

This decision must be well informed by what Heidegger called the "call of conscience" (sections 274-280 of *Being and Time*) about which Heidegger's explanation was rather obscure. He describes *conscience* as something that "discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent," or that "simply holds itself aloof from any way of becoming known" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 316; p. 319). Heidegger's ambiguity in this aspect is not really difficult to unmake—the privative character of obeying one's conscience has something to do with the pressures of inauthenticity or the demands of banality and carelessness which stem from one's immersion in the immediate and urgent concerns of everyday existence. The everyday world is a world that thrives, for the most part, according to Heidegger, on "idle talks," "gossips," etc. In other words, distancing from the world rids

oneself of the inauthentic expressions of emergency, urgency and immediacy which altogether develop and legitimate an image of life that is subservient to banality and short-lived goals. A serious Dasein, as Heidegger is wont to promote, is a being that lives out its “openness to *Being*” (Origin of the Work of Art, p. 67), instead of wallowing in the immediate consumption of the everyday expressions of the false essence of ‘*beings*’ (that is, things, circumstances, issues, etc., which are defined by trivial or superficial interests). But, before we complete a presentation of this line of reasoning in Heidegger, let us digress for a while to present his concept of the *ontological difference* (between ‘Being’ and ‘beings’) which informs the kernel of his partly defensible concept of authenticity, give and take some of its implications.



The Ontological Difference

Roughly put, the ontological difference between *Being* (the originary foundational source of disclosed and discoverable knowledge) and *being* (that is, the ordinary conception of what makes a thing as it is, or that of which it is understood as something with a positive value) lies on the very constitution of Dasein itself, namely, its capacity to transcend in the sense of exercising its freedom to disclose Being itself and by disclosing thus it reveals its difference with various accounts of the essence of Being. Suffice it to say that Being is the original source of utterance, of language itself, while many forms of expressions which have found themselves in language are articulations of the same ‘being of beings’ (or Being itself). Contemporary philosopher such as Richard Rorty, for instance, talks about the Heideggerian notion of Being, the being of beings:

“[Since]...words of Being...are just abbreviations for whole vocabularies, whole chains of interlocked metaphors, it is better to say that *Being is what vocabularies are about*. Being’s poem is the poem about Being, not the poem Being writes. For Being cannot move a finger unless Dasein does, even though there is nothing more to Dasein than Being’s poem (Rorty, 1991, p. 37).

If there is an ontological difference between Being and its various manifestations in language, it is that Being has been the subject of many different interpretations. It must be pointed out that Being does not interpret itself; it is Man or Dasein that does the interpretation. (The same can be applied, for instance, to our understanding of God. God does not interpret nor speak of Himself. He speaks through various signs, signs which become intelligible only through the interpretations that Man makes of them). Nevertheless, if there is one primordial interpretation that Man or Dasein must have originally made of Being, it is that, according to Heidegger, the very ‘understanding of the world—the world towards which Dasein...always comports itself’ (Ibid, p. 119) counts as the most fundamental. In other words, Dasein is predisposed to understand and interpret the world; it is this activity that fundamentally defines its being-in-the-world, its being-thrown-into-the-world, its unhappy consciousness of the fact that the world is originally without meaning. The awareness of such constitutes, for Heidegger, the ontological

difference between Being and beings, namely, “the intentional constitution of Dasein’s compartments [disclosing, originary transcendence] is precisely the ontological condition of the possibility of every and any [discovering...] transcendence” (Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 65). To simplify, the ontological difference is the very act of disclosing performed by Dasein. In the process of disclosing the world to which it fundamentally relates, Dasein also differentiates, sorts out, divides, subtracts, multiplies, and adds continually, thereby, augmenting Dasein’s perspectives of the world that originally appeared before it like an unsolvable paradox, or an enigma needing no resolution.

What constitutes the forgetfulness of this primordial fact (which in turn negatively encourages an inauthentic relation to the world) is that Dasein, for quite some time, has continued to ignore its responsibility to its own intentional power, the power to make illusions of which humanity has been made to forget that they are not to be taken for absolute truths. The worst case would be a type of Dasein, or a type of a human subject that usurps all the power of Dasein as *humanity* to advance its own subjective interest. When the rest of humanity-Dasein is ignorant of even their own power to contest the power of a presumptive Dasein (such as the Overman), the illusions they absorb and consume become totally disengaged from their fundamental rootedness in the inventive or creative capacity of the human being. In other words, these illusions are taken for truths, fossilized and understood as artifacts of an irreversible phenomenon that took place in the past and of which the present has no power to control let alone reverse its course. Doesn’t this relate to some types of belief-systems which operate on the illusion of infallibility, of permanence, and universality?

The Openness of Dasein

After exposing the ontological difference, we are now ready to return to our discussion of the notion of the ‘call of conscience’.

Heidegger argued that conscience can only call upon an *authentic self*, that self of Dasein that refrains from the pressures of the world, its corruption and banality. By refraining from the publicness of the world in various guises of immediacy and short-sightedness of human visions, and the parochialism of opinions about the world itself, Dasein is said to exhibit an “authentic-ability-to-be” (*Being and Time*, p. 369), that is, to be one’s true self in taking up the “authenticity of a Dasein’s being as *care*” (Ibid). Caring for one’s self is taking stock of one’s true capacity to defy the world and its inauthentic issues and interests. True self, as Socrates would have admonished his pupils to accomplish rather than pursue the lofty ideas of cosmology, can be achieved only by hearing the call of conscience. This call is that of the ability to be a self in *self-care*, a kind of caring that induces Dasein to the fundamental awareness of the contingency of Time, its unpredictability, such that making decisions or maintaining a resolution vis-à-vis the absurdity of life in general brings the human subject into the primordial awareness that *nothing is guaranteed* and therefore one must take care of oneself, be cautious and discreet in everyday dealings, or practice prudence in everything. This led Heidegger to argue further that *care* reveals the temporal constitution of Dasein’s being (Ibid, p. 416). With care, Dasein becomes aware of

the flux of Time. And because it does not wish to be overrun by the stream, Dasein takes care of its decisions, actions, and motions through taking responsibilities for its own compartments. We do take care ourselves in order that we may be prepared for the inevitable or the final blow of chance, or the accident that underlies the movement of life itself.

Also, for Heidegger, care defies the onslaught of anxiety that Dasein may feel in the face of the absurd, or the apparent lack of meaning in the world amidst the desperation it suffers. Heidegger warns of anxiety: “Anxiety discloses an insignificance of the world; and this insignificance reveals the nullity of that with which one can concern oneself” (Ibid., p. 393). Incidentally, Heidegger has the same thing in mind when he warned of an irresponsible interpretation of the death of God wherein the world orphaned by the divine is now usurped by the Overman. In his essay *The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead* Heidegger says:

“Overman never enters at all into the place of God; rather the place into which his willing enters is another realm belonging to another grounding of what is, in its other Being. This other Being of what is, meanwhile—and this marks the beginning of modern metaphysics—has become *subjectness*. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 100)

In other words, one who is totally consumed by anxiety (that is, *not mastering anxiety* which proves essential for bringing Dasein into “the mood for a possible resolution” [Ibid, p. 344]) may force the world, which he views as lacking in significance, to bend to his own wishes and capricious goals in order that it may assume significance (to *himself*). When therefore the world assumes the significance the Overman gives of it, the world loses its connection to Time. Nietzsche may be right in arguing that with the death of God and the usurpation of the Overman, the world simply assumes an eternal repetition, precisely, losing touch with time. Time is no longer moving, so to speak. But Heidegger was quick to clarify that for lack of care, the human subject undergoes self-destruction. And the worst case of this self-destructive act of the human being is to elect himself to Godhood, to a supreme form of being that is above Time, the messianic complex that underlies extreme forms of desperation, the delusion of grandeur. Going back to the notion of the ‘call of conscience’, this is precisely what Heidegger wished to promote—to heed one’s conscience as of a Dasein’s sense of “being-guilty” (*Being and Time*, p. 323). As a being-in-the-world, Dasein is already guilty of making the world whose fundamental corruptibility is therefore of its own rather accidental making (because Dasein is thrown into the world whose very cause escapes comprehension). By this awareness of primordial guilt, Dasein can be taught to avoid forcing his will upon others (thus the possibility of morality), upon the world itself which can become more corruptible in the wake of the act of world-mastery, of the occupation of the world itself, as in the examples provided by fascism and dictatorship and the ecclesiastical defense of the right of the clergy to supervise the secular affairs of the public (during the height of the supremacy of the Church).

The Paradox of Human Decision

Here, we will be concluding our presentation of Heidegger's philosophy with the idea of human resoluteness or resolve which roughly means "being free for death" (Ibid., p. 435).

Heidegger writes of the idea of resoluteness in *Being and Time*: "The resoluteness intended in *Being and Time* is not the deliberate action of a subject, but the opening up of [Dasein], out of its captivity in that which is, to the openness of being" (Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 67). Insofar as human decisions are not guaranteed of positive outcomes, the resoluteness of Dasein can also be considered a form of irresoluteness, an indecision that is paradoxically assumed in making decision. Resoluteness would mean here the sheer ability to make decisions. But Dasein does not make decisions with a certain finality in mind, but only in the light of choosing its own self as the absurd guarantor of the rightfulness of its own decision. The ultimate test case for Dasein to choose itself is when faced with the possibility of death. By choosing itself, it chooses to assume responsibility for its own actions vis-à-vis the general condition of unpredictability. It can only choose itself for others would be equally held in their own indecisions. However, by choosing itself Dasein also feels 'being-guilty' for others as well as for the world in general. *For others* because Dasein is lost in its own world, almost in ignorance of the existence of others. *For the world* because Dasein is part of it, in fact, part of its own corruption and desperation. So by choosing itself Dasein takes responsibility for its own actions which may impinge on others even unintentionally. When faced with its own responsibility, the human subject is therefore already responsible for others. Being-guilty may thus come unnoticed, or unknown to Dasein at first. But through a profound awareness of its being-in-the-world, the world being a world of *I*'s and others, Dasein assumes responsibility for humankind. Only, this awareness must not be allowed to reach a point at which Dasein desires to become an Overman arrogating the responsibility to chart the destiny of others. Heidegger is clear on one point: to be responsible is to be an authentic being as care. Care, as we have discussed, brings the human being into an awareness of the virtues of prudence and discretion in one's decisions.

By an awareness of Time, as it is of Death—which exhibits the sheer unpredictability of time itself, Dasein withdraws from the temptation to fall back on its previous *irresponsible* dispositionality, at a point in which it is lost in captivity of the banality of the world in that it is *held back from deciding authentically for its own self* due to the immediacies that overpower it, or the uniformity that characterizes its following the rule of the majority, in short, the inauthenticity of its immersion in the everyday world that constitutes a kind of irresolution that is ripe for desperation and decadence. No doubt, Hitler had easily convinced the German public to support his cause, a desperate public that was held back from making sensible decisions on its fate instead of supporting a horrible solution to the problems that confronted them. It may also be said that for failure to accept the possibility of death, the human being has already lost its fundamental connection to time, time being an ultimate limit to human ambitions, to existence itself. Death as an ultimate end of time teaches us to value life before it is terminated. It teaches us why humans need to love one another, to care for one another, to defend one another against threats to its future.

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Above all, Heidegger generally situates the paradox of human decisions within the context of the *history of Being*. Heidegger observes:

“In the history of Western thinking, indeed continually from the beginning, what is (*das Seiende*) is thought in reference to Being: yet the truth of Being remains unthought, and not only is that truth denied to thinking as a possible experience, but Western thinking itself, and indeed in the form of metaphysics, expressly, but nevertheless unknowingly, veils the happening of that denial” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, p. 21).

Heidegger remained ambiguous in all his writings. One example of this ambiguity is the inexactness of his presentation of concepts which are important to his own project; nonetheless, an inexactness that is richly insinuated as to mean, for instance, that Being remains unthought by virtue of a human strategic decision to keep it away from full disclosure. This obviously has something to do with the strategic involvement of *Being* in the machinations of power. *Being*, therefore, is originally an objective actuality, not as an independent objective entity such as regarded in metaphysics but as tactically presumed and assumed by social actors who find their situations partly yet influentially structured by past decisions, and deliberations of preceding generations which they do not have absolute control to reverse, or completely negate which precisely warrant the view that “the truth of Being remains unthought.” For instance, the strategic drafting of the history of nations by colonial powers beginning in the late 17th century so overpowered natural religious interests, or so-called savage morality or natural religion, that the modern emphasis on one God, or monotheism effectively contrived a theological flattening of differences under a singular compelling category of universal sameness. This flattening is enforced and propagated by epistemic institutions, by so-called speculative sciences dominant in the 18th century such as metaphysics, which found its counter-part for the God of organized religion in *Being*, viewed as the ultimate source of reality. In other words, to some extent, even our understanding of God is a result of a conscious and deliberate employment of the term Being. However, since this employment is beyond our present capacity to change or reverse, owing to the rootedness of its usage in social institutions, practices, norms, and conducts, which have been determining people’s lives for centuries, we tend to ignore the actual objective history that has borne its usage. God therefore becomes a self-evident reality, a taken-for-granted fact. When power as a compelling and invasive human initiative tampers with the contingency of things, the result is an ordered world that is necessarily forgetful of its own contingent hence strategic nature, which precisely provide an objective correlative for Heidegger’s concept of the “forgetfulness of Being.” Heidegger’s conceptualization of the unthought of the truth of *Being* is closely linked to power: the unthought is enforced and humanity has forgotten its arbitrary origin.

The paradox of *Being* (which fundamentally establishes the paradox of how we go about living our individual lives) is therefore not intrinsic to *Being* itself; it is intrinsic to social power.

Definition of Terms

Authenticity—in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, authenticity is described in various nuances of expressions; it may mean “constancy of the self,” (p. 463); “potentiality-for-Being-one’s-Self” (p. 220) or the potentiality of the self to understand fully the paradox of life, which Being represents, which also means the possibility of understanding the ‘being’ of oneself; or in general, the openness of Dasein towards Death, which reveals the temporal constitution of its intentional comportment. In all these nuances, authenticity is achieved when Dasein fully comprehends the antinomies of its being-in-the-world.

Care—that is, “making its own being an issue for it” (Dreyfus, p. 240) as, for instance, when Dasein takes responsibility for its own self; Dasein takes care of itself in the way that it strives to bring itself to the realization of its potentiality-for-Being-one’s-Self.

Comportment—simply, the way in which somebody behaves.

Dasein—Heidegger’s term for Man; *Da* (in German) roughly means the ‘world’, whereas *Sein* means ‘being’, hence Dasein is being-in-the-world.

Inauthenticity—the opposite of authenticity, chiefly characterized by Dasein’s inability to overcome its lostness in the publicness of everyday existence which retards its understanding of the paradox of life.

Study Guide for Discussions

1. What is fundamental ontology? How did Heidegger pursue the project of fundamental ontology in relation to the history of Western philosophy from the Greeks to recent times? What were his foundational premises?
2. How is the project of fundamental ontology related to Nietzsche’s method of destructive retrieval?
3. According to Heidegger, what had gone wrong in Western philosophy started by the Greeks? What were his two major premises which launched his project in *Being and Time*?

4. What is meant by staying away from the world to understand the world better?
5. Why is Dasein also called a being-in-the-world?
6. What is the ontological difference? How does it employ a philosophy of Man/Dasein?
7. Why is Dasein also called a being-towards-death?
8. What is the function of Time in the realization of the potentiality of Dasein to understand itself?
9. Why is anxiety, despite its tendency to bring down the self, essential in Dasein's discovery of its potentiality to make decisions in the face of life's absurdity?
10. What makes Death interchangeable with Time as far as *Being and Time* is concerned?
11. Explain why care is essential for Dasein's self-development. How does care avoid the tendency of the self to arrogate the freedom of others?
12. What makes Dasein guilty already by simply being-in-the-world?
13. What were Heidegger's criticisms of the philosophy of subjectivity?
14. What is the 'call of conscience'? How may we relate it to the concept of resolution?
15. How does 'everyday existence' generate inauthentic dispositions?
16. How can Dasein live in authenticity?
17. What is the consequence of forgetting the ontological difference between Being and being? Relate your answer to the metaphysics of subjectivity criticized by Heidegger.
18. What is meant by "Being cannot move a finger unless Dasein does"?
19. What do you think is the kind of lifestyle must Dasein follow in order to live in authenticity? Would it require a return to a state of nature, as Rousseau suggested? How may you relate this lifestyle to the aesthetic life of a poet, for instance?
20. Despite Heidegger's criticisms of the philosophy of subjectivity which accords untold powers on the human subject, why do you think Heidegger fell into the same trap of subjectivism as proven by his collaboration with the Nazis?
21. What is the relation of 'authenticity' to 'care'?
22. What makes Dasein's finite freedom a superior power in itself?
23. How is question no. 22 related to the concept of thrownness? Explain your answer.
24. What are the dangers of not being able to master anxiety?
25. What are the dangers of irresolution?
26. Explain the broader social and historical condition of the Heideggerian concept of the forgetfulness of Being. How is it related to the development of the conception of Man, God, and History.

Essay Reading 1
Virgilio A. Rivas

ESSAY ON NIHILISM AND THE ITALIAN PHILOSOPHER GIANNI VATTIMO
(Part of a paper originally delivered during the Philosophical Association of the Philippines' Annual Conference, 2007)

Nihilism begun to be a powerful feature of modern and contemporary discourse on the advent of Nietzsche, or the event called *Nietzsche* that has never ceased to fascinate us in ways that range from its positive appropriations to a wholesale downsizing of his rhetoric to the handiwork of a madman. Nietzsche remains to date a compelling read for students of philosophy, theory and criticism, which is not only a proof of his enduring legacy as a thinker, but more so, a testimonial to the profoundest crisis of thought that he rather creatively exemplified.

WHAT IS NIHILISM ACCORDING TO FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE?

Briefly put, nihilism is a condition under which humanity has seen the worst of its time. In Nietzsche's understanding of the destiny of the West, for instance, nihilism had assumed the form of the death of God wherein the core values that bound humanity to a sense of meaningful existence had been eroded by forces which Nietzsche attributed most acutely to Christianity.

Christianity, according to Nietzsche, has effectively mobilized the forces of nihilism (i.e., fatalism, the ascetic pessimism of religious devotion, belief in the after-life, and worst, as Nietzsche would argue, the metaphysical doctrine of incarnation) in terms of justifying a rigorous obedience to a higher ideal or a utopian future that could never be attained by any measure of infinity—itsself a measure of the promise of redemption that constitutes the core teachings of the Church. It therefore requires a deeper sense of *self-mastery* against the reasonable awareness of this unmistakable impossibility. Self-mastery becomes a weapon against the world itself—the world as an outspoken challenge to the elusive basis of the Christian ideal. In short, the world is evil for it dares to belie the self-conquering works of the Christian by not only exposing the absurdity of a utopian future, but also by exciting the Christian to return to earthly concerns, which has some obvious connection with how Christianity views the world as an enormous temptation.

For Nietzsche, this depreciation of the world requires a fantastic amount of will-to-power to be able to circumvent what is undeniably a colossal power in itself, the world as a non-negotiable condition of the possibility of existence.

WHAT IS NIHILISM ACCORDING TO MARTIN HEIDEGGER?

Martin Heidegger saw nihilism in modern technology. Incidentally, the manipulation of nature by technological means presupposes, at the very least, that the world (which is closely bound with nature) is something to be exploited. Heidegger described this as the technological enframing of the world, which means reducing the world and its inhabitants (collectively represented by the term *Dasein*) into a standing-reserve, an emergency supply which, at any given time, can be expended for instrumental purposes. For Heidegger, however, the root of this enframing consists in nothing less than a misappropriation of *Being*.

Being lies at the root of philosophy, or perhaps, the most evident object of thinking upon which philosophy makes sense as an inquisitive venture (Maritain 1989, p. 126). From the ancient times to date, it has remained the most compelling background of philosophizing. For Heidegger, the history of our understanding of Being bears out the dangerous terrain through which humanity has traversed for the last two thousand years. The peril is on the misappropriation of the ontological difference between being/s and *Being*, which Heidegger argues, dates back to the *Pre-Socratics*, and for the part of a technical misappropriation of the theory of causes that has since then guided the understanding of the ontological difference between being/s and Being up to recent date, to the Aristotelian theory of causality.

In his essay “The question concerning technology,” Heidegger seeks to expose the limitations of Aristotelian theory of causes. According to him (1977a, p. 9), Aristotle could be faulted with a failure of representation, of failing to demonstrate “the primal meaning of that which is later called causality.” The material, efficient, formal, and final causes which cover the Aristotelian theory of causality lack a fundamental connection to what ontologically constitutes the *unity of the four causes*, namely, the bringing-forth or the occasioning of *Being* in its various modes of presence. For instance, the chalice is related to the silver in terms of *material* causation; the chalice to the silversmith in terms of *efficient* cause; the chalice to its being utilized as a sacrificial vessel in religious rituals in terms of *formal* cause; and the sacrificial vessel to the *telos* of the chalice as an aspect of consecration to the *final* cause. What this cycle of causation lacks is the primal cause that occasions the cycle which must precede any intelligible point of origin in the material cause. For Heidegger, the theory of causes in Aristotelian physics fails to account for the condition of the possibility of *causing*, or ordering, assembling, gathering-forth, or the bringing-forth (which is broadly identified with the Greek word *techne*) of what is to be known as chalice. Heidegger (1977a,) summarizes his view of the *techne*:

“It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth, according to the perspectives of the four modes of occasioning [the theory of causes in Aristotle]. This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus what is

decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing” (p. 13).

According to Heidegger, modern technology proceeds from a misappropriation of this primal bringing-forth of the mode of the presencing of *Being*—the ontological condition of the possibility of *all forms of revealing* as the *bringing-forth of Being*, whether in thought or extension, manufacturing or mental designing. The misappropriation grows into a nihilistic disposition as soon as *Being* is understood to be brought-forth by an act of will, by a *will-to-power*. In the same essay where he expounds his critique of Aristotle, Heidegger (1977a) exposed this misappropriation in the light of the *responsibility of the silversmith* in the manufacturing of the vessel:

“The silversmith is co-responsible as that from whence the sacrificial vessel’s bringing-forth and resting-in-self take and retain their first departure. The three previously mentioned ways of being responsible (the material, the formal, and the final causes) owe thanks to the *pondering* of the silversmith for the “that” and the “how” of their coming into appearance and into play for the production of the sacrificial vessel”(p. 8; emphasis added).

The crux of the matter lies in the usurpation of the responsibility for the bringing-forth of *Being*, which Heidegger saw in modern technology. In other words, Aristotle was silent about the fact that, after all, it is Man who brought the chalice into being. If, for instance, we extend this human responsibility to the larger operations of History, we can immediately deduce that Man can also claim to be the sole creator of History. The situation becomes more acute in the wake of the death of God. Man can also usurp the place formerly reserved for the divine.

In his essay “The word of Nietzsche: God is dead,” Heidegger (1977b,) says:

“Never can man put himself in the place of God, because the essence of man never reaches the essential realm belonging to God. On the contrary, compared with this impossibility something far more uncanny can happen...Thought metaphysically, the place that is peculiar to God is the place of the causative bringing about and preserving of whatever is, as something created. That place of God can remain empty. Instead of it, another, i.e. a place corresponding metaphysically, can loom on the horizon...Overman never enters at all into the place of God; rather the place into which his willing enters is another realm belonging to another grounding of what is, in its other Being. This other Being of what is, meanwhile—and this marks the beginning of modern metaphysics—has become *subjectness*” (p. 100; italics mine).

One is reminded of the Protagorean *homo mensura* principle—Man is the measure of all things. It is this subjectivist horizon of understanding *Being* that Heidegger seeks to avoid

and has thus mounted a philosophical battle against its many forms in Western metaphysics.

Notion of Emancipatory Nihilism

Contemporary Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo took up the concept of nihilism propounded by Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, he drew largely from Heidegger a notion of nihilism that is both enabling and dangerous. It is an age of irreversible nihilism, judging from the fact that the Nietzschean notion of the death of God is very much attuned to the random mood of the time, its generally anti-religious bias with the general feeling of rejection toward rigid order, strict morality and discipline. However religion is still very much around, shaping society and the course of world history. But this is precisely what nihilism is for Vattimo: as the old ways are now rejuvenated in the present, we obtain a picture of the contemporary situation in which everything is ambiguous. But there is something positive about ambiguity.

For Vattimo, the death of God is a cause for celebrating the potentials of human freedom. He also argues that nihilism is an irreversible course of human history, that is, after the collapse of the religious age, and with it the irrelevance of metaphysics and theology, human history is now on its feet, charting its own destiny without the support of the belief in a preordained world. Such nihilism, if it is irreversible, must fundamentally teach us that there are more essential works to do than simply, or uselessly bemoan the death of God.

Weak Ontology

In Vattimo's creative rethinking (2003, p. 19) of the concept of nihilism, the negative connotation often associated with it has been remodeled in what he calls the "weakening of Being." For Vattimo, the weakening of *Being* or 'weak ontology' takes the positive side of the irreversibility of history. In a world devoid of God, the age of the metaphysics or religion is replaced by the secular age. It is an age 'beyond metaphysics', an age that slides into the irrevocable weakening of Being in which Being is understood no longer as "an objective datum that precedes the application of "conceptual scheme." Vattimo (2003) observes:

"[We] can speak of Being only at the level of events in which the ever-varying odes that structure the world of human historical experience are instituted...Being should be thought of as "event": Being "is" not, properly speaking, but rather "comes about," happens. My thesis is that the "identification" of philosophy with sociology, or rather with an 'ontology of actuality,' has meaning only from this perspective" (p. 8).

Weak ontology as “ontology of actuality” seeks to address, among others, one of the most gruesome outcomes of the metaphysical history of the West, namely, the rise of fascism that has claimed millions of lives under the pretext of overcoming nihilism, or the collapse of moral order. This overcoming has assumed the form of confronting the oblivion of the ontological difference between being/s and Being which has inspired modern technology to condense the world into a standing-reserve. However, for Vattimo, the real overcoming of nihilism (following Nietzsche’s proposal of transvaluation) must consist in abandoning the metaphysics of Being (for instance, the religious defense of the absoluteness of God) in favor of the actuality through which Being manifests itself, that is, in the lived world, in social, political, and cultural experiences where religion is no longer relevant as a guide to action, or the irrelevance of the old belief systems. As Vattimo (1999) argues:

“Then to believe in salvation will not mean adhering to the letter of everything that is written in the Gospel and in the dogmatic teaching of the Church, but rather in trying to understand the meaning of the evangelical text for me, here, now. In other words, reading the signs of the times with no other provision than the commandment of love, which cannot be secularized, because (if you will) it is a “formal” commandment...which does not command something specific once and for all, but rather applications that must be “invented” in dialogue with specific situations and in light of what the holy Scriptures have revealed” (p. 66).

Study Guide for Discussions

1. What is weak ontology?
2. How did Vattimo revitalize the concept of nihilism, popularly associated with negative connotations, with an ironic twist such that it is made to serve positive ends?
3. What image of Man can we obtain from Vattimo’s conception of weak ontology? How is weak ontology related to the alternative solutions to the problems of contemporary age, specifically, those which fundamentally relate to the feeling of desperation brought on by the death of God?