

TO BE IS NOT-TO-BE: NIHILISM, IDEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF BEING IN HEIDEGGER'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. PART I: BEING AND TIME

Mihai NOVAC

Lecture Phd, "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest

Abstract

Heidegger's political preoccupations came more explicitly to light after his provisional flirtation with and subsequent rejection of Nazi ideology. Knowingly, his initial interest was far more ontological in nature. On the other hand, that doesn't mean that his Being and Time period was not rich in substantial subjacent political presuppositions and implications. The main focus of my present endeavor lies precisely therewith: basically this is an attempt at a non-esoteric conceptual reconstruction of Heidegger's philosophical path with a special interest in its political presuppositions and, maybe more importantly, implications. Its guiding thread is the relation between the question of Being (Seinsfrage), the so called Dasein (with special emphasis on the Being-towards-death/Sein zum Tode) and his notion of authenticity (Eigentlichkeit as being one's own). As such, what we are dealing with here is some sort of Heideggerian political existential analysis. Thereby I will try to provide (i) a sufficient thematization of the subjacent political stratum of his thought in Being and Time, ii) an account of his flirtation with and, especially, rejection of Nazi ideology as part of (iii) a more general critical analysis of ideological modernity as essentially conducive to nihilism (the so called forgetfulness-of-Being, in its political sense, approximately Heidegger's version of alienation). In conclusion I will try to argue for an individualistic interpretation of Heidegger's political philosophy, one which is essentially opposed to Nazi ideology (as well as to any political ideology whatsoever for that matter). This is the first part of the aforementioned endeavor, corresponding to Heidegger's Being and Time period.

Keywords: Being (Sein), being (entity/Seiende), Nihilism, Dasein, authenticity (Eigentlichkeit), ideology

1. Introduction

The concept of nihilism offers a good starting point in understanding Heidegger's political philosophy. As a formal characterization of the corresponding phenomenon, Nietzsche's following insights suffice for now:

“2

What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; why? finds no answer.

3

Radical nihilism is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be divine or morality incarnate. This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of truthfulness- thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality.”¹

As such, the basic idea behind nihilism would be that there is no *ground*, no necessarily and universally valid principle to any of our ontological, epistemological or moral claims. Noticeably, generally speaking, we could say that there are two main facets of nihilism: the first, metaphysical, the second, moral (the latter usually deriving from the former).

i) With respect to the metaphysical one, the basic claim would be that there is no principle or eternal being, underlying the perpetually changing flux of human experience. Moreover, things themselves, to which we *naturally* ascribe a more or less distinct and stable identity, are not at all as such, but only, provisionally, *appear* to be so (usually due to an inherent identity-seeking propensity of human consciousness), however actually being placed in a permanent state of flux governed by a completely chaotic bundle of impulses. In a nutshell: chaos is the basic feature of the world.

ii) Consequently, if *becoming is all there is*, thereby no eternal ground, no truth subjacent to existence as a whole, then it would appear that, in the words of Ivan Karamazov, *everything is permitted*: in the absence of God there is no immutable standard for good and evil, therefore all moral claims being historically relative and having more to do with ideology, i.e. *the self-righteousness of power*, than with a truly universal human ethics.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books), 1967, p. 9.

I will not provide here a substantial account of the emergence of nihilism in European culture. I have done that elsewhere.² Generally and traditionally, nihilism has been criticized for its anomic potentiality: it has been said that when/if adhering to the *general public*, i.e. becoming an actual *Weltanschauung*-possibility, nihilism would effect (a) the renunciation, on part of the individual, to any *higher aspiration* in favor of some sort of *Carpe diem! hedonism* embedded in a (b) Hobbesian general political Lifeworld. Knowingly, the history of the 20th century certainly does not fall short of providing substantial arguments in this respect, with the World Wars being the most notorious, however most certainly not the only, examples thereof. More to the point, as Nietzsche had already warned, 19th century positivistic optimism itself would be undermined by nihilism: if *God becomes dead* than, however secularized, truth and the entire axiological infrastructure resting on it falls along with it. A great deal of both Continental and Anglo-Saxon philosophy, in the first half of the 20th century, could be understood as an, explicit or implicit, attempt at coping with this crisis. Heidegger's philosophy itself could be interpreted as one particular endeavor in this respect, partly capitalizing on Husserl's phenomenology, on the one hand, and Nietzsche's and Kirkegaard's existential philosophies, on the other. Heidegger, however, set about from a new and rather revolutionary angle: to him, the *source and core* of the crisis, was neither epistemological, nor axiological in nature, but rather ontological. In short, its basic feature would consist in the so called *oblivion or forgetfulness of Being (Vergessenheit des Seins)* stemming from a confusion which is structurally embedded in the entire European culture and Lifeworld: the (mis)interpretation of Being (*Sein*) as entity (*Seiende*), i.e. in *lay terms*, of existence as object. This is his basic initial distinction in *Being and Time* and will consequently draw our attention for the *time-being*.

First, *entity*. For our initial purposes, suffices to say that, for Heidegger, *entity* stands for *any-thing that is*, i.e. corporal beings occupying space in the world: trees, cars, hammers and, of course, humans (in their strictly physical capacity). Provisorily, the Cartesian notion of *res extensa* would be an approximation in this respect.

Secondly (and more complicatedly), *Being*. Generally, with Heidegger, I think there are three *reciprocally supervenient* meanings of the notion of Being:

² Mihai Novac, „European Culture between Ideology and Metaphysical Voluntarism” in *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 9, Iulian Rusu (Ed.) (Iași: Ecozone Publishing), pp. 45-54.

i) the formal-naive connotation: the very *act of being*, i.e. of holding a more or less determinate place in the realm of the real;

ii) the *interdeterminative* connotation: the *relational background*, as I have mentioned elsewhere³, to which a thing belongs, namely “in which (without our explicit knowing) the respective thing is embedded and which *makes it be precisely that which it is*. As such, what a thing *is*, is determined by the world to which it belongs, namely by the way it, with its specific role and function relates to other things, themselves provided with their own specific roles and functions, *in nuce* by its *Being-connection*. Any particular thing is made possible by a preexisting world which, as long as it is understood, the thing opens. Thus, the entity becomes apparent in its Being, and phenomenology, precisely as long as it is capable of bringing to light (*Aufweisung*) and legitimating (*Ausweisung*) its connection to the Being, becomes (...) ontology.”⁴

iii) the existential connotation: what we (but not Heidegger) could call self-awareness, i.e. not *just being*, but being conscious thereof. In this respect, Heidegger restricts the use of the term *existence* to human’s (Dasein’s) mode of being, as Dasein is the only entity which *does not solely be*, but specifically maintains a constant relation to itself, i.e. permanently understands itself with respect to its own possibilities of being. As the original Latin meaning of *existentia* implies, by existing, Dasein is not just identical with itself, but is, at the same time, outside-itself, i.e. *stands forth to* and thereby *steps out of* itself. In rather Kantian terms, we could say that Dasein is both *transcendental* and (self)*transcendent*. Consequently, for Heidegger, at least during his *Being and Time* era, Dasein is the very *gate to and of Being*⁵. More on this later on.

As such, as stated earlier, the question of Being, i.e. *What is Being?*, correlatively *What does it mean to be?*, constitutes both the basic problem of philosophy, in the narrow sense, and the horizon of human existence, in the wide sense – basically, for Heidegger, any conceivable form of human existence (individual *lived-life*, artistic manifestation, cultural configuration etc.) represents, consciously or not, the articulation of a particular

³ Mihai Novac, “Esse in Anima: The Phenomenological Ontology of C.G. Jung” in *Applied Social Science: Science and Theology*, Michele Marsonet & Georgeta Rață (Ed.) (Newcastle : Cambridge Scholars), 2013, pp. 79-87.

⁴ Idem

⁵ That is, of Dasein to Being, and of Being to the world.

understanding of the act of being, a more or less specific answer to the question of Being if you will. And, for some reasons which we will discuss later on, this question has *fallen into forgetfulness*, has ceased to be asked, or better put *performed* and, consequently, we have lived for a very long time⁶ lacking an actual preoccupation with Being – bluntly, we have lived without actually knowing it: nihilism is the consequence of this phenomenon.

In other words, according to Heidegger, the founding fathers of the European Lifeworld, i.e. those thinkers that grounded the framework of our existence as Europeans have articulated and passed down a distorted and restrictive understanding of Being, i.e. one that didn't allow the reiteration of the question of Being (which normally should be reenacted with every new cultural configuration, or individual destiny). The very categories and language of our thought and human interaction are, according to Heidegger, tributary to this traditional misinterpretation of Being which followed an ever degenerative path up to the (post)modern age – therefrom, our alienation from our lives and Being, namely nihilism. That is why Heidegger states that the history of European thought and culture is in fact the history of the *withdrawal of Being* (from the world).

To Heidegger, the sources of this historic distortion are to be found with the very origins of our thought, namely the ancient Greek thought and more particularly Plato. In short, the *oblivion of Being* conducive to nihilism is the gradually sublimated product of the Platonic definition of Being as *immutable presence*, i.e. as perpetually identical and unchanging. In other words, according to Heidegger, Plato's answer to the question of Being was so powerful and (apparently) *natural* that it was taken as definitive, as the only possible one, and consequently the question as such has been forgotten. However, Heidegger claims this was wrong as (i) Plato's definition itself is unsatisfactory and, more importantly, (ii) the question of Being is more important than its answer, as the former is the very driving force of human existence, both individually and culturally.

On the other hand, for Heidegger, just as for Nietzsche, nihilism is not necessarily a strictly negative, but rather an ambivalent phenomenon: on its negative side, it is true that it is conducive to the forgetfulness and negation of Being, culturally, socially and politically manifested through an *overinstrumentalization* of the world, nature and, ultimately, Dasein itself, but on its positive side, it also brings about a potential cleansing of Dasein's *existential*

⁶ After Plato actually.

horizon of its deep-rooted misinterpretation of Being, thereby enabling the potential recuperation of our primordial, *abysmal-interrogative* if you will, relation to it (manifested, for example, in the thought of Parmenides and a few of the other pre-Platonic Greek philosophers). In short, for Heidegger, nihilism is the last stage of a sickness which has to be left to run its course as it brings about the death (or rather *suicide*) of an already much too distorted and crooked organism – in this case, apparently, precisely *that which kills us, makes us stronger*. More on this, later on.

As such, a very unfortunate way of reacting to nihilism would be, according to Heidegger, to see it as a recent deviation from an authentic and beneficial tradition which would then, supposedly, have to be reinstated (as, for example, the conservatives, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and, ultimately, Husserl himself had done). As previously mentioned, the adequate way of relating to nihilism would be to understand it as a direct expression of the essence of Western tradition, thereby enabling or, actually, imposing its entire rejection and subsequent restatement of the question of Being which has been all this time precluded by it.

Knowingly, Heidegger's first (famous) confrontation with the problem of nihilism took place in his 1927 *Being and Time*, which could be generally seen as an attempt at determining the meaning of Being by an analysis of the human being (*Dasein*) in terms of temporality, that is, an understanding of the relation between Being and time by examining the way in which they coexist in (or rather *as*) *Dasein*. As we have seen before, the question of Being constitutes, for Heidegger, the source and ground of all *ontologies*, i.e. ways and realms of being (and Being) and, as such, of the entire human understanding and existence. Therefore, by forgetting the question, human being actually loses its ground⁷ (*Grund*) and, consequently, its freedom (as Heidegger will show in his 1930 lecture on *The Essence of Human Freedom*). As a consequence thereof, human being becomes reduced to a post-modern version of what Nietzsche called in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the last man (der letzte Mensch)*, the antithetical alternative of the *Übermensch*, a mere *calculating animal* governed solely by pleasure seeking and self-preservation and living the gregarious and collectively predetermined life of the *hive*.

⁷ Which in fact, as we will see later on, ultimately reveals itself as an abyss (*Abgrund*).

However, how did the question of Being come to be forgotten? Generally, we could say that Heidegger gives, along his work, three, progressively fundamental, answers to this question, which I have called, (i) the cultural, (ii) the existential and (iii) the ontological. As yet, we have not discussed all the concepts necessary for an in-depth analysis of the three; however, we have enough for a quick summative preview. A propaedeutic observation relating to the first two *layers* of the forgetfulness of Being: Being came to be forgotten in a very unusual way, that is precisely by being generally taken as self-evident – in other words, precisely because everyone thinks to know, from the very beginning, what *being/Being* means, nobody bothers asking anymore. That is because almost everybody understands this question as *What does it mean for something, or rather, some-thing to be?*, Being is from the very start, from the very initial preconscious formulation of the question, understood as belonging to and being defined by *Thingness (Dinglichkeit)*. On the other hand, this is not necessarily a self-evident equivalence, i.e. the proposition stating the identity between Being and Thingness is not apodictic. Hence, before stating it, one should examine, first, its source and, then, its comprehensiveness, i.e. whether Thingness is all there is to Being, if you will.

As previously stated, according to Heidegger, the sources of this *reification* of Being displayed by our (post)modern world are threefold: (i) cultural, thereby involving some specific aspect of European culture, (ii) existential, thereby involving some aspect of Dasein and (iii) ontological, thereby involving some peculiarity of Being as such.

This is a personal summative reconstruction of Heidegger's view on the matter. As with any reconstruction, this is bound to involve a certain degree of rearrangement and reformulation of Heidegger's arguments. However, while doing so, I think I have remained true to the spirit of his work.

As I have already pointed out, in his understanding, the (i) cultural or intellectual origins of the reification of Being can be traced back to Plato as he originally articulated and handed down a distorted, i.e. reciprocally exclusive, understanding of the relation between Being and time. More explicitly, with his notion of Idea (*ἰδέα*) Plato introduced a definition of being as perpetual presence, which by its unchanging and transcendent character stood in complete opposition to the temporal realm. According to this definition *everything that really is*, has to remain so, i.e. *precisely the way it is*, throughout eternity. Consequently, everything that at some point or another *ceases to be the way it once was*, i.e. disappears, fades or changes,

displays a certain degree of participation to the opposing side of Being, i.e. *nothingness* and thereby belongs to Being only in a secondary, provisory and *apparent* manner. As such, from this perspective, physical entities occupied an intermediary realm between Being and nothingness: in opposition to the latter, they *were for some time*, in opposition to the former, *only for some time*. In a nutshell, starting with Plato, the dichotomy between Being and time became the grounding distinction of all European thought.

However, from this perspective, within the temporal realm, some entities remained identical for a longer time than others, this meaning that they participated to Being to a higher degree, than the others did. Thereby emerged a subjacent hierarchy of entities, depending on their degree of participation to Being, displayed in their perdurance (i.e. the amount of time they occupied) – Aristotle’s system of categories and its latter scholastic version, the Great Chain of Being, are among its most influential forms. Within this hierarchy, human beings themselves occupied a place which was mostly inferior to other physical entities – as it was obvious that many of the latter endured a much longer time than humans did. As such, in order to overcome its transitory character and adhere to the higher positions of this ontological hierarchy, human consciousness progressively sought to emulate physical objects, i.e. tried to *make itself in their image*. Modern positivism, socially engendered by the industrial ideologies (be it capitalist, be it communist or be it national socialist), is, in Heidegger’s view, the apex of this historical tendency towards the reification of consciousness which brought about the alienation of Dasein from its specific way of *Being* and, thereby, nihilism. In a nutshell, an improper understanding of Being led to an improper self-understanding of Dasein itself: paradoxically, in its attempt to avoid nothingness, Dasein has lost itself. However, according to Heidegger, we shouldn’t hold Plato solely responsible for this fact, as it was not by coincidence that precisely his reifying view was preferred over the other, more *abysmal* ones (as displayed by Parmenides, Heraclitus or the Greek tragedians).

And this brings us up to the (ii) existential source of the forgetfulness of Being. Basically Heidegger, at least in his *Being and Time* era, tried to understand the forgetfulness of Being as a consequence of the flight of Dasein from the face of death, specifically felt as *Angst*. As such, individual Dasein, faced with the perspective of its own, future but imminent, demise, seeks refuge in a collective and impersonal identity (*das Man* – the *They/One*) which would, supposedly, grant it the possibility of an *eternal endurance* (as the community doesn’t die, only the individual does). Moreover, in the (post)modern world, as a result of the previously

mentioned process of reification, this collective identity is built by analogy to the objectual world. Consequently, on the level of the One, Dasein loses both its personal and its existential characters. Considering that more than half of *Being and Time* is dedicated to this *collectivist self-mystification* of Dasein, we will take our time with it.

First of all, noticeably, when referring to human beings, Heidegger avoids the use of traditional terms such as subject, ego, consciousness, self-awareness and so on, preferring some peculiar notions of his own making⁸ such as *Dasein*, in his *Being and Time* period, or *mortals*, in his later works. Without going into much detail, this is because, on the one hand, he considered the subject-object dichotomy along with all its derivative terminology (consciousness, awareness, subjectivity and so on) to be already tainted with the aforementioned reification process and, on the other, he thought to have found another, more fundamental trait of human existence than the *ego cogito*: the *Da-sein*, i.e. the very act of *finding oneself to be already here*, i.e. in a *world*. Consequently, to Heidegger, the *being-in-the-world (in-der-Welt-Sein)* constitutes the primordial and irreducible experience of human existence and not the *self-thinking away from the world* as Descartes' notion of ego implies. In other words, to Heidegger, these traditional notions already *subimply an original divisiveness* between the so called consciousness, on the one hand, the world, on the other, which, in our basic experience of Being, is nowhere to be found. More generally speaking, what we are dealing with in Heidegger's case is, as I have mentioned elsewhere, "*that double movement specific to phenomenology, i.e. of removal of consciousness from under the exclusive claim of the subject, on the one hand, of the world from under that of the object, on the other, and of placing them in an ontological relation of concrescence in which the two terms, consciousness and world, constitute reciprocal a priori preconditions of possibility.*"⁹

For all these reasons Heidegger prefers the term Dasein which he, most notoriously (and obscurely) characterizes as "ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside entities which we encounter (within-the-world)." ¹⁰ However obscure, this is his most famous

⁸ At least in this sense.

⁹ Idem 3.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp. 293/par. 249.

and comprehensive definition of Dasein¹¹ and we will work on it. On its terms, there are three basic existential features (Existentials) of Dasein: *existentiality (Existentialität) - ahead-of-itself, facticity (Faktizität) - Being-already-in the world and falling (Verfallen) - Being-alongside entities which we encounter within-the-world.*

I think the best way of understanding existentiality is, as I have already done, to refer to the very etymology of the term, in Latin *existere* meaning quite literally standing out. But standing out of what and to whom? Quite simply put, out of itself and to itself. In other words, to Heidegger, Dasein is the only entity which, as different from all the others, manifests its act of being not just by inertly filling up space, if you will, but also by constantly relating to itself, that is, its way of Being is not so much ontic as onto-logical (i.e. has knowledge thereof) and thereby gains access to, what we could call, the realm of the possible, as different from the mere ontic entities which are constrained to remain within the boundaries of the actual. Without going into much detail, this implies two basic things: (a) that Dasein is originally divided with respect to itself (nothingness is at the heart of Dasein's Being, if you will) and (b) that Dasein has no determinate given nature or essence by which it is, but, quite simply, is. Heidegger expresses this by saying that Dasein is not, but has to be (*hat zu sein*). Moreover, as we will see later on when discussing falling, not even individuality is a given feature of Dasein, but on the contrary, it has to be gained and, as such, it can always be lost.

As such, existentiality corresponds to the fact that Dasein stands out of itself by being ahead-of-itself. This is what Heidegger calls projection (*Entwurf*) which is the basic existential governing Dasein's existentiality. How does it work? Basically, the answer would be that Dasein, by existing outside of itself in the realm of the possible, always understands itself with respect to the array of possibilities, i.e. existential scenarios or more concretely life paths, which present themselves. In this process, it understands these possibilities (or, better put, itself through these possibilities) by projecting itself along them, i.e. by anticipating its own becoming if following one or another of these existential scenarios. And I think anticipation is the best word for describing this, as this is precisely where (or better put, when) this process takes place: in the future! Consequently, in his view, the future is not some expected present state, that is, some present which hasn't come yet, but the transcendental source of Dasein's present self-understanding. To use a non-Heideggerian terminology, if self-awareness means

¹¹ As *Care*.

self-reflection, then the future is the place from which Dasein reflects upon itself in order to become aware of itself. Heidegger partly refers to the German etymology of the term in order to justify his interpretation: the German word for future is Zukunft, that is zu-Kunft, literally coming to, suggesting that the future, properly understood, is the place from which Dasein comes towards itself. As such, in Heidegger's view, which is radically different from most of the previous present-oriented philosophies¹², Dasein is a specifically futural entity: "Dasein is its past in the way of its own Being, which, to put it roughly, 'historizes' out of its future on each occasion."¹³

II Now for the second basic existential, *facticity*. We have previously seen that, according to Heidegger, Dasein understands itself through the various possibilities which present themselves to it. Where do these possibilities come from? Simply put, from the world to which the respective *Dasein* belongs, or, to put it in a more Heideggerian language, into which it is thrown (*geworfen*). This, again, would amount to three basic things: (a) that Dasein, as existing, is not the source of the possibilities through which it understands itself; (b) that these possibilities are not mere theoretical potentialities, but actual shapes Dasein's existence is bound to take and which consequently matter to it (or better put him/her); (c) that not all possibilities are compossible, that is, Dasein cannot realize all of them together and consequently has to choose among them.

One of the several relevant passages in this respect is the following: "As existent, it (*Dasein*) never comes back behind its thrownness in such a way that it might first release this 'that-it-is-and-has-to-be' from its Being-its-Self and lead it into the 'there'. (...) The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can never get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis. To be its own thrown basis is that potentiality-for-Being which is the issue for care."¹⁴ Simply put, Dasein has the possibility to choose neither the circumstances of its birth (its *Da* if you will), nor its death (i.e. the fact that it will, eventually, at some point, die) but only to opt for one or another of the limited array of

¹² With the possible exception of Nietzsche.

¹³ Idem 10 pp. 41/par. 20.

¹⁴ Idem Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp. 330-331/par. 284-285.

alternatives which present themselves between these two points. Birth and death are the cornerstones of Dasein's freedom, if you will, and, ontologically speaking, one of the ways in which nothingness belongs to Dasein's Being. The other instance in which nothingness becomes part of its Being presents itself in the context of choosing: by exercising its freedom, Dasein has to choose among several alternatives and consequently, with every actual choice it makes, Dasein rejects, un-makes all its alternative counterparts.

“In being a basis – that is, in existing as thrown – Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent before its basis, but only from it and as this basis. Thus ‘Being-a-basis’ means never to have power over one’s ownmost Being from the ground up. This ‘not’ belongs to the existential meaning of thrownness. It itself, being a basis, is a nullity of itself.(...) Freedom, however, is only in the choice of one possibility – that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them.”¹⁵ Heidegger wraps all this up in the concept of ontological guilt (*Schuld*) which constitutes Dasein’s primordial and ubiquitous burden. Before getting to the third existential, I would ask you to keep in mind the fact that, in Heidegger’s view, Dasein’s freedom as choice stems from the permeability of its Being to nothingness and can only manifest itself as such, i.e. as nullification of the un-chosen alternatives, if you will. Anticipatively, I should say that only by facing death does Dasein become actually capable of choosing and thereby what we would call an individual.

III And now, for *falling* (*Verfallen*). As mentioned earlier, in Heidegger’s view, and contrary to many of the traditional thinkers’, Dasein does not necessarily exist as an individual: it is neither born as such, nor does it necessarily become one along its existence; in fact, on his terms, most of us don’t ever become one and, moreover, all of those few who do, are always susceptible of losing this status. In short, for Heidegger, individuality is a human capacity which must be gained and maintained through constant effort if it is to be preserved. Then *where* and *as what* does Dasein exist as long as it is not an individual? Quite predictably, within the previously mentioned object-like collective identity called *the One* (*das Man*; frequently also translated as ‘*the they*’). Synthetically, we could say, in a non-Heideggerian language, that the One (“*they*”) represents the collective impersonal soil (thereby implying both inherited instinctual and socially-constructed behavioral and semantic patterns) of any

¹⁵ Idem.

individual ontogenesis, one which, however, many do not ever leave. We shouldn't hold Heidegger to be an elitist – he doesn't necessarily regard the One/"they" in a derogatory way. Quite the contrary, he considers it one of the essential preconditions of any Dasein ontogenesis (be it individualistic or not) and one of the main environments for the emergence and development of its relation to Being. Anything related to the *semantic structure of the world* (language, rational thought, affective patterns, practical skills and so on) is acquired by Dasein through its existence on this level. Heidegger just claims that, at some point, Dasein's exaggerated belonging to it precludes its potential individual becoming.¹⁶ The One's way of being mainly becomes manifest on the level of the so called *everydayness (Alltäglichkeit)* which could be seen as some sort of socio-cultural matrix comprising both the average model of humanity as projected by the culture in cause and the normative expectations (moral and practical) derived therefrom. The proper way of handling a hammer, the occasions on which it is proper to offer flowers, imperatives such as *One should not throw up in public!* are, I think, good examples thereof. *Who shouldn't throw up in public? Everybody but no one in particular* – this is precisely the meaning Heidegger ascribes to the *One-Self*. To put it in his words: "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The 'they', which supplies the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein, is the 'nobody' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another [Untereinandersein]."¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, a substantial part of Dasein's everydayness consists in its practical skills and activities. Without any risk of overstating, we could say that, in Heidegger's view, on the level of everydayness, the world itself is a giant structure of interconnected meanings, functions and uses which predetermine the identity of any given entity: a hammer, for example, has as destination (*Wohin*) the hammering of nails in order to build houses and shelters for Dasein. In order to properly accomplish this task it has a certain instrumental structure (i.e. shape, weight, resistance and so on) which it otherwise wouldn't have had. On the other hand, it also has an origin (*Woher*) which connects it in a specific way to other things: it has a handle, made out of wood, found in trees, growing in forests. There are some

¹⁶ Conceptually we could see it as some sort of Heideggerian crossbreed between Nietzsche's *existential horizon*, Dilthey's *Weltanschauung* and, maybe, Mannheim's *ideology* (in its maximal sense).

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp.166/par.128.

particular nuances but, generally speaking, we could say that nature is progressively assimilated into the *pragmatic meaningful structure* Dasein calls *the world*, as the basic provider of raw material. However interesting, I will not follow here the problem of Dasein's relation to nature, as my present interest lies elsewhere.

As such, the world, on the level of Dasein's everydayness, is a systematic bundle of pragmatic relations and practices. How does Dasein relate to itself, i.e. *exist*, along such a practice? As anyone who was ever involved in any kind of determinate practical activity I think would agree, Dasein relates to itself along such a practice precisely by *losing its sight of itself* and concentrating it almost entirely on the task *at hand* – while practically engaged, *Dasein exists along the present task* (thereby ignoring its past identity, or its future becoming and so on). Consequently, on the level of everydayness, Dasein exists in complete forgetfulness of itself (and the future) and total receptivity to the practices at-hand (and the present). We could say that on this level, Dasein's existence is disseminated among the various practical contexts that make up its daily routine. This, again, is a normal component of Dasein's existence, but one that, if exaggerated, causes Dasein to lose *its grip on itself*, if you will, to become inauthentic (*uneigentlich*). Observation: the German term *Eigentlichkeit* is usually translated as *authenticity*. However, even if its semantic sphere most certainly includes this connotation (i.e. *genuineness*), its primordial, etymological meaning would amount to something like *being-one's-own*. This is also Heidegger's original way of using this concept.

As such, why and in what way does Dasein become inauthentic when exaggeratedly belonging to the One's everydayness? Basically, the answer would be that within this existential sphere things are *already given as such*, i.e. they are more or less univocally and customarily pre-determined (with respect to the existence of any personal Dasein). Hammers are to be handled *in such and such* a way and in no other, flowers are to be offered on *such and such* occasions and in *such and such* ways and in no other, throwing up in public is to be avoided because that isn't the proper way one behaves in public and so on. Again, in Heidegger's view, there is nothing wrong with this kind of collective procedural norms and practices as such. The problem arises when they fully take over Dasein's existential sphere and that is because by their predetermined and compulsory character they constrain Dasein's existence and very self-awareness to *the realm of the actual* which is the domain of non-Dasein entities, that is of inert objects, Dasein thereby losing its specific character as a *being*

of the possible. In short, under the spell of the One, Dasein's Self *disowns itself*, particularly, it becomes unable to choose.

On the other hand, this is not viewed by Heidegger as an *unnatural* process but, *au contraire*, as I have already alluded earlier on, as the result of one of Dasein's most natural tendencies: that of avoiding its own finitude. In other words, precisely by naturally fleeing away from the existential angst induced by the perspective of its own, future and unavoidable, death, Dasein takes refuge in this collective and impersonal form of identity which, supposedly, grants it some sort of immortality but at the cost of its, shall we say, *personhood*. Moreover, its relation to time is correspondingly modified: in this state, Dasein loses track of its future, as the future is the *time of death*, and concentrates exclusively on the present, as the time of its actual existence. Consequently, it reinterprets time as a perpetual present, i.e. the past as a *present that is no longer*, the present as a *presently present present* and the future as a *present that is to come*. According to Heidegger, the entire history of European thought and culture, at least since Plato, is based on such an interpretation of time: the very notion of objective infinite time as developed within the mathematical sciences of nature and progressively extended over the entire world of Dasein is one of the most fundamental expressions of this process. As we will see later on, in his view, all modern industrial ideologies are, in fact, alternative avatars of this reification by which Dasein reinterprets itself as an object, precisely in order to escape its finitude. In a nutshell, we could say that, *by avoiding death, Dasein loses its life*.

Synthetically, the flight from death causes Dasein to restrain from projecting, which leads it to lose its existentiality. We could also say that given the angst caused by thrownness, Dasein reacts by letting its falling take precedence over its existentiality. That is what inauthenticity basically amounts to.

That would be Dasein's permanent problem, one which however, reached its climax in the modern age, according to Heidegger. Now for the antidote. Quite obviously, if this entire alienating process is triggered by Dasein's avoidance of its own finitude, that is, of its death, any eventual solution should start from there. Basically, in Heidegger's view, Dasein's acknowledgement of its own finitude and subsequent confrontation with the existential angst caused by it, pulls Dasein out from under the spell of the One's everydayness and places it in direct relation to itself. Most significantly, by becoming aware that *death awaits it*, Dasein

stops acting as if it had *all the time in the world*, that is, all the time needed to successively realize all the alternative life paths presented to it and starts actually choosing among them. To put it *temporally*, its present becomes the image of its intended future. The affective driving force behind this *existential becoming* of Dasein is the very angst it once tried to avoid: by acknowledging its participation to nothingness Dasein becomes now ready and able to exercise its freedom as nullification of the *unchosen alternatives*.

“Death is Dasein’s ownmost possibility. Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its ownmost potentiality-for-Being in which its very Being is the issue. Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the ‘they’. (...) The ownmost possibility is non-relational. Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that the potentiality-for-being, in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just ‘belong’ to one’s own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death lays claim to it as an individual Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the ‘there’ is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue.”¹⁸

Basically, Heidegger highlights four, *equiprimordial*, features of death:

i) its futurity – death is always a problem for the future, never for the present (as once it comes Dasein is no longer). Therefore death is, for each Dasein, a potential, never an actual, reality.

ii) its inexorability – despite its essentially potential character, death is unavoidable, i.e. it is a *necessary potentiality*, if you will.

iii) its *ownness* – each Dasein owes at least one death to Being, that is *its own*. By that, Heidegger concludes on the *non-relational* character of death and, consequently, of any form of existence potentially (but necessarily) ended by it. In other words, in front of death, Dasein

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp.308/par. 263.

cannot be *represented*, i.e. no one else can take the place of any Dasein in front of its own death.

iv) its ubiquity – potentially speaking, death can strike at any moment, in principle, there is no specifically *scheduled* time for its arrival and, as such, each actual moment of being is, for Dasein, a potential moment of *unbeing*.

Heidegger wraps all this up in the concept of *being-towards-death (Sein zum Tode)* the conscious acknowledgement of which puts Dasein in touch with its own specific and personal existence. In other words, Dasein has to constantly live its life under the shadow of death if it is to shape its existence in the image of its own project (*Entwurf*) for itself, i.e. become its own authentic (*eigentlich*) Self. Thereby, Dasein stops wasting its time in the perpetual dissemination of everydayness and makes use of each and every moment in the articulation of the existential project it has designed for itself: each present moment becomes a *moment of vision (Augenblick)* of its future and *personally intended* becoming. *In nuce*, in the state of authenticity, the future Dasein (instead of the present One/"they") dictates to the present Dasein what to do.

Does the authenticity of Dasein allow for any form of coexistence? I think the answer is 'yes' and one of the key remarks in this respect is to be found in subchapter 26 in *Being and Time* entitled "The Dasein-with of Others and Everyday Being-with":

"With regard to its positive modes, solicitude¹⁹ has two extreme possibilities. It can, as it were, take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can leap in (*einspringen*) for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely. In such solicitude the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him. This kind of solicitude, which leaps in and takes away 'care', is to a

¹⁹ Solicitude (*Fürsorge*) is the basic (sub)existential of 'care' responsible for Dasein's relationship with the Other, as different from *Concern/Preoccupation (Besorgen)* which guides Dasein's relation to all instrumental entities.

large extend determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand.²⁰

In contrast to this, there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as leap ahead of him (*ihm vorausspringt*) in his existential potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care – that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a 'what' with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it."²¹

This is maybe the closest Heidegger has ever got to Kant's *categorical imperative*. Basically, what he claims here is that Dasein can relate to the Other in two alternative fundamental ways: as an inert (object-like) entity or as an existential being (i.e. endowed with what we would call self-awareness). In the former alternative, the Other is denied his/her *ownness* (that is, more or less, its *autonomy*), in the latter, quite the contrary, by help of Dasein, the Other is *potentiated* in his/her *ownness*.

More explicitly, in both cases, Dasein *meets the Other* as an object of care (*Sorge*). Why care? In short, because as long as the Other affects, in one way or another, Dasein's existence to the point of being noticed by it (in one way or another), than the Other must matter to Dasein (again, in one way or another). However, it depends on Dasein to decide on the kind of care the Other is entitled to. In Heidegger's terms, it is up to Dasein to choose the (sub)existentials of care by which to relate to the Other: either as an object of *preoccupation/concern* (*Besorgen*), which is the realm of the instrumental *inert* entities, or as an object of solicitude (*Fürsorge*), which is the realm of Dasein-like, i.e. existential entities. Most clearly, in the former alternative, the Other is denied its existentiality, its Being if you will, and treated as a tool. As the previous passage would suggest, this does not necessarily imply abusiveness on the part of Dasein, which is however even more *concerning* as even some of the positive, shall we say *helpful*, ways of Dasein's relating to the Other can lead to the latter's *disownment*. Why? Basically because in *caring* for the Other, Dasein may be tempted in

²⁰ I.e. instrumental entities.

²¹Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp. 158-159/par. 122.

helping him/her by taking upon itself the Other's *burden*, i.e. his/her existence if you will, fact which is inauthentic because, (a) it is impossible (as no Dasein can represent the Other in front of his/her own death and, consequently, in front of his/her own existence as well) and (b) because it treats the Other as an inert, *handleable* entity. In short, this form of disownment amounts to Dasein's complacency in the Other's impotency which causes the Other to try to surrender its existence to Dasein (which is impossible and self-denying). Most extremely, Dasein can act with respect to the Other as if being willing and able to take upon itself the Other's *Being-towards-death* fact which is impossible, and denies the Other's own existentiality, more concretely precludes the Other's confrontation with the Angst induced by the perspective of his/her *own* future but unavoidable death (and thereby his/her individualization). As we will see later on, this is the basic motive behind Heidegger's hostility towards the modern political ideologies.

Alternatively, Dasein can *care* for the Other by helping him/her *transparentize* him-/herself for his/her own Being-towards-death and, implicitly, for his/her existentiality and free will. As such, without going into much detail, the key to an authentic *Being-with (Mitsein)* lies, for Heidegger, in the acknowledgement of the non-relational character of the *Being-towards-death* of each Dasein: by not avoiding it (and correspondingly not accepting the Other's willingness to avoid it), Dasein takes hold of its own projective nature, if you will, consequently of its existentiality and, at the same time, lets the Other free to do so on its own account. Moreover, the only way Dasein can help the Other on this path to individualization is by serving as an example of conscious assumption of the Being-towards-death (probably, not unlike Socrates did for Plato). As mentioned earlier, this pulls out Dasein's relation to the Other from under the spell of the One and lets the Other be as he/she chooses. The whole of this achievement of authenticity is what Heidegger calls *resoluteness (Entschlossenheit)*:

"In the light of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of one's self-chosen potentiality-for-Being, resolute Dasein frees itself for its world. Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates. When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of the Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another – not by ambiguous

and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the 'they'/(One) and in what 'they'/(One) want to undertake."²²

On the other hand, that would be, from a Heideggerian standpoint, precisely what modern ideologies do not do, i.e. letting both Dasein and the Other become their own individual selves. Basically, the reason for that is threefold:

i) Notwithstanding their doctrinary particularities, modern ideologies always construct a collective (and impersonal) ideological subject, that is some sort of *ideological One*, which regulates the existentiality of each and every individual Dasein adhering to it. In other words, Dasein's belonging to the ideological community is conditioned by its, more or less, total compliance with the core values and behavioral patterns on which the ideological community was built. By this, Dasein lets the ideological One dictate it its array of Being-potentialities which is, quite obviously, inauthentic.

ii) As Marx rightfully noted, *ideologies are the product of the relations of production* which are, by their very nature, instrumental and reifying. Consequently, any ideological One, including that of Marxism, would try to make Dasein in the image of the objects and relations which make up its instrumental world and, consequently, treat it as such, i.e. see its Being-potentialities as being defined by the class interests captured by the ideology in cause. In Marxian words, but from a Heideggerian perspective, precisely because class consciousness is the expression of the mode of production, it is not to be obeyed by any Dasein seeking self-individualization. This is a conclusion which can be most clearly drawn on the basis of Heidegger's thought from this period and one which will be harshly dealt with by his more *Marxian* students (as for example Sartre or Herbert Marcuse did in his *Heideggerian Marxism*).

iii) In perfect keeping with the aforementioned aspects, modern ideology avoids angst (which is the only way Dasein can achieve authenticity) by distracting, or rather, displacing Dasein's attention from *its own* mortality to the so called *quality of life*, particularly to some sort of utopian promise of biological immortality which, however tacit, all modern technological ideologies hold very dear. However, by falling prey to this false illusion of immortality, Dasein loses its will to choose on its own: it feels no compulsion to do so, given

²² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962, pp. 344-345/par. 293.

that its promised immortality would grant it the possibility of successively living all the alternative life-paths among which, in its mortal state, it would have to choose. In short, by living up to any technological ideology, Dasein exchanges *its own* mortality for a *disowned* immortality. This is an aspect which separates all modern technological ideologies from the traditional religions, given that, in the latter, however differently and intricately solved, mortality is an ever recurrent issue.

All this entitles us, I think, to view Heidegger's political position in his *Being and Time* era as some sort of *ruralist* individualistic anarchism. As with most views of this sort, it is much easier to determine what they oppose, rather than what they stand for politically. At any rate, it is rather obvious that the Heidegger from this period opposes:

i) collectivism (along with any form of *communal hegemony* over the individual self);

ii) *technologism* (that is, not technology as such, but the uncritical belief that technology could and should be called upon to solve any human problem);

iii) *urbanism* (that is the belief that the city, with its specific culture and way of life constitutes the natural environment for the accomplishment of humanity – fact which sets Heidegger in opposition to both *bourgeois* and proletarian alternatives);

iv) *traditionalism* (that is the unreflected reverence for the past as the holder of a necessarily beneficial tradition which, if lost, would have to be reinstated – which sets Heidegger in opposition to conservatism);

v) rationalist liberalism (and particularly its contemporary *metaphysical* emulation, i.e. positivism);

vi) Catholic clericalism (and its political expression, i.e. Christian democracy), along with any form of *politicized* religion;

I think all this sufficiently supports Heidegger's interpretation as an individualistic anarchist. As for the *ruralist* aspect of his position, although it will become more apparent in his later works (as his 1934 *Why Do I Stay in The Provinces?*), I think it is safe to say that it is tacitly but all-pervasively present in his *Being and Time* era as well. In short, what I mean by it is that Heidegger seems to have been more favorable, or at least less hostile, to the

rural environment with its specific way of life, as it seemed to him to enable a more authentic relation to Being than the modern urban world ever could. However, we shouldn't try by this to view Heidegger as some sort of German version of Tolstoy, as he doesn't favor the rural world by virtue of some traditional collective wisdom which it would supposedly hold. Heidegger's appreciation for the rural world is of a different, maybe even opposed, nature: he favors it because it apparently holds a better outlook for the potential individualization of Dasein. The reason for that is twofold: first, because, seemingly, the rural world has remained less permeable to the reification process which, as we have seen, is very much responsible for the progressive oblivion of Being culminating in the modern industrial world and, second, because by its still non-secularized character, the rural world retains, to some extent, the perspective of individual mortality (a recurring issue in any version of Christianity and, possibly, religion in general) which potentially enables Dasein's confrontation with the angst conducive to its authenticity. *In nuce*, it is not so much that the question of Being is better answered in the rural world, but that it is better asked.

Now, for the summary: I have determined Heidegger's interpretation of modern nihilism as an all-pervasive historical, political and existential trend towards the oblivion of Being stemming from the very core premise of European Lifeworld - the confusion between Being and entity, in lay terms, the definition of Dasein (human being) as object. Following Heidegger, I have traced back the sources of this phenomenon to three basic interrelated factors: (i) the cultural, i.e. Plato's definition of Being as (perpetual) presence, (ii) the existential, i.e. the flight of Dasein from the face of death and (iii) the ontological, involving some aspect of Being as such (which I have intentionally left out of our discussions so far).

I have then concentrated on a basic analysis of Dasein in terms of existentiality, thereby trying to lay bare the *internal mechanics* of Dasein's (self-)reification. Thereupon, I have come to the conclusion that its basic form of manifestation consists in some sort of self-renunciation on part of Dasein to *its own* personal mortal existence in favor of a collective, allegedly immortal but impersonal, object-like identity Heidegger calls the One/'they' (*das Man*). Followingly, I have tried to elaborate Heidegger's solution to this problem as consisting in the conscious assumption on part of Dasein of its own finitude, particularly in its lucid confrontation with its own mortality, which is the only way Dasein can achieve the will to choose. Along with Heidegger, I have called this achieved state of *ownness* authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*). In this context, I have provided a positive answer to the question whether

Dasein's authenticity is compatible with its coexistence with the Other, by trying to show that and how any authentic (that is non-reifying) inter-personal relation is based on the mutual acknowledgement of the finite character of human existence. On this basis, I have tried to sketch out a general Heideggerian critique of modern political ideologies as essentially inauthentic. The three basic reasons thereof are that (i) by their collectivism, modern ideologies preclude Dasein's potential individualization, (ii) by their *reifying instrumentalism*, they deny Dasein's existentiality, treating it as a tool and (iii) by their *immortalism* they avoid Dasein's confrontation with its own mortality, thereby lacking it of its incentive to choose. In this context, I have determined Heidegger's political position (in the *Being and Time* era) as some sort of *individualistic rural anarchism* fact which, if true, would make Heidegger's view essentially incompatible with any collectivist ideology. How could a thinking that was so individualistic have fallen victim, even if temporarily, to such an extremely collectivistic ideology as Nazism is disconcerting and troubling. However, that, along with the third (that is the ontological) reason for the oblivion of Being, will make the object of our discussion in the latter part of this endeavor.

References

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (New York : Vintage Books), 1967.
- Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag), 1967.
- Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), 1962.
- Michael Gillespie, "Martin Heidegger" in *The History of Political Philosophy*, Leo Strauss.& Joseph Cropsey (Ed.) (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 888-906.
- Mihai Novac, "Esse in Anima: The Phenomenological Ontology of C.G. Jung" in *Applied Social Science: Science and Theology*, Michele Marsonet & Georgeta Rață (Ed.) (Newcastle : Cambridge Scholars), 2013, pp. 79-87.
- Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland. Heidegger und Seine Zeit*, (Frankfurt am Main : Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag), 1998.