

Heidegger's Phenomenological Inquiry of the Being

Surbhi Uniyal

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University India

Abstract

The paper aims to focus on the existential phenomenology of Heidegger which includes the description of the 'meaning of Being'. It shows how Heidegger's philosophy is influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl, being influenced by Husserl how is it different from it? Husserl's intentionality is directed towards the outside world while for Heidegger intentionality is an inward journey of the "Dasein". This inward journey is through self-understanding and self-reflectivity. For Heidegger when we try to explain Being why to do it through the outside characters when it is so near to us and can be understood through self-reflection. The paper describes Heidegger's phenomenological structure of Being which he called the 'Care Structure'. It also shows how human beings live an authentic existence by living through the futuristic goal which Heidegger calls 'Being-ahead-of'. Thus, this paper aims to critically analyze the phenomenological inquiry of Being by contrasting it from Husserl's phenomenology and traditional ontological theories of substance as done by Heidegger.

I. Husserl's Phenomenology

Phenomenology began as an influential movement with Edmund Husserl, he was influenced by Brentano on the notion of intentionality but they differed from each other in many senses. According to Husserl phenomenology as a 'first philosophy' is without any presuppositions and it lays the basis for all further philosophical and scientific investigations. Husserl defines phenomenology as the scientific structures of consciousness. "Phenomenology began as a discernable movement with Edmund Husserl's demand that philosophy takes as its primary task the description of the structure of experience as they present themselves to consciousness."¹Husserl's phenomenology began as a critique of both psychologism and naturalism. He suggested that only by suspending or bracketing the 'natural attitudes' could philosophy become a rigorous science and said that phenomenology is a science of consciousness rather than of empirical things.

Husserl describes consciousness as intentional as it 'refers to' or is 'directed towards' an object, 'consciousness is always consciousness of something'. Husserl has taken the notion of intentionality from his teacher Brentano. Brentano had a strong notion of intentionality, he claimed that intentionality is the defining characteristic of mental and all mental phenomenon are intentional and it is a only mental phenomenon that is intentional. Husserl criticized the strong notion of intentionality by Brentano and states that not all mental phenomenon are intentional. Mental phenomena like pain, dizziness are not representational or directed towards something. So mental phenomena could be both intentional and non-intentional and the intentional mental

¹A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism, Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, P.2

phenomena are called the act of consciousness by Husserl. Therefore, not all mental phenomena are intentional and only conscious awareness is intentional as we are conscious of being conscious of something.

Husserl develops the method called 'phenomenological reduction' to make the study of consciousness rigorous. Phenomenological reduction is a process that suspends beliefs about the contingent features of phenomena so that the analysis will be focused on the necessary features of phenomena. Husserl called this process of suspension by various names like 'epoche', 'bracketing of presuppositions' and 'suspension of judgments'. Husserl describes this phenomenological reduction in three stages which are psychological reduction, transcendental reduction and eidetic reduction. In the psychological reduction he says that we should bracket all our judgments about the world from the natural standpoint to make philosophy a rigorous science. Transcendental reduction, on the other hand, does the reduction of the subject of consciousness, here the subject brackets his historical and cultural identity in order to reach pure consciousness which is called 'transcendental ego'. At last, comes eidetic reduction which is the reduction done on both object and subject of consciousness until there is a direct seeing of the essences. This knowledge is the goal of phenomenological reduction and makes philosophy a rigorous science.

Husserl also talks about the structure of experience which could be explained by taking up the melody example. In a melody, the notes at time t_1 , t_2 , t_3 and so on, must be heard in a succession. "Successiveness would thus appear to be an essential aspect of one's experience in order to have this particular kind of experience."² To be a melody each notes should be retained, as each note which is experienced as sounding now the past notes are retained and are experienced as fading into the past. As one hears each notes, the notes not yet heard, but are still to come, are also, in a sense, part of the experience. They are the part of what is currently being experienced, not in the sense of currently sounding along with the presently experienced note, but as expected."³ Husserl called this expectation as 'protention'. So the structure of experience includes retention, present now and protention in succession.

II. Heidegger's Existential Phenomenology: Care as Intentionality

Heidegger's philosophy is known as existential phenomenology which means viewing human life from inside rather than pretending to understand it from outside. The fundamental aspect for Heidegger is to answer the ontological question what is it to be? In order to answer this the consciousness is not directed outside to the world rather it is inwardly directed. According to Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being has forgotten in the Western tradition. They have only tried to articulate Being to be the ultimate having different characterizations and naming. According to Heidegger, those philosophers were raising "what" and "who" questions but in order to have a meaning of Being we need to ask "how" questions. As "how" questions are inward directed and are answered from the first-person viewpoint. When somebody ask 'how are you?' you answer it by reflecting upon yourself and through first-person perspective answer this question. The question of 'what' and 'who' are answered from a third person perspective, while the question of 'how' is always answered from a first-person perspective therefore it is an inward journey. The question of 'how'

² Cerbone, David. *Understanding Phenomenology*, P.25

³ Ibid, P.26

doesn't involve the in providing the description of the physical appearances it is rather concerned about ones feelings and inner states.

Heidegger then makes a distinction between ontic and ontological, where "being" or the entities in the world are considered ontic and "Being" or Dasein is considered ontological. In the ontic level a 'being' is biological person who merely surviving on the instincts like eating food on being hungry, drinking water on being thirsty and so on, without any reflective analyses of his actions. While in the ontological level a 'Being' is a person who lives an authentic life by reflecting upon his actions and thoughts. He self-reflectively tries to give meaning to his life by analysing the kind actions he performs and the values he adheres to, reflective chooses options in leading his life and not by blindly following others.

"Where Husserl focuses on intentionality as a feature of consciousness that can be thought about in abstraction from its existence, Heidegger emphasizes that Dasein is an entity whose essence lies in its existence and whose existence is always individuated and personal."⁴ Dasein is different from 'present-at-hand' things like tables and chairs, it is rather something which is not fixed and is always in a process of becoming. The 'present-at-hand' things have fixed specifications like fixed shape, size, form and so on, while Dasein has no fixed specifications, it keeps on changing or evolving. Dasein has various choices in life which leads him to various possibilities in life, therefore he is not something fixed it is always in a process of becoming as ever evolving. Dasein's dealings in the world are the site of its intentionality. A fundamental basis of our Being-in-the-world is care according to Heidegger. Heidegger said that "Dasein's Being reveals itself as care."⁵

"Care has a formal structure of Being-ahead-of-itself-already-in-Being-involved-in something. This being-ahead implies a structure whereby care is always a being about something, specifically such that Dasein in concern, in every performance, in every provision and production of something, in particular, is at the same concerned for its Dasein."⁶ Heidegger's care-structure can be explained through his formula containing three aspects which can be described independently but are closely connected to each other. These three aspects are ahead-of-itself (understanding/ projection), already-in (thrownness) and Being-alongside (falling). Dasein is always ahead of itself as it always projects itself in term of some for-the-sake-of or the possibility of becoming. So for Heidegger what we are is at no point fixed but something we project ourselves to be in terms of having potentiality-for-Being which is not yet. Whereas in already-in Heidegger says that we are already in a 'state-of-mind' constituted by mood, belief, anxiety, and past experiences. "Befindlichkeit or mood are bound up with what Heidegger calls "thrownness", which underlies the idea that our Being-in-the-world and many of its features in each case are not matter of choice or decision."⁷ The third is Being-alongside which is that Dasein is always falling as it is always caught up in the ongoing activities. This falling is conditioned by understanding and mood as our current activity is informed by the self-understanding in terms of which we are projecting ourselves, as well as the mood and dispositions we bring to that particular activity.

⁴MacAvoy, Leslie. "Heidegger and Husserl", *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, P.140

⁵ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, P.227

⁶ Heidegger, Martin. *History of the concept of time*, P.295

⁷Cerbone, David. *Understanding Phenomenology*, P.55

Heidegger arranges this formula in atemporal sequence as future-past-present. Where “Being-ahead-of is” seen as a futuristic goal looking for the possibilities of becoming which is not yet. “Already-in” which is also called thrownness is associated with the past as talks about the state-of-mind in which we are and is in a way attached to us without our choice. As soon as a person becomes aware of himself he sees himself to be “already-in-the-world”. Whenever a person becomes aware he sees himself to be situated in the world, like being located in a particular socio-religious community, or a particular family, to a particular linguistic community and so on. Whereas Being-alongside is a present situation in which a Dasein is. Therefore, Heidegger’s temporal sequence of future-past-present is, ‘Being-ahead-of’ – ‘Already-in-the-world’ – ‘Being-alongside’.

We can make a comparison of this Heidegger’s temporal structure of care with that of the Husserl’s structure of experience. Similar kind of structure can be seen in Husserl’s formulation of the structure of experience as for him experience is a unity of past, present, and future. Which is the combination of retention-present now and protention? Husserl took an example of a piece of melody to explain his temporal sequence. Where one remembers the tone which has been played and knows the one which is being played in the present and in the light of these he projects the future tone. There is a continuity in the temporal sequence which produces a melody. Similarly in the case of Heidegger the continuity in the temporal sequence provides a meaning to one’s life without which a life becomes meaningless. The structure seems to be the same but they are used for different aims. As Husserl’s structure is used to explain the epistemological experience while Heidegger uses this structure to explain ontology of the Being. Still, we can see that there is an obvious influence of Husserl on Heidegger, even though Heidegger twisted it to suit his study of Being.

Heidegger through this care structure in Being and Time has attacked the traditional understanding of ontology from whom the substance is understood in terms of actuality. Whereas Heidegger came up with a new understanding of Being in terms of potentiality and not actuality. In terms of possibility, Dasein is always seen as futuristic. As Dasein is futural therefore neither our past nor our present can be properly understood as being isolated from future. “In Being-ahead-of-oneself as Being towards one’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being, lies the existential-ontological condition for the possibility of Being-free for authentic existentiell possibilities.”⁸ The underlying condition for having the future possibility is the notion of freedom, as only when one has freedom can one think about the possible choices in life. So the Being-ahead-of or has the potentiality as he is free and this freedom helps Dasein to live an authentic life.

III. Authentic Existence

Heidegger makes a distinction between entities in the world (being) and Dasein (Being). According to him entities in the world have fixed and determined characteristics while Dasein does not possess any fixed characterizations rather it is always in a process of Becoming. Rather than being objects among other objects in the world, Dasein is a ‘relation of being’ which is a relation that is obtained between what one is at any moment and what one can be as the temporally extended unfolding of life into a realm of possibilities. In Heidegger’s view of Dasein individuality is not ‘given’ for being human, even though all humans possess the ‘potentiality-for-

⁸ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, P.237

Being' individuals. In our everyday being-in-the-world, we are in most of the cases seen as the 'They' or 'They-self' which is also called 'Das Man', doing our everyday work in which we are thrown. Dasein's existence is in the choices of possibilities which are open to him and since his choices are not fixed so his existence is not determined. So for Heidegger authentic existence is something we choose in relation to our possibilities.

Dasein is the unity of future-past-present rather than only being fixed in past and present. As a unified whole authentic Dasein fulfills its potentiality-for-Being in an ongoing, unfolding happening that has directedness. "Heidegger says, only in authentic existence does the "authentic Being-a-whole of Dasein [become] possible with regard to the unity of its articulated structural whole. Authentic existence reveals "temporality which is primordial and authentic."⁹ The care structure which includes future-past-present is a futuristic journey of the Being as the Being is seen as looking for the future choices. Being makes sense of his life by reflecting on the future goals. It is only humans who have the capability to look for possibilities in life, which other entities in the world doesn't possess. So only when a Being looks for the future possibilities can he be said an authentic Being as he is not fixed in his past in which he is thrown.

Heidegger says that the everyday Dasein is lost among the 'they' and becomes 'they-self' which means inauthentic Dasein. Inauthentic Dasein, for Heidegger, just is everyday Dasein precisely because it has the 'they' as an essential structure of its Being. The 'they' is inauthentic because it obscures Dasein's nature as Being-in-the-world. Insofar as authentic Dasein is possible i.e. Dasein that comes to realize its own nature as Being-in-the-world on its own terms apart from 'they'.

Dasein has the inherent potentiality for self-realization which helps him to make sense of himself. The potentiality which Dasein has is always "for-the-sake-of-something" as it is a purposeful activity. Being a purposeful activity it is always directed towards future goals. This purposeful activity of Being-ahead-of amounts to the authentic existence of Dasein. Dasein has the freedom to look for the possibilities and choose from them this helps him to live an authentic existence. The "Das-Man" is said to live an inauthentic life as he doesn't reflect upon himself and look for the possibilities in life, he is rather fixed in his thrownness. So a Being through the unity of Being-ahead-of-already-in-Being-alongside which is future-past-present lives an authentic life.

Conclusion

To be humans is to be different from other objects in the world as the objects in the world have fixed characterizations while human beings do not have fixed characterization as they can transcend their givenness. From the above discussion, it could be seen how Heidegger tries to locate the meaning of Being through the care structure. It also shows the similarities and distinctions between Husserl's and Heidegger's intentionality. According to Husserl philosophy should be objective and presuppositionless while for Heidegger philosophy should not be conducted from a detached, objective, disinterested standpoint because certain phenomena only show themselves to one who is engaged with the world in the right kind of way. For Heidegger the intentionality is inwardly directed through self-reflection and which

⁹Guignon, Charles. "Authenticity and The Question of Being", Heidegger, *Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, P.17

makes sense of the Being. This intentionality is the care structure in Heidegger which makes Dasein's life as an authentic existence.

Bibliography

A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism, Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., U.S.A., 2006.

MacAvoy, Leslie. "Heidegger and Husserl", The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger, Edited by Francois Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, 2013.

Cerbone, David. Understanding Phenomenology, Acumen Publishing Ltd., U.K., 2006.

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time, Translation Macquarrie and Robinson, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., U.K., 1962.

Heidegger, Martin. History of the concept of time, Translated by Theodore Kisiel, Indiana University Press, U.S.A., 1985.

Guignon, Charles. "Authenticity and The Question of Being", Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time, Edited by Denis McManus, New York, 2015.