

## The Ownmost Potentiality-for-Being as Ought-to-Be<sup>1</sup>

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*Wei-Ding Tsai*

**Abstract:** This article attempts to ponder a kind of ethics which could be developed from early Heidegger's thought. I use the subjunctive "could" here because Heidegger never put forward an ethical theory and explicitly rejected to do so in his later thought. Even though Heidegger's later philosophy is indeed incompatible with normative ethics in its prevalent sense, this article argues that his early work at least contains some axiological element, upon which a possible ethics can be founded. Even if we don't know exactly what such a possible ethics might eventually look like, we can at least thereby know what conditions it needs to satisfy.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, ethics, potentiality-for-Being, primordially, existential solipsism

### The axiological element in early Heidegger's ontological thinking

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines human Dasein as "potentiality-for-Being" (*Seinkönnen*) and means by this term that Dasein can transcend its facticity (*Faktizität*) and *be* towards different ontical-existential potentialities. He divides those potentialities further into authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) and inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*) and provides an ontological-existential description of them. He emphasizes repeatedly that the existentialia (*Existenzialien*) of inauthentic Dasein do not signify any "lower degree of Being."<sup>2</sup> He means namely that authentic Dasein is not

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<sup>1</sup> Several parts in this article have been presented in Chinese on some academic occasions previously, and I would like to express my special thanks to those colleagues who gave me critical comments and suggestions which made me able to revise the earlier version of the present article and to articulate it in a better way.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 17. Aufl. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 43, 167.

“higher” than inauthentic Dasein, although the former is *more primordially* concerning its mode of Being.

According to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of Dasein—or fundamental ontology –, we should understand his terminology of authenticity and inauthenticity as devoid of any value judgment, that is, as neutral. But we can also recognize that those terms somehow do carry a certain kind of valuation when Heidegger uses them in *Being and Time*. This recognition can be founded on the main goal of Heidegger’s philosophy: to grasp the meaning of Being. For the early Heidegger, the *most primordial* mode of Dasein (authenticity) as the ownmost potentiality of his Being is the only way to approach the long-forgotten Being appropriately. For his intention to grasp the meaning of Being, Dasein’s authentic mode of Being is what should be sought and thus be considered as ontologically *better* than its inauthentic mode, even though Heidegger claims that the former cannot properly be called *higher* than the latter. As long as Heidegger’s thought is guided by this intention, he must *ontologically* value authenticity over inauthenticity.

Furthermore, this value-laden difference between authenticity and inauthenticity is based on a general idea, namely: The more primordial a mode of Being is, the better it *is*. For example, the entity that is ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) is more primordial than the entity that is present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) and is therefore better in the sense that it is ontologically nearer to the true Being of a thing. Therefore, it is also better for Dasein to treat the entity within-the-world (*das innerweltliche Seiende*) as ready-to-hand but not as present-at-hand, if Dasein wants to avoid misunderstanding the true Being of the thing. Simply put, *what is ontologically primordial is good*. This is the axiological view which is consistently held in Heidegger’s thought. And it has a further implication: *What is ontologically derived is not good enough and not wished-for*. Since inauthenticity as Dasein’s derived mode of Being is not good enough to understand the meaning of Being, Dasein ought to strive for authenticity and seek to leave inauthenticity behind, even though inauthenticity might be unavoidable in the end.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that Being and value in Heidegger’s thought cannot be definitively separated from each other, and that the criterion for judging whether the value of Being of an entity is good or not lies in the degree of primordially of its mode of Being. But the ontological distinction between the so-called good and not-good—or good and bad—must still not be confused with the ethical distinction between good and evil or between right and wrong. In other words, “bad” here actually means only a lack of primordial Being, and concerns neither the good or evil of an attitude, nor the right or wrong of a behavior. There is no moral normativity in Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein. Therefore, it is true that there is no ethics in *Being and Time*.

### To what extent can we talk about an ethics developed from hermeneutics of Dasein?

Indeed, Heidegger's hermeneutics of Dasein is not concerned with ethical issues. But does this mean that the axiological element hidden in the hermeneutics of Dasein could not, nevertheless, form a basis for any ethical theory? To ponder this question, we need at first to realize how Heidegger understands the concept of "ethics." Taking a closer look at later Heidegger's comments on ethics may be helpful for us to undertake this task appropriately.

In the *Letter on "Humanism"* in 1947, Heidegger writes: "Soon after *Being and Time* appeared, a young friend asked me, 'When are you going to write an ethics?'"<sup>3</sup> Heidegger's reply to this question is strangely circuitous. He does not want to say outright *when*, if at all, he will write an ethical theory. Instead, he proceeds only to "deconstruct" the concept of ethics in order to clarify the relationship between "ontology" and "ethics." Heidegger acknowledges that human beings have a longing for binding instruction and for rules about how they ought to live cleverly and happily while their helplessness "soars to immeasurable heights."<sup>4</sup> But he is not interested in finding out those binding rules. He regards "ethics" simply as a collection of such binding rules of life and claims that people's "desire for an ethics" amounts to a desire for "gathering and ordering all their plans and activities as a whole in a way that corresponds to technology" so as to afford those, who are already delivered over to the masses, namely to the *They (das Man)*, "a reliable constancy."<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Heidegger regards ethics as a product of Platonic academy, i.e., as a product of metaphysics.<sup>6</sup> If we consider the relationship between "ontology" and "ethics" limited to this context, then we will, according to Heidegger, remain within the purview of Platonic metaphysics.

A more in-depth explanation can be found in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, published in 1953. Heidegger's account of the conceptual separation between Being and Ought (*Sollen*) in *Introduction to Metaphysics* makes his viewpoint about ethics clearer. He explains that the concept of Being has undergone a distorted restriction during its divorce from four concepts in the history of philosophy. After "Being" had experienced its opposition to the concepts of Becoming (*Werden*), Seeming (*Schein*), and

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 2. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), 349.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

Thinking (*Denken*), it was finally separated from Ought completely at the end of the eighteenth century and namely by Kant. Kant regarded nature as a special kind of entity and contrasted it with the categorical imperative (*kategorischer Imperativ*) which is equal to the Ought. In order to lay a foundation for itself, this Ought requires to have a value (*Wert*) in itself.<sup>7</sup> For Heidegger, such value is nothing but what he said in *Being and Time*: "the present-at-hand determinants of a thing."<sup>8</sup>

So far, Heidegger does indeed consistently regard ethics as a theory of present-at-hand norms for human beings, where the Ought is completely separated from Being and thus is not ontologically primordial. Furthermore, he believes that the primordial thought of Being might still be encountered in the period before Plato. So, he writes in *Letter on "Humanism"*: "Thinkers prior to this period knew neither a 'logic' nor an 'ethics' nor 'physics.' Yet their thinking was neither illogical nor immoral."<sup>9</sup> Those tinkers didn't need ethics in the modern sense for them to live a happy life. Such a kind of ethics as a philosophical discipline which attempts to justify moral norms is eventually a product derived metaphysically. The reason why Heidegger did not write an ethics after *Being and Time* now becomes clear. It is because he regards ethics as a system of valued norms controlled by "metaphysical" thinking and argues that "every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing"; "it does not let the being *be* but rather lets the being solely *be considered to be* the object of its doing."<sup>10</sup> Just like sciences (*ἐπιστήμη*) such as logic, epistemology, aesthetics etc., ethics for Heidegger also belongs to the metaphysics of subject-object and thus should be left behind by the primordial thinking. For the same reason, the later Heidegger turns away from his earlier analysis of the authentic Dasein and towards a more radical "authenticity" where no more ethics exists.

Nevertheless, the later Heidegger's rejection of ethics is quite disputable because he seems to restrict, already at the outset, the meaning of the word "ethics" to *normative ethics* and thus denies any ethics on the ground that normative ethics is a product of metaphysics. By doing so, Heidegger would rule out in advance all possible ethical theories which eventually do not belong to normative ethics in this sense. It is just like some theologians who define "theology" strictly as the study of Christian God and therefore exclude all other studies of supernatural or sacred beings from "theology." Even if Heidegger indeed intends to limit his critique of ethics to normative ethics, his critique still cannot generally apply to all theories of normative

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 2. Aufl. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1958), 151.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 350.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

ethics. The reason behind Heidegger's critique of normative ethics might apply to utilitarianism and deontology; it is hard to apply to virtue ethics, since the latter doesn't provide a set of present-at-hand principles to determine human moral behaviors clearly. Furthermore, while he regards every moral norm for binding human behavior as general rules of the They, he also overlooks the potentiality of an individual to control his own situated behavior autonomously.

Despite the above-mentioned disputation, Heidegger's rejection of ethics, however, does not hinder us from identifying His standpoint: Although he opposes all normative ethics because of their metaphysical form, he does not therefore claim that human beings must be amoral in their primordial existence. In other words, he still concedes the possibility that the primordial Being of Dasein can *be* in a moral condition—whatever it actually could be.

Insofar as we have now inspected the late Heidegger's standpoint about ethics together with his axiological viewpoint in *Being and Time*, we have already prepared a horizon for developing a possible Heideggerian ethics—albeit on the condition that we do not grasp the word “ethics” completely in accordance with Heidegger's own definition. To talk reasonably about a possible theory of ethics within the system of early Heidegger's philosophy, we must understand “ethics” in its broader sense. After all, the late Heidegger's argument against ethics is directed only against normative ethics in its prevalent sense; in other words, it is not necessary for Heidegger's thinking to reject all kinds of ethics. Besides, since Heidegger recognizes that Dasein can be moral in its primordial existence, a study of such a moral state should be called ethics too. In short, a Heideggerian ethics must explain how the primordial Being of Dasein could be moral and what characteristics such a moral state might have. For this purpose, we shall now make a brief description of the ontological structure of Dasein's primordial Being.

### **The condition of the possibility of the primordial Being of Dasein**

Heidegger asserts that an entity is primordial only when it is at the same time a whole (*ganz*) and authentic (*eigentlich*).<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the existential analysis of everyday Dasein cannot grasp the wholeness and authenticity of Dasein. His reasons can be shortly formulated as follows. First, Dasein as existence is transcendent—i.e., it always “stands out of itself”—so that there can always be another potentiality for it, and as a result Dasein is always in a state of incompleteness. Although the formal analysis of the

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 233.

structure of care (*Sorge*) in the first division of *Being and Time* has provided us the whole structure of Dasein's Being, but it is not capable enough to explain the potentiality-for-Being-a-whole (*Ganzseinkönnen*) of Dasein. Secondly, since Dasein acts in its everyday life always according to the potentialities offered by the They, it first and mostly does not project itself toward its ownmost potentiality—authenticity –, but is used to acting in inauthentic ways. Therefore, we cannot meet Dasein's ownmost potentiality simply through the formal analysis of everyday Dasein. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the possibility that Dasein can be authentic and whole. In fact, Heidegger even declares that “[the] care-structure does not speak *against* the possibility of Being-a-whole but is the *condition of the possibility* of such an existentiell potentiality-for-Being.”<sup>12</sup>

The question which the ontological-existential analysis of authentic Dasein faces is as follows: How can Dasein be its Being in the primordial sense? To answer this question, we need to inquire into the phenomenon of care—not only in the care-phenomenon in general, but directly in its authentic mode. It is through this special mode of care that the Being of Dasein can turn itself from inauthentic to authentic. According to this changing, what Dasein mainly cares for is now no longer the entity within-the-world (*das innerweltliche Seiende*) or Dasein-with (*Mitdasein*) which it encounters in everyday life, but its own Self. Because of this difference regarding what is cared for, Heidegger designates this mode of care as care-for-self (*Selbstsorge*). Especially in authentic Dasein, the mode of care-for-self is clearly distinct from the care in everyday life—while the latter presents itself mainly in the modes of concern (*Besorgen*) and solicitude (*Fürsorge*).

Before we analyze the authentic care, which makes Dasein open up to its primordial Being, it is necessary to explain several points. (1) The self, which Dasein in its authentic care *is*, is not the *They-self* (*Man-Selbst*) in everyday fallenness—namely not the self behaving according to the opinions from the They –, nor is it the metaphysical subject of theoretical knowledge. In principle, only the self in its primordial Being can be counted as the authentic “I” of Dasein; in contrast, the They-self is only a “not-I” in the sense that it has lost in the inauthentic self. (2) According to Heidegger, both modes of authenticity and inauthenticity are all characterized by *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we cannot say that the They-self is not mine, nor that only the authentic self is mine. This means that the mineness is just one of the constitutive conditions of authenticity, but not its sufficient condition.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 317; English translation: *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, reprinted (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001). Henceforth all English translations will refer to this work.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 42f.

(3) Authenticity is the *most* primordial potentiality of Dasein. A potentiality of Being is authentic not only because it is mine, but also because it can be *decided only by myself* and thus be my primordial mode of Being. It is therefore a kind of potentiality that can only be realized by the authentic “I” in the first person and not by someone else. The authentic self is the “Self which is *specially* grasped.”<sup>14</sup> (4) Since inauthenticity is also in each case mine, everyday Dasein could certainly speak and act in the first person, too. But everyday Dasein saying “I” here understands itself only from the concerned “world” so that it mistakes the They-self as its ownmost potentiality-for-Being and therefore loses its authentic self. In Heidegger’s eyes, the “I” here flees rather into the “not-I.”<sup>15</sup> (5) Although only authenticity is considered as a primordial mode of Dasein, Dasein is *first and mostly* inauthentic and is essentially as They-self projected in the world. This means not only that Dasein is inauthentic until it reaches its authenticity. It also implies that authenticity, once it is reached, can by no means be maintained forever. In other words, the Being of Dasein would lapse from authenticity back into inauthenticity as soon as its will to self-determination decreases. Carman clarifies this point with a simile: Inauthenticity is like the permanent pull of gravity, while authenticity is like resistance to the inertia of falling and can cease at any moment.<sup>16</sup>

Our inquiry about the existential analysis of authentic care can thus be reformulated in another way: How can the everyday Dasein as They-self become the authentic self? The intention of this paraphrase here is to point out that there is a unique viewpoint on the concept of individuality which is hidden behind Heidegger’s remark about authentic care. If we can bring Heidegger’s concept of individuality into prominence in our analysis of authentic care, then it would be helpful to reveal how Dasein goes from its potentiality-for-Being to its ought-to-Be.

### The existential analysis of authentic care as care-for-self

Let us return to the question which the existential analysis of authentic Dasein was meant to solve: Why can authentic care seize the wholeness and authenticity of Dasein? Our inquiry could begin with three existentialia in the formal structure of care, i.e., *attunement* (*Befindlichkeit*), *understanding* (*Verstehen*) and *discourse* (*Rede*). Since care-for-self is the outstanding mode of care—it aims to open up the ownmost potentiality-for-

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 129, emphasis is mine.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 321f.

<sup>16</sup> See Taylor Carman, “Must We Be Inauthentic?” in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, vol. 1, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall & Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2000), 28.

Being –, to clarify the structure of these existentialia will help us disclose its concrete way of revealing the authentic self.

### *Attunement in care-for-self*

At the outset, the attunement in care-for-self is to be discussed. Heidegger points out that there is an outstanding basic attunement which “takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the ‘world’ and the way things have been publicly interpreted”<sup>17</sup> and thus “manifest in Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—i.e., its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself”<sup>18</sup>. This basic attunement is referred to as “anxiety” (*Angst*).

According to Heidegger, the attunement of anxiety differs from fear (*Furcht*). The object of fear is always an entity within-the-world that can be definitely pointed out; by contrast, the “object” of anxiety is indefinite and cannot be found anywhere in the world, because the “what-it-is-about” (*Wovor*) of anxiety is “nothing ready-to-hand within-the-world,” but “the world as such.”<sup>19</sup> Since the world as such does not signify the totality of all entities within-the-world, to which Heidegger always refers as “world” in quotation marks, but as ‘something’ *most primordial* and/or “the *possibility of the ready-to-hand in general*”; and since the world ontologically also belongs to Being-in-the-world, therefore the what-it-is-about of anxiety is Dasein itself.<sup>20</sup> In other words, when Dasein is anxious, it becomes indifferent to the entities within-the-world. What now stands in the foreground is its self. The covering and obscuring interpretation of the “world” that the They brings forward to Dasein can no longer set Dasein’s heart at rest. This anxiety forces Dasein to turn its gaze from the entities within-the-world back to itself and let it *only take care of itself*. This process, in which the attunement of anxiety brings Dasein “back from its absorption in the ‘world’” and discloses it as “*solus ipse*,” is described by Heidegger as the “singularization” (*Vereinzlung*) of Dasein—Heidegger calls it existential “Solipsism.”<sup>21</sup> Dasein can overcome the covering and obscuring effected by the They only when it is under the condition of its singularization, and thus freely project its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. It is anxiety that brings Dasein to meet its authenticity. So said Heidegger: “Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 187.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 188f.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

However, this does not mean at the same time that Dasein in anxiety is already authentic. Strictly speaking, anxiety only opens up the potentiality for Dasein to become sharply aware of two kinds of modes of its Being—authenticity and inauthenticity. It is still possible that Dasein in this moment lacks the courage to face its authentic self and flees again to the entities within-the-world. In this case, Dasein goes from being anxious about Being to being afraid of some entities. To explain how Dasein reaches its authentic and whole self, Heidegger must further resort to another two elements of authentic care—understanding and discourse –, although all the three elements actually unfold together in care-for-self.

### *Understanding in care-for-self*

Let us now turn to the understanding of care-for-self. The understanding which discloses Dasein's potentiality-for-Being through projection has in its turn also an outstanding mode that can project Dasein toward its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Heidegger calls this mode of understanding "the existential Projection of an authentic Being-towards-death (*Sein zum Tode*)."<sup>23</sup> Death as the uttermost possibility of Dasein's Being is "a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is."<sup>24</sup> Since Dasein's Being after its death can no longer be there, it can finally grasp its potentiality-for-Being-a-whole only through thinking about its death. Anyway, Dasein would not take its Being-towards-death first and mostly seriously, but flees before its own death by talking about the death of others in the form of idle talk (*Gerede*). On the other hand, thinking ahead—with Heidegger's word: "anticipatory disclosure (*vorlaufendes Erschließen*)"<sup>25</sup>—to its own death brings Dasein before nothingness, and the nothingness makes Dasein anxious, namely lets it only care for itself. At the point of death, Heidegger discerns not only that "Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety,"<sup>26</sup> but also maintains further that the existential understanding of death can grasp at the same time the wholeness of Dasein's Being and the possibility of its authenticity.

This is based on Heidegger's analysis of the structure of death. He points out that death as the uttermost possibility of Dasein has five characteristics which are dependent on each other, i.e.: ownmost (*eigenst*), non-relational (*unbezüglich*), not to be outstripped (*unüberholbar*), certain (*gewiss*) and indefinite (*unbestimmt*). Their contents could be explained briefly

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

as follows. (I) "Death is the *ownmost* possibility of Dasein," because it is the possibility of Dasein's Being which is unique and absolutely cannot be represented by another Dasein (*Mitdasein*). Besides, Dasein can disclose not only "its factual lostness in the everydayness of the they-self" from its Being-towards-death, but also can snatch itself from the They, so that only its Being is now completely at stake.<sup>27</sup> (II) Death is the *non-relational* possibility of Dasein, because death lets Dasein detach all connections to other *Mitdasein*, so that it forces Dasein to become individual. Only when Dasein is non-relational in its individuation, i.e., only when it *is* from itself, can it really be authentic.<sup>28</sup> (III) Death is the *not to be outstripped* possibility of Dasein, because it is "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein," the end of the essentially always ecstatic Dasein. If Dasein does not flee before death, then its anticipation of death can give it freedom, so that it can for the first time "authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped," before it dies.<sup>29</sup> (IV) Death is the *certain* possibility of Dasein, because death can make Dasein not allow the uttermost possibility of its Being to be covered by the They-self, so that Dasein can consider its death as real. The certainty of the not to be outstripped death ensures Dasein the wholeness of its Being. Just because this "considering death as real," Dasein is asked to take a certain behavior (i.e., to select its ownmost possibilities) and to exist "in the full authenticity."<sup>30</sup> (V) Death is the *indefinite* possibility of Dasein, because death is for Dasein "possible at any moment." Death is approaching, but the hour of death "remains constantly indefinite." Since death is at the same time certain and indefinite, it means a constant threat for Dasein, i.e., "the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein's ownmost individualized Being." The only thing which can let Dasein stay open to this threat in such a way so that Dasein could ascertain the wholeness of its potentiality-for-Being in its individualization, is anxiety.<sup>31</sup>

Through the existential analysis of death, Heidegger shows how the wholeness of Dasein can be grasped in its anticipation of death. Besides, Heidegger's concept of individuality is also thereby more clearly characterized: With anxiety in anticipation of death, the individualization of Dasein is not only non-relational to any other entities, but also determined from its own end and resolution.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 239f., 263.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 250, 263f.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 250, 264.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 256f., 264f.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 258, 265f.

*Discourse in care-for-self*

The last element of care-for-self to be investigated is discourse (*Rede*). Since Dasein in its authentic care is, as discussed above, non-relational to any other entities, the authentic discourse must be of a radically individualized character. In other words, it is not Dasein's talking with a *Mitdasein*, but with *itself*. What makes this mode of discourse outstanding is that it can give expression to Dasein's understanding of its authentic self *distinctly*. But this kind of Dasein's talking with itself is not a soliloquy of everyday Dasein as the They-self. The latter remains still arrested in the ordinary idle talk of the public so that its communicated expression cannot be regarded as authentic. In addition, the authentic discourse, strictly speaking, means neither a soliloquy of authentic Dasein, because the latter is a monologue of authentic Dasein itself and is thus not enough to explain how everyday Dasein *becomes* authentic. So "Dasein's talking with itself" can only be a dialogue between Dasein's authentic self and its They-self, although both "selves" are the same Dasein. To prove that this case is possible, Heidegger highlights a phenomenon, i.e., conscience (*Gewissen*). By his explanation of conscience, Heidegger aims "not only [to] carry forward the earlier analysis of the disclosedness of the there (Da), but *more primordially* [to] grasp that analysis regarding the authentic Being of Dasein."<sup>32</sup>

Conscience is an "internal" phenomenon that people can experience in everyday life. People hear their conscience calling. It tells people what they "ought to do" or "ought not to do." Through the phenomenon of conscience, one becomes not only aware of the distance between what one actually is and what one should be. He also realizes that his ought-to-be which his conscience reveals must be already "inside" himself. Heidegger's phenomenological explanation of conscience does not in principle deviate from this description. But it is noticeable that his interpretation is neither psychological nor theological. He takes conscience at first as a thrown fact of Dasein, and further as existential evidence to prove that Dasein is able to anticipate its authentic potentiality-for-Being, while it still stands under the rule of the They.

Heidegger interprets conscience as a call of Dasein's authentic self to its They-self, and the call of conscience as a special mode of discourse.<sup>33</sup> Since the call of conscience is a mode of discourse, it can of course be analyzed according to the existential structure of discourse: (1) The call of conscience is a kind of communication (*Mitteilung*), which the authentic self addresses to the They-self. This call communicates something to the addressee and the addressee will do something to respond to this call. Therefore, the call of

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 270, emphasis is mine.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

conscience is precisely a special communication which calls for an action. (2) What-is-talked-about (*Beredetes*) in the call of conscience is concerned about Dasein itself, and at first about the addressed They-self. Nevertheless, the what-is-talked-about must include the authentic self, because the addressed They-self is called for coming to its authentic self. (3) Although what-is-said-in-the-discourse (*Geredetes*) in the call of conscience is usually described as “voice of conscience,” it is, when seen from the phenomenological perspective, voiceless: “Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent.”<sup>34</sup> The call says nothing. That is the reason why the addressee can at this moment stop hearing the loud idle talk of the They and be called back to the state of reticence (*Verschwiegenheit*) of its potentiality-for-Being. Only because of this can the addressee finally listen to his authentic self and then understand it. Heidegger designates this voiceless call as “a primordial kind of discourse for Dasein.”<sup>35</sup>

### Existential solipsism as foundation for an ethical theory

In the foregoing, the existential structure of the primordial Being of Dasein has been briefly explained by Dasein’s three essential existentialia (attunement, understanding and discourse). Corresponding to those three essential moments of disclosedness, Heidegger renames them respectively as *uncanniness* (*Unheimlichkeit*), *will-have-a-conscience* (*Gewissen-haben-wollen*) and *reticence* (*Verschwiegenheit*). Uncanniness is the existential state of “not-at-home” (*Un-zuhause*) which is disclosed by anxiety and means that Dasein now does not “dwell in tranquillized familiarity” of the They.<sup>36</sup> Will-have-a-conscience is the self-understanding of Dasein through the call of conscience, an excellent manner of self-projection. This term means that Dasein, while it is “hearing the appeal correctly,” finds itself guilty (*schuldig*), decides to become the authentic self being in uncanniness, and lets this ownmost self “in itself” actively behave. Will-have-a-conscience is at the same time “readiness for anxiety” (*Bereitschaft zur Angst*).<sup>37</sup> Reticence refers in general to the existential stillness of Dasein itself. It is to take “the words away from the common-sense idle talk of the ‘They’,” so that Dasein can understand the voiceless discourse of conscience appropriately.<sup>38</sup> At last, Heidegger integrates these three moments of Being of authentic Dasein into a united disclosedness and calls it “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*). Resoluteness is the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 271ff., 296.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 189, 296.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 287f., 296.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

authentic uncoveredness (*Unverborgenheit*) of Dasein as *care*—and namely the *most primordial* truth of Dasein.<sup>39</sup>

We can now summarize Heidegger's analysis of authentic Dasein shown above with one of his own sentences: "Dasein is *authentically itself* in the primordial individualization of the reticent resoluteness which exacts anxiety of itself."<sup>40</sup> This is the disclosedness of the ownmost Potentiality-for-Being. And we could call it the whole structure of existential "solipsism."

The existential "solipsism" describes not only the Being of authentic Dasein, but also suffices here to illustrate how inauthentic Dasein becomes authentic Dasein. Since, as mentioned earlier, authenticity has ontologically an axiological element and is thus superior to inauthenticity, can we now develop on the basis of such an existential solipsism a possible moral theory? Basically, this question is ultimately to ask: In what way can the ownmost Potentiality-for-Being become the Ought-to-Be (*Seinsollen*)?

It is true that Heidegger has not yet used such a term like "*Seinsollen*" and does avoid mentioning "*sollen*" (ought to) in his hermeneutics of Dasein. Apparently, Heidegger's hermeneutics of Dasein is free of any ontically value judgment by describing the Being of authentic Dasein phenomenologically. It seems to suggest that Heidegger excludes the concept of "ought" from his philosophy. But if we more carefully read Heidegger's critique of the differentiation between Being and Ought in *Introduction to the Metaphysics*,<sup>41</sup> we can clearly find out that his inquiry into the historical concept of Being intends to go back to a primordial status of Being where "ought to" and "is" cannot be divided from each other. This means that his description of authentic Dasein has indeed revealed an inclination of ontological value concealed in Dasein's Being. When he inquires into the question of the primordial Being of Dasein in *Being and Time*, he does not only want to let Dasein understand its authenticity and inauthenticity *ontologically*, but also ask Dasein that it ought to reach its authentic, ownmost mode of Being *ontically*. It is at this point that we can seek at least a possible ethics whose task is to turn from inauthenticity to authenticity. As for what such an ethics will look like in the end, it remains to be studied later.<sup>42</sup>

*Department of Philosophy  
National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan*

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 149ff.

<sup>42</sup> For example, as one anonymous reviewer put it, "the passive occurrence of anxiety needs to be addressed" in this possible moral theory. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, further reflections on Heideggerian ethics have to be discussed elsewhere.

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