

The Concept of Willing in Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to clarify the meaning of Dasein with respect to the concept of willing that is revealed in the 'for-the-sake-of (*Um-willen*).'¹ Yet it should be noted that in fundamental ontology willing has a peculiar meaning. In contrast to the general concept of willing founded in practical reason, the willing of Dasein is based on the pre-thematic dimension.

Keywords: care, mood, *Um-willen*, willing

Although in fundamental ontology Heidegger speaks of the destruction of traditional ontology, his elaboration of the question of Being still belongs to the tradition of transcendental philosophy. This is demonstrated by the fact that he seeks to clarify the meaning of Being on the basis of the transcendental concept of Being. "We can also call," he remarks, "the science of being, as critical science, *transcendental science*."¹ Transcendental science, however, is first elaborated not by Heidegger but by Kant.² According to Kant, the transcendental way of thinking concerns neither an ontical structure of beings nor of their totality but a condition of possibility of beings based on our mode of *a priori* knowledge of beings. Heidegger, who takes over the tradition of transcendental method, also stresses that the analysis of things in the environment essentially presupposes our mode of *a priori* knowledge. "This '*a priori*' letting-something-be-involved is the condition for the possibility of encountering anything ready-to-hand."³ Yet, what is important here is that in fundamental ontology, our mode of apriority is not concerned with the condition for the possibility of experiencing the thematic objects in nature. On the contrary, it deals with *a*

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, trans. and ed. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 17.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), B25.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 117.

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priori condition for encountering pre-thematic things,⁴ namely equipment (*Zeug*) in the environment. Moreover, Heidegger insists that the *a priori* condition of equipment is sought not in the *domain of consciousness* as in the case of Kant's critical philosophy, but in the *domain of Dasein*. But what is the primordial ground of man (*Dasein*) that undermines knowing of consciousness?

We want to argue here that the primordial ground of man defined as *Dasein* consists in existential willing.⁵ So in addition to the temporal structure, the essential characteristic of *Dasein* must be sought in the phenomenon of willing. Yet at first sight, our attempt to identify willing with the primordial ground of human *Dasein* seems misleading. As Heidegger explicitly states, it is not willing but an affective mood (*Stimmung*) that precedes the domain of conceptual knowing in the existential analytic of *Dasein*. "Only we must not be misled by this into denying that ontologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for *Dasein*, in which *Dasein* is disclosed to itself *prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure."⁶ As indicated here, an affective mood is the primordial ground of *Dasein*. However, when it is closely examined, the willing of *Dasein* is not inconsistent with Heidegger's thoughts that emphasize affective mood.

According to Heidegger, willing and an affective mood are not two separate states of man. In regard to this point, he states as follows: "This suggests that willing is itself a kind of state, that it is open in and to itself. Willing is feeling (a state of attunement)."⁷ Here willing is equated with feeling. By the willing of *Dasein*, Heidegger, however, does not mean the intellectual and naturalistic volition in the traditional sense. In contrast to this, the willing of *Dasein* has an existential meaning. Our task is to clarify an existential meaning of willing of *Dasein*, on which the transcendental science

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. by William McNeill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 343–344.

⁵ However, there are already several attempts to expose the primacy of doing over knowing in Heidegger's philosophy. Cf., Gerold Prauss, *Knowing and doing in Heidegger's "Being and Time"*, trans. by Gary Steiner and Jeffrey S. Turner (New York: Humanity Books, 1999); Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988); Franco Volpi, "Dasein as praxis: Heidegger and Aristotle," in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. by Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1996). These attempts, however, remain unsatisfactory, because the existential meaning of willing is not explicitly discussed. Consequently, without having a clear understanding of willing, it is difficult to grasp what Heidegger means by doing over knowing in fundamental ontology.

⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 175. Cf. Michel Haar, "Attunement and Thinking," in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 159–171.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, trans. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 52.

of Being is founded. The existential meaning of willing can be first clarified in its relation to equipment in the world.

Being-in-the-world: The Correlation of Dasein and Equipment (*pragmata*) in Practical Activity

In order to elucidate the existential willing of Dasein, it is important to begin with the analysis of the world in fundamental ontology. When Heidegger explains Dasein, he never mentions the term consciousness separated from the world. Instead, he emphasizes 'Being-in-the-world.' What he understands by the world is a place "that 'wherein' a factual Dasein as such can be said to 'live.'"⁸ Heidegger calls the world of a factual Dasein the environment (*Um-welt*). In the environment, human Dasein primarily *lives* (exists) before he *thinks*.

As a living entity, Dasein primarily forms its world as the environment (*Umwelt*). The peculiar feature of environment, according to Heidegger, lies in the fact that in it, something first gets encountered not as a 'thing-*realia*' but as a 'thing-equipment (*Zeug*).'⁹ In regard to this point, Heidegger states: "Equipment—in accordance with its equipmentality—always is in terms of its belonging to other equipment; ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, door, rooms. These 'things' never show themselves proximally as they are for themselves, so as to add up a sum of *realia* and fill up a room."⁹ Hence, in order to understand the meaning of environment, the distinction between 'thing-*realia*' and 'thing-equipment' must be clarified.

By the term 'thing-*realia*,' Heidegger means the categorial determination of things in traditional ontology. From the standpoint of traditional ontology, the 'thing-*realia*' as the Being of things (*res*)¹⁰ denotes the universal determination of a thing. Since 'thing-*realia*' is mediately given in the understanding, it is regarded as a thematic object. Yet this way of determining things in traditional ontology is not applicable to the 'thing-equipment.'

In contrast to 'thing-*realia*,' a 'thing-equipment' is encountered in the world where Dasein lives. In other words, the 'thing-equipment' is what is *immediately pre-given* to Dasein before the abstract theoretical construction. Hence, it is regarded as a pre-thematic thing. Moreover, Heidegger insists that unlike a 'thing-*realia*,' the pre-thematic equipment is never given to Dasein as a singular piece of equipment unrelated to other equipment: "Taken strictly, there 'is' no such thing as an equipment. To the Being of any

⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 97–98.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 245.

equipment there always belong a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is.”¹¹ A piece of equipment is always given in the equipmental whole, because the use of equipment essentially presupposes its relation to other equipment.

According to Heidegger, the reference to other pieces of equipment is possible by the fact that the function of equipment is constituted in the ‘in-order-to (*Um-zu*)’ structure: “Equipment is essentially ‘something-in-order-to.’”¹² Since a totality of equipment is constituted by various ways of the ‘in-order-to,’ equipment is defined such as “serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability.”¹³ It should be noted here that instead of the traditional ontological determination of things in terms of substantiality or materiality, Heidegger uses the term ‘serviceability’ and ‘usability’ for determining the essence of equipment. However, a piece of equipment is never given in intuition. Consequently, one cannot discover the ‘serviceability’ of equipment by just looking at it. For Heidegger, the ‘serviceability’ of equipment, for instance, a hammer, is immediately disclosed in the practical activities of Dasein. “The hammering itself uncovers the specific ‘manipulability’ of the hammer.”¹⁴ Hence, it is in the hammering rather than the ‘intuition of essence (*Wesensanschau*)’ that we can grasp the essence of a hammer. The use of equipment certainly indicates that in dealing with things in the environment, the practical comportment towards a thing precedes its theoretical comportment.

The analysis of equipment in the environment leads to Dasein’s practical comportment, necessarily presupposing the phenomenon of ‘willing.’ The practical activity of Dasein, however, should not be understood as the action of man that is guided by the rational principle derived from ‘I think.’ In contrast to this the primordial action is manifested in the practical activity of Dasein, which is only possible on the basis of conative ‘willing’ founded in the pre-thematic dimension. This existential willing defined as the pre-thematic willing is further clarified in connection with the phenomenon of care.

The Willing of Dasein and Care (*Sorge*)

The analysis of equipment has shown that there is primacy of the practical comportment over the theoretical comportment in Dasein’s relation with things. For Heidegger, the ontological ground for these practical activities is based on care (*Sorge*), which is “the ground of the Being of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

Dasein.”¹⁵ Since care is the ground of Dasein, it is also characterized in terms of willing. In regard to this point, Heidegger states: “Dasein’s projection of itself understandingly upon a potentiality-for-Being towards a possibility of the entity ‘willed.’ In the phenomenon of willing, the underlying totality of care shows through.”¹⁶ For the complete understanding of existential willing, it is necessary to explicate what Heidegger means by the phenomenon of care.

From the perspective of existential willing, human Dasein is defined primordially as *ens cura* that precedes *ens cogitans* and *ens volens*. By care, Heidegger means Dasein’s concern for its Being. This meaning of care, however, must be distinguished from the ontical sense of care in the everyday world. Care, in the ontical sense, signifies the inner state of ‘melancholy,’ ‘worry,’ or the ‘care of life.’ When care is interpreted in this ontical sense, the assertion “the structure of the Being of Dasein is care” seems to be equated with a pre-philosophical statement like “life is essentially care and toil.”¹⁷ Understood in this way, the meaning of care seems to suggest Dasein is an entity that constantly worries about its living condition.

In dealing with care, Heidegger, however, does not intend to portray such an ontical state of Dasein, which represents the gloomy rather than the bright aspect of life.¹⁸ Instead, he wants to develop an ontological structure of Dasein. As the ontological structure, care provides the condition of possibility for such an ontical state like ‘melancholy’ or ‘tribulation.’ “It has nothing to do with ‘tribulation,’ ‘melancholy,’ or the ‘care of life,’ though ontically one can come across these in every Dasein. These—like their opposite, ‘gaiety’ and ‘freedom from care’—are ontically possible only because Dasein, when understood as *ontologically*, is care.”¹⁹ The ontological meaning of care precedes the ontical state of ‘melancholy.’ In contrast to ‘melancholy’ or ‘tribulation,’ Heidegger insists that the ontological meaning of care is closely bound up with ‘propensity (*Hang*)’ and ‘urge (*Drang*).’

In dealing with Heidegger’s philosophy, the phenomenon of care is difficult to understand, because it is an unprecedented concept. We can hardly find the corresponding concept of care in modern philosophy. Yet, in *History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger explicates care with the familiar concepts such as ‘propensity’ or ‘urge’: “Before we proceed toward the understanding of one of these ways of being, namely, the interpretation of this character of the ‘before,’ we shall clarify the two phenomena which are

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 220.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 239.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 301.

¹⁸ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), 327.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 84.

closely associated with care--*urge* and *propensity*.”²⁰ It is in the analysis of ‘*urge*’ that we can find a clue to understand the ontological meaning of care in the context of modern philosophy.

For Heidegger, as a living entity the fundamental characteristic of Dasein consists in the ‘need (*chreia*)’ of something. If their needs are not fulfilled, all living entities whether they are human beings, animals, or plants cannot exist. Thus, since man is in need of something in order to exist, he is regarded as a living entity. In contrast to human Dasein, a stone, for instance, is a non-living entity, because it can exist without needing anything from elements around itself. That is, a stone does not have to endeavor to exist. In its state of existence, a stone can be what it is and can remain in a given immutable condition without seeking elements. As such, it is considered as a being-in-itself in a state of complacency. But unlike a stone, human Dasein does not have such a complacent state in relation to surrounding things. In order to exist (live), man must constantly seek elements from the outer world. Moreover, man can meet the needs of life, because he is capable of striving for something in the world. For Heidegger, *urge* represents this power of going towards something: “*Urge* has the character of ‘towards’ something. In particular, this ‘towards something’ points to an element of compulsion which comes from the ‘towards’ itself.”²¹ This ‘towards something’ of *urge* characterizes an essential aspect of care.

Urge, however, is not the only ontical modality of care. The phenomenon of *urge* presupposes a state in which human Dasein is dependent on the things in the world. Human Dasein’s dependence on the surrounding things indicates its ‘propensity’ “to becoming ‘lived’ by whatever world it is in.”²² In this sense, by the term ‘propensity,’ Heidegger wants to show the fundamental structure of Dasein that Dasein is “already-being-involved-in-something.”²³ Thus, the propensity of Dasein reveals the other moment of care, which shows Dasein is a thrown entity in the world.

In Heidegger’s view, *urge* and propensity are essentially tied together and form a unity in care. This unity characterizes the fundamental structure of care. In this unity of care defined as ‘willing,’ one can ascertain the peculiar characteristic of the pre-thematic willing distinguished from the intellectual will in the traditional philosophy. According to the traditional conception, the ground of intellectual will is always thought to be a simple ground. In contrast to this, Heidegger argues that the ground of care consists in the various structural moments such as *urge* and propensity that are equiprimordially constituted.

²⁰ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 295–296.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 240.

²³ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 296.

As shown in the preceding section, the existential willing of Dasein is grounded in the pre-thematic willing of care. Yet, it is important to clarify here that although care, in an ontical sense, is constituted in the unity of urge and propensity, it should not be thought as a blind willing circumscribed by the natural instinct. As Heidegger argues, the willing of Dasein is manifested in the midst of beings in the world, whereas an instinct is found in nature. Furthermore, the practical activities based on the willing (care) of Dasein have the correlative relation with equipment, whereas an instinct has only a correlative relation with natural things. For Heidegger, only human Dasein can have the practical comportment toward equipment, because the pre-thematic willing of care is grounded in the 'for-the-sake-of (*Um-willen*)' of Dasein, which indicates that Dasein is self-determined. Hence, the '*Um-willen*' of Dasein indicates that although the pre-thematic willing precedes the intellectual will, it is not reduced to the naturalistic will. On the contrary, the pre-thematic willing also transcends naturalism.

The *Um-willen* of Dasein as Free-willing

In the preceding section, I have indicated that things are proximally encountered as equipment, and the defining characteristic of equipment lies in its 'usability.' The 'usability' of equipment that is in the contextual whole, however, should not be conceived as a jumbled heap of things. Rather, they are ordered in a specific purposeful function. In other words, they are based on the teleological principle of 'toward-which.' But the teleological principle of equipment does not lead into the endless 'toward-which' of equipment. The 'toward-which' of equipment ultimately reaches the end. For Heidegger, the ultimate purpose of equipment is based on the "for-the-sake-of (*Um-willen*)' of Dasein. He illustrates this point with respect to using a hammer: "... there is an involvement of hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection 'is' for the sake of [um-willen] providing shelter for Dasein."²⁴ Thus, as the ultimate 'toward-which' of equipment, the '*Um-willen*' of Dasein is a foundation for the interconnective relation of equipment.

In fundamental ontology, Heidegger is concerned with establishing the *a priori* condition for encountering the pre-thematic equipment, by which he tries to overcome all void constructivist philosophies of neo-Kantianism. The *a priori* condition for equipment is sought in the willing of Dasein. With the phenomenon of *Um-willen*, one can finally ascertain why the willing represents an essential characteristic of Dasein. For Heidegger, the *Um-willen*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

of Dasein consists in the 'willing': "But a for-the-sake-of-which, a purposiveness [*Um-willen*], is only possible where there is willing [*Willen*]."²⁵ Here one can see an etymological relation between *Um-willen* and 'willing,' which is lost in English translation. However, it should be noted that when Heidegger speaks of willing, he does not mean the 'act of willing' in the traditional sense. Concerning this matter, he remarks as follows: "This will cannot be a specific 'wanting' an 'act of willing' [*Willensakt*]' as opposed to other kinds of behavior (e.g., representing, judging, rejoicing)."²⁶ In other words, the willing of Dasein is not to be equated with the traditional view of a free-floating will that proceeds from an isolated and autonomous consciousness of an autarkic subject. In contrast to the traditional understanding, the willing of Dasein is situated outside of an autarkic subject.

In the preceding section, I argued that the pre-thematic willing of Dasein is founded on 'urge' and 'propensity.' However, although the willing of Dasein is defined in respect to 'urge,' it is not reduced to the naturalistic will. For Heidegger, the *Um-willen* of Dasein indicates the freedom of Dasein, insofar as Dasein gives its own end independent from the external cause. The free act of *Um-willen*, however, is not to be understood as self-initiating spontaneity. In the self-initiating spontaneity, there is presupposed the underlying self-centered substance (*subjectum*), which is thought to be the ultimate ground of possibility. In such a view, possibility is considered as a property (*Eigenschaft*) of the self-centered subject; consequently, it is not absolutely detached from the realm of actuality. On the contrary, possibility is simply regarded as a dormant power, which is not yet actual right now but can be actualized in the future.

In contrast to the traditional view, Heidegger argues in fundamental ontology that "higher than actuality stands *possibility*."²⁷ According to him, possibility is higher than actuality, because the possibility of *Um-willen* does not presuppose the self-centered subject. Instead, it is founded on ecstatic temporalization. "This for-the-sake-of is," Heidegger remarks, "in each case, the for-the-sake-of of willing, of freedom, i.e., of the transcending being-toward-oneself. But this for-the-sake-of has the intrinsic possibility of such a coming-toward-oneself in the mode of binding only in the ecstatic temporality."²⁸ The ecstatic temporality essentially breaks away from the self-same subject by virtue of being outside of itself. Consequently, the possibility of Dasein derived from ecstatic temporality also breaks away from the realm

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. by Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 185.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. by Terrence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 101–103.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 63.

²⁸ Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 211.

of actuality and remains a constant possibility. It should be noted that since Dasein essentially finds itself in constant possibility, Heidegger uses the verbal meaning of 'willing' rather than the nominal meaning of 'will.'

With the discovery of the constant possibility of Dasein, which is only revealed in the future, we can finally understand the peculiar meaning of willing in Heidegger's thoughts. The willing of Dasein originated neither from the self-centered subject of the intelligible nor the self-center subject of the sensible. It is situated between the intelligible and the sensible. "Dasein is the Being of the 'between.'"²⁹ And in corresponding to the willing of Dasein, equipment is not in the intelligible realm or in nature; rather, it is found in the world. Thus, with the existential meaning of willing, which is unveiled in the *Um-willen* of Dasein, he discovers the third term between the intellectual and naturalistic will.

Conclusion

I have tried to explain Heidegger's transcendental science of Being in respect to the willing of Dasein. And in this attempt, we also have a better understanding of Heidegger's thoughts. In other words, by emphasizing the willing of Dasein, we can discover the coherent structure of seemingly unrelated concepts like 'equipment,' 'care,' and 'for-the-sake-of,' by which the essence of Dasein is constituted. Furthermore, with the existential willing of Dasein, we can ascertain the distinctive characteristic of the practical activity of Dasein as it is distinguished from the practical activity of modern man.

In the modern age, in which rationality is incorporated in autonomy, rational man discovers that he has a new power by which he becomes the legislator of nature. With this new power, namely, rationality combined with an unlimited Promethean will, the practical activity of modern man begins a total domination of nature culminating in the contemporary technological world. In contrast to the practical activity of modern man, the practical activity of Dasein deals not with the present actuality but with what is 'coming,' namely, what is 'not yet.' In the engagement with such an open possibility, man can finally escape from the closure of the Promethean will, which shows its mastery over things by seizing all things for itself.

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²⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

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