



MU-TAJOP



Vol. 1 No. 2

March, 2022

Madonna University
Thought and Action
Journal of Philosophy

...liberating the world with reasoning

A publication of Department of Philosophy Madonna University, Nigeria
thoughtandactiontajp@gmail.com

**The Epistemic
Valuation of Martin
Heidegger's Notion
of Self and the other**

*¹Benedict Michael
Shamíja, PhD*

²Abraham Adí

Department of Philosophy
Benue State University, Makurdi

The Epistemic Valuation of Martin Heidegger's Notion of Self and the other

¹*Benedict Michael Shamija, PhD*

²*Abraham Adi*

Department of Philosophy
Benue State University, Makurdi

Abstract

This paper is an epistemic valuation of Martin Heidegger's notion of the self and other entities (beings). Heidegger explored the concept of the self and that of others more subjectively from within our human experience against Husserl's transcendentalism. He had in his mind, the aim of establishing a solid and sound phenomenological foundation of the self and other entities as epistemic fundamental ontology. To avoid Cartesian language, Heidegger suggests a new terminology *Dasein* (being-in-the-world). He conceived 'self' basically as *Dasein*, which he said is our most primitive and basic view of things. This work looks at Heidegger's attempt to solve the problem of philosophy through epistemic exploration of self and the others. The study adopts expository and descriptive methods with the view of addressing the human existential features of the self within the world. The study finds out that Heidegger's epistemic valuation of the self (*Dasein*) and other entities as against traditional approach, is not only an attempt against Husserl and Cartesian reductionism but also against any epistemic program that focuses rather upon the full range of experienced phenomena without separating it into distinct parts. The study concludes that Heidegger's understanding of the self and other entities in the world is fallible and subject to reconstruction and re-examination. This is why he talks of rehabilitation of beliefs at the tribunal of experience.

Key Words: epistemic, valuation, self, Martin Heidegger, entity, beings, ontology

Introduction

The major philosophical concern of the 18th and 20th centuries as is evident in Descartes, Hegel, Kant and Husserl teachings centered on the issues concerning human knowledge, the individual self and other beings. These traditional thinkers, according to Heidegger, failed to see the relation between an object and the knowing subject. Heidegger rejected this traditional philosophical approach on the ground that it constitutes a scandal because it presents objects of knowledge as things that are just out there merely for human consumption. Such philosophical approach equally presents a false impression of truth as something encapsulated and hidden somewhere waiting to be discovered. For Heidegger, the actual job of philosophy is not to ask about what is knowable

and what is not, but rather to ask the question of self-knowledge and the knowledge of other beings. But to ask effectively this question is to return first to the human being (man) in his existential world. Thus, Heidegger's epistemic valuation of self-conscious individual person and the external objects in the world is the most primitive and basic view of things (Stumpf and Fieser, 2003). Going by the above establishment, we can proceed to state that Heidegger's discourse on self-conscious being and his affinity with other entities is a discussion on subject-object relationship which deals with the subjective, mental procedure of deep reflection guided by very strict description of experience exactly as it occurs without the prejudice of any prior assumption or presupposition. What prompted Heidegger to develop epistemic analysis of this nature in the first place was his conviction that Western culture lost its true direction and purpose. Although before him, Husserl had argued that we understand the phenomena of the self and the world only as it presents itself to our conscious selves. Husserl says that "phenomenology must honor Descartes as its genuine patriarch" (Stumpf & Fieser, 2003). That is why like Descartes, Husserl believes that in order to attain true and certain knowledge of an individual self, one should start from a presuppositionless position. Consequently, the initial and very important step in epistemic investigation of the self and other entities is what Husserl calls the *phenomenological epoche*, an *eidetic* science, that is, a science concerned only with essences.

Heidegger in common with many of Husserl students, including Roman Ingarden, rejected Husserl's Cartesianism and transcendental idealism. In *Being and Time* Heidegger drops all Husserl's central concepts. He no longer talks of consciousness, objectivity, directedness, the *noema*, *noesis* and the transcendental ego. Heidegger instead employed the concept of self as the proper mode of access to the phenomena of concrete human life, factual life as he had initially called it in his early lecture courses, a way of thinking about human nature that remained faithful to the historical, lived practical nature of human experience. Here, Heidegger linked Bergson's, Scheler's and Dilthey's account of human life to overcome Husserl's predominantly cognitive approach to human being: whereas, Husserl made cognition (*Erkenntnis*) the main focus between humans and the world. Heidegger influenced by Augustine and also by Scheler, saw that humans are primarily caught up in living their lives wrapped up in moods and emotional commitments, in cares and worries, falling into temptation, projecting themselves into possibilities, seeking to make themselves whole. This epistemic valuation of the self and that of other entities, for Heidegger leads to a new way of being rather than to a set of philosophical propositions. Heidegger claimed that what Husserl had given him was eyes with which to see. For Heidegger this 'seeing' meant doing away with all philosophical theories, whether idealist or realist, and cultivating a "pure naivete". Thus for Heidegger any meaningful proposition/theory must be able to understand *Dasein* from within the concrete particularity of a lived life.

A self-Conscious being (*Dasein*) as Source and Concern of Epistemic Analysis

Dasein is etymologically sourced from the German word *Da-sein*. By its literal understanding, it means "being-there". However, in traditional German philosophy, *Dasein* is taken generally to stand for any kind of Being or existence. Meanwhile, in its everyday application, it is employed in a much narrower sense to refer to the kind of being that belongs to persons (Macquarrie and Robinson, 1972). Macquarrie and Robinson in their translations of *Being and Time* further explained that Heidegger follows the everyday usage in this respect but goes somewhat farther in that he often uses it to stand for any person who has such Being and who is thus an entity (conscious) himself (p. 27). Heidegger in his own words on *Dasein* says it is the entity which each of us is himself (p. 27). To Heidegger, a self-conscious *Dasein* could be taken to mean man or

human being. The expression the entity which each of us is himself, clearly explains what Heidegger meant by self. However, that is not all about self. According to Heidegger, a self being always understands itself in terms of its existence- in terms of possibility of itself; to be itself or not itself (p.33). He further contends that “a self-being is conscious of itself based on its possibilities” (p.34), Heidegger explains that: *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, or get itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular *Dasein* decides its existence whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting (p.33).

This goes to say that only a self-conscious being decides its own existence. Existence as an issue is quite fundamental to this *Dasein*. It is a concern that confronts him in its existence. Heidegger says existence is the determining character of a self-conscious being. That is, *Dasein* necessarily exists.

The Presence of other entities

Heidegger acknowledges the presence of other entities besides the self. Entities are found around and could be described as “existential or existenz”. What does Heidegger mean by this? According to him existential which means presence-at-hand applies to entities other than a self *Dasein* and it relates to a passive way of existing such as lying around of things which is characteristic of non-human entities (Unah, 1994, p.59). Existenz on the other hand, according to Jim Unah refers to the existence of *Dasein* as the human person. Accordingly, Heidegger insists that man alone exists stories, trees, animals, angels and God merely are but do not exist. It could be observed from this existential-existenz dichotomy that Heidegger accords priority to the existence of self-conscious being. This is because as James Brown (1994) notes the essence of self (*Dasein*) is in this existence (p.81). The existence of self is significant unlike the lying around of other entities because in its existence therein lies a possibility of self-consciousness and meaning-making. The lying around or the being of the non-human entities to Heidegger does not bring about the individual entities, self-consciousness nor invoke meaning. Brown maintains that human existence is not only that which exist but which is conscious of its existence as existing (p.82). As an entity, which is self-conscious, the self being also realizes that it is in existence with others. This is what informs Brown’s contention that the nature of both self and that of other beings is in common. Human existence is a shared existence and the social interdependence of everyday experience is primordial and constitutive. This can also be explained that a self-conscious and affirmative being is prompted by its consciousness of other entities. The constitutive of this being encompasses his physical environment making up of human existence. Informed by these considerations, Heidegger insists that the question of existence is one of *Dasein*’s ontological affairs leading to the constitutive structure of his being.

Meanwhile Heidegger says in view of other being’s ontological constitution, its existential analytic had already been delineated in terms of its possibility and necessity. Thus to a self *Dasein*, being in the world is something that belongs essentially as its essence (1969). Heidegger accordingly stressed that the fundamental ontology which predicates all other ontologies emanates from the existential analysis of self *Dasein*. (p.33). He advances three propositions to demonstrate the priority of the entity of a conscious being over other entities. By the first priority of the conscious being, it is able to become aware of its existence. Secondly, he notes that a self-being essentially exist as a self-conscious entity thus realizing that it is an entity with other entities. Above all, in its attribute it is an entity possessing the qualities of determining other ontologies. A self *Dasein*,

Heidegger insists has turned out to be more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically. By ontological interrogation, the concern is with the meaning of being or nature of being. Thus, Brown maintains that ontology is a rational enquiry, an activity of the human mind. This inquiry leads to some conclusions such as; the mind is an open possibility, it is an inexhaustible reservoir of meaning. It also reveals that the nature of being in general, is being-in-common, that is, human existence is shared existence and the social independence of our everyday experience is primordial and constitutive (Brown, 84). The significance of Brown's submission cannot be over-emphasized. However, it must be observed that by the constitutive nature of a self being, it is an entity which must be first interrogated adequately before other entities. It is on this note that Heidegger (Heidegger, 1982) strongly concludes that : "If to interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, *Dasein* is not only the primary entity to be interrogated, it is also the entity which already comfort itself" For Heidegger, the basic state and fundamental constitution of *Dasein* is being in the world. Moreover, a conscious being knows other entities and has some understanding and familiarity with which it approaches them. It is precisely this antecedent mode of implicit understanding that makes it possible for a self-conscious being to encounter the beings around it. The central features of our being-in-the-world is that we encounter beings with regard to non-human beings. This encounter takes the form of a taking care of *Besorgen*; with regard to other men, it occurs as care for (Fursorge, 1987).

Critique of Heidegger's Notion of the Self and the Other

Robert Dostal (1993) argues the focus of Heidegger's *Being and Time* was ontological. He attempted answering the question of a self-conscious Being which according to him is long forgotten by the proceeding ontologies. It is important to observe here that it was through the Husserlian principles of phenomenology that Heidegger saw a gate way to deconstruct the epistemic valuation of the self and the others. Heidegger, nevertheless, seems to claim a total detachment for his veteran predecessor Husserl, an assertions which Dostal saw as unfair representation of Husserl's own work (p, 244). Despite Dostal position, Heidegger's choice of the epistemic method aided his analysis of being—*Dasein* as man whom he (Heidegger) explained along the line of temporality and nothingness. Husserl accepts that all that philosophy is, is a description of experience of things in themselves. This was not very palatable for Heidegger, who emphasizes the fact that philosophy entails an understanding that experience is always already situated in a world and in manner in which beings are disclosed. We can thus submit that the Husserlian intentionality has been transformed by Heidegger's philosophy as the thought that all manner of experience is grounded in care. This epistemic ground of care forms the very existential analysis which Heidegger sought to develop in his *Being and Time*. Thus, Heidegger explains or describes experience properly so much that if we do not primarily find or understand Husserl's notion of being, Heidegger's submission bring us more explanation of experience in respect to a self-conscious *Dasein* which is the being for whom 'Being' is an issue. Heidegger criticized the traditional way of explaining human existence as very abstract and metaphysical. He sought an existential answer to the issue of being. However, despite the existential character of his work, which seems to have an anthropological nature, Heidegger made it clear that the self (*Dasein*) is not intended to serve as a method of conducting a philosophical anthropology. The above idea according to Derrida (1976) portrays that even though a deeper look at the Heideggerian teachings of a self-conscious *Dasein* may not mean man 'quatale' but his discourse (Heidegger) still shows *Dasein* as man (Derrida, 67). Heidegger's attempt to answer the question

of being of each of us was done in order for him to open the more general question, which inadvertently meant an adoption of epistemic method. This methodology in the final analysis makes him arrive at the very conclusion that a self-conscious being is care. His thrownness, Heidegger continues, makes him find himself in the world amidst other beings. In this state, *Dasein* is thrown into its very possibilities, which includes its own possibility actualized in death. Heidegger, having come this far, attempts to explain the need for a self-conscious being to live out these possibilities. The need for responsibility and even freedom to choose to be responsible. This introduced Heidegger to his very explanation of authentic and inauthentic existence, which became the very crux of his discussion of a self-conscious being and his relationship with other entities in the world. This explanation plausibly carried into existentialism an attempt to explain man, his nature and place in the world against other beings that he exists alongside with. Jean Paul Sartre (1948) a strong analyst of Heidegger in his book *Being and Nothingness* made the same distinction following Heidegger. He saw in the account of Heidegger a veritable explanation of what ontology should consist of especially as it pertains to man and his affinity with other entities in the universe (p.59). Heidegger's epistemic valuation of a self-conscious being and his relationship with other entities is criticized for his usage of obscure language, weak arguments and dubious etymologies to hide the deep flaws therein in his philosophy. Heidegger would have been more clearly understood had he raised up decisively the issue of freedom and human choice, which thereof can be vitiated by death. However, he skipped the issue of freedom therefore endangering a self-conscious being as an entity which merely walks into nothingness, a submission which renders the whole aspect of the human endeavor in its entirety meaningless. Sartre's (1948) explanations of the *pour-soi* which agrees systematically with that of Heidegger could be said to have stemmed from his explanation in his book *Existentialism is Humanism* where he stated that 'existence proceeds essence' and if it is so, then man is responsible for what he is (Sartre, 76).

Sartre believes that the whole of world of men is the same. And as such the responsibility of man's existence not only ends with him but equally extends to the other entities. Heidegger on his own account would be more willing to accept the independence of everyone in the face of self-actualization. Heidegger implicitly sought this idea of epistemic valuation of the self and other entities dearly and hence spent his whole time in the analysis of the human person as beginning from the world of phenomena and ending in the world of phenomena (Heidegger, 1982). The epistemic valuation and existence of Heidegger's being, we could gather from his work, has a spontaneous beginning. This beginning, of course, is traced back to nothing not even evolution. He is however, willing to describe the origin of man from the point of view of "thrownness" in which man just finds himself in the world in utter confusion. In this confused state, man strives to make some meaning out of the world by striving to live an authentic life, which consist in continually transcending himself towards nothing in particular. The above, no doubt makes human existence precarious. Man's life in the world as Being-in-the-world, following Heidegger's *Being and Time* has no yardstick for measuring its morality. Any action sequel to the above goes in as morally correct in as much as the individual is convinced of what he want to do. Little wonders then Sartre (1956) explained further in his *Existentialism is Humanism* that every action by man is good (77). Thus, Heidegger emphasized that to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the epistemic value to what we choose since we can never

choose evil. This explanation evidently is faulty because not only that the sense of evil stems from man's innermost cravings to dominate and subdue others but equally that man has the nature of both good and evil. Chris Fledges explained this better by stating that in the *Man and Society* (2004) stating that the "very nature of man is such that he continually seeks to satisfy his personal desires irrespective of the right of the others but is checked always by the dictates of morality and law" (p.26). Man's end following Heidegger's treatise renders man's whole life meaningless since the whole effort of man comes to nothingness but death. At death, everything about man is destroyed. *Dasein* is brought to the state of non-being. In this state, man's achievements, efforts and sufferings ends meaninglessly. One may be quick to ask Heidegger what the reward for authentic life is all about according to his teachings. One who heartedly chooses the Epicurean utilitarian principle to the extreme may likely laugh at the seeming visionless nature of Heidegger's explanation of man's life in the world as his teachings seem to make life a whole lot of nothingness and useless. Russell who seems to be extreme in his ideas of death and man in the world appear to have a more convincing answer to the human destiny than Heidegger (Russell, 1984, p. 69). From the above, it suffices to say that the whole of Heidegger's explanation of *Dasein* as a being for itself is faulty and cannot easily be acceptable (p. 69). On another note, explaining a self-conscious being in relation to other beings, Heidegger emphasizes that those other beings owe their explanation to a self-conscious *Dasein* and as such they are not conscious. The distinction between consciousness, which depicts freedom and which is not bound even by the principle of causality and other objects subject to causal laws of mechanical influences outside of them is unpalatable. This influenced the thought of subsequent philosophers whose philosophy held sway in the contemporary period like Merleau-Ponty who distinguished the '*ensoi*' that stands as a 'general label' for nature from the *pour-soi* which represented for him nature or the label for humanity. Furthermore, in Heidegger's mode of existence, it is obvious that he considers the concept of inauthenticity from a negative perspective on the ground that it is a choice of life within the universal *modus operandi* or what Dilthey(1970), calls objective spirit or common life-context. A life where people condition themselves with the attitude of mind; where one fails to grasp one's being with transparency and clarity and thus, loses his identity and value in the crowd-consciousness, then, becomes the *das man* (common man) or what Achebe calls the 'man of the people'. A situation where one's values, goals and ideas are determined by popular public opinion; and if such a person makes any claims to knowledge you can be sure that it will be grounded on what he grew up with or is generally accepted rather than personal conviction. He will accept things without deep reflection and will say I know without stopping to ask himself what it really means to know. (Dilthey, p. 45). Heidegger strongly believes that by standing *Dasein* out as that which has its existence prior to essence and being a 'being' through whom other beings are understood he has attempted to answer the question of being whose failure has led to a great shortcoming in the epistemology of the preceding epistemologists. He insists that our understanding of being is based on the way we are in the world and relate with/to the entities therein. However, we must understand equally that this defect identified in the traditional way leads, in every standard, to a misdirected quest for a definitive theory of everything. The question still stands out as to whether Heidegger actually succeeded in what he set out to do. He never denied the Kantian effort/influence in the modern period to fight to land the question of being which has long ago been forgotten and which even Descartes finally laid to rest by his method. Heidegger's thesis is a very genuine one. He started

well on the general understanding of being, a field where he so desired to rescue but eventually crash landed by leaving the *Being and Time* incomplete. We agree that man does not exhaust the entirety of beingness. But Heidegger's *Being and Time* seem to be contended handling only the existential structure of man while suspending the structure and ontological grounds of other beings. He primarily understood *Dasein* as the totality of what beingness should be but in the course of his work, he customized it to man who for him answers the question of being *qua* being. This aspect of Heidegger's work seem to make a mess of his whole task leading him back to existential anthropology which he claimed he was apt to avoid. Primarily, Heidegger made the study of human existence superior to the quest for the leaning of 'Being', which he understood as the very basic principle which underlies reality. This further leads to a more fundamental question of what it means to ask the question of self. These questions raised about self (being) lie behind the obviousness of everyday life and further blind the empirical questions of natural sciences. There is yet another gap in Heidegger's philosophical methodology-discourse. Heidegger's postulates that things disclose themselves to man does not make for proper object-subject distinction which gives the knower the faculty of immediate apprehension of realities but instead are left with conceptualization as one could see in the sciences. If this is what he actually meant, it means that he did not actually set up to do a rigorous study on being making his project just an academic exercise that ended up in futility.

Conclusion

The main task of Heidegger concerning the question of epistemic valuation of a conscious self and other entities is his reconstruction of the meaning of existence from what some philosophical thinkers thought it should be, and thus, situate philosophy in the right track. The central point of his thesis has the inherent ability to direct the contemporary man to a new ground of meaning and foundation in life. Situating philosophy in the right track means nothing rather than centering it on man in his existential 'givenness'. It is against this background that Heidegger's thesis on epistemology is centers on *Dasein*, a term he uses to epitomize the kind of a self-conscious being that possesses the attributes of existence. In this regard, Heidegger argues that *Dasein* is the only Being whose essence lies in his existence. The only being that cannot be really defined, for its definition lies in its potentiality. It is a being that defines itself in its existential givenness or situation. A self-conscious being that strives, develops, chooses, decides and commits himself to some course of action that defines his existence as opposed to that of other living and non-living things that are not of human beings which he called presence-at-hand-entities; whose essences have been defined and fixed. It is against his background that Heidegger uses man as the archetype of this kind of being he calls *Dasein*, since it is only man that has the ability to develop, decide, choose, commit, project and be responsible for those actions that defines his existence. By and large, Heidegger's epistemic valuation of the human person (*Dasein*) cannot be thrown overboard for the simple fact that it enlightens us on the act of acquiring the empirical orientation needed for scientific development. Hence, as with the objective method of analysis of self-conscious being and other entities, Heidegger prefers the subjective and concrete method aimed at liberating the mind from dogma.

References

- Arendt, H (1994). *Essays in Understanding*, Ed. Jerome Kojn. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovan, Besorgen, M and Fursorge W. (1987). *The Problem of Consciousness*. Trans. Cohen Pittsburgh:Duguesne University Press.
- Blackham, H. (1959). *Six Existentialist Thinkers*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Chiedozie, O. (ed), (2011). *Epistemology and Philosophy of History*. A Critical Reader, Ogun: Babcock University press.
- Chris, F. (1952). *Perception of Knowledge*. New York –Washington Square press
- Daniel, D. (1994). “Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl”. Theodore Kisiel and John Van Buren (eds) *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essay in his Earliest Thoughts*. Albany: Sunny Press,
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology*. Trans. G. Spivak: Baltimore, MD: Hopkins University Press.
- Gadamer, H.(1989). *Truth and Method*. 2nd edition. Trans. Joel Weimsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Sheed and Ward.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. F. Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1969). *Being and Time*. USA: Henry Regneny Company.
- Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. A. Hofstadter, Indiana University Press, 1982.
- James, B. (1994). *Central Issues in Epistemology*. Ed .Jerome Kojn. New York
- James, D. (1970). *Being, Man and Death: A Key to Heidegger*. Kentucky State: The University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge..
- Robert, D. (1993). “Time and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger”.-Charles Cuignon ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sartre, J.P. (1956). *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Sartre, J.P. (1948). *Existentialism is Humanism*. Trans. Philip Mairet. USA: Haskel House Publishers Ltd.
- Samuel E. S. (2003). *History of Philosophy. Socrates to Sartre and Beyond*. New York: McGraw-Hill High Education,
- Samuel E.S & Fisher, A. (1982). *A Self- Conscious Being*. Trans. G. Spivak: Baltimore. John Hopkins University
- Ruch, E.A. (1977). *The Ways of Knowing and Thinking*. Roma, University of Lesotho,
- Russell, B (1984). *Epistemological Analysis of the Self*. Washington D.C Press