

HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF THE WORLD

The Cartesian tradition ponders man as a thinking-substance and relates that substance to the world epistemologically. In order to know the world the thinking-substance which is residing in body, needs to contemplate by going out from its inner sphere because the world is considered to be external. This epistemological relation between man and the world indicates that although the thinking-substance is in the body and has connection with the material reality, still this location does not explain a spatial determination of the thinking-substance. It is an unextended nonphysical entity and its existence in the material world is not imperative. Accordingly, man is a non-spatial and non-temporal being and is a worldless subject, in the sense that he can exist without his body and without this world.¹

Heidegger stands against this interpretation of human existence and its relation to the world. Dasein (human existence), for him, is a worldly entity. One may think that since Descartes and Heidegger begin their philosophical expedition from human existence, they belong to the same tradition. No doubt Heidegger, like Descartes, considers man to be his starting-point but Dasein is substantially distinct from the Cogito. Heidegger undermines the Cartesian Philosophy and believes that the world and the worldliness of Dasein constitute the ontological structure of human existence.² The most primordial characteristic of being a man, is to be in the world. The worldliness of Dasein, however, should not be interpreted in religious terms; that man is a mortal creature and his temporality can be understood as something contrary to the existence of a non-temporal being namely, God. Dasein's attitude towards the existence of God is neutral and characterised by indifferentism.³ Dasein is unconcerned with the existence of God and its being in the world has no religious significance. In *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, this point has been again discussed by Heidegger, where he states that Dasein has no intention to make a decision whether positive or negative, concerning the existence of God.⁴

Being-in-the-world (in-der-Welt-sein) is the first ontological constitution of Dasein and the first existential given in *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Although Heidegger's discussion of this existential is short but it is an ontological foundation for the other existentials which describe Dasein. The significance and the place of this existential are similar to the significance and place of the category of Being in Hegel's logic, as both of them are the broadest and the ground for the subsequent existentials and categories.

Dasein presupposes being in the world. This priority of the world for human existence is not recognised by Descartes for two reasons; first, man as a thinking substance is a worldless creature, that he can exist without being in this world. Second, the problem for him is certainty and true knowledge rather than existence. Otherwise, the 'Cogito ergo sum' presupposes being in the world ontologically.⁵ Besides, since the major issue is cognition then the world as an external object for the thinking substance requires a proof, whereas, the world, in Heidegger's ontology, does not require that and it is beyond human doubt.

Dasein as a self relating being is able to relate itself to the world and to the other Daseins only when it is in the world. But what is the world for Dasein? In answering this question Heidegger has analysed three meanings of the world:

- i. The world as the first existential and an *a priori* condition which constitutes the ontological structure of Dasein, and characterises the way in which Dasein is supposed to be.
- ii. The world as the totality of being including facts, events, objects and people and this concept of the world is synonymous to Nature.
- iii. The ontic meaning of the world which represents the place in which Dasein lives or the environment (*Umwelt*) where Dasein has contact in its everyday life with objects used as equipments (*das Zeug*).

Every ontological term has at the same time an ontic base. The ontic base for the meaning of the world is the environment where

Dasein performs its activities in everyday existence. The environment is, hence, defined as the sum of the equipments which are used for practical purposes and is distinguished from the objectivity of the world as it appears in our theoretical understanding of the phenomena. The term "*Umwelt*"⁶ indicates the spatial relation of Dasein and signifies the place where Dasein "Lives" prior to all kinds of speculations and scientific analysis of the world. In this kind of relation to the world, and in this special kind of the world viz., *Umwelt*, there is a definite way of handling the objects described as dealing (*Umgang*), "This kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use: and this has its own kind of knowledge".⁷

Being in the world is a unitary phenomenon⁸. But it can be analysed into three constitutive items; Being-in, Being-in-space, and the worldhood of the world. The first constitutive item has a twofold meaning. It is used to explain the relation of the entities to each other and to space. When we say, "The chair is in the room", we describe the relation of the chair to the room by "in" and the room is understood as space for the chair. In the second case Being-in functions as an existential and describes Dasein's relation to space. The proposition, "The chair is in the room" is logically and grammatically correct and similar to the proposition, "The man is in the room". But when we examine them on the ground of Heidegger's ontological analysis of "in" their meanings appear to be different. The relations of the chair and the man to the room which are shown in these two propositions are quite far from each other. As it is known, the presence of the man in the room is not same like the placement of the chair. Man's presence is not only corporeal and does not exist like the chair. Man has a unique way of existence which is called *Existenz* by Heidegger.

As we have seen, the constitution of "inhood" is used in our language to describe the spatial relation of Dasein as well as the objects. But Dasein is not in the world the way trees, stones, etc., are in the world. According to Heidegger, "in" has originally come from the Latin term "*innen*" which means "to reside" or "to dwell". Dasein resides in the world whereas trees do not reside but are in the world. The term "to reside" is a conscious characteristic of Dasein

to be at a place and at the same time to have feeling of belongingness or alienation for it. The entities do not enjoy this qualification and do not have the residing-relation to the world¹⁰.

The distinction between two different meanings of "in" leads to another interesting point and that is Dasein's spatiality. Heidegger's discussion on space is not concerned with the problem whether space is an *a priori* form of our outer sense or something relational. Space for him has an ontological structure and is an *a priori* condition for Dasein. And then the spatiality of Dasein presupposes the existence of the world. But Dasein's spatiality is different from the spatiality of other entities. The existential Being-in-space does not describe the position of the entities in space, and in addition to that we can not say that the entities are alongside the other in space. We use propositions like, "The book is by the window", in our everyday language, which is false even when the book touches the window and there is no distance between them. The existential "Being-alongside" is used to describe Dasein's spatial relation. The entities do not touch each other.¹¹ The existentials are different from the traditional ontological and epistemological categories. They analyse the structure of human existence and are not applicable to the entities. In this way, the application of the existentials "Being-in" and "Being-alongside" to Dasein provides a new conception of space. Being-in-space is understood on the ground of Care (*Fursorge*). The spatiality of Dasein is related to and depends upon its closeness and remoteness from an object or another Dasein, not mathematically but in the sense that how far Dasein cares for them. An object, for example, may be far from us but our concern shows that it is near. "A friend is approaching me on the sidewalk. He is not closer than the sidewalk to me, but I feel his presence to be closer than the sidewalk and even when he approaches me, I am not aware of the closeness of the sidewalk. The distance between Dasein and the objects or the other Daseins corresponds to care. Dasein, however, is "in" the world in the sense that it deals with entities concernfully and with familiarity. If spatiality belongs to it in any way, that is possible only because of this Being-in. But its spatiality shows the characters of de-severance and directionality".¹²

As a protest against the Cartesian interpretation of subject and object relation, Heidegger insists that the primordial relationship of

Dasein with the world is based on the pragmatic consideration of using the world as equipments (*das Zeug*), and these equipments are made for specific purposes by Dasein and for Dasein and are characterised by disposability, "The work to be produced, as the "towards-which" of such things as the hammer, the plane, and the needle, likewise has the kind of Being that belongs to equipment. The shoe which is to be produced is for wearing (footwear) (*Schuhzeug*); the clock is manufactured for telling the time."¹³ To see the world as made of equipments with the pragmatic characteristic is the primordial relationship of Dasein with the world. To use an object, as something ready-to-hand is prior to the way we think about it and analyse it into its universal determinations. Accordingly, Dasein relates itself to the world in two ways;

- i. The primary attitude is the practical behaviour of Dasein towards the entities and uses them as equipments "ready-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*).
- ii. The secondary relation is derivative and theoretical based upon scientific observation. This cognitive relation is considered by Descartes to be the only possible way of dealing with the world as an object present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*).

It is not wrong to see the world as something present-at-hand. but this relation is not the only possible way of dealing with the world. As it is discussed earlier that Dasein is a worldly entity, resides in the world, and uses it as equipments. Dasein is not as observer or a scientist only but relates itself to the world practically to accomplish its purposes. Descartes has not realized this practical relation and has given priority to theoretical speculations, "What it is to be is for the first time defined as he objectiveness of representing, and truth is first defined as the certainty of representing, in the metaphysics of Descartes."¹⁴ Hubert Dreyfus has also remarked that the theoretical understanding of the world which is reflected in Descartes' subject-object metaphysics is responsible for the rise of modern science.¹⁵ Heidegger is, then, trying to argue against the concept of objectivity and theoretical representation of the world by emphasizing the pre-scientific attitude of Dasein, and considering the world of ready-to-hand to be more fundamental and prior to present-

at-hand. By doing that he solves also the problem of subject-object distinction and the existence of the world remains beyond human doubt. It should be remembered that the priority of ready-to-hand equipments to present-at-hand object is not related to pragmatic theory of truth. It is rather based on the distinction between the twofold relationship of Dasein with the world. To use something like my pen for writing and to think about the pen as an object of my speculation are two different ways of looking at the world. I am using the pen in my everyday existence without thinking about it as an object, and this way is primordial to my analysis of the pen to its universal qualities. In this way, by making being-in-the world as a fundamental ontological requirement for human existence, and denying the priority of theoretical speculation, Heidegger shakes the foundation of the Cartesian tradition and provides us a new philosophical ontology.

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NOTES

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