

DASEIN, DEATH AND FUTURE

(A Study in the Philosophy of Heidegger)

Dasein literally means 'Being-there'. "Though in traditional German Philosophy it may be used quite generally to stand for almost any kind of Being or 'existence' in every day usage it tends to be used more narrowly to stand for the kind of Being, that belongs to persons" (foot note, p. 27).¹ So Dasein throughout this paper means individual person.

Every living organism dies. "Death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life". (200) Death is a daily occurrence and it is an undeniable fact.

Death is usually considered to be an evil and the greatest enemy of man against which man is helpless. It causes the maximum suffering to man. It would be a metaphysical study to deal with death as an evil and suffering. Death may also be taken as a biological fact. Biologically death is cessation of physiological functions. As birth is the beginning of a living organism, death is the end of it. Science studies death from a biological standpoint. Heidegger deals with death from an existential standpoint.

Death is always the death of an individual. Death may be looked upon either authentically or inauthentically. In an inauthentic way we come across death as an event among the world of events. It is one of the 'they' who dies. A funeral procession passes by as we are engaged in our pleasures or problems. Death in an authentic way is one's own and has a special meaning. Heidegger writes, "Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's own most possibility-non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped". (302)

The following points stand out from the above definition of death by Heidegger. Death is (i) the own most possibility of the self, (ii) non-relational, (iii) certain, (iv) indefinite and (v) that which is not to be outstripped.

'The own most possibility of the self' is the possibility of man going out of existence. It is true that biologically every one

must die his own death and one cannot die in the place of another. So 'own most possibility' indicates that death which is in the future of every individual is his own exclusively and it is an important characteristic of the being of man (Dasein). "It is a 'not-yet' which any Dasein, as the entity which it is, has to be" (288). 'Not-yet' indicates 'possibility' and 'as the entity which it is, has to be' implies 'own most' or personal belongingness of death. Same is the case with 'certainty'. Man is sure to die. As Heidegger says "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die" (289).

'Non-relational' indicates that when a man dies, he is no more existent to have any relationship with anything. Death is the end of life and it is a non-relational end, i. e., it is an end at which man is devoid of all relations. When he is no more, it is impossible for man to enter into any type of relation.

That death is 'indefinite' is a temporal characteristic. The 'existential mood of anxiety' which Heidegger mentions in the context of indefiniteness is due to the temporal indefiniteness of death. Though death is certain, no one knows when death occurs, whether it is natural or accidental. It might be said that death is definite in some cases at least as in suicide as a person committing suicide knows definitely about his death. Such an argument is untenable. Even in the case of a suicide death is indefinite as there are any number of instances where attempts at suicide have misfired.

'Not to be outstripped' means that death is considered as an end, beyond which there is nothing else. The individual man does not outlive his death. When a man dies, he becomes non-existent. Death is the end of man's life.

Death as the not-yet has to be understood in the unique existential sense. In order to explain his point of view, Heidegger makes helpful comparisons of death as an end with several other 'ends' which are 'not-yets' which we may note briefly.

He takes the example of a moon (287) which is not yet a full moon. The whole moon is existent, but we see only a part of it due to various circumstances like the relative position of the earth in space. The death of an individual is not already so existent. "The 'not-yet' which belongs to Dasein, however, is not just something——, it 'is' not yet 'actual' at all" (287).

Death is not like the end of a road. (287) A road upto the end point is an arbitrary, artificial end. Death as an end has the characteristic of natural necessity.

Heidegger compares the death of Dasein with ripening of a fruit. There is a resemblance between the two. Any fruit ripens and the not-yet of ripeness of the fruit is comparable to the not-yet of the death of Dasein. "The 'not-yet' has already been included in the very Being of the fruit, not as some random characteristic, but as something constitutive. Correspondingly, as long as any Dasein is, it too *is already its 'not-yet'*" (288). However, there is an important difference between the two. "With ripeness, the fruit fulfills itself". (288) But death is not such fulfilment of the Dasein as it cannot be said that Dasein has "necessarily exhausted its specific possibilities" (288) at its death.

Next, Death according to Heidegger is to be understood as that which makes Dasein a whole. Dasein is a whole which comprises in itself birth, death and in between care. Birth is not that which is no more and death is not that which is not yet. Death is as Dasein's own most possibility. Both birth and death are co-existent with the Dasein, which is care; and because of all the three factors Dasein is a whole.

Dasein occupies a very unique position in the universe. The aim of Heidegger is to understand 'Being' and he tries to achieve his aim through Dasein. The understanding of 'Being' is through time. Time is viewed as a possibility to understand the Being in all its manifestations. "Whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with *time* as its standpoint". (39) Past, present and future are the ecstases of time. These parts of time are derived from Dasein. They are founded or based on the basic states of Dasein.

Future : In the context of the study of death, we are mainly concerned with future as death is futural to a person. Ordinarily future is understood as the not-yet actual. A future event is one that has not yet occurred, and that which will occur later on. Heidegger differs from such a conception of future. He does not mean by the future the not-yet but that which *is* potentially which will be realized in the course of time. "By the term, 'futural' we do not here have in view a 'now' which has *not-yet* become

'actual' and which sometime *will be* for the first time. We have in view the coming (*kunft*) in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself". (373) Such a notion of future depends upon the fact that time is derived from or dependent upon Dasein. The individual man is born in the world and finally dies. As man is born, death is inescapable for him. Man in going towards death is going towards his ownmost end as death is potentially present in him. As death is already present (potentially) in the individual man, future is also said to be present.

Primordial or authentic future is finite. This is so again, as the authentic time and hence the future are pertinent to the self. The self is a 'being-towards death', and the being of the self comes to an end at death. The individual man dies and goes out of existence. "Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein." (294) Hence the self is finite. Consequently time is finite and the future is finite. This future which is finite is the future of an individual finite self.

At this juncture it is relevant to refer to an important question, "Does not the time go on ? Is time not infinite ?". Heidegger himself raises this question and answers yes.

Heidegger admits a notion of endless time, and he calls it 'inauthentic' or ordinary time. The inauthentic time is infinite. It is said to be derived from the authentic or finite time. As Heidegger points out, "The problem is not one of how the derived infinite time.....becomes *primordial* finite temporality; the problem is rather that of how inauthentic temporality arises out of finite authentic temporality....." (379) Heidegger makes the most important contribution to the philosophy of time when he says that the ordinary notion of time which is infinite is not a basic conception of time but has only a derivative status, derived from the authentic, finite time of the self.

The derivation of the infinite time from the finite time is explained as follows. The structure of Dasein with birth, death and in between care gives rise to time and its structure. This is primordial time and is finite. The individual experiences other things existing 'alongside-of-himself'. The self endures and in so far as the self has been enduring, other things are considered to be enduring. This idea of enduring is extended in imagination by

the self beyond its own endurance. Such an imaginative extension gives us the notion of 'time-infinite'.

However the ontological basis of such an imaginative extension of duration disappears with the death of the self; and hence the inauthentic time or the notion of time as being endless would then be without any basis. Therefore infinite time has only a derivative status. However, Heidegger opines that the infinite time is admissible.

Heidegger further explains the derivation of infinite time as follows. In science and history we come across events which are described as occurrences happening 'in time'. As we cannot possibly understand these occurrences apart from time, we get a notion of time as that in which occurrences take place. "That time 'wherein' entities within-the-world are encountered is the 'world time'". (471) World time is the public or objective time. Public time is that kind of time within which we encounter or come across entities ready to hand and present at hand. These entities are of a different character from that of Dasein and so are called entities 'within time'. (465) They are always presented as being in the 'now'. Consequently the ordinary understanding of time is a sequence of nows. Such time is a stream of flowing successive nows which leads to the notion of infinite time.

Moreover in inauthentic existence, the self is lost in the 'they'. The 'they' never dies for death in each case is the death of a particular individual. "Dasein knows fugitive time in terms of its 'fugitive' knowledge about its death". (478) The world time or the inauthentic time goes on for it "belongs to every one and that means, to nobody". (477) Thus Heidegger's distinction between the authentic Dasein and the inauthentic Dasein gives rise to time-finite and time-infinite respectively.

Infinite time naturally implies infinite future. But it is important to note that in Heidegger's Philosophy, infinite time (consequently infinite future) is inauthentic and has a derivative status only. The notion of time and its structure is primarily based on Dasein. Dasein is a totality of 'facticity, existence and falling' corresponding to past, present and future respectively giving rise to the concept of time.

The above study of Heidegger has revealed that death as the necessary end of Dasein leads to the understanding of future. Heidegger's notion of future as being potentially present along with past and present is a significant contribution to the understanding of time.

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NOTE

1. All references in this paper are from Heidegger — *Being and Time*, S. C. M. Press, London, 1962. Page numbers given in brackets are from the book.