



KARILEMLA

## Cultural Being: Heidegger's Hermeneutical Conception of the Human

**ABSTRACT:** Heidegger was averse to the use of terms like “culture” and “worldview” because of the misleading connotations they had accumulated with modernity and its technological culture. He sees the ideas of culture and worldview as born within the story of the conquest of the world as technologically representable picture. Despite Heidegger's own reservations about the term “culture”, this paper argues that his hermeneutic phenomenology can provide adequate phenomenological ground for genuine and ontologically significant difference in our cultural experience of the world. Dasein accesses and hence knows all phenomena from the background of a shared hermeneutical horizon. Heidegger describes Dasein as fallen into and lost in this shared horizon. The lostness of everyday Dasein in its world is the basis for phenomena to appear to Dasein meaningfully. Heidegger describes world-formation as a sort of pre-cognitive socialization that happens to every Dasein receptively rather than cognitively. As Dasein the human being is transcendence towards the world, and hence the unified expression of Dasein as “Being-in-the-world”. The ontic dimension of this ontological structure of Dasein means that Dasein is constantly involved in its practical world of concerns. I read the ontic dimension of Dasein's world of involvement as culture and thus Dasein as the cultural Being. The cultural horizon is never static, just as the world in its ontological sense never is. Both ontologically and ontically Dasein is historical, a particular tale that can be recorded reflectively. Although Dasein's ontico-ontological horizon is never closed off, we can genuinely record the differences in these horizons, their histories and meanings, without having to plunge hopelessly into any triumphalist universalism. This wouldn't be the case if Dasein were not ontologically historical and ontically cultural.

**KEY WORDS:** Heidegger • Ontic • Ontological • Cultural Being • Everydayness • Tradition • Fallenness • Historicity

### Introduction

I begin by showing that Dasein is an engaged agent who is always already Being-in-the-world. The universal existential-ontological characteristic of Dasein (which Heidegger calls existential) is that Dasein accesses and hence knows all phenomena from the background of a shared standpoint, a hermeneutical horizon or world. Heidegger thinks that we can understand a being like Dasein not theoretically or scientifically, but from the analysis

of its pre-scientific, practical engagement with the world. Then, I proceed to demonstrate how Heidegger's existential structure of fallenness is one of the basic structures of Being-in-the-world. Fallenness attaches us to "everyday". For Heidegger, it is a positive mode of Dasein's absorption in the world of entities and with Others (*das Man*). In the third section, I move to Heidegger's emphasis on the dialogical component of discourse in Dasein's everydayness, which is the existential characteristic of Being-in-the-world with the "they". The "they" means the power of the socio-cultural forces (both already given and evolving) investing the past with meaning. Being-in-the-world is always a matter of being involved with the world of practical concern. This is understood as the ontic world. This ontic world is the culture one is thrown into. As Being-in-the-world Dasein presses ahead into various projects, tasks and relationships within its world and community. This pressing ahead already means entanglement in and desire to maintain a tradition. I assume the Heideggerian self which reinterprets and transforms itself, is useful to the understanding of a dynamic notion of a cultural being. Our cultural horizon is a constantly moving, recreating and dynamic horizon. Heidegger understood this in terms of the historicity of Dasein. For Heidegger, it is only on account of Dasein's temporality that one can be a historical being.

My aim in the following analysis of the inseparability of humans and their world, their engrossment and lostness in the world, their everyday Being as this engrossment in the world itself and the consequent conclusion that they are constitutively historical beings is to argue that Dasein is a cultural being.

### Inseparability

There is a relation of inseparability between world and self. This relationship exists, not in any idealistic or reductionist sense but in terms of significance or meaning. The Heideggerian self or Dasein is not an encapsulated and representationalist self like modern philosophy advocates. Rather, the self for Heidegger is a being who is in the world with other Daseins and entities. It is a self, who is involved in a relational totality of meaning and significance. Heidegger's radical breakthrough to a hermeneutic phenomenology pronounces human being's involvement in the world of meaningfulness. For him, this meaningfulness is experienced in a non-reflective manner. Our everyday world is the environmental world we live in. Hence, the world for Heidegger is not an aggregate of objects but a world of referential relationality. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger writes that Dasein

[...] finds itself primarily and constantly in things because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of<sup>1</sup>.

Since our existence happens in terms of meaningful comportments with other Daseins and entities in our everyday world, I will argue the following with Heidegger: in these comportments what is primordial is not a relation of separation and detachment, but one of attachment and involvement.

The philosophical task has been to give an interpretation of the truth of reality in its universality. Philosophy interrogates the universal that becomes intelligible outside of time, space, culture, context and history. This epistemology, privileges the theoretical point of view and considers it superior to practical engagement. One of Heidegger's main projects in *Being and Time* is to attack the Cartesian mental substance that leads to human beings disconnectedness to the world and its failure to do justice to Dasein's experience as culturally situated beings.

Against this approach, the well-known Heideggerian position is: philosophy and theorization in general are never intelligible without reference to a horizon of intelligibility. Heidegger holds that we cannot achieve a priori knowledge about the world in a detached manner, because the structure of the objective world is defined by its equipmental or functional relation with the subject. Hence, Heidegger sees the most appropriate ontological description of the subject as "Being-in-the-world". Understood in this manner, world is the referential whole of the subject's involvements. It is not the sum total of discrete objects. Traditional metaphysics, according to Heidegger, depicted reality as the aggregation of disengaged objects in their *Vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand) in the world without considering their purpose, service or function in the world in terms of Dasein. On the other hand, Heidegger argues that things or objects come across to Dasein primordially in their *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand). *Being and Time* shifts the focus of the epistemological standpoint from the spectator of the world to the actor in the world. Therefore, the ontological connectedness of the subject to the world and the earth is pronounced.

Heidegger introduces the notion of our shared everyday skills or practices into which we are socialized as Being-in-the-world. These practices provide the background for us to understand ourselves as subjects and make

<sup>1</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1982, p. 159.

sense of the world we are in. Even the term Heidegger chose for the entity he was enquiring into in *Being and Time*, Dasein or Being-there, demonstrates the “worldly”, involved character of the human being. This is because Being is a comportment of Dasein towards itself or from itself towards another entity. Thus, the term Dasein expresses the ontological relationship between human beings and the world.

The phenomenological world which Heidegger is talking about is neither the common world nor the subjective world but the worldhood of the world in general. This worldhood is an ontological concept that stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the-world. Totality of involvements which frees Dasein to encounter the ready-to-hand is called worldhood. Being-in-the-world is a way in which Dasein’s character is defined existentially; therefore, worldhood itself is an existential:

The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this ‘wherein’ is the phenomenon of the world. And the structure of that to which [woraufhin] Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the worldhood of the world<sup>2</sup>.

The world, then, is the “wherein” of the understanding (*Verstehen*), which is Heidegger’s term for the practical pre-reflective way in which we have a sense of things *zuhanden* (ready-to-hand). Before a *zuhanden* entity is discovered as such, its very discoverability as *Zuhanden* depends on a referential totality of Dasein’s involvements. It is discovered by Dasein in its Being as *Zuhandenheit* only because of this totality. Hence, the world is the background of an act of understanding. The *Zuhanden* thing comes to the foreground as such-and-such only because of this background.

This referential totality of Dasein’s involvements, ontically speaking, is the world of historical peoples. Dasein not only understands the objects in its world but also concerns with them, takes issue with them, cares about them. In the most primordial sense, in anything that a Dasein takes issue with, her world in the specific sense of “mine” is constitutively there as the background of the thing that is known. This is because Dasein is existentially constituted as care. Heidegger’s analysis of the ontology of the world and elements within it is well-known. A hammer can function as a tool in the carpenter’s hands only in terms of a totality of equipments, an equipmental world. Equipment is not one specific item but is a relational part of the “totality of equipments” (*Zeugganzes*). Heidegger

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York, 1962, p. 119.

refers the totality of equipments to “the work”. The function of the hammer is always directed towards something, (*das Um-zu*) that is, an end product (the referential relationality). The end product will have a recipient who can make use of it. The work has an applicability. Heidegger holds that this kind of practical engagement is possible only in a larger public world of our involvements.

As far as Dasein is concerned, I argue that the relation of inseparability between world and self is established on account of the fact that in each instance, its ways of Being involves two conceptually separable processes, existence (ek-sisting) and mineness. Eksisting means standing out into or transcending towards the world<sup>3</sup>. In *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* Heidegger points out that

[...] transcendence is not just one possible comportment (among others) of Dasein toward other beings, but it is the basic constitution of its being (*Grundverfassung seines Seins*), on the basis of which Dasein can at all relate to beings in the first place<sup>4</sup>.

Only on the basis of Dasein's transcendence, can one think of world-forming which is comprised of simultaneous and intertwined temporal-spatial ways of Being. The second ontological feature of *Jemeinigkeit* (mineness) makes it possible for Dasein to own up its Being. This gives me a sense of how I am faring in the world. I argue that the radical breakthrough that Heidegger achieved with regard to our ontological-epistemological accessing of the world attempts to show that each of us is a complicated being in the making. This is because we are involved in a multiplicity of tasks as Being-in-the-world in the light of a not fully articulable but extremely intricate attunement to and projective understanding towards a complexly structured totality of meanings called the “world”. The status of mineness in terms of transcending existence towards the world is a question that Dasein cannot circumvent. This means that for Dasein its own Being is an issue always even in its concern with things and solicitude towards others.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger discusses explicitly Dasein's transcendence towards the world. He holds that “the transcending beings are not the objects—things can never transcend or be transcendent; rather, it is the ‘subjects’— in the proper ontological sense of the Dasein—which transcend, step through and step over themselves. Only a being with the mode of being of the Dasein transcends, in such a way in fact that transcendence is precisely what essentially characterizes its being”. (M. Heidegger, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, p. 299).

<sup>4</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim, Bloomington 1984, p. 165.

Dasein is always already in a meaningful web of relations. It is in this referential relations, beings make intelligible to us. Moreover, this intelligibility of meaning making arises only from the socio-historical world. The Dasein is cultural being because of this very inseparability of its world from its self. Dasein is “[...] a unique self-interpreting, self-understanding way of being”<sup>5</sup>. Its self-understanding is entangled in its world-understanding. If it were not so, it would not have been a cultural being but primordially a spiritual or mental or divine or some other sort of being. In the meaning making process, the process of getting entangled in the things and others of its world, the cultural existence of Dasein, forgetfulness of “own self” reaches its zenith. This element of our cultural existence is my concern in the following section.

### Fallenness

One of the existential structures of being in the world is fallenness or unequivocal absorption in the world. The “in-ness” of Dasein’s being in the world is not like water being in the bottle, body being in clothes or even fish being in the sea, but it is like being in love or hate<sup>6</sup>. This utter immersion in the world represents the inauthentic mode of Dasein’s existence because it means compromising the mineness-existence structure of Dasein; it means the weight of being Dasein tilting towards the world. Heidegger insists that this is not a “moral” characterization. Dasein’s falling into the world is not a moral failure but is an existential-ontological characterization. It is the way average human life is. Immersion in the world, according to Heidegger, is primarily ruled by a kind of common, public understanding of things and affairs of the world, judgments and viewpoints, upheld within the dominant human culture prevalent in one’s socio-historical tradition, from which individual humans cannot easily isolate themselves. Heidegger’s term for this mode of existence of the social Dasein, sociality as such, is “the They” (*das Man*). That into which we fall in order to become Dasein is the tradition into which we grow; we grow into it to the extent that it becomes an inalienable aspect of our existence and rules all of our existential dimensions.

In its inauthentic, falling mode, Dasein is completely immersed or absorbed in the “they”. This means that being in the world is always a matter of being involved with an ontic world. The ontic world is the culture or tradition that we are thrown into, and out of which alone can we have an understanding of Being. “Dasein’s thrownness into a world among other entities

<sup>5</sup> K. A. Aho, *Heidegger’s Neglect of the Body*, Albany 2009, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> J. Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World*, Cambridge 2006, p. 74.

as a singular being is what Heidegger understood by Dasein's facticity"<sup>7</sup>. For Heidegger, possibilities are open for Dasein because of its thrown basis. It is through these possibilities that we can project contexts of meaningfulness. Our self-understanding is itself drawn from the public world into which we are thrown. The analysis of Dasein as "Being-in" the world and the fact that Dasein's disposition of itself towards the world, the wholeness, within which it already finds itself is of importance and this makes it possible to locate Heidegger's understanding of dwelling upon the earth as cultural being. For Heidegger, existence presupposes the world because Dasein is a self who needs a dwelling. "But the fact that, as Dasein, I must have a world to live in, to dwell in, to call my home, is *a priori*"<sup>8</sup>.

In the essay "Building Dwelling Thinking", Heidegger asks what it means to dwell? Taken together with the explication of dwelling in *Being and Time* and in this essay<sup>9</sup>, "to dwell" means to be familiar with, to care for and to look after. He goes on to argue that 'to build' also originally meant "to dwell". Although the force of the argument here is etymological, in the overall structure of Heidegger's thought it is not. "Being in" means to dwell upon the earth caringly. If our most primordial comportment towards the world of things and people is one of caring, mattering involvement, then "to dwell upon the earth" really means "being involved with an ontic world". "Being in" is a way of attuning ourselves to being affected by the world. "Dasein's openness to the world", Heidegger remarks, "is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind"<sup>10</sup>. Attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) has to do with how Dasein finds itself in the world; how it is affected by the world; it discloses a world to human beings in its alreadyness. For Heidegger, ontologically, the fact that we always find ourselves in one mood or another indicates for him that we are affective beings, impinged on by the world.

Hence, Being-in is not to be understood in terms of the kind of relationship of Being which two entities extended "in" space and location have. Rather, Being-in is a state of Dasein's meaningful Being or existence; it is an existiale. When Heidegger speaks of world-projection, what he means is the relational character that humans possess in its relation to the world. Here, all our attunement, understanding and possibilities reside. All

<sup>7</sup> R. Padui, *From the Facticity of Dasein to the Facticity of Nature: Naturalism, Animality, and the Ontological Difference*, "Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle", 2013, annual 3, p. 53; emphasis modified.

<sup>8</sup> M. Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Dekalb, 1989, p. 58–59.

<sup>9</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 79–80.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 176.

possibilities and truths have their Being upon the canvass of the world. This canvass freely binds and loosely completes itself.

This fallenness or lostness in the “they” attaches us to “Dasein’s average everydayness”. The “they” constantly accommodates Dasein in its everydayness. “Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The “they”, which supplies the answer to the question of the “who” of everyday Dasein, is the “nobody” to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another (*Untereinandersein*)”<sup>11</sup>. Hence, this averageness levels down to what we know as publicness or culture, these are not negative characterizations in a moral sense; they are characterizations of how existence is in an average way. If common existence was not somewhat inauthentic and fallen, we would have been in perpetual anxiety to be our most authentic self, social life would have been rather impossible. Fallen existence means ‘giving oneself over to a culture’ and carrying on one’s life without resisting cultural influences and impingements. Rather, it means smoothly integrating oneself into the stream or flow of cultural life, giving into its prejudices and accepted interpretations and even critiquing or challenging its prejudices only on the basis of its own assumptions and norms. For Heidegger, it is culture or tradition that expresses the interpretedness in which Dasein finds itself thrown. This is the case whether Dasein exists in its authentic or inauthentic mode. Dasein has no choice in the face of the inescapable socio-cultural forces. It has nowhere else to go. In Dasein’s inauthentic mode, one who is not aware of one’s own existence can lose oneself in the “they” or publicness. Hence, Dasein owns up its own Being and finds the meaning of its existence only in terms of the larger public world, determined by a tradition, into which one grows. Dasein as Being-in-the-world discloses a world which is constituted by discourse. Culture or tradition discloses the possibilities that it carries along in discourse. Dasein’s intelligibility gets expressed in discourse because for Heidegger every communication discloses Dasein’s everyday existence that pertains to a particular context.

### Everydayness

Heideggerian existential phenomenology attempts to explain the ontological characteristics of Dasein in its average everydayness. The immediate awareness of our existence is quotidian and humdrum. Dasein’s everyday Being unfolds in terms of its environmental world. However, Heidegger holds that Dasein’s everydayness is not to be understood in terms of describing an

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 165–166.

account of particular events as each day unfolds in Dasein's everyday life. Rather, "everydayness is rather a distinctive how of the being of Dasein, even when and precisely when this Dasein has an inherently highly developed and differentiated culture at its disposal"<sup>12</sup>. We are born into a cultural world and our everydayness is already culturally constituted. The web of meaning is already set, the wherewith all for meaning-making activity is pre-given. Our interpretive project which is the basis for the creative and dynamic aspect of culture has this pre-givenness as its boundary. Hence, our hermeneutic undertaking takes place within a porously bounded, somewhat limited horizon. Heidegger holds that it is within the horizon of Dasein's everydayness we discover the world.

For Heidegger, the world is always the one Dasein shares with others and so the world of Dasein is a with-world (*Mit-welt*). This characteristic of "with" makes the world shareable. Everyday Dasein is indifferent, even still it is floating along things and with other Daseins because Dasein is worldly and engaged with other things and people who matter to it. This ontological dependence is something that gives rise to the cultural being that Dasein is. I assume that this could be Heidegger's reason for claiming a concrete description of Dasein as a socially embedded self; his account of Dasein analytic as Being-in-the-world and Being-with-one-another emphasize the dependence of human beings upon sociality. Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein's existence in *Being and Time* at the ontological level is a thickly constituted social self.

Dasein is not only ontologically Being-in-the-world; it is always an ongoing self-interpretation in the modes of authenticity, undifferentiatedness, and inauthenticity. For Heidegger, authentic means that mode of Dasein's existence in which Dasein owns up its potentiality-for-Being. In fact, in becoming authentic, Dasein freely chooses to become what he/she wants to be. But this freedom is a finite freedom, bound within time, space and historicity.

Undifferentiatedness is the claim that at an ontological level we are modally undifferentiated in the average everydayness of our existence. In this mode, we are not even aware that our existence is socially leveled. Inauthenticity means letting the ownmost self to be interpreted in terms of its projective possibilities according to the "they-self". The two ways of being authentic and inauthentic are ontological and not ontic. However, they are

<sup>12</sup> *Idem, History of the Concept of Time; Prolegomena*, trans. Th. Kisiel, Bloomington 1985, p. 155.

produced and manifested in existentiell-ontic modifications<sup>13</sup>. For instance, in/authentic Being-with requires corresponding existentiell-ontic modifications of our Being-with because it takes place in reference to a world of significance, and a field of meaning.

From the very moment of its self-awareness, Dasein locates itself within a set of practices, a set of roles within a society – a world. These roles are pre-given because one can just be a place-filler in the given roles in terms of social expectations. Dasein often is and does its projects inauthentically by playing these roles and following these practices. Although this is the average, everyday possibility of Dasein's existence, it is an entity for which its own Being is an issue in all cases and relates to itself as "mine". Hence, amidst the inauthenticity of humdrum existence, there always lurks the possibility of authentic existence. The possibility of Dasein becoming the individual, rather than being a role-filler, presents to Dasein the possibility of owning up to its selfhood. Whether it exists authentically or inauthentically, Dasein cannot escape its ontological relationship with the world wherein it finds itself thrown. Thus, human beings begin and end as cultural entities. Their attempts to break free of this givenness (that is, authentic existence) are themselves owned-up as resolute ways of relating to their world of givenness.

This interrelatedness between human life and social context is evident in Heidegger's claim that Dasein in its everydayness is dominated by *das Man* (they/ the other) which for him is not a negative category. "What is decisive is just that inconspicuous domination by Others which has already been taken over unawares from Dasein as Being-with"<sup>14</sup>. I assume in

<sup>13</sup> The ontological-ontic slippage is deliberate in Heidegger's works (the famous ontological difference) and is the innovation that Heidegger introduces to transcendental philosophy. Everything ontological is never separate and away from the ontical. Ontological difference is central to the critical philosophical tradition in Europe after Heidegger. In the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger asserts that "Being is always the Being of an entity" (M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 29) and not some Platonic form separated from the entity. The hermeneutical structure of the ontological enquiry attests that the ontological question is intimately dependent on the ontical question. Heidegger writes: "But the roots of the existential analytic, on its part, are ultimately e x i s t e n t i e l l , that is, o n t i c a l . Only if the inquiry of philosophical research is itself seized upon in an existentiell manner as a possibility of the Being of each existing Dasein, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence and to undertake an adequately founded onto-logical problematic" (M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 34). That is, we can't even begin the ontological enquiry unless the philosopher is ontically gripped by the problem. I argue that a solely ontological or solely ontic description of Dasein analytic as Being-in-the-world would in fact fail to explain the existential-analytic of Dasein. Heidegger's ontological analysis, thus, constantly refers to cultural achievements and what they do to transform our ontological structure.

<sup>14</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.

Heidegger's account, even when Dasein struggles over social leveling and achieves its authentic possibilities it is still never a no-Being-in-the-world. It is never *solus ipse*. It is always an engaged social self. But in its authentic mode it has achieved its selfhood resolutely in terms of its own possibilities. Nevertheless, these own possibilities are still social. For me, this commitment to sociality ontologically is significant to show that human being is culturally constituted. Dasein finds itself fallen because of the inevitable result of socialization; it drifts away from its own unique/authentic possibilities. It conceals from itself the being that Dasein is and convinces that everything is in order in the world. Dasein's fallenness is not the consequence of choice but as Michael Crotty notes, it is "[...] the fact that Dasein finds itself in the first instance within the intricate texture of inherited meaning is to be warmly welcomed"<sup>15</sup>. In this case, Dasein finds itself following the social customs prescribed by Dasein's cultural context in a non-reflective way.

The sacred rituals, social norms and its practices which are the elements of a culture are found to be the real matrix for the non-reflective life of Dasein<sup>16</sup>. Human beings are born into an already existing culture which defines their identity as members of a community. We do not have the option to generate our social customs from ourselves. Rather, we find ourselves in a situation which already operates according to the customs. Our actions conform to this custom in a non-reflective way. Heidegger holds that for the most part in our everydayness we simply follow these norms and practices without questioning. For him, "it is not the irreducible and ultimate fact that 'man' exists in a world that transcends him; rather he exists in a state of givenness"<sup>17</sup>. I assume that Heidegger's existential structures of the state-of-mind, understanding and fallenness are appropriate if we look from a cultural perspective. My thrownness into a culture or a society is not my selection; I have no control over the circumstances to which I am delivered. The moment one arrives to this world, one is thrown into an existing culture or tradition. One has no answer why this is so. This "givenness" can never reveal the real meaning of its existence.

In its thrownness, Dasein's possibilities are limited by its world. But unlike in Sartre, it is not in great human freedom that we pick and choose our authentic possibilities. We do this by locating ourselves in a context because we are always engaged temporal, spatial and historical beings. Location

<sup>15</sup> M. Crotty, *Tradition and Culture in Heidegger's Being and Time*, "Nursing Inquiry", 1997, no. 4, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> J. Russon, *Heidegger, Hegel, and Ethnicity: The Ritual Basis of Self-Identity*, "The Southern Journal of Philosophy XXXIII", 1995, no. 4, p. 509.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lewis, *Cultural Studies*, London, 2008, p. 46.

for us is our historical space and tradition. At the same time, Heidegger's Dasein enjoys certain flexibility with respect to its social world; it is neither condemned to be free nor condemned to be a fully determined history. Hence, for Heidegger, context is very important because Dasein always finds itself in a particular context. Dasein's facticity is contextual. As Being-in-the-world, Dasein always situates itself in contexts that are laden with cultural import, which in turn allow Dasein its leeway for interpretation. The context is dynamic and amenable to transformation and so Dasein can reinterpret and differently deploy its tradition and its world. This way, every tradition for Heidegger is a dynamic entity. While movement and change is natural to the world, every change has a reference to a past, a tradition.

Culture is a historical people's coherent way of encountering their givenness in a particular spatio-temporal horizon and making that givenness meaningful and desirable to themselves. In this sense, culture is always a handed down and yet dynamic tradition, though nature may not be said to be so. Heidegger thinks of our dynamic historical thrownness in terms of the historicity of Dasein. What this means for culture is that it is always a tradition of interpretation of phenomena. Our cultural tradition provides us with the point of view in order to access or discover beings and their possibilities from the options available made ontically available to us. Critical approaches to these options are again mediated through the same culture and oppositions placed upon it, and not mediated through radical revisions of its foundations. While a culture's identity implies a steady state of cogency about the people's sense of significance regarding their place in the world, it is never completely closed to interpretive experiments. This negotiation between continuity and change is vital to cultural being. In Heidegger's framework the cultural tradition is always understood in terms of the historicity of Dasein. The notion of historicity for Heidegger makes tradition both inherited and yet makes room for choice. Therefore, in the following section, let me try to understand how human beings are historically constituted as Being-in-the-world.

### Historicity

Heidegger's existential analytic describes the human being as a historical being. In its thrownness, Dasein discovers itself within a historical context. This context is nothing but the domain of the "they-self" or culture. The historical phenomenon of culture is the way of life of a people. Culture comes into expression and institutes itself through history and language. Without a specifically vibrant historical consciousness, Heidegger thinks, conscious

reflection over the creative forces of culture cannot be undertaken. "The concepts of 'a people without culture'", he reminds, "and 'a people without history' are taken equivalent"<sup>18</sup>. Hence, this means that the concept of culture and history are interwoven in a form of life. Human beings are culturally and historically constituted as Being-in-the-world. Dasein being historical is the outcome of a particular, ontic negotiation between Being and beings within the openness provided by human beings. It is grounded ontologically on a decision of human beings in which truth occurs and thereby makes history possible.

In *Identity and Difference* Heidegger notes: "Whatever and however we may try to think, we think within the sphere of tradition. Tradition prevails when it frees us from thinking back to a thinking forward, which is no longer a planning"<sup>19</sup>. This way, human beings do not create a new situation. Rather, they project the possibilities and direct themselves to the already inherited and prevailing situations. For Heidegger, history becomes more historical by resolute repetition of the past. Heidegger goes on to say that if every trace of the essence of history were hidden from human beings, then not only the historical human being's comportment with beings would become an impossibility but even the tradition would never come into play. The revelation of the truth of Being that changes in different metaphysical epochs becomes significant because of history. As a historical being, Dasein temporalizes itself in a particular context – a tradition that it inherits and yet has the freedom to choose from the possibilities that are offered by its socio-historical background.

Heidegger, in particular, has put considerable weight on the use of repetition in his hermeneutic of Dasein. Repetition becomes a project of historical understanding. However, repetition does not entail reproduction of what was given by one's own tradition; rather it appropriates what is given in order to resolutely work out toward the future possibilities because Dasein is being-ahead-of-itself. Of course, in his book *Being and Time* Heidegger does not mention any particular tradition but recognizes that Dasein is a situated self, a self who is always suited in a particular social and historical context.

The accusation of the total determinateness of culture neither applies to Heidegger's ontological formulation of the world and understanding of Being nor to my ontological characterization of cultural being on the basis of Heidegger's ontology. While there is a handed down tradition, by historicity

<sup>18</sup> M. Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler, London 2000, p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, *Principle of Identity, in Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh, New York 1969, p. 41.

(*Geschichtlichkeit*) Heidegger means the possibility-driven manner of our approach to what is past; it means “‘recurrence’ of the possible”, and the possible is judged by a concern with the future. A look at the limits of human freedom without deception cannot be blind to the tradition where human existence finds itself already in. This ‘finding oneself already in’ is generally uncritical and floats along in an average way with the handed down interpretations of phenomena. The ultimate message of *Being and Time* and Heidegger’s later philosophy is not to be complacent about tradition, not to take it passively as the given, not to plunge or fall inauthentically into socially leveled interpretations of phenomena. Aho argues that if this were the case, Heidegger’s work would then “[...] result in another form of historical or cultural relativism. But this is not his aim”<sup>20</sup>. Rather, Heidegger’s aim is to overcome relativism by showing that an understanding of meaningful revelation of Being is fundamental for existence. Aho further holds that

Heidegger is rejecting the interpretation of life a sequentially ordered stream of experiences that ultimately ends in death. Life, rather, is a ‘movement’ or ‘happening’ that is structurally determined by the ever-present possibility of death<sup>21</sup>.

Dasein’s existence is not to be understood merely as thrown into a web of social relations. Rather, the essence of existence for Heidegger is a temporal happening of an understanding of Being. This understanding of Being is always in a network of meaningful relations

Dasein’s everydayness is that Being which is between birth and death. The in between is crucial for Dasein because as Dasein it is never at the beginning or at the end of its temporal stretching along or historicizing, but in the midst of it, which is the pull between birth and death. Hence, the stretching along and the movement are specific for Dasein and is not the motion of something *Vorhanden* (present-at-hand). The specific movement in which Dasein stretches itself along is known as historicizing. This stretching along and the persistence belongs to Dasein’s historicizing. The movement that concerns Heidegger is the stretching of Dasein between birth and death because of its being futural. In *Being and Time* Heidegger prioritizes the future because of the phenomenon of death that plays a crucial role in Dasein’s temporality. Hence, Heidegger argues that the existential-ontological constitution of historicity has been concealed by the way Dasein’s history is ordinarily interpreted. For Heidegger history is not a record of past

<sup>20</sup> K. A. Aho, *Heidegger’s Neglect of the Body*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

events which are no longer there<sup>22</sup>. For him, history is thought in terms of temporal happenings. Andrew Mitchell notes: "History is thought on the basis of exposure and what we are exposed to in history is its coming in all dimension"<sup>23</sup>. Hence, Heidegger rejects historicism because it prioritizes the past in a definite scientific manner by attempt to seal and preserve it in its objective accuracy.

In Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one can bring out the underlying cultural and historical characteristics of the book. David Couzens Hoy notes "the person for Heidegger is essentially social and historical. Of course, the individual is free to combat this tradition as well as to lose himself in the politics of the day"<sup>24</sup>. The fact is, Dasein is thrown into a world ahead-of-itself. It has to understand that world from a position within it. Dasein is never outside of that world, but always already thrown into it, in the middle of it, and thus always has to understand itself from the inside of that world. As thrown we cannot escape the givenness of the situation. This is the guiding hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger's project in *Being and Time*.

Hence, I understand the term "cultural being" in an ontologico-ontic relation. By the phrase 'cultural being' I mean that we become a self with an identity – who I am? – only in terms of our relation to the world, determined by a tradition, into which we grow. If we do not have an identity in this manner, then we cannot be with others. The question of selfhood does not arise beforehand. The question of self is constitutive of the world-receiving

<sup>22</sup> For Heidegger historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), as in *Being and Time*, means the concrete working out of temporality in Dasein's existence or Dasein's ontological character as the historicizing being, a being that is a temporal stretch of its past in light of its future. Dasein stretches itself between birth and death. It is in this movement of Dasein stretching itself between birth and death that it finds the meaning of its existence. Historicity is possible because of temporality. Hence, it is between birth and death that Dasein's existence attains Being-a-whole. Heidegger remarks that historicity "stands for the state of Being that is constitutive for Dasein's 'historizing' as such; only on the basis of such 'historizing' is anything like 'world-history' possible or can anything belong historically to world-history" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 41). For Heidegger, historicity is different from objective history (*Historie*). Objective history and its study (historiology) is about the facts of a past era or past events that have come and gone. *Geschichte*, or Dasein's tradition as such, meaningfully constitutes it when each Dasein stretches itself along from birth to death projecting its future possibilities on the basis of the tradition it has inherited. By history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*) what is meant is neither *Geschichtlichkeit* nor simply *Geschichte* or *Historie*. *Seinsgeschichte* is *Geschichte* understood from the point of view of *Ereignis* or the event of manifestation of Being.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Mitchell, *The Coming of History: Heidegger and Nietzsche against the Present*, "Continental Philosophy Review 46", 2013, no. 3, p. 404.

<sup>24</sup> J. Salem-Wiseman, *Heidegger's Dasein and the Liberal Conception of the Self*, "Political Theory 31", 2003, no. 4, p. 547.

process as I have explicated earlier on. Cultural being means I am what I am, not by way of a process of “making” as much as a process of “receiving”, but what is received is itself that which is already “made” through human processes of receiving-responding (passive-active) to meanings. Never “constructing” or “making” in a willful/ voluntaristic sense. What is made through receiving-responding is never closed off but is open. The process of receiving-responding is a historically dynamic rather than static process. Our critical responses to the already “received” and “made” are themselves affirmations, negations and ambivalences arising out of the “received” horizon of meaning. Hence, I contend that the term “cultural being” can only be understood within an ontologico-ontic framework. Human beings’ process of receiving-responding to meanings (which is understood as the Heideggerian account of phenomenology) is possible only in the world because “everydayness” is determinative for Dasein even when it has not chosen the “they” for its “hero”<sup>25</sup>. Dasein is a cultural being and is conditioned on its everydayness. In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger clearly mentioned that the ontological explanation of human beings is rooted in Dasein’s existentiell, which is, ontical. A purely ontological understanding of the human being that separates itself from the world of practical concern or existence cannot adequately provide a cultural understanding of the human being. It is only within this ontologico-ontic framework, can one conceive the human being as a cultural being.

## Conclusion

Heidegger’s existential analytic describes human beings as active and engaged self. Dasein encounters the entities and relates with Others as Being-in-the-world. Therefore, Dasein is not just a spectator of events that are occurring around her in the world. Heidegger’s radical breakthrough to a hermeneutic phenomenology and his emphasis on an involved self in the world opens space for a cultural and historical understanding of the human being. For Heidegger, Dasein is not an encapsulated self within a region that goes out to the world and returns to its region of consciousness. The Heideggerian account of self is an active and complex self. However, Dasein is capable of reinterpreting itself and relating to the world and other Daseins as definite ways of Being-in.

Culture is the ontic givenness of what Heidegger describes as the “world” which is the backdrop of the possibilities available to a people. In

<sup>25</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 422.

this sense, culture is the web of meaning within which individuals and communities make sense of their existence. Culture cannot be based merely on speculative grounds; there are no theoretical suppositions in culture. It is set in a system of human actions and purposes – a system that keeps evolving. All theoretical descriptions arising from a culture are reflective appropriations of its system of meanings. With the change of perspective that Heidegger introduces, it becomes clear that many aspects of our experiences in the world cannot be captured in quantitative terms.

The world, however, is not a product of Dasein's subjectivity. It is not the conscious projection of a subject as the totality of its objects. Rather, it is the field or clearing of Dasein's disclosiveness (*Erschlossenheit*) and understanding. Dasein is disclosiveness and so only Dasein can be meaningful. Our cultural being and our cultural world are nothing static. Heidegger thinks of this dynamism in terms of the historicity of Dasein. It means the stretching of Dasein between birth and death which is known as historizing. Dasein's historicity cannot be understood unless its past is taken into account; therefore, what has been handed down to us from one generation to the next is of great importance in order to understand ourselves as cultural being.

By cultural being is meant that being who becomes self in a receptive-responsive relation to the always already available historical-cultural space of meaning called "world". Despite Heidegger's own reservations about "culture", Dasein is a cultural and historical entity through and through because the selfhood that Heidegger speaks of in *Being and Time* is situated in a social and historical background. 

KARILEMLA – jest pracownikiem naukowym na Wydziale Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych w na Indyjskim Uniwersytecie Technologicznym (Bombaj Indie). Jej zainteresowania naukowe obejmują filozofię kontynentalną (szczególnie filozofię Heideggera), filozofię technologii, kulturę indyjską (zwłaszcza kulturę Ao-Naga). Jest wizytującym pracownikiem naukowym na Uniwersytecie Emory (Atlanta USA). Pracuje nad doktoratem poświęconym Heideggerowskiej krytyce kultury.

KARILEMLA – research scholar in Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India. Her research interests include continental philosophy (especially Heidegger), philosophy of technology, and Indian culture (especially the Ao-Naga culture). She is a visiting scholar at Emory University (Atlanta USA). Her doctoral research is devoted to Heidegger's critique of culture.