

Agency and Mortality: Heidegger's Existential Analysis of Death and its Practical Philosophical Background

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Introduction

The main point that I would like to address is the close relationship between Heidegger's existential analysis of *death* and the classical problematic of ethical theory concerning human *happiness*, originally proposed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although the term *eudaimonia*, the original Greek word for happiness, does not appear in *Being and Time*, I will show, by careful reading of the lecture courses Heidegger held on Aristotle around 1924-1925, that the classical problematic of *eudaimonia* plays a great role in the existential conception of death.

For years, readers of *Being and Time* have regarded the existential analysis of death as an attempt of secularizing the theological understanding of life and death.¹ Indeed, after Heidegger's important lecture courses from 1921 to 1922 were published under the title *Phenomenology of Religious Life* in 1995, we can see even more clearly that the theological notion of *Parousia* functions as a significant resource for the existential understanding of

1. Löwith famously presented such a picture of Heidegger by calling him a "godless 'Christian theologian'" (Löwith 1984, 90). See also, Rentsch 1989, 147.

death and temporality.²

Yet, there is one important point we should not forget, i.e. Heidegger's critical-destructive repetition of Western tradition generally traces back to ancient philosophy. I would also claim that this is the case in the analysis of death. Certainly, Heidegger acknowledges the great significance of *praxis* in religious life and its specific confrontation with death and other existential phenomena such as conscience and anxiety. However, in Heidegger's historical view, this religious self-interpretation of Dasein can be fully understood only in the connection to the problematic of the ancient practical philosophy and its ontological understanding of Being.

Therefore, by pointing out that the traditional problem of ethical theory lies in the concept of death in *Being and Time* as its background, I will be able to reexamine Heidegger's analysis of death, which is often ignored when the "actuality" of Heidegger in the context of contemporary philosophy is discussed. In the final part of the essay, I will show the actuality of Heidegger's analysis of death by focusing on *agency and mortality*.

1. Heidegger's Critical Interpretation of Aristotle's Eudaimonia

It is well known that in the discussion about human happiness in *Book I of Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to the old question raised by the ancient politician Solon: "Must no one at all, then, be called happy while he lives; must we, as Solon says, see the end?" (*EN I*, 10, 1100a10-11). Therefore, is it only after seeing one's death that we can judge if one's life has been happy? Although Aristotle realizes that a happy life can sometimes become unhappy in the end, as in the case of Priam described in Homer's *Iliad*, Aristotle still attempts to explain why we commonly believe that happy men are happy while they live.

Aristotle notes that we assume happiness to be not entirely vulnerable to unstable fortunes and to be "something permanent and by no means easily changed" (1100b2-3). According to him, we actually know that such permanent happiness is well shown in "virtuous activities" (1100b10). "The man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of

2. On this subject, see Ciocan 2009.

life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances, as the best military use of the army at his command and a shoemaker makes the best shoes out of the hides that are given him” (1100b35-1101a5). In such a sense, “no function of man has so much permanence as virtuous activities” (1100b12-13). So, Aristotle responds to Solon’s advice in a more optimistic vein:

Why then should we not say that he is happy who is active in accordance with complete [*teleios*] virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life? Or must we add ‘and who is destined to live thus and die as befits his life’? Certainly the future is obscure to us, while happiness, we claim, is an end [*telos*] and something in every way final. (1101a14-19)³

Before looking at Heidegger’s critical interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of *eudaimonia*, I would like to refer to the current situation of Heideggerian research. Today, after the long-lasting trend of “existentialist” interpretations of *Being and Time*, it is quite common among readers to consider Aristotle’s virtuous man or *Phronimos* as the precise model of authentic [*eigentlich*] Dasein. Some even regard the whole enterprise of *Being and Time* as a “translation” of *Nichomachean Ethics*, as Volpi (1999) puts it. There are, in fact, several passages that seem to provide strong support for this line of interpretation, especially in Heidegger’s intensive interpretation of *Nichomachean Ethics* from the 1924/25 lecture *Plato’s Sophist*. For instance, Heidegger clearly states in the interpretation of *Book X* of *Nichomachean Ethics*: “It [*eudaimonia*] constitutes the authentic Being of human Dasein” (PS, 118/GA19, 172).

However, if one looks more closely at his comments on *eudaimonia*, the picture of Heidegger as a devoted Aristotelian would be radically changed.

3. A brief sketch of Solon’s problem in *Nichomachean Ethics* suffices for our purpose of interpreting Heidegger. It is yet worth noting that Aristotle admits in this passage that happiness does not exclude external goods, and thus it depends on fortune to some degree. For this aspect of Aristotle’s thought and its complex relationship with his basic belief of permanency of happiness, see Irwin 1999.

In the above statements from the 1924/25 lecture, Heidegger admits that “the authentic Being of human Dasein” is shown in the concept of *eudaimonia*. However, one should not rashly conclude that Heidegger would find Aristotle’s understanding of authenticity entirely acceptable from the existential-ontological view. Rather, he intends to critically examine “the ontological meaning of *eudaimonia*” (ibid.).

Heidegger’s criticism is directed at some temporal implications of the idea of “permanent happiness” that could remain unchangeable even at the moment of death. Immediately after the sentence “It [*eudaimonia*] constitutes the authentic Being of human Dasein” (ibid.), Heidegger states: “This Being amounts to nothing else *than being-present, pure being present to that which always is* [Anwesendsein, reines Gegenwärtigsein bei dem, was immer ist]” (ibid.). This temporal interpretation of *eudaimonia* leads further to the ontological claim that “the *eudaimonia*, as pure and simple *telos*, is in the purest sense self-contained Presence-at-hand [eigenständiges Vorhandensein] of the living being in the world” (119/173). So, Heidegger does not acknowledge the genuine understanding of human Dasein in the concept of *eudaimonia*. Rather, he sees in this concept even the central feature of *Falling* [Verfallen] of Dasein, in which human Dasein is always and already understood in the ontological mode of presence-at-hand.

For Heidegger, the problem of understanding one’s life before one’s death is not treated sufficiently in Aristotle’s ethics, or at least some ontological-temporal problems remain to be considered. In Heidegger’s view, Aristotle’s treatment is based on the specific temporality of presence-at-hand, which, while known as the main claim of his existential approach in *Being and Time*, should constitute the Being of worldly entities, which could not temporize the existential Being of human Dasein.

2. Telos as Complete-being

We have seen how Heidegger concludes his critical interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*: “The *eudaimonia*, as pure and simple *telos*, is in the purest sense self-contained Presence-at-hand of the living being in the world.” We will now ask how he could derive such a conclusion from Aristotle’s text.

In the 1924/25 lecture, Heidegger begins his criticism with the claim that “Aristotle takes *eudaimonia* in a strictly ontological sense, as *telos*” (GA19, 172/PS, 118) and targets this “ontological meaning of *eudaimonia*” (ibid.). He quotes the sentence from *Book X* of *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle calls *eudaimonia* “what we state the end [*telos*] of human nature to be” (EN X, 6, 1176a31-32) and translates the term *telos* as “complete-being [Fertigsein]” (PS, 118/GA19, 172).

What Heidegger intends to do with this translation is to note that Aristotle’s notion of *telos*, in its first sense, does not mean exactly the purpose or goal which one would have in mind, for the accomplishment of which one would plan and take action. In other words, *eudaimonia* as *telos* does not refer to a state that one *will* complete in the future. Rather, it is, as Being or state, supposed to be *always and already* completed. Heidegger remarks: “This [*eudaimonia*] does not concern a mere possibility of Being, but the possibility of Being in its presence” (ibid.). Formulated differently:

It cannot be an optional capacity which sometimes is awake and sometimes sleeps, on the contrary, *eudaimonia*, insofar as it concerns the Being of human being as its complete-being, as the authentic Being of human’s highest ontological possibilities, must be a Being of human being which is at every moment, constantly what it is. (ibid)

So Heidegger comprehends the temporal implication in the whole story of *eudaimonia*. Aristotle’s view of “authentic Being of human’s highest possibility of Being” as something that should be so complete that it is at every moment what it is, is not separable from the temporal orientation in present-being that constitutes the ontological category of presence-at-hand.

This diagnosis of Aristotle’s ontological presupposition is associated with my suggestion in the previous section: Heidegger does not regard *eudaimonia* as the genuine existential mode of Being. Instead, he supposes that in the concept of *eudaimonia*, the unauthentic mode of Being of Dasein that Heidegger calls *Falling* is expressed. The specific Being of Dasein is not understood in accordance with its own Being, but in terms of the Being of worldly entities.

Notably, Heidegger often claims that the general thesis of Aristotle’s

philosophy is oriented to the ontological understanding of the Being of entities as being produced [*hergestellt*]. This view is originally manifested in the report *Phenomenological Interpretation to Aristotle: Indications for the hermeneutical Situation* from Fall 1922: “[In Aristotle] the field of entities, which gives the original meaning of Being, is that which is *produced* and is taken to be used in the first sense” (GA62, 373). This thesis plays a decisive role in Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s works. For example, in this report, in a brief sketch of the first book of *Physics*, Heidegger states: “In the explication of the seventh section [of the first book] the ‘basic category’ of poiesis generates [erwachsen] and this category rules the whole ontology of Aristotle” (394). More concretely, Heidegger shows that for Aristotle “the leading example” for formulating a category of poiesis is “‘the becoming of a column out of copper’ (in the movement of *productive* comportment [Umgangsbewegtheit der *Herstellung*])” (395). Being is understood as a movement or process in the same way as a column is *complete* after having been produced out of copper.

This exemplary role of production functions not only in Aristotle’s interpretation of the natural world. Heidegger’s emphasis focuses on the claim that the leading example of production is still decisive in Aristotle’s understanding of human life. Even in the conception of a human being as a complete-being, which should make up the authentic Being of human’s highest possibility of Being, “the movement of *producing* [Herstellen] is presupposed as an example” (385). This means that according to Aristotle, the basic idea that “Being is *complete-being*, i.e. the Being in which the movement has reached *his end*” (ibid.) also defines what human nature is. The concept of complete-being as the human’s highest possibility of Being is not acquired through investigating the specific Being of human Dasein and its own relationship to the end, but is made possible by applying the ontological understanding about produced entities in human life.

Heidegger claims further that on the basis of such an ontological presupposition, Aristotle was led to the controversial idea that the pure complete-being can be realized in its most perfect form only in the special mode of human Being “*sophia*” (ibid.). For, while *phronesis* is intentionally related to human life that is essentially changeable, *sophia* as genuine *nous* or “pure cognition” (386) is concerned with things that do not change, and thus

enjoys a more self-sufficient form of human existence. As we have seen in the last section, the good life of a virtuous man is also acknowledged as an expression of the complete-being, *eudaimonia*. However, when the completeness is deployed as the criteria of understanding several modes of Being, it is evaluated as a mode of Being that is not so much complete and self-sufficient as the pure seeing activities of *sophia*.

3. Chairological Time

Heidegger's *destructive* interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy has a further aim. He dares to comprehend the whole tradition of Western philosophy from the viewpoint of a dominant understanding of Being of entities as being produced. In his view, the Christian conception is a typical variant of this tradition and constitutes the "Greek-Christian interpretation of life" (GA62, 369). I quote a clear statement from the 1927 lecture *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

For the Christian interpretation of the world, in conformity with the creation story of Genesis, every entity that is not God himself is created [geschaffen]. [...] The creating of Creation has the general ontological character of producing. Creation is also interpreted in some sense with regard to production. Despite its different origins, it was as if ancient ontology in its foundations and basic concepts were cut to fit the Christian world-view and interpretation of that which *is* as *ens creatum*. (BP, 118/GA24, 167-168)⁴

Revealing an ontological basis of the philosophical tradition, in which Being is generally understood as being-produced, does not mean revealing a mere negative evaluation of history. Rather, it defines the central task of Heidegger's philosophy. Through it he is motivated to seek the authentic Being of human Dasein that can *not* be ontologically identified with non-

4. As the later Heidegger often claims, the notion that world as a whole is produced, reached its most extreme form in modern techniques. For Heidegger, even the newest problems in the age of techniques should be considered by returning to their roots in Greek philosophy, especially in Aristotle (cf., Vetter 2006, 90).

human worldly entities.

Heidegger is yet not interested in providing some brand new interpretation of Being or a mere manifestation of certain worldviews. For him, philosophizing should be strictly historical. He seeks a clue for what he calls, in *Being and Time*, an “ontological interpretation” that “*should capture the Being of this entity [Dasein], in spite of this entity’s own tendency for concealing [Verdeckungstendenz]*” (BT, 359/SZ, 311), and he does it in the history of Western philosophy. In the early development of Heidegger’s philosophy, while preparing for the work of *Being and Time*, one of the most important figures in history for him was again Aristotle.

We now return to Heidegger’s interpretation of the virtuous man in Aristotle’s ethics. While Heidegger attacks the ontological-temporal implication of the notion “*eudaimonia*,” he finds interestingly the counterargument again, in Aristotle’s understanding of the virtuous man [*phronimos*]. “*Phronesis* is, so long as it is performed, in a constant struggle against a tendency of concealing [Verdeckungstendenz] residing at the heart of Dasein itself” (PS, 36-37/GA19, 52).

We should note again that completeness or production is ontologically constituted in the temporality of present-being, which is the temporal understanding that something is always present. Aristotle has a tendency to regard the perfect form of completeness in theoretical life. But Heidegger will show that a constant struggle against such a tendency is expressed in Aristotle’s thinking that practical life is revealed to human Dasein as constantly changeable and not perfectly complete. This intention is already manifested, as Heidegger first noted in his discussion of Aristotle’s philosophy in the 1921/22 lecture, which has the same title as the above-mentioned 1922 article. In this lecture he talked about “*chairos-time*” (PIA, 102/GA61, 137) or “*chairological-‘time’*” in which “*factual life has its time*” (103/139). Obviously, this kind of lived temporality is compared to the temporality of being-always-there.

Heidegger describes the task in the 1922 article: “The concrete interpretation shows how this entity, *chairos* constitutes itself in the *phronesis*” (GA62, 383). What one should notice here is that in *Book VI* of *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle characterizes action as consisting of several elements (PS, 100/GA19, 146; EN VI, 9, 1142b23 et sqq.), the temporal

character of action is counted as one of these elements. “Every action is carried out at a determinate time” (PS, 101/GA19, 147). Indeed, if one lacks the ability to act at a right moment, we would not regard him as a good agent. The most important point in this context is to remark that time of action does not have the temporal character of being-always-present in the same way as the objects of theoretical perception should have. The time of action needs to be perceived at an appropriate moment by the virtuous man. According to Heidegger, “*phronesis* is a way of keeping eyes on fully articulated moment [Verwahrungsweise des vollen Augenblicks]” (GA62, 384).

The concept of *phronesis* implies the lived temporality that should be specific to the Being of Dasein and be distinguished from the temporality of being-present. This is yet still questionable if the chairological time of *each action* could also temporalize *life as a whole*, in which every action could be temporally contextualized. It seems that in this respect Heidegger does not expect a lot from Aristotle’s theory of action, because, as the discussion about *eudaimonia* has shown, when Aristotle approaches the problem of understanding one’s life as a whole, his argument is basically dependent on the temporality of being-present. In fact, regarding the chairological character of factual *life*, another resource from the philosophical tradition influences Heidegger deeply: the temporality of Christian life.

In the lecture *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* that was held only one year before the 1921/22 lecture, Heidegger focuses on “time and moment” in “Bible use of the terms” (PRL, 106/GA60, 150). What Heidegger will make apparent is that in the Christian understanding of factual life, “the explicit characterization of the When, not an objectively indifferent When: *chairos*” is decisive (ibid.). The motto for this line of interpretation is expressed as: “Christian religiosity lives temporality as such” (55/80, 73/104).

How is the “when” constituted in Christian life? Heidegger’s textual basis for answering this question focuses on *Paul’s* letters. In Heidegger’s interpretation of Paul’s first letters to the Thessalonians he states: “Paul lives in a peculiar distress, one that is, as an apostle, his own, in anticipation [Erwartung] of the second coming of the Lord. This distress articulates the authentic [eigentlich] situation of Paul. It determinates each moment of his

life" (68-69/98). Paul lives temporality in such a way that he is constantly distressed in anticipation of "*parousia*," and each moment of his life is determined by this distress. One of the most significant features of Paul's first letters to the Thessalonians, which Heidegger notes, is that "Paul does not say 'When' [of the day of Parousia]" (72/102) in the sense of some future time-point which one could expect. "The When is in no way objectively graspable" (73/104), and "the entire question for Paul is not a cognitive question" (72/102). "The question of 'When' leads back to my comportment. How the *parousia* stands in my life, that refers back to the enactment of life itself. The meaning of the 'When', of the time in which the Christian lives, has an entirely special character" (73/104).

The "when" of *parousia* is essentially *indeterminate*. The question of the when leads back to each comportment in Christian life and so determines each moment in life. Apparently, this kind of temporality is compared to a temporality articulated in Aristotle. According to Heidegger's interpretation, Aristotle, when he tries to articulate human happiness, presupposes the temporality of present-being in spite of his insight into the chairological character of human praxis. This contrast is explicitly seen when Heidegger emphasizes that "there is no security [Sicherheit] for Christian life; the constant insecurity is also characteristic for what is fundamentally significant in factual life" (73/105). By anticipating *parousia* Paul's life is determined by "distress," while the happy man, as described by Aristotle, enjoys a kind of security in the complete state. Heidegger comments: "The meaning of this temporality is also fundamental for factual life experience, as well as for problems such as that of the eternity of God. In the medieval period these problems were no longer grasped originally, following the penetration of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy into Christianity" (73/104).

We can now see that the term "chairological time" has at least two aspects for Heidegger. On the one hand, it refers to the temporality of each action that is carried out at an appropriate time, at each *moment*. On the other hand, the issue is temporalization of *life as a whole*. And these two sides are to be unified. In this respect, it does not suffice to say that Heidegger's ontological-temporal interpretation of religious life and the existential repetition of it is an attempt to secularize Christianity. The cen-

tral aim can be rather understood as a radicalization of lived temporality, which is partly found in Aristotle's ethical theory, at least when he talks about action by a virtuous man. However, as for life itself, Paul's letters are much more contributory. We should note that Heidegger's largest task in the second division of *Being and Time* is to articulate the phenomenon "anticipatory resoluteness" (BT, 349/SZ, 302). This is nothing other than the expression of the inner relationship between decisive action at each moment and the Being of Dasein as a whole. We are now in a position to examine the famous analysis of death in *Being and Time* again.

4. Question Concerning Being-a-whole of Dasein

The first section of the famous analysis of death in *Being and Time* (section 46) is titled "the seeming impossibility of getting Dasein's Being-a-whole into our grasp ontologically and determining its character" (BT 279/SZ, 235). We can expect that "the seeming impossibility" mentioned here is associated with Aristotle's optimistic response to Solon's skeptical question concerning the possibility of self-knowledge before seeing the end of life. Yet, Heidegger will not support Aristotle's response because Aristotle's treatment of this problem is based on the ontological understanding of being as complete-being and the temporality of being-always-there.

In fact, the existential analysis of death attempts to show that being-at-the-end i.e. coming-to-the-death of Dasein cannot be understood in terms of completeness. In the case of worldly entities, being-at-the-end means that a process of production has been completed and entities begin to be present at hand (i.e., to be available for use), as Aristotle's leading example of "the becoming of a column out of copper" (GA62, 395) implies. However, if Dasein comes to the end of its Being, it is not at the beginning of being present, but rather *is no longer there*. Heidegger states in the 1925 lecture *History of the Concept of Time*: "Being-complete, asserted about a worldly thing at hand, means precisely first being present at hand and becoming available," but "being-complete, when asserted about Dasein, means no-longer-being" (HCT, 311/ GA20, 430).

In *Being and Time*, this contrast of meaning of the end (or *telos* in Aristotle's sense) between worldly entities and Dasein is illustrated with an ex-

ample of fruit. The end of fruit is “ripening.” “With ripeness, the fruit *fulfils* itself [sich vollenden]” (BT, 288/SZ, 244). The fruit is complete and ready to be eaten. However, this interpretation of complete-being cannot be applied to the end of Dasein:

But is the death at which Dasein arrives, a fulfillment in this sense? With its death, Dasein has indeed ‘fulfilled a course’. But in doing so, has it necessarily exhausted its specific possibilities? Rather, are not these precisely what gets taken away from Dasein? Even ‘unfulfilled’ Dasein ends. (ibid.)

In order to understand this contrast, we should note that Heidegger describes the phenomenon of death precisely from the *first-person perspective* of each Dasein. Heidegger does not treat Dasein’s death from the observational point of others who survive and can objectively see the end of its life as a worldly event. According to Heidegger’s claim, the fact that no one can experience his own death as a worldly event does not provide a good reason for supporting “the suggestion that the dying of Others is a substitute theme for the ontological analysis of Dasein’s totality and the settling of its account” (283/239). No doubt, someone’s death can be also experienced as a specific kind of loss by those who remain. “In suffering this loss, however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers’ ” (282/239). Between the dying man and those who remain there is a gap concerning the meaning of “loss.” In Heidegger’s view, the above suggestion ignores this gap and rests on a problematic presupposition: “Any Dasein may be substituted for another at random” (283/239).

We should recall that Solon’s question is obviously raised from the standpoint of those who remain and see the end of another’s life. If we speak of death from such an observational viewpoint, we tend to regard it as something that happens after one’s life, and thus something that is never accessible to the dying man himself. In Heidegger’s view, this “seeming impossibility” of getting access to the phenomenon of being-a-whole of Dasein is yet not a genuine one. This kind of skepticism is based on the tendency that conceals the specific character of death: “dying, which is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my substitute, is perverted

into an event of public occurrence which the ‘they’ encounter” (297/253).

Against such a tendency, Heidegger pursues the possibility of being-a-whole of Dasein by an existential analysis of Dasein’s *own* death. In this strictly first-person perspective, death is not a present occurrence which can be seen in a similar way as the complete state of other worldly entities or as the end of others is seen. Rather, death should be investigated as a very specific possibility that each Dasein is concerned with in its very Being. This possibility is yet not one of other possibilities because it is a possibility in which all existentiell possibilities of Dasein become impossible or totally lost. “Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (294/250).

As long as death is understood as a total loss of existentiell possibilities, it is not described as something merely added to one’s life. In other words, death cannot be understood as something that has no great influence on life itself in the same way as Aristotle considers happiness to be permanent and not entirely vulnerable to death. On the contrary, Heidegger’s emphasis focuses on, to borrow Blattner’s phrase, our *vulnerability* to death⁵. Dasein’s relation to the end of its Being has an affective mode called “anxiety in the face of death” (295/251). In this anxiety, death does not mean some objective occurrence after life, but “*death is something that stands before us – something impending*” (294/250).

Heidegger carefully distinguishes the impending character of death from that of worldly events. For example, “a storm, the remodeling of the house, or the arrival of a friend” (ibid.) can stand before us. However, these possible events can also not come or they can be eventually avoidable. On the contrary, when anxiety in the face of death is at stake, Dasein is *certain* that so long as it exists, death is never avoidable. “Death is a possibility of Being which Dasein itself has to take over in each case” (ibid.). The specific character of Death is thus its distinctive “certainty” (301/257).

Further, because death is differentiated from worldly events which will expectedly occur and eventually not occur, the when of death standing before us is not quite in a normal temporal order. Surely, we can use information about average life expectancy and predict how long we can live and

5. Blattner 2006, 149.

when death comes normally. However, this means that we can know the when of death only as a “public occurrence which the ‘they’ encounters” (297/253). In the authentic anticipation of my own death, “along with the certainty of death goes the *indeterminacy* of its ‘when’” (302/258).

Therefore, Dasein does not acquire some relation to death in its biological death, which Heidegger distinguishes from “dying” and calls “demise” (291/247). Dasein is constantly certain that he is dying without knowing the when of it. Instead, the issue is whether Dasein either authentically anticipates its own death or non-authentically interprets it as a public occurrence, which does not have much to do with its current life. However, even the fact that everyday Dasein is in a “constant *fleeing in the face of death*” (298/254) makes it clear that Dasein *is* always and already *towards death*. “The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-towards-the-end*” (289/245).

The Being-towards-death is not an indifferent, observational relation to death. It is itself *the way of Being* of Dasein. In anticipation of the possibility of the absolute impossibility of existence, Dasein is not concerned with the objective state of being dead, for example, the loss of consciousness or pain, but, in the first sense, with its “ownmost possible-being” (294/250) towards which it can project itself.⁶ “With death, Dasein stands before itself in its own most possible-being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein’s Being-in-the-world” (*ibid.*).

According to Heidegger, the fact that Dasein exists and is biologically *not yet* dead, does not suggest the “seeming impossibility” of full self-understanding. This *seems* impossible, because the end of Dasein is understood in terms of completeness. For Heidegger, this means that the lived *temporality* of Dasein is falsely interpreted. The future of Dasein is not a time point in which something is *realized* or complete. Existentially, it rather means *possibility* in the first sense. The temporal character “not yet,” which belongs to the being-towards-death of Dasein, means more than that “there is always something *still outstanding*, which [...] has not yet become ‘real’” (279/236). In anticipation of death, Dasein does not comport itself

6. Nagel makes a similar point in his discussion about the meaning of death: “[...] if death is an evil, it is the loss of life rather than the state of being dead, or nonexistent, or unconscious, that is objectionable” (Nagel 1979, 3).

towards the realization of some possibility, but towards the “the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.” In being towards possibility as a possibility, Dasein lets itself come towards itself in its ownmost possibility to be, or it *is* this ownmost possible-being. “The letting-itself-come-towards-itself [zukommen lassen] in that distinctive possibility which it [Dasein] puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of *the future as coming towards* [Zukunft]” (372/325). Heidegger explains these points in the following way:

Death is always already *impending*. As such, death belongs to Dasein itself even when it is not yet whole and not yet completed, even when it is not dying. Death is not a missing part of a whole taken as a composite. Rather it *constitutes the totality of Dasein from the start* [...]. (HCT, 313/GA20, 432)

The phenomenon of the ‘not yet’ has been taken over from the ‘ahead-of-itself’; no more than the care structure in general, can serve it as a higher court which would rule against the possibility of an existent Being-a-whole; indeed this ‘ahead-of-itself’ is what first of all makes such a Being-towards-the-end possible. (BT, 303/SZ, 259)

We can hardly fail to hear the echo of Paul’s distress for the *parousia* in Heidegger’s pursuit of the possibility of being-a-whole in the existential analysis of death. As we have already seen, Heidegger emphasizes in his 1921/22 lecture that the when of *parousia* is indeterminate. *Parousia* “stands in my life,” and it “refers back to the enactment of life itself” (PRL 73/GA60, 104). All these concepts are existentially reformulated as standing-before and being-towards-death.

There is yet a significant difference between Paul’s distress and Dasein’s anxiety. While Paul waits for *parousia* and even desires it, there is nothing to occur in the case of existential death. It is not an occurrence in any sense. Rather, it is simply *nothing*. “In this affectivity [anxiety] Dasein finds itself *face to face* with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of its existence” (BT, 310/SZ, 266). The real problem of Dasein’s death is not what happens at the moment of biological death, but a loss of its existence. *In-*

independently of the factual state of being dead, Dasein exists as a whole in the anticipation of its own death. So, there is no room for the skepticism about being-a-whole of the sort implied in Solon's advice in Heidegger's existential ontology.

5. Authenticity and Phronesis: Temporarity of Action

At the end of the analysis of death in *Being and Time*, Heidegger concludes that "the existential projection in which anticipation has been delimited, has made visible the *ontological* possibility of an existential Being-towards-death which is authentic" (BT 311/SZ, 266). However, Heidegger adds: "The possibility of Dasein's having an authentic Possible-being-a-whole emerges, *but only as an ontological possibility*" (ibid.). This self-understanding of Heidegger is also formulated: "This existentially [existenzial] 'possible' Being-towards-death remains, from the existentiell [existenziell] point of view, a fantastical exaction" (ibid.).

To understand this remark, it is necessary to explain Heidegger's distinction between "existential" and "existentiell." In the introduction of *Being and Time* Heidegger states:

The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads *along* this way we call '*existentiell*'. The question of existence is one of Dasein's ontical 'affairs'. This does not require that the ontological structure of existence should be theoretically transparent. The question about that structure aims at the analysis of what constitutes existence. The context of such structures we call '*existentiality*'. (33/12)

The *existential* analysis of death is an attempt at ontologically analyzing the structure of existence. However, this analysis does not clarify how the ontological possibility of an existential being-towards-death is experienced as an existentiell affair of Dasein. That is why Heidegger admits that from an existentiell point of view, such a possibility remains a fantastical exaction.

Therefore, directly after the analysis of death, Heidegger moves to "the

problem of how an authentic existentiell possibility is attested” (312/267) and claims that “this possibility is attested by that which, in Dasein’s everyday interpretation of itself, is familiar to us as the ‘voice of conscience’” (313/268). Heidegger calls this “voice” as a “call” and says: “The call has the character of an appeal to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost possible-Being-the-Self” (314/269).

There is some textual evidence for saying that Heidegger has Aristotle’s *phronesis* in mind, when he mentions the familiar self-interpretation of Dasein. In the 1924/25 lecture, he states: “*Phronesis* is nothing other than conscience set into motion, making an action transparent” (PS, 39/ GA19, 56).

The reason why *phronesis* can be regarded as conscience is twofold:

First, *phronesis* makes an *action* transparent. This point is related to the *chairois*-time of an action we have seen before. “*Phronesis* is a way of keeping eyes on fully articulated moment [Augenblick]” (GA62, 384). In the 1924/25 lecture, Heidegger even translates Aristotle’s concept of will or deliberation [*boulé*] as “resolution [Entschlossenheit]” (PS, 103/GA19, 150) and states: “The elaboration of the concrete situation aims at making available the correct resoluteness as the transparency of the action” (ibid.). To make an action transparent means to elaborate the concrete situation for an action at the particular moment. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates these aspects of conscience in a similar fashion: “It [the call of conscience] does not hold before us some empty ideal of existence, but *calls us forth into the Situation*” (BT 347: SZ 300). Once again with the term “resoluteness [Entschlossenheit]”: “It [resoluteness] has put itself into that Situation already. As resolute, Dasein is already *taking action*” (ibid.). In brief, *Phronesis* is an example of what is known as the “voice of conscience,” because it calls Dasein forth into the concrete situation in which Dasein resolutely takes action.

The second reason *phronesis* can be regarded as conscience is that the *telos* of *phronesis* is what Heidegger calls the Being of Dasein. While the *telos* of *poiesis* is the complete state of worldly entities (PS, 36/GA19, 51), the *telos* of *phronesis* is “the for-the-sake-of-which [*hou heneka/ Worumwillen*]” (35/50) of Dasein. Heidegger interprets this self-relation of *phronimos* in existential terms: “The resolute deliberation [*bouleuesthai*] of *phronesis*

concerns “the Being of Dasein, the living good [*eu zēn*] i.e., the good way to be Dasein” (34/49). In *phronesis*, taking action and being good cannot be separated. “In every step of the action, *phronesis* is co-constitutive” (101/147). In other words, *phronesis* is not a kind of knowledge which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have. “Conscience [*phronesis*] cannot be forgotten” (39/56). *Phronesis* will not be lost even when Dasein is not acting right now. Rather, it is a way of being ready to take action at the particular moment.

Heidegger admits that the *phronesis* of Aristotle provides an example of the possibility of being-authentic. However, it is nothing more than an example. Importantly, the analysis of *phronesis* investigates a possible-*ethical*-being, and its analysis is not *ontologically* elaborated. For Heidegger, the authenticity and resoluteness of Dasein should be ontologically investigated, and this ontological investigation is only performed when the possibility of being-authentic is seen as the possibility of “authentic possible-being-a-whole [eigentliches Ganzseinkönnen]” (BT 348/SZ, 301). As we have seen, the topic of authenticity is introduced in order that the being-towards-death will not remain a mere fantastical exaction. But again, according to Heidegger’s claim, the possibility of being-authentic is required for its further ontological elaboration to be unified with the possible-being-a-whole. One of the main concerns in the second division of *Being and Time* is to pursue the possibility of being-authentically-a-whole by analyzing Dasein’s *anticipatory resoluteness*.

In my view, these methodological steps are connected to Heidegger’s criticism against Aristotle’s understanding of virtuous men [*phronimos*]. We have seen in the first and second sections that according to Heidegger, Aristotle ontologically understands happiness, which is shown in virtuous activities, in terms of the temporality of being-always-there. However, this aspect of Aristotle’s philosophy is opposed to his insights into the chairological time of each action virtuous men perform. In the third section, I have also argued that Heidegger thus takes a clue for the chairological time of life as a whole from the Christian temporality. It is against such a historical context that in *Being and Time* Heidegger tries to unify the problems of being-a-whole and the authentic-being of Dasein and to connect two kinds of temporality (i.e., the temporality of each action and of being-a-whole

in the mode of being of Dasein: anticipatory resoluteness). Heidegger's explanation of Dasein's authentic Being on the basis of its "*Finitude of primordial temporality*" (378/330) can be understood as a critical response to Aristotle's way of positing the infinite permanence in order to understand the meaning of Being of Dasein. In the philosophy of *Being and Time*, the *meaning of Being* of Dasein is, as is most well known, the existential temporality that is primordially made visible in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness (374/326).

6. Agency and Mortality

In the last section of this essay, I would like to reexamine Heidegger's analysis of being-towards-death by focusing on the general concept of *agency* and to show the significance of human *mortality* for the philosophy of agency.

The concept of agency is not separable from the concept of *identity* of the self. An agentic self has to be an identical entity between two or more different time points of action or experience. The widely accepted approach to the problem of self-identity is based on the investigation of the persistence of conscious subject. Traditionally, the concept of the "I" has played a central role in such an investigation. Heidegger points out: "The 'I' seems to 'hold together' the totality of the structural whole. In the 'ontology' of this entity, the 'I' and the 'Self' have been conceived from the earliest times as the supporting ground (as substance or subject)" (BT, 365/SZ, 317).

Heidegger then takes Kant's concept of the "I" in *Critique of Pure Reason* as a historical example. In Kant's philosophy, the "it [the 'I'] is not itself a *predicate*, but the absolute 'subject'. What is expressed and what is addressed in saying 'I', is always met as the same persisting something" (366/318). For Heidegger, the conception of the self in this manner is yet not acceptable, exactly for the same reason that he criticizes Aristotle's practical philosophy:

He [Kant] takes this 'I' as subject again, and he does so in a sense which is ontologically inappropriate. For the ontological concept of the subject *characterizes not the Self-hood of the 'I' qua Self, but the self-*

sameness and steadiness of something that is always present-at-hand. To define the 'I' ontologically as 'subject' means to regard it as something always present-at-hand. (367/320)

Heidegger's alternative notion to the presence-at-hand of the "I" is the "constancy of the Self [Ständigkeit des Selbst]" (369/322). To understand this notion, it is necessary to draw attention to the temporal implication of the concept of constancy. The sentence "it rains constantly [Es regnet ständig]" does not necessarily mean that it rains without any break, that is, the state of raining persists in the sense of being-always-there. Rather, it refers to the state that it sometimes stops raining, but then it starts to rain again and again; it is rainy for some period of time. This temporal characteristic of constancy is analogical to the unforgettable character of *phronesis* in Aristotle or the authentic Self in Heidegger, in which Dasein is constantly ready to take action at a particular moment.

Therefore, the constancy of the Self cannot be understood as being-always-there. This implies that something being constant has its end. In the analysis of the meaning of the end, Heidegger, in fact, mentions the phenomenon of raining and states: "The rain ends [aufhören]. It is no longer present-at-hand" (289/244). The rain can be constantly there and finally no longer there. But exactly concerning the meaning of the end, the analogy of rain is no longer useful. For the meaning of no-longer-there of raining is no-longer-present-at-hand. As we have seen before, Heidegger's claim is that the end of Dasein can not be ontologically grasped with the same level of understanding as the end of worldly entities. The Self can be no longer there, but in the sense of being-towards-death. Thus, Heidegger can state after the analysis of death and authenticity: "Existentially, 'Self-constancy' signifies nothing other than anticipatory resoluteness. The ontological structure of such resoluteness reveals the existentiality of the Self's Selfhood" (369/322).

In contemporary philosophy, many authors refuse to regard the self-identity of agency in the sense of the persistence of the conscious "I", and prefer to adopt a more existential approach. The concept of identity is of-

ten treated in the sense of a practical self-understanding of *who I am*.⁷ The important change in this kind of conception of self-identity is that the Self is not regarded as something that is firmly being-always-there, but on the contrary, as something often in danger of being questionable or unfamiliar even by the agent himself. Taylor, for example, refers to the so-called “‘identity-crisis’ when we have lost our grip on who we are.”⁸ The self-understanding of who I am is vulnerable even to the possibility of its loss.

In principle, this vulnerability is taken as a given fact about identity, so long as the philosophy of agency is performed independently of the ontology of human beings. In this regard, we can consider the “actuality” of Heidegger’s existential analysis of Dasein for contemporary discussion. His analysis can be interpreted as an attempt at analyzing the ontological condition of the vulnerability of human agency.

According to Heidegger, as we have seen, the Being of Dasein is not a kind of possible-being to be completed, which would enjoy the permanent state of being after all. Rather, it is directed towards death (i.e., the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Being). This possibility of being-towards-death is a specific kind of possibility for human Dasein, and it makes Dasein possible to have existential anxiety about its own being(-in-the-world). Importantly, no other entities, neither God nor worldly entities, can be anxious, so long as they enjoy the mode of being in the sense of completeness; infinite-being or being-present-at-hand. From Heidegger’s perspective, the vulnerability of human agency is ontologically based on the fact that a human being is *mortal* (i.e., exists in the mode of being-towards-death).

7. Taylor 1989, 30. See also, Ricœur 1990 and Korsgaard 2008.

8. Taylor 1985, 35.

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NOTE: Quotations from Heidegger's works are followed by two sets of page numbers (in parentheses); the first refers to a page of the standard English translation, the second to a page of the standard German texts. Occasionally, I changed the English translations myself when I was convinced that the standard translation was misleading or false. For example, while the German word "Seinkönnen" is translated as "Potentiality-for-Being" in the English standard translation of *Being and Time*, I replaced it with my own translation of "possible-being," which is a literal translation of the original German word.

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