

## **Beyng, Thinking, and Caring: Hermeneutic Contours of Human Ek-sistence in Heidegger**

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Being aware of the possibility of committing the fallacy of oversimplification cum reductionism, I venture to say that Heidegger's hermeneutic contours in wrestling with 'the human existence' can be found in the oasis of three ground-concepts in his writings: *beyng*, *thinking* and *caring*. Taking a cue from the parable of 'Care' in *Being and Time*, I focus on the Heideggerian point of departure. Then I go on to dwell on the thematic interweaving of *beyng*, *thinking* and *caring*. And I conclude with the Heideggerian capture of the essence of human being in 'ek-sistence' and the implied critique of metaphysical humanism within the symbiotic intertwining of 'beyng' and the 'human being'.

... man is a *thinking*, that is, a *meditating* being. ... [T]he rootedness, the autochthony, of man is threatened today at its core. [T]his loss of autochthony springs from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born. ... [As Johann Peter Hebel wrote:] We are plants which - whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not - must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit.

(Heidegger, 1961, p. 47-49)

The human being *is* ... in so far as he is the *ek-sisting* one.

(Heidegger, 1996, p.266)

### **Pausing the Problem**

When metaphysics becomes dense, metaphor comes into play. In his magnum opus *Being and Time* Heidegger writes:

Once when "Care" was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took a piece and began to shape it. While she was thinking about what she had made, Jupiter came by. "Care" asked him to give it spirit, and this he readily granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, Jupiter forbade this and demanded that it be given his name instead. While Care and Jupiter were arguing, Earth (Tellus) arose, and desired that her name be conferred upon the creature, since she had offered it part of her

body. They asked Saturn to be the judge. And Saturn gave them the following decision, which seemed to be just: “Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you should receive that spirit at death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since “Care” first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called “homo”, for it is made out of *humus* (earth). (Heidegger, 1996, p.184).

The above metaphor has a visible and poignant family resemblance with the story of creation in the Biblical weltanschauung. But the point that I want to elucidate here is that this is a paradigmatic Heideggerian metaphorization of the tripartite constituent dimensions of human existence that symbolizes the warp and weft of its meaning: *Being, Thinking and Caring*.

Much before Heidegger, It was Immanuel Kant the irreplaceable German philosopher, who to my mind, paused this pertinent question. For Kant any genuine act of philosophizing should engage with a cluster of four primal questions:

The field of philosophy ... can be reduced to the following questions:

What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? What is the human being? Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the second, religion the third, and anthropology the fourth. Fundamentally

we could reckon all of this as anthropology. (Kant, 1992, p.25)

At this juncture, I want to suggest rather a provocative thesis: Though Kant raised this question, it was left to Heidegger to wrestle with the primordially of human being both ontically and onto-logically in his quest for the *humanum* in a radical way. Not only this. As I understand

Heidegger takes it to the onto-theo-logical conclusion what Nietzsche had to say about the archetype-nihilist: “the human being who judges that the world as it exists should not be, and [further] judges that the world as it should be does not exist.” (Nietzsche, 2002, p.259). Heidegger does untie this intertwined philosophical knot by trying to re-think the *humanum* in the matrix of neither ‘calculative thinking’, nor ‘conceptual thinking’ but what he calls ‘meditative thinking’ in a novel and creative way.

### **The Heideggerian Point of Departure**

In his seminal work on *Being and Time*, Hubert Dreyfus contends that for Heidegger “ the tradition has misdescribed and misinterpreted human being. Therefore, as a first step in his project, he attempts to work out a fresh analysis of what it is to be human” ( Dreyfus, 1991, p.1). This does not however mean that the conception of what a human being is centrally significant though it enjoys a crucial importance in Heidegger. In a sense it is important to recognise that for Heidegger the interrogation of the human is parasitical to his foundational project, that is, of *beyng / being*. It is this trajectory that leads Heidegger to conclusively state that the traditional account of the human not only forgets ‘being’ but also more significantly the presupposed binary logic of the traditional ratiocination forecloses any fresh thinking of being.

### **Beyng**

The English word ‘beyng’ is an archaic usage for ‘Being’ and Heidegger began to use this archaic spelling beginning from the 1930s to give primacy to his own preferred and characteristically non-metaphysical notion of being distinguished from the traditional approaches to ontological imagination. Heidegger says that as a source of entities or as an origin *beyng* is a RIFT that clears away, a rift within which entities can come to a ‘stand’. Heidegger contends that rather than positing some primal entity which provides for a fixed and

definitive relationality that would determine all other things a rather settled position would be the possibility of a positive absence. Beyng is thus the positive absence. An important clue to my mind in understanding beyng is to contradistinguish it with the metaphysical understanding of being. For the primordial metaphysical question is ‘what are entities’? Heidegger further contends that beyng is more ‘inceptual’ than entities. It is that which allows entities to appear as what they are to human cognition. Hence the beyng-question is *why is what is?* To appreciate further the Heideggerian employment of the term beyng one needs to keep in mind that Heidegger’s ontology is structurally relational. In other words what something *is*, is a function of how that given entity relates to other entities. And beyng is the responsible factor for ‘essencing’. For ‘entities are, beyng essences.’ And the history of various understanding of being is actually a history of changes because beyng is finite and is particular to a given historical epoch. It is here the humans come in as they play an important role in this epochal transition. That means beyng involves an “allocation of entities and this allocation is the attuning determination, *the throw that throws the human being into a fundamental attunement.*” ( Wrathall, 2021, p.123)

## **Thinking**

In interrogating the ‘essence’ of the human existence, another factor that is hermeneutically crucial is the vital distinction Heidegger makes between poetic thinking/ meditative thinking vis-à-vis calculative or superficial thinking. This fundamental distinction drawn by Heidegger is premised on the fecundation of thought as envisaged by Heidegger. Heidegger’s clarion call is to retreat from mere representational or explanatory thought to thought as remembrance. In his own words:

The first step ... is the step back from the thinking that merely represents - that is, explains - to the thinking that responds and recalls. ... The step back takes up its residence in a co-responding

which, appealed to in the world's being by the world's being, answers within itself to that appeal. ... Whatever becomes a thing occurs out of the ringing of the world's mirror-play. Only when ... world worlds as a world, only then does the ring shine forth, the joining from which the ringing of earth and heaven, divinities and mortals, wrests itself free for that compliancy of simple oneness. (Heidegger, 2001, pp.179-180).

Elsewhere Heidegger brings out the radicality of the task of 'thinking': The task of our thinking has been to trace Being to its own from Appropriation - by way of looking through true time without regard to the relation of Being to beings. To think Being without beings means: to think Being without regard to metaphysics. Yet a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics. Therefore, our task is to cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself. ( Heidegger, 1972, p. 24).

To cultivate this meditative thinking, for Heidegger, is the 'coming home' of human beings.

## **Caring**

For Heidegger, the form of the human being is Care or, in other words, human being is shaped by Care. Heidegger metaphorizes this 'essence' of human being in his magnum opus *Being and Time* and carves out the meaning of the 'human' from its etymology *humus* meaning the earth (Heidegger, 1996, p.184). Here Heidegger interweaves what I might call the materiality in the form of clay as well as non-materiality in the form of spirit. This process of creation becomes mysteriously problematic when one encounters the whole idea of 'naming'. While Care, Jupiter and Earth were arguing about what name should be given to this newly carved out entity, Saturn gives a judgement that evokes the very fundamental ontic-ontological structure of the human being. Saturn here stands for the mythological God of time and in my reading

of this parable, Saturn (Time) is the decisive factor in synthesizing the rather incompatible and contrarian elements of Earth, Care and Jupiter (Spirit). For Saturn is said to rule human being's 'temporal sojourn in the world'. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger does attempt to picture the unifying importance of Time but that takes not an ontic but an ontological turn. Here one may note that though the ontological structure of Care as portrayed in the parable describes the meaning of human being in its constant neediness, it does not give a sense of unity to the simultaneity of the ontic and the ontological situatedness amidst which human beings always find themselves. As Scott puts it: "In the midst of ontic answers to ultimate questions and everyday certainties, the lack of permanent certainty by Care always requires us constantly to plan and organize with concern. No answers or establishments eliminate the destabilizing force of Care." ( Scott, 2010, pp.61-62)

In the parable of Care, Heidegger evokes the mythico-poetic understanding of Care which gives rise to an intuitive understanding of the humans. And this intuitive understanding in the humans is in a radical sense pre-verbal as well as pre-theoretical ( Scott, 2010, p. 59). Interestingly in *Being and Time* we come across the Heideggerian appropriation of 'Care'. For Heidegger 'the Being of *Da-sein* is Care':

The formal existential totality of the ontological structural whole of *Da-sein* must therefore, be grasped in the following structure: the being of *Da-sein* means: ahead-of-itself-in-being-already-in-(the-world) as being-amidst (intra-worldly encountering entities). This being fulfils the meaning of the term *care*, which we use purely ontologico-existentially. (Heidegger, 1996, p.192.)

The above crucial passage has two facets: 1) 'ahead-of-itself 2) being-ready-in-the world. Here it is pertinent to note what Heidegger has to say about his choice of the word 'Care'. He says that he arrives at the term 'Care' not as a matter of 'theoretical-ontical generalization' but rather through a generalization which Heidegger calls 'a priori-

ontological'. In his own words: “ the *perfectio* of humankind, becoming what it can be in its being-free for its own most possibilities (projection), is an ‘accomplishment’ of “Care”. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 199). Here it is significant to note that before engaging the notion of ‘Care’, Heidegger introduces the twin notions of ‘concern’ and ‘solicitude’. The former means ‘the manifold ways of being-in’ into which being-in-the-world is split up. And the latter in a sense means ‘the entity with which *Da-sein* does not concern itself, but rather stands in solicitude [with it].’ (Heidegger, 1996, p.121).

### **Concluding Remarks: The Human Ek-Sistence**

The journeying that we have undertaken thus far shows that Heidegger radically re-thinks the ‘being’ of the ‘human’ by identifying the hermeneutic contours of ‘beyng, thinking and caring’. In one word he carves out the image of the human *ek-sistence*. Some Heideggerian scholars have claimed that in doing so, Heidegger subjects ‘metaphysical humanism’ to destruction ( G. Rae, 2010, p.32). Neither does the idea of anthropocentrism be ascribed to the thought-world of Heidegger. But there is some merit when critics point out that in a specific sense Heidegger’s philosophical anthropology is wedded to what one might call ‘anthropologism’. It is beyond the scope of this paper to make an attempt to dwell on these claims. Suffice to say that for Heidegger thought must clear those understandings of the human being held previously by evaluating their normative content and logical underpinnings. In a sense this means taking a closer look at the presuppositions that govern one’s theoretical impulse. What is of utmost significance is that Heidegger in his characteristic style intertwines the essence of Being with the question of the meaning of human existence. In his own words:

the question about the essence of Being is intimately linked to the question of who the human being is. Yet the determination of the human essence that is required here is not a matter for a free-

floating anthropology ... The question about human Being is now determined in its direction and scope solely on the basis of the question of Being. (Heidegger, 2000, p.129)

To my mind, this is what Heidegger does when he calls the human being's unique relation to Being its 'ek-sistence'. For as Heidegger says very pertinently:

“The essence of man lies in *ek-sistence*.” ( Heidegger, 1978, p. 248).

## End Notes

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