

## Heidegger and the Question of Dasein's Being-a-Whole

*Ruslanas Baranovas*

The problem of individuation is an old metaphysical problem. Basically it could be expressed in two questions: 'What makes an entity that exact entity?' and 'What makes this entity different from other entities?'. This paper will be somewhat experimental. We will try to see the shape this old problem takes in the post-metaphysical philosophy of Martin Heidegger. First, we need to look back at Kant. In the "*Critique of Pure Reason*" Kant talks about two different kinds of individuation: the individuation of the object and the individuation of the subject. Although Heidegger is one of the most severe critics of the philosophy of the subject, undoubtedly *Dasein* replaces Subject in "Being and Time". According to Kant, individuation is a transcendental principle... Every phenomenon one experiences is followed by a representation "*I think*". To simplify, every experienced phenomenon is experienced by someone. The Subject gets its identity and unity from the transcendental unity of apperception, which synthesizes all its experiences under "*I think*". The question of individuation then becomes, first and foremost, the question of unity of the subject both through time and synchronically.

Heidegger changes the terrain of Kantian philosophy (thus putting an end to it): "Being and Time" no longer talks about structures of understanding and reason but about existential structures of *Dasein*. However, before we start talking about Heidegger, we first need to prepare the ground for it. In "Being and

Time” Heidegger distinguishes three types of beings: presence-at-hand (objects) [*vorhandenheit*], ready-to-hand (equipment) [*zuhandenheit*] and *Dasein*. All three types of beings have different types of Being. In this paper we will examine the individuation of *Dasein*, “being, which every one of us is” (Heidegger, 2008, p. 27). *Dasein*’s type of being is existence. Because of that, Heidegger warns us not to think about *Dasein* in categorical vocabulary based on the ontology of objects (the mistake Descartes made, who differentiates between thinking and extended substances, although he still calls thinking substance a thing, *res cogitans*). Categories - structures of understanding - should be replaced by existentials, existential structures of *Dasein*.

As being-in-the-world *Dasein* is always factual. It is not some abstract subject – *Dasein* is always “mine”, submerged into certain activities, life situations, tradition and public opinion. When watching ourselves in the world, we always notice that we constantly choose to do something and not to do something other, to achieve certain goals, to communicate to certain people and avoid others. Some things seem important to us and others do not. What does it say about *Dasein*? Considering these problems, Heidegger gives an incredibly simple answer, not yet thematized by the tradition: *Dasein* is driven by care [*Sorge*]. “Being-in-the-world is essentially care” (Heidegger, 2008, p. 237). Care is inscribed into *Dasein*’s existence, its foundation (or groundlessness): we care about the greatest plans in our career, we want to become academics, celebrities or lawyers. But care also reveals itself in short-term goals and even in the activities that we engage in unconsciously.

In the structure of care, Heidegger discovers the moment of temporality. This structure of Being, which essentially belongs to *Care*, we shall denote as *Dasein's* "Being-ahead-of-itself (ibid., p. 294). Care is always ahead of the current state of affairs. Care makes plans and creates projects that *Dasein* tries to accomplish in the future. This existential structure is the core of *Dasein's* being: I can plan to become a professor and I can (absolutely unconsciously) move towards a cup of water in the kitchen. This structure of care reveals the foundational and primal *Dasein's* orientation towards the future. *Dasein* is always directed beyond itself. We should notice that the philosophical tradition which is always driven by the epistemic subject always thought of the present as the most important moment in time, while the existential subject of Heidegger cares most about the future.

As being-in-the-world, *Dasein* finds itself in certain possibilities. For example we can be born in certain social strata, have some or other talents, have an opportunity to gain an education. *Dasein* does not choose these opportunities but it finds itself in them. This existential structure of being Heidegger calls "thrownness" [*Geworfenheit*]. We are always thrown into certain possibilities.

It's not enough to only understand our own possibilities, every single one of us must try to realize them in our being and when realized, they open new possibilities. The conscious or unconscious choice to realize certain possibilities Heidegger calls a *project* [*Entwurf*]. The fact that *Dasein* exists as a possibility, points to a certain relation to its projects. If we talk about *Dasein* not in terms

of ‘what?’ but in terms of ‘how?’ then a certain project reveals itself not as a striving for a certain state (becoming a teacher), but as an endless process (being a teacher). In this sense, the process of being a teacher never ends and the project can never be accomplished. Therefore, to be project-oriented, means to be in a constant process.

I choose some possibilities and reject others. That is how my essential finitude reveals itself. As *Dasein* I cannot realize all of my possibilities, some of them have to be negated. This mode of lacking is called *nichtigkeit* by Heidegger. Unrealized possibilities may haunt me just like the ones I try to realize to constitute my identity. The fact that I didn’t manage to become a lawyer is as important to me as the fact that I’m now trying to become something else. This two-sided concept of project-orientation means “that *Dasein* can never be characterized essentially by a set of factual features, like its current goals and accomplishments” (Dreyfus 1991, p. 188). Imagine that you estimate yourself only as your current achievements and your past, only by everything that you are at the moment. You would lose an essential part of your identity. Let’s say that a hard-working student who dreams of becoming a professor already sees their future academic career as an essential part of their identity which determines their current actions and values. Tradition claims that who you are is determined by the events of the past that brought you to your current situation but according to Heidegger, self-understanding is determined by *Dasein*’s orientation towards the future.

What makes this fluid and open to future *Dasein* a whole? What makes *Dasein* one and prevents from losing their identity

through time, even though it changes its project? To answer these questions Heidegger turns to the analytic of being-towards death. For Heidegger death is not only the end of life that shows itself when *Dasein* no longer exists. The phenomenon of death cannot be understood by investigating other dead people, because we will always encounter only them, not death itself. In other words, Heidegger disagrees with the famous Epicurean thesis “When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not”. Affirmation of life and death shows themselves for Heidegger as a unity. That is why in the existential analytic, death is replaced by being-towards-death.

While being open to possibilities, *Dasein* greets death as a special one. In general, every project takes on a “not-yet” structure. Let’s say that right now, while writing this paper, I have not-yet completed my master studies but this goal is essential for my self-understanding. Being-towards-death also has the not-yet structure and, just like all the other possibilities, while being a “not-yet”, it influences our being and self-understanding. Off course, in the case of being-towards-death, this not-yet has a “no-longer-*Dasein*” structure. It means that when death comes, i.e. when this possibility becomes actual, *Dasein* no longer exists. As a possibility, death has one more important structural feature: I always have to experience my own death; no one can die in my place.

Probably the most accurate description of the paradox of death as a possibility is given by Giorgio Agamben in the first chapters of “Language and Death” (Agamben, 2006). Agamben notices that Heidegger gathers the entire structure of being-towards-

death into one sentence “death, as the end of *Dasein*, is *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped (Heidegger 2008, p.303). By saying the own most and unconditional, Heidegger means that no one can take my place in my own death. We all know that we are going to die even though the time of our death is not certain for us. Whatever we do, we cannot avoid death, there is no medication to prevent it. Agamben also notices that death, unlike other possibilities, gives *Dasein* no content that it could actualize. “Death, as possibility, gives *Dasein* nothing to be 'actualized', nothing which *Dasein*, as actual, could itself *be*” (Heidegger, 2008, p. 307) Moreover, death doesn't provide *Dasein* any image, any representation of itself, it is the pure experience of negativity. “Heidegger begins with this experience of a negativity that is revealed as constitutive of *Dasein* at the very moment it reaches, in the experience of death, its ownmost possibility” (Agamben, 2006, p. 3). Death as a possibility is the only possibility that will happen unavoidably. And yet, the question of death is not a question of knowing. For Heidegger it is more an experience of one's own finitude. The analytic of death, aside from the valuable description of an important part of the reality of *Dasein*, achieves other positive aspects and helps to solve the problem of the unity of *Dasein*.

First of all, death gives meaning to separate activities and projects. Let's imagine a football game that would last forever. What would a goal mean in a match like that? If the game never ends all the actions performed during that game lose their meaning. The meaning is given to the game by its limits, by its temporality and its finitude. Just the same, death as finitude gives meaning to all

*Dasein*'s projects by giving them temporality. But what is the most important to us, being-towards-death helps Heidegger solve the being-a-whole problem. If *Dasein* is an entity which exists within possibilities and the essential part of its self-understanding are projects of the future, the infinite opening to the future would never allow *Dasein* to understand itself as a whole. It would be shattered. Let's see it through an example. If *Dasein* was infinite in the sense of time, it could, first and foremost, try to accomplish all of its projects, like being an academic and later – a part of the criminal world. This infinity would not allow *Dasein* to understand itself as a whole, because it could always take on new projects and completely change the old ones, thus changing its experience of existence completely. Aside from that, it would still have an endless amount of possibilities in the future. That's why the bounding provided my death, the understanding that *Dasein* can only realize so many projects, allows *Dasein* to understand itself as a whole, as an integral individual.

After the “*destruktion* of Western ontology” and the critique of metaphysics as *oblivion of being*, it looks like what unifies *Dasein*'s being is the limit, *peras*. The limit as being-towards-death and vice versa. It's the finitude, which opens the unity of existence.

## ∞ References

Heidegger, M 2008, *Being and time*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York.

Agamben, G 2006, *Language and death: the place of negativity*,  
University Of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.

Dreyfus, H. L 1991, *Being-in-the-world: a commentary on  
Heidegger's being and time*, The MIT Press, London.

