

Heidegger's Call for Conscience

——A Preliminary Exploration of Heidegger's Existentialist Ethics

Jingshuang Wu^{1,a,*}

¹*Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No. 1037 Luoyu Road, Hongshan District,
Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China*

a. 1097675429@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Conscience is generally regarded as a certain definite concept and directly applied to the discussion of ethical issues. However, Heidegger, starting from the fundamental ontology, re-endowed the ontological significance of conscience. Heidegger also gave ethical significance to the call of conscience due to the foundational role of foundational ontology. This article will first elaborate on the relationship between Dasein and Falling in Being and Time, explaining that Dasein is "Being in the World", and Falling is the inauthentic existence of Dasein. Secondly, in order to achieve authentic existence, people need to turn to the discussion of conscience. Heidegger's conscience is the conscience of existentialism, which means that people need to be aware of their own guilt. This guilt means that existence is a free existence, and on this basis, through resoluteness, people can realize the call of conscience. At the same time, Heidegger's discussion of this issue involves a discussion of ethical ontology, which has a different ethical significance from normative ethics in terms of the authentic existence.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger, ethics, conscience, guilty, resolution

1. Introduction

The rapid development of modern society has led to a disregard and misunderstanding of the meaning of life. How to return oneself to real life and achieve true Self-identity has become a problem. German existentialist philosopher Heidegger attempted to find the meaning of existence by reconstructing traditional ontology. Heidegger opposes the traditional ontological approach of "the binary opposition between subject and object" and advocates a return to "Being" itself. This ontology pursues "authentic existence" through the exploration of "Dasein", seeking a more profound way out for the existence of this "Being". Conscience, as an important concept, plays a role in calling people to free themselves from the state of falling. Although it belongs to the content of Heidegger's theory of existence, the role of "conscience" in "authentic existence" also gives it ethical significance. The concern of "conscience" for the real world and human life, as well as the pursuit of poetic life, carries a strong ethical color. Heidegger's foundational ontology constructs a new ethical paradigm based on this, which is the primordial ethics that pursues true existence. Heidegger's breakthrough in traditional ontology drives the transformation of the connotation of "conscience". Only by delving deeper into

its ethical significance under this new "conscience" can make better understand the value of Heidegger's theory and seek the meaning of existence.

2. Dasein and Falling

2.1. Being in the World

Heidegger opposes the traditional ontological view of separating the "Being" from the "beings" and proposes the view of "Dasein". The basic structure of Dasein is defined as "Being in the World", which is an organic whole composed of three parts: "Dasein and existence", "Being in the World", and "The Mitda-sein and the They".

In "Dasein and existence", Heidegger refers to people as "Dasein", and the ego is no longer regarded as a cognitive subject, but is set as "being" from an ontological perspective. The existence of Dasein has the characteristics of "To be" and "mineness", "To be" means that existence is not handiness, but the possibility of existence. So for the existence of Dasein, what is important is not itself, but how it exists. "Mineness" means that the existence of "Dasein" in its existence is always my existence, so Dasein is the manifestation of existence itself. Therefore, Heidegger expounds that "existence" is the essence of "Dasein". "Dasein" comprehends itself through "existence", that is to say, it comprehends itself from its own possibilities. According to different self reflections, there is a difference between "authentic existence" and "inauthentic existence"[1].

In "Being in the World", it is actually to demonstrate that people's own existence and the existence of the world are not separated. For its understanding, it is necessary to distinguish between the general meaning of "being in something". This statement aims to express "in the world", which refers to a relative relationship between objects based on their location, and is used to describe the spatial state of things. However, what Heidegger said about "Being in the World" is not a discussion of space, but rather a representation of "Being together with the world" from an ontological perspective, indicating that "Dasein has an essential construction in the world" and also exists in the form of "Being in the World".

In "The Mitda-sein and the They", Heidegger believed that all people live together with others in this world, which means that people are always together with others. Therefore, Dasein should not distinguish oneself from others. So, when people use "others" to describe people other than themselves in daily language, they actually lack a certain degree of accuracy. This statement overlooks the situation that everyone exists together with others in the world. At the same time, Heidegger introduced the concept of "the They" to illustrate the state of human existence in daily life. This state of existence is specifically manifested as the muddled state of human life, which Heidegger also referred to as the "averageness". It is used to describe the equality of life without any disturbances, reflecting the inauthentic existence of people in daily life.

2.2. The authentic existence and the inauthentic existence

Authentic existence and inauthentic existence are two opposite ways of existence, while the lifestyle of the They is inauthentic existence, and its main manifestation is "Falling Prey". Falling is the fundamental style of daily life in Dasein. Falling means that it dissipates into the world where everyone exists, falling out of its authentic existence into the world. As a way of human existence, humans lose their true selves in falling and become lost in the assimilation of the public [2]. Falling into the world includes three types: Idle Talk, Curiosity, and Ambiguity.

Idle Talk describes an average level of comprehensibility. In the idle talk state, people do not pay attention to the specific existence referred to in the discourse, but only understand the surface meaning, and only understand the average meaning among them. This deepens the self isolation of individuals, which is only related to existence. Humans should be a possible existence, and it is within this average

comprehensibility that this possibility is closed. Curiosity is reflected in the way people perceive things. In the state of curiosity, people only focus on seeing and constantly switch from one place to another in pursuit of novelty, without lingering in the world around them that is covered by care. So, in this situation, people are burdened with the possibility of constant dispersion, and the resulting understanding becomes an unfounded existence that cannot reveal the truth. "Ambiguity" is formed by the combination of "Idle Talk" and "Curiosity". People can talk about things they encounter in daily life, but there is no way to determine what creates these things. It indicates that "idle talk" and "curiosity" make people fake the things they discussed earlier as truth, resulting in an "ambiguous" outcome.

In fact, inauthentic existence does not mean "truly not", on the contrary, it refers to non living existence, which already exists in this world. It is the existence of "the They", by covering up their "To be", thus closing the possibility of existence. On the contrary, authentic existence is one's own "To be", which fully unfolds in the possibility of existence and reveals itself. At the same time, authentic existence can arise from inauthentic existence, so in this sense, being immersed here as a inauthentic existence is not completely negative. However, the inauthentic existence is actually a groundless falling that lures "the They" into a self perceived good state, thereby sealing off their possibilities and preventing them from realizing their authentic existence, thus falling into a state of tranquility.

3. The conscience of existentialism

3.1. Call of Conscience

Corresponding to Falling is Heidegger's concept of conscience, which is the "Authentic Potential of Being", and this "Authentic Potential of Being" is witnessed by the Dasein itself. It manifests as a "To be" aimed at calling all solidified existence to its authentic existence. This also means that conscience needs to allow Dasein to hear its own voice, and this voice originates from the heart of Dasein. In this sense, Heidegger regards conscience as an internal call for Dasein to study its authentic existence, endowing it with ontological significance.

This understanding of conscience in Existentialism is different from the vulgar interpretation of conscience. The vulgar interpretation of conscience mentioned by Heidegger mainly refers to the interpretation of psychology, physiology, and theology. In the view of psychology, conscience becomes a description of people's psychological state and is persistent in classifying and studying this so-called "psychological activity"; In physiology, conscience originates from human physiological functions and is the result of biological evolution, without any special significance or value; In theology, conscience is a direct consciousness of human beings about God, used as a basis for proving theological issues such as the existence of God. In Heidegger's view, the common problem with these descriptions is that they all understand conscience as a fixed existence. Heidegger believed that conscience is not a ready-made existence, but rather a call to it from the perspective of existentialism, calling it out from The They. So, the conscience in Existentialism is not to negate the vulgar interpretation of conscience, but to precede them and provide them with a theoretical foundation.

The specific operation of conscience in Existentialism is called the call of conscience, which refers to the demand for people to break free from the temptation of "the They" to themselves. The call of conscience hopes that people will turn a deaf ear to the state of "the They", because that sound is just a noisy sound without specific content. It requires people to suddenly become aware of the present, awaken from averageness, and make changes to averageness, no longer lost in the expression of Falling: "Idle Talk", "Curiosity", and "Ambiguity".

In the call of conscience, there exist both the "who call" and "who is called by the call". According to Heidegger's statement "The calls come from me, and yet over me", the so-called "who call" and

"who is called by the call" should both be "me". "Dasein calls itself in conscience." As the caller, "Dasein" is the authentic existence, and as the called, "Dasein" is "finding itself in the ground of its uncanniness." [1]. So both "who call" and "who is called by the call" are "Dasein", just two different states of existence. The authentic existence needs to be called back to the abandoned state of "Dasein", and to rediscover oneself from averageness of calling out. The nature of this call lies in its silence. This means that the call for conscience is not based on a specific language, but rather always takes place in silence. Daily language can easily lead people to stay idle and lose their pursuit of possibility, so the call for conscience is not a verbal interaction, but a silent way. Its function is not to tell you certain specific behavioral norms or moral principles, but rather to call for it to return to the possession of possibility.

3.2. Conscience, Guilty, and Resoluteness

The function of the call for conscience is to make "Dasein" realize that it is "guilty". The term "guilty" here is also based on ontology, rather than a general everyday understanding. Heidegger stated that there are two ways to understand "guilty" in daily life, which are to explain the "guilty" in the sense of "having debts with..." and "being responsible for...". It can be said that this sense of "guilty" manifests as a lack of respect for someone, thus highlighting a moral significance. In fact, from an ontological perspective, "guilty" is mainly to illustrate that "Dasein" is because its own existence is "guilty". Only when the existence of "Dasein" is inherently guilty, can it have daily guilt.

This kind of "guilty", due to its own lack of respect for others, first and foremost has a negative nature, that is, "nullity". The "nullity" here is a meaning of "is according to.....", revealing that "Dasein" is "guilty" in the state of Falling. The not-quality of "guilty" has a dual structure. Firstly, people are thrown into this world, so people's existence is inevitable. Secondly, for "Dasein", its existence has multiple possibilities. The planning of the world by "Dasein" is a free planning, which allows people to freely choose one state rather than another, but this freedom also means that after choosing, they are not other things. "Dasein" is a free existence, and the existence of freedom is the basis for "nullity". It is precisely the not-quality that separates the ethical and ontological significance of "guilty", reflecting that "guilty" is not a simple ethical concept. From the perspective of "responsibility", Sun Xiaoling explains that there is a fundamental lack of understanding of "guilty" as an ethical concept in daily life.

The existential structure of "Dasein" - existence, Thrownness and Falling - all reflect the characteristic of "not". "Existence" indicates the need to plan for the world, and from this perspective, this free planning process reflects the characteristic of the existence of freedom in the face of various possibilities in the not-quality. "Thrownness" means being thrown into a realm full of freedom and possibility, rather than having some kind of thrown property attached to it, and not removing this property can make it an authentic existence. This is inherently free, and in fact, it has to be free, which means it has to face possibilities and plan itself. "Falling" refers to saying "no" to the authentic existence, and the saying "not" fundamentally stems from the existence nature of "Dasein". So, all three aspects of worrying are "guilty", so "guilty" is the basis for existence, not just the nature of things.

It is precisely the "nullity" that makes people bear the guilt. Only when conscience summons "Dasein" to the face of primitive guilt, to the authentic existence, can "Dasein" listen to the call of conscience, return to its true self, and reach its authentic existence.

Heidegger explained from the perspective of existence that people can make themselves aware of their own guilt through conscience, and thus obtain the authentic existence. From the perspective of existence, that is, from an ontological perspective, it is also necessary to explain how to choose the authentic existence based on one's own will. So, in order to achieve authentic existence, it is necessary to explore the role of determination, which is "the silent, always prepared to fear, and self planning

towards the most self blaming existence". For "Dasein", there is a responsibility for its existence and it will not change. (People) are determined to rely on (their) understanding of this responsibility and plan (themselves) in turn to achieve (their) authentic existence. Only in this way can dasein achieve the authentic existence. For "Dasein", death is the only definite thing. As the end of existence in the world is death, death limits and defines the possible wholeness of existence[3]. This means that this kind of planning activity only faces death, and in the process of leading to death, determination makes "Dasein" truly exist, which is also a possible form of determination for one's authentic existence. So people say that ending existence is the determination to truly become what "Dasein" can be. Being the first form of existence that can be witnessed in the existence of "Dasein" is what determination should mean. This kind of anticipatory resoluteness exists towards the most inherent source. This ability implies that "Dasein" can only plan itself towards specific possibilities, and therefore the existential attribute of "Dasein" determined by any possibility includes an "actual situation" [4]. Resolve to liberate oneself from the situation when planning oneself, in order to achieve authentic existence. In this sense, determination fulfills the mission of conscience.

4. Conclusion

The primordial ethics reflected in Heidegger's theory is fundamentally different from normative ethics. Heidegger's criticism of traditional philosophical ontology aims to delve into the discussion of existence itself. Zhang Zhiwei pointed out that Heidegger believed that people simply understood the problem of existence as the problem of the beings, which is actually because people themselves live in an inauthentic ordinary world, and this ordinary state in which they live also obscures the authentic existence[5]. Heidegger's discussion is about the relationship between "Dasein" rather than the specific relationship between "people", which means that Heidegger is not concerned with specific ethical practices. And on the contrary, the fundamental ontology established by Heidegger is to liberate "Dasein" from "the They" and make it aware of its own possibilities.

However, specifically speaking, Heidegger's questioning of the meaning of existence also implies the originality of ethics. Heidegger used many ethical terms such as "conscience" and "guilty" when discussing "Dasein", but because of Heidegger's insistence on an ontological perspective in solving these problems, many scholars believe that this does not actually reflect a clear ethical orientation. However, Heidegger believed that the reason why people have a responsibility, which is also a moral obligation, is because people are free, not because of their own subjectivity. Heidegger's analysis of responsibility emphasizes the limitations of human existence, prompting people to confront the irreducible particularity and individuality in ethical life, and pursue the possibilities in people's lives. In Sun Xiaoling's view, the concept of this subject has transcended the perspective of subject object opposition in modern philosophy since Descartes, as well as the subject of self legislation at the metaphysical level in Kant's philosophy. [6]Heidegger's discussion of "Dasein" is actually a search for the obscured relationship between humans and existence. As Yu Ping said, the meaning of this being does not exist as a concept, but rather as a response to (people's) freedom or the call to inhabit the world.[7] This kind of rethinking of the moral subject is a foundational work for ethics. Only by thinking about the truth of existence can people truly reveal the ontological basis for their ethical existence, and thus make an authentic sense of ethics possible.

At this level, Heidegger's fundamental ontology holds ethical significance due to its foundational role. As Katherine Sepulveda said, ontological conscience tells people that rather than being required to have morality, we should live with morality[8]. In Heidegger's fundamental ontology, the essence of truth is freedom, and freedom is "To be". Heidegger regards the authentic state of "Dasein" as the ontology, and the exploration of conscience is based on the perspective of the existence of "Dasein". The intention of the call of conscience is to lead people towards the possibility of existence and obtain the authentic existence. Heidegger attempted to use "conscience" to bring things back to themselves,

and the fundamental purpose of this ontology based exploration is ethics. In fact, Heidegger delved into the study of ethical ontology.

Heidegger's concept of conscience or discussion of "Dasein" is an average expression that ignores the difference between the existence of others and "my" existence. This research approach actually indicates Heidegger's abandonment of the traditional ethical subjectivity research path. However, Heidegger did not break free from the subjective tendency of philosophy. He attributed all the true co existence relationships to the authentic existence of "Dasein", and the authentic existence of "Dasein" can also "become the 'conscience' of others," and the concept of "Dasein" still has a tendency towards solipsism.

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