

Heidegger's Dasein: Development of the Ancient Greek Ontological Ideas of Being and Death

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Abstract. The primary objective of this article is to investigate the relationship between death and existence in philosophical systems that date back to ancient times and continue to exist in the present day. First, it will investigate the origins of the definition of existence, and then it will proceed to conduct an analysis of the philosophical advancements that occurred during the time period of the ancient Greeks. Last but not least, it will investigate Heidegger's viewpoint on existence and contrast it with the concepts that were prevalent among the ancient Greeks. This approach achieves a number of conceptual comparisons and analytical work by combining the ontological philosophy tradition with other philosophical traditions. There is Heidegger's concept of death, which is interpreted and compared textually as an important phenomenological text and tradition of thought. This is one of the examples. The finalization of its conclusions lies in the succession and development between the concept of death in phenomenological existentialism and the traditional metaphysical tradition. This is accomplished by organizing its work and the concept of death in his early period, and later lines of thought. The specific threads that are presented in this study will be beneficial to future scholarly work that is reflective on death from the perspective of the development of ideas in the tradition.

Keywords: Heidegger; Being-Towards-Death; Dasein.

1. Introduction

This article goes through the tradition of ontological philosophy, which accomplishes a series of conceptual comparisons and analytical work. Among these is Heidegger's concept of death, which is textually interpreted and compared as an important phenomenological text and tradition of thought [1]. By organizing its work and the concept of death in its first, middle and later lines of thought, it finalizes its conclusions with the succession and development between the concept of death in phenomenological existentialism and the traditional metaphysical tradition. In the future, scholarly work reflecting on death from the tradition of the history of ideas will benefit from the specific threads presented in this study.

In one such piece of work, it begins with a comprehensive examination of the important legacy of significant ancient Greek philosophers in their work on ontological philosophy, and the paper will synthesize and compare the ontological views of Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle. Synthesizing these important results of ancient Greek philosophy is a very important reference for reviewing the work of phenomenology and Heidegger in particular.

2. Parmenides: Being (Existence)

Parmenides was one of the pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece who developed a famous view of existence known as Parmenidean Ontology. Parmenides was well-known as a philosopher who developed the truth of existence. Parmenides's main philosophical contribution can be summarized in his assertion that "being is" [2]. He distinguishes between "paths," i.e., the "way of being" (existence) and the "way of non-existence." In his writings, Parmenides argues that "The is is" and "The is not is not," suggesting that existence is an absolute, unchanging state for him. In contrast, non-existence is impossible because we cannot discuss what does not exist. Parmenides uses early logic principles, mainly excluding opposites, to analyze existence and non-existence. He states that



non-existence is unthinkable because you cannot talk or think about what does not exist. Therefore, the only possibility is existence if non-existence is unknowable and unspeakable. Parmenides' ideas suggest a timeless and unchanging conception of existence that somehow resonates with the later Platonic ideal form. This means that existence is an indivisible whole that cannot be divided into parts or components. Secondly, Parmenides believed that existence is unchanging and immutable; there is no change or movement. This also means that existence is omnipresent; it fills the entire universe and is everywhere. This view of his existence challenges the change and diversity of the material world and provides a philosophical framework for understanding life, death, and eternity.

By using the concept of Parmenides that existence is unchangeable, death seems to be an epiphenomenon. Because, as Parmenides said, reality is permanent and immutable. It cannot be produced or generated; it cannot be disappeared or ended. If death is an epiphenomenon, all living things are epiphenomenon, just like humans; born and die means a human's life begins and ends; it is not permanent but changeable. But if we adjust that all living things are unique units, the core of their existence is itself; no matter death or birth, the existence itself does not change; the core of being itself is existence.

3. Plato: The World of Form and the Sensible World

Some years later, Plato introduced the concept of Forms or Ideas to distinguish between the real world, which is eternal and unchanging, and the world of the senses, which is constantly changing. According to Plato, although the material world is fluid and flawed, it is through participation in the eternal and unchanging Ideas that things in the material world gain meaning and reality [3]. For Plato, authentic existence is located in the ethereal world of the Rational Types, which are perfect, eternal archetypes that are the essence and cause of everything we perceive. Plato's definition of existence thus involves two dimensions: the things of the sensory world as imperfect copies of the rational types and the rational types themselves as authentic, unchanging beings.

Plato divided the world into "The world of Form" and "Sensible world." In the "World of Forms," on the one hand, the Ideas make the existence of the "Sensible World" possible by endowing primitive matter with form. Thus, the Ideas constitute the form, that is, the essence of the Sensible World. On the other hand, due to the perfection of the Ideas, the "World of Forms" becomes the purpose towards which the "Sensible World" aspires, so the Ideas also become the motive force behind the movement of sensible things. For things in the "Sensible World," ideas are the essence, the goal of their development, and the motive force of their movement. For example, because there is an idea of a circle in the human mind, one can draw a circle on paper. The concept of the circle in the mind belongs to the "World of Forms"; although it cannot be seen or touched by the eyes or hands, it is perfect. The circle drawn on paper can be seen and felt; it belongs to the "Sensible World" and imitates the idea of the circle as its purpose. Although it is not a perfect circle, when drawing it, one strives to approach the ideal Idea of the circle.

How do we separate humans into these two worlds? Plato thought the soul and body were isolated; the body was transitory and belonged to the "Sensible world"; the soul belonged to the permanent "World of Form." In this case, the soul is imperishable, is out of the material world, and has a higher level of existence. During life, the soul cannot go back to the "World of Forms," death is the ending of the human body; after death, the soul can go back to the "World of Forms." In conclusion, Plato saw death as a process of liberation of the soul from physical bondage, part of the soul's return to its proper state of being, the "World of Forms."

4. Aristotle: The Four Causes and Potentiality vs. Actuality

Aristotle understood philosophy as the total of all sciences, consisting of the theoretical sciences, the practical sciences, and the arts, where the theoretical sciences are categorized into first philosophy (metaphysics), physical or natural sciences, and logic, and the practical sciences contain ethics and

political science. According to Aristotle, to explain the causes of things, one should first establish a study of "being" and categorize being, with the highest level of being being "being itself" [4].

Things are said to be "Being" in two senses: contingent properties (eventualities) and necessary essences (categories), such as entity, nature, quantity, relation, place, time, etc.; "Being" also includes certainty (true rather than false) and potentiality (potential rather than actual existence).

In the First Philosophy, everything must have all these ten essences. We cannot find anything in the world that does not have these essences or does not belong to them, and therefore, the essences exist as a matter of necessity. These essences have a basic one, and all other essences must be supported. Otherwise, the different essences will lose their significance. This essence, which exists as a pillar, is the entity. The entity is the essence that answers the question of what the thing is. The other essences can only answer how the thing is. When one wants to describe how a thing is, one must first find out what it is.

Aristotle proposed the "Four Causes" theory to explain the reasons for the existence of entities: the material cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the final cause. In artificial objects, the four causes are distinct from each other, but in natural objects, both the efficient and the final causes can be reduced to the formal cause; the form dictates the essence of things, encompassing the motive force and purpose of their development, being active and dynamic, whereas the material is passive and receptive. Since any individual thing is composed of form and material, both form and material are entities. However, form represents the individuality of an entity, being definitive, while material possesses universality, being indefinite. Thus, form is the entity as essence. The form and material of things are relative: what is formal to a lower-level entity is material to a higher-level entity. The universe constitutes a unified sequence of alternation from material to form, ascending in order. Higher-level entities constitute the form of lower-level entities and also serve as the motive force and purpose driving the development of lower-level entities towards themselves. By using the concept of the "Four Causes" theory within the context of life, death can understand as the separation of the material and formal. The formal of life (soul) leaves it material (body), causing the end of life.

Aristotle mentioned another concept called "Potentiality and Actuality." The relationship between potentiality and actuality corresponds to the relationship between material and form. When the material has not yet acquired the form of a thing, it is in a potential state. It becomes an actual entity only when it has acquired a specific form. The process of generation for an entity is a transformation from potentiality to actualization, and this process is motion. The material is that which can be moved, and the form is that which moves. The latter propels the former into motion; therefore, motion belongs to the side of actualization or form. In the context of life, death signifies the end of the process of actualizing life's potential. In a sense, death is the natural culmination of the realization of life's potential.

5. Heidegger's Authenticity

In Martin Heidegger's seminal work, "Being and Time," a profound examination of human existence unfolds, serving as a beacon for those navigating the complexities of life. As a pivotal figure in 20th-century philosophy, Heidegger transcended conventional interpretations of life and death, delving into the profound implications of authenticity on individual beings. He posited that grappling with the inevitability of death heralds not a descent into pessimism but an initiation into a journey of self-discovery and authentic existence. Through his intricate analysis of death, being, and the pursuit of a life grounded in authenticity, Heidegger beckons us to introspect, reconsider our relationships with others, and reflect on our role in the cosmos [5].

In "Being and Time," Martin Heidegger explores the critical role death plays in unveiling the authenticity of the individual. He perceives death not merely as cessation but as a pivotal conduit to recognising and realising life's authenticity. This perspective confronts and challenges conventional understandings of life and death, positing that the inevitability of death propels individuals to reflect

profoundly on their existence and embark on a journey toward a life imbued with greater personal meaning and authenticity. This insight into death transcends a mere existential challenge; it is a journey of self-discovery that navigates through the obscurity of daily existence to uncover a mode of being that resonates with our authentic selves. Heidegger asserts that by confronting our finite and terminal nature, we gain the capacity to comprehend ourselves and the world with greater authenticity and lead lives of heightened significance and purpose. Thus, this paper posits that Heidegger's scrutiny of death in "Being and Time" furnishes a profound perspective for grasping the essence of human existence and underscores the quintessence of pursuing authenticity.

Delving into the philosophical domain, Heidegger elucidates the concept of death, particularly emphasizing its "absolute privateness." This concept is pivotal to Heidegger's exposition of human existence (Dasein), spotlighting death's distinctive and non-transferable nature as an individual experience. According to Heidegger, the privateness of death denotes the ineluctable solitude each person faces at their end, signifying that within our being, specific experiences elude communication through language, defy sharing, and remain beyond complete comprehension by others [5].

By accentuating death's absolute privateness, Heidegger underscores its inescapability in life and proposes that this privateness bestows each life its distinct meaning and value. Although the experience of death remains uncharted territory for each individual, its profound psychological and existential ramifications instigate a deep contemplation of one's existence, thereby fostering the pursuit of authenticity.

Heidegger further articulates that the privateness of death compels us to undertake choices and decisions independently throughout our existential journey. Given our inability to depend on others to experience or understand our death, the decisions we make in life ought to reflect profound contemplation of our being and the personal responsibility that accompanies it. This reflective process encourages us to extricate ourselves from the habitual patterns of daily life, seeking lifestyles and values that authentically express our innermost selves instead.

Moreover, death's privateness unveils the inherent solitude that pervades human relationships. Despite the intimacy of some connections, the ultimate experience of death remains unshakeable. This realization is not intended to underscore loneliness or despair but rather to highlight the necessity and capacity of individuals to discover and realise their authenticity when confronted with life's paramount questions. Therefore, Heidegger's delineation of death's privateness not only serves as a philosophical reflection on humanity's ultimate fate but also as a profound exploration of how individuals can pursue meaning and authenticity within the confines of finite existence.

As delineated by Heidegger, the "absolute privateness" of death is intrinsically linked to his conceptualization of individual authenticity (Authenticity) [5]. He argues that death's privateness not only unveils the unique existential experience of each person but also accentuates the profound reflection and choices individuals must undertake alone when faced with death. This reflective decision-making process is a crucial pathway to achieving and embodying authenticity [6].

Within Heidegger's philosophical framework, authenticity emerges as a profound understanding and manifestation of individual existence (Dasein). Authenticity transcends mere expressions of honesty or sincerity, evolving into a state where individuals are empowered to actively and consciously select their life paths based on their unique conditions and possibilities. This state mandates individuals to surpass the expectations and norms imposed by "the Others" (the "They" or *das Man*) in everyday life, enabling them to carve their paths and engage with the world on their terms.

The non-transferability of death mandates that individuals confront their demise autonomously, fostering profound self-reflection. This autonomy propels individuals to critically evaluate their lives, assessing whether their values, goals, and actions authentically mirror their inner convictions. Through this introspective journey, individuals are urged to divest themselves of socialized identities and roles, confronting their essence to unearth their authenticity.

Heidegger posits that the recognition of life's finitude and the inevitability of death ignite a determination to pursue authenticity. Confronted with death's privateness, individuals realise that living authentically is the only means by which their finite existence can attain meaning. Consequently, individuals commence making active choices grounded in a deep comprehension of self and an awareness of their genuine desires. These choices and actions, rooted in contemplating death's ultimate reality, epitomize the pursuit and realization of authenticity.

Furthermore, death's privateness also lays bare the tension between individuals and society in the quest for authenticity. Individuals may discover conflicts between their inner beliefs and societal expectations. In such instances, death's privateness emerges as a source of strength to uphold one's authenticity, urging individuals to maintain their independence, even at the cost of contradicting social norms. Hence, the privateness of death not only elucidates the authenticity of individual existence but also challenges how individuals strive for equilibrium within society.

“Authentic Being-towards-death signifies an existential possibility of Dasein.” (Being and Time 304)

"Being-toward-death" emerges as a pivotal concept in Martin Heidegger's seminal work, "Being and Time," to enrich our comprehension of the quintessence of human existence. This profound notion underscores that death transcends its certainty in human life to serve as an essential lens through which the condition of individual existence (Dasein) can be understood. Heidegger's exploration of this concept elucidates the process by which individuals engage in reflection upon and actualization of their existence, confronting the certainty of life's cessation.

Heidegger posits that death represents the sole inescapable certainty for Dasein, marking it as an event unique in its inevitability. Yet, he advocates for a perception of death beyond physiological implications. He proposes a more nuanced understanding of it as a state of being intricately tied to temporality, denoted as "being-toward-death." This condition suggests that individuals acknowledge their finitude and purposefully and consciously incorporate this acknowledgement into their routine existence and decision-making processes. Contrary to perceiving death as a detrimental finality, Heidegger encourages a forthright confrontation with death, acknowledging its irreversibility. Authenticity can be attained through this confrontation and the subsequent diminution of avoidance and anxiety. Within Heidegger's analytical framework, "the Others" (the "They") symbolize the socially endorsed, universally accepted norms and values. The disposition of "being-toward-death" inherently challenges the mode of existence prescribed by "the Others," propelling individuals towards decisions that resonate with their core beliefs amidst acknowledging life's finitude and impending conclusion. This stance enables individuals to transcend the conformities of everydayness, fostering a profound self-understanding and realisation.

Accordingly, "being-toward-death" emphasizes the necessity for individuals to base their choices on personal judgments and values in the face of life's termination and finitude, as opposed to conforming to societal dictates blindly. This anticipation of one's demise catalyses a more engaged and autonomous approach to living, prompting individuals to select actions and pursuits that hold intrinsic personal significance and value.

6. Conclusion

By reframing the inevitability of death as a fundamental aspect of Dasein that unveils paths to authenticity, Heidegger's concept of "being-toward-death" not only challenges traditional perceptions of mortality but also offers a compelling framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of human existence and the pursuit of authenticity. His inquiry into death as an integral component of Dasein unveils significant insights into the essence of human existence. He argues that the inevitability of death transcends being a mere physiological cessation, serving instead as a pivotal moment that uncovers the potential for authenticity inherent in Dasein. This engagement with death's finitude and inescapable reality prompts individuals to critically assess their lives, discarding the inauthentic ways of being imposed by societal conventions or others. It advocates for a resurgence of

an authentic mode of existence, characterized by self-determination and a true reflection of one's desires, values, and goals.

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