

Is Heidegger's Hermeneutics an Interpretation of Being of Dasein?

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to argue that Heidegger's understanding of hermeneutics is a way of Interpretation of Being of Dasein because he accepts that hermeneutics is a philosophical movement in which thinker understands and interprets what the meaning of Being is. One has to read very carefully Heidegger's major work of *Being and Time* to see what hermeneutics means. Heidegger thinks that all philosophers who dealt with hermeneutics misunderstand it. Philosophers from Plato to Husserl could not give the meaning to hermeneutics as what Heidegger's understands. So Heidegger redefines and reconstructs the meaning of hermeneutics as he does for philosophy. So Heidegger redefines and reconstructs the meaning of hermeneutics as he made for philosophy. He believes that a new beginning of philosophy must be phenomenological hermeneutics. In this paper, I will try to explain how the meaning of hermeneutics changes in the western philosophy, to explore how Heidegger understands it and how he makes it as phenomenological movement of ontology.

Keywords: Heidegger, Hermeneutics, Dasein, Existence, Understanding, Interpretation, Care, Being-in-the-world, Death, Authenticity and Inauthenticity

Introduction

Definitions of Hermeneutics

The word *hermeneutics* comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuen* and the noun *hermeneia*. The verb *hermeneuen* and the noun *hermeneia* have three meanings: to express, to interpret and to translate. The basic or real meaning of hermeneutics is to bring to understanding or to make clear and understandable of the problematic words or sentences.

"Hermeneutics, at the beginning, is a sub discipline of theology where it covers the study of methods. As a method, hermeneutics makes clear and understandable the problematic on hard sentences of sacred texts. Because dogma has to be interpreted". (Silverman, p. 43) So, "the messenger of gods is called 'hermes' means an interpreter of gods' words to ordinary people". (Kearne, 14) "The terms 'hermeneutics' has a variety of meanings. Its original meaning comes from theology, where hermeneutics was the method used to infer the mind of the ancient writer, usually of some part of the Sacred Scriptures, but also the meaning of liturgical and religious symbols, etc." (Silverman, p. 43)

However, Heidegger discusses and rejects all these definition or meaning of hermeneutics because he thinks that hermeneutics is more than all previous meanings. For him, hermeneutics is not a method as Husserlian phenomenology or hermeneutics is not a linguistic analysis. On the contrast to these meanings, hermeneutics is a philosophical movement or tendency but not a school as existentialism. So for Heidegger, hermeneutics is a philosophical activity or praxis. In broader meaning, Hermeneutics is to make such understanding meaningful for life and thought. (Shapiro p. 3-4)

On the other hand, for young Ricoeur, hermeneutics in traditional way is a study of methods for interpreting difficult texts but later he thinks that hermeneutics extends to a general epistemological sphere". (Howard, p 167) Also hermeneutics is a philosophical method, one among the others he seeks to articulate and interpret because for him hermeneutics of symbols, signs, myths or stories give a rise to think and interpret. (Pellauer, vii)

Historical background of Hermeneutics

After giving some definitions of hermeneutics, let's trace its historical development. Heidegger says that in Plato's work of *Theaetetus*, Plato has his own version of hermeneutics. "Plato's hermeneutics is the announcement and making known of the being of a being in its being" (Kearne, 14) However in Aristotle's philosophy, hermeneutics has a practice dimension which is linked to 'discourse'. Because discourse makes beings openly manifest. Hermeneutics in practice sense means a translation from one language to another and make a commentary. In Augustine, hermeneutics is the interpretation of ambiguous passages in Scripture. In seventeenth century, hermeneutics is an interpretation itself. Schleiermacher thinks that hermeneutics is an art (technique) of understanding' another's discourse. But for Heidegger, hermeneutics is not a discipline connected with grammar and rhetoric. (Kearne, 15)

Late 19th century, Scheiermacher and Dilthey used the term "Hermeneutics" in connection with the theory of knowledge. They called their activity "understanding" that different from "explaining". (Howard, pp. 1-2) For Dilthey, hermeneutics is an analysis of understanding as such and human sciences. Natural scientists give or know how nature changes by finding the laws of nature. Dilthey calls this knowledge 'explanation' but for him social scientists try to understand what happens in history or society or tradition. The knowledge of social sciences or humanities bases on 'understanding'. Gadamer, "hermeneutics comprise the conditions and processes of the hermeneutical circle used by the interpreters to obtain meaning from literally text and historical/cultural phenomena." (Silverman, p. 43-44)

Influences on Heidegger's Hermeneutics

When Heidegger starts to develop his idea of hermeneutics at the beginning of his career under the Husserl's supervise, he gets the influence of Nietzsche, Dilthey, Brentano and Husserl. So Heidegger gets some things from each of his predecessors.

The problem of modern philosophy was to ground and justify the knowledge of philosophy as natural sciences did since Descartes. Descartes' dream was to make the philosophy as universal science and Husserl tried to make philosophy as a rigorous science.

When Nietzsche said that God was dead, he reject all kind of theory of ethics, especially Christian theory of ethics and western metaphysics. For Nietzsche, his time is the end of the western metaphysics and ontology, namely traditional philosophy. Heidegger gets the idea of ending of western metaphysics from Nietzsche. Heidegger wants to start a new beginning of philosophy and a new investigation of the meaning of Being.

While Dilthey explained the difference of knowledge and methods between the social and natural sciences at the end of 19th century, he showed on what grounds both sciences should be. "The modern interest in hermeneutics seems from the work of W. Dilthey and the beginning of the scientific study of history. For Dilthey, hermeneutics was the method of determining the mind of the historical author or agent.

Heidegger was influenced by Brentano's idea of the seeing multiplicity of being and intentionality. He adapted them to his philosophy.

Husserl wanted to demonstrate the essence of things by developing the phenomenology method. So he tried to suggest a new beginning of philosophy without starting any supposition. But Heidegger says that Husserl's phenomenology is descriptive but he introduces a hermeneutic phenomenology in his *Being and Time*. His double task is to reground the ontology as fundamental base for philosophy, then to destroy the western history of ontology because it is metaphysical and no concrete answer to the meaning of Being since Plato.

In Husserl's phenomenology, the ego is a starting point for intentionality but for Heidegger, Being-in-the-world with others is the ground of intentionality because Dasein concerns and encounters itself and others in-the-world.

When Husserl suggests the world of life as a source of all condition of meaning in his *Cartesian Meditation* and *Crisis*, he recognized the ego not enough the source of all projects. Heidegger takes the term intentionality world of life and uses in his analysis of everydayness of Dasein's Being. (Grondin, 49-50)

Heidegger and Hermeneutics

For Heidegger, hermeneutics goes beyond the methodological aspects of hermeneutics to the existential- hermeneutical analysis structure of the interpreter, that is of Dasein's Being in-the-World. "According to metaphysical approach we are mortal that we seek to ground Being on something like eternal permanence...It is against this metaphysical outlook that Heidegger proposed his own hermeneutics of Dasein. I.e. his philosophy of human finitude." (Grondin, 10) Heidegger thinks that hermeneutic philosophy is an analysis, interpreting, understanding or evaluating of the being of Dasein. When Heidegger introduces his idea of hermeneutic philosophy that seeks for the meaning of Being, indeed he rejects the history of ontology, namely western philosophy. The aim of his *Being and Time* is the rejection of traditional ontology and restating a new question.

Heidegger's aim

As it is said above, Heidegger's project is the destruction and deconstruction of the tradition. According to Heidegger, the modern ontological dualism of spirit and nature goes back to the Cartesian distinction between the ego cogito and the *res corporea*. The world is understood as such an extension in the Cartesian tradition. Heidegger maintains that the Cartesian ontology of the world in which Being lies in extension is not concerned with the phenomena of the world, and it does not succeed in determining the nature of the entity with-in the world.

According to Heidegger, Descartes restricts the question of the world to that of Things of Nature as those entities with-in-the-world which are approximately accessible. For Heidegger, traditional ontology causes Descartes not to see his way into a deeper grasp of the problem of an ontology of Dasein, and he departs from the phenomena of the world. Consequently, Descartes takes the Being of Dasein in the same manner in which he takes the Being of the *res corporea*. If the Cartesian definition of the world is ontologically in error, then for Heidegger, the traditional ontology must be re-interpreted from the very beginning.

In the Heideggerian destruction of the historical destiny of ontologies, the destruction of the Cartesian understanding of Being links the ancient and the medieval metaphysics to the Kantian doctrine of being in which Heidegger tries to see the roots of the previous ontologies. Consequently, one can be most faithful to the spirit of the destruction if one simply tries to understand the general character of the forgetfulness of Being's moment from ancient to modern times with Descartes.

Asking a new question: the meaning of Being

Philosophy, for Heidegger, is the dialogue between Sein and Seiendes because he says that "in distinction from the mastering of beings, the thinking of thinkers is the *thinking of Being*. Their thinking is a *retreating in face of Being*." (Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 7) For this reason, the aim of philosophy is to distinguish Being from beings. Therefore, Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology meant only a reasking of the question of Being in a different manner. So he begins his major work *Being and Time* with a quotation from Plato's *Sophist* that addresses the question of Being.

"For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression "*being*". We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word "*being*" ? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being*." (Heidegger, B&T untitled page)

According to Heidegger "with the question of the meaning of *Being*, our investigation comes up against the fundamental question of philosophy" (Heidegger, B&T, 49). Heidegger thinks that the Pre-Socratics see Being as *unconcealment*,

aletheia in its primordial meaning. However, with Plato and Aristotle philosophy turns from Being to beings as the fundamental question of metaphysics.

Destruction of traditional ontology

Our purpose here is to explain and to interpret what Heidegger means by destruction and how he relates the destruction of ontology to temporality. According to Heidegger, his reinterpretation of the question of Being is a positive destruction because he is not going to destroy or do away with the history of ontology, but he says that his positive destruction is an "*overcoming*" of the history of ontology. Heidegger asserts that his task of the reinterpretation of the question of the meaning of Being is to break free of the frozen traditional ontology with a radical way of asking a new question about Being instead of beings.

Therefore, the meaning of re-interpretation is not to shake off the philosophical tradition, but to carry out the positive possibilities of a tradition and to keep it within its proper limits. By re-interpretation or retrieving of traditional ontology, we mean the disclosure and the elaboration of hidden and unthought possibilities of the question of the meaning of Being in its history of ontology.

For Heidegger, the philosophical hermeneutics of Dasein is firstly to clarify the history of being. The destruction of the history of being prepares a new understanding or interpretation of man who dwells in the world as a Being of possibilities. So his hermeneutics of activity is a movement from inauthentic to authenticity, from destruction of history of being to re-understanding of Being in its own self, from Dasein's everydayness life to future possibilities of Being itself. (Grondin, 59)

Heidegger's understanding of Phenomenology

Our purpose in this section is to re-interpret the interpretation of Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology. We have to keep in mind that destruction for Heidegger means the re-asking and the re-interpreting of the question of the meaning of Being. He maintains that it is possible philosophically to analyze what it means to be or the meaning of Being only through phenomenology, because "phenomenology is our way of access to what it is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.*" (Heidegger, B&T 60) Therefore, ontology must deal with its subject matter by employing the phenomenological method. "Thus "phenomenology" means to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself... Thus the term "phenomenology" is quite different in its meaning from expressions such as "theology" and the like. Those terms designate the objects of their respective sciences according to the subject-matter which they comprise at the time. (Heidegger, B&T 58-59)

From the interpretation of the concepts of "phenomenon" and "logos", the expression of "phenomenology" means: "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself." (Heidegger, B&T 58) By this definition, Heidegger reaches his Husserlian maxim: "to the things themselves." (Heidegger, B&T 58) But this definition is very broad so he distinguishes the ordinary definition of phenomenology which is "to have a science of phenomena means to grasp its objects *in a such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly."⁸ In this ordinary definition of phenomenology, he sees phenomenology as descriptive which is at bottom tautological and ordinary.

"What is it that phenomenology is to 'let us see'? What is it that must be called a 'phenomenon' in a distinctive sense? What is it that by its very essence is *necessarily* the theme whenever we exhibit something *explicitly*? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground." (Heidegger, B&T 59)

"The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting.... hermeneutic also becomes a 'hermeneutic' in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends.... "hermeneutic", as an interpretation of Dasein's Being, has the third and specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence;.. hermeneutic works out Dasein's historicity ontologically as the ontical condition for the possibility of historiology, it contains the roots of what can be called 'hermeneutic' only in a derivative sense: the methodology of those humane which are historiological in character...Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of existence, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it arises and to which it returns." (Heidegger, B&T 62)

Heidegger's Understanding of Hermeneutics: Analysis of Being of Dasein

Everydayness, theyness

When we assert that Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is the analysis of Dasein's Being, we mean that Dasein is aware of itself in the daily life of everydayness. So Dasein finds and realizes itself in hits everydayness life with other because Dasein as an understanding of Being involves to daily life in-the-world.

Dasein has been thrown into world as the possibilities of Being. Each human being as Dasein is characterized from the outset as a Being of possibility and of "having-to-be". (Grondin, 57) But Dasein lost its authenticity when Dasein lives with other and follows the other because when Dasein lives as "theyness" then it is no longer authentic. Dasein always encounters, articulates and interprets what we encounter with our public language. The aim of Dasein as the possibilities of Being-in-the-world is go ahead of itself and leap ahead of others. "Out of its thrownness, Dasein comes to reflect upon the projectors and plans of indelibility that have constituted its history". (Grondin, 59)

Dasein in its everydayness is inauthentic. It does not see its authenticity of Being-in-the-world immediately. The inauthentic existence of Dasein as Being-in-the-world lies in its average everydayness. In an average everydayness, we live inauthentically because of living under the force of habit as the "one" or the "they." In average everydayness, Dasein's existence is demonstrated by the "others"; it is the public in general, i.e., "one" or "they".

Authenticity means to be oneself, being one-self. Authenticity depends on Dasein's own being but not on Dasein's being-with-others. Authentic Dasein is always in each case mine. The factual existence of Dasein does not make Dasein authentic or inauthentic.

Being-in-the-world

Dasein as Being-there is not something standing outside or is not looked up within itself. Dasein as Being-in-the-World is an existence which is always already standing out in-the-world. Dasein as Being-in means involves or interests (concern-care) in-the-world. Dasein as Being-in-the-world means that it has always existential relation to the World. (Denker, 63)

Dasein as the possibilities and understanding of Being lies and encounters with other in-the-world. Dasein is thrown into the world so it tries to disclose, discovers, interpret of understands what are there its surroundings and in the world. So to be in-the-world is a Being that involves and encounters the things and others discloses, and also interprets, understands and discloses or discovers.

World is not a total of things. World is not only earth or soil or country World is an existential and ontological meaningless of something. Dasein is in-the-world. World is not Descartes' *extensa* or matter. World is phenomenological and hermeneutical meaning, «to be of use»

Being-with, Being-for-self and others

Others are always there with me and I am always there with others. We are encountering with others either things, animals or humans in the World. Dasein is not isolated from environment and World.

Dasein is always a relation with something because Dasein has initial intentionality towards others. Being with is an existential togetherness. Dasein touches to his surroundings. (Denker, 64)

"To be Dasein, to be "there "means that this "there" that we are, can be elevated to consciousness... as something that each one of us has to take up something to the possibly..." "Dasein is a self-dialogue, that is in a state of permanent confrontation with its own self and thus with others."

Dasein is signified out as a being of *Sorge-Care*... For Heidegger understanding is not to be thought of as a mode of cognition. Rather it alludes to a "possible being" ...to be able, to be up to it, to cope with it." (Grondin , 51)

Thrownness, Fallenness, Facticity

Dasein's Being-in-the-world as care has three fundamental characteristics: (1) Existence (2) Facticity (3) Falling. The essence of Dasein lies in its "to be" or in its existence

Thrownness is the facticity of Dasein. Dasein has been thrown into the world and inauthenticity of everyday life. Fallenness is an inauthentic and existential mode of Dasein in its everydayness.

Dasein always finds itself thrown into a concrete situation and attuned to a cultural and historical context. This thrownness makes up Dasein's facticity. Dasein in its facticity has the tendency to fall from authenticity, but when Dasein falls, it has also to ability to choose its possibilities and understands or interprets its own being. (Denker, 214)

Care

The relationship of Dasein to Being-in-the-world is based on its concern. Heidegger does not use the expression "concern" in its ontical significations, but he uses it in its ontological meaning as an existentiale which designates Being as a possible way of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger chooses the term "concern", because "the Being of Dasein itself is to be made visible as *care*... only because Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care. Because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein, its Being towards the world is essentially concern." (Heidegger, B&T 84) The phenomenon of concern shows that Dasein's world is a world of meaningful relations of Dasein. Therefore, Dasein's Being-in-the-world is essentially "Care." "Care" is a existentiale for Dasein's Being as Being-in-the-world. Dasein's Being reveals itself as care". (Heidegger, B&T 227)

Dasein's Being is care and Dasein concerns to the world so the relation of Dasein to the world is not theoretical or epistemological but practical and ontological. So the essence of Dasein lies in its to be or in its existence and the being of Dasein is concerned about in its being or in its case mine. So care is the basic structure of Dasein just as it is encountered at first and most often in its everyday environment. Being of Dasein shows itself in care.

Authenticity and inauthenticity

In this part we also bring out that Heidegger's Dasein analytic is based on the idea of Being-in-the-world, of care, of finitude, of authenticity or inauthenticity, of temporality, and historicity in which Dasein is primordially an understanding of Being.

Dasein is the questioner that raises the question of its being. Dasein is an entity which met provide an access to the question of being. Dasein has a possibility to be authentic or not. To be authentic means to be its own existence.

The analytic structure of care as Dasein's Being-in-the world can be examined either authentically or inauthentically: The authentic analytic structure of Dasein's comportments are state-of-mind, understanding, and discourse. The inauthentic comportments of Dasein's Being-in-the-world as care are ambiguity, curiosity and idle talk.

Interpretation

Heidegger accepts that assertion as a logical statement or proposition is the derivative mode of interpretation because interpretation is more basic and belongs to hermeneutics. When one makes a predicate statement, there is a logical truth and signifies the present-at-hand object. But interpretation is not a predicative statement. Interpretation states the ready-to-hand and usability and serviceability of tools.

Interpretation is basically the making explicit of our understanding of something. Since every understanding is historical, every interpretation is a destruction of the tradition from which we understand something. Interpretation is the development of the possibilities of Dasein's projections. (Denker, 122)

Interpretation has three basic structures: As-structure, fore-structure, and meaning. Interpretation makes explicit something as something but as-structure required fore-structure which is interpreted already in advance; Fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception are the ground of interpretation of as-structure. The third structure, meaning, is an understanding of the as-structure. All these structures of interpretation must be understood in terms of their ontological function which makes explicit the meaning of Being. i.e., what it means to be.

Understanding

Understanding is our most basic ability to live within the world and others. The structure of understanding is projection. Understanding always has a mood, Understanding gives the possibility of interpretation. Understanding can be authentic or inauthentic.

Authentic understanding of Dasein's existence itself in its own resoluteness, conscience and guilt. Inauthentic understanding of Dasein falls prey to fallacies and it flees from death and its own possibilities. Dasein has always an implicit understanding of being. We understand something as something. (Denker, 222)

For Heidegger, Dasein is an understanding of Being because it has the projection of possibilities of meaningfulness for things and itself. So Dasein's existence is futural that is, it's being towards future. Heidegger thinks that future has priority over both the past and the present. Understanding is existential and ontological basis of Dasein's Being because only Dasein as Being-in-the-world has a form of structure of understanding. Dasein is understanding of Being that has possibilities.

Hermeneutical circle

The circle of understanding lies on three fore-structure of Dasein itself. Dasein has a priori and primordial knowing. Fore-structure of Dasein's knowing is fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception.

Dasein interprets and understands something as something in terms of its fore-structure. No interpretation of an object could be free of preconception. So hermeneutical circle based on fore-structure of understanding and interpretation of Dasein's knowing.

Temporality and Death

Dasein is always "ahead of itself", if Dasein is "not yet" Dasein forwards itself to its existence. But Dasein cannot grasp in its totality of being so Dasein is a being towards to its end that is Dasein as "being-towards-death". "Dasein, as care, is the thrown (that is, null) basis for its death". (Heidegger, B&T, 353) Death is no longer appear as the interpretation of existence.

If Dasein is being-in-the-world, If I am, it has the potential and possibility to be in itself or not. When Dasein dies, it is no longer a being-in-the-world.

Heidegger describes the phenomenological meaning of death as "to let death, as that which shows itself, be seen from itself in the way in which it shows itself from itself." (Heidegger, B&T, 58) so death is a factual event but I cannot be experience my death or describe it. As Epicurus said, death means nothing to us. When we are alive or existence, death is not present and whenever it is present, we are nonexistence....In so far as I am aware that death will necessarily be present for me at some uncertain time as a factual event. (Stefanovic, 3-4)

Resoluteness and conscience

Resoluteness is an outstanding mode of Dasein's disclosedness. It is the authenticity of care and makes it possible for Dasein to exist authentically. It frees us from everyday life.

If Dasein listens its own call of conscience, Dasein follows its own possibilities and becomes authentic existence in the World. Conscience calls for Dasein to obey the demands of its own unique situation and to choose its own projection. (Denker, 193)

Dasein is authentic when it follows the call of conscience in its resoluteness which "calls Dasein back to its thrownness so as to understand this thrownness as the null basis which it has to take up into existence." (Heidegger, B&T, 333) Therefore, resoluteness brings Dasein right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand

Conclusion

Heidegger's ontological and existential analysis of Dasein and its temporality is for the sake of the question of the meaning of Being. Dasein is the "there", the place of the truth of Being, and therefore by no means something different from Being. Fundamental ontology can be discovered through Being as the place of manifestation. A part of Dasein's structure is to have a pre-understanding of its ontological Being. Therefore, Heidegger answers what Being as such is only what the meaning of the Being of Dasein is in the light of the understanding of temporality. Heidegger's hermeneutical analysis of Dasein's Being, which are the analysis of Being-in-the-world, Being-with, thrownness, fallenness, authenticity, inauthenticity, care, interpretation, understanding, death, resoluteness and conscience are aimed essentially at destroying the history of ontology, then to start a new beginning of philosophy.

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