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HEIDEGGER'S HISTORY OF BEING AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF 'OTHER' CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Abstract

Heidegger's movement away from his project of Dasein analytic of *Being and Time* to Being-centeredness in the middle period of his writings allows Being to give itself in appearing or clearing in its manifoldness. In the later years, Heidegger goes on to say that Being lies in the openness, luminosity or clearing (*Lichtung*) and determines the truth of beings. For Heidegger, it is in Being's revealing-withdrawing inter-play that historical people come and ground their own cultural history. In this paper, I shall argue that Heidegger's thinking of the history of Being is useful for establishing the phenomenological ground for a philosophical defense of 'other' cultural traditions in the background of their increasing questionableness in the planetary phase of the western understanding of Being. I show Heidegger's attempt to overcome ontotheology and what according to Heidegger happens to the history of ontology in western metaphysics with the specific meaning of Being it has inherited since Plato. *Destruktion* of the history of Being is an unrelenting, ever-

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ongoing process in Heidegger's writings. It has developed much earlier than *Being and Time* in the 1920s as a fiercely critical approach to the western philosophical tradition. The second section discusses Heidegger's turn (*die Kehre*) towards the history of Being. It is through the history of Being, Heidegger attempts to overcome the history of western ontology. Heidegger contends that the history of Being unveils the truth of Being in a particular manner to the historical people in each metaphysical epoch. Hence, there is no single revelation of Being once and for all. This is an important notion that I shall emphasize in support of my conception of 'other' cultural traditions. The third section is on the history of Being of the Greeks and the Late Moderns. While Heidegger emphasizes six such metaphysical epochs, I have chosen two important ones for our analysis; the original Greek understanding of Being or *Physis* and the late modern technological understanding of Being or *Gestell* (enframing) as Heidegger sees it from the point of view of the history of Being. In the concluding section, I argue that Heidegger's attack on a reified and unified history of philosophy and his emphasis on a divergent history of Being clear the way for my attempt to draw up a phenomenology of other cultural traditions.

Keywords: Ontotheology; Historicity; Other; Tradition; *die Kehre*.

Resumo

O afastamento de Heidegger relativamente ao seu projeto de analítica do *Dasein* em *Ser e Tempo*, para o centramento no Ser, no período médio da sua obra, permite que o Ser se manifeste ou clarifique na sua diversidade. Nos anos posteriores, Heidegger afirmará que o Ser reside na abertura, luminosidade ou clareira (*Lichtung*) e determina a verdade dos seres. Para Heidegger, é na interação revelação-remoção de Ser que as pessoas históricas vêm e fundamentam a sua própria história cultural. Neste estudo, pretendo argumentar que o pensamento de Heidegger sobre a história do Ser é útil para estabelecer o terreno fenomenológico para uma defesa filosófica de "outras" tradições culturais no contexto da sua crescente questionabilidade na fase planetária da compreensão ocidental do Ser. Assim, evidencio a tentativa de Heidegger de ultrapassar a ontoteologia e o que, segundo Heidegger, acontece com a história da ontologia na metafísica ocidental com o significado específico de Ser que herdou desde Platão. *Destruktion* da história do Ser devém um processo implacável e permanente nos escritos de Heidegger. Começa a desenvolver-se muito antes de *Ser e Tempo*, na década de 1920, como uma abordagem ferozmente crítica à tradição filosófica ocidental. A segunda secção do estudo discute a viragem de Heidegger (*die Kehre*) para a história de Ser. É através da história do Ser que Heidegger tenta superar a história da ontologia ocidental. Heidegger defende que a história do Ser revela a verdade do Ser de uma forma particular para as pessoas históricas em

cada época da metafísica. Portanto, não há uma revelação única do ser, de uma vez para sempre. Esta é uma noção importante que pretendo enfatizar em apoio da minha conceção de “outras tradições culturais”. A terceira secção é sobre a história do Ser dos gregos e dos modernos tardios. Embora Heidegger enfatize seis épocas metafísicas, escolhi duas importantes para esta análise: a compreensão original grega de Ser ou *Phusis* e a compreensão tecnológica moderna tardia de Ser ou *Gestell* (enframing [emolduramento / com-posição]) como Heidegger a vê do ponto de vista da história do Ser. Na secção final defendo que o ataque de Heidegger a uma história da filosofia reificada e unificada e a sua ênfase numa história diferenciada do Ser abre caminho para a minha tentativa de elaborar uma fenomenologia de outras tradições culturais.

Palavras-chave: Ontoteologia; Historicidade; Outro; Tradição; *die Kehre*.

Introduction

Two pivotal notions need to be understood to gain a grasp of Heidegger's philosophy as a whole and the later Heidegger's turn towards the history of Being: *Sein* and *Alêtheia*. They are not only key words in his large opus, but are interlinked concepts. *Sein* means Being, the 'to be' of entities. *Alêtheia* means unconcealment or truth. For Heidegger, these notions are misconstrued in the history of western metaphysics. He argues that the word 'Being' was misunderstood in terms of whatness or essence in all metaphysics since Plato. Hence, the early Heidegger's *Destruktion* or destruction of the history of ontology can be read as a process of overcoming western metaphysics. However, this does not entail abandonment of past metaphysics; rather it means understanding the past critically. The history of western metaphysics has been interested in the necessary and the non-changing. Therefore, overcoming metaphysics was sought to guide philosophy towards an enquiry concerning Being, the 'to be' of entities. Being for Heidegger is the occurrence of the truth of beings. This understanding of Being was developed in the manner of the history of Being in his later works. Accordingly, the history of Being is understood as a particular negotiation of the predominance of Being in each metaphysical epoch anywhere. If 'historicity' of Dasein is something different from 'history of Being' as Heidegger contends, my aim is to show in this paper how the concept of the history of Being holds up in relation to my understanding of ontological cultural being and ontic traditions/ cultures.

1. Overcoming Ontotheology

Ontotheology according to Heidegger is the misinterpreted understanding of Being in the western metaphysical tradition since Plato. In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger holds that *ontos* or Being was understood as a being or entity which is foundational (*theos* or God) for all entities. It is both ontology and theology. Ontotheology grounds beings in a supreme being which is considered to be the ultimate cause. Joeri Schrijvers remarks: «This Supreme Being is then invoked to assure the unity of the essence of all the diverse, empirical beings and, importantly, to present the essence of a being independently of that of which it is the essence, of its empirical existence that is»¹. Ontotheology thinks of Being from out of beings; it thinks Being as the essence of beings. This way of understanding takes Being as the *substantia* of a thing. However, for Heidegger, Being is not the substance of being. Heidegger argues that the understanding of Being as substance distorts the original Greek insight regarding Being known as *Phusis*, on which I shall dwell at length in a later section. For Heidegger, Being is neither a being nor the permanent foundation for all beings or entities. Rather, for Heidegger, Being «...is the coming to presence of whatever presents itself, the Being of beings...»². Therefore, Heidegger's early understanding of *Destruktion* or destruction of the history of ontology and his later understanding of the history of Being originate from this critique of the metaphysics of presence. Hence, overcoming metaphysics is one of Heidegger's projects leading to the reformulation of the question of Being which Heidegger terms a historical moment in the history of ontology. It also means the incorporation of the truth of Being into philosophizing. Moreover, it implies understanding the meaning of Being and rejecting the metaphysics of presence.

Bernd Magnus in his book *Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy: Amor Fati, Being and Truth*³ notes that Heidegger's own project of Being is also a continuation of traditional metaphysics. However, it is in the narrower usage of the term that Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology is oriented.

¹ J. Schrijvers, «Marion, Levinas, and Heidegger on the Question Concerning Ontotheology», *Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2010) 210.

² M. Heidegger, «*Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*», D. Farrell Krell e F. A. Capuzzi (trans.), 1943. Reprint, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1984, p. 8.

³ B. Magnus, «Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy: Amor Fati, Being and Truth», in *The Martinus Nijhoff, Hague*, 1970, p.61. «Metaphysics is not only a traditional philosophy for Heidegger. He frequently uses the term in a broad sense in which it is said to express man's relationship to the Being of beings. In this sense Heidegger regards man's relationship to what is as metaphysical».

Heidegger conceives the narrower sense of metaphysics in terms of the way Being has been understood during the period from Plato until Nietzsche. Heidegger's objection to metaphysics is about how Being is misconstrued since Plato in terms of ontotheology, whereby Being of beings is understood as 'idea' or as constant presence. Metaphysics for Heidegger means the representation of beings in their Being. Yet he argues that it fails to respond to the question of what Being means. He argues that metaphysics does not pose the question of Being's truth and has never paid attention to its foundation. Therefore, his project is to resuscitate the meaning of Being that has been obscured in the entire metaphysical tradition.

Iain D. Thomson in his book *Heidegger on Ontotheology*⁴ holds that for Heidegger, the question of "what is an entity?" has two metaphysical positions: entities understood in terms of 'whatness' or 'as such' and entities understood in terms of 'the being of entities' or 'thatness'. For Heidegger, the term 'whatness' connotes the characteristics that qualify a thing whereas 'existence' or thatness means the 'to be' of an entity as distinguished from its 'whatness'. The main point here is that when the traditional metaphysics thinks of "thatness" in terms of "whatness", it thinks theologically and not ontologically because theology determines "the supreme entity" or "God" as the grounding ground of the being of entities as a whole. Hence, Heidegger notes that Being is different from the whatness of a pen. 'Existence' is different from the 'whatness' of a pen. To be aware of existence as an entity or in terms of whatness is an existential awareness.

Heidegger observes that Being means the three fundamental presuppositions in the philosophical tradition. Being is the most universal and emptiest of concepts. Therefore, it evades any definition. Its empty universality, indefinability and self-evidence does not call for any further explication of the nature of Being. Heidegger argues that the universality of Being does not imply that Being has been defined in its origin. In short, the metaphysical tradition, in Heidegger's terms, takes the ontical for the ontological. Hence, since its inception, metaphysics has been involved in this confusion of Being for beings. Heidegger holds that this confusion persisted throughout the history of western metaphysics in the absence of Being's truth. Each metaphysician of the west understood Being as a foundational entity: idea, form, God, *cogito*, will and so on. These are all beings themselves and not the background understanding of beings as a whole or Being on the basis

⁴ I. D. Thomson, «*Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*», Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

of which we can make sense of beings in their significance. Consequently, the essence or whatness took the predominance of what beings are over Being. In *Metaphysics as History of Being* Heidegger speaks of two factors that characterize western metaphysics. The first factor is «*the precedence of beings*»⁵ and the second factor is «*the assumed self-evidence of Being...*»⁶. Because thatness remains unquestioned everywhere in its *nature...*⁶. These factors mislead us to cling to the error and blind us from the sight of the truth of Being. The error is the notion of Being as constant and unchanging presence rather than as the dynamically unfolding presencing.

For Heidegger, when whatness precedes existence in metaphysical thinking, it prioritizes beings and the meaning of Being is equated with actuality. Actuality means something existing in fact as contrasted with what is intended or expected. When Being shows as actuality, it means that Being is a completed product of an activity. In *Being and Time* actuality is distinguished from possibility. For Heidegger, actuality is merely presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) which is always taken for granted, whereas possibility is the radiance of Dasein. Its Being is up for grabs. It takes each moment as it comes with its possibility. Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time* «Higher than actuality stands possibility»⁷. The whole of Dasein-analytic can be understood only when we understand that Dasein is possibility driven. Because of the emphasis on possibility (the not-yet) there is a fundamental not or anti-essentialism in the very structure of Dasein and in its understanding of Being. The essence of Being lies in its 'to be' always responsible for its possibility because Dasein is always on its way. According to Heidegger, the history of western metaphysics leading to the modern age has accustomed human beings to think of Being in terms of actuality. When Being has transformed into actuality, beings are conceived as truly real because Platonism is at work. Heidegger holds that in the whole of the history of metaphysics, the word 'actuality' 'reality' and 'existence' have been used interchangeably to mean the same thing. However, this does not entail that these words are to be accepted without questioning and are free from ambiguity.

In *Being and Time*, the terms reality and real connote different meanings. Reality is one of the possibilities ontologically grounded in the Being of Dasein,

⁵ M. Heidegger, «Metaphysics as History of Being», in *The End of Philosophy*, 1- 54, Joan Stambaugh (trans.), 1936. Reprint, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 11.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ M. Heidegger, «*Being and Time*», John Macquarrie e Edward Robinson (trans.), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, p. 63.

whereas 'the real' is that which is independent of Dasein. «*Consciousness of Reality' is itself a way of Being-in-the-world* »⁸. In this sense, readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand are 'modes of reality'. But traditional sense of reality is pure presence-at-hand. Moreover, «Being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of Being; that is to say, reality (not the real) is dependent upon care»⁹. Hence, misinterpretation of Being in terms of the real leads to the meaninglessness of Being.

Metaphysics is about the truth of Being as a whole. However, with the epochal transformation from truth to certainty, Being has become meaningless. Meaning for Heidegger in *Being and Time* is a mode of Dasein's Being in the world, the realm of projection. In projection, entities are uncovered in their possibility and significance which we come to understand as meaning. Meaning designates the clearing of Being. It is meaning which makes the projection possible. Hence, Heidegger holds that the meaninglessness of Being happens when metaphysics has shunted the truth of Being.

If the modern world is sunk in meaninglessness, it is because we have forgotten the basis on which (Being) we can have possibilities. If earlier eras (say, the medieval era) overemphasized Being as a founding entity (God), today, modern humans have neither the founding entity nor Being in its Heideggerian sense. Being for Heidegger is contingent and finite, but it is that alone which makes things meaningful and significant; things that matter. Without that, everything is equal to everything else; they appear merely as resources to be manipulated. They have no special significance. Heidegger holds that the age of consummate meaninglessness is the consequence of modern subjectivity.

Heidegger argues that in order to overcome metaphysics, it has to be approached through the history of Being. For him, overcoming metaphysics is essential because «...the 'world' has become an unworld as a consequence of the abandonment of beings by Being's truth»¹⁰. However, overcoming metaphysics does not imply that one has to discard past metaphysics and start anew. Rather, overcoming includes the past. As noted, overcoming metaphysics for Heidegger also means the incorporation of the truth of Being. This historical moment is not an ideal situation but it implies the ignition of the truth of Being in the history of ontology. It is an event of

⁸ Ibid., 254.

⁹ Ibid., 255.

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, «Overcoming Metaphysics», in *The End of Philosophy*, Joan Stambaugh (trans.), Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 104.

that turning in which Being's truth comes to sway in the history of western metaphysics. The end of metaphysics means the collapse of the modern form of ontology or what is often called the classical philosophy, which is nothing but the transcendentalist, universalistic Dasein ontology. However, it does not connote the cessation of the history of Being because metaphysics is about the truth of Being as a whole.

Heidegger's turn to the history of Being *die Kehre* (the turn) is a critique of the intellectual culture and worldview of the west. His critique is mainly centered on the technological understanding of Being; the determinative nature of subjectivity that prioritizes rationality to absolute validity. Hence, in the following section, I shall try to explicate what Heidegger means by the history of Being.

2. History of Being

For Heidegger, history of Being is neither a history about humanity nor about the relationship of humans to beings that one researches in the social sciences. For Heidegger the history of Being is Being itself and nothing else. Heidegger's history of Being is different from scientific history or historiography of chronological events. It is about how Being comes to be interpreted historically. The argument is not about the necessary teleology of our understanding of Being but about how we can show in terms of possibilities (out of the future) the meaning of Being in general with reference to different onto-historical epochs. Our present is meaningfully and yet critically related to our past. Heidegger does not claim that the account he gives is the only way that this relation can be. Another way of relating to the first beginning/*phusis* is not impossible.

Heidegger opines that truth as uncovering of Being is made possible only when Dasein is Being-in-the-world. Being opens up and presences itself to historic humans in order to unveil its truth. This coming to presence is an ontological determination as Heidegger notes. Truth is grounded in Being and it brings to presence what Being is. In *Nietzsche*, Heidegger writes that «truth stands with Being in the realm of the grounding question... in asking the guiding and grounding question of beings and Being we are asking simultaneously and inherently about the essence of truth»¹¹. Truth, for

¹¹ M. Heidegger, «Nietzsche Vol I The Will to Power as Art », D. Farrell Krell (trans.), 1961. Reprint, Harper & Row Publishers, New York 1979, p. 66.

Heidegger, is unconcealing of an entity as it is in its Being. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger holds that «Beyng needs humans in order to occur essentially, and humans belong to being so that they might fulfill their ultimate destiny as Da-sein»¹². Things do exist independent of Dasein's experience of them, but their Being is only relative to Dasein. Hence, Heidegger calls the human being 'the shepherd of Being' in the essay *Letter on 'Humanism'*, where he says that «man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of Being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being»¹³. This clearly shows that truth for Heidegger is not subjective. Dasein does not determine the truth of beings. Being requires Dasein, the language-wielding entity, for the disclosure of its truth. It is through Dasein that the meaning of Being is revealed. Although humans do not determine Being's revealing, but by their proactive response, they can take part in a different revealing and contribute to the unconcealment of Being. This is a cultural project that the later Heidegger, in my interpretation, allows. Without such an interpretation, the only possible result of the later Heidegger's view of cultural agency is quietistic and passive.

Dasein's historicity is understood by Heidegger in terms of his analysis of temporality. For Heidegger, to exist historically is to exist in terms of the temporal *ek-stases*. The essential sway of Being has to be understood in terms of the three-part dimensions of temporality, i.e., the past, the present and the future. Heidegger speaks of Dasein in terms of thrownness, projection and fallenness in order to accentuate the temporality of Dasein's existence. For him, Dasein is thrown into a world or a tradition over which it has no control; Dasein is delivered over to its tradition. «In 'thrownness' there is a being-delivered-over of Dasein to the world, so that this being-in-the-world is overwhelmed by that to which it is delivered over»¹⁴. In Dasein's thrownness, it locates itself in a historical tradition or culture. Thus, human beings are thrown into a culture or tradition which is not of their own making and yet are meaningful to them. Hence, the past is not a collection of facts but a living unfolding, out of which they project their future possibilities, whether

¹² M. Heidegger, «*Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*», R. Rojcewicz e D. Vallega-Neu (trans.), 1936-38. Reprint, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 2012, p. 198.

¹³ M. Heidegger, «*Letter on 'Humanism'*», in *Basic Writings*, 213-265, F. A. Capuzzi (trans.), D. Farrell Krell (ed.), 1946, Reprint, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, New Delhi 2008, p. 234.

¹⁴ M. Heidegger, «*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*», R. Taft (trans.), Fifth Edition, 1929. Reprint, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1997, p. 188.

in affirming it or negating it. Hence, for Heidegger, the past is constitutive of our present as well as of our future. It is in Dasein's thrown projection that the future discloses itself meaningfully. As Heidegger puts it:

It becomes all the more historical, which is to say, it grounds history all the more originally, as it overcomes radically what has gone before by creating a new order in that realm where we have our roots¹⁵.

In this picture, then, are we makers of history? Each case of Dasein is a particular negotiation of the understanding of Being at each moment. There is thus great variety and versatility within historical humanity. Surber in his book *Culture and Critique* writes that «in describing *Dasein* in terms of temporal *ek-stases*, Heidegger meant that each represents a distinctive and irreducible dimension of any instance of understanding and thus of hermeneutics itself»¹⁶. Human beings exist dynamically and creatively. Hence, in Heidegger's framework the interpretation of Dasein's historicity proves a concrete working out of temporal *ek-stases*.

Heidegger's turn to the history of Being (*dieKehre*) in the middle period of his writings speaks of the history of Being as a particular negotiation between historical peoples and the predominance of beings in which truth occurs in accordance with their prevalent understanding of Being. For Heidegger, the history of Being is about the understanding of Being in various epochs. Each understanding of Being is historically contingent and is *epochal*. In *Time and Being* Heidegger writes:

Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings. The sequence of epochs in the destiny of Being is not accidental, nor can it be calculated as necessary¹⁷.

Historical people come to negotiate the occurrence of the truth of beings and make a decision about Being's truth and ground their own history

¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Vol I The Will to Power as Art*, p. 27.

¹⁶ J. P. Surber, «Culture and Critique: An Introduction to Critical Discourses of Cultural Studies», Westview Press, Boulder Co, 1998, p. 57.

¹⁷ M. Heidegger, «*On Time and Beings*», Joan Stambaugh (trans.), Harper & Row Publishers, New York 1972, p. 9.

accordingly. Since Dasein is a historical entity, its understanding of Being is historical. It is to be noted here that for Heidegger, history is neither about successive domination of beings nor is it an account of past facts as it is ordinarily understood. Rather, history of Being for Heidegger is the clearing of Being or the sway of Being itself. History happens only when beings are brought to unconcealment and preserved. This means to say that history is not the subjectivist production of a 'we-self'; rather, it is a receiving-responding negotiation with beings within time. We are much more strongly affected by the tradition we grow into and are shaped by rather than shaping it and transforming it. History is receiving this tradition and responding to it appropriately, whether positively or negatively, whether naively or critically. Critical transformations and revolutions within history are appropriate responses to tradition rather than overturning of it.

Our adept inhabitation of the world is essential to the uncovering of the entity because it is always amidst a context of connections that we discover them. But we do not discover them as flimsy appearances that come and go, but as stable phenomena that endure a variety of contexts. This stability of things, for Heidegger, is their essence. Heidegger's understanding of essence is different from the traditional views of essence. Traditional metaphysics identifies essence with the substantia of the thing. Andrew Mitchell in his article *Contamination, Essence, and Decomposition: Heidegger and Derrida* notes:

...essence is nothing substantial, it is an 'event' or 'occurrence'; essence does not lie beneath or below the object in question, but is found at the 'limit' of the object; essence is nothing general, but what makes the thing a unique singularity¹⁸.

For Heidegger, essence is the occurrence of Being's truth in its unique singularity. A clearing for the occurrence of Being's truth unveils through the essencing of the thing. However, unlike the traditional conception, essences are not immutable. They are certain salient features of things that stand out in a particular historical epoch in a particular culture. Essences are historical and thus changeable. Some demarcated forests which were sacred groves for the tribes-people have become timber resources for the moderns. Truth is the freedom to let be the essence of things. Human beings err in clinging on

¹⁸ A. Mitchell, «Contamination, Essence, and Decomposition: Heidegger and Derrida», in *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception*, D. Pettigrew and F. Raffoul (eds.), State University of New York, Albany 2008, p. 135.

to handed down essences as sacrosanct. Mark A. Wrathall¹⁹ comments that when we are immersed and absorbed in certain ways, we are unable to see the essence of Being that is shaping our ways comporting towards the world. Therefore, within the clearing itself is both concealment and unconcealment. It is a strife against concealment because the clearing conceals certain essences of Being that historical Dasein settles on certain other essences. If this were not the case, the possibility of inhabiting and familiarizing with the world would have been impossible. The clearing is the space of different possibilities of essences in different historical eras in different cultural horizons. Hence, it is now clear that, for Heidegger, historical epochs or cultural worlds give rise to different essences of things; that is, their different ways of Being. Modern science, for him, then, is a cultural product of the west and scientific truth, therefore, is not the only conception of truth. There can be religious truths, mythical truths, cultural truths, artistic truths and the like.

This being the case with Being, Heidegger asks how did ‘classical philosophy’ understand Being. We have already said they understood Being in terms of Ontotheology. Hence, Heidegger narrates the ontotheological epochs of Being since Plato’s absolutization of Being as Idea. Epoch is the historical revealing of Being by withdrawing/concealing or holding back other understandings of Being and ‘granting’ a historical epoch its stamp of truth or unconcealment.

While Heidegger emphasizes about six such metaphysical epochs, the two important ones for our analysis are the original Greek understanding of Being or *Phusis* and the contemporary technological understanding of Being. *Phusis* means the manifold emergence of beings without human imposition, which emphasized manifoldness in the way we understand reality whereas technological modernity disallowed this possibility. Heidegger’s understanding of the manifold revelation of Being in different cultural epochs in western metaphysics is useful for a phenomenological grounding of my conception of “other cultural traditions”.

3. The History of Being of the Greeks and of the Late Moderns

Since truth is the unconcealment of things in their Being within historical epochs and untruth is concealment, it seems to be a settled Heideggerian

¹⁹ M. A. Wrathall, «*Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History*», Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.

position that it does not make sense to talk about progress of historical epochs upon a scale of gradation. For Heidegger, the truth of Being in each epoch arises from that age's metaphysics which is not comparable to another age's. «Metaphysics grounds an age, in that through a specific interpretation of what is and through a specific comprehension of truth it provides to that age the basis upon which it is essentially formed. This basis holds complete dominion over all the phenomena that distinguish the age»²⁰. Each epoch has such dominant forms of the revelation of Being's truth, which has meaning for a particular people at a particular time. However, it is to be noted here that for Heidegger truth is not relative to Dasein because Dasein does not determine the truth. Rather, it is truth that lets Being to unconcealment.

Truth for the Greeks is experienced as the unconcealment of beings in their Being or truth as uncovering. For the Greeks, the understanding of Being is in terms of *Phusis*. Heidegger notes that the unassisted, natural bringing forth (*Phusis*) like the blooming of a flower as against human-assisted bringing forth (*Poiēsis*) like bringing forth the figure out of a piece of wood by a carpenter is what the early Greeks meant by *Phusis*. This self-emergence of *phusis*, which holds sway and which has its own inner law (unaided by human agents) has these aspects of sheltering, concealing and unconcealing that arise from the so-called earth. Hence, the Greeks understand whatever presences before them directly. The Being of beings is understood by Heidegger as presencing. In this kind of unconcealing/ withdrawing inter-play, the truth of Being opens up and history is grounded. History of Being is understood as 'the projection of a world that a people carry out', and thus it is an essential way in which the truth of Being comes to sway in history. Heidegger emphasizes the multiplicity of revealing in the age of the early Greeks which that age seems to have fostered.

In Greece, at the outset of the destining of the West, the arts soared to the supreme height of the revealing granted them. They brought the presence [*Gegenwart*] of the gods, brought the dialogue of divine and human destinings, to radiance. And art was simply called *technē*. It was a single, manifold revealing. It was pious, *promos*, i.e., yielding to the holding-sway and the safekeeping of truth²¹.

²⁰ M. A. Wrathall, «Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History», Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.

²¹ M. Heidegger, «The Question Concerning Technology», in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 3-35, W. Lovitt (trans.). 1938. Reprint, Harper & Row Publishers,

Undoubtedly, Heidegger invokes here a multiple vision. The only possible answer to the question why the Greek age becomes an exemplar for Heidegger's project of the history of Being when each age is said to have its own dominant form of revealing seems to be this: «It was a single, manifold revealing»²². That is, a single dominant revealing that fosters a variety of visions, all of which were called *technē*. *Technē* does not connote 'technology' as we understand it in the modern age, for the Greeks conceived *technē* in the sense of natural bringing-forth and letting appear as it is. This does not entail that Heidegger privileges the Greek age.

In *Building Dwelling Thinking* Heidegger adds that the Greek understanding of *technē* «of late it still remains concealed, and more resolutely, in the technology of power machinery»²³. Unlike the Greeks who lived in the openness of Being's presencing, the modern humans understanding of the technology of Being threatens Being's revealing as Heidegger holds. More than human beings being the sole actor of an act of revealing of Being, they are the vehicles of the revealing as the language-wielding creatures. I argue that if «the various-successive self-withdrawals of being in its destiny are the epochs of the various ways in which presence destines itself to western man»²⁴ then, human beings can be gentle contributors to minimize the dangerous monopoly of vision by contributing as historical agents towards fostering other visions.

Heidegger conceives of modern technoscience as different from Greek *techne* and *episteme*. What is most devastating in this critique is the way Heidegger conceives the essence of technoscience in the well-known essay *The Question Concerning Technology*. In this account, technology in its essence precedes modern science and rules it. The essence of modern technology is a way of revealing the totality of beings. This revealing in the modern age comes across as transforming, storing up, and unlocking the energies of nature. Technology is the way of human relationship with nature from the point of view of its resourcefulness. Hence, Heidegger calls the essence of technology as *Gestell* or enframing. Our relationship towards nature in this age, thus, is one of *Bestand* or standing-reserve. Being needs humans in order to come out freely into the open to reveal its truth as *Gestell*. And yet, humans do not

New York 1977, p. 34.

²² Ibid.,

²³ M. Heidegger, «Building Dwelling Thinking», in *Basic Writings*, D. Farrell Krell (ed.), HarperCollins Publishers, New York 2008, p. 361.

²⁴ M. Heidegger, «Four Seminars», A. J. Mitchell and F. Raffoul (trans.), 1966-73. Reprint, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 2003, p. 61.

create the essence of technology.

The technoscientific age of the west, on the other hand, is also a cultural product of the west. How did the projection of the technoscientific unfold? The essence of technoscience is a way of revealing/ unconcealment of the truth of Being. Each age has such dominant forms of revealing and no form of revealing that has captured an age can be wished away. However, Heidegger's view of modern technology is a critique of modernity as such. Heidegger does not believe that modern humans can become untechnological nor does he argue in favor of the destruction of technology. Moreover, our whole comportment towards Being is one of standing-reserve so that humans themselves «will have to be taken as standing-reserve»²⁵. Both the human being and beings are reserved as resources for modern technology. Heidegger notes that human beings fail to see in the modern technological intoxication that *Gestell* (enframing) is a 'claim' and fail to see they themselves are the ones 'spoken to' by the demanding revealing of Being as *Gestell*. For Heidegger, enframing is more real than any other technological apparatus and machinery because it possesses a strange ownership and appropriation. It appropriates the essence of human beings and beings to an unrecognizable state.

For Heidegger, modern technology overtakes not only the beings but humans too. Thus, modern humans become alien to Being because they do not grasp it at all. We glorify calculative rationality and its triumphs and fail to see any other way of looking at reality. However, Heidegger opines that modern humans cannot entirely master the Being of beings because Being tends to conceal itself in withdrawal. In its constant withdrawal and clearing, historical humans come and project the different possibilities of essences in different historical eras. If this is the case as Heidegger has contended, then, the argument here is, there is no single revelation of Being once and for all. The argument here is, if history of Being uncovers a particular manner in which historical people approach the question of Being, as the middle Heidegger contends, it is then the case that we can weave the history of Being that unfolds within different cultural horizons including that of 'Other' cultural traditions.

²⁵ M. Heidegger, «The Question Concerning Technology», p. 27.

4. In Defense of ‘Other’ Cultural Traditions

Culture is a broad concept and it embraces a large range of meanings, making it virtually impossible to render a precise definition of it. However, in accordance with the argument of this study culture may be understood as the particular way of life of a people, their particular interpretation of the world around them and the understanding of their place and goals within it. All artifices, including customs, systems, cultural goods, ideals and the like, are produced broadly in terms of such an interpretational framework. Edward Taylor’s definition of culture is considered as the most influential one. He opens up his seminal anthropology text with this definition of culture, «that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society»²⁶. However, this definition does not imply that every culture has all such elements. Culture is more than a way of life. It is the web of meaning within which individuals and communities make sense of their existence. In this sense, culture is as opposed to what is considered natural. The constantly ongoing interaction with other cultures, dynamic learning in response to a historical givenness within one’s own culture makes culture more vigorous.

Culture emerges within human relationships in a particular society. Without the intersubjective space wherein meanings circulate, the ‘Da’ of Dasein, culture cannot come to be. For Ernst Cassirer, culture is also an intersubjective world, a world which is accessible to all human beings and in which they necessarily participate. However, they relate themselves through the various worlds of forms out of which culture comes into being. Our awareness of the world of objects is made known through our mutual interests with others. They work together to create our own version of the world/culture.

It can be said that every culture is the product of the particular experiences of the community that houses it, past, and present. Every tradition must be regarded as the living but dynamic embodiment of its past but its past is appropriated, as Heidegger says, in terms of the future. The possibilities held in store by the future light up the past in its significance. Without this possibility-driven coming back to the past, the present cannot be understood as something mattering or involving for the individual and the community; without such an engagement, there cannot be said to be a living culture or

²⁶ This definition is taken from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

tradition. This receptive-responsive dynamism makes human beings a cultural being and the connection between culture and tradition becomes more significant in this receptive-responsive relation. Therefore, culture cannot be understood unless its past is taken into account. The notion of tradition is not something fixed because human beings always actively and continuously engage with the traditions they inherit. In this sense, a culture or tradition cannot be fully defined and its authentic import is always something 'not yet' and 'not arrived'. This does not mean a culture is a meaningless and formless entity; rather, it means that the full significance of a culture cannot be grasped in a neat and proper description. This difficulty is not merely a difficulty of articulation but it arises from the very constitution of culture.

For Heidegger, the essence of truth is not an empty generality or abstract universality but «rather that which, self-concealing, is unique in the unremitting history of the disclosure of the 'meaning' of what we call Being” and he emphasizes that this is “what we for a long time have been accustomed to considering only as beings as a whole»²⁷. That is, the 'universal' itself is formulated according to western philosophy in terms of what Heidegger calls the understanding of 'beings as a whole' or Being. The western understandings of beings in their wholeness, as I have enunciated in this paper, have changed across historical periods from *phusis* to *eidōs* to *actualitas* to *ens creatum* to object and resource. It is the particularity of the modern understanding of being that it has a planetary tendency. Culture in the sense I have explained above is not an understanding of Being. While an understanding of being is ontological, culture as such is ontic. However, why is an understanding of beings as a whole called 'ontological'? This is so not only because Being does not lend itself to full articulation but also because it defines human essence as such. The 'Da' of Dasein is the space for the circulation of the understanding of Being. A particular human being becomes a Dasein when she/he grows into the collective Dasein of the community and *ek-sists* in terms of the understanding of beings as a whole that circulates within that collective Dasein. Her/his individuality arises out of the specific negotiations that ensue from her/his understanding of beings as a whole. *Being and Time* is emphatic that she/he becomes an authentic individual not by overstepping or being indifferent to the collective Dasein or Being-with but by owning the possibilities available there, positively or negatively, as one's own and by projecting oneself towards them meaningfully. The understanding of Being

²⁷ M. Heidegger, «On the Essence of Truth», in *Basic Writings*, 111-142, J. Sallis (trans.), D. Farrell Krell (ed.), 1977. Reprint, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, New Delhi 2008, p. 153.

is so much part of the essence of being human that it in some way slips away from the fully describable aspects of our world; however, what ensues from it in their ontic generalities are not unconnected to what is ontological. The ontic and the ontological are in a constant interactive interplay. It is therefore that I have referred to the receiving-responding Being of the human being as cultural being. The ontic aspects of what humans participate in within the intersubjective space of meanings are themselves what form and shape their Being as human individuals.

The planetary tendency of the late modern western understanding of Being therefore runs the risk of obliterating or at least obstructing other understanding of Being concurrent to the western. While this is neither an absolute nor complete obliteration or cancellation of other major understandings of Being like the Indian and the Chinese, the possibility of total disappearance and obliteration looms large for cultures on the margins like that of the *Ao-Nagas*²⁸. And for such cultural worlds, the danger of obliteration approaches them from the western understanding of Being as well as its hybrid forms. ‘Other cultural traditions’ are a constant threat to western philosophy. Its ground plan makes it difficult for it to view and conceive the already accepted notions of reality and meaning in other cultural epistemological traditions. Western philosophy deals with the reality of the world from an intra-cultural approach. For western philosophy, as Estermann holds «...the problem of the ‘other’ has been a constant threat and a challenge that it never really coped with, because it adopted a strictly intra-cultural approach. The ethnic, generic and philosophical ‘other’ has been ignored, humiliated, marginalized, suppressed or even exterminated»²⁹. Hence, when western philosophy locates itself as the center of all meaning and intelligibility, other intelligibilities are measured in relation to its own. It sees the ‘other’ through the lens of ethnocentrism. The ‘other’ here means that which does not share the understanding of Being common to the west at a particular historical epoch. The ‘other’, for example, in the current scenario means that which does not understand all beings as resourceful material for human gratification. Because western philosophy restricts its horizon to its own understanding of Being, it is unable to come into a genuine dialogue with other traditions. Therefore, the reality of the world

²⁸ Ao-Naga is one among the sixteen recognized tribes of the state of Nagaland, India.

²⁹ N. Note – R. Fornet-Betancout – J. Estermann – D. Aerts (eds.), *Worldviews and Cultures: Philosophical Reflections from an Intercultural Perspective*, Springer, New York 2009, p. 7; cf. J. Estermann, «Andean Philosophy as a Questioning Alterity: An Intercultural Criticism of Western Andro- and Ethnocentrism, *ibidem*, 129-147.

which is perceived and pre-conceived in other cultural traditions comes as a threat or a challenge to the already universalized western epistemology. Hence, Derrida notes: «Metaphysics — the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call as Reason. Which does not go uncontested»³⁰. So, for Derrida, western philosophy erases its *mythos* and metaphors by imposing upon them the universality of *logos* and literality. For Heidegger, the domination of western science and worldview in the contemporary world is a domination of western metaphysics. Traditional western philosophy inclines towards a homogenizing process. Globalization should also be seen as an attempt at homogenization of cultures, a 'global culture' in modular affinity to the western *logos* and science. This tendency to level down cultural differences leads to the denial of the status of a full partner to other cultures in the dialogical processes of understanding the world and deciding how we must comport ourselves towards and towards other humans. Needless to say, such a condition also leads to denial of good life as such to the other and prevent them from developing a healthy cultural identity and sense of meaning and identity. It also leads to a failure to understand and accept the difference and a failure of not allowing the space for a unique identity and a distinct culture to grow. In fact, encountering the "other" in inter-cultural dialogue makes us aware of the limits of our own world-view. It reveals the existence of the other human projects and diverse types of cultural experiences.

4. Conclusion

For Heidegger, there is no single revelation of Being once and for all. All understanding of Being, including the present planetary one, is a contingent historical phase, in the revealing-concealing ontological play. Historical people ground their own cultural history in the revealing-withdrawal inter-play of Being. At the same time, there is no going back to the Greeks for Heidegger. There can only be another appropriation of the Greek understanding of Being, which does not demand absolutization, imperialism of uniformity and denial of meaning to other traditions of 'global humanity'. Heidegger's sustained

³⁰ J. Derrida, «White Mythology», in *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982, p. 213.

effort was in articulating a non-dominational understanding of Being for the western tradition. I argue that Heidegger's attack on a reified and unified history of philosophy and his emphasis on a divergent history of Being of the west clears the way for my argument emphasizing the philosophical necessity of 'other' cultural traditions and their meaningfulness. In the same way, according to our understanding of cultural being, 'other tradition' does not mean a closed and fixed horizon of meaning. It can only be an open horizon which can meaningfully encounter its 'others'.

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