

The Ethical and Young-Hegelian Motives in Heidegger's Hermeneutics of Facticity¹

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Almost routinely, the absence of an ethics has been singled out as one of the most glaring lacunae of Heidegger's philosophical endeavour. In France, Emmanuel Levinas was the first and foremost philosopher to regret this vacancy of the ethical dimension. His protest was directed mainly against the alleged primacy of ontology and the question of being. The preeminent motor of our existence and, thus, of philosophy would not be being, but the ethical imperative, represented by the other. The irreducible alterity of the other challenges my own being, thus laying bare its essential "secundarity", its peripheral status in the face of the other. By maintaining so forcibly the question of being, Heidegger, in spite of his self-proclaimed critical ambitions, would fall back into classical ontology and renew its totality claim that swallows whatever form of alterity. The reduction of individual beings to the sameness of Being, that is constitutive of ontology, would make the ontological question blind to the defiance of being and sameness that proceeds from the plea of the other. This accusation that Levinas set forth as early as 1951 received little attention at the beginning². It rapidly acquired a new urgency in the wake of the wide-spread discussions and suspicions raised by Heidegger's entanglement with national-socialism. The events of 1933 led some to believe that the political

¹This text is an updated self-translation of a paper that originally appeared under the title "Das junghegelianische und ethische Motiv in Heideggers Hermeneutik der Faktizität", in *Wege und Irrwege des neueren Umgangs mit Heideggers Werk*, ed. by I. M. Fehér, Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1991, pp.-. We thank the original publisher for permitting the publication of this adapted translation.

²See E. Levinas, "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?" (*Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 56, 1951), p. 88-98. It formed the starting block of *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, 4th ed. 1984).

error had something to do with a certain and typically ontological blindness towards the ethical dimension. Seen from an outside perspective, i. e. regardless of the precise circumstances and the specific context of Heidegger's own janus-like involvement, there is something to the suggestion, reinstated by Adorno among others, that the totality claim of philosophy can translate into a tendency for some form or other of political totalitarianism. In this blindness, that one could date back to Plato, if not earlier, Heidegger would be just one of the latest links in a long chain of philosophers, that also includes many of his contemporaries, like Lukács or Sartre who were at some time prone to celebrate stalinism as a progress in the conscience of freedom. Intuitively, one could actually think that philosophy, with its inner drive towards clear, ultimate and certain principles always had a hard time to reconcile itself with such a gray element as democracy, that rests on the wavering ground of public opinion and its seductiveness. Philosophers, whose science Plato once described as being of a kingly nature, have never been outstanding democrats.³

It would certainly be hazardous to dispute any relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and his political error. Heidegger, for one, was the first to recognize it: his political proclamations drew all their authority and substance from his philosophy, as if he had wanted to stamp on the political events of his time the seal of a "philosophical spirit", as Jacques recently pointed out.⁴ In view of the intensity of the philosophical as well as of the political involvement it appears doubtful however whether this engagement has to be attributed to any absence of an ethics in Heidegger, as is customary in large parts of the literature, and as if ethical philosophers of the time did not find their peace with national-socialism (that to most did not yet appear in 1933 to be clearly totalitarian - the Röhm putsch of June 30, 1934, opened the eyes of everyone, including Jaspers and Heidegger). Then Heidegger was certainly possessed of an ethical awareness. When Jean Beaufret asked him, immediately after the war, "when are you going to write an ethics?", he responded instantly, thus demonstrating his sensitivity on this matter, with a long letter on humanism,

³Compare the observations, influenced by Levinas, of R. Bernasconi, "Habermas and Arendt on the Philosopher's 'Error': Tracking the Diabolical in Heidegger", in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 14/15, 1991, p. 3-24, especially p. 3: "The scandal arising from Heidegger's political involvement with Nazism and from his postwar silence on the holocaust refuses to go away, but the evident glee of Heidegger's philosophical opponents in the consequent damage to his reputation is misjudged. It is not only Heidegger, both the man and his thought, who is diminished by the whole affair, but also, and perhaps primarily, philosophy itself."

⁴*De l'esprit* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).

which became the first public testimony of his newly accentuated thinking in the footsteps of the *Kehre*.⁵ To this day, it has remained one of the most representative, evocative and readable texts of the later Heidegger. Insofar as an ethics has to reflect on the ἦθος or the dwelling of humankind on this earth, replied Heidegger, this thinking was already under way in the ontology of *Being and Time*. The ontology of *Dasein*, he provokingly stated, was in itself an "originary ethics" (*ursprüngliche Ethik*).⁶ By stating this, Heidegger anticipated Levinas' accusation: ontology is not outside ethics, it offers rather its most radical realization.

But in what sense can ontology claim to be the original form of ethics? Was this ethics really to be found in the fundamental ontology of 1927? This claim is far from obvious since, if it were, nobody would have dreamed of incriminating the absence of an ethics in Heidegger's main work. In order to sort out this important question, we can now fortunately go beyond, or behind, *Sein und Zeit* and take into account the earlier lectures. *Sein und Zeit* is so cryptic, so formal in a way, that it is hard to take it at face value. For instance: did Heidegger really intend to set forth the pure idea of Being and to decline its generic variations? Furthermore, to what extent did he understand himself as a phenomenologist after exposing his anti-phenomenological notion of *phainomenon*? Why did he outline such an ambitious table of contents he had no certainty of bringing to its end? Why did he question the whole project of the book on its last page? Was existential, even theological self-understanding more important to him than ontological, phenomenological inquiry? What or who were his true inspirations, Luther or Husserl, Augustine or Kant, Kierkegaard or Dilthey? Then came the numerous reinterpretations after *Being and Time*, that in the meantime have been discovered to be just that, reinterpretations.

For a long time, readers who did not have the privilege to follow Heidegger's notorious lectures were left in the dark as to the ultimate intentions of *Sein und Zeit*. The publication of texts from the early Heidegger could offer a new key to the understanding of his whole philosophy. In a sense, Heidegger appeared more "honest" in his earlier lectures, philosophizing ingeniously on the issues that preoccupied him, without a philosophical system in his back pocket

⁵On this see my "Prolegomena to an Understanding of Heidegger's Turn", in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 14/15, 1991, p. 85-108.

⁶M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2nd ed. 1978), p. 353.

or, despite his obvious self-awareness, wanting to make a name for himself (otherwise he would have published some of his work). When pressed by his students to be more specific on some theoretical issues, like his relation to Husserl's phenomenology, he bluntly told them that he was "not a philosopher", going as far as to say that he might even be something like a "christian theologian".⁷

Wherever Heidegger speaks of ontology in his earlier lectures, he always associates it to the general task of an ontology of *Dasein* that would spring from the "self-preoccupation" that inhabits every human. The strongest indication of this can be seen in the title of the lecture of the summer semester of 1923, a relatively late stage for the "early" Heidegger: "Ontology" with the sub-title in brackets "Hermeneutics of Facticity", as if the terms were equivalent.⁸ Facticity means our own specific being insofar as it is something that we have to "be", that is, to assume, to take in our care. This idea of a *Zu-sein*, that we have "to be" this specific being that we are, will go into the concept of "existence" in *Being and Time*. It suggests, simply put, that our being, our *Dasein*, is a task for itself, for ourselves. Whether it realizes it or not (and not to, is to flee from oneself according to Heidegger), our *Dasein* is characterized by the fact (thus, the facticity) that it is open to its own being. In classical terms, which Heidegger is trying to avoid, one could say that our *Dasein* is distinguished by a capacity of self-reflection concerning its own possibilities of existing, a self-reflection that is of an utterly ethical import, since it deals with a decision we have to assume concerning our being in this world. To be a *Dasein*, to be "there", means that this "there", that we are, can be elevated to consciousness and, yes, our conscience, as something that each one of us has to take up according to the possibilities that are at the time specifically ("jewels") available to us, and only to us.

I would like to expound on this point by saying that for Heidegger, our *Dasein* is constituted by something like an "inner dialogue", a dialogue with itself because it knows or can always know how things are standing about its own self, i.e. what possibilities of existence are being offered to ourselves. Our

⁷Both references from a letter of August 19, 1921 to Karl Löwith, published in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, ed. by D. Pappenfuss and O. Pöggeler, vol. 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1990) p. 29.

⁸M. Heidegger, *GA: 63* (1988). On the anything but accidental acquaintance of ontology and hermeneutics in this programme title, see my "Die Hermeneutik der Faktizität als ontologische Destruktion und Ideologiekritik", in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, vol. 2, p. 163-178.

"self" is nothing but this ongoing tacit discussion on what we should, could or must be. That we are confronted to such a "choice" or "resolution" can be confirmed by the negative experience we can have of ourselves when we realize that we could have done things differently, that we missed this or that possibility. Without any doubt, the early Heidegger could find this idea of an inner dialogue in the work of Saint Augustine, one of the most notable mentors of this period, even though Heidegger did not write or speak much about him. Beyond this historical link to Augustine, that coming publications of the earlier Heidegger will document more extensively, it is more important to see the issue itself, the fact that *Dasein* is a self-dialogue, in a state of permanent confrontation with its own self and thus with others (that can very well dwell within us).

Sein und Zeit retained this idea of an inner dialogue of facticity by defining *Dasein* as the being whose own being is constantly at stake. In the same breath, Heidegger could write that *Dasein* is singled out as a being of *Sorge*, of care, and more specifically (lest we be indulged by the later Heidegger into thinking that care only concerns Being in itself!) care of oneself (*Selbstbekümmderung*). In this way, the "ontology" of *Dasein* was unmistakably directed towards ethics, rather: it was in itself an ethical enterprise. Humanity is not characterized by its purely theoretical, intellectual or rational grasp of the world, following the understanding of man as *animal rationale* that dominated the rationalist tradition of philosophy from Plato to Husserl, it is more specifically circumscribed by the task it is for its own self, by its dialogical existence as something it has to take in its care. This task can be described in kantian terms as a *Sollen*, an imperative "to be" that is inscribed in everyone of us, if we want to follow it or not. It is therefore not surprising that Heidegger could rely on Kant's practical philosophy in a lecture course of 1930 on the essence of human liberty, conceived as nothing less than an introduction to philosophy.⁹ To be "free" means that we are not fixed in reality, but that we have to assume ourselves as a project, a future we can open up for ourselves. Even where man appears to be preoccupied by theoretical pursuits, he remains governed by the fundamental imperative of the "care" of *Dasein*. There is no knowledge that isn't an answer to a specific quest worth caring for. The primary mode of our relationship to the world is thus for Heidegger "intoned

⁹M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit. Einleitung in die Philosophie*, GA: 31 (1982).

understanding" (*befindliches Verstehen*). And understanding doesn't here signal primarily a form of "knowledge", as it was, say, for Schleiermacher or Dilthey, who saw in this knowledge the specific avenue of the human sciences. Originally, Heidegger claims, understanding is not to be thought of as a mode of cognition. Rather, it alludes to a "possible being" (*Seinkönnen*), more something than we can do than something that we can know. Heidegger relies on the German locution *sich auf etwas verstehen* (to be able, to be up to the task, to "know-how", etc.), to suggest that understanding is more something like a "competence", an ability to run things, to "know one's way around", than any specific form of theoretical insight. To "understand" something, is to be able, to be up to it, to cope with it, even to master it. It is thus according to such a mode of "understanding" that *Dasein* muddles through existence, that it sorts out how it can manage its affairs. One could say that this understanding is thought of as a mode of self-orientation for *Dasein* that is not so much a means to know as it is to know-how. Some interpreters have pertinently suggested that this analysis brought Heidegger in the vicinity of pragmatism.¹⁰

According to Heidegger, *Dasein* already finds itself immersed in possibilities of understanding, that is more or less conscious projects whose function it is to forestall a potentially threatening course of events. In order to stay afloat in this world in which we are and feel "thrown into", our understanding clings to different possibilities of being and behaving that represent as many interpretative, caring or "fore-caring" ("*vor-sorgende*") anticipations on the world. Before we become aware of it, we find ourselves entangled in historical perspectives and ways of understanding the world (and thus ourselves since we are essentially, following Heidegger, "beings-in-the-worlds"): "Those perspectives, which stand at our disposal more often than not in an implicit manner and in which factual life enters into much more through custom than through any explicit appropriation, open up the avenues for the mobility of care".¹¹ However, as *Dasein*, better still, as potential *Dasein*, we do not remain inexorably captive of these interpretative possibilities. We have the opportunity to elaborate and to raise them to consciousness. This unfolding of our specific situation of understanding is what Heidegger terms *Auslegung*, a

¹⁰See the contributions of C. F. Gethmann and G. Prauss in the volume *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie* (ed. by A. Gethmann-Siefert and O. Pöggeler, Frankfurt a. M.: 1988).

¹¹M. Heidegger, "Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation", ed. by H.-U. Lessing, in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, 6, 1989, p. 241.

concept that ordinarily means "interpretation", but that here amounts to a rendering explicit of what guides our understanding. This possibility of "explicitation", of *Auslegung*, necessarily belongs, as a possibility, to a being that is already characterized by self-care, by self-awareness, even if it always limited. This (self) interpretation is not a process that is added to understanding. It is nothing but understanding carried through its own end. We understand in order to keep abreast and to sort our way out in our world. Consequently, we are also capable of sorting our way out in *Verstehen* itself and to shed light on the anticipations of understanding. Interpretation, hence, merely brings understanding to itself, as a "self-understanding of understanding", so to speak. Heidegger writes: "The development of understanding is what we call interpretation (*Auslegung*). In it, understanding becomes aware of what it has comprehensively understood. In interpretation, understanding doesn't become something else, but itself".¹²

The philosophy that will reflect on this self-interpretation accomplished in the name of a practically oriented understanding will have to carry the name "hermeneutics". "Hermeneutics", specifies Heidegger, is hereby understood "in the original meaning of the word, in which it signifies the task of interpretation".¹³ Interpretation, in turn, has to be taken in its Heideggerian sense, where it signalizes the development of the anticipations of understanding. As a philosophical project, hermeneutics will thus carry to its end a reflective task of interpretation that *Dasein* naturally performs out of itself. The hermeneutics of facticity will thus offer an interpretation of the interpretation of *Dasein*, a self-interpretation of facticity.¹⁴

Its intent is eminently critical and in accord with the tradition of enlightenment. This self-interpretation wants to pave the way to a level of self-transparency (*Selbstdurchsichtigkeit*) that has to be conquered by every *Dasein*.¹⁵ Heidegger's hermeneutics promises to announce to *Dasein* the

¹²*Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 14th ed. 1977), § 32, p. 148

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴For this reading of hermeneutics as a self-interpretation of interpretation, compare C. F. Gethmann, *Verstehen und Auslegung. Das Methodenproblem in der Philosophie Martin Heideggers* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), p. 117, and R. Thurnher, "Hermeneutik und Verstehen in Heideggers *Sein und Zeit*", in *Salzburger Jahrbuch für Philosophie*, 28/29 (1984), p. 107.

¹⁵Even though it was more preponderant in the early lectures, the expression *Selbstdurchsichtigkeit* also appears here and there in *Sein und Zeit* (p. 144, 146). On the importance of this notion of self-transparency in Heidegger's earliest period, see H.-G. Gadamer, "Heideggers 'theologische' Jugendschrift", in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, 6, 1989, p. 232. See also from H.-G. Gadamer, "Heidegger und die Griechen", in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, ed. by D. Pappenfuss and O. Pöggeler, vol. 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1991)

fundamentally open ground-structures of its own being so that the particular *Dasein* can take hold of them. This specific "announcement", *Kundtun*, says Heidegger, is called for since, more often than not, these structures and this openness are missed by factual *Dasein*. It misses its own self, because it recoils from the task of defining and developing its own avenues of understanding through a process of reflective interpretation or appropriation. Instead, *Dasein* lazily takes over the prevailing and public view of things, that alleviates it from the burden of self-determination. Of course, no one can avoid stumbling into the "proven" interpretations that are already there before us. No single *Dasein* can take it upon itself to create its own modes of understanding out of the blue. We all depend on the performance of tradition. But if we do so without self-awareness, without acknowledging what we are doing by repeating what has been transmitted to us, we succumb to a certain "fall" or forfeiture (*Verfallen*). One could easily single out the "theological" origins of this notion of fall, but again it is more urgent to see why it is so appropriate for a being labeled "*Dasein*". Then, in this fall from the possibility of self-determination, we stop in a certain way, to be a *Dasein*, to be "there" where and when the determining decisions concerning ourselves take place. The earlier Heidegger spoke of an essential "ruin", a *Ruinanz*, to evoke this self-abolition of *Dasein*. In lectures posterior to *Being and time* and in his recently published *Beiträge zur Philosophie* of 1937-39, Heidegger coined the notion of "*Wegsein*" to describe this venue of a *Dasein* that "isn't there".¹⁶ It is not there (*da*), but away (*weg*), away from itself, by letting someone else (the "we", *das Man*) conduct the self-dialogue of *Dasein*. It has to be stressed that this fall or ruin is in a sense unavoidable. Heidegger will therefore single it out as an existential, as a foremost category or predicament of our existence. Nevertheless, the notion of *Dasein* is constituted as a possible, perhaps sisyphical counter-instance against this fall from oneself. And the reflective unfolding or explicitating interpretation of our hermeneutical situation is the means through which we can become aware of ourselves as *Dasein* and control our tendency to fall into anything but this debate with ourselves, to which we are invited or compelled as *Dasein*.

As a self-interpretation of our self-interpretation, the philosophical hermeneutics of factual existence will take up this declaration of war against the

p. 62: "Heidegger meinte mit *Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, wie er sich damals ausdrückte, Erhellung. Er meint, daß das *Dasein* sich erhellt, sich hell wird."

¹⁶GA: 29, 94 ff.; *Beiträge*, GA: 65, 301, 323 ff.

falling tendency of *Dasein*, in the name of a more authentic, more *Dasein*-like way of comprehending ourselves. Insofar, one has to acknowledge that its point of departure is thoroughly ethical. It aims to combat the cover-up of facticity that holds sway wherever *Dasein* gathers its self-determination "from the world", instead of doing so from its inner dialogue, as it is incised, as a possibility we all have before our eyes, in the fundamental structure of *Dasein*. This self-definition of *Dasein* out of the world (the "we", etc.) will be qualified by Heidegger, in the strong terminology of the Young Hegelians, as nothing less than "self-alienation" (*Selbstentfremdung*). The expression is rigorously justified, since *Dasein* is not itself anymore, that is the virtual agent of its own self-determination, but the mere exponent of an unquestioned self-interpretation that stems from elsewhere. It is "away" from itself, literally: self-alienated. The avowed programme of the hermeneutics of facticity will be to fight against this self-alienation in the hope of reminding *Dasein* of its virtual possibility of liberty or self-determination, however limited it may be according to the always different situations we are in, or that we are, period: "It is the task of hermeneutics to enable the specific *Dasein* to gain access to its own character of being as *Dasein*, to proclaim it and to trace back the self-alienation that is plaguing *Dasein*."¹⁷ What is envisioned, to remain in the vocabulary of the Young Hegelians, is something like an autonomous self-consciousness of man, that Heidegger identifies as an "awakenedness" that needs to be conquered: "The theme of hermeneutical inquiry is the always particular *Dasein*, more specifically questioned as to its character of being with a view to developing a radical awakenedness of its own self."¹⁸

Those potent formulations carry a tone that is reminiscent of the critique of ideologies. In reality, the enterprise of the early Heidegger is not so distant from the concerns of the Young Hegelians. The prime objective of this generation of students that was disillusioned by Hegel's system was to do away with the merely theoretical and idealistic perspective of classical philosophy to make way for a more practically oriented form of critical reflexion. This motive found its expression in the famous eleventh thesis of Marx on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; what is

¹⁷*Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, GA: 63, 15: "Die Hermeneutik hat die Aufgabe, das je eigene Dasein in seinem Seinscharakter diesem Dasein selbst zugänglich zu machen, mitzuteilen, der Selbstentfremdung, mit der das Dasein geschlagen ist, nachzugehen."

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 16: "Thema der hermeneutischen Untersuchung ist je eigenes Dasein, und zwar als hermeneutisch befragt auf seinen Seinscharakter im Absehen darauf, eine wurzelhafte Wachheit seiner selbst auszubilden."

important is to change it". It is not surprising to see Heidegger, in spite of his well-documented aversion for communism, express his sympathy for Marx' notion of alienation and his understanding of it as an essential dimension of our historical destiny in as late a text as the "Letter on humanism".¹⁹ It corresponded all too well to his earlier motivations, at a time when he was certainly unable to read anything from Marx or even Freud.

Marx surely isn't the most fashionable of authors nowadays. Nevertheless, a form of critique of ideologies is at work wherever one attempts to unmask a doctrine that aims to hamper the exercise of human freedom, be it propagated by the metaphysical understanding of man, the capitalist ideology, the politically correct movement, or by self-proclaimed liberators, in short, by every form of prevailing wisdom that doesn't question its own foundations. What Heidegger espouses is not any determined form of a critique of ideology, as they are to be found in the young Hegelians, say a socio-political version thereof or a critique of religion (though one could encounter some traces of these in his work). Heidegger merely teaches that the ethical motive for a critique of ideology or false consciousness is already inscribed in the fundamental structure of a being potentially understood as *Dasein*. Heidegger remembers us that this "authentic" structure of *Dasein* always has to be conquered anew by each and everyone, and that it has to be saved from any dogmatic claims at ever exhausting the promise of liberty. *Dasein* is inhabited by a fall, by a being-away-from-itself, in kantian terms, by a "self-inflicted minority". Out of this universal philosophical horizon it becomes possible to differentiate and to hail different forms or applications of a critique of ideology. The marxist version ist but one of the possible realizations, and it has to accept other forms besides it.

One of the opportunities the hermeneutics of facticity offers philosophy today could be to help us relativize the prevailing and unquestioned oppositions of schools and traditions, most prominently the opposition of hermeneutics and critique of ideologies that has dominated the scene ever since Lukacs' and Adorno's attacks against Heidegger and up to the more recent debates between Habermas, Gadamer, and Derrida. It is not surprising that students of Heidegger like Marcuse, Löwith or even Apel could start off with Heidegger and then feel completely at home in the critique of ideologies of the

¹⁹*Wegmarken*, 336.

marxist tradition. Through Heidegger they had learned that the fundamental impetus of philosophy lies in a fundamental critique of the flattening or levelling effect of prevailing dogmaticisms that restrain the possibilities of human freedom and self-awareness.

Heidegger certainly shares the unsatisfactory feeling of the young Hegelians concerning the philosophical concept that remains strictly theoretical. The theoretical ambition of traditional philosophy has been to grasp the totality of the world, but more often than not its results appeared irrelevant to the practical concerns of our *Dasein*. What the concept can never encompass, because it is, in principle, open, is the particular and specific realization of the possibility of existence that each one represents. Besides Augustine, it was Kierkegaard who imparted to Heidegger this "Young Hegelian" suspicion regarding self-sufficient speculation, thus awaking in him a sensitivity for the higher urgency of the ethical.

Nevertheless Heidegger knew that his philosophical endeavour could not entirely forfeit the theoretical medium. This is why he took good care to propose his own conceptual framework - that he, significantly, never ceased to modify before and after *Being and Time*, to protect it with more or less success from any scholastical rigidity - under the provision that he was just offering "formal-indicative" (*formalanzeigende*) orientation. The notion of "formal indication" means that the terms used to describe existence require a specific and unprescribable process of appropriation on the part of the reader, or listener. This process is not contained in the concept itself, it can only be awakened, encouraged, admonished by it. The formal indication would be totally misunderstood as the description of an objective state of affairs. As an exhortation to self-awareness on the terrain of every specific *Dasein*, it wants to be "filled" with concrete content according to our different situations. The formal indicative can thus only suggest or "indicate" the possibility of *Dasein*, the openness of self-determination. Heidegger stresses this point clearly: "All the propositions on the being of *Dasein* (...) have, as uttered sentences, the character of an indication: they only indicate *Dasein* whereas, as uttered sentences, they at first look mean something that is readily perceptible; (...) but they indicate a possible understanding and the conceptuality of the structures of

Dasein that lies in such an understanding. (As sentences indicating such an ἔρμηνεύειν, they have the character of a hermeneutical indication)."²⁰

Such formal indications are what the Jaspers review of 1921 alluded to under the heading of "hermeneutical concepts", that is notions that "we can only gain access to in the always renewed attempt to accomplish the task of interpretation"²¹. The formal indication introduces us in a situation of decision, but its concrete realization must remain open²² since it has to be "performed" by every specific *Dasein* and according to its own unique way. The admonished awakenedness has to happen as a free accomplishment against the stream of self-alienation. This self-illumination of existence is what Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity is all about.

This appellative, exhortatory dimension of the urged awakenedness will go on to command the entire problematic of conscience (*Gewissen*) in *Being and Time*. As an existential, this conscience only takes the form of a "call" (*Ruf*), a call "to-want-to-have-a-conscience" (*Gewissen-haben-wollen*). This call remains therefore formal in nature, and critics were quick to incriminate here yet another lacuna of Heidegger's analysis. But according to Heidegger, it doesn't fall in the immediate competence of philosophy to recommend any concrete models for our edification. His existential hermeneutics is content with the task of "recalling" this call of conscience which has to be filled by everyone of us, and in our way, and whose structure is strictly identical to that of *Dasein*. Then man is as a potential "da", or "awakenedness" regarding its existential decisions, distinguished as a being of conscience, aware of a "debt" (*Schuldigsein*) to its own self. *Dasein* is "in debt" insofar as it has the tendency, in falling from its possibilities, to have someone else take those decisions for it instead of

²⁰GA: 21, 410: "Sie indizieren nur Dasein, während sie als ausgesprochene Sätze doch zunächst Vorhandenes meinen (...). Sie indizieren das *mögliche* Verstehen und die in solchem Verstehen zugängliche mögliche Begreifbarkeit der Daseinsstrukturen. (Als diese ein ἔρμηνεύειν indizierende Sätze haben sie den Charakter der *hermeneutischen* Indikation)." Compare GA: 63, 80: "Die *formale Anzeige* ist immer mißverstanden, wenn sie als fester, allgemeiner Satz genommen (...) wird." That Heidegger retained this notion of formal indication after *Being and Time* is confirmed by the lecture course of 1929/30, GA: 29, 421-435.

²¹"Anmerkungen zu Karl Jaspers *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*" (1919/21), in *Wegmarken*, p. 10-11.

²²See on this O. Pöggeler, "Heideggers Begegnung mit Dilthey", in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, 4, 1986-7, p. 134. Compare also H.-G. Gadamer, "Heidegger und die Griechen", in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, ed. by D. Pappenfuss and O. Pöggeler, vol. 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1991) p. 70: "Es geht wahrlich nicht darum, Heideggers Sprache zu wiederholen. Dagegen hat sich Heidegger immer mit Entschiedenheit gewehrt. Anfangs war er sich der Gefahren solcher Wiederholung so sehr bewußt, daß er das Wesen philosophischer Aussagen geradezu 'formale Anzeige' nannte. Damit wollte er sagen, man könne im Denken höchstens die Richtung zeigen. Aber man müsse selber die Augen aufmachen. Dann erst werde man die Sprache finden, die das sagt, was man sieht."

confronting them resolutely and with full responsibility. Here again, one can perceive in Heidegger's analysis of *Gewissen* an echo to Kant's ethics of *Sollen*. Kant also only wanted to recall the appellative character of moral duty which stems from every human reason - and against the primacy of theoretical, syllogistical metaphysics. We cannot avoid being touched, perhaps shattered by a compelling moral law, the application of which however can only occur at the level of our own specific maxims and judgment. For the application of the moral law, there are in turn no rules nor edificatory examples. Every *Dasein* must take full responsibility for its own self. Similarly, moral awakenedness also retains for Heidegger the status of a "task" that lies before everyone and from which we can never recoil, so long as we exist and feel summoned by the call "to be" our own *Dasein*. Man as *Dasein* is thus characterized from the outset as a Being of possibility (*Seinkönnen*) and of "having-to-be", of *Sollen*.

Through this understanding of humanness from the vantage point of an existence approached in purely ethical and practical terms, through the vocabulary of care (*Sorge*), Heidegger certainly contributed immensely to the rehabilitation of practical philosophy in our century. It has to be noted that Heidegger's earliest lectures were followed by students like H.-G. Gadamer, L. Strauss, H. Arendt and H. Jonas, all of which were later credited with a revival of practical philosophy.²³ One could also evoke later students like J. Patocka or E. Tugendhat that clearly perceived the ethical import of Heidegger's ontology of facticity. Even if this rehabilitation of practical philosophy took on many different forms, some of which clearly at odds with Heidegger's own intentions, it is more than likely that, from its own possibility, it has to be traced back to Heidegger, more specifically to his rediscovery of man as an essentially caring and ethical being that was carried through by his hermeneutics of facticity. This rediscovery of our situated and ethical humanity was outlined as a counter-model against the strong epistemological bent of neo-kantianism and the methodological perspective that was dominating the course of philosophy in the twenties and also prevailing in some sections of phenomenology. It was grounded in a mainly theoretical, contemplative understanding of human subjectivity. For it, humanity is defined through its primarily intellectual competence, through an attitude of theoretical perception of the world. The

²³On this, we are following a suggestion of Manfred Riedel, "Seinsverständnis und Sinn für das Tunliche. Der hermeneutische Weg zur 'Rehabilitation der praktischen Philosophie'", in *Hören auf die Sprache. Die akroamatische Dimension der Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 131-162.

issue of the cognitive relationship between the subject and its object thus became the central concern of philosophers. In his early lectures, Heidegger discovered that this academical question wasn't up to the urgencies of his time, that he found in a state of moral disarray, manifest in the all-prevailing nihilism, a crisis of the values of modernity and its scientificity. A new beginning was called for. Under the "Young-Hegelian" influence of Kiekegaard, Heidegger called into question the entire epistemological background of his contemporaries and attempted to reconquer a more radical, that meant a more *ethical* understanding of our human being-in-this-world. That this momentous step was followed by a multifarious rehabilitation of practical philosophy was nothing but the logical outcome of his ambitious hermeneutics of facticity.

If Heidegger did not develop any specific "ethics", it is only because his entire project, founded as it is on the self-preoccupation of *Dasein*, which is also "there" collectively, was ethical from the ground up. For a hermeneutics of facticity, the clear-cut division of philosophy in disciplines like logic, aesthetics, epistemology, and then, besides the others, an ethics, corresponded to a false reification and fragmentation²⁴ of philosophical inquiry that is always directed to the whole of our experience ("*das aufs Ganze geht*") - a reification against which all Young Hegelians are immuned. This ethical motive remained predominant in Heidegger's later work, even though the high-flown discourse of conscience, indebtedness and authenticity seemed to fade, to make room for a more prudent, more serene approach of our dwelling on this earth. The thinking of the destiny of being that we encounter in the later Heidegger clearly results from a radicalization of the experience of human "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*). In view of its being-thrown-onto-the-world, human *Dasein* ceases in a way to emerge as the sole architect of its projects of existence, as appeared to be the case in the early lectures as well as in *Being and Time*. It now receives its possibilities from the history of being that has already decided, before us, how being is to be seized. The somewhat peripheral character of humanness in respect to this seemingly overbearing history of being doesn't have to lead to resignation in front of the *fatum* that we always come to late and thus have to renounce any attempt at enlightenment. On the contrary: Historical enlightenment has now become the main task of philosophy. Out of its thrownness, *Dasein* comes to reflect upon the projections and paths of

²⁴Compare GA: 29, 52 ff, § 10: "Die Bildung der Schuldisziplinen Logik, Physik, Ethik als Verfall des eigentlichen Philosophierens".

intelligibility that have constituted its history. With respect to his interpretatory praxis, Heidegger's thinking remained thoroughly hermeneutical. The ethical motivation that distinguishes his hermeneutics did not cease to command Heidegger's attempt to clarify the history of being. The "destruction" of this history of being still aimed "to prepare a metamorphosed dwelling of man in this world", as Heidegger reinstated in a text of April 1976, which could have been his last philosophical pronouncement.²⁵ This quest, that directs Heidegger's entire work, is obviously ethical from the outset and in its consequences.

What one could find questionable is thus not the absence of any ethics in Heidegger, but perhaps the somewhat utopian character of this idea of a whole new type of dwelling on this earth. This revolutionary zeal also goes back to the Young Hegelians. It could very well be that such a utopism might also have been a determining factor in Heidegger's political engagement. He wrote explicitly that Hitler's "revolution" implied an entire metamorphosis of our own *Dasein*,²⁶ as if national-socialism would be the instance to finally carry out the revolution sought for by the Young Hegelians!

It would be erroneous to ascribe the political error of 1933, that one will have to learn to differentiate from what later became manifest as the reality of national-socialism, to some "absence" of an ethical consciousness. We hope not to be misunderstood on a issue so sensible as this, but one could also see in Heidegger's political errancy the consequence of an exacerbated moral consciousness. There is no doubt that the hermeneutics of facticity was inhabited by an ethical motive. One will also not call into question the fact that Heidegger jumped into the fray in 1933 *because* he felt he could not remain indifferent to the requirements of his time, thus putting into praxis his own idea of resolute existence.²⁷ Events proved him humilatingly wrong, but Heidegger was not lacking any principle of responsibility. Far from it: since *Dasein* must carry responsibility for its situatedness and thus its community, Heidegger

²⁵Grußwort an die Teilnehmer des zehnten Colloquiums vom 14.-16. Mai 1976 in Chicago, in *Jahresgabe der Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft*, 1989, p. 13: "...die Möglichkeit eines gewandelten Weltaufenthaltes des Menschen vorzubereiten".

²⁶See the opening sentence of M. Heidegger, "Anruf an die Deutschen Studenten (3. Nov. 1933)", in *Martin Heidegger und das 'Dritte Reich'*, edited by B. Martin (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), p. 177: "Die nationalsozialistische Revolution bringt die völlige Umwälzung unseres deutschen Daseins."

²⁷See on this connection I. M. Fehér, "Fundamental Ontology and Political Interlude: Heidegger as Rector of the University of Freiburg", in *Knowledge and Politics. Case Studies in the Relationship Between Epistemology and Political Philosophy*, ed. by M. Dascal and O. Gruengard (Boulder/San Francisco/London: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 316-351.

invested himself, with great risk to his personal reputation, in the political arena in the hope, he believed, of orienting what he took to be a promising revolution in the direction that was appropriate. If Heidegger had any right to see some positive possibilities in the "revolutionary" outburst, born out of many motives in 1933, is a moot point. To be sure, there were at the time more lucid and much braver estimations of what the "awakening", the "*Aufbruch*", was all about. But the mistake that is relevant for philosophers could lie in the expectation that a *fundamental* and *ethical* revolution of *Dasein* could be brought about through political means. It is the illusion that concrete politics could some day satisfy the requirements of the ideal state. Our point is that the sense of the ethical dimension is possibly overburden in this respect. It could very well be that the radicality of human finitude and the limits it sets on any dream of a total revolution aren't heeded in such an expectation.

In conclusion, one will have to recognize that the revolutionary point of departure of Heidegger's early hermeneutics of facticity had the often overlooked merit of calling to attention the primacy and the urgency of the issue of ethicity for a being such as *Dasein*. Against the back-drop of an epistemological and methodological self-reduction of philosophy, that he saw in neo-kantianism, in the epistemological orientation of Dilthey's hermeneutics and even in phenomenology itself, Heidegger contributed greatly, by reappropriating some tenets of Young Hegelianism, to the reawakening of an original ethical consciousness, that led to a rehabilitation of practical philosophy. But we could also learn out of this new sensitivity for the ethical sphere that there are also limits to the possibilities of a philosophical ethics, such that they can underscore the problematic nature of any messianism that would promise to revolutionize *Dasein* by finally bringing it back to its forgotten essence. Isn't the Young Hegelian hope for a total and political revolution the expression of an overexcited moral conscience and a seduction that surpasses the realm of what is possible for our finitude? A practical philosophy that would take into account this finitude of moral conscience would have many lessons to learn from Heidegger's example.