Searching for Dasein: Positive Science's Failure to Become the Philosophical Locus of Natural Knowledge Universality

Lucas Ribeiro VOLLET
Department of Philosophy,
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina,
R. Eng. Agronômico Andrei Cristian Ferreira, s/n - Trindade,
Florianópolis - SC, 88040-900, Brázil
Email: luvollet@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

I will argue in this article, using mainly Heideggerian conceptual apparatus that positive science has failed to represent the philosophical *locus* to ground the phenomenological-essential structure of the universality of human knowledge of the natural world. To show the phenomenological structure of the synthetic *a priori* judgments of natural science, Kant tried to substitute metaphysics through transcendental philosophy, but he only managed to develop the programmatic form of *philosophical questioning*. That programmatic account has not yet formed the objective historical consciousness of the universality of natural science. It is the mere "possible experience" of a subject. I will argue that *subjective possible experience* cannot give a historical perspective on the universality of scientific possibilities. It is, therefore, an incomplete property for the phenomenological codification of the intentional unity of meaning of the natural science content. The result is a void of ontological parameters for judging natural science's role in our culture as the highest instance of universal knowledge.

Keywords: Dasein; positive science; universality of human knowledge; subjective possible experience.

INTRODUCTION: HEIDEGGER ON THE REIFICATION OF RATIONAL PARAMETERS OF UNIVERSALITY

Two interconnected themes underlie the key that unlocks Heidegger's philosophy's rhetorical and conceptual engine. The first theme, called "ontological difference", represents the author's engagement with the division between the question of Being (*Sein)* and the question of beings (*Seiendes)* (Philipse¸2021; Chalita & Sedzielarz, 2021). This thematic object allows the author to generalize a model for the study of any phase of philosophical thought. The model involves the question: what is the orientation with

which this phase of philosophy approached the question of the essence of Being? If it was from an ontic orientation, that is, giving primacy to entities in their regular interconnections, the author believes that there is the phenomenon of forgetting or concealment at work. Suppose it was from an ontological orientation, giving primacy to the question of Being *qua* Being, or the essence of Being. In that case, the author believes there was an original and authentic understanding of the very production of the categorial structure in which Being is shown, phenomenologically codified, or uncovered.

The second is the theme of "Dasein", i.e., in Heidegger's words, the entity that "in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (1962, p. 32). This means that we are grasping "that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question" (1962. p. 35). Indeed, this brings us to the question of Being and truth its temporality. The existential nature of Dasein – or its finite, factual, uncertain situation – underlies the consolidation of a horizon of possibilities that appears in the world as a *future* and not a mere logical-semantic or imaginative abstraction of the diagrammatic possibilities of modelling *truth*.

> Dasein projects itself towards its potentiality-for-Being in the 'truth'. This projection is possible because Being-in-the-truth makes up a definite way in which Dasein may exist (1962, p. 415).

Thus, Dasein can be called that way of being in which we place ourselves when we are in possession of some specific temporal awareness of the question of truth and the possibilities of truth (Guignon, 2012). According to Heidegger:

> Dasein's Being finds its meaning in temporality. But temporality is also the condition that makes historicality possible as a temporal kind of Being which Dasein itself possesses, regardless of whether or how Dasein is an entity 'in time'. (1962, p. 42)

The two themes (ontological difference and Dasein) are intertwined. Heidegger believes that the existential situation of the question about Being creates an ontic-ontological primacy, in the very sense that it is through (Dasein's) existential path that *ontological difference* comes to be experienced as a challenge of (Dasein's) own possibilities and horizons of interpretation (Shah¸ 2015). As our experience tends to dramatize the conceptual and hermeneutical history produced by this Dasein, this mode-of-being becomes close to us ontically, but not ontologically: "Dasein is ontically 'closest' to itself and ontologically farthest" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 36). This is to say that we come to be acquainted with our Dasein through its psychological and anthropological reifications. It is natural for us to be sensitive to that mode-of-being through psychological reifications, such as anxiety and fear, or mechanistic reasoning, such as probability and the calculation of marginal harm. Heidegger spends pages and pages of his most influential work (*Being and Time*) narrating the slight and subtle differences in authenticity between each of these dramaturgical expressions of Dasein (Micali, 2022). However, I do not need, in order to capture the main point, to go down this avenue. The fact that each historical human being has become a presence that contributes to the conceptual universe through his *Dasein* does not prevent us from observing this *Dasein* without its human counterpart.

In this theoretical exercise, Dasein describes the types of philosophical expression that a historical epoch uses to codify its possibilities and question the essence of Being. At

the cost of advancing a daring interpretative license, we could complement this description by stating that some of those codifications are made ideologically, narratively, and according to other inauthentic forms of pseudo-philosophical awareness. As this codification comprises the phenomenological correlation structures that will come to be essential, each historical epoch is sensitive to Being through its philosophy, or ideology, which defines for it its notion of "possible" and "necessary", and the subsequent parameters of the universality of its historical phase (phenomenologically codified by the synthetic and analytical *a priori* ideal structures that spread through the institutions of mediation of truth, such as language and scientific paradigms).

My hypothesis does match a typical interpretation of Heidegger. According to it, what Heidegger is trying to do, throughout his career through different doors, is to rescue a pre-metaphysical, pre-psychological, but also pre-linguistic (and pre-intentional) way of studying the phenomenon of openness that generates *reformist interpretations* of the difference between essence and factuality—and the subsequent awareness of "possible truth" that this difference normativizes. This form must also be pre-propositional to avoid the state of normative obscuration created by the logical-semantic idealization of this sphere of essences. What he intends by reusing the controversial expression "Dasein" is to define the place of questioning where the original question is rescued, instead of obscured. As he defines Dasein at the beginning of *Being and Time* (2010) as the being that is in question in its own Being, he succeeds in invoking not a reification of ontological difference, but the reflexive place where that difference is generated. This study is possible, however, only through a kind of rescue of the original ontological question. The knowledge about essence/factuality is generated not in the calming humour of a resigned attitude but through an attitude of defiance and contravention. The places where this knowledge is possible are those where there is still room for reform, either by means of revision or reinterpretation.

ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AND DASEIN

What the problematization of Dasein thematizes is the ability to generate knowledge about the difference between essence and actual existence (factuality), *as a problem.* Heidegger calls that the *ontological difference.* The expression *ontological difference* refers primarily to the difference between *Seiendes* and *Sein*, beings and the Being of beings. The type of knowledge generated in the production of this difference is that of negation, or the possible expansion of knowledge of the entities beyond the sphere of its positive presence. The theme of negation, however, is controversial enough not to warrant a simple description. I will have to review this notion little by little, as the text develops. A good fixed point to introduce the problem is Kant's reflection on the object of transcendental theology of the *Transcendental Dialectics*, where he discusses two different forms of determination. For Kant (1998):

> ...the thoroughgoing determination in our reason is grounded on a transcendental substratum, which contains as it were entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken, then this substratum is nothing other than the idea of an All of reality. All true negations are then but limits, which they could not be called unless they were grounded in the unlimited (the All) (p. 555).

Logical negation has a character limited to a unilateral opposition, that is, it is limited to a rule of exclusion of certain possibilities, while ontological negation (or transcendental)

explores a substrate of all possibilities excluded by the determination. According to Kant, the rule "indicated only by the word 'no', is never truly linked to a concept, but only to the relationship of this with other in judgment" (Kant, 1998, p. 555). It is the last representation of difference which interests us. Knowledge of that difference is set to highlight the ontological character contained in the awareness of the *specific or essential differences* that characterize the limits of the counterfactual possibilities of being. Speaking of Aristotle, Heidegger (1995) states "...he designates questioning concerning beings as a whole and questioning concerning what the beings of beings, their essence, their nature is" (p. 34).

As polemic as it may sound, I will assume as our reading hypothesis that the coining of this expression (ontological difference) reflects Heidegger's strategy for approaching the theme of the "essence" or essential possibilities of Being (*being qua being*). This hypothesis granted, the ontological difference is the description of the stability of any awareness of possible-truth, i.e., the description of the *categorial stage* where the awareness of truth possibility is distinguished from possible-falsehood in a consistent way. That consistency equals the tolerance of Being to counterfactual assessment, or the *limits of the non-actual* for the beings compatible with that generic category. The scientific awareness of that moment of stability is what conditions the consolidation of a paradigm of studies, when the categorial fondation is assumed as consensual and even accepted with a degree of blindness. The scientific stage of that awareness is one way of making consciouss experience "positive", in the sense that its intencional correlations are then bound to the surface of evidence. Positive sciences may be seem as a production of stable platforms of negation, in order to ground any higher speculation in a theoretical unity that is still connected to positive interpretations. This is a politics to avoid crisis in paradigmatic studies.

Let's use an allegory to color this explanation. We may imagine that when humanity, entering the stages of high speculation, comes to conceptualize about the *possible* in an ontological way, i.e., from the perspective of the *essential difference* of Being, it is also able to create that awareness as a knowledge that is modeled against the background of a negation, a counterfactual assessment, or a "difference". If it is able to enter the conjectual activity avoiding indifference and indiscernibility, one can claim to have mastered some degree of knowledge of the difference between non being and being. Some categorial ground is stablished to set that difference as primitive and stable. As Being can be said in many ways, each category will express that difference in a manner proper to its ontological region, and therefore that humanity stage built a compreension of Being that is prior or fundamental. The fundamentality of that awareness is destined to be forgotten, though, the more that compreension of the ontological region is based on a deep categorial frame that is taken for granted and then its negative aspect is taken out of questioning. Positivism – as a philosophical claim on the computational and verificational view on meaning – is the most complete stage of that forgetfulness of the negative part of the compreension.

The degree of clarity that a stage of civilization can give to this difference can be checked by monitoring the stability of its models to predict consistency. In one of Heidegger's own examples, Thales of Milleto tried to gain knowledge of this difference, but he failed, because he determined the Being of beings by using another being: water. As this example shows no ontological difference in the characterization of beings and their determination, in Thales' explanation no awareness of the categorical foundation that

systematizes the generic compatibility of the beings of the considered group-category – physis – was achieved. In fact, only after Aristotle's Metaphysics could the ontological question about the first principles – or the highest causes – be fully separated from the special sciences and then absorbed by the categorial question. Non-contradiction hence becomes the center of the first-science problem.

We may think of that as one of the most primitive stages of intellectual conciousness. Once faced with this phenomenon, the Being can be unfolded in its possibilities according to its essential differences, that is, from a negative knowledge of peculiar kind, capable of avoiding indifference, confusion, conceptual instability. As humanity is now ready to enter the speculative arena without losing itself in some mythological dramaturgy, it becomes ready to fix parameters of rational discourse. That difference is the awareness of possibility as consistent compatibility, i.e., of the stable points where truth is distanced from falsehood in unified ways. From the beggining it is a Logical awareness, although only after some ontological reflection (Aristotle's metaphysics) the Greek cuture was able to make that awareness reflectively as a law: non-contradiction.

After considering this way of generating knowledge of ontological difference, we can say that we do not know or are not sure about all the strategies used by a scientific culture to generate this knowledge of the possible, as opposed to the factual. The history of the Greeks is one of the unique references we have. We know that this is an expression of intellectual activity in its most speculative and theoretical forms (a conceptualization), but we have no idea if the example of the Greeks would repeat itself in another scientific culture. To speak of western culture, there are at least two radically different ways that confronted each other at some point: metaphysics and the natural science. Both tried to generate ontic knowledge from some deep conceptualization, although the second is more sensitive to empirical revision (French & McKenzie, 2012; Bhaskar, 2014). We know little about how the ontological difference is generated because we have no means of analysing it without some knowlegde of how things are pre-conceptually. Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (2010), promises to study that pre-stage of the problem. He wanted to thematize that negative activity of conceptualization from its pre-conceptual root, as something present in the structure of the problematization, i.e, the being that – because of its finite nature – is the mode the positiveness of Being is problematized.

As a reading hypothesis, the idea of *Dasein* finds a place in the Heideggerian system as his conceptual door to access the theme of "possibility" or "differential essence" through the original structures in which *possibilities* open up. In the work *Plato's Sophist*, Heidegger (1997) states: "to be disclosing, to remove the world from concealdness and coveredness. (…) that is a mode of being of Human Dasein" (p.12).

KANT'S LOGIC OF EXPERIENCE AND THE ATTEMPT TO RESCUE THE DASEIN THAT *DISCLOSES* THE PARAMETERS OF UNIVERSALITY FOR NATURAL SCIENCE

Heidegger thinks that at least one time in Western history, the authentic expression of philosophy, distanced from its covered or ontic conversions, happened. But Heidegger's proposition about the conditions for authentic philosophy, and therefore the rule he uses to exclude "bad expressions" of philosophy, is fairly underdeveloped. We are not speculating about the author's unstable opinions about *philosophical happenings*. Let's just talk about his divided and reluctant position around the situation and performance

of metaphysics to establish itself as a place for authentic philosophical *aporia*. The author, like Kant, is torn between solidarity with the metaphysical enterprise and criticism of its speculative deviations. Kant asks in the preface B of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "what sort of treasure is it that we intend to leave to posterity, in the form of a metaphysics (…)?" (Quintero, 2021, p . 235). His conclusion is that there is a negative utility for this study, although it cannot go beyond the limits of possible experience.

For Heidegger, if understood as ontology or a question about the essence of Being, metaphysics is the mode of expression of the question about finitude (Dasein) most apt to do justice to a historical understanding of the Universals that populate the categorial center of gravity of the scientific canon of truths of an epoch. Thus, if we understand metaphysics as Kant's phenomenological theory of the synthetic unity of representations, we may say it is the expression of the most authentic Dasein: "the question concerning the possibility of ontological knowledge becomes the knowledge of the essence of a priori synthetic judgments" (Heidegger, 1997, p. 9). If we understand it, however, as a reification of the necessity of universal knowledge in pure supersensible terms, it would prevent these Universals from surpassing their merely speculative nature. It would block its ability to position itself as Conceptual unities within an arena of verification and correction by the intuitive sensibility (the space-time conditions of instantiation). This would place metaphysics beyond the reach of the subjective intuitive manipulations that would allow these universals to assume significance in a Dasein.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998) is, in this context, the text indicting this degeneration of metaphysics. It is an attempt to rescue the existential conditions (Dasein) of the historical universals of Newtonian natural science, placing it within the reach of correction instruments elaborated as a new parameter of rationality: Empirical Logic (mathematical schematic diagrams mixed with other types of *a priori* syntheses). As Kant pulls the metaphysical question to its synthetic *a priori* model, studying the forms of synthesis of the manifold, he rescues the possible Dasein of Newtonian natural science, showing the origin of the phenomenological codification – the *forms* posed by the subject – of the relations of essence sewing natural tempo-spatial phenomena. This is the accomplishment of Kant's *Copernican Revolution* in Philosophy (see Kant 1998, p. B xvi)

Kant was able to give a rational yardstick for regulative judgment of the higher stages of theoretical speculation in natural science, notably those making use of mathematics and *inductive schematization* (understood as empirical or synthetic logic). But we argue that the most Kant achieved was revealing the categorial role of the subjective expression of existence. The subject appears as the reification of an experimental Dasein activity of the empirical scientist. It is the activity of experimental manipulation to adjust its incomplete experience and to encode its universality in pure synthesis (apperception). This merely subjective contribution creates a state of universality exposed to merely heuristic rational parameters, which always fail to create the connection with the ontological theme. When we try to bring it to phenomenological clarity, subjectivity is limited to an intentional-codification of its manipulative results.

CONCLUSION

Although Positive Natural Sciences accomplishes the requirements of calculation, the universality of its possible essences has not yet been grasped with enough ontological awareness. This means that the necessity of the distinction between Sense and pseudo-sense (non-sense, absurd, unknowable) within the categorial framework of high

theoretical natural science does not reach a state of stability that match our understanding of the world. So our historical understanding of the rational parameters of the universality of that science is drastically incomplete to describe it as a *meaningful field* that can be phenomenologically encoded and universally communicable. That is, we have not matured the phenomenological codification that would give stability to the *universality* natural sciences have to reach to be a worthy substitute for ontology in the task of both disclosing the essential truth of the totality of beings and giving us a horizon of life-understanding.

I also conclude that the return to metaphysics through the transcendental model – Kant's project – reified the philosophical question inside a subjectiveness that is sensitive to its finitude and temporality merely through an awareness of its cognitive limitations (its impossibility of accessing *things in themselves*). As that cognitive limitation is practically manifested by the expression of fear and economic prudence, the result is an ever-increasing ideological reification of the ontic results of natural science, which threatens to become an industry for the production of probability curves harnessed by the culture of calculation.

The void of ontological parameters for evaluating the universal nature of natural science *a priori* knowledge provokes a subsequent crisis of the positive sciences' ability to justify themselves philosophically. This was spotted by Husserl's lecture in Vienna in 1935 (*Philosophy and the Crisis of the European Mankind*), and it is discussed extensively in the Introduction to General and Transcendental Knowledge: "At bottom these sciences have lost their great belief in themselves, in their absolute significance" (Husserl, 1969, p. 5). The last message encouraged by this reflection is: the crisis of modern sciences should not justify a return to mythical irrationality or gnostic anti-logocentric reflection, but should invoke the need to improve the human capacity to give a temporal-historical perspective to its models of universality – whether institutional or scientific.

REFERENCES

Bhaskar, R. (2014). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*. Routledge.

Chalita, M.A., Sedzielarz, A. (2021). Beyond the frame problem: what (else) can Heidegger do for AI*?. AI & Soc*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01280-3

French, S., & McKenzie, K. (2012). Thinking outside the toolbox: Towards a more productive engagement between metaphysics and philosophy of physics. *European journal of analytic philosophy*, *8*(1), 42-59.

Guignon, C. (2012). Becoming a person: Hermeneutic phenomenology's contribution. *New ideas in Psychology*, *30*(1), 97-106.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. San Francisco, Harper and Row.

Heidegger, M. (1997). *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1997). *Plato's Sophist*. Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and time*. Suny Press.

Husserl, E. (1969). *General and Transcendental Logic*. Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, E. (1970). *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Northwestern University Press.

Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of pure reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Micali, S. (2022). Anxiety Between Terror and Fear. In *Phenomenology of Anxiety* (pp. 17-58). Springer, Cham.

Philipse, H. (2021). *Heidegger's philosophy of being: A critical interpretation*. Princeton University Press.

Quintero, C. G. (2021). *Academic Skepticism in Hume and Kant: A Ciceronian Critique of Metaphysics* (Vol. 449). Springer Nature.

Shah, S. A. (2015). Heidegger's Readings of Kant: Appropriation of time and space through understanding the historicity of da-sein as being-in-the-world. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *54*(2), 81-90.