

HEIDEGGER'S HISTORICISATION OF ARISTOTELIAN BEING

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Heidegger's early work concerned with establishing a fundamental ontology. Specifically, it examines Heidegger's interpretation and presentation of Aristotle's own ontological thought. Given Heidegger's predetermined assessment of being as historically determined, it is sought to show how that predetermined view influences Heidegger's presentation of Aristotle's metaphysical work. The wider implications of Heidegger's assertion that being human is irretrievably historical are also considered.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger; Aristotle; Being

This paper considers Heidegger's presentation of Aristotle's notion of being, and attempts to show, through references to a number of Heidegger's works, that Heidegger interprets Aristotle's ontological thinking in a most un-Aristotelian way. Specifically, Heidegger attributes to Aristotle's ontology an unwarranted historical dimension. Such an attribution is unwarranted because Aristotle locates the primary meaning of being – as 'being qua being', which is not exclusively human, in reality: in the intrinsic reality of the natural world, of which we are a part. So far as Aristotle is concerned, the matter for the study of being is how man expresses and sustains his individuation as a human being. (Here human being should be considered as a verb rather than a noun.) Productive activities which reveal human talents and skills are incidental to that primary ontological concern. For our productions, whilst forming the substance of our historical world, do not sustain us as human beings. For Heidegger, by contrast, it is through 'worldling', i.e., through our creation of a surrogate world – that we constitute ourselves as human beings.

In endeavouring to formulate a fundamental ontology of human 'thinghood' two thousand years after Aristotle, Heidegger had to either accommodate or overcome the ontological conclusions of Aristotle's philosophy. And, certainly, much of

Heidegger's early work was concerned precisely with that task. At the same time, since two millennia of world history separates us from Aristotle, it too must be given some ontological appraisal. If our ontological goal is to move towards the realisation of human 'telos', has that movement been aided by the intercession of a purposeful history, or diverted by it? This is an important question which leads us to consider the ontological significance of world history? The question is important because, from a consideration of Heideggerean and Aristotelian philosophies of being, it is history that emerges as the major point of contention between these divergent views of 'being' human. History, thus, operates as both an obstacle to achieving commonality, and as the key to understanding the ontological dilemma. For it is not that there is no place for history in Aristotle's metaphysics, there is. But that place is as a source of deprivation – 'sterēsis', i.e., as a movement that is contrary to being. This is because, so far as Aristotle is concerned, whilst historical pursuits may be no more than merely incidental to being, if they become all-consuming and we come to see ourselves exclusively in historical terms, measured entirely by social goals and material achievements, then we are in danger of becoming solely determined by a movement contrary to being, i.e., of being shaped by the movement of 'non-being', as Aristotle described it. Of course, we couldn't have come to look for purpose in the historical world, if we hadn't first lost our ability to find meaning in nature. According to Heidegger, the world has become historical because Dasein is ontologically historical, i.e., according to his very nature. And it certainly appears to be the case that social and material goals now direct most of our lives, notwithstanding the evident destructive effect such practices are having on our environment. And therefore it is to the inception of historicity in our own being that we must look.

The difficulty for Heidegger, in attempting to assimilate Aristotle's philosophical terms into his historical worldview, is that Aristotle's ontology is not just unhistorical, but anti-historical. History was not deemed philosophically significant by the Greeks, as they did not believe that being resided there. History was viewed as the science "that brings the flowing to a standstill,"¹ whereas man's 'being' remained in the reality of the flowing and not in the historical standstill. Aristotle recognised history as a movement in the opposite direction to being. Because Aristotle realised that the underlying constancy of the cosmos is 'change', and that everything within it holds the possibility of becoming other than it is, he recognised that nature could not be the only source of form, and that forms could also arise from deprivation – *sterēsis*. For, whilst 'sterēsis' – is 'the absence in something of anything it might naturally have' and

¹ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1984), 4. Plato, *Phaedo* 96a 7-9 *Cratylus* 437b

in that sense is the opposite to form, it is also the beginning of change, i.e., change into something else. This means that new forms of existence may come into being as a result of a lack or deprivation, just as sickness derives from an absence of health. Consequently, the pursuit of historical activities, can become another source of form if those activities become determining. For Heidegger, however, being is resolutely historical in an original sense and not through any form of deprivation. The primary movement of *Dasein* – Heidegger’s term for ‘situated-being’ or ‘being-there’ – is historicizing.

Initially, in lectures given prior to ‘Being and Time’, Heidegger attempted to establish an ontological route from Aristotle’s philosophy to his own, i.e., to draw out a thread of commonality regarding human behaviour in ‘society with others’. By sidelining the ‘Metaphysics’ and ‘Physics’, and focusing instead on Aristotle’s practical works: the ‘Politics’ and ‘Rhetoric’, Heidegger hoped to find support for his historical/societal vision of human ontology. Through making the discursive practices involved in ‘speaking-with-others’ foundational, and transposing man’s autochthonic relation with reality into something more mediated, the primacy of intrinsic reality was undercut. For Heidegger, the platform for being is language, which is why, for him, being is an exclusively human domain; and our appropriate stance regarding it is one of questioning. For Aristotle, however, the route to being is through reality, which is why he draws an explicit distinction between reality itself and what the mind thinks and says about it. In both the ‘Metaphysics’ and the ‘Nicomachean Ethics’ Aristotle directs the reader towards his own contemplation of reality; he is not to rely on the consensus reached by others. This is because, for Aristotle, being is not a social or political achievement, but a fundamental metaphysical relation which underlies those activities and makes them meaningful.

In Part I Heidegger’s presentation of two of Aristotle’s fundamental ontological terms - ‘*energeia*’ and ‘*ousia*’ – is considered. By transplanting them from their metaphysical home ground to territory more conducive to historical interpretation, Heidegger attempts to utilise them for his own ontological project, or at least to neutralise them so that they don’t obstruct it. That project, however, appears unconvincing. And, in later years, Heidegger appears to give up any intention of forming an ontological bridge from Aristotle’s thinking to his own. His concluding remarks regarding Aristotelian Metaphysics are condemnatory, as he comes to the view that metaphysics is historically compromised and that Aristotle’s ontological assertions are as determined and limited by history as any others. In analysing these two philosophical terms, some consideration must also be given to the significance of movement. This is because Aristotle’s entire ontology is concerned with movement.

The cosmos is in a constant state of movement and change. Everything within it is moving, either towards becoming more what it is, or towards becoming something else. Aristotle sees that all beings are grounded in their own potential, which means that an inner movement is necessitated if that potential is to be realised. ‘*Dunamis*’ is the power or force enabling that inner realisation. Outer, visible movements that are concerned with place, direction and utilisation do not relate to the realisation of potential. In effect, these external movements are mechanical and the term *kinēsis*’ is used for them. A useful analogy might be a comparison between the movements of the quantum world and those of the Newtonian. Heidegger, however, does not seem to recognise this distinction. Perhaps this is because he fails to recognise the distinction Aristotle draws between the meaning of ‘potential’ and ‘possible’. This is a very important distinction and it is often blurred because we generally assume that they are one and the same, but they are not. What is potential inheres in the thing itself, it is that being’s identity, properly realised. This means that identity and potential are irrevocably linked. By contrast, what can be realised as a matter of logical possibility is completely extraneous to the question of potential; possibilities do not inhere in things themselves. This means that numerous historical possibilities may in fact be achieved whilst a being’s potential remains completely undeveloped.

Part 11 considers the wider philosophical and political implications of Heidegger’s exclusively historical interpretation of human being. For Heidegger, and other thinkers influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey’s ‘*Lebensphilosophie*’ – the philosophy that “life should be interpreted from itself,”² history is the living, formative movement of human existence. Dilthey acknowledged that he was simply expressing the views of his age in rejecting earlier metaphysical systems for their stasis and inertia, and more significantly, for their inability to say anything meaningful about the apparent dynamism of historical life, and the freedom of action it offered.³ In this historical interpretation of human freedom, i.e., through various possibilities for action, is, perhaps, revealed the most significant disconnect between our modern understanding of freedom and Aristotle’s.

PART I. HEIDEGGER’S PRESENTATION OF ARISTOTLE’S PHILOSOPHICAL TERMS

‘Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy’ was published in 2002. The work, which constitutes volume 18 of Heidegger’s collected works, contains the previously

²Wilhelm Dilthey, ‘Gesammelte Schriften’, 5:370-371: quoted in *Dilthey And The Narrative Of History*: 170

³ It goes without saying that the stasis and inertia imputed to Aristotle’s metaphysics stemmed from mistranslations which failed to recognise the dynamism in his philosophical terms..

unpublished text of the lecture course on Aristotle that Heidegger gave at the Philipps – Universität Marburg in 1924. There is no complete manuscript of the lecture course; only the beginning and the concluding parts, which comprise about one third of the total, have been preserved. And, therefore, transcripts from a number of Heidegger's former pupils were referred to in an effort to reconstitute the missing parts. Heidegger was shown the completed manuscript prior to publication, but did not thoroughly check the work. However, the tone of Heidegger's early thinking on Aristotle was set two years earlier in a course of lectures given at Freiburg, entitled 'Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle'. Heidegger added as a heading to that lecture manuscript a motto, "in order to characterise the intention of the interpretation." The motto comprises several short quotations from Kierkegaard and Luther, taken from works condemning a theology that glories in the reality of a present God and the arrogance of a speculative metaphysics presuming to know him.⁴

The title, 'Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy' was derived from the contents of the surviving handwritten manuscript of the course, and also from notes provided by students. However, it is noteworthy that the working title for the text, as it was being prepared for the Gesamtausgabe, was 'Aristotle: Rhetoric'. This choice of alternative title is instructive, because, as the editors point out, what Heidegger accomplished in the lecture course was "the interpretation of the being-there of human beings with respect to the basic possibility of speaking-with-one-another, following the guide of Aristotelian Rhetoric, but also a series of further texts of Aristotle are taken as the basis for this interpretation."⁵ Those other texts are primarily drawn from the 'Politics' and 'Nicomachean Ethics'; with references also being made to the 'Metaphysics' and 'Physics', and also to Aristotle's works on logic. However, the prominence attributed to Aristotle's 'Rhetoric', as Heidegger's guiding text, is entirely appropriate. In that work Aristotle naturally focuses on language, and its persuasive potential. Aristotle there makes the point that rhetoric is not about individual man, but concerns classes of men, governed men. The aim of rhetoric is to persuade people confronted with various choices of action when there is nothing else to guide them. It is not concerned with their individual knowing of reality, which is a matter for metaphysics. As Aristotle points out, the more correctly people handle their individual concerns, in which they are guided by other faculties, the further removed they are from rhetoric, which is, essentially, about the clever use of words.⁶ In the

⁴ John van Buren, 'Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther', *Reading Heidegger From The Start*, 167

⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Indiana University Press: Indianapolis, 2002), 273

⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans., W. Rhys Roberts (Dover Publications Inc: New York, 2004), 12

opening pages of that work Aristotle states that the persuasive tactics he is elucidating concern general matters and the universal lines of argument appropriate for them. And later he admits that even though it is unworthy to pay attention to the way words are delivered, with rhetoric it is necessary, because “the whole business of rhetoric has to do with appearances.”⁷ What this would seem to indicate is that whilst Heidegger could derive support for his notion of ‘being-there’ in the context of beings ‘speaking-with-one-another’ from his reading and application of Aristotle’s ‘Rhetoric’, Aristotle, who understood human ‘being’ in terms of individual and individuating ‘thinghood’, would regard such a collective mode of being as incidental to the governing sense of ‘being’. For Aristotle ‘being’ is not primarily a question of ‘being-with-others’, but of ‘being’ as oneself. It is an ontological question, not a political one.

In considering the early lectures Heidegger gives on Aristotle’s metaphysical terms, what emerges is an interpretation of those terms which endeavours to trace out a route from Aristotle to the present. Heidegger tries to effect this, not only by his own idiosyncratic interpretation of Aristotle’s philosophical terms in an attempt to render being historical, but also by attempting to embed Aristotle’s individualistic metaphysics in a wider politicised, situational context. By insisting that shared speaking with others in society is of primary ontological significance Heidegger seems to be presenting that social coalescence as our governing way of being in the world. And, whilst it is no doubt the case that speaking with others is an everyday activity and, indeed, the heart of social and political life, that is not the governing sense of ‘being’ that Aristotle sets out in his philosophical works. For Aristotle is concerned with what being is, not with what beings do. In his earlier lectures on ‘The Phenomenology of Religious Life’, Heidegger examines the letters of Paul, the apostle, and was no doubt influenced by Paul’s aspiration of a shared way of thinking, common to all men: that they “all speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”⁸ However, in attempting to provide an ontological justification for such a unified vision, and explicate ‘being-in-the-world-speaking-with-others’ as man’s primordial way of being, Heidegger was attempting to establish an ontological ground for a religious disposition.

*1. Movement – *Dunamis* and *Kinēsis**

Heidegger commences the ‘Basic Concepts’ lecture course by pointing out that nothing philosophical is being sought, a caveat he repeats a number of times in the first few pages. Instead, he seeks conceptual support from Aristotle for his own

⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* bk III ch 2 1404

⁸ Paul I *Corinthians* ch1,10 – authorised King James version

formulation of man's relationship with Being in term of Dasein. Heidegger recognises that what concepts make intelligible for others are general representations of things, but says that what he actually seeks is not that shared knowledge, but the concrete experience that gave birth to the concept. With regard to the concept of movement, Heidegger suggests that what must be asked is, "what did Aristotle have in mind when he thought of movement? Which moving phenomena did he have in view? Which sense of being did he mean in speaking of a moving being?" Adding that, "we do not ask these questions with the aim of gaining knowledge of a conceptual content, but rather we ask how the matter meant is experienced."⁹ Thus, what is sought is not conceptual knowledge, but an understanding of the reality experienced by Aristotle that formed the basis for such knowledge.

Heidegger suggests that Aristotle's investigation into movement "has a *fundamental significance for the whole ontology*: basic determination of beings as *energeia*, *entelecheia*, and *dunamis*."¹⁰ However, he does not investigate that ontological significance. Notwithstanding his recognition of the fact that what Aristotle says about movement could have profound implications regarding our understanding of the nature of reality: "insofar as movement is a mode of the being-there of beings, it is possible that what we understand, in a fully well-worn sense by 'reality' is in fact to be fully determined."¹¹ In fact, despite having recognised movement as an ontological determination with far reaching implications concerning the 'how-there of beings', Heidegger seems to interpret such movement, not as inhering in beings themselves, but as a property that makes things available for use: "kinēsis: presence of the ability-to-be-a-chest of this wood as such (related to the ability-to-be-a-chest)."¹² Such an 'externally-focused' interpretation of movement fits with Heidegger's understanding of our "basic mode of being-in-the-world" as being concerned with manipulation and utilisation.¹³ And, ultimately, Heidegger appears dismissive of Aristotle's theory of movement, suggesting that there is not enough time to understand Aristotle's research, let alone to take it seriously: "Aristotle says, movement is actuality, but the actuality of *dunamis*, of possibility, i.e., of non-actuality – actuality of inactuality: a contradiction – and he even lets it stand – antinomy, dialectic! That sounds very ingenious, but there is nothing to it except thoughtlessness, or perhaps something else:

⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 12

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 222

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 206

¹² *Ibid.*, 254

¹³ *Ibid.*, 263

irresponsibility to history.”¹⁴ *Dunamis*, however, here means potency, not possibility. It refers to “the innate tendency of anything to be at work in ways characteristic of the kind of thing it is.”¹⁵ As previously pointed out, the relevance of the distinction between the potential and the possible is far-reaching, because whilst possibilities may be realised in history and the external movements that constitute it, the innate potency Aristotle is referring to is not such an achievement. Rather, the activities that actualise this potency, such as perceiving and contemplating, produce nothing outside themselves, and are complete in each moment.

In 1931 Heidegger again considers the philosophical significance of ‘*dunamis*’; this time in the context of the first three chapters of book θ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.¹⁶ Here Aristotle presents ‘*dunamis*’, or potency, in two ways: as a force applied in acting, and as a force received by ‘being acted upon’. In acting it is the potency of something else that is affected, whereas, in ‘being acted upon’ it is one’s own. These are not powers additional to being, but constitute what something is in itself; they are “indissociable from the essence of being”, as Heidegger puts it. However, for Heidegger, the fundamental meaning of potency so far as *Dasein* is concerned relates to the external expression of ‘*dunamis*’, i.e., to what it produces through acting. Since, for Heidegger, “all the phenomena found under the title ‘*dunamis*’” – capability, talent, skill, proficiency, being accomplished etc., are all gathered together in “ability”. As *Dasein* is the “being on the way towards an accomplishment.”¹⁷ However, all these productive actions relate to ‘*kinēsis*’, which is not the activity of being. For Aristotle the primary significance of ‘*dunamis*’ relates to ‘being acting upon’, because what results from ‘being acted upon’ in the way Aristotle describes is a change in the one ‘being acted upon’ to an active condition and into that thing’s nature.¹⁸ It is this notion of ‘*dunamis*’, i.e., concerned with ‘being acted upon’ by an operative reality that is the more important one for book θ because this meaning of ‘*dunamis*’ is concerned with the deep structural features of being.¹⁹ Heidegger sees in ‘producing a work’ a decisive determination of the existential being of *Dasein*, “a fundamental posture toward the world,”²⁰ and, by contrast, sees a lack of producing

¹⁴ Ibid., 257

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1050a 18

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Interpretations of Ancient Philosophy/Aristotle Metaphysics θ* , trans., Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Indiana University Press: Indianapolis, 1995)

¹⁷ Ibid., 85

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 417b 3-17

¹⁹ Kosman, ‘The Activity of Being in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*’, in T. Scaltsas, D. Charles and M.L. Gill ed., *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 204

²⁰ Ibid., 125

as a 'failing' of 'dunamis' - a sinking into 'unforce'. Heidegger regards the other form of potency, i.e., 'being acted upon', as synonymous with "impotence" and "deprivation". Because, for him, the potency that relates to the 'being-at-work' of a being relates to what it can bring forth and not to what it can actually be.

2. *Energeia*

According to Heidegger, "energeia is perhaps the *most fundamental being-character* in Aristotle's doctrine of being." And, recognising that the term contains the root word 'ergon' – 'work', he asks, as does Aristotle, "what is the 'ergon' of human beings, the 'genuine achievement' and the 'concern' in which human beings as human beings live in their being-human?"²¹ In answering this question, however, Heidegger does not look to Aristotle's philosophical works for which the term was coined; it is referred to in the 'Metaphysics' 167 times. But seeks clarity regarding its presumed connection with 'speaking with others' by consulting the 'Politics' and 'Rhetoric' where the term is barely mentioned; it occurs only twice in the 'Politics' and 13 times in the 'Rhetoric'.²² Heidegger asserts that what he is attempting to procure is a concrete view of what Aristotle understands by the being and 'being-there' of human beings. From consulting these political works, which deal with how man lives in association with others and how he is able to wield power within society, Heidegger reports that a fundamental character of the 'being-there' of human beings is "*being-as-speaking-with one another* through communicating, refuting, confronting."²³ For Heidegger, 'announcing' and 'speaking' appropriate the given world and, thus, come to constitute the world that we designate 'the surrounding world' which we, as 'beings together', live in. Heidegger seems to be saying that it is how we speak about the world that entirely comprises our mode of being within it. And, further, that it is what such speaking establishes – 'the accomplished world' – that entirely constitutes the realm of our being. It seems that our work as human beings is not to perceive and contemplate the given world, by holding ourselves open to it, as Aristotle suggests, but to create our own historical form of existence within the world that we have appropriated. For, when Heidegger speaks of 'being-in-the-world', what is being described is not the

²¹ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Indiana University Press: Indianapolis, 2002), 31

²² George A. Blair *Energeia and Entelecheia: 'Act' in Aristotle* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992), 8-10. Blair sets out the number of times 'energeia' appears in works of Aristotle:- Physics 74, De Anima 67, Metaphysics 167, Nicomachean Ethics 145, Eudemian Ethics 33, Politics 2, Rhetoric 13

²³ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans., T.A. Sinclair (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 33

world itself, as what has been there all along, but only certain aspects of Dasein's modern, historical form of existence in the world.

In the 'Metaphysics', in which Aristotle sets out his understanding of being and his chosen means for approaching its study, he draws a clear distinction between being's place in language and its governing, primordial place in reality. Aristotle explains the difference as follows: "the intertwining and dividing are in thinking but not in things, and being of this sort is different from the being of what is in the governing sense (for thinking attaches or separates what something is, or that it is of this sort, or that it is this much, or anything else it might be)."²⁴ Of the way of being arrived at by thinking and speaking, Aristotle says that it does not reveal any nature that is outside itself and for that reason should be set aside. As "what must be examined are the causes and sources of being itself, as being." They reside in reality and not in how we communicate, refute or announce reality in the mode of 'being-together-speaking.' Aristotle later repeats the point, that metaphysics is not concerned with the being that is thought about and discussed, "it is not of being in this sense that the sources are being sought, but of being that is outside and separate."²⁵

'*Energeia*' is a neologism Aristotle carefully crafted in order to convey the inner activity of being, which is a movement we rarely if ever consider. The prefix 'en' means within and 'erg' refers to work; accordingly, '*energeia*' means 'to act within', to 'be busy within', "to be internally active."²⁶ As George Blair explains, to create this word Aristotle uses a very rare active voice of an active verb, thereby underlining both its active force and its internality, and emphasising that the word points to the activity itself and not to anything the activity might produce: "the internal activity [is] the work."²⁷ By so acting, Blair suggests that "Aristotle has gone out of his way to avoid having the word interpreted as 'actuality' or as a kind of static modality of being." Because what Aristotle is looking to convey is a "working that doesn't work on anything, but is just being active inside the agent."²⁸ Ayreh Kosman, too, in his work, 'The Activity of Being in Aristotle's Metaphysics', points to the centrality of activity – '*energeia*' in Aristotle's metaphysics. And suggests that the ontologically primary issues that '*energeia*' and '*dunamis*' disclose relate to self-identity and being.²⁹

²⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans., Joe Sachs (Santa Fe: Green Lion Books, 2002) 1027b 20 - 1028

²⁵ Ibid., 1065 2a-21

²⁶ George A. Blair, *Energeia and Entelecheia: "Act" in Aristotle*, 19

²⁷ Ibid, 29, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1050a 21 trans. Blair

²⁸ Ibid, 19

²⁹ Ayreh Kosman, 'The Activity of Being in Aristotle's Metaphysics', in T. Scaltsas, D. Charles and M.L. Gill ed., *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 196

Like Blair and Kosman, Joe Sachs also suggests that *'energeia'* should be regarded as the central element of Aristotle's philosophical vocabulary, since its meaning is at the heart of all his thinking. Sachs translates *'energeia'* as 'being-at-work' and points out that because the term relates to an ultimate idea, it is not definable by anything deeper or clearer, but can only be grasped by examples or analogies,³⁰ which Aristotle provides in the *'Metaphysics'*. *'Energeiai'* are activities like seeing, knowing, contemplating and understanding, that are complete at every moment, because their goal is contained within the activity itself. Such self-contained activities are distinct from motions or processes that are not complete at every moment, because the goals of these motions lie outside the activity qua activity and relate to what that activity produces, like building a house, or losing weight. It appears that these activities of the soul – *'energeiai'* – express and preserve our human "thinghood"; they are not superadded to our completed natures, but are actually constitutive of our nature as individual human beings.³¹ In drawing the distinction between these two different kinds of action, Aristotle is making it clear that only such inner activities relate to the realisation of human potential in terms of being, or 'thinghood'. *'Energeiai'* are a special kind of activity that operate not so much in accordance with what we do, but through what is done to us through our perception and contemplation of reality. They are concerned with our conscious apprehension of the natural world and not with our production of a surrogate one.

Whilst Heidegger recognised the profound significance of the mistranslation of *'energeia'* as *'actualitas'*: "Its significance underlies all history," as a result of which, "all western history is Roman and never Greek", he doesn't penetrate to the dynamic significance of *'energeia'*, because his metaphysical vision remains focused on a notion of being as 'fixed presence'. He doesn't manage to penetrate the dynamic nature of being, because he persists in seeing reality as a fixed and static structure. For Heidegger, following Dilthey, only history offers man the possibility of self-realisation, because only in history is movement possible. But of course, the only movement that history allows is mechanical and so does not pertain to being: it is concerned with *'kinēsis'*, not with *'dunamis'*.

Heidegger's own responsibility to history persuades him to present the inner activities that constitute *'energeiai'* as being externally directed. He clearly needs to do this if 'being-with-others-speaking' is to be made the foundation of being.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Sachs, Bk ix, chapter 6

³¹ Learning is not an activity of the Aristotelian soul, because it is not complete at each moment. See Ronald Polansky, 'Energeia in Aristotle's *Metaphysics IX*', in *Aristotle's Ontology*, ed., Anthony Preus, and Anton, John, P, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 211

In order to present the work of being human in this externally directed way, Heidegger does two things:-

i). He interprets our direct interface with the world not as one of perceiving reality, but of listening to our interpreting selves: “Hearing, which corresponds to speaking is the fundamental mode of ‘perceiving’ – the genuine possibility for ‘*aesthesis*’ – perception.”³²

ii). He diminishes the significance, particularly the religious significance, of contemplation, and presents it as something rather mundane. He does this by severing the causative link Aristotle establishes between pleasure and the effort of contemplation. As a result, pleasure is seen to be a basic disposition of life and not the result of the work of contemplation.

i). Perceiving To Hearing

In order to shift the work of ‘being’ from ‘knowing’ reality through perception, which, for Aristotle, is the primary activity of the soul, to ‘being-with-one-another-speaking’, which for Heidegger, “is not something that is brought to human beings, but is rather *the* being-possibility,”³³ Heidegger suggests that perceiving is actually hearing: “whether or not seeing in connection with contemplation reveals the world in the genuine sense, it is still *hearing* because it is the *perceiving of speaking*, because it is the possibility of being-with-one-another.”³⁴ In order to effect this shift, from perceiving to hearing, from reality to language, a diminished view of perception is necessary. And that is what Heidegger attempts to present, in this and later works. Essentially, Heidegger makes perception subject to discursive knowing. As a result, any ‘simple seeing’ which is not the result of our concerned preoccupation with the world is dismissed as meaningless. In ‘Being and Time’, Heidegger considers the significance of perception that is not consummated in interpretation, under the heading ‘Curiosity’. He asks, “What is to be said about this tendency just to perceive?”³⁵ and suggests that it “concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen (that is to come into a being towards it) but just in order to see.” For Heidegger such simple seeing is, by its very nature, to be distracted by things and to seek abandonment in novelty, because for Heidegger, perception appears to have no ontological purpose.

³² Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 32

³³ *Ibid.*, 40

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 72

³⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 214 [172]

Heidegger seems to derive support for his claim that perceiving is really hearing from Aristotle's assertion in the 'Politics' that man alone of all the animals knows the just and the unjust, and that he alone has language. However, Aristotle does not connect the two observations. And in the 'Nicomachean Ethics' he makes the point that man knows the just and the unjust through his own perception of reality, not from listening to others. Aristotle describes the polis as the place where men share their common views; he doesn't say that it is where they derive their understanding of reality from. For Heidegger, however, it seems that it is only in the polis that man is truly being human: "the polis is the being-possibility that itself lies enclosed and traced out in advance in the human being's genuine being."³⁶ And it seems to be this linguistic 'being-possibility' – the 'being-as-speaking-with-one-another', that Heidegger endeavours to trace back to 'being' as the work of 'being human'. So far as Aristotle is concerned, however, the work of 'being human' is more individuated and resides in man's personal relationship with reality. Elsewhere in the 'Nicomachean Ethics', Aristotle favourably quotes Hesiod as saying, "good in his turn is he who trusts one who speaks well", but "altogether best is he who himself has insight into all things."³⁷ For it is through the power of insight, exemplified in Aristotle's contemplative hero, that man knows the just and the unjust. And, in this contemplative endeavour, Aristotle explicitly states that others are not needed.³⁸ It is the '*spoudaios*' – the serious, contemplative individual, who knows with his own judgment what is right. Further down in the same passage Aristotle draws a comparison between the political life and the contemplative one and identifies the contemplative life as that which is best. He dismisses the political life as being too superficial, since its focus is on external goals and achievements, whereas the contemplative has no goals beyond himself. From such an analysis, Aristotle suggests that "we divine that the good is something of one's own and hard to take away."³⁹ It, therefore, seems that for Aristotle it is the intrinsic reality of the given world, rather than the views expressed by others, which informs the perceiving, contemplating man of what is truly just and worthwhile.

According to Heidegger, "since its earliest beginnings metaphysical thinking is oriented to seeing," and the problem with that is that it "thinks Being as a constant being-present-at-hand."⁴⁰ As a result, man not only fails to raise Being to a question,

³⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 35

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b 10

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1177a 27

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1095b 25

⁴⁰ Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans., Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (New York: Humanity Books, 1991), 29

because he contents himself with what can be seen, but he also fails to establish a right relation with the world. For Heidegger it is thinking not seeing that is of primary metaphysical significance, because it launches and maintains the individual on the way to establishing the historical world of Dasein. It appears that for Heidegger perception is not consummated in the reality seen, but in what is subsequently disclosed in discourse: “Perception is consummated when one addresses oneself to something as something and discusses it as such. This amounts to interpretation in the broadest sense and on the basis of such interpretation, perception becomes an act of making determinate.”⁴¹ Whereas for Aristotle, perception is the defining activity of the soul and requires effort, since it allows reality to act upon and alter the perceiver, for Heidegger perception holds no such potential. Heidegger does not regard perception to be a significant metaphysical activity, essentially, because reality is not recognised as having anything significant to impart. From which it follows that the primary meaning of ‘*dunamis*’ – potency or power, so far as Dasein is concerned, is seen to be ‘acting on another’, rather than ‘being-acted-upon’ by reality itself.

ii). Pleasure and Contemplation

The other way that Heidegger moves ‘being’ away from Aristotle’s governing, active sense towards a situational, historical ‘being in the world’ is through his restrictive interpretation of contemplation, which, for Aristotle, is the key activity of ‘being’. Heidegger does this by diminishing both its religious significance and its effortful nature. As a result, contemplation is seen to be little more than a bare physiological awareness. The essential point being that it remains rather mundane. In both of his works on ethics Aristotle links contemplation with divinity.⁴² As both a necessary presence and the underlying reason for the activity itself, divinity and contemplation are indivisible. Heidegger, however, sees nothing religious in this activity. And, in fact, he doesn’t really see it as an activity at all, just “an outré form of reflection.” In explaining away the happiness contemplation is said to lead to, he says, “pleasure is, put succinctly, nothing other than the determination of the presentness of being-in-the-world, which is there in finding-oneself as such.” For, according to Heidegger, “pleasure is in itself already there with being, as living,” which would seem to suggest that nothing is to be gained by contemplating. Aristotle draws a direct connection between pleasure and living life, but that doesn’t mean that pleasure is already given with life. On the contrary, Aristotle says that happiness is not a condition of life, but

⁴¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time* 89 [62]

⁴² Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

the end at which human beings aim, which would seem to suggest that it is both effortful and fulfilling. Whilst ‘*eudaimonia*’ is often translated simply as ‘happiness’ or ‘pleasure’, it would be more accurate to translate it as referring to a particular way of living, to ‘living an inspired life’, perhaps. Since, the happiness the term embodies is not something added to any sort of life; rather this is the happiness that dwells within us, potentially at least. It is the happiness we attain by living in accordance with our true nature. As Aristotle says, “Happiness is a certain way of being-at-work and not something that is present like some possession”⁴³ Aristotle doesn’t see pleasure as a basic determination given with life, but only according to a certain way of living. And in this regard he draws a distinction between the different ways of living that people enjoy. Because, according to Aristotle, “[men] do not all have the same nature or the same best active condition, nor even seem to; they do not all pursue the same pleasure either, though they all pursue pleasure.”⁴⁴ For Aristotle pleasure is a way of ‘being at work’ that only internal activity can summon: “without being at work, no pleasure comes about.”⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Aristotle makes the point that not all those who enjoy life enjoy living, but only those who are living it a certain way, i.e., who themselves are a certain way. From which it follows, Aristotle suggests, that pleasure, in a sense, is effortful, since we are responsible for the active condition that brings it about.⁴⁶ According to Heidegger, “pleasure itself is not a mode of being that appears occasionally, pleasure is in itself already there with being as living,”⁴⁷ which is partly true. Pleasure is given with living, but Aristotle’s point is that actively living is not always there with life, because possessing a life and actively living it are not the same thing.

In his early lectures on religion, Heidegger sought to show how the primal Christian experience had been distorted when expressed through the medium of Greek conceptual thought. He was particularly concerned at Augustine’s adoption of the Greek concept of ‘*fruitio Dei*’ – the enjoyment of God in contemplation. The problem is obvious, if God is present to be enjoyed now in contemplation, what is the believer waiting for in anxiety and insecurity? What Heidegger felt is lost, when kairological time is reduced to chronological time, is the anxious, wakeful waiting of the believer, as he gets lulled to sleep, and, thus, back to the every day, by the tranquilising effect of the beatific vision revealed in contemplation. And, more

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* trans Joe Sachs, (New Mexico: Green Lion Press, 2002) 1169b 30

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1153b 30

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1175a 20

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1105a 25-26; 1114b 21-23

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 164-165

importantly, thereby closes himself off to his, for Heidegger, more authentic, historical relation with God. However, what is lost in this rather ascetic summation of the activity of contemplation is Aristotle's assertion of its effortful nature. It is not possible to fall asleep and be a contemplative, because contemplating isn't an activity that can be performed mechanically. As Aristotle made clear when discussing the origins of philosophy, the activity of contemplation begins with wonder. And, therefore, the 'every day' is not inert for the true contemplative. Rather, the contemplative engages with the natural world in a way that eludes Heidegger. And the pleasure the contemplative experiences whilst contemplating reality attests to the veracity of the call to contemplate. The true significance of contemplation lies in what it says about reality, and about us as part of that reality. For Heidegger, however, reality does not appear to have such profound depths. When he opened his lecture course entitled 'Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle', in 1922, Heidegger began by reciting Luther's condemnation of 'the pagan master Aristotle'. The condemnation ended by suggesting that "Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *De Anima* and *Ethics* ... should be completely discarded along with the rest of his books that glory in natural things."⁴⁸ For Luther there is nothing in creation worthy of contemplation, and, consequently, he suggests that intuition and contemplation be given up in preference to looking to the future, to "what is not yet."

3. *Ousia*

If, as Heidegger has endeavoured to show, the only significant movement so far as being is concerned pertains to the accomplishments of history, then it would seem to follow that the entity whose beingness is in question – '*ousia*' – is impervious to any form of inner activity and can only be moved externally. And this is precisely the way in which Heidegger chooses to present Aristotle's term designating 'beingness'. And he does this largely by conflating the term '*ousia*' with '*parousia*' even though they designate ontologically distinct entities. For whereas '*ousia*' refers to a being as a process, i.e., in a process of being and becoming, '*parousia*' designates a fixed and static entity.

As Joseph Owens points out in his detailed study, 'The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*', '*ousia*' is the primary instance of Being from which all others flow and upon which all other beings depend: "it is the very core of Being." And for that reason Owens asserts that this is the most important instance of Being to maintain in any translation if its true meaning is to be kept. As he explains, the word

⁴⁸ Kisiel. *Reading Heidegger From The Start*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994) 171

'ousia' is derived from the verb 'to be', but has the ending of an abstract noun to be something like 'beingness'. However, its meaning is not conceptual but concrete, as the 'beingness' it points to is that of the dynamic and self-organising world.⁴⁹

The ontological significance of the distinction between Aristotle's metaphysical understanding of 'being' - as an individual's inner activity directed towards the knowing of reality - and Heidegger's more political, historical presentation of Dasein - as man's productive way of 'being in the world together' - is lost in the conflation of the Greek terms 'ousia' and 'parousia'. Since the former denotes a being capable of ontological activity and the latter does not, Heidegger insists, however, that "ousia is an abbreviation of 'parousia'", and generally treats the terms as synonymous.⁵⁰ But what is lost when the "thinghood" of 'ousia' is swallowed up in the entity that is 'parousia', is the internal activity of 'being' that constitutes that "thinghood". Aristotle makes this very point in 'De Anima', contrasting the cutting activity of an axe, which makes the axe what it is, with the steering activity of a sailor in a boat, which is an action that is not intrinsic to what he is.⁵¹ Whilst the Aristotelian sailor - considered here by Aristotle as 'parousia' i.e., in a context where 'thinghood' is not in question - may steer a boat, and undertake other doings, his 'thinghood', i.e., 'ousia', and the activity he needs to keep on 'being' in order to be it, are not discernible in these external activities. Aristotle actually points out that it would be impossible to recognise the ontological significance of inner activity in entities engaged in external actions: "it would be difficult to see why the soul is not separate from the body if the soul were the being-at-work of the body in the way that a sailor is of the boat."⁵² Because these are clearly separable entities, the sailor can leave the boat. However, the cutting cannot leave the axe, without taking the identity of the axe with it. What Aristotle is explaining is that the nature of our "thinghood", or 'ousia', is constituted by activities, such inner activities being intrinsic to what we are. They are not like the external motions of 'parousia', because they inhere in us and individuate us: they are not 'doings' but 'being'. If an entity's 'parousia' is made the starting point for a study of being, how can 'being' as an activity that determines the state of being of that entity be examined? The answer is that it cannot, and neither can the question of that being's ontological vulnerability to change. For the obvious reason that an entity

⁴⁹ Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies: Toronto, 1951), 143

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 25

⁵¹ Aristotle, *On The Soul*, trans., Joe Sachs (New Mexico: Green Lion Press, 2004), 406b 10

⁵² Aristotle, *De Anima*, 413a 10

viewed as *'parousia'* is deemed to be fixed and therefore invulnerable to ontological change.

If *'ousia'* is conflated with *'parousia'*, the inner activity that *'ousia'* is being disappears from view. As a result, form, which Aristotle regarded as inherently active, comes to be regarded as something static or structural that is simply imposed on passive matter, without necessitating any activity, or doing, on the part of matter itself. In such an event, the activity that matter is 'supposed to be' engaged in falls beneath the metaphysical horizon, and what is left is just a static entity. In this regard, both George A. Blair and Mary Louise Gill speak of Aristotle's radical insight in recognising that form is not a superimposed structure, but in a sense is what matter is actually 'doing,' - its 'being, in effect.'⁵³ If form is seen as the activity that a being is 'being', or is capable of 'being', then matter contains the ability of that being to realise that activity, which means that matter, too, has ontological significance. And, because matter has the potential to act otherwise than in accordance with its given form, i.e., it is able to do something else, it, thus, has the power "to seriously threaten[s] the intrinsic unity, and hence the substantiality, of the object to which it contributes."⁵⁴ Matter must have this potential, otherwise it would be indistinguishable from form and there would be no possibility for movement or change within the cosmos. The essential point is that inner activity has a self-actualising significance: it is an ontological necessity if a being is to preserve its nature. Because, as Gill points out, "an organism's activity is much more than an expression of what it is, it is also the means by which the organism preserves itself from deterioration."⁵⁵

This important distinction between ontologically significant inner activity and incidental external motions is lost in the conflation of these two terms. However, such a conflation of terms is necessary for Heidegger in order to be able to provide a historical context for being. For Heidegger, the historical is a 'core phenomenon' which denotes the quality of an object changing in time. And, therefore, in order to be historical it is first necessary to be an object, which means to have the quality of becoming in time: "each characterization or use of the sense of 'historical' is always determined through this *foreconception of the object*. The *object* is historical: it has the particularity of proceeding in time, of changing."⁵⁶ The difficulty with human "thinghood", however, when understood as Aristotle presents it as *'ousia'*, is that its

⁵³ George A. Blair, *Energeia and Entelecheia; "Act" in Aristotle* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992), 45

⁵⁴ Mary Louise Gill, *Aristotle on Substance - The Paradox of Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 219

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans., Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti Ferencei (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 23

becoming, its *'telos'*, is not a determination of history. And, therefore, it would not seem to qualify as a suitable object for history. In fact, any historical change would appear, potentially at least, to be a movement away from 'thinghood', i.e., to be ateleological. However, Heidegger insists that human beings are historical objects: "the application of the historical to human reality, too, will be a determination of the object-historical. The human being itself is, in its actuality, an object in becoming, standing within time."⁵⁷ In order for human beings to qualify as historical objects it is necessary for any avenue to unhistorical, or trans-historical, becoming, which recognises ontological realisations, to be closed. And this is effectively achieved by viewing a person's potency or power - *'dunamis'* - solely in terms of their external activities, or doings, i.e., in terms of a *'parousia'*, accomplishing through 'acting upon others'.

Heidegger gains support for his view that human beings are historical objects just like any inanimate object, by referring to the non-philosophical use of the word *'ousia'*. For the ordinary meaning of *'ousia'* identifies as beings - property, possessions, goods and estate: "it is noteworthy that *definite* beings - matters such as possessions and household goods - are addressed by the Greeks as *genuine* things". And, he goes on to suggest that, "if we examine this customary meaning, we may discover what the Greeks meant in general by 'being'." Clearly *'ousia'* designates concrete beings. The task, therefore, is to discover how that concreteness relates to the how of being, i.e., to "a being in the how of its being."⁵⁸ In considering our relationship to the things designated *'ousia'*, Heidegger suggests that the emphatic way in which these concrete things are present to us is in their everyday availability for use. And he, consequently, extends the term to include *'pragmata'* - general things - things that we can utilise.⁵⁹ What Heidegger, thereby, establishes is that the basic meaning of *'ousia'* relates to things that are 'present', i.e., available to us to use.⁶⁰ "The how of being refers to being there in the manner of being-available."⁶¹ Thus, according to Heidegger, a being's 'how' is its availability for use, since this is what he construes constancy of presence as assuring: "by ousia nothing else is meant but constant presence."⁶² "By being we mean nothing else but constant presence, enduring constancy. What the Greeks address as beings proper is what fulfils this understanding of being as being-

⁵⁷ Ibid., 25

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 20

⁵⁹ Ibid., 19

⁶⁰ Ibid., 24

⁶¹ Ibid., 19

⁶² Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 37

always-present.”⁶³ However, because Heidegger regards ‘ousia’ as synonymous with ‘parousia’ and because ‘ousia’ points to ‘every day’ things, he takes the ‘how’ of their presence, i.e., their ‘enduring constancy’ for granted. But, the matter of their ‘how’ is the very metaphysical question of ‘beingness’ that Aristotle endeavours to address. How do beings express and maintain themselves as separate, individual beings in a world of constant change? This is the fundamental ontological question Aristotle is seeking to answer. What is enduring in beings is not their availability for use, which isn’t any kind of ontological answer, but their beingness, since that is what maintains them as what they are.

In chapter 8 of Book v of the ‘Metaphysics’, Aristotle explains that ‘ousia’ is attributed to independent things and is also responsible for the ‘being’ of a thing and that it means - “what it is for something to be.”⁶⁴ It is this last meaning, ‘*ti en einai*’ – ‘what it is for something to be’ - that Heidegger seems to regard as supplying a historical basis for Dasein. This is because he interprets this active phrase as referring, not to what something is currently and continuously being, but to what it has already been: “It refers to ‘being’, that is, the ‘what-being as it was already.’” Heidegger says of such a being that it is so determined, “with an eye to *what it was*.” And adds, with regard to human being, “I see a being that is there genuinely in its being when I see it in its *history*, the being that is there in this way coming from out of its history into being. This being that is there, as there in this way, is *complete*; it has come to its end, to its *completeness*.”⁶⁵ However, the difficulty with considering ‘completion’ in this historical sense, i.e., as a “completed act”, as an activity that has “come to its end”, is that such expressions pertain to the mind’s cognition of reality and not to the active ‘presencing’ of reality itself, which is always changing. And, as a result, the ‘reality’ captured in the concept of the ‘completed act’ blocks any apprehension of the dynamic reality continuing beneath. Consequently, ‘completeness’, which for Aristotle relates to an act as its fullness and perfection qua activity, i.e., as an ongoing act, in its ‘continuing to be’, as expressed in the neologisms ‘*energeia*’ and ‘*entelecheia*’, is reduced to the mundane description of a past event, i.e., ‘the completed act’. A dancer is complete, in the Aristotelian sense, when he is dancing, not when he has finished a dance.

In ‘parousia’, Heidegger denatures and stabilises ‘ousia’. As what is a resource for ‘being’ becomes a material reserve for ‘doings’ – the substance of historical being. In effect, ‘ousia’ is turned into a resource for living historically, rather than life a resource

⁶³ Ibid., 37

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* book v Ch 8 1017b 25

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* 26

for actively being, as ‘being’ becomes grounded in a certain way of existing— a historical way of ‘being-in-the-world’. Given that Heidegger’s understanding of “thinghood” is comprised in the notion ‘*parousia*’ – a completed entity that moves about within a world of its own achievements, it is not surprising that Heidegger eschews any notion of ontological work, since there is nothing ontological for ‘*parousia*’ to achieve. However, one of his manuscript notes summing up the lecture on Aristotle’s ‘Basic Concepts’ seems to suggest an awareness of the possibility of just such work: “Parousia, ousia – basic explication: entelecheia, dunamis, energeia. With this Greek ontology first comes into its own. But that means: How, which being-there, always what, Which are we ? Everything shifts in the direction of this question. Being-there in general experienced as ontological task. One has [to do] with consciousness and person and living. Here everything breaks down c.f. Jaspers”⁶⁶ With regard to the concluding reference, it is interesting to note that Heidegger reviewed Jaspers’ work, ‘Psychology of Worldviews’ in 1919/21, shortly before the lecture course on Aristotle’s basic concepts. And in that critique makes evident his view that an adequate philosophical account of human “thinghood” must extend beyond the metaphysical; it must be historical. As Heidegger there explains, life is to be seen as an external achievement – a “creative formation” that human “thinghood” accomplishes through “an act of going out of itself”. He concludes his review by suggesting that “mere contemplation”, which he later dismisses in ‘Being and Time’ as nothing more than a distraction, must go on to the “infinite process” of a “radical questioning which holds itself in the question”.⁶⁷ Thus the appropriate orientation towards being becomes one of achieving and questioning. For Dasein the determining activity regarding being is not ‘being’ itself, but questioning, for which a human ‘being’ first needs to be established, i.e., stabilised, as a questioner: Dasein – ‘the being for whom being is in question’. The contemplative, however, unlike Dasein, does not seek an answer, for he has no question. He doesn’t seek to determine what language can ‘unconceal’, or an explanation for his ‘being-there’. He doesn’t seek anything other than the experience of reality itself, which is his ‘being’. Dasein and the contemplative, thus, emerge as embodiments of contrary movements of ‘being’. The former concerned with the productive force of history, through which it accomplishes its being, and the latter with the receptive potency of ‘being-acted-upon’ by an operative reality.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 258

⁶⁷ Heidegger, ‘Comments on Karl Jaspers’s Psychology of Worldviews’, trans., John van Buren, Pathmarks, ed., William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), quoted in *Heidegger’s Way of Thought*:159

PART II WIDER SIGNIFICANCE OF HEIDEGGER'S HISTORICAL PROJECT

For Heidegger, the world in which a human being is a being is not the given world. Because, according to Heidegger, nature lacks sufficient substance for being and needs to be set aside. Instead, since Dasein “for the most part dwells with things invested with value”, i.e., made things, it is the world that Dasein has appropriated through language, in which he asserts himself as part of a greater historical whole that is ontologically significant.⁶⁸ In the Kassel lectures, given in 1925, under the general title, ‘Wilhelm Dilthey’s Research Work and the Present Struggle for a Historical Worldview’ Heidegger stated that a major problem in western philosophy concerned the difficulty of attaining an ontological sense of human life. Heidegger regarded this crisis as a struggle for a historical worldview in which knowledge about history would determine our conception of the world and human existence.⁶⁹ Heidegger was attracted to Dilthey’s Christian reading of the history of philosophy and shared his view that, in focusing on the inner self and historical consciousness, Christianity had gone beyond the limitations of Greek cosmology. And whilst both were perplexed at how to make the ‘unfathomable living dimension’ first discovered by Christianity philosophically accessible, Heidegger agreed with Dilthey that, “the reality of the inner world is that it is at once a historical world which as such can be understood.”⁷⁰ Certainly for Heidegger, the focus of that ‘lived experience’ came to be expressed in the ‘factual life experience’ of Dasein, which is a historically situated mode of ‘being-in-the-world’, devoid of any notion of unhistorical individuation.⁷¹

Although Heidegger rarely expressed his religious convictions, early on in his career he presented himself as a Christian theologian attempting to serve God through his works. And, certainly at this time, he appears to have been influenced by the theology of Luther.⁷² Luther was, for Heidegger, the theologian who gave voice to the true Christian experience, as expressed in terms of horror, dread, guilt, suffering, anxiety, care and fallen-ness. And many of these terms, which Luther emphasised in his teachings, were adopted by Heidegger in his attempt to construct an ontological justification for the Christian life of suffering.⁷³ However, the

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell 1962), 92 [56] References in square brackets refer to 8th German edition, 1957

⁶⁹ Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 358

⁷⁰ Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 101

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 101

⁷² John van Buren, ‘Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther’, ed., John van Buren and Theodore Kisiel, *Reading Heidegger From The Start* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 170

⁷³ John van Buren, Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther’, 170

plausibility of the Lutheran demand for such anguished experience depends upon the reality of an absent God, and the consequent denial that he is knowable within the realm of human experience. Clearly Aristotle's metaphysical vision of a divinely inspired and animated universe, knowable to man through the effort of contemplation, clashed with Luther's interpretation of a diminished reality and of man's impotence within it. The productive, worldly exertions favoured by Luther are the very antithesis of the ontological effort Aristotle addresses, which is indiscernible and produces nothing.⁷⁴ Thus, two very different notions of human work lie at the base of these two different perceptions of being human. For Luther, man orients himself to the world through his belief. He may be productive but ontologically he is impotent, whereas, the Aristotelian perceiver produces nothing, but is empowered.

What ultimately emerges in Heidegger's historical understanding of Being is the presentation of a theologically derived conception of Being, endeavouring to shape a sustainable ontology. Having already found the justificatory theory for existence in Christian theology, Heidegger was in search of an ontological ground to support it. As Heidegger states in 'On The Essence of Ground', written in 1929, "through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as being-in-the-world, no decision whether affirmative or negative, is made concerning a possible being toward God. It is, however, the case that through an illumination of transcendence we first achieve an adequate concept of Dasein, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered."⁷⁵ The task that then followed was to ontologically ground that mode of being, experienced psychologically as a theological absence. It could not be done, Heidegger could not extrapolate an ontology from theology, a realism from idealism, and the work he commenced in 'Being and Time' was not completed. Perhaps, what is most significant about Heidegger's attempt to historicise Aristotle's ontology is that it failed. And yet at the same time, our historical orientation to life feels entirely natural. The question that, therefore, calls to be considered, is, how did our historical orientation to the world arise?

A prerequisite for making a being available for history is to ensure that it is no longer available for itself. And just such an ontological shift is effected in the transition from 'ousia' to 'parousia'. Both Christendom and history are founded on an understanding of man as 'parousia' – a being available for external works. Since the futural aspirations of both depend on a common conception of insubstantial nature.

⁷⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2002)

⁷⁵ John Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity*, 61 (New York: Continuum, 1999), 61; Krell, *Basic Writings – Martin Heidegger*, 253

Whereas the cosmic cycles celebrated by the Greeks kept the meaning of life within its lived realm, the eschatological focus of early Christianity, which later transposed into the concept of a progressive and universal history, relocated that meaning beyond the margins of individual life. Consequently, individual energetic resources became available to be harnessed and directed towards the furtherance of that ill-defined external goal. For the modern, historical world meaning derives from purpose, which is an association that entered the world with a changed orientation towards it. That new orientation looked beyond the actual facts of reality to an ultimate overriding purpose beyond, “it emerged from faith in an ultimate purpose”, which for the Jews and Christians was salvation. And it is that notion of overriding, transcendent purpose that has been transposed onto secular history and is sustained by the notion of progress.⁷⁶ Thus, the focus of life becomes projected forwards, as it is the aspiration of future goals that serves to imbue the present with meaning.

Heidegger asserted that any notion of being is at the same time an interpretation of human nature. But, it is also a doctrine of power. For the most obvious distinction between these contrasting ontologies, of natural potential and historical possibilities, is that only in the former case is power owned. And, therefore, not only is history an account of realised possibilities, it is also an ontology of disembodied power: of power that is available to be harnessed for external use. Heidegger was unable to assimilate history into Aristotle’s primary ontology because history’s movement is antithetical to those more fundamental ontological goals. Rather, history stands separate, a derivative ontology, sourced in deprivation and nourished on non-being. Only a diminished interpretation of human ‘thinghood’ founded on ‘*parousia*’ could find ontological significance in incidental possibilities and allow the mechanical movement of history to become determining. For ‘*parousia*’ is, by definition, essentially formless: it engages in no inner activity of ‘thinghood’ beyond the biological. It is therefore not surprising that the actual form shaping ‘*parousia*’ is history, i.e., that historicising is the formative movement of ‘*parousia*’. As Heidegger states, “the specific movement in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along is ‘historicizing’.”⁷⁷ However, ‘*parousia*’ isn’t simply an external variant of ‘*ousia*’, it is ontologically entirely different, because the latter is sustained by individuating activity, but the former isn’t. And, because the realisation of individuated ‘thinghood’ relies on the underlying reality of individuating activity, a lack of such activity will inevitably result in a change of identity. As Mary Gill pointed out earlier, a being’s innate activity isn’t just the expression of what it is it is also the means of its

⁷⁶ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 4

⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 427 [375]

preservation. Ayreh Kosman makes the same point, observing that what is most notable in Aristotle's thinking is a view of potency that is not used up in producing, or in any form of external activity. Rather, it is a potential that is realised and, indeed, only realizable through the inner actualization of the inherent potency of a being 'being' itself. As Kosman says, "in the realization of the ability that an entity has..., in an entity's actively exercising its being, the ability is not consumed it is precisely preserved and made manifest, is called forth into the full and active exercise of its being, so that realization does not **replace** ability, but **is** ability, and is the occasion for the fullest and most real expression of the ability that it is."⁷⁸ Aristotle is quite clear that the question of identity is answered by activity: "it is the case both that each thing seems to be nothing other than its own 'thinghood', and what it is for it to be is said to be the 'thinghood' of each thing."⁷⁹ It is the activity that is determinative and not the name, since the activity is the reality from which names are derived. Accordingly, the form must be at work upon the material in a way that makes the particular thing what it is. Since '*parousia*' itself has no form, i.e., no active form of being, which is what Aristotle means by form, it can't exist as an individuated being. Rather, '*parousia*' must be coalesced and conformed in accordance with some other over-arching movement or form; and that form is history.

It appears that individuated being is inappropriate for historical being, and ultimately incompatible with it. And, consequently, the promise of freedom that world history is seen to offer is really an illusion, disguised by the plethora of possibilities of historical existence. For Dilthey and Heidegger, human life is primarily a cultural phenomenon, which does not extend to the natural world. And what emerges from this 'formative culture', and its directing of human impulses, is the elimination of the active form of Aristotelian individuation. For individuating activity has no place or purpose when "the historical world [is] the ongoing product of communal human activity."⁸⁰ According to Dilthey, "the term 'life' no longer narrowly refers to the psychic nexus of an individual but to larger socio-historical systems of influences as well." Accordingly, "each life experience thus may be viewed as a function of larger contexts of life."⁸¹ However, the elimination of individuation remains invisible to the historicizing impulse, because the multitudinous possibilities of communal action history yields appear as freedom. As Dilthey asserts, "historical consciousness is an

⁷⁸ Kosman, 'The Activity of Being in Aristotle's Metaphysics', in T. Scaltsas, D. Charles and M.L. Gill ed., *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 206

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1031a 15

⁸⁰ Owensby, *Dilthey And The Narrative Of History*, 123 [my emphasis]

⁸¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Selected Works,' Princeton University Press, 1989 5:224; 'Gesammelte Schriften', Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 6:314: quoted in *Dilthey And The Narrative of History*: 148

appreciation of life's multidimensionality." He is right that the impression it gives rise to is that "it keeps life's vitality open."⁸² However, this is obviously only in productive, historical terms. Consequently, the pseudo vitality of historical consciousness is able to pretend a transformative potential that it does not possess, and falsely suggests that existence is enhanced by remaining uncompleted,⁸³ whereas in reality this is simply the trap of endless productivity. For the prison house of history is founded and sustained by the illusion that by producing more we become more.

As far as Aristotle is concerned, however, the reason thinking about productive possibilities appears limitless is because produced things are always open to change, and therefore so too is the thinking that endlessly produces and reproduces them. Teleological activity, by contrast, has an end; the end is in the activity itself. Ateleological, or goalless actions, however, which Aristotle usually describes as motions, can go on forever as they have no ontological purpose. Aristotle draws the following distinction between actions concerned with being and those concerned with producing: "The active condition governing action is different from the active condition governing making and neither of them is included in the other.... The end of making is different from itself but the end of action could not be, since acting well is itself the end."⁸⁴ The action underlying history is making; it isn't teleological. And, as Heidegger insisted earlier, the human being itself is a historical object, and its becoming is a "standing within time." Hence, what we make of ourselves, or, rather, what is made of us, in history is ateleological. We now live in a way that is essentially goalless, as we have been separated from our own ontological ends. Instead, our lives are externally ordered and utilised; whilst all the while, that usurpation of our ontological power is thinly disguised as our very own societal aspiration. Thus, the hallmark of history is utilisation. For our ontological resources, which retain our capacity to be truly human, are no longer under our control.

The modern day thinker who most presciently described the burden of history is Nietzsche. For Nietzsche the history of the past two millennia constitutes a lie against beings, which the individual, himself, must overcome. To this end, Nietzsche attempts to make the individual feel uncomfortable with his way of being in the world, encouraging him to think and act against the grain of historical thought. Nietzsche has no interest in such historical creations as nations, states, societies or cultures, all of which he regards as operating as oppressive structures seeking to exploit the individual and deprive him of his energetic resources. For Nietzsche history is

⁸² Owensby, *Dilthey And The Narrative Of History*, 171

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 171

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a – 1140b

superfluous to being and, therefore, potentially hostile, because man's ability to grow into "something great and truly human depends on his ability to be unhistorical."⁸⁵ It is, therefore, not surprising that Nietzsche saw himself narrating the history of the next two centuries. For he saw the inevitability of the entropic movement that was bringing about a world determined by disembodied historical power. Such a reality he realized would be revealed once the illusory 'truth' of society's supposedly 'foundational' values had been exposed. For Nietzsche, the approaching nihilism wasn't simply a questioning derived from the realization that formerly esteemed values were not as had been thought, but a recognition of the fact that the ontological effort invested in sustaining that prior valuation had exacted an energetic toll, inflicting "the pain of futility" in the realisation of "the lack of an opportunity to recover in some way." Nietzsche saw that adhering to such values had exacted an ontological price, because by adhering to false values life's energetic 'overplus' had been commissioned to follow a fruitless historical mission.

The determining nature of modern culture is, certainly, more pronounced now than it was for Nietzsche. Nevertheless, he foresaw its growing formative power and surmised that at the root of that deforming historical development was a fear of the individual. He saw that the individual was being adapted and made useful for society and suggested that what was really being sought, whether this was admitted or not, was nothing less than a fundamental 'remoulding', "indeed the weakening and abolition of the individual." Nietzsche saw that what was preferred, and would in any event become inevitable unless the individual's ontological resources were restored to him, or recaptured by him, was nothing less than a change in ontological form. For in place of individual existence which was generally viewed as "evil, inimical, prodigal, costly and extravagant," Nietzsche recognised that there were hopes that man could be managed "more cheaply, more safely, more equitably, and more uniformly if there exist only *large bodies and their members*."⁸⁶ Nietzsche believed that a fundamental philosophical error prevented history's degenerative nature from coming into view, and that concerned philosophy's failure to recognise man's mutable nature: "all philosophers share this common error: they proceed from contemporary man and think they can reach their goal through an analysis of this man. Automatically they think of "man" as an eternal verity, as something abiding in the whirlpool, as a sure measure of things."⁸⁷ As far as Nietzsche was concerned, however, man's nature is not so secure. Because to set man apart from nature and to attempt to found him within

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *On The Use and Abuse of History For Life*, 15

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, 'Daybreak 132', *A Nietzsche Reader*, 95

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, 'Human All-too Human 2', *The Portable Nietzsche*, 51

history is not just to deprive him of his instincts, it is to change him, to prevent him from becoming mature. And it is in that immature and malleable condition that society strives to maintain him, having recognised that it is the incomplete soul that is the more useful.⁸⁸

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⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 718, ed., Walter Kaufmann, 383