

Chapter – 1

Introduction

Introduction

Philosophy gets under way only by a peculiar insertion of our own existence into the fundamental possibilities of Dasein as a whole.¹

Authenticity is a dramatic theme that has been inspiration not only for philosophy, but also for various forms of art. We study this theme in this dissertation with reference to one of the greatest philosophical classics of our times: Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The book itself is bereft of any drama. It is claimed to be phenomenological ontology in its purest form. However, our search will reveal the dramatico-philosophical shades of the ontology of authenticity in *Being and Time*. We will expose the existential ontology of the human person in *Being and Time* very much in line with the tradition of the dramatic theme of authenticity in existentialism as a whole. We will show that the theme is very much connected to 'life' despite Heidegger's claim to the contrary. To achieve this goal, we first look into the landscape of existentialism wherein the theme appears in its dramatico-philosophical brilliance.

1.1. Existentialism as a Philosophy of the Themes of Life and Authenticity as a Human Ideal

The philosophical pursuit began in the East and the West as a way of life.²

An even-handed observer of the same pursuit tends to be cynical today, because a

¹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, trans. David Farrell Krell, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p.110

² It is true that philosophy began in the West with the Pre-Socratics, who were chiefly cosmologists and did not speak much about human life as such. So much so, Aristotle nicknamed them 'physicists.' However, even for the pre-Socratics whatever philosophy they were propounding was a way of life. They were not only thinkers but also poets and seers. The pre-Socratics were

discipline that originated to probe into the meaning of the existence of the human spirit, his/her world and the power behind that existence, has become abstruse, technical and a verbose jugglery in the academy. Philosophy has little to do with life and the teacher of philosophy has little to do with living out a philosophy.

Even in the West, which now has become the champion of the professional approach, philosophy had much to do with life during the Greek period and later. Socrates, a rather godly figure in the Western tradition, was the legendary martyr for the philosophic life.³ Karl Jaspers points out: “The future destinies of philosophy are sure to be reflected in its attitude toward Socrates.”⁴ Plato could, without overstatement, be called the father of philosophy as a theoretical discipline. Nevertheless, he lived and taught in the light of his master’s example. He was astutely aware that ‘*noésis*’ or pure reason was a hard-fought achievement but a liberating one. Even in the later times, there were thinkers in the West who embraced philosophy as the true love of wisdom and a way of life. Spinoza was another thinker who spent his life for the philosophy he wrote and was convinced of.

convinced that they were revealers of things/truths greater than themselves.

³ In fact, suggestion toward transformation of philosophy in the Socratic mirror in order to achieve alternative philosophical futures of rejuvenated images of Socrates are made, owing to the ‘spent’ state of philosophy in the present. (Stephen A. Erickson., “The Image of Socrates in the Mirror of Jaspers,” *Philosophy Today*, 38 [1994], p.285) It was also reported in USA WEEKEND that once dismissed as a sort of parlour game for eggheads, philosophy is making a comeback among regular folks. They say Socrates and Plato speak to modern life. So much so, troubled people are seeking philosophers’ rather than psychologists’ help. In New York, American Philosophical Practitioners’ Association wants to put philosophers in counseling status. They are considering licensing philosophers for this. They intend to train children in school for critical and philosophical thinking so that they will learn to make decisions. Socratic dialogue is the best method they propose. It is about dialogue and not diagnosis, and so is more involving and therapeutic than traditional therapy. (Ann Japenga, “Philosophy: The New Therapy for 2000,” from the regular feature New Frontiers: Changing the Way We Live in USA WEEKEND, October 22 – 24, 1999, p.4)

⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Buddha, Confucius, Jesus – The Paradigmatic Individuals*, trans. Ralph Manheim, (London: Hancourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p.18

He was excommunicated from his Jewish community for his interpretation of the Scriptures at the age of twenty-four. He lived the quiet life of a scholar, earning his livelihood grinding lenses which led to his untimely death due to tuberculosis, refusing the honour of the chair of philosophy at Heidelberg and never seeking the limelight or loving money.⁵ Despite such glorious past, Western philosophy, by and large, developed a theoretical bias, a tilt toward reason-for-its-own-sake, an intellectual gimmick, which has nothing to do with life. It is as if knowing the truth does not suggest a programme of life.

Among the Orientals, even now, serious philosophical undertaking is primarily life-centred, though the Western professional and academic approach is gradually and increasingly finding acceptance. In India, for instance, there are still many people who undertake philosophical enquiry to release themselves from the fetters of life. Most of the Indian philosophers of the recent times, whom we study in the courses on Contemporary Indian Philosophy in our universities, are non-academicians, who made radical commitments in life and wrote philosophy from life-experiences: Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Tilak, and so on goes the list.

Analytic philosophies have enthralled the Western philosophical circles by mere pure theoretical delight. As the scientific revolution progressed, the magnitude of precise knowledge increased tremendously and knowledge as such began to mean specialized and scientific, aiding predictability, after the fashion of the physical

⁵ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. IV, "Descartes to Leibnitz," (London: Search

sciences.⁶ Even social sciences are making use of the scientific tools and are developing a degree of predictability, appropriate to their own domain, though this may not be close to that of the physical sciences. Social sciences, such as economics, that employ scientific tools are becoming more popular. In this scenario, the spirit of positivism has given rise to a sense of guilt among the philosophers. They feel they are not scientists, the engineers of exact, reliable knowledge of the scientific kind. Barret aptly points out: “Hence the extraordinary preoccupation with technique among modern philosophers, with logical and linguistic analysis, syntax and semantics; and in general with the refining away of all content for the sake of formal subtlety.”⁷ Heidegger, for one, was vehemently opposed to the application of the scientific method in philosophy. In *What is Metaphysics?* He states: “Philosophy can never be measured by the standard of the idea of science.”⁸ Again, in the *Letter on Humanism* he observes: “Philosophy is hounded by the fear that it loses prestige and validity if it is not a science. Not to be a science is taken as a failing that is equivalent to being unscientific.”⁹

We must not, however, fancy that this is but a recent trend or a philosopher’s nostalgia for the enviable rank their discipline once occupied. Descartes, the acclaimed father of modern philosophy, moans in his *Discourse on Method*:

Press, 1976), pp.205-06

⁶ Scientific theories are inductive unlike mathematical theories, and as such cannot be proved totally. What makes them valid is their degree of probability, which in turn is judged when the phenomena with which they deal are true to prediction. In fact, a single contrary instance forces the rejection of a truly scientific theory. That much is the rigidity and exactness!

⁷ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1962), p.6

⁸ Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?,” *Basic Writings*, p.110

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, p.219

“Regarding philosophy, I shall say only this:... it has been cultivated for many centuries by the most excellent minds and yet there is still no point in it which is not disputed and hence doubtful...”¹⁰ Descartes was a mathematical man and he valued mathematics for its ‘certainty and self-evidence of its reasoning,’ though he did not understand its true use.¹¹ So was Immanuel Kant, another trendsetter of the West – a logical, methodic thinker, a Newton-admirer. In his preface to the first edition of the *Critique* in 1781, Kant stated the aims of his celebrated masterpiece: ‘thoroughness,’ ‘certitude and clearness.’¹² Hence, at the back of the contempt for dispersed views, lacking precision and certainty, is the scientific temper of our age, the compulsion to rationally justify everything, the dread of the mysterious, the scorn for anything that baffles our understanding.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the race for advancement, specialization, research, provability/verifiability and pointed knowledge leads away from the concerns of life. Philosophers, in their mad dash to be more and more scientific, are becoming more and more ineffective. Philosophy, the mother of all sciences, has brought about intellectual revolutions in the past that have affected peoples’ lives, but today it has degenerated to a mere tool of academic squabbles. Though progresses in pure physics have been understood correctly by a mere handful of persons, they have dramatic, sometimes tragic, consequences on the

¹⁰ Rene Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham and others, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.24

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

¹² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* – of the series GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD, No. 42, (London: William Benton, 1952), p.2

general public.¹³ Philosophy does not any more have such exciting effects. Newer and newer philosophic hypotheses are getting born in the universities and die there without having anything to say on life. Ordinary people, even the intellectually curious ones, did not hear of the monumental magnum opus of Russell and Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* (1910) or Wittgenstein's famed *Tractatus* (1922).¹⁴

It is in this background that existentialism¹⁵ came as a solace. It was a

¹³ Albert Einstein never contemplated that his revolutionary equation ($E=MC^2$) would be the theoretical progenitor of the atom bomb. But it was! The bomb itself was a tragedy for the Japanese and an exciting signal of victory for the allied forces. "The atomic bomb is the supreme example of the way in which the academic researches of Einstein and his generation of physicists became, within few decades, applicable in ways they could never have foreseen. In fact, the range of applications of their work has sometimes led to World War II being called "the Physicists' war." (Bill MacKeith, ed., *Pioneers of Modern Science – of the series THE WORLD OF SCIENCE*, Vol. 16, [New Delhi: S. Chand and Company, 1994], p.119). Philosophers played a great role in the French Revolution; but whether they can again play such a role is contestable.

¹⁴ However, people did hear of Russell's more popular essays, like *The Free Man's Worship* (1902), *Why I am not a Christian?* (1927), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), *A History of Western Philosophy* (1954), his *Autobiography* (three volumes published in 1967, 1968 and 1969) and so on.

¹⁵ It is not easy to define existentialism because two writers both claiming to be existentialists do not seem to agree on any one cardinal point. Hence existentialists are put together "in terms of a number of recurrent themes that are in fact independent of one another but have as a matter of philosophical history, been associated in a variety of patterns. These themes are the individual and systems; intentionally; being and absurdity; the nature and significance of choice; the role of extreme experiences; and the nature of communication." (Alasdair MacIntyre, "Existentialism," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, Vol. III, [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company & The Free Press, 1972], p. 147). The *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives the following working definition: "The various philosophies (dating from about 1930) that have been referred to by the term Existentialism have in common an interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character." (Henry R. West, "Philosophical Schools and Doctrines," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 25, [Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1994], p.611). This, in fact, is a narrow understanding of Existentialism. In a broader sense, existentialism "refers to a much earlier trend in Western thought dating back to the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes (300 B.C.E) and including such divers works as *The Confessions* (c.400) of Saint Augustine, the *Pensées* (1670) of Blaise Pascal, and the works of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)." (Paul August Rentz, "Existentialism," *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. John K. Roth, [London, Salem Press, 1996], p.294). The works of Søren Kierkegaard and Frederick Nietzsche also should be included in this list. In this sense, "the existential movement is seen in the tendency of some Western religious and literary writers to dwell upon the sense of paradox and tragedy in the human condition." (ibid.)

philosophical movement that touched people. It went outside the four walls of the academies. People began to talk about it; it shook the literary world. Some of its best expounders were novelists. Quite a few of its noted protagonists were non-academicians. Many of them lived a life that matched the particular shade of existentialism they propounded. People read the existential classics and nodded their heads in agreement, saying ‘yes, such is life,’ though ‘professional’ philosophers rejected it as mere sensationalism and psychologising.

What made this twentieth-century movement special was that it dealt with issues that are important to humans, though not necessarily to philosophers. Barrett observes: “The very themes of Existentialism were something of a scandal to the detached sobriety of Anglo-American philosophy.”¹⁶ The existentialists spoke of anxiety, death, guilt, the conflict between the authentic and the inauthentic self, the fakery of the person lost in the mass, the absurdities of life, the failure of reason and rationalizing etc. These themes are foreign to Anglo-American philosophy¹⁷ but they are themes of life. Existentialism was the nearest contemporary parallel to the Socratic quest after philosophizing about and examining of human life, whatever be the conclusions derived by the various existentialists.¹⁸

¹⁶ William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, p.9

¹⁷ In fact, Bertrand Russell’s influential and popular *A History of Western Philosophy* does not utter the term ‘existentialism’ or the names like Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Sartre.

¹⁸ The Socratic quest is well set forth in the oft-quoted maxim, founded in Plato’s *Apology*, 38.a: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” During his trial, or at least in the portrayal of the same in Plato’s account of it, Socrates pinpoints the programme of his life as philosophising and examining his own and others’ lives. He insisted that he would do these even if he were acquitted. (Plato, *Apology*, tran. H. N. Fowler, in *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus* which is part of the series Loeb Classical Library, [London: Harvard University Press, 1982], p.133ff.) Socrates spoke of the formation of ‘character.’ However, many of the existentialists revolted against the constraints of conventional morality. Nevertheless, the

Edward G. Lawry, an American, argues that despite Anglo-American philosophy's adoption of 'an extraordinarily disciplined procedure based on the legacy of the criterion of reason,' some building of bridges can help a serious revival of existentialism there. He observes:

Wisdom has often been sought in the writings of imaginative literature and essays as well as in the technical studies of the learned. Existentialists have pursued wisdom there unapologetically and with vigour... Highly complex, technical conceptual analyses are not philosophic mistakes, but neither are they the identifying marks of true philosophy. There is good sense in learning our philosophy from literature.¹⁹

The ideal of authenticity in existentialism can be placed alongside the Socratic quest to continuously re-examine human life and the Indian ideal of *moksa*, though from a very different standpoint. The standpoint is different because most of the existentialists strove to work out of the absolutist moral systems of meaning, whereas the early Greeks and the Vedic Indians strove to establish such a realm of things. Their common identity is only in that they all strove to establish the meaningfulness of human life, one in reference to an eternal order of things and the other assuming that there is no such realm of things and that man can fabricate meaning out of meaninglessness. This dissertation is an attempt at linking Martin Heidegger's philosophy of authenticity with the concerns of real life. This is necessary because Heidegger curiously claims that his ontology of authenticity has no practical aims.

agreement is upon a philosophical examination of human life, which the existentialists did with vigour.

¹⁹ Edward G. Lawry, "Whatever Happened to Existentialism?," *Philosophy Today*, XXX (1986), p.344

1.2. Statement of the Problem: Approach and Justification

Our study explores both the existentialist ideal of authenticity in general and Heidegger's concept of authenticity in particular. We deal with the former only to place the same notion in Heidegger's *Being and Time* in context. The text of *Being and Time* is divided into two major sections. The First Section pictures the human being as not at home in the world, homeless and anxious. It is inauthentic because it generally does not own up its self but is dictated by the social mass into which it is merged. The Second Section of *Being and Time* tells us that man's anxiety about homelessness is also an anxiety in the face of its ultimate finitude. However, within this finite framework humans can make a life out of apparent hopelessness by resolutely owning their true/own possibilities upon the horizon of its death. Such a dynamic process of becoming authentic is possible because human beings 'care' about their own being and because their Being is engulfed in a finite understanding of time which Heidegger calls 'temporality.'

Our study will establish Heidegger's ontological conception of authenticity as a practical ideal of life. We will do this not arbitrarily but by analytically revealing a hidden exhortative ideal in *Being and Time*. This ideal is authenticity. After having established that Heidegger challenges his reader to pursue the ideal of authenticity, we venture to point out the practical implications of such a pursuit. Even if it is an exhortative ideal, authenticity is radically subjective and its content is open to the judgement of individuals. We will explore in detail the relevance of such an ideal to man's moral behaviour. We will also explore this ideal in reference

to a very controversial incident in Heidegger's own life: his open support of the Nazis for a period of ten months. We will argue that this failure on Heidegger's part manifests the problems of the authenticity ideal in his magnum opus. In fact, his philosophy of authenticity in *Being and Time* can be linked to his Nazi encounter. Nevertheless it should challenge us to purge the ideal of its ambiguities and take what is best in it.

What is exactly best in the authenticity ideal? A major argument of our dissertation is about the need to restore the individuality of the individual in our age of social leveling, standardizing through fashion and cultural colonialism. The uniqueness and the individuality of human beings is lost in a vulgar desire to conform. Our thesis is an attempt at a balanced defence of the 'return of the individual' and for this we will invoke the authenticity ideal of *Being and Time*. All human beings desire to know. Similarly, all human beings desire to be true to themselves. Only few are actually true to themselves because of the insurmountable social pressures, both subtle and obvious. We believe that this is a worthwhile attempt and on this belief rests the need for and value of this thesis, if it has any.

Research on Heidegger has been multifarious and voluminous. Though in India Heidegger is little known, his fame in Europe as the most original philosopher since Hegel and in the English-speaking world as the adversary of the scientific method in philosophy has risen to obvious heights. Heidegger is one of the few philosophers who touched the heights of both fame and controversy while alive. Even his theme of authenticity, a theme that has been central to his philosophy

throughout his philosophical career despite the so-called ‘turn,’ has been variously researched and studied. What then is the place of our study in this sea of secondary literature on Heidegger? We study Heidegger’s concept of authenticity with a singular purpose of drawing on its practical import, moral bearings and the existential-dramatic punch. We contend that it is impossible to exhaust the various applications, unveiling the nuances and demonstrating the versatile influences of such a seminal thinker as Heidegger was.

We have titled our dissertation “A Life in the ‘Own’ Self” in order to highlight the emphasis of our study. In usual Heideggerian terminology “existence” should be preferable to “life.” However, we have chosen “life” because we want to connect the existential ontology of authenticity to the actual living of an authentic life. An authentic life is one in which an individual owns up his Being, his self. That self which we have seized hold of in authenticity is the ‘own’ self. ‘Own’ would mean ‘my very own.’ ‘Mineness’ as a characteristic of human existence is what makes authenticity possible according to Heidegger. There is yet another nuance in which ‘own’ is used as a qualifying adjective of ‘self.’ We translate the German word ‘*eigentlichkeit*’ as authenticity. The root of this German noun is the adjective ‘*eigen*’ which has the meaning ‘own.’ Only that self which is my very own is authentic. This also means that it is rarely that we live a life in our own self and for the most part we live in a borrowed self, which Heidegger distinguished as the “they-self.” Our subtitle clearly shows that the study is aiming at a critical review of Heidegger’s notion of authentically owning up one’s own self. This *critical appraisal we achieve in the penultimate chapter.*

This study is limited only to one of Heidegger's numerous philosophical productions. It is admitted that we are not giving the wholistic picture of Heidegger's understanding of human authenticity. We have two reasons in doing so. Firstly, *Being and Time*, which characterizes the views of early Heidegger, is a project by itself. It gives a coherent picture of human authenticity, which could reasonably stand alone without reference to his other works. Secondly, we believe that Heidegger's early notion of authenticity as pictured in *Being and Time* has its own validity and that it is not correct to say that his later conception of authenticity as releasement is superior. The voluntarism of the earlier concept gives way to certain fatalism in the later conception. It is the voluntaristic earlier notion that makes Heidegger an existentialist and we intend to treat Heidegger's notions of authenticity in reference to the existential search after human authenticity.

We have followed a combined method of descriptive analysis, both thematic and textual, and critical appraisal in arriving at our open-ended conclusions. Our conclusions are open-ended because philosophy, we believe, is a continuous search after truth and can never be said to be at an end. It is admitted that we have two handicaps. Our lack of knowledge of the German language is a real shortcoming since Heidegger's style of philosophical prose is closely tied to that language. Secondly, a lot of existing materials even in English as secondary literature for Heidegger scholarship has been unavailable to us. The second limitation is inconsequential because though we have not exhausted the materials available, we have actually covered a lot of it, especially the significant ones. The first limitation mentioned above could have serious bearings on our understanding. This has been

taken care of by careful and patient reading of the translations and their commentaries. For this reason we have quoted extensively from the translations and commentaries.

The structure of our dissertation is simple and direct. We have six chapters. The first and last of these are entitled “Introduction” and “Conclusion” respectively. The second chapter is entitled “A Prelude to Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity: Historical Setting and Preliminary Notions.” Here, we place Heidegger’s notion of authenticity within the existential movement and introduce his philosophical background for writing on the concept of authenticity in *Being and Time*. The third and fourth chapters are descriptive in character. The third chapter explores the First Division of *Being and Time* where a picture of the everyday, inauthentic man emerges. This chapter is entitled “Authenticity and Everyday Dasein: Preparatory Analysis.” The fourth chapter, “Authenticity and Temporality: Primordial Analysis” explores the Second Division of *Being and Time* where the picture of the authentic man who resolutely anticipates his death emerges. This chapter points out the salient features of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity. The fifth chapter is entitled “Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity in *Being and Time*: A Critique.” This chapter presents a critical appraisal of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity embodied in *Being and Time*. While upholding the ideal of authenticity as a way out of the chronic socially protected inauthenticity of modern man, we have made ample attempt to point out the many aspects of this notion as pictured in *Being and Time*, which require a reappraisal. Overall, our study will guide us to a picture of authentic human being who is authentic to himself and constructively social. Heidegger

himself, was fond of violent interpretations of other philosophers' texts. Certain amount of violence may be now required to free the authentic individual of *Being and Time* from a theoretical cage.

The present study is specifically a study in existential ontology. By connecting Heidegger's ontology to the questions of life, our study also becomes partly a study in philosophical anthropology. Trying to read this thesis from a stance of analytical tradition or from an allied stance would not do justice to this attempt. The thesis should be seen in the existential framework and clear-cut logical answers to every problem posed is against the spirit of this study. An existential philosophy is only as logical as existence itself. And so a sympathetically existential reading of this thesis is recommended.

We were inspired to do this dissertation due to a personal desire to be as authentic as possible. The attempt has both brought us down to earth and made us resolved. It has taught us both the failure and the feasibility of an ideal when applied in real life.

