

ANIMAL DASEIN

THE GENESIS OF EXISTENTIALS IN THE EARLY HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATIONS OF ARISTOTLE

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Abstract: Focusing on Heidegger's early phenomenological interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy of life (1919-1926), I will show how *Dasein's* existential structures – *Befindlichkeit*, Understanding and Being-with through language – have been developed on the basis of capacities belonging to animal life: perception (*aisthēsis*; *Vernehmen*), disposition (*diathesis*; *Befindlichkeit*), desire (*orexis*; *Sorge*), mobility (*kinesis kata topon*; *Umgang*), understanding (*praktike noein*; *Verstehen*), circumspection (*phronesis*; *Umsicht*) and voice (*phonē*, *Rede*). This genesis of existentials in animals explains why, before *Being and Time*, Heidegger used to grant to animals *Dasein's* way of being.

Keywords: Heidegger, Aristotle, Animals, Existentials, Dasein.

“Life” refers to a *mode of being*, indeed a mode of *being-in-a-world*. A living thing is not simply at hand [*vorhanden*], but is in a world in that it has its world. An animal is not simply moving down the road, pushed along by some mechanism. It is in the world in the sense of having it.”

Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*¹

We are so used to think of *Dasein* as a human being that, with the exception of some superficial debates, nobody doubt that "if *Dasein* is not man, it is nothing other than man".² This understanding is so pervasive that some simply translate "*Dasein*" by "human existence".³ However, in Heidegger's account, the existential structures are so basic that one can hardly understand animals as deprived of them: how could animals not be fundamentally defined by affection (*Befindlichkeit*), by the fact that they know how deal with the world and by the structure of being-with-one-another? We will focus on Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle's ontology of life (1919-1926) in order to show that these structures are not properly human, but are grounded upon the fundamental structures of animal life.

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- 1 GA 18, 18[14] : References to Heidegger's work are given in the original edition (GA: Gesamtausgabe, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main) with the exception of *Sein und Zeit* (SZ) and the *Natorp-Bericht* (NB). Page numbers refer to the original edition followed, when appropriate, by the English translation in square brackets.
 - 2 Derrida, “Les fins de l’homme”, in *Marges – de la philosophie*, 151. Cf. Heidegger, *Beiträge*, §176, 300.
 - 3 For example, in his recent translation of WS 1925-26, Sheehan claims this translation says “so very little while formally indicating, in a direct way, the matter in question.” (GA 21, *translator's foreword*, xi).

§1. Reading *Befindlichkeit* as *diathesis* and *Sorge* as desire

The first existential structure – *Befindlichkeit* – translates Aristotle’s notion of *diathesis*, or disposition and comes from Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle’s analysis of the passions: “The affects (*pathe*) are not mental states, but refer to the *disposition of the living in his world* [*Befindlichkeit des Lebenden*], how he stands to something, how he lets something affect or concern [*angehen*] him” (GA 18, 122). *Befindlichkeit* thus belongs to any being endowed with perception: it refers to the fact that a living being always finds itself [*befindet sich*] pleasantly or unpleasantly disposed toward what it perceives in the world. In finding-oneself well or badly disposed, there is disclosedness of both the world and oneself:

“By the very fact that a living being discloses a world, the Being of this being is also disclosed to it. It knows about itself even if only in the dullest way and the broadest sense. Along with the disclosure of the world, it is disclosed to itself.” (GA 22, 208[169])

Following Aristotle, Heidegger argues that “where there is perception of something, self-orientation in a world, there is [pain and pleasure], feeling oneself *attuned* in such and such a way, feeling well or ill, and thus also being open to, being on the lookout for: *orexis* [desire] (DA, 413b23)” (GA 22, 185-6). Desire belongs to the most primitive of animals because perception and appetite are equiprimordial powers: “Where there are feelings of pleasure and pain, there must be desire” (DA, 434a1).⁴

As we know, Heidegger renders *orexis* as *Sorge*, or care (SZ, 171; McNeill, 1999). This puzzling translation makes sense only if we understand intentionality not as the structure of consciousness or reason, but as the basic structure of life itself, as a “volitional being-out-for-something and going toward it: *orexis* (desire)” (GA 63, 70). Life is always related to something, striving for something, oriented toward something. That “toward-which” life is oriented is never a mere object, but always something that has significance or importance for living beings because, as Aristotle says, no animal moves by itself toward or away from something unless it has the desire to (DA, 432b17-29). The movement of a living being is always the movement of desire, or in Heidegger’s language, the movement of care.⁵

The basic structure of desiring or caring unveils the world as what matters to a living being: “The world is there in living in such a way that living, being-in-itself, always *matters* to it in some way.” (GA 18, 50-51[36]). Animals are open to the world in the sense that they “have” a world (GA 20, 223). Having a world means being involved in it, caring about it, being concerned by it. This peculiar “mineness” of factual life has nothing to do with self-reflexivity: life is given as “mine” in the simple fact of experiencing pleasure and pain.⁶ This “mattering” is a basic structure of the world of living beings which has therefore nothing to do with an objective reality: “The world, in the character of *hedu* and

4 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 434a1. Hereafter, DA.

5 It is precisely this idea which made possible Heidegger’s radicalization of ontology: life’s mobility is always a concerned mobility; *Lebensbewegtheit* is always a *Besorgensbewegtheit* (NB, 44). On the intentionality of life, see the example of the snail in GA 20, 223: “The snail is not at the outset only in its shell and not yet in the world [...]. It crawls out only insofar as its being is already to be in a world.”

6 “The affective as such already has the character of having-itself” (GA 18, 247). To neglect this “mineness” in animals under the assumption that it is so vague that it appears as a dumbness is to omit the fact that Heidegger chose the expression “*sich befinden*” to avoid any self-reflexivity (GA 20, 352). Even in the case of human *Dasein*, this openness to oneself is essentially non-transparent, it is precisely this *Diesigkeit* which makes a hermeneutics of factual life necessary (GA 61, 88).

luperon, is nonobjective; animals do not have the world there as objects. Rather, the world is encountered in the mode of the uplifting and the upsetting [...]” (GA 18, 48[35]). The way in which the world is there for animals depends on the degree to which an animal is awake or closed up in itself, but regardless of degree, “the possibility that the world matters to a being depends on this peculiar openness” (GA 18, 52[37]). Even if this mineness could express itself so dimly such that it appears in lower animals as a mere *Dumpfheit*, all animals participate to the first existential structure of *Dasein*—*Befindlichkeit*.⁷ But what about the second key component of being-in-the-world? What about understanding (*Verstehen*)?

§2. Understanding: *aisthesis* as *aletheuein* and *krinein*

“Understanding,” as Heidegger insists in 1926, must be taken “not in a specific theoretical sense, but in a practical one: to understand doesn’t mean to know something, but to know your way around something, to know how to do something” (GA 22, 207). Only if we recognize that orientation within the world, dealing with something is already a form of understanding can we grasp why Heidegger granted this fundamental structure to animals:

“Understanding belongs to the mode of Being of animals. To say that something is understood means that it is manifest in its being such and such: it is no longer concealed. In understanding, there is something like truth, *aletheia*: that which is unconcealed, not covered over, but on the contrary, uncovered.” (GA 22, 207-8[169])

Understanding is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Aristotle identifies several degrees or modalities of understanding at the very beginning of *Metaphysics*: *aisthesis*, *mneme*, *emperia*, *techne*, *episteme*, *sophia* (GA 22, 23-25). If *aisthesis* is named as the first level of understanding, it is because perception is the basic form of disclosing upon which all the other forms of understanding are based. *Aisthesis* is the most primitive form of *aletheuein*, “because it discloses the world, though indeed not in speech and assertion” (GA 22, 186), it is a form of uncovering that lets something be “known” in a certain sense.

This cognitive dimension of perception, this discrimination (*krinein*), explains why Aristotle cannot easily define perception as either irrational or rational (DA, 432a30): “the *aisthesis* of the animal already has the character of *krisis*, even in *aisthesis*, in normal perception, something is highlighted in relation to something else” (GA 19, 39). In natural perception, we do not perceive a multiplicity of sensory qualities (like pure noises), but rather *things* (GA 20, 368). Because of the synthetic nature of perception, we always perceive *something as something*. This synthesis – *a* as *b* – need no propositional thematisation, for it already belongs to natural perception: what we perceive is already significant, it makes sense (GA 21, 121). This synthetic nature of perception is what the early Heidegger called “the ‘as’ of significance” (GA 58, 114) or “critical-as,” (GA 17, 31)⁸ which will later be renamed “hermeneutical-as” (SZ, 158).

§3. Memory, experience and *phronesis*

Because perception is by itself a form of *synthesis* and *krinein*, Heidegger will attribute a form of understanding to animals. But not all animals are not confined to mere *aisthesis*, many are also endowed with *memory*. This decisive faculty allows animals to

⁷ “*Dumpfheit* is already a finding-oneself [*Sich befinden*]” (GA 63, 180n).

⁸ “We always see the world in an *as*. If I see something in the distance then I do not see something indeterminate. Instead we take it initially and mostly *as* something. This basic character of the world is possible through a definite manner of perceiving: *krinein*.” (GA 17, 294). “The ‘as’ is the structure of understanding” (GA 21, 150)

retain past images or representations (*phantasia*) and remember that what appears good may only be apparently good. Memory-driven experience (*emperia*) makes animals more intelligent and more cautious (*phronimoteron*) and therefore more difficult to trap and deceive (MP, I, 1). Animals endowed with memory are more able to anticipate what is coming, that is more capable of circumspection (*Umsicht*):

“If the living being were determined by *aisthesis* alone, then its world would extend only insofar as it sees, smells, etc. at any given moment. The living thing would be restricted to the sphere of what is immediately present-at-hand. Once it has *mneme*, however, the living thing becomes, in certain sense, free, no longer bound to the beings currently given in perception. In this way, the living being dominates a broader scope of the world, which becomes and stays available to it. Its being-in-the-world no longer requires ever new perceptions; on the contrary, when it finds itself within the same position in a world-nexus, it already knows how matters are arranged. The living beings that have *mneme* are *phronimotera*, “more prudent,” they are “more able to see around [*Umsichtiger*]”: they do not live in the moment anymore, but in a whole which they dominate. As *phronimotera*, they are also *mathetikera*, able to learn, they are “more teachable.” They thereby increase the scope of what they understand and know” (GA 22, 209[170]).

This description of the gradual transition from a primitive life to a life endowed with memory and anticipation trace the transformation of a life entangled in the immediate moment to a life possessing a *real temporal dimension*: an animal with memory lives in a totality that it “owns” in a certain sense. This “having”, Heidegger says in 1924, is “a pale expression for being-aware-of” (GA 18, 244).

We usually take for granted that *phronesis* is one of the highest possibilities of human life, one animals would be deprived of. Only if we understand “prudence” or “foresight” as “a certainty of orientation” can we understand “that animals also have a kind of *phronesis*” (GA 18, 235). This ability to orient oneself skillfully does not imply that these “modes of self-orienting become explicit” (GA 19, 129). *Phronesis* is not a “practical reasoning”, a weighing of the consequences of action, but rather an *Augenblick*, closer to *aisthesis* than to *logos*, it is the “look around” [*Um-sicht*] that makes possible *Umgang*, dealing with the surrounding world.⁹ “*Umgang*” is the term used by Heidegger to translate Aristotle's notion of *kinesis kata topon*, the motion peculiar to animals. As “being-able-to-move-by-themselves from place to place,” animals already have a sense of where they are going (GA 18, 238). Whether they fly, run, swim or crawl, animals move themselves *toward something*. This “something” they are striving for must be given in one way or another *as desirable* because, as Aristotle argues, “no animal moves except by compulsion unless it has an impulse toward or away from something” (DA, 432b18).

“Aristotle shows that what triggers the movement is not mere consideration. The object is not grasped through *aisthesis*, but through *orexis*. [...]It is not the case that the living being first observes things disinterestedly, merely looks in a neutral attitude, and then moves toward something; on the contrary, *orexis* is its fundamental mode of being.” (GA 22, 309[228])

Animal perception is always action-oriented, imperative or prescriptive. According to

9 It is not wrong to associate *phronesis* with deliberation and reasoning, but this intellectualization of *phronesis* misses the fact that *phronesis* is an *aletheuein* without *logos*: *phronesis* is a glance at the concrete situation, at what is so, but could always be otherwise (GA 19, 163-4). “*Phronesis* makes available the situation and is only possible because it is primarily an *aisthesis*; a pure and simple glance at the moment” (NB, 42).

Aristotle's logic of desire, to perceive something pleasant is to perceive it *as desirable*, as something *to pursue*. As soon as an animal desires something and sees it, it will go after it, without any prior reflection or decision.¹⁰ The fact that animals may be able to remember that what appears good is just an apparent good (a *phainomenon agathon*) explains why some animals will be granted a form of *phronesis*: "Hence, some animals are classified as prudent (*phronimos*), those which, in all matters relating to their own lives, have a clear ability to predict" (NE, 1141a25-28).

§4. *Phone* and *logos* at the basis of being-with [*Mitsein*]

We have seen that the first two existentials, *Befindlichkeit* and understanding, define animal life. However, Heidegger adds a third existential structure: discourse (*Rede*) or language (*Sprache*). This structure is not an independent one, but is equiprimordial with the first two (SZ, §34). One could wonder why this third structure comes into play since Heidegger made very clear that understanding doesn't need any articulation in speech by showing the derivative nature of statements (SZ, §33). So, why suddenly make language a basic existential? A closer look at the *function* of this structure shows the translation of "*Rede*" by "discourse," can be misleading. To speak is not to make statements about the world: *speaking is basically speaking with one another (Miteinanderreden)* (SZ, 165). Only if we understand language as speaking with one another can we understand the reason for this existential structure: Heidegger's purpose is to show that *Dasein* is always *Mitdasein*, that being-in-the-world is always being-in-the-world-with-another.

If "the phenomenon of *communication* must be understood in an ontologically broad sense" (SZ, 162), then it goes without saying that it is not a properly human phenomenon. Animals have plenty of ways to communicate and understand each other. With their voices (*phone*), animals do not only communicate feelings of pain and pleasure, but also the coming of a predator or the location of food.¹¹ The language of animals, Heidegger insists, has nothing to do with propositional speech: by warning his fellows of a predator's approach, the crane does not make a statement about the world, but seeks to bring other animals to a particular disposition (fear), in order to encourage certain behaviour (flight). As Kisiel remarks, the language of animals *is not apophantic, but essentially rhetoric*.¹² Long before the turn toward ordinary language, Heidegger argues that language is not primarily composed of true or false propositions, but essentially aims *at doing something or making others do something*. In SS1924, he argues animal voice "gives no report about the being-at-hand of what is pleasing: but rather this indication and crying out is in itself an *enticing* or *warning*":

"Enticing and warning as *repelling* and *attracting* have in their ground *being-with-one-another*. Enticing and warning already show that animals are with one another. Being-with-one-another becomes manifest precisely in the specific being-character of animals as *phone*. It is neither exhibited nor manifested that

10 This is precisely the meaning of Aristotle's practical syllogism: what is needed in order to explain animal behavior is, first, a desire and, then, something perceived as desirable. From there, the animal's movement will naturally follow like the conclusion of a logical syllogism from its premises (*De Motu Animalium*, 7)

11 In *Politics*, Aristotle says that sounds produced by animals are signs (*semeion*) of their pleasure and pain and that they use their voice (*phone*) to communicate these affections to each other (1253a8-14). In *The Parts of Animals*, he remarks that birds use their voice to communicate among themselves (*pro hermeneian alloesis*) and to teach something to another (660a17-b2).

12 *Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 295: "The animal encounters its environing world in terms of pleasure and pain. It gives voice to this in a kind of 'animal rhetoric' which entices or warns. Luring and alluring signs seek to bring the other animal into the same disposition, threats and warnings would deflect it from a certain disposition".

something as such is there [...] they only indicate it within the orbit of their animalistic having-to-do. Since animals indicate the threatening, alarming and so on, they signal in this indicating of the being-there of the world, their own being in the world” (GA 18, 54[39]).

This last point is of capital importance: the animal indicates not only that it finds itself in a world, but also *how* it finds itself in the world. Animals communicate with each other and with us, even if they do not have, strictly speaking, *logos*.

§5. *Proairesis* as the distinctive feature of human life

If the three basic existential structures characterize the lives of animals what distinguishes human life? As we know, Heidegger does not agree with Aristotle for human excellence rests not in contemplative life but in practical life. Man is the only animal capable of decision (*proairesis*), of resolute action (GA 18, 99; GA 22, 187).¹³ But why is man the only living being “able-to-resolve-itself” (GA 18, 254-56)? The answer given by Aristotle will be crucial for Heidegger: man is able of authentic resolution because of his understanding of time: “Humans because they possess an *aisthesis chronou* [‘sense of time’], can presentify *to mellon* [‘the future’](433b7) as the possible and as that for the sake of which they act”(GA 22, 311). Of course, animals also act, but they cannot *not act*, not pursue what is given as desirable; whereas man can decide not to pursue what is immediately pleasant and genuinely decide the course of his life.

§6. Conclusion

To be sure, there will be nothing left in *Being and Time* of this genesis of existential structures in animal life, as few traces remain of Aristotle's major influence on *Sein und Zeit*. If Heidegger will eventually claim that animals have no world, not even an *Umwelt* (GA 40, 54), his earlier lecture courses show that this constitutes a reversal in his way of thinking. On his way toward *Being and Time*, Heidegger thought “we miss the essential if we do not see that the animal has a world” (GA 80, tr.163). Far from being this merely living thing it will soon become (SZ, 50), the animal was considered “a being for whom living, being-in-itself, matters to it in some way” (GA 18, 51), a “being to which we must attribute, in a formal way, the kind of being which belongs to *Dasein*” (GA 20, 223).

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¹³ “Humans have the possibility to understand the *orekton*, the desirable, as the basis of their action and the motive of their decisions”(GA 22, 311).

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