

Ontological Difference and The Struggle of Dasein to Approach the Meaning of *Being*: Basic Thought of Martin Heidegger Meitty Josephin

1. Preliminary

Martin Heidegger is one of the thinkers who has been influencing the history of philosophy. His main thought was not apart from his passion to search the meaning of Being. His passion to search the meaning of Being had been started since 1907, when he was 18 years old. At that time, he was given a book which was written by Franz Brentano. The book was entitled “On the Manifold Sense of Being according to Aristotle” and was given to him by Dr. Conrad Grober[1]. The problems of Being in this book seized his attention and had become the matter of his philosophy reflection.

His philosophy reflection of Being had further development on his magnum opus called “Being and Time” in 1927. This work had been written not only for the sake of the searching of Being but also had been written to honoring Husserl. Heidegger was Husserl’s teaching assistant from 1919 until 1923. In 1928, he replaced Husserl’s position as a philosophy professor at Freiburg University.

Heidegger’s thought of Being was influenced by Husserl’s phenomenology approach. Because of that, his ontological thought couldn’t be apart from Husserl’s phenomenology approach. Phenomenology approach was used by Heidegger on his ontology framework. In other words, phenomenology was used as an approach to search the meaning of Being. At this point, there is a fundamental difference between Heidegger’s thought and Husserl’s. The focus on the thought of Husserl was more connected with the problem of cognition (the Epistemology’s problem). While on the thought of Heidegger, phenomenology was used in order to approach the Being (the problem of Ontology).

This writing will show Heidegger’s effort to searching the meaning of Being. Generally, this writing will be divided into two parts: first, the discussion of the phenomenology approach in the Heidegger’s ontological concept. And the second, the discussion of the ontological difference between Being and beings, and how they connected to human being (Dasein) and the truth.

2. *Phenomenology in the Effort to Find The Meaning of Being*

All the series of Heidegger’s thought was the effort to find the answer about one question that had been questioned since the ancient Greek times: *What is Being?* The searching of its answer was done with the philosophy analysis namely, the ontological concept. According to Heidegger, the task of ontology is to bring the proper explanation about the Being itself and to bring out Being from its various entities or from its beings, crop out in its wholeness.[2]

What is the meaning of the statement: “to bring out Being from its various entities or from its being, crop out in Its wholeness?” Heidegger tried to remind us not to be naïve. We shouldn’t treat everything that was given to us as Being itself. He wanted to find Being itself which apart from its beings or its entities. The investigation of the Meaning of Being must be done. Because for him, the history of West Philosophy was the history of the forgetfulness of Being. How did he get such conclusion? First, we must understand clearly the problem that was arised. We often hear and use “to *be*” to indicate something, for example, “There **is** a black dog”,

“Angels **are** real”, or “Budi **is** a human being”. We always focus on the subject or the object of statements. We only focus on Budi or on the term of “human being”. We never ask about “**is**” in the statement. **Is** or **Be** is something different from Budi and human being. But, the connection between Budi and human being depends on **is (Be)**. The history of philosophy had not saw this problem clearly. **Be** was treated as taken for granted, and never be questioned. **Be** was reduced to idea or something abstract. **Be** had been forgotten in the history of philosophy. The forgetfulness of Being (Be) consists two kinds: first, the forgetfulness of Being itself, and second, the forgetfulness of the forgetfulness of Being. With his ontological concept, Heidegger wanted to find the Being that had been forgotten in the history of philosophy.

The ontological concept that had been used by Heidegger had a unique characteristic: using the phenomenology method. This phenomenology method didn't focus on the object of research but more focus on how this research was conducted.[3] How to explain the ontological concept which had the phenomenology method as its basis? To answer this question, we must understand what is phenomenology first.

Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl was the first philosopher who introduced the phenomenology course. Phenomenology is a study (*logos*) of everything that appeared (*phainomenon*).[4] This study had been trying to raise and to investigate the essence of all the things that appeared to us or the essence of all the phenomenons. What are the phenomenons? The phenomenons is not only concrete nouns as body, animal, flower, tree, or chair. But also memory, image and reflection, or all the notions of feeling. Phenomenons are all the things that appear in the human consciousness. Phenomenons and the human consciousness are the object of phenomenology investigation.[5]

Why we need the kind of phenomenons study like that? The answers is, that we must free ourselves from our tendency in front of phenomenons or realities around us. What kind of tendency that must be avoided? The tendency is our habit to always need an interpretation, to always interpret everything (phenomenons) that we see. This tendency can make the phenomenons don't appear as they are.[6] To overcome this tendency, phenomenology has given the concept that makes the possibility to back to the phenomena itself. In the other words, phenomenology has been trying to avoid all the kind of interpretations, prejudices, and the supposition that already grown in tradition and our view of life. The phenomenology's slogan that also becomes its method is “*zu den Sachen selbst*” (back to the thing itself). With back to the thing itself, phenomenology has opened the chance for human being to see the phenomenons as they are.

The Phenomenology in The Searching of Being

Now the question is, how phenomenology can be implemented in the searching of Being? We have already known that Heidegger had been using the phenomenology to approach the Being. It showed that Being was approached as a phenomenoma. According to Heidegger, phenomenology comes from two Greek words namely, *phainomenon* and *logos*. *Phainomenon* (φαινόμενον) is taken from the verb, *φαίνεσθαι* which means “To show itself”, manifestation. The manifestation has a meaning: “*can be seen/ can be appeared in itself*”, so the full meaning of *phenomenon* is “*that which shows itself in itself*” [7]. While *logos* is “what is being talked in the discourse of the appearing” [8]. In discourse, *logos* is something that “makes

something appears”. In the end, phenomenology is “*to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself*”[9]

In the conclusion, the investigation of Being which used the phenomenology method was a way to let Being “appear as itself from itself”. Appearing can be divided into two kinds: *Scheinen* and *Erscheinung*. *Scheinen* is “similarity”. Something can appear similar to something else. For example, we saw one ad on TV which had been using an artist who really looks like Jokowi. On the beginning, we could have a mistake and thought that the artist was Jokowi himself. But when we look carefully, we would realize that the artist and Jokowi just had the similar face. This “similarity” was called *Scheinen*. Meanwhile, *Erscheinung* was called “appearance”. “Appearance” is something that shows itself in such a way, thus appears as something else, while its real self masked behind its appearance.[10] The later, is what we called the appearance of Being; where Being doesn’t appear itself in the wholeness because in his appearance, it also hides itself. Being that hide itself can only be approached by letting it to show itself from itself. To let Being shows itself means we must not force Being to be seen with our interpretations, but to open ourselves, to let Being to be seen. (*Sehenlassen*).[11] In other words, we must not interpretate the meaning of Being but let the Being shows itself to us.

3. The Ontological Difference and The Problem of Dasein: Basic Thought of Heidegger

We have already known that Heidegger approached the Being as a phenomena in the phenomenology concept. The problem that has to be raised is, what is the difference between Being and phenomenons (or what we called, beings)? How to implement the phenomenology into everydayness when Dasein wants to approach the Being?

Heidegger’s effort to made distinction between Being and the others phenomenons (beings) is called ontological difference. Beings are all the things or entities that we have around: everything that we hear, see, feel, touch, and smell. Then, what is Being?

Heidegger showed that Being has some characteristics includes: first, Being is the most universal concept. But this universality doesn’t come from the groups of particular beings. Universality of Being is beyond all the universality of genus and species. Second, Being is not an entity (beings) so it can’t be defined. But Being is not the an empty concept that must be forgotten because in the fact, human beings always live in their understanding of Being.[12] Heidegger’s explanation of Being characteristics has left the question about the real meaning of Being. Because all the characteristics that has been told already, couldn’t give the fullness of its meaning.

So, how can we reveal the meaning of Being? If we want to reveal the meaning of Being, we should start our research from the only one being who can question his own being, namely Dasein (human being). Dasein means “*There-Being*”. *Dasein* refers to human being. He didn’t use “human being” because in Heidegger opinion, in the history of philosophy, the “human being” term had been used to define human being as a thing only[13].

The connection between Dasein and Being is understood as existence. But this relation is not the only relation that Dasein has built in this world. There is the other kind of relation that has been built by Dasein. This relation is called existensiiil relation. The existensiiil relation was made when Dasein met other beings or all the realities around him. The existensiiil relation arises for examples, when we get in touch with the book that we read, or the computer that we use. But, there was the time that we started to do reflection and started to find ourselves question: “why we are born in this world?”. That was the time that we started to contemplate the Being.

When we started to contemplate the Being, we were opening ourselves to the Being. This moment was called existential relation. Dasein always understands himself in his existential sphere- the sphere of himself possibility; becomes himself or not becomes himself.[14] The more he approaches his being or becomes himself, the more he will get closer to Being itself. And according to Heidegger, the more he get closer to Being itself, the more he will get closer to the truth. But the more he immerse himself in the beings, the more he will get distant from Being itself and from the truth. Thus, Dasein always becomes the possibility itself: becomes or not becomes.

4. Ending: The Unconcealment of Being as The Truth

This writing has shown how Heidegger approaches the problem of Being. The problem of Being can't be apart from the fact that Being could only be approached with the question of Being itself. Dasein or human being is the only being that has ability to question the being of himself and the being of the beings. It is the reason why Being could only be approached with Dasein himself. From the explanation, could be seen that Being is approached when we start to meditate the Being itself. It means, we open ourselves to the Being. Different from general opinion that Being can be attained, for Heidegger, Being only can be approached. Being is the one that gives itself to us or the one that reveals itself to us. This revelation of Being happens when we open ourselves to the Being itself.

If we see all the explanation that has given in this writing, we will find that none of them could define the meaning of Being. This is the logical consequence that was offered by Heidegger in his approach. For Heidegger, Being cannot be found and cannot be defined. It just can be approached through the revelation or unconcealment of Being itself. The unconcealment of Being happens through Dasein. The unconcealment of Being is the key concept of Truth in Heidegger thought. The truth according to Heidegger, is the unconcealment of Being itself.

[1] Richardson, William J, *Heidegger Through Philosophy to Thought*, (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague (1963)) hlm. 3

[2] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1973)) hlm. 49

[3] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, hlm. 50

[4] Hardiman, Budi. F, *Heidegger dan Mistik Keseharian: Suatu Pengantar Menuju Sein und Zeit* (Jakarta: KPG(2008)) hlm.20

[5] Tjaya, Thomas Hidya, *Enigma Wajah Orang Lain Menggali Pemikiran Emmanuel Levinas* (Jakarta: KPG(2012)) , hlm.24

[6] Hardiman, *Heidegger dan Mistik Keseharian*, hlm. 21

[7] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, hlm. 51

[8] Susanto, Trisno A "Historisitas Pemahaman" *Majalah Filsafat Driyarkara* Vol.2 Thn. XXV (2001) hlm.24

[9] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, hlm. 58

[10] Hardiman, *Heidegger dan Mistik Keseharian*, hlm. 27

[11] Hardiman, *Heidegger dan Mistik Keseharian*, hlm. 26

[12] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, hlm. 22-23

[13] Riyanto, Bambang "The Ontological Foundation of Dasein" *Majalah Filsafat Driyarkara* Vol.2 Thn. XXV (2001) hlm.7

[14] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, hlm. 3