

Chapter—5

Possibility of Metaphysics / Return to Metaphysics: Heidegger and Existentialist:

In the previous chapter we have seen, the Logical Positivist and the Analytical philosopher tried hard to demolish metaphysics. The arguments given by Positivists against metaphysics were: (1) they were empirically convinced that all knowledge ultimately depended on sense experience; and (2) their logical analysis of language revealed that even compound linguistic statements could be resolved into simple ones so as to convey some reports of immediate sense- experience. Following Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus* Positivists like Schlick held that the structure of all meaningful language represented the structure of the facts of experience. Whether a sentence like: "That was green" was true; we had to refer to the experience to the state of affairs that made the sentence true. To understand whether it was true or false, it could be said that the method of

ascertaining the significance of a sentence was the same as that of its verification. The Logical Positivists maintained that the meaning of a sentence was the method of its verification. Thus when the method of verification was applied to metaphysical doctrines regarding the concept of ultimate truth, the Idea, the Absolute, the doctrine became meaningless as these entities could not be verified by any sense- experience. In spite of all the efforts to demonstrate metaphysics as meaningless, it continues to occupy much space in the minds of philosophers. The philosopher like Heidegger, who is also a pioneer of existentialism, did metaphysics in the name of interpreting the concept of Being. In his book *Being & Time* Heidegger started about the problem of Being. This problem can be asked in many different ways, What is Being?, What is the meaning of Being? etc. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* the question becomes, Why are there things rather than nothing? So the problem of Being is the central task of Heidegger's metaphysics.

The problem of Being is a problem central not only to philosophy but vital to all human culture. Philosophers have always been concerned with metaphysics, they concerned with what is. Heidegger frequently distinguishes between metaphysics, ontology, and the study of Being. The common distinction between metaphysics and ontology is that metaphysics is the study of Being and ontology is the study of entities. But

Heidegger's use of these terms is not consistent. Sometimes he uses —metaphysics” to refer to the study of Being and other times he does not. In *Being & Time* Heidegger used the term ‘ontology’ as a blanket term to designate all investigations of Being. For simplicity, we shall continue to employ the term —metaphysics” to refer to the study of Being, and restrict ontology. In Heidegger's metaphysics we actually find two very different sorts of metaphysical questions. First, whether a particular entity exists; for example, —Is there a God?” —Is there a Santa Claus?” Secondly, what it is for anything to be. Heidegger thinks that previous philosophers were concerned about the first question and they forgot the second one. But what is the difference between these two questions? To ask whether a particular entity exists presupposes that we already understand what it is to exist and that it makes sense to speak in general of “existence”. Philosophers only asked the first question (about ‘entities’) instead of second question (about —the Being of entities”). Here Being (Sein) is the problem.

In doing metaphysics, Heidegger was actually looking back to Pre-Socratic Philosophers. Heidegger's lifelong project was to answer the —question of Being”. It is the question which was first posed by ancient Greek philosophers from Anaximander to Aristotle. Heidegger's pursuit of the grounding question of metaphysics uncovered what he called the history or destiny of the truth of Being. That history or destiny viewed as a whole,

unfolded essentially as oblivion of Being. According to Heidegger metaphysics begins with Plato and Aristotle. In their metaphysics –Being” is accepted as ‘permanence of presence’ and they in some sense initiated the forgetting of the question of Being. For Heidegger it was early Greek thinker who experienced the uncoverdness of Being. But they did not preserve that experience in texts, they leave only mere traces of Being. Heidegger thinks, metaphysics in its present form always represents only ‘beings as beings’, but it does not recall Being itself. This description of metaphysics emerged with Plato when he made the distinction between the beings of experience as a world of shadows and the Being of these beings as a world of ideas. Heidegger understands by Being the lighting process by which beings are illumined. In *Humanisms* Heidegger says that Being is not a being, because it is that which makes beings present to man, and men to each other. It is nearest to man because it makes man what he is. It allows him to enter into comportsment with other beings. But it is farthest removed from him, because it is not a being, due to his own structure which can comport himself. Being encompasses all beings, just as a domain of openness encompasses everything found in it. Heidegger thinks it is from Being, that metaphysics derives all its vigour. Being can be understood as the ground in which metaphysics as the root of the tree of philosophy is held fast and nourished. To understand the ground of metaphysics we have to pose the ‘ground’-question and it is the question about the sense of

Being. The ‘sense’ of anything is the non-concealment by which it appears as itself. Non-concealment is what is meant by truth. So the ground-question of metaphysics becomes the interrogation of Being as truth. But metaphysics cannot ask such question. It is concerned with beings as they appear, but it cannot mediate the light by which beings are illumined, as the light does not appear as a being. So there is no way in which metaphysics can get Being in focus.

Although Being is the central question of all the metaphysical questions but Heidegger says, it is difficult to grasp the meaning of Being. In doing metaphysics Heidegger actually describes the nature of Being. He says, we see a building over there. It is an essent (Seindes). We encounter corridors, staircases, rooms etc. in that building but where is the Being of that building? We utter such expressions like —being of the building” etc. Do we really encounter being? Etymology shows that —being” is a noun but it does not belong to the class of nouns like “house”, “chalk”, “bread” etc. —Being” is a noun like —falling”, “going” etc. Thus —being” is a substantive formed out of an infinitive—“to be”. It is clear then, —being” cannot be encountered like chalk and duster can be. Nevertheless, we can see an apple falling, a boat sailing etc. Being is encountered neither in that way. Then do we have to agree with Nietzsche that “being” is an empty, vaporous term? But the emptiness of “being” does not make it meaningless to Heidegger. For

Heidegger —being” is the most universal word. So many things are expressed with the help of the single word —is”. He cited many expressions like —God is”, —The lecture is in the auditorium”, —The book is mine” and many other. In each case “is” is meant differently. —Being proves to be totally indeterminate and the same time highly determinate”.^{liii}

To understand a concept is to understand it as opposed to its limitations, that is to that form which it is distinguished. In understanding the concept of Being, Heidegger contrasts it with the concepts of become, appearance, thinking and ought. The distinction between being and become stands at the beginning of the inquiry into being. Become is genesis, the —notyet”. But being appears as the pure fullness of the permanent, completely untouched by the changing process and unrest. For Heidegger, in the thinking of Pre-Socratic philosophers there is no difference between Being and Becoming. It is Plato, who is responsible for such a distinction. Plato accomplished a metaphysical revolution by contrasting Being and Becoming. The later concept applies to the entire visible world insofar as the world is involved in constant change and is always in the process of Becoming something other than it has been. Plato found becoming (the world of change before us) unsatisfactory as an object of knowledge, and since for him every form of knowledge corresponds to a type of object. He thought genuine knowledge must have for its object something changeless,

something different from the immediate realm of becoming. So, Plato was convinced that knowledge must be direct to Being.

Heidegger thinks early Greek thinker shared a totally different view regarding the question of Being and Becoming. Here he actually follows the view of Heraclitus and Parmenides. It is a common belief that Heraclitus perceived the world only as becoming and Parmenides saw a being behind becoming. Aristotle himself writes about Heraclitean view that —all perceptible things were in a permanent state of flux and that there was no knowledge of them...^{»liv}

The distinguishing mark of Heracliteanism is the acceptance of change as the law of all being. It is Heraclitus who said that you cannot step twice into the same river. All things, for Heraclitus are in perpetual flux and change; nowhere in the universe is there to be found eternal rest, unchanging stability. And there is not only perpetual change but also perpetual conflict. The clash of opposites is the very condition of life. Evil and good, hot and cold, wet and dry and the rest are each other's necessary complements and the endless strife between them is the sum of existence. The only harmony possible is a harmony of conflict and contrast. With Parmenides we find

ourselves in an entirely different intellectual atmosphere. Parmenides considered the sense as deceptive and condemned the multitude of sensible things as mere illusion. The only true being is 'the one', which is infinite and indivisible. It is not, as in Heraclitus, a union of opposites, since there are no opposites. That concept, which was placed as central and drew all the others entirely into its circle, was Being. All time and qualitative distinctions must be denied to Being. Being is also unchangeable, entirely homogeneous and unitary in quality. It is also not plural, but is the one unique, individual, absolute cosmic Being. All plurality, all qualitative difference, all origination, all change or destruction are shut out by true Being.

Heidegger rejects the traditional interpretation of Heraclitus and Parmenides. It is a customary description that Heraclitus's doctrine is opposed from the doctrine of Parmenides. A much quoted saying is attributed to Heraclitus: everything is in flux. Accordingly there is no being, everything is becoming. —Actually Heraclitus, to whom is ascribed the doctrine of becoming as diametrically opposed to Parmenides' doctrine of being, says the same as Parmenides".^{lv} Generally Heraclitus was viewed as the preacher of becoming and Parmenides was viewed as the preacher of being. But this world of change and conflict pictured by Heraclitus is not a

mere chaos. It is governed by an imminent principle of order and measure. His name for the ruling principle is the Logos. Logos means a variety of things. In ordinary Greek speech some of its meanings are explanation, argument, reason (in many senses), story, language (grammatical) etc. The Logos of Heraclitus is the universal —proportion of the mixture”, the law or principle of measure and just order which effects the harmony of opposing tensions. But the Logos is law because it is God, a living all-ruling intelligence which seems to be in same way identified with the Ever-Living Fire which is the stuff of the universe. This Fire is not identical with the visible, elemental fire and is —everliving” not immortal, for it is in turn transformed into all things and all things into it. This transformation of all things into each other according to the living-divine law which somehow persists when the Logos-Fire itself is transformed is a cyclic, ever-recurring process, the —way up and down”. The Logos is the principle of life and intelligence of men, but they have the choice of shutting themselves up in their private worlds of ignorance and stupidity or opening themselves to the universal Logos and the unbounded depth of its wisdom. For Heraclitus the Logos is a universal principle which is the cause of order, proportion, balance, harmony in the continual flow of being. So, Heraclitus saw a universal principle or Logos behind the concept of becoming.

There is a tendency to reduce the distinction between being and appearance but this distinction is as old as the distinction between being and becoming. Being is real and authentic whereas appearance is unreal and inauthentic. —The distinction implies an evaluation- the preference is given to being”^{lvi}. Although Heidegger clarifies being by contrasting it to becoming and appearance but on a closer analysis of the concepts, he rejects any essential difference between being and becoming or being and appearance. Heidegger’s uses of the German word *schein* for “appearance” provoked him to conclude that appearance means exactly the same as being. Heidegger said, when we say: the moon shines, this means not only that it spreads a glow, a certain brightness, but also it stands in the sky, it is present, it is. —Here appearance <*Schein*> means exactly the same as being”^{lvii} that is both of them indicate to a presence. Actually non-being is the opposition of both “being” and “appearance”, which means to withdraw from presence. After becoming and appearance Heidegger examined the distinction between being and thinking. Being has often been understood as opposed to thinking but thinking differs from the other counter parts of being that is becoming and appearance. Being is placed before thinking as an object, being takes on its entire interpretation from thinking. —Thinking brings something before us, represents it”^{lviii}. Being can be understood by differentiating it from ought. The distinction between being and thinking is downward and it indicates that thought is the

sustaining and determining ground of being. On the other hand, the distinction between being and ought is upward. This proposes that while being is grounded in thought it is surmounted by the ought. It is the idea, the prototype. The idea presents a view, it is in an essent. For Plato the idea of ideas, the supreme idea is the idea of good. The idea constitute being, ousia, the supreme idea stands beyond being. —Thus being itself, not as such but as idea, comes into opposition to something other, on which it, being is dependent^{liX} .

This discussion of the four distinctions shows us the determinateness of being. As different from becoming being is permanence and from appearance being is the enduring prototype, the always identical. As against from thought it is the underlying, the already there. Being as different from ought is the datum, the ought that is not yet realized or already realized. So, being is defined as permanent, always identical, already-there, enduring presence, the ousia. This definition of being is not sudden. This definition has grown out of the determination which dominates our historical being-there by virtue of its real beginning among the Greeks. —If being has determinateness it is not because we have delimited a mere word meaning. The determinateness of being is the power which still sustains and

dominates all our relations to the essent as a whole, to becoming, to appearance, to thinking, and to the ought^{1x}.

The problem of Being is asked in many different ways, —what's Being?" —what's the meaning of Being?" etc. Metaphysics asks and answers the question concerning Being. Metaphysics thinks of Being only by representing beings as beings. It means all beings as a whole, although it speaks of Being. From its beginning the propositions of metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings and Being. For Heidegger, this confusion must be considered an event—and not a mere mistake. Due to the manner in which metaphysics thinks of beings, metaphysics almost seems to be, without knowing it, the barrier which keeps man from the original involvement of Being in human nature. To lead our thinking on the way on which it may find the involvement of the truth of Being in human nature, to open up a path for our thinking on which it may recall Being itself in its truth—to do that the thinking attempted in *Being & Time* is —on its way". On this way—that is, in the service of the question concerning the truth of Being—it becomes necessary to stop and think about human nature. The unconcealedness of Being, the involvement of Being in human nature is an essential feature of Being. But how could this nature of Being be explained. To characterize with a single term both the involvement of Being in human nature and the essential relation of man

to the openness (—here”) of Being as such, Heidegger chose the name of —beingthere (Dasein)”. Heidegger says —thequestion of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself...”^{lxi} In metaphysics this term is used interchangeably with existential, actuality, reality and objectivity. —Being there” names that which should first of all be experienced, and subsequently thought of, as a place—namely, the location of the truth of Being. In metaphysical language the word —existence” is a synonym of —Beingthere” and both of them refer to the reality of anything at all that is real, from God to a grain of sand.

In *Being & Time* Heidegger exclusively used the term —existence” for the being of man. Once “existence” is understood rightly, the —essence” of being there can be recalled: in its openness, Being itself manifests and conceals itself, yields itself and withdraws. In *Being & Time* the word “existence” designates a mode of Being; specifically, the Being of those beings who stand open for the openness of Being in which they stand, by standing it. This —standing it” this enduring is experienced under the name of —care. The ecstatic essence of Being there is approached by way of care, and, conversely, care is experienced adequately only in its ecstatic essence. For Heidegger, the being that exists is man. But human existence cannot really be defined as it is potentiality of being. Man is continually in advance

of himself. If we analyze the ontological structure and mode of existence of man then we firstly notice that man is being-in-the-world. That man stands in relation with other things and persons. But Heidegger does not mean merely that man finds himself standing, as a matter of fact, in relations with other things and persons. He means that man exists as a being which is concerned with —the other”. Man is being-in —the-world as concerned with the other‘ in the realization of his own possibilities. Heidegger is not saying that the human ego is responsible for the being of everything other than itself. For him, the individual comes to discover himself as an individual subject only as a being within the world and as a being in relation with other persons. Social interdependence, being-with, is also constitutive of human mode of existence as a human being. Man is a being who is set towards the realization of his possibilities, not as an isolated ego, but as a being, who is interrelated with the world of things and the world of persons.

Heidegger is also careful to insist that when he that man is being-in-the-world he did not mean to affirm that man is a worldly being in the metaphysical and theological sense. And the term —the world” should not be taken to mean this world‘ in contrast with the other world‘ or the material world as contrasted with the spiritual world. According to Heidegger man

is being-in-the-world' means that man is open to Being. It is man who can raise the problem of Being; and he can do so because he stands out from the background of Nature as open to Being. This openness can be obscure, but this does not alter the fact that man as man is potentially open to the mystery of Being. In his book *Being & Time* Heidegger tried to see whether any new vocabulary and even a new grammar is possible to talk about Being. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* he begins the question with an investigation into the etymology and grammar of Being. The search for an unmetaphysical language, a language which is thereby non-conceptual' leads him to poetry, philosophy of the Pre-Socratics and the poetry of Holderlin. For him it is poetry through which we can grasp the true meaning of Being. According to Heidegger, as the first step in the search for the meaning of Being, we must start with the being of the questioner himself. Man stands in a peculiar position with regard to the problem of Being. It is he who raises the problem; and he is able to do this because he has a special relation to Being.

In doing metaphysics Heidegger actually uncovers the concept of Being. Heidegger has tried to show that philosophers forgot the distinction between Being and beings and thus unable to capture the real sense of Being. And thus they gradually fall away from Being. Against the fallen'

historical positions Heidegger asserts that understanding of Being is the basic problem not only of philosophy, but of all human enterprise and of human beings in general. There are many presuppositions and prejudices about Being. We can discuss the problem of Being, following R.C. Solomon in this way—

(i) The analytical question: what is the meaning of the expression Being?

(ii) The metaphysical question: what is Being? Or what is the ground of Being?

(iii) The theological question: why is there Being at all?

The first question asks, what are we saying of a thing when we assert that it exists? The answer to this question would naturally want to have a set of criteria of some sort for determining whether or not a thing exists, independently of what particular thing or type of thing it is. The second question is the most puzzling and Heidegger often suggests that the expressions we use to discuss Being do not faithfully capture the correct concept of Being. Heidegger states in his later works that our everyday language cannot capture essential truths about Being. Solomon calls the third question theological and it is the most perplexing of the three questions. The question why...? in this interpretation is just the question for an explanation of what it is for something to exist. It is not a quest for an

explanation of why it ought to exist. In the words of Heidegger, we find out that this privileged question why has its ground in a leap through which man thrusts away all the previous security, whether real or imagined, of his life. The question is asked only in this leap: it is the leap; without it there is no asking. This question, because of such an interpretation, is of profound importance in all human culture. The neglect of the question and the subsequent falling way from Being is responsible not only for the unhappy state of metaphysics, but of a decline of culture in general.