

# The End of Metaphysics and Heidegger's Thanatology

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## I . Introduction

This paper aims to investigate Martin Heidegger's thanatology in order to understand his attempt to destroy metaphysics. Throughout the Western tradition, metaphysics has dealt with the fundamental nature of Being [*Sein*] of all beings [*Seiendes*]. For Heidegger, traditional metaphysics is onto-theological; on the one hand, it is ontological because Being

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is considered the most universal ground common to all beings, and on the other hand, it is theological because Being is thought as the highest ground above all beings. The onto-theological question of the metaphysical tradition lies in the investigation of Being as the most universal and highest ground of all beings. Heidegger argues, however, that this question never leads us to an *authentic* solution conducive to revealing it; rather, it has produced an *inauthentic* solution, which in fact conceals what it really intended to ask. In this sense, the meaning of Being has been concealed since the question about Being has never been asked in the history of Western philosophy. It is, therefore, crucial for Heidegger to uncover the concealedness of Being through asking the authentic question about Being.

In this paper, I will argue that Heidegger's concept of death offers a possible way of finding an authentic solution to metaphysical questions in his philosophy. The following sections of this paper include Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics that exhibits the urgency of asking the question about Being by means of the concept of *Dasein* [being-there] in an existential sense. Then there will be an exploration into Heidegger's interpretation of death employing his own authentic solution—that is, the transition from the inauthentic *Dasein* to the authentic through a resolute anticipation [*Vorlaufen*] of death—so the metaphysical question can be clarified. Finally, the conclusion will demonstrate that Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics culminates in his thanatology wherein we can see how Heidegger himself asks the question about Being in authentic way.

## II. Heidegger's Critique of Traditional Metaphysics

Stemming from ancient Greek philosophy, Heidegger understands the metaphysical question as the "question about beings as such and as a whole."<sup>1</sup> The question about a being (or beings) is not the question about this or that being but the totality of being as such—thus, the Being of all beings. It searches for the universality of all beings, and not only what commonalities are shared among them but what goes beyond the particularity of them; hence, all their particularities are reduced into the universality that they all share. Heidegger appeals to the fact that in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines the "first philosophy" as a science which inquires into "beings insofar as they are in Being" and whose subject is "being *qua* being."<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's first philosophy is the investigation of being *qua* being, which is what Heidegger depicts as the metaphysical question of the Being of all beings.

For Heidegger, the metaphysical question is essentially two-fold: ontological and theological. On the one hand, "metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such"<sup>3</sup>; thus, it tries to find what all beings share in nature. Traditional metaphysicians ontologically comprehend the Being of beings where there is no more basic "Being" that can be found and interpret it as "the ground in which every being as such is grounded."<sup>4</sup> The ontological role of Being is to give the most universal ground to all beings. On the

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1) Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 54. Henceforth abbreviated as ID.

2) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle II*, trans. W. D. Ross (New York: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1003a.

3) ID, 70.

4) ID, 32.

other hand, “metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything”<sup>5)</sup>; hence, it seeks what gives reasons for all beings. Traditional metaphysicians theologically grasp the Being of beings where all beings issue and interpret it as the ground that gives for an all founding-ground on which all beings are based. As Heidegger himself describes:

Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest. The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the *grounding ground*. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.<sup>6)</sup>

When it comes to Being of all beings, metaphysics ontologically offers the way for a bottom-up approach to Being wherein the ground-giving unity is the most universal ground that all beings share, while it theologically conceives of a top-down approach to Being, which is the highest ground, accounting for the universal ground that is common to all beings. Onto-theologically, thus, the Being of all beings has been understood as the “grounding ground,” which is the “metaphysical concept of God.”<sup>7)</sup> Throughout Western history, according to Heidegger, Being has been represented by different names such as “*Phusis*, *Logos*, *Hen*, *Idea*, *Energeia*,

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5) ID, 70-1.

6) ID, 58. Italics added.

7) ID, 60.

Substantiality, Objectivity, Subjectivity, the Will, the Will to Power, [and] the Will to Will.”<sup>8)</sup> The central historical role of metaphysics is to establish the ground and to reinforce the ground of the ground—thus, the grounding ground—for beings. Through both a bottom-up and a top-down processes, traditional metaphysics fortifies its foundational claim that Being is the fundamental foundation of all beings. Therefore, the origin of the “onto-theological constitution of metaphysics” is the “perdurance” that opens up the history of metaphysics and dominates “all of its epochs.”<sup>9)</sup> From the metaphysical point of view, all beings belong to the realm of alterability where they are contingent and thus alterable, whereas Being of beings is the unalterable ground upon which all contingent beings are dependent. What is at stake is the fact that the meaning of Being emerges in the course of the reduction of all beings to Being in order to secure the solid foundation of all beings.

For Heidegger, foundationalism of traditional metaphysics coming from both a bottom-up ontological and a top-down theological approaches culminates in modern technology. In the age of modern technology, according to Heidegger, Being is not only “faced with the challenge of letting beings appear within the horizon of what is calculable,” but also “forced to secure all beings that are [our] concern as the substance for [our] planning and calculating.”<sup>10)</sup> In order to secure the foundation of all beings, we [*das Man*],<sup>11)</sup> who live in the age of technology,

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8) ID, 66.

9) ID, 68.

10) ID, 35. For Heidegger's account of technology in detail, see Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 3–35.

11) Here “we [*das Man*]” refers to the “they-self [*das Man-selbst*].” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward

reduce them into the realm of calculation and make them understandable, predictable, and calculable. Thus, Being serves as a means to provide us with the persisting ground of all beings, which in turn serves as a means to control them for our own sake. In this sense, beings lose their authenticity and their Being is concealed in the dominance of modern technology as ways of “functionalization, systematic improvement, automation, bureaucratization, [and] communications.”<sup>12)</sup> Metaphysical understanding of Being rests on the built-in assumption that Being is the grounding ground for all beings, which in fact entails the inauthenticity of beings as well as the oblivion of Being itself in its concealment.

Heidegger calls into question the metaphysical problem that the Being of all beings as the grounding ground has been taken for granted by traditional metaphysics. In order to ask the question about Being, Being itself should be given in the first place because we cannot ask about something “ungiven.” Yet, Being is neither one of beings nor given like a being who is being-there. Being is only possible through beings; hence, it is always the Being *of* and *for* beings. Being reveals itself in its relation to beings. Whereas traditional metaphysics focuses on Being as the grounding ground for all beings, Heidegger asks about Being in relation with beings in an existential—*not existentiell*<sup>13)</sup>—sense. The question of Being can be appropriately

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Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 2008), 167. Henceforth abbreviated as BT.

12) ID, 51-2.

13) On the difference between existential and existentiell, see BT, 33. Here Heidegger gives the primacy to an existential question over an existentiell one. The former is about the ontological structure of Dasein while the latter is about Dasein's ontical affairs. As far as existence that determines the character of Dasein is concerned, the context of the ontological structure of Dasein, that is, existentiality, constitutes the

raised in the mode of entity, which has the possibility of the question. For Heidegger, this entity is Dasein [being-there], which does not take place among other entities. Rather, "it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it"; thus, "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence."<sup>14</sup> In order to question about Being, he first pays attention to the existence of Dasein.

From an existential sense, Heidegger points out the twofold danger in terms of Dasein's relationality, which results in overlooking the ontological significance of Dasein. On the one hand, the existential meaning of Dasein can be lost in its relation to other entities. In the course of having its relationship to others, Dasein becomes one of the entities among others. The reduction of Dasein into other entities engenders the "they-self [*das Man-selbst*]" as follows:

The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic* Self—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [*eigens ergriffenen*]. As they-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the "they," and must first find itself. This dispersal characterizes the 'subject' of that kind of Being which we know as concerned absorption in the world we encounter as closest to us.<sup>15</sup>

For Heidegger as noted in the citation above, the they-self is one among many "they [*das Man*]" whom we always encounter in everyday life—in particular, according to him, in our age of modern technology. Since the self is involved in many different

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entities that exist. Hence, "the ontological analytic of [Dasein] always requires that existentiality be considered first" (33).

14) BT, 33.

15) BT, 167.

kinds of relationships with others, it is tempted to entrust itself to the anonymous “they” who are not different from and so indifferent to itself. In these relationships, the self becomes the they-self among “they,” and thus the authenticity of the self is subsumed under the anonymity of the “they.” Heidegger argues that this togetherness of the “they” in its everydayness is “Dasein-with [*Mitdasein*],”<sup>16)</sup> which has no ontological character: as he says, “that which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked.”<sup>17)</sup> These relations are mere collections of the average they-selves, based on the routinized everydayness of Dasein-with wherein the self loses and forgets its ontological authenticity.

On the other hand, the existential meaning of Dasein also can be lost in its relation to the world. At the outset, Dasein is thrown into the world without reason where it sleeps, drinks, and lives in the everyday; hence, *Da-sein* literally indicates existentiality of a being who is in a state of being-there. “Being-in-the-world is a state of Dasein which is necessary *a priori*.”<sup>18)</sup> In the first place, Being-in-the-world signifies the ontical state of Being that Dasein along with others, belongs to the objective world, and engages in everydayness of the world. This objective world that all others share is an “environment [*Umwelt*]”<sup>19)</sup> encompassing all *everyday* Daseins—that is, Daseins-with. In this regard, the environment is a “with-world [*Mitwelt*],”<sup>20)</sup> which is closest and most familiar to Dasein-with. There is no ontological character in the with-world where

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16) BT, 118.

17) BT, 69.

18) BT, 79.

19) BT, 93. It can be also translated as the “world around.”

20) BT, 118.



Dasein-with is absorbed and falling into. Both "absorption [*Aufgehen*]" and "falling [*Verfallen*]" of Dasein-with disclose a state of "Being-lost" in the with-world.<sup>21)</sup> The absorption of Being into the world in turn constitutes "publicness [*Oeffentlichkeit*]" that "controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted."<sup>22)</sup> In this regard, everydayness of Dasein-with reveals a tendency of Dasein, the falling of Dasein into everydayness of the with-world where Dasein itself loses its authenticity and gains its inauthenticity according to the publicness. Consequently, Dasein's everydayness is the basis for publicness by which everything becomes identified, calculable, and familiar to all Daseins-with and thus loses the authenticity of Being in the publicness of the "they."

However, Heidegger never rejects the danger of Dasein's everydayness in terms of its twofold relationality: its relation to others (the they-self) and its relation to the world (Dasein-with in the with-world). On the contrary, he takes Dasein's everydayness as his starting point for asking the question about Being in an authentic way. As Heidegger states, "This undifferentiated character of Dasein's everydayness is not nothing, but a positive phenomenal characteristic of this entity."<sup>23)</sup> The everydayness of Dasein paves the positive way for getting out of the publicness of Dasein-with, where Heidegger attempts to retrieve the authentic Dasein from the falling of Dasein-with into the with-world as follows:

That which is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The 'world'

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21) BT, 219-20.

22) BT, 165.

23) BT, 69.

can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others. Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities.<sup>24)</sup>

For Heidegger, anxiety violently shakes the public [*oeffentlich*] structure of Dasein-with thrown into the with-world and exposes a naked state of the individualized Dasein as Being-in-the-world. Anxiety takes Dasein-with out of its falling into the with-world and individualizes it for the authentic Being-in-the-world. The individualization of Dasein refers to the fact that Dasein's Being is no longer governed by the everydayness of the with-world, but only Dasein itself takes over its Being as a way of "its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world." What makes Dasein-with, i.e., an inauthentic Dasein, *authentic* is the very anxiety in the sense that it instigates the transitional moment, where Dasein existentially withdraws from the everyday relationality of something familiar, calculable, and canny and then confronts something unfamiliar, puzzling, and "uncanny [*unheimlich*]."<sup>25)</sup> While the Being of

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24) BT, 232.

25) BT, 233. "*Unheimlich*," based on the root *Heim* [home], can be translated as uncanny, unfamiliar, or unhomely. In the face of anxiety, Dasein feels uncanny. As anxiety does, the uncanny "throws one out of the 'canny,' that is, the homely, the accustomed, the usual, the unendangered." Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 161. On Heidegger's terminological exposition of the Greek word "*deinon*" that he translates as "uncanny," see Heidegger, *Introduction*

Dasein-with in the with-world has sunk into the publicness of the "they," anxiety fiercely cuts into the publicness of the inauthentic Dasein and opens up the possibility of the authentic Dasein as Being-in-the-world.

It is important to note that in no way is the "something" uncanny relevant to the determinate cause of anxiety regarding any definite object or region. Heidegger makes a clear distinction between anxiety [*Angst*] and fear [*Furcht*]. Although both have the threatening character that reveals "Dasein in the Being of its 'there',"<sup>26)</sup> Dasein occasionally encounters something fearsome [*furchtbar*] as the "entity within-the-world" coming from "some definite region."<sup>27)</sup> Because Dasein knows "where fear comes from" and "what makes fear," it can handle, control, and appropriate fear and at last make it familiar to Dasein itself: thus, fear becomes no longer something uncanny. To use Heidegger's language, something fearsome has "readiness-to-hand," and "presence-at-hand" that we encounter "within-the-world."<sup>28)</sup> Fear cannot fundamentally shatter the horizon of Dasein's falling into everydayness of the with-world: rather, it is routinized at any time and then Dasein lapses into the everyday structure of the publicness of the "they." By contrast, Dasein does not know where anxiety comes from and what makes it. Existentially, in the face of anxiety, Dasein feels something uncanny, and thus anxiety makes Dasein feel not being at home in the world and even in Dasein itself. It is impossible to embrace anxiety within the publicness of the "they" because the abysmal anxiety is inexhaustibly unknowable. As Heidegger points out, "Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand

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to *Metaphysics*, 159-61.

26) BT, 180.

27) BT, 230.

28) BT, 179.

within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious.”<sup>29)</sup> Anxiety comes from *nowhere* other than Dasein itself, as long as Dasein *is* thrown into the world. Anxiety existentially calls into question Dasein’s everydayness, then *implodes*—not *explodes* in a strict sense—the publicness of the “they,” and for this reason throws Dasein back into its ownmost individualized thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] as the authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world.

### III. The Possibility of the Absolute Impossibility of Dasein

The ownmost authenticity of Dasein as potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world reaches its climax in the face of death as the ultimate anxiety. In Heidegger’s account of death, the focus of Dasein’s relationality shifts from its relations with others and with the world to its relation with itself. In the face of death, Dasein has no relation other than its own relation to itself since no one can take Dasein’s having to die from the Dasein; thus, death is the ultimate authentic possibility of Dasein itself. Dasein can gain an authentic relation to itself by means of “anticipation [*Vorlaufen*]<sup>30)</sup> to death. To anticipate is to understand Dasein’s present way of Being from the perspective

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29) BT, 231.

30) BT, “*Vorlaufen*” can be also translated as “running toward or into...in advance or ahead.” When it comes to death, however, “*Vorlaufen*” does refer to neither “waiting for death” nor “actualizing death.” In order not to miss Heidegger’s ontological-existential point, it should be understood in terms of its possibility. See, BT. 306 (note 3). I will discuss it in detail below.

of its future possibility. Insofar as death is understood with regard to its possibility, it is a matter of the present in this world rather than a matter of the future in the other world. Heidegger's interest in the existential-ontological understanding of Dasein's Being leads him not to "theodicy or theology of death" but to the question about the meaning of Dasein's Being in terms of death: as he says, "our analysis of death remains purely 'this-worldly' insofar as it interprets that phenomenon merely in the way in which it enters into any particular Dasein as a possibility of its Being."<sup>31</sup> In this respect, death as the absolute anxiety is the possibility of Dasein's impossibility from which no one can be free.

However, everyday Dasein is constantly tempted to flee from the very anxiety of death with its full dedication to everyday affairs. The possibility of death is forgotten in the security, comfortableness, and familiarity that comes from the everyday structure of publicness of the "they" while Dasein begins to fall more and more into everydayness of the with-world. In this course, the inauthentic Dasein is convinced of the ontical-existential fact that death is not its own authentic possibility but only a matter of others, forgetting the ontological-existential fact that the very death is its ownmost and innermost possibility. Thus, to ward off the possibility of death means to reject one's own authenticity with the provisional complacency of its inauthenticity rooted in the state of Dasein-with thrown into the with-world. By running away from the absolute possibility of death, Dasein becomes isolated from its ownmost authentic possibility of Being.

In contrast, the authentic Dasein confronts the absolute anxiety of death, which is the authentic possibility of itself.

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31) BT, 292.

Dasein not only ontically witnesses the death of others, but also ontologically understands its own death as the *apodictic*—and not simply the empirical—possibility that haunts its whole life due to its thrownness into the world. In an ontological sense, the authenticity of Dasein results from its “understanding of death [*Verstehen des Todes*].”<sup>32)</sup> Here “understanding [*Verstehen*]” is quite misleading unless it is understood in a literal sense. Literally, “under-stand-ing” here refers to an act or a state of standing under rather than to knowing, noticing, or realizing as ordinarily understood.<sup>33)</sup> In this context, the authentic Dasein stands upright in front of the possibility of the absolute impossibility of itself and takes the possibility as its authentic Being; thus, the authentic Dasein *understands* its Being as Being-toward-death [*Sein-zum-Tode*]. When it comes to Heidegger’s thanatology, “In the first place,” Heidegger himself notes, “we must characterize Being-towards-death as a Being towards a possibility.”<sup>34)</sup> He goes on to point out a problematic relation between the possibility of death and its actuality as follows:

‘Being towards’ a possibility—that is to say, towards something possible—may signify ‘Being out for’ something possible, as in concerning ourselves with its actualization...In concernfully Being out for something possible, there is a tendency to *annihilate the possibility* of the possible by making it available to us. But the concernful actualization of equipment which is ready-to-hand...is always merely relative, since even that which has been actualized is still

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32) BT, 305.

33) The German word “*Ver-stehen*” consists of “*ver-*” implying “to do for or to become for” and “*stehen*” referring to “to stand or to be upright.” It also has the implication of an act of standing.

34) BT, 305.

characterized in terms of some involvement—indeed this is precisely what characterizes its Being.<sup>35)</sup>

First of all, Dasein can conceive of something's actualization that is made possible by means of Being-out [*Aussein*] for the "something," and then make sense of it from the perspective of its actuality in general. This means that something actualized can affect something possible as a way to characterize its Being. However, in the case of death, it is a very different story. Regarding death, the relation between possibility and actuality becomes problematic in an extreme sense since the two can indeed nullify each other in their relationship. As soon as possibility becomes actualized, it is no longer possibility. In the same way, when death as a possibility is actualized, then nothing can be possible unless the dead are resurrected. There is no possibility in something actualized because it is already realized, finalized, and dead. In this sense, the fact that death is actualized means that there is no longer possibility: thus, death is the absolute impossibility of Dasein. However, this is not Heidegger's final word: rather, he pays close attention to the *possibility* within the absolute impossibility. As he points out, "Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein."<sup>36)</sup> Insofar as the problematic relation between possibility and actuality is not taken into consideration regarding death, the ontological significance of the very possibility of death will be missed, though Heidegger himself constantly gives the primacy to possibility over actuality. In other words, the ontological meaning of the absolute impossibility of Dasein as the possibility of death can be decoded

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35) BT, 305.

36) BT, 294.

in light of the baffling relation between possibility and actuality. Then, how does Heidegger resolve this relation? From his own ontological viewpoint, it seems that his response to the baffling question is also somewhat baffling.

Even though actualized, it remains, as actual, something possible for doing something; it is characterized by an 'in-order-to.' What our analysis is to make plain is simply how Being out for something concernfully, comports itself towards the possible: it does so not by the theoretical-thematic consideration of the possible as possible, and by having regard for its possibility as such, but rather by looking *circum*-spectively away from the possible and looking at that for which it is possible.<sup>37)</sup>

In this passage, Heidegger apparently alludes to the practical and functional implication of "Being-out [*Aussein*]" regarding the relation between possibility and actuality. By means of "Being-out" for the possible, the relationship between possibility and actuality can be reconciled; and requires an "in-order-to." In other words, if something is possible, it lends itself to being an actual thing. If we say in order to think of the possibility of something, it must be able to be actualized. Thus, if we are "Being out for something," it means there is a possibility that we are in support of something that *can be*. Thus, as Heidegger points out, something actualized can serve for the benefit of Dasein's possibility and manifest itself as some kind of a ready-to-hand object that is employed for a practical aim. Heidegger does not reject the ready-to-hand role of something actualized, but never accepts it in the case of death.

Heidegger straightforwardly maintains, "*Manifestly* Being-

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37) BT, 305.



towards-death, which is now in question, cannot have the character of concernfully Being-out to get itself actualized," and therefore "death as possible is not something possible which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but a possibility of Dasein's Being."<sup>38)</sup> Actualizing of the possible death signifies "bringing about one's demise," and for this reason, deprives itself from "the very ground for an existing Being-towards-death."<sup>39)</sup> Through the actualization of the possible, more importantly, death would be routinized in the horizon of everydayness and becomes familiar to Dasein, and hence the ontological-existential meaning of death will be neglected. However, without the relation of possibility to its actuality that Heidegger has in mind, how can the possibility be *authentically* possible? This question challenges Heidegger's argument of the Being as possibility toward death. What makes the Being as a possibility oriented toward death? Definitely, Heidegger's answer is the possibility itself: as he states, "Being towards this possibility, as Being-towards-death, is so to comport ourselves towards death that in this Being and for it, death reveals itself as a possibility."<sup>40)</sup> His point here is quite mysterious because Heidegger seems to be convinced that something possible should not be actualized in order to save its possibility since it can make the possibility possible.

However, as Heidegger argues, when the possibility of death is not considered in its relation to actuality, does not the possibility remain *permanently possible*? Is it possible to say that the permanent possibility is authentically—so existentially and ontologically—possible? If something possible remains simply

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38) BT, 305. Italics added.

39) BT, 305.

40) BT, 306.

something possible that is endlessly delayed, postponed or detained within a perpetual possibility, it would be nothing but something impossible. Isn't this another way to ward off the absolute anxiety of death? If it is the case, the possible is not different from the impossible from an ontological viewpoint. In this context, if death were considered as something possible heedless of its actuality, it would not be a matter of Dasein itself. Then, Dasein neither sees death as its own ontological—thus, unavoidable—belonging nor *understands* it as the absolute anxiety which can threaten its everydayness. Meanwhile, Dasein becomes isolated from the possibility of death itself, and then remains in the realm of publicness of Dasein-with in the with-world because death never breaks up the ontical horizon of everydayness.

In this case, G. W. F. Hegel's account of death as the "tremendous power of the negative" can give a meaningful insight into an interpretation of the relation between possibility and actuality. The life of the Hegelian Spirit never "shrinks" from the negativity but rather "endures it and maintains itself in it."<sup>41)</sup> In order to endure death, Dasein embraces the possibility of death, which is totally uncanny to itself. The possibility itself cannot make Dasein endure death; rather, its actuality can make Dasein embrace the possibility of death despite its uncanniness that makes itself feel not being at home. In this regard, it is more appropriate to say that what makes the possibility possible—and so authentic—is its actuality. The tensional relation of possibility and actuality is as if there is an impenetrable crack in Dasein's Being that cannot be ontologically—not ontically—traversed. This does not mean they have no

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41) G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

relationship because of the crack: on the contrary, the ineradicable crack ontologically constitutes the tensional relation between the two without sacrificing both of them. Although Heidegger employs "Being-out" to debunk any approach to the tensional relation between possibility and actuality other than an ontological-existential one with sacrificing actuality in favor of possibility, the authentic possibility of death can be ontologically possible only in its relation to its actuality.

From the perspective of Heidegger's ontology, any reconciliation of the possibility of death and its actualization is – and should be – ontologically impossible since as soon as they are reconciled, death is subsumed under everydayness of the "they." An extreme example of the routinization of death is suicide where the possibility of death is indeed actualized. When committing suicide, one is able to control the absolute impossibility of death in that he can make a decision, as long as he is not out of his mind, as to when and how he kills himself. Death, which exclusively belongs to himself, is at his disposal: thus, it is under his control. For him, death is not something uncanny at all but rather something canny, in which he definitely feels at home. In this sense, he directly *understands* the actualization of death at the expense of the possibility of it. In no way does the self-actualization of death intensely shatter the ontical horizon of his falling into everydayness because he actualizes and so routinizes death at his disposal. Through reconciling the tensional relation between possibility and actuality, he remains in the realm of the inauthentic-ontical-existential structure of publicness with forgetting its own authentic-ontological-existential meaningfulness of Being. Even if the example of suicide betrays the problem of the actualization of something possible, in a

strict sense, committing suicide refers not to the actualization of the possibility of death but rather to the actualization of death itself because he simply dismisses the possibility of death and then chooses to actualize death itself. Thus, the problem in question comes from the actualization of death with the loss of its possibility, not from the actuality in relation to the possibility of death. In this case, although Heidegger sacrifices the actuality of death in favor of its possibility, the authentic possibility of death can be ontologically secured only when the tensional relation of the possibility to the actuality—not the actualization of death itself as in the case of suicide—is taken into consideration.

Heidegger's argument on the priority of the possibility of death over its actuality eminently appears in his exposition of the concept of anticipation. In the above discussion, which briefly touched upon the anticipation of death in terms of its possibility, however, the tensional relation between possibility and actuality can shed a new light on the concept of anticipation in an ontological sense. By means of a new angle of anticipation, it will become more obvious the reason why the tensional relation of possibility and actuality—in particular, regarding death—should remain in the delicate balanced irreconcilability. In the following passage, Heidegger criticizes any interpretation of something possible with regard to something actual:

Being towards this possibility, as Being-towards-death, is so to comport ourselves towards *death* that in this Being, and for it, death reveals itself *as a possibility*. Our terminology for such Being towards this possibility is '*anticipation*' of *this possibility*. But in this way of behaving does there not lurk a coming-close to the possible, and when one is close to the

possible, does not its actualization emerge? In this kind of coming close, however, one does not tend towards concernfully making available something actual; but as one comes closer understandingly, the possibility of the possible just become 'greater.' *The closest closeness which one may have in Being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual.*<sup>42)</sup>

For Heidegger, anticipation [*Vorlaufen*] is a form of understanding [*Verstehen*] so that Being-toward-death as possibility is "*anticipation of this possibility*." It is the anticipation that leads Dasein to "comport...towards death"; hence, Heidegger seems to endorse that the possibility of something possible makes the possibility possible through anticipation. However, what makes this anticipation let Dasein comport toward death? What makes Dasein run into [*vorlaufe n*]<sup>43)</sup> death as its own authentic possibility of the Being-toward-death? According to Heidegger's ontological viewpoint, the "what"—no matter what it is—does not come from outside Dasein but from Dasein itself as a possibility. In this regard, everything "comes and goes" within Dasein's possibility regardless of its actuality. Does not this possibility intimate an everlasting possibility with no anticipation of its actuality? Ontologically, as Heidegger maintains, something possible is not relevant to something actualized and so remains something possible. However, the crux of the matter here is how to endure, embrace, and embody its possibility without its relation to actuality. Can this possibility existentially interrupt the ontical structure of everydayness of Dasein-with thrown into the with-world? Does not the actuality enable the possibility to

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42) BT, 306-07.

43) See, note 30.

actualize its possible capacity to destroy the public structure of the “they”? Here the actuality is never associated with something actualized like the actualization of death in the case of suicide: rather, it is the one side of the crack in Dasein’s Being, which sustains the other side, i.e., the possibility.

Thus, Dasein can *understand* the paradoxical situation of Being-in-the-world by the tensional yet balanced relation between possibility and actuality. On the one hand, death is the farthest to Dasein because it is something uncanny that Dasein cannot ultimately control. On the other hand, death is the closest to Dasein because it is something impending that Dasein should solely undertake here and now. Just as Heidegger says, “As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die,”<sup>44)</sup> the authentic Dasein takes death as the impending possibility from which Dasein never escapes. Only when Dasein *understands* the paradoxical character of the impending uncanniness, death as the possibility of the absolute impossibility breaks down the ontical-existential-inauthentic structure of everydayness, and then exposes the ontological-existential-authentic structure of Being-toward-death. In this vein, Heidegger’s statement can be properly understood: “this anticipation includes the possibility of taking the *whole* of Dasein in advance in an existential manner; that is to say, it includes the possibility of existing as a *whole potentiality-for-Being*.”<sup>45)</sup> Through the anticipatory *understanding* of death, the authentic Dasein can *understand* the totality of its own existence, that is, its own Being as such. Consequently, the significance of Heidegger’s thanatology, that is, the ontological-existential-authentic meaningfulness of death is the

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44) BT, 289.

45) BT, 309.

authentic solution to the metaphysical question that has long been concealed by traditional metaphysics.

#### IV. Conclusion

This paper examined Heidegger's thanatology in order to grasp why he attacks traditional metaphysics. Heidegger calls into question the question raised by traditional metaphysics and does so in an existential context in which the meaning of the question has been concealed and obscured. Onto-theologically, traditional metaphysics has searched for the grounding ground, which can guarantee the certainty, predictability, and calculability of all beings by means of asking about Being. Thus, the history of metaphysics is the journey to their home (*Heim*) where all beings feel secured, certain, and at home. For Heidegger, however, this journey suffers from homesickness (*Heimwehkrank*) in which all beings lose their authentic home, that is, Dasein's existentiality. The authenticity of Being cannot be found in any foundational ground that might secure permanently its existentiality; rather, it emerges from where the very ground is broken down. Heidegger criticizes that the grounding ground is in fact groundless and even blurs the authentic ground of its existentiality. In this sense, what is urgent to Heidegger is to uncover the covered meaningfulness of Being by traditional metaphysics.

The aim of this paper is to present a possible way for uncovering the authentic meaning of Being through Heidegger's concept of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein, which violently shakes the inauthentic structure of Dasein-with thrown into the with-world and then

reveals the authentic structure of Dasein as Being-toward-death. Although Heidegger himself consistently rejects any relation of possibility to actuality regarding death, this paper argues that in order to make the possibility *ontological*, *existential*, and so *authentic*, the tensional relation between the two should be sustained. Finally, the reason why Heidegger censures traditional metaphysics rests not on its question itself, but on its way of questioning that in fact conceals the authentic meaningfulness of Being. In this sense, Heidegger attempts to ask about Being in order to reveal the ontological-existential-authentic structure of Being as Being-toward-death. Therefore, Heidegger's thanatology betrays the fact that the "end" of metaphysics has the twofold implication: *Abschluss* and *Zweck*. The end of metaphysics is to end [*abschließen*] traditional metaphysics for the end [*Zweck*] of metaphysics itself.

Key words: Martin Heidegger, thanatology, Being-toward-death [*Sein-zum-Tode*], onto-theology, traditional metaphysics, Dasein, anticipation [*Vorlaufen*]

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## &lt;국문요약&gt;

## 형이상학의 종말(목적)과 하이데거의 죽음학

김창현 (클레어몬트 대학원)

이 글의 목적은 전통 형이상학이 제기해왔던 존재 물음에 대한 마르틴 하이데거의 비판을 살펴봄으로써, 기존의 존재 물음 속에 은폐되어 왔던 현존재의 존재론적인 의미를 하이데거의 죽음학을 통해서 드러내는 것이다. 하이데거는 전통 형이상학의 존재 물음이 존재자들의 확고부동한 기반이자 토대로서의 존재에 대한 물음으로 소급된다는 점에서 존재-신학적이라고 판단한다. 이런 존재-신학적 존재 물음은 존재의 의미를 드러내기보다는 그것을 은폐함으로써 존재의 망각을 야기하게 된다. 존재의 의미는 정초주의에 입각한 확고부동한 토대에서 가능한 것이 아니라, 오히려 그러한 토대가 무너지는 지점, 즉 절대적 불가능성으로서의 가능성인 죽음을 통해서 적나라하게 드러난다. 현존재는 가능성으로서의 죽음을 자신의 것으로 전적으로 떠맡을 때 비로소 자신의 본래성을 회복하고, 존재의 의미와 마주대할 수 있는 것이다. 비록 하이데거 자신은 죽음의 가능성(possibility)을 보장하기 위해 그것의 실현성(actuality)을 끊임없이 부정했지만, 이 글에서는 죽음의 가능성이 단순한 가능성에 그치는 것이 아니라 본래적 가능성, 즉 “실현 가능성” 차원에서 이해되기 위해서는 가능성과 실현성 사이의 긴장관계 속에서만 가능하다는 것을 보여주고자 했다. 죽음을 실현 가능성의 차원에서 이해할 때, 비로소 현존재의 존재론적 의미를 드러낼 수 있게 된다. 결국 하이데거의 죽음학이 의미하는 것은 그의 형이상학 비판의 목적이 존재 의미를 은폐해왔던 전통 형이상학에 종말을 고하고, 이를 통해서 형이상학 자체의 본령을 회복하는 것이다.

주제어: 마르틴 하이데거, 죽음학, 죽음을 향한 존재, 존재-신학,  
전통 형이상학, 현존재, 선구(先驅)