

Heidegger, Dasein and Disability: Re-thinking what it means to be Human?

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Abstract

Citizenship relies on notions of what it means to be a human person. Within the western philosophical tradition the human person is understood to be an able-bodied, rational, autonomous and free individual who is also an economically producing member of society. Suffice it to say, many people with disability would not fit this criteria. Consequently citizenship, and the inclusion it implies, would seem to be denied them. What options are therefore available to challenge this philosophical based view?

Martin Heidegger, who was arguably one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, challenged these traditional western philosophical views. By using a phenomenological approach to address the ontological question of what it means 'to be' a human person, he came up with an alternative understanding. He coined the term Dasein, which literally means 'being there', to refer to human Being. In this way he clearly differentiates his inquiry into what it means 'to be' a human person from that of traditional western philosophy which is interested in 'what is' a human person. In this paper I will outline his theory and explore the ways in which it enables inclusion for people with disability. I will then argue that Heidegger's ontology provides a foundation that may potentially lead to a political society that is able to recognise and value disability as part of the spectrum of what it means to be human.

Heidegger is arguably one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th Century. This position has been gained due to a number of factors. Most notably his philosophy challenges traditional western philosophy. He rejected the Cartesian notion of a disembodied 'I', as well as departing from Aristotle and Kant, both of whom, despite the vast difference between their respective philosophical positions, approach the question of the meaning of being from the perspective of the logic of propositional statements. Heidegger essentially challenges the way we think.

Traditional western philosophy has not been able to cater for disability within the framework of Human Nature or political philosophy.¹ The construction of disability as an opposition to the normalising categories of humanness and citizenship, exclude disability as 'lack' and 'useless'. Heidegger is critical of the method and conclusions of these philosophical approaches and is therefore worthy of investigation as to

¹ I have argued this position in 2 unpublished papers: 'Normalisation-SRV: Still relevant or a promise unfulfilled' presented at the 41st ASSID National Conference 2006 and 'Political Philosophy and Justice: Examining Rawls' claim that his theory cannot account for people with disability'. Reinders, H. S. (2000) has also argued extensively that disability cannot be adequately understood within liberal society, particularly within the framework of morality.

whether his philosophy will provide a more inclusive picture for people with disability.

My focus on Heidegger will begin with a close reading of Being and Time in terms of his inquiry into Dasein and the 'meaning of being'. I am particularly interested as to whether his inquiry can be inclusive of those people with profound intellectual disability. Despite the fact that Heidegger sets a different question and undertakes a different approach to traditional western philosophy, is Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein limited to those human entities that are intellectually competent, rational and capable of an economic contribution to society? Can his enquiry offer anything more inclusive for people with disability than his predecessors?

I will consider the above questions with particular emphasis on Heidegger's notion of Dasein as 'being-in-the-world' and as 'being-with'. As it is not possible to consider every aspect of Heidegger's thought in relation to the inclusion of people with disability, I have decided to focus on that aspect of Dasein which is in relation with others. As people with disability experience exclusion, as exclusion from being-with, it seems that this idea of Heidegger's offers an interesting avenue into his philosophy for considering the place of people with disability.

As an aside I want to briefly set the scene regarding the dominant view of how people with disability are seen within contemporary society. In the past the plight of people with disability and the issues associated with 'being disabled' were largely confined to the private domain. In recent history this has changed. Disability occupies a space in the public domain in terms of the political and social. Additionally, disability is now an area of academic enquiry and study, as well as there being professional training courses for those working in the field. People with disability themselves, are far more apparent in contemporary society than they were in the past. Despite the fact that disability is now at a level of societal and political consciousness, there is still significant stigma associated with being disabled, and many debates about how best to address the 'problem' of disability.

In early 2003 Christopher Reeve, a high profile actor and quadriplegic, came to Australia by invitation from Bob Carr to attend a forum on spinal cord injury, and to

join in the debate on stem cell research. Whilst for most Australians this debate raises questions of morality in relation to making use of embryonic stem cells, the debate is quite a different one for many within the disability community². The obsessive quest to find a ‘cure’ that was represented by Christopher Reeve created a great deal of anger for those in the disability field that are part of a movement aimed at trying to create a greater acceptance and understanding of disability as simply being part of the spectrum of what it means to be a human person. Christopher Reeve represents a view that disability is an unfortunate accident, sickness or anomaly that needs to be fixed or cured. The arguments opposing this view, recognise that disability is not only one of the ways in which human beings exist, but is, in fact, no less desirable and of no less value than any other expression of being human.

The debates initiated by Christopher Reeve’s visit to Australia, continue to divide those with disability and those involved with them. My reason for raising this debate is that it raises a problem regarding the approach taken to dealing with disability. The disability debates revolve around what it means to be human and what are the limits of being human. That is, at what point do we say that a certain life is no longer acceptably or desirably human. When people argue for withdrawal of medical intervention, the arguments are often associated with the capacity of the person. We refer to people with profound intellectual disability or brain damage as people being in a vegetative state. The use of the word ‘vegetative’ should not be underestimated. The use of a term that compares the person to a non-human state is very powerful. And the implications are not lost. Such a referent leaves hanging the view that such a person is not really human. The approach also reveals that the way we understand what it means to be human is related to our capacities and our characteristics. The implication of this for people with a disability is that they end up being understood in terms of their deficits. It seems to me that this approach to understanding what it is to be a human being, sets an acceptable minimum standard and anything that falls below that standard is not acceptable.

So what does all of this have to do with Heidegger and his quest into the meaning of being? The relevance is that Heidegger also recognises that traditional philosophy has been focused on questions that leave out the most primary question of all. What does

² See for example (Leipoldt et al., 2003)

it mean 'to be'? Whilst western philosophy has been concerned with the entity of the human person, it has done so in terms of trying to understand 'what' a human person is. Heidegger is insistent that there is a more primary question that philosophy needs to consider and that is, what does it mean *to be* this entity we name a human person. As I personally hold the view that people with disability are simply part of the spectrum of what it means to be human, I am keen to find a starting point which acknowledges this. Such a starting point then sets a completely different agenda for how we address what it means to have a disability, and the consequent ways in which people with disability are regarded in society.

In inquiring into the question of being, Heidegger is not inquiring into the 'what' of an entity. He is critical of the idea that there is a subject who stands apart from an object to be identified in terms of properties and characteristics that define it. In moving away from the idea "of the human being as an unmoving point of view upon the world" (Mulhall, 1996:39), Heidegger understands that we are actors in the inquiry. If the inquirer is also an actor, then the method of inquiry must recognise this. Heidegger described this method as phenomenology, an "...analysis by which the meaning of various ways in which we exist can be translated from the vague language of everyday existence into the understandable and explicit language of ontology *without destroying the way in which these meanings manifest themselves to us in our everyday lives*" (Gelven, 1989:42. Italics in original) By asking what it means 'to be' rather than 'what is' a human being, Heidegger has thrown the philosophical tradition on it's head.

Furthermore, Heidegger insists that we must take account of our preconceptions. The inquiry must be transparent to itself. So whilst 'Being' refers not only to humans, but also to animals, nature and objects, "...the meaning of being must be sought in human understanding" (Frede, 1993:50). Just as Heidegger distinguishes his inquiry from that of science which investigates a material entity, he also distinguishes that entity which is the human being from other entities and makes this the centre of his inquiry. It is important to understand the difference between inquiring about an 'entity' and what it means 'to be'.

To assist in making clear the difference Heidegger uses the term *Dasein*, which literally means ‘being there’. Unlike scientists and previous philosophers who inquired into the properties and characteristics of the human person, Dasein is that entity for which the ‘meaning of being’ is a concern for it.

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.* Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological.

(Heidegger, 1962:12)

Heidegger's question already opens up possibilities of inclusion for people with disability as he is not interested in understanding the human person in terms of characteristics, capabilities and attributes, but rather his interest is what it means ‘to be’ a human person. Furthermore, the phenomenological method is engaged with understanding existence through existence itself. That is, it is concerned with the ways in which Dasein exists and is related to the world in which it exists. This would suggest that Dasein must be understood from all experiences of all human beings, and not some confined ‘ideal’ concept of what constitutes a human being.

Disability is most often understood specifically in terms of capacities, or rather the lack of capacities. But Dasein is about existence as opposed to characteristics and capacities. Heidegger's move away from this approach of understanding the human person as an object to be identified in concrete terms, means that potentially people with disability will not be categorised as a group outside of the ‘norm’. The emphasis is instead on ‘what it means to be’, on existence, and this ensures that there is a different starting point that does not put human beings into differing categories. Rather by focusing on Dasein, on what it means ‘to be’, Heidegger opens up the possibility of inclusion. This includes the possibility of considering that Dasein refers to all human experiences of what it means ‘to be’ without placing value laden determinations on an ‘ideal Dasein’ which excludes those that don't make the grade.

What is not clear at this stage, however, is what is included by Heidegger when he claims Dasein as ‘that being for which the meaning of being is an issue for it’? Does

this indicate that Dasein must have the capacity to ask this question? If this is the case, it would suggest that persons with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities that prevent them from potentially asking this question cannot be Dasein. Yet Heidegger makes clear that he is describing what universally belongs to Dasein and not just his own limited interpretation of Dasein. So what exactly does Heidegger mean when he says that 'being is a concern for Dasein'?

To be better able to engage in this question, it is important to continue to follow through Heidegger's analytic of Dasein. In the first instance, to unravel a little more of what Heidegger understands by the term Dasein. Already it is clear that Dasein is not an object that is studied objectively from the outside. Nor is Dasein simply an alternative term for human. In section 9 of *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that "The essence of Dasein lies in existence" (p42). That is to say, by using the term Dasein for this entity, Heidegger is expressing its Being rather than its "what" as if it were a table, house or tree. (p42) In expanding on the idea that Dasein is an issue for itself, Heidegger claims that Dasein is that entity which in each case is mine. Dasein is not present-at-hand and is rather that which is internal and self-reflective. In other words Dasein is significantly different to inanimate objects and other life forms that do not have the capacity for self-reflection. Those objects which simply exist, are referred to by Heidegger as present-to-hand. For example, a chair does not have the capacity to choose where it wants to be or how to be. It is simply present-to-hand. As Gelvin (1989) points out, the claim that Dasein is always mine simply indicates that the object of inquiry is always available and that the procedure of analysis must be hermeneutic self-reflection. (p50) More simply Mulhall (1996) suggests that an alternative way of understanding the idea that the Being of Dasein is an issue for it, is to understand that every choice that Being takes, is a choice about the form its own life will take (p67). And certainly people with disability engage in choices about their life. Even if that choice is simply to make clear a like or dislike. Even the most profoundly disabled are able to show displeasure or pain.

Connected to Dasein being in each case mine, Heidegger emphasises that Dasein is possibility. "That entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its being as its ownmost possibility (p42). It is in this sense that Dasein can "...choose itself and win itself" (p43). In other words Dasein is never fixed; it is

always potentiality and possibility. This is not to say that every Dasein is always consciously aware and active in understanding itself. Heidegger claims that there are two ways of being; authentic Dasein and inauthentic Dasein. Whilst at first appearance this would suggest a more valuable and less valuable way of being, Heidegger makes abundantly clear that inauthentic Dasein is neither less nor worse than authentic Dasein. In fact it is impossible to be authentic Dasein at all times. "Rather it is the case that ... Dasein can be characterised by inauthenticity – when busy, when excited, when interested, and when ready for enjoyment." (p43)

This distinction between authentic and inauthentic Dasein makes clear that people with profound disabilities (those with no verbal communication and/or ability to care for themselves) can be included in Heidegger's understanding of Dasein. If authentic Dasein is about Dasein that is able to understand and engage with the fact that its being is a concern for it, whilst inauthentic Dasein does not actively engage in this activity, then the fact that an intellectually disabled person may not have the capacity to engage with the meaning of being does not exclude them from being included as Dasein. At the very least such people would be seen as inauthentic Dasein. And given Heidegger's claim that inauthentic Dasein is no less than authentic Dasein, people with disability are necessarily included and carry as much value as any other Dasein.

The full extent to what is understood by authenticity and inauthenticity relies on further inquiry into what is understood as Dasein. As referred to above Dasein is not a subject that exists in isolation and can be studied as such. As the essence of Dasein lies in existence, then being-in-the-world becomes central to the inquiry into the meaning of being.

Being-in-the-world for Heidegger implies relationship. Again he distances himself from the dualism of traditional western philosophy. Dasein does not sit as a separate entity with a world around it that it can investigate and describe. "There is no such thing as the 'side-by-side-ness' of an entity called 'Dasein' with another entity called 'world'" (Heidegger, 1962:55). Because the essence of Dasein is existence, being-in means to be in relationship with. If we use Heidegger's example of water in a glass or clothes in a cupboard, we can see that the two entities are related by a particular location in a particular space. "Both water and glass, garment and cupboard, are 'in'

space and 'at' a location, and both in the same way" (p54) Heidegger, therefore provides an understanding of engagement in the world "...which is at the same time spatial and physical as well as mental." (Kenkmann, 2005:479)

Furthermore Being-in-the-world reveals Dasein's facticity. Dasein's facticity implies that an entity's being-in-the-world is such that its own destiny is tied up with that of other entities which it encounters. For example, the simple task of eating involves sitting on a chair and eating food from a plate on a table. Dasein does not view the chair or the table as an entity to be examined. Dasein sits on the chair and eats food from the plate on the table. There is activity associated with these objects that always already means that Dasein engages with them. So Dasein takes up an attitude of engagement. Dasein's being in the world is indicated by such examples as "...having to do with something, producing something, attending to something..." (Heidegger, 1962:p56) This relationship Heidegger describes as *Bersorgen* (Concern).

At first glance Being-in-the-world would seem to suggest an engagement which implies the ability to actively do something. Kenkmann (2005) summarises this idea of Dasein's being-in-the-world by stating "We are to a great extent what we do" (p480). So what does this mean for the person with disability? For some people with disability it is not possible to 'do' anything. For instance, for those people with profound disabilities who have no physical capacity to independently hold an item, who have no mobility, and have no known means of formal communication. The question would have to be asked as to whether they can engage with the world in Heidegger's sense. Does Heidegger's explication of being-in-the world include such people?

Heidegger tells us that Dasein is always already in the world. But unlike those entities that are present-at-hand or ready-to-hand within the world, Dasein "...is 'in' the world in the sense that it deals with entities encountered within the world, and does so concernfully and with familiarity." (Heidegger, 1962:104). Of course one can engage with the world in many ways even when one can't initiate that engagement in a physical way. The person who is pushed in a wheelchair through a shopping centre and looks at the items on display and is later supported to eat their lunch in the food hall is Dasein being-in-the-world. This engagement may be supported by another

Dasein but still clearly indicates engagement. The reality is that like any Dasein, people with disability cannot exist outside of the world. Even if they are confined to an institution, this is still being-in-the-world. So whilst Heidegger gives examples of Dasein's modes of existence and being-in-the-world, Dasein is not limited to these or to the ability to undertake a minimum level of physical or intellectual activity.

Thus far we can see that Heidegger's analysis of what it means to be is constructed in a manner that is clearly inclusive of all human entities. However, people with disability experience exclusion primarily in their encounters with others. So I now turn to the aspect of Heidegger's theory that is of most importance for this inquiry. That aspect of being-in-the-world that is concerned with being-with or Dasein-with (*Mitdasein*). It is this relationship with other Dasein and Heidegger's concept of solicitude that I will turn to now.

To begin with Heidegger tells us that even when Dasein engages with present-at-hand and ready-to-hand entities they are implying recognition of other Dasein. For example, Heidegger tells us that when a craftsman is at work, along with the equipment encountered in doing the work, there is also the others for whom the work is being done that are likely to be encountered (p117). These others who are encountered in such contexts are not "...narrowed down to equipment ready-to-hand or Nature present-at-hand, and thus to entities with a character other than that of Dasein." (p118) These entities are like Dasein. They are those from whom Dasein does not distinguish itself. What we find is that Being-in-the-world is a world that is always shared with others and is essentially social. "The world of Dasein is a *with-world*...Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [MitDasein]." (Heidegger, 1962:118)

Heidegger explains our engagement with other people as *Fursorge* (solicitude), rather than as concern as he does with our engagement with the world. (p131) Heidegger likens the "...expression 'solicitude' in a way which corresponds to...(the)...use of 'concern' as a term for an *existential*." (p121). Solicitude, however, does not only have a positive mode of understanding. In fact it is the deficient and indifferent modes of solicitude "...that characterise everyday, average being-with-one-another." (p121) This negative mode of solicitude, of everyday being, refers to the ways in which

Dasein engages with Others in the world in a manner that is indifferent. Dasein passes by Others without regard. The Other does not matter and is disregarded. This way of being-with Others is largely the same as the way Dasein comports itself towards the ready-to-hand equipment it concerns itself with daily.

There are 2 ways in which solicitude can occur in its positive mode according to Heidegger. In the first instance one leaps in and takes over for the other. In this mode of solicitude the Other is dominated and becomes dependent. Solicitude takes 'care' away from the Other. In contrast to this the other mode of positive solicitude does not leap in, but rather leaps ahead of the Other. In this way they do not take away care, but instead gives it back to the Other. This kind of solicitude is essentially authentic in that it acknowledges the existence of the Other as opposed to treating the Other as a 'what' with which they are concerned. Put succinctly "Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude – that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates." (Heidegger, 1962:122)

When considering disability and their being-in-the-world as Other, it is striking how aptly these modes of solicitude represent how people with disability are regarded in contemporary society. Heidegger may not have necessarily interpreted these modes of solicitude in this way, but it seems to me that they describe what it means to be disabled very accurately. To a large extent people with disability experience the negative mode of solicitude in which Dasein simply ignores them and places them on the edges of society. Dasein in its everyday average Being-with-one-another takes no account of people with disability. They are irrelevant and delegated to spaces that are apart. They do not matter.

But of course people with disability are not entirely segregated or outside of the world. Indeed, they are very much in the world. Interestingly, when considering the first of the positive modes of solicitude which leaps in and takes away care and which makes the Other dominated and dependant, it is astounding how accurately this describes most of the ways the non-disabled engage with the disabled. However, this mode of engagement is challenged as inappropriate by some as it is experienced as dominating

and encourages dependency in a manner which closes off possibilities for the individual.

People with disability and those that are concerned that they have a quality of life promote a way of being-with that enhances the person to have some control over their life. It promotes personal choice and being open to possibilities. To me this also sounds very much like Heidegger's explanation of solicitude which treats the other as an Other Dasein and is concerned with liberating and freeing the Other.

Perhaps the way in which I have considered being-with as solicitude is not entirely faithful to Heidegger's intention. Never-the-less it provides a very useful tool for examining the way in which our society treats and regards people with disability. Furthermore it offers a clear process for ensuring proactive and positive ways of engaging with people with disability, so that they are viewed and supported in a manner which enables them to be liberated and open to possibilities most often closed off to them. Whilst Heidegger does not intend to make value judgements about various modes of being-with, his outline of these clearly show the benefits of solicitude as "...that which leaps forth and liberates." (p122)

At this point in *Being And Time*, Heidegger tells us that "...Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein is essentially for the sake of Others." (p123) We therefore return to that aspect of Dasein that is in relationship with Others: Dasein-with-Dasein. This in turn leads Heidegger to the question of the 'who' of Dasein. For the most part Dasein in its average everydayness is absorbed in the world and it is not itself. The question therefore remains for Heidegger: "*Who* is it, then, who has taken over being as everyday Being-with-one-another." (p125) In this section Heidegger also expands on his conception and understanding of authentic and inauthentic being.

According to Heidegger Dasein exists mostly in an average everyday mode in which Dasein is dispersed into the 'they' self. This mode of Being-with, is explained by Heidegger as being absorbed in the world in such a manner that one ..."dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more." (p126)

The who of Dasein becomes the 'they' self. The way in which Dasein engages in the world – reads, sees, judges, recreates, etc – is the way in which Others do so. Dasein becomes indistinguishable from the Others. Or as Heidegger so aptly puts it, “Everyone is the other, and no-one is himself.” (p128) This mode of Dasein-with is inauthentic being-with. It is not that Dasein becomes the Other, but rather their mode of being is indistinguishable from the other. This mode of being-with is different from authentic being-with.

The authentic self differs from the 'they' self in that Dasein discovers the world, brings it close and discloses to itself its own authentic Being. Dasein is then able to clear away obscurities and concealments. (Heidegger, 1962:129) Authentic being is about understanding. It differs from the 'they' self in that it is not about conforming. The 'they' self conforms with others and this stops Dasein from interacting with its own existence. The 'they' deadens Dasein's individuality. But for Heidegger individuality is not about having a particular set of properties that sets me apart from others. Authenticity involves self-interpretation and a breaking away from the 'they' in a manner that does not transcend, but rather modifies one's role. In authentic being, Dasein is still tied up with the Other, but in a way in which Dasein is consciously engaging and inquiring into itself. It is not “...detached from the “they””; it is rather an existentiell modification of the “they” – of the “they” as an essential existentiale.” (p130) Authentic Dasein see possibilities and engages with these and recognises that there are no certainties. Dasein recognises itself as that entity which asks questions about the meaning of Being.

There are some very interesting implications of Heidegger's 'they' self for people with disability. If the 'they' self relates to Being such that I become indistinguishable from Others, it could be argued that people with disability rarely exist as the 'they' self. One of the very fascinating aspects of people with intellectual disability, for instance, is that they rarely go about their lives in a manner that fits the 'norm'. The way in which they view the world is typically not in keeping with how the majority of society see the world. If everyday being-with is largely about normalised modes of being, then people with disability generally don't fit that mode of being. One of the most prominent ideologies for working with people with disability over the past 50 years has been what is referred to as Normalisation. Normalisation aims to ensure that

people with disability have access to and participate in a life that is as close as possible to the norm and that their roles are valued ones within society. For many this has resulted in encouraging people with disability to look and act like 'everybody else'. Yet there is no doubt that a significant majority of people with intellectual disability stand out in a crowd. One of the main reasons is because most people with disability are not like everybody else, and despite attempts to make them, they largely have no desire to be, nor do they have the attributes (cognitive and behavioural) to do so. The idea that this should automatically mean that people with disability should be of lesser value is often not put into question. Heidegger's analysis, however, opens up the possibility that perhaps people with disability are authentically Dasein and that therefore their difference ensures that they are of as much value as any other person. But the question remains within this framework as to whether people with disability are still primarily caught up in the 'they' of 'disabled being'?

Of course Heidegger tells us that Dasein is always both authentic and inauthentic, and that neither is preferential to the other. So whether people with disability have, because of their disability, an easier avenue into escaping the 'they' self is of little relevance if there is no greater value in authentic Being. What does become clear, however, is that people with disability are clearly catered for in this exposition of being-with, of Dasein-with-Dasein. For many people with disability, being with others is an essential part of their life. Heidegger's recognition of the social nature of Being and the essential nature of Being-with-others is significant for the inclusion of people with disability in a society that is largely about individuals rather than community. Whilst Heidegger understands that Dasein is always being-with even as a hermit (others are still always relevant and recognised even when alone) the extent to which Heidegger's theory is essentially about engagement in the world and with others, provides a far more useful starting point for what it means to 'be' human, than the traditional philosophical inquiry that starts with 'what' is a human. So whether the person with disability exists as the 'they' self or as an individuated self, is of little importance so long as they are included as Dasein.

Whilst I have only covered a small part of Heidegger's inquiry into the meaning of being, those aspects dealt with are the basics on which his existential analytic of Dasein is built. At the level of the basics – Dasein as being-in-the-world and Being-

with – I have shown that Heidegger’s inquiry into the meaning of being is able to cater for people with disability. This is significant when compared to those traditional philosophies which use as the starting point, ‘what’ is a human being? These philosophies have been shown to exclude people with disability in their determination of ‘what’ constitutes Human Nature.³

Heidegger has been challenged for separating the ontological from the ontic⁴, but it is this that makes his approach useful for thinking about people with disability in an inclusive way. It offers a different way of thinking, that posits people with disability within the spectrum of what it means ‘to be’ human.

The question remains as to whether this starting point will provide a different outcome for the inclusion of people with disability when considered at the ontic level. Some would argue that Dasein is always thrown into the ontic, so therefore it is not possible to have ontology without the ontic. There are still many unanswered questions regarding the experience of ‘being-disabled’. Heidegger has provided a philosophy which understands what it means ‘to be’ human based on relationship, engagement with the world and possibilities, as opposed to the idea of a human person as a rational, contributing and useful member of society. But we are still left with some of the questions that are highlighted by the traditional philosophical approach. Can Heidegger’s ontology enable a different way of responding to the ontic that will enable a challenge of current values and attitudes towards people with disability? Can it deal with the idea of ‘being’ human as ‘useless’ as opposed to ‘useful’? Can disability, along with the pain and suffering associated with it, be seen as part of what it means to be human, as opposed to something which needs to be fixed? And finally can it offer an approach that can recognise that relationships with people with disability are as meaningful as those with the non-disabled, even when that person has a profound intellectual disability or mental illness?

³ Some recent examples of critiques of liberalism and its exclusion of people with disability: (Ingram, 2006; Kymlicka, 2002; Nussbaum, 2006; J. S. Reinders, 2002; Sen, 2004; Tankard Reist, 2006; Vorhaus, 2005)

⁴ The ‘ontic’ refers to a particular being or object, the facticity of the individual; e.g. a worker, woman, disabled individual. Dasein always refers to the ontological, not the ontic as it would be virtually impossible to fully unfold someone’s facticity which would change anyway, depending on context. Dasein is ontologically always more than any set of facts.

I have not been able to engage with these questions or consider in more detail Heidegger's analysis of what it means 'to be'. I have, however, provided a starting point which is both suggestive and promising for a way of thinking differently, and that clearly enables the inclusion of people with disability in contemporary society.

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