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Finding Oneself Well Together with Others: A Phenomenological Study of the Ontology of Human Well-Being

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Abstract: Based on critical readings of Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, the paper offers a phenomenological study of the ontology of well-being that transcends the opposition between subjective and objective being. By interpreting the Heideggerian notion of *Befindlichkeit* as the fundamental way in which humans find themselves in the world, being affected by and faced with their own existence, the paper opens a way to understanding well-being that locates the possibility of elevating one’s own being not inside or outside the I but in the affective bond to others called friendship. Aristotle’s reflections on *philia* play a crucial role in developing this understanding of well-being, according to which humans find themselves well by sharing joy with each other and making a vital contribution to the realization of their own possibilities.

Keywords: well-being; ontology; Heidegger; *Befindlichkeit*; friendship



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1. Introduction

Despite being extensively studied within multiple disciplines in the past decades, the concept of human well-being is still in need of further philosophical investigation. Some of the most influential theories in the field have centered on “subjective” and “objective” well-being, often taking for granted that it makes sense to divide well-being into these two distinct categories and analyze them separately.¹ Yet, the theories on both sides of this divide run into so many seemingly unresolvable problems that one may wonder why they have gained so much traction in the first place and whether the subjective–objective distinction is adequate for a conceptually coherent account of human well-being at all.

The overly restrictive theories on either side appear to lack or rule out what the other relies on. Already Kierkegaard and Nietzsche observed that subjectivity cannot be adequately grasped in objectifying terms, and objectivity as a scientific concept is founded on the exclusion of certain subjective elements, such as sensations and desires, which is why many researchers on each side attempt to combine and take into account the other “pole” in order to salvage their theories.²

However, a deeper problem emerges out of the conceptual vacuum that theorists on either side leave behind, as they do not address what is entailed in the term “being” when referring to human well-being. Instead, they start out from certain intuitions or assumptions about pleasures and desires on the subjective side of the spectrum and about values or capacities on the objective side, which usually raise similar objections concerning arbitrariness—why only pleasure or desire and why exactly these values and capabilities as sole promoters of well-being³, —or atomism due to the lack of explanations of the possible interrelations between the elements going into the theory.⁴

Adding to this and stressing the ontological blind spot of most theories of well-being, there has been a lot of focus on the aspect of wellness, be it in the form of pleasure, happiness, joy or flourishing. One might argue that this has rightly been so, as one or more of these affective states can be considered as proxies for well-being.⁵ Still, if it remains unexplained how these different states are linked, not only among each other and to human

well-being but to what it means to find oneself well while being in these states, then relevant questions as to their ontological status are left unanswered. The major stumbling block for hedonism and desire theories has been the same, since Plato let Socrates argue against them by alleging that something may appear pleasant or fulfilling to somebody, but this does not imply that it really *is* pleasant or fulfilling and much less that it *is* good for that person.⁶ Some people may feel pleasure or satisfy their desires without being any better off, and somebody could even experience happiness while finding themselves uncomfortably awkward in this supposedly desirable state. Perhaps that person is not really happy then. If this is so, then it could indicate that each one of us may not be the best at assessing what is actually good and bad for us.

Viewed from the perspective of subjective well-being, this may seem outrageous: If we ourselves are not the best to assess and know what is good and bad for us, who is? The purpose of the paper is to develop an answer to this question that transcends the opposition of subjective vs. objective, the I vs. the world, by taking our starting point in a phenomenological investigation of what is entailed in human well-being with emphasis on the term “being”. As already stated, much has been said about the aspects of wellness in well-being which may partly be because the word itself is commonly associated with a pleasurable, desirable or flourishing state of being. Yet, in so far as pleasures, desires and flourishing do not always track or accompany well-being, the paper argues that we need to tap into the ontology of human well-being in order to explore what it means for humans to find themselves well. If we leave out such an investigation of well-being, wellness appears to be floating in mid-air without any foundation or structure to sustain it: Is well-being just a passing sensation, or is it rooted in emotions, experiences and relationships that sediment over time and shape our modes of being in the world? If human well-being stands in no relation to humans finding themselves well according to certain spatial, temporal and interpersonal coordinates in their lives, then it would seem to be reducible to fleeting appearances of “wellness” that comes and goes, unstructured and unconditioned, without any states or modes of being to uphold it.

In developing a phenomenological approach, which deals with basic questions about how we humans find ourselves in the world, we shall revisit Martin Heidegger’s early studies on the meaning of being with critical reference to such existential modes as being in the world, being with others and finding oneself affected by and faced with one’s own finiteness. Despite having very little to say about well-being, something we shall comment critically on, Heidegger’s phenomenological elaboration of the basic ontological question of the meaning of being will prove to be relevant for the present investigation. Following upon the initial interpretation of Heidegger’s understanding of being, the paper engages with critical questions concerning relationships with others and their contribution to well-being, such as sharing joy among good friends. These questions are very present in one of Heidegger’s main sources, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, but remarkably absent in his interpretation of Aristotle and in his own thinking. By offering answers to some of these questions, the paper sheds new light on the part of Aristotle’s ethical thinking that is concerned with human well-being.

2. Being, World and Time

2.1. Being-in-the-World in Being and Time

During the years leading up to the publication of his major work in 1927, *Being and Time*, Heidegger had been pursuing an elaborate answer to the question of what being means, a question only posed by us humans, who live in and experience the world in our daily encounters with things and other people. According to his phenomenologically conceived “destruction” of salient positions in the history of philosophy, worldly relationships had predominantly been conceptualized through the subject–object paradigm which he deemed inadequate as a description of how life is actually lived and experienced. Instead of following the predominant epistemological paradigm, he took stock of how we commonly experience ourselves being involved in life: our characterizations of ourselves and what we

have lived through are filled to the brim with references to the world and how it affects us. “The world, in which I find myself (*ich mich befinde*), concerns and affects me (*geht mich an*),” Heidegger claims in one of his most influential lecture courses on Aristotle in 1924, “we shall denominate this affective mode a particular form of world encounter in life” [20], p. 51.⁷ Three years later in *Being and Time*, he expands on his interpretation of Aristotle, presenting being-in-the-world as the inescapable, existential fact about humans, who never find themselves isolated outside the world, but they are, as long as they live, occupied by something worldly somewhere in time.

This formal description seems so obvious that it cannot have escaped the attention of almost every philosopher before Heidegger, who recognizes that being in the world may be the most salient feature of human existence. Yet, he insists that what characterizes us human beings the most, is most often the hardest to notice [22], pp. 15–16, pp. 54–55. One could add to this that even when one notices it, a challenge still remains, namely to verbalize it properly, and this seems to be what Heidegger is struggling to achieve: a phenomenologically satisfying indication of what being means for humans, who by asking themselves that question convey their openness and exposure to their own finite existence.

Despite Heidegger’s attempt to get closer to life by offering a phenomenological account of what it means to be for “each human being in his or her concrete, individual historical being” [23], p. 86, as he states in another of his lecture courses leading up to *Being and Time*, he has often been criticized for relying on an evocative, non-intuitive use of language, especially by introducing new expressions that obscure rather than clarify the meaning of being. Most readers of his work will readily acknowledge that there is some truth to this critique that can be softened but not completely dismissed. If one wanted to defend Heidegger against this critique by reference to his struggle to break away from the traditional vocabulary of metaphysics, it still remains an open question whether he leaves behind all vestiges of epistemology in his early lectures, where he employs terms such as “individual” and “human being”, thereby giving the impression that somebody may exist as a subject over against the world. In *Being and Time*, he makes every attempt to let go of this terminology, but he still advances central concepts of being able to (*sein können*) and decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*) which appear to refer to a “subject” with enough resources to take upon itself to choose itself.⁸

We shall return to these critical points later. Heidegger’s ambition in *Being and Time*, notwithstanding the problems contained in it, is to overcome the divide between subjective and objective being by reinterpreting the term *Dasein* and its being-in-the-world as the fundamental way in which every human being is situated somewhere, literally “there” (*Da*), open to existence. Human existence is bound up with and unfolds itself in space and time which should not be understood, Heidegger warns his readers, as containers or objective entities inside which human subjectivity happens to be. Rather humans find and understand themselves as existing through spatial and temporal modes that penetrate to the core of their being, and it is these modes of understanding and finding oneself faced with and affected by whatever takes place in the present, the past or the future that Heidegger sets out to clarify.⁹

2.2. Heidegger on *Befindlichkeit*

The German word that Heidegger employs to convey what I have translated with the English expression “to find oneself faced with and affected by” is *Befindlichkeit*. In English translations of *Being and Time*, this word has been rendered “state-of-mind”, “disposedness”, “affectedness”, “situatedness” and “attunement”. The last word has been taken up by Daniel Haybron, who without referring to Heidegger centers on attunement, engagement and endorsement in his interpretation of a “phenomenology of well-being” in *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* [18], p. 55, pp. 112–122. Yet, neither attunement nor any of the other English terms proposed for *Befindlichkeit* reproduce its fundamental ontological meaning.¹⁰

One can be more or less attuned to something on the ontic level which seems to be something positive. Yet, according to Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit* itself precedes any such

graduation or differentiation between positive or negative states, as it refers to the primary way in which humans find themselves faced with and affected by their existence, a mode of being that makes attunement, together with other affective states and their opposites, possible in the first place.

In order to deepen our understanding of this constitutive mode of being, it is helpful to consider how *Befindlichkeit* is used in everyday German language. When one asks somebody how they *befinden sich*, then it is used with a reflexive form that opens up an existential relation between the self and the spatial and temporal dimension in which somebody finds themselves. Thus, verbal cognates of *Befindlichkeit* are often employed with regards to work, places, or interpersonal relations, and the one who responds will usually say that they find themselves well, all right or perhaps less well within the relevant spatial and temporal context. In English, we would ask how somebody is doing or faring, which has been widely used among scholars of well-being, but posing the question in this way puts more stress on the subject in its active mode and less on its situatedness and affectedness in space and time. If I answer that I am doing well or not so well, then it may be and often is related to something that has to do with where I am and what happens to me, but both the question and the answer still gravitate toward the “doings” of the subject or the I, who is naturally the main authority on its own state of being.

Befindlichkeit conveys a different notion that Heidegger elucidates by seeking out human existence within a dimension, being, whose origin remains unknown, and its sudden impact escapes the grip of each human being. Humans think that they know about their own being in the world, and they do, according to Heidegger, but most often in limited and inauthentic ways that do not take full account of the spatial and temporal conditions of their own being. Finding oneself somewhere in time relays the ontologically more fundamental notion that how one is affectively situated in existence becomes disclosed or revealed through certain moods and in such ways that the experiencing self discovers its own particular mode of being belatedly or through a spatiotemporal disclosure that is not of its own making. Rather than being behind the disclosure as first movers, humans arrive too late and find themselves moved by something that has already come to pass and installed itself inside them when they realize or try to understand its impact. Heidegger denominates this belated form of being moved, which continuously befalls somebody in various ways, thrownness. It makes itself felt in moods, such as fear, anxiety, sadness or boredom, also called *Stimmungen* in German which refer to how somebody is attuned (*gestimmt*) or determined (*bestimmt*) in their own being [30], pp. 133–134.

Heidegger’s existential analysis of the fundamental ways in which humans are situated in and affected by existence makes the question of being, especially of being-in-the-world, more concrete and less obscure, as he shows how each one of us is moved by and is thus in touch with the spatial and temporal coordinates of our being—here and there, possibility and realization, past, present and future—even when we are not fully aware of or flee from these factual conditions. *Befindlichkeit* is a more elaborated concept of what Heidegger in an early lecture had denominates world encounter, in which I am fundamentally concerned about myself and affected by being in the world, even when I try to turn my back on myself or escape from the world. In *Being and Time*, he analyses the ontological conditions of such a world encounter, and *Befindlichkeit* denotes the primary mode of being open and exposed to the world in one’s factual existence of being there with the whole weight of one’s past. In this way, his existential analysis of *Befindlichkeit* incorporates important aspects of his account on world and space, and it prefigures his exposition of temporality in the second part, where he returns to the concept of *Befindlichkeit* in the fourth chapter after having introduced caring concern (*Sorge*) and determinedness (*Entschlossenheit*) as the ontologically most authentic modes of confronting one’s own existence.

The following analogy may help to capture some of the conceptual overtones in his dense analysis of *Befindlichkeit*: the modes of being in which each one of us finds ourselves (*Befindlichkeit*) can be compared to how the “bonds” of our particular human existence are arranged in their spatial and temporal complexity with their openings, nodes,

and closures. Moods (*Stimmungen*) represent the resonating “tones” of these bonds that constitute our being but which we also form by projecting ourselves into the future in our attempt to understand ourselves and express ourselves in the world through language. In § 29 to § 34 in *Being and Time*, Heidegger advances these three existential modes of world openness—finding oneself (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*) and language or articulation (*Rede*)—as constitutive for human existence. However, if one reads the corresponding paragraphs on these three modes, it may not become clear why Heidegger makes this selection and goes on to interpret anxiety (*Angst*) as a fundamental way of finding oneself affected by existence (*Grundbefindlichkeit*), whereas fear is presented as a derived and ultimately failed mode of facing one’s own existence.

If we return to Heidegger’s lecture course on Aristotle from 1924, it will not only become clearer how he prepares the way conceptually toward *Being and Time* but also what he leaves out by drawing on Aristotelian ethics in his interpretation of human existence. What is most striking for us, who engage with Heidegger’s work in order to reconceptualize human well-being, is that he starts developing the concept of *Befindlichkeit* from the Aristotelian concept of pleasure, *hēdonē*, which he translates by finding oneself well (*wohlbefinden*). What a living being experiences when it finds itself well (*Sichwohlbefinden*), Heidegger interprets Aristotle as saying, is that it enters into “a heightened state of being, a specific lightness of being-in-the-world, inherent in joy” (*Gehobensein, eine spezifische Leichtigkeit des Seins-in-der-Welt, die in der Freude liegt*), a state of being that is most its own and in which its own possibilities do not produce any form of anxiety [20], pp. 46–49, pp. 53–54. In fact, to make his point clear, Heidegger offers the opposite example of anxiety, namely joy, which he presents as the *conditio sine qua non* for rejoicing over something. This mood springs from the deeper-rooted state of finding oneself lifted, a mode of being, which needs to be explored further, as Heidegger only introduces it briefly, and he confounds it with pleasure, i.e., *hēdonē*, although Aristotle deploys another word for joy, namely *chairein*.

In contrast to pleasure, which mainly covers momentary sensations of wellness without always determining if the one experiencing them is really well, joy may prove to be a more enduring indicator of and contributor to human well-being. “Which activities–modes of being—we associate with our well-being (*Wohl*),” Ernst Tugendhat observes, “is determined by those activities which bring us joy and can only be determined by that” [25], p. 203 (my translation). In contrast to Heidegger, who mostly focuses on gloomy *Stimmungen*, Tugendhat mentions Aristotle’s account of *philia*, which “is obviously closely linked to joy”. We shall later see if this is so obvious.

Heidegger does not touch upon *philia* in his lecture course on Aristotle and omits drawing any distinction between pleasure and joy, probably because his focus is on the meaning of being and not on well-being as such. He coincides with Aristotle in that other living beings also find themselves in certain states of wellness or fear, and thus he needs another key concept than *Befindlichkeit* to unlock the enigma of what it means to be human. Heidegger identifies this complementary Aristotelian concept with *logos*, i.e., language, which he, reasonably enough, links to the Aristotelian conception of humans as political beings [20], pp. 45–47. Whereas other living beings call out to attract and warn each other, humans share their views and thoughts on what is useful, right and good through speech in order to make themselves understood, and by doing so, they engage in politics. The good constitutes the meaningful endpoint of human existence, Heidegger affirms in his lecture course on Aristotle [20], pp. 65–69, whose view on well-being becomes clearer in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: having offered a preliminary definition of humans as the only living beings in possession of *logos*, Aristotle asserts that humans achieve well-being not by “living a solitary life” on their own but together with their family, friends and fellow citizens, “since a human being is by nature political” [31], p. 9 (I, 7, 1097b).

In the light of Heidegger’s early interpretation of Aristotle, the tripartition of the principal modes of being open to the world in *Being and Time* becomes more intelligible. *Befindlichkeit* and language correspond to Aristotle’s division of the soul into two parts: An alogical and affective part that is receptive to sensations and a logical and rational

part that deliberates and thinks. What is the role of understanding? Like Aristotle, who acknowledges that the alogical part is somehow receptive to *logos* [31], p. 19 (I, 13, 1102b), Heidegger needs a mediator between *Befindlichkeit* and language that allows for the former to be expressed through the latter. Understanding seems to fill out that role. Heidegger claims that although the three modes of world openness are each assigned their own temporality, they belong together [22], pp. 335–348.

Even so, there is a tension in *Being and Time* as to which of the three is more fundamental: On the one hand, *Befindlichkeit* seems to constitute the principal existential mode of *Dasein*, which influences understanding and can function on its own, leaving the other two stranded, which is what happens in anxiety. On the other hand, understanding is clearly given a more and more privileged place, as we come closer to and move into the second part of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger concludes that *Dasein* is, first and foremost, being toward a future that it projects itself toward in virtue of being able to. This projection is the work of understanding, not *Befindlichkeit*, which is to a higher degree bound to what has happened and gone by.¹¹

We do not have to resolve this tension in Heidegger's thinking. It is also present in contemporary studies on well-being, whose authors look for a balance between affective and cognitive states. Heidegger's intention is to shed light on the ontological conditions that make such affective and cognitive states possible, and even though he wants to distance himself from both Aristotle's psychology and modern cognitive science, he inherits an unresolved tension between *pathos* and *logos* present in both. What remains to be explored is how finding oneself well, what Heidegger calls *Sichwohlbefinden* in his lecture course on Aristotle, could be related to his conceptions of *Befindlichkeit* and understanding in *Being and Time*. Heidegger himself only hints at this relation in his lecture, in which the concept of the good falls into the background and so does the Aristotelian observation that it is together with others, particularly in friendship, that humans display their political nature as community builders and get into the reach of the highest form of well-being, *eudaimonia*. Heidegger ends up transforming the rich Aristotelian account of what it means to live well by interacting with others into a formal Kierkegaardian description of *Dasein's* solitary being toward its own finite limit, death. His description anticipates the existential analysis in *Being and Time*, where the only traces left of virtuous well-being, which is central in Aristotle's ethical and political writings, can be dimly picked up in concepts, such as being with others (*Mitsein*) and showing concern for others (*Fürsorge*).¹²

However, instead of elaborating further on these bonds between humans, Heidegger picks out fear and particularly anxiety as the primary ways of finding oneself faced with and affected by finitude and death. Anxiety singularizes *Dasein* and discloses the fundamental feature of standing on one's own, *solus ipse*, without being at home and having a foothold in the world, an existential feature that is not perceived by the "average" human being [22], pp. 187–188. In fact, Heidegger claims, humans are prone to fleeing and fearfully turning their back on their own finitude when being absorbed into everyday language and their familiar world, where the majority of people expect everyone else to do and say what anybody says and does. As anybody is really nobody in particular, human existence tends to lose its own uniqueness and is in danger of losing contact with its own authentic self whenever everyone fulfills the expectations of everyone else and nobody takes a stand on their own [22], pp. 127–128.

Heidegger envisages anxiety to open up the fundamental and authentic mode of finding oneself in existence, which breaks with the self-absorption into the mass of the one (*das Man*). This break is intimately linked to the call of conscience that confronts each one of us with the possibilities that are most our own, distinguishing us from the indistinct and selfsame mass [22], pp. 272–273. Yet, Heidegger's selective focus on singularizing phenomena, such as anxiety and conscience, raises several questions concerning other human modes of finding oneself in the world than the ones he uncovers. Although anxiety may be one form in which the fact of our own finitude manifests itself in human life, there could arguably be other modes that give human beings the chance of finding and becoming

themselves in a truthful way. In so far as being with others is, as he establishes in § 26 of *Being and Time*, part and parcel of being in the world, could certain encounters with others contain sufficient resources to move and turn somebody toward themselves and therefore also help loosen the grip of the one?

A related question concerns anxiety that opens up a unique and fundamental mode of finding oneself in existence: Is it given that every *Dasein* in its singularity, and being in a state of anxiety that tends to weigh and wear a person down, can find the power to take upon itself to choose itself in the face of death? Heidegger seems to take for granted that these powers become available to human existence in passing through the stages of anxiety thereby enabling *Dasein*, who follows the call of conscience, to become determined. Yet, considering the devastating and depressing effect that anxiety can have on any singular human being, it is far from given that everyone or *Dasein* at its best is able to lift themselves out of this downward spiraling *Befindlichkeit*.

We shall argue that the access to the elevating powers and heightening effects on one's own being is to be found elsewhere, namely in human well-being which involves the presence of others, if it is to endure. This path leads in a different direction than the ones pursued in *Being and Time*, in which the concept of well-being is absent, and the existential significance of others is downplayed. Its one-sided focus on the meaning of being as the ultimate philosophical question leaves little room for exploring prospects that could enhance the quality of being itself. In the following section, we shall view these questions as interrelated and develop an answer, based on a closer reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which makes it plausible that there are ways of finding oneself well and raising one's state of being through the interaction with others.

3. Well-Being, Friendship and Joy

3.1. Spatial and Temporal Aspects of Well-Being

Before we engage with these questions, it is useful to recall the role that Heidegger's phenomenological approach to ontology plays in this context. The present paper started out by arguing that the study of human well-being could be furthered by an ontological investigation of what is meant by "being" in human well-being. Without such an investigation, most studies of well-being will tend to center on intuitions and assumptions about wellness without grounding their understanding in the worldly and temporal character of being human. Still, there are also studies that reach conclusions similar to the ones presented in this paper but through other means. Two of the most well-known arguments against hedonism and desire theories, Robert Nozick's experiencing machine and Derek Parfit's well-wishing stranger, do not take their starting point in any prior phenomenological or ontological inquiry, and yet both show some of the problematical consequences of these theories that isolate the experiencing agents from the world or leave them unaffected by relevant future events.¹³

Heidegger's ambitious project of laying bare the fundamental modes through which humans make sense of their existence prepares the way for situating human existence dynamically and affectively in its everyday practical affairs. Just like recent research has demonstrated that past experience and future expectation shape human happiness, studies of well-being could make progress along the same lines by elucidating the significance of space and time in humans' search for well-being in their everyday dealings with the world. Several researchers in the phenomenological tradition have made fruitful use of what David Seamon has called well-being-of-person-or-group-in-place which refers to people's often unrecognized immersion in their familiar lifeworld as the place of well-being [37]. Viewing well-being from the perspective of this recent phenomenological tradition, spaces and places are not merely supportive features added onto human beings' existence, but in so far as these either modulate or disturb the quality of humans' being in the world, they also intervene in and have a decisive impact on humans' health, emotions and cognition. Based on Heidegger's late thinking, Galvin and Todres have developed the dual concept

of “dwelling-mobility” to integrate spatial and temporal, stable and dynamic aspects with well-being which they argue should be thought of as an “abiding expanse” [38].

Although these studies, most of which are underpinned by empirical research or literary readings, put more flesh on the Heideggerian notion of *Befindlichkeit* and embed humans within cultural contexts of dwelling and homeliness, it is not clear if they alone or with the help of Heidegger’s late thinking can bring us all the way to a phenomenologically satisfying circumscription of the constituent or contributing elements of human well-being. As Seamon makes clear, dwelling and belonging can also lead to chronic ill-being, and although Galvin and Todres attempt to develop their philosophy of caring and well-being by drawing on Heidegger’s understanding of dwelling and home-coming, these concepts, when interpreted against the backdrop of Heidegger’s late thinking, make little room for the well-being of the dwellers, who are closer to becoming pawns in a cosmic event of interacting forces, called the fourfold, than to finding themselves lightly lifted in their being on earth.

Still, in one of his late, short texts titled *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger makes an attempt to find a suitable human *ethos* that is grounded in and dwells on what is nearby. *Gelassenheit* allows humans to sense and be in contact with their surroundings while keeping a meditative distance and openness to what remains unknown. This *ethos*, which Heidegger associates with dwelling, could lay the basis for being well in a world filled with still more things and devices that tend to alienate us from what is closest at hand. Yet, it is only a basis, *Boden* and *Ground*, as Heidegger himself states, not a generator of well-being in itself nor an ethical pathway toward being or living together with others. In relation to technology, Heidegger claims that *Gelassenheit* is characterized by letting things in and, at the same time, leaving them aside as something that does not really affect us [39], pp. 16–17, 23–26. However, this is not transferable to the plural affairs of interpersonal relations that affect and matter to us, not just as something external but as bonds that penetrate to the core of our being. It does not seem to be possible to cut the bonds to others and remain unaffected in one’s own being, and much less could one experience well-being by leaving others to themselves, as this would also mean isolating oneself from others. If one wants to present dwelling with and caring for others as constituent parts of well-being, as Galvin and Todres do, then Heidegger’s thinking needs some revision, particularly his incomplete reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in his early lecture that determines much of his thinking in *Being and Time*.

3.2. Aristotle on *Philia* and Joy

A closer reading of Aristotle’s major ethical work will show that he ties human well-being to being virtuous and living together with others in good friendship. It is well-known that Aristotle dedicates much more space to this relationship than to any single virtue: his two books on *philia*, which in ancient Greek covers loving and caring relationships between family members, lovers and friends, take up almost a quarter of the whole treatise. There are several reasons why Aristotle assigns such a privileged place to *philia*: as we saw in an earlier quotation from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, human beings do not reach *eudaimonia* on their own; only together with others, in relationships of familiarity, friendship and citizenship, can humans display their full potential and flourish, which is why Aristotle observes, at the beginning of the first book on *philia*, that “no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good things”, and “it also seems that friendship holds cities together” [31], p. 136 (VIII, 1, 1155a). Although often mentioned together with family relations and citizenship, friendship remains the most vital and, as Aristotle claims right before the above quotation, “most needed” relationship of the three, as no human being can live well without experiencing the sort of care, trust and mutual recognition inherent in *philia*.

Philia in its different forms constitutes such a valuable human good, according to Aristotle, as it may have a beneficial effect on how people live both at a communal and personal level, consolidating the good practices in society, in which people support and

help each other, and empowering them to act and think better than they would have if they had been living on their own. In order to clarify how the most enduring interpersonal bonds are established, Aristotle observes in book one of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtuous people cherish virtue (*philaretōi*) and enjoy carrying out “noble actions” (*chairōn tais kalais praxesin*) and seeing others do the same. If this were not the case, then they would not be virtuous but would be living in conflict with themselves and others by not approving the good that they themselves are supposed to be exemplifying [31], pp. 12–13 (I, 9, 1099a).

When Aristotle returns to what it means to take share and delight in other people’s virtuous actions in book nine, which is the second book on *philia*, he adds that it is in this way, by recognizing and affirming the reality of the virtues, that the most enduring and significant friendships in society are formed [31], pp. 168–189 (IX, 9, 1169b–1170a). Good friendship is the full expression of what it means to cherish or love virtue, and the value of the virtues is brought out not by being in the possession of someone but by being enacted, which takes place within the plural reality of practices that Aristotle refers to by the term *praxesin*. There is no room for keeping the virtues self-indulgently for oneself in Aristotelian ethics. The Greek expression for somebody cherishing or loving virtue, *philaretōi*, already contains a link to others through the prefix *phil-* and could also be translated as being a friend of virtue.

When the virtuous enter a friendship, it is not because of the pleasure that they find in other people’s company, according to Aristotle, as this would turn their friendship into the least stable form of relationship and a mere means for achieving *hedonē*. It is the other way around: because of the good or the noble that they see realized in the deeds of other people, who become their friends, they express joy, *chairein*, i.e., they are affectively engaged in and approve of these actions which manifest and perhaps even exceed in virtue what they themselves would have done. Joy is the sort of pleasant emotion that rises out of and completes action and life itself, “like the bloom every year” [31], p. 181 (my translation, X, 4, 1174b). This moment of flourishing cannot be sought after outside action, and Aristotle underscores that a virtuous life consists in being active and “has its pleasure within itself” [31], p. 13 (I, 9, 1099a).

Yet, there seem to be some complications to this story, as Aristotle himself observes a little later by drawing forth the brave person who is faced with death and destruction. He will prevail, Aristotle insists, and endure the wounds he receives because “it is noble (*kalon*)”, but he will also be in pain, and “the more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the prospect of death [. . .]” [31], p. 52 (III, 9, 1117b). This description does not coincide with the perhaps too nice-looking picture of the intrinsic pleasure of a virtuous life. In some passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle seems to make the virtuous man overly impeccable, happy and filled with joy, while recognizing, in other parts of his work, that being virtuous is not always measured out in pleasure. Given that the brave man does not succumb to the bad situation, in which he finds himself, he could still be well, and yet he can hardly be said to experience well-being and much less the sort of flourishing that good friends share in joy.

This takes us back to Aristotle’s reflections on friendship which, instead of singularizing each human being in the face of death, creates the sort of continuity and connections in life that produce and increase well-being. Even the happy man does not live well alone, “for a solitary life is difficult”, whereas it is easier for him to keep his active life going (*energein*) together with others, and it becomes more “continuous” in this way [31], p. 169 (IX, 9, 1170a). Joy appears to be the affective expression of this continuity through which the happy man remains connected to his good friends by spending time together with them and also living together with some of them. For Aristotle, the temporal and spatial conditions of well-being are closely linked to humans coming together by accompanying and sheltering each other in friendship [31], p. 136 (VIII, 1, 1155a)). These amical forms of being and coming together do not have to reach the climactic heights of flourishing together in order for them to exhibit joy and well-being which may also be present in daily activities, such as playing, hunting or philosophizing together [31], p. 173 (IX, 12, 1171a).

It has been noticed that “the philosophical literature on virtue and the philosophical literature on well-being do not map on to one another perfectly” [40], p. 364. Daniel Haybron has gone further and argued that Aristotelian virtue ethics in its perfectionist variant is not a theory on well-being and “may not even be trying to answer some of the central questions animating modern accounts of well-being” [18], p. 158. As the present paper does not view the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a work exclusively on perfectionist virtue ethics but reads it as offering insights into aspects of well-being that modern accounts do not always cover, it differs from Haybron’s critical observation which is not concerned with the finer details in Aristotle’s work but with Aristotelianism in general.

One of the fine-grained details that Haybron does not value sufficiently is that Aristotle counts friendship among the external goods that are necessary for living and being well. Haybron draws the conclusion that external goods only “facilitate good functioning” and should not be seen “as distinct contributors to well-being” [18], p. 156. This conclusion can hardly be sustained if we take Aristotle’s verdict seriously that no one would want to live without friends even having all the other good things in life. If this is so, and we still have to dig deeper into what this implies, then friendship clearly does contribute something extra to well-being that the other good things, including the virtues, do not.

Haybron could still be right that Aristotle ties well-being too tightly to virtue. It seems counterintuitive that only the virtuous can experience well-being and not also other people independently of their moral merits. Still, it is important to be clear that *aretē* for Aristotle is a measure in the human realm not of moral merit but of how well somebody realizes his or her potential. Thus, human well-being is not primarily a question of functioning well or of life going well, as it is for many theorists of well-being, but it expresses, as the word itself says, something about being, particularly about the being involved in realizing its own potential. Even though one could be skeptical about the applicability of Aristotle’s organic metaphors in the human realm, it is difficult to imagine how human well-being would come about without humans realizing or bringing to fruition some part of their own being. The problem with Aristotelian virtue ethics is not so much that *aretē* is behind almost every good thing in human life but more that Aristotle often presupposes that for a human being to live and be well, they will need all the virtues of the philosopher’s catalogue. This is the perfectionist dream that Aristotle sees fulfilled in the impeccable and happy man, who appears to have reached the highest possible plenitude.

Yet, some of Aristotle’s reflections on friendship can be read as running counter to this perfectionist dream of leading an impeccably virtuous life according to the rule of reason, for instance, when he states, having counted friendship among external supplies, that “it is impossible or not easy to do noble actions (*kala prattein*) without supplies” [31], p. 13 (I, 8, 1099a). Had it been impossible, then all noble and good action would have depended on friendship and external goods, but the minor correction that he adds, that it is at least “not easy”, turns friendship into a secondary but still important ally for the virtuous, who remain self-sufficient enough to act and find themselves well on their own.

But as with his general claim that a virtuous life is intrinsically pleasant, a claim that he himself contradicts, his presupposition that the virtuous can, in principle, live and act perfectly well also without friends may not be as unequivocal as he makes it sound. Considering that “someone who is to be happy will need friends who are excellent” [31], p. 170 (IX, 9, 1170b), it seems that good friendship is necessary for reaching and sustaining *eudaimonia*. Still, one might ask how excellent friends need to be in order for them to contribute well-being. Although the Aristotelian conception of *philia* cannot be reduced to one fixed relationship between the same sort of people, one could still be worried that well-being in Aristotelian terms becomes tied down to noble people mirroring each other’s virtues. As only very few can count themselves among the truly virtuous, Aristotle’s ideal model for virtue friendship seems to reduce considerably the number of people who can become good friends and experience the sort of well-being that appears to be reserved for the best.

Yet, Aristotle's account of the way in which good friends see each other reveals that their interaction does not merely consist in mirroring what they can already see for themselves. When they are together, important aspects of themselves appear that would not have caught their attention had it not been for the presence of the friends. Analyzing what is implied in an active, virtuous life that is good and pleasant in itself, Aristotle states that as "we are better able to contemplate (*theorein*) our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than our own, and thus good men find pleasure in the actions of other good men who are their friends, since those actions possess both these essentially pleasant qualities, it therefore follows that the supremely happy man will require good friends, inasmuch as he desires to contemplate actions that are good and that are his own, and the actions of a good man that is his friend are such" [31], p. 169 (IX, 1169b–1170a).

It is right after this passage that Aristotle repeats what he has already made clear, namely that virtuous people enjoy seeing each other performing virtuous actions and that this adds something extra to each friend's well-being that neither of them can mobilize on their own. On this account, well-being is, as one commentator has defined it, enjoying the good [41] that belongs to the one who perceives, but it does not become tangible until it is reflected in the noble actions of the friends. What each friend is less able to see, recognize and appreciate, namely themselves and their virtuous actions, becomes realizable and enjoyable when they see their good friends in virtuous action. Therefore, despite acting well and living a pleasant life, even the most virtuous cannot accomplish full well-being on their own, as they lack the joyful and insightful vision of themselves and their own realization of virtuous action. Only by seeing each other can each friend get a manifest idea of what they themselves are, namely virtuous. In this sense, although they are not ignorant of their own virtues and know themselves to a certain degree—if not, they would not be able to recognize themselves in each other—they cannot fully appreciate and enjoy their own being in action.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does not give any reason for why this is so. In one of his other ethical treatises, *Magna Moralia*, he observes that knowing oneself is such a hard task, even for the wise, because we humans are so easily misled by our own perception and judgment: "now we know we are not able to see what we are from ourselves (and that we cannot do so is plain from the way in which we blame others without being aware that we do the same things ourselves, and there are many of us who are blinded by these things so that we judge not aright)" [42], p. 1920 (1213a). This is why, he concludes, that also the self-sufficing man, who is not wholly self-sufficing then, "will require friendship in order to know himself."

While the friend becomes a mirror for the other friend in *Magna Moralia*, it is not clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics* exactly what it is that one friend sees in the other by contemplating him in action. The word *theorein* conveys some sort of insight into the active being of another human, in this case, the friend, who would also need friends to become completely aware of himself and his actions. Although they need each other to see what they themselves are and bring it out into the open, one could still see in this friendship between good men a mirroring scene reserved for the excellent, who have the same virtues.¹⁴ Yet, not even the virtuous seem to be exactly the same in everything that they are, and if they were, they would not have anything to offer each other. In this context, it seems odd that Aristotle does not bring up the role of language or dialogue as the medium in which friends meet. It appears to be because there is something evident about what the friends see in each other, like when someone, who is brave or just, immediately realizes when somebody else acts in a brave or just way.

Language comes in at the end of this chapter on the friends increasing their self-awareness. There Aristotle asserts that good friends share their lives in speech and thought [31], p. 171 (IX, 9, 1170b). This makes room for more divergence and critical dialogue in friendships than when friends just see in each other what they themselves are. In more diversified friendships, friends could get to know different aspects not only of themselves but also of what they could become. Disposing of a variety of virtues together,

which each of the friends may not possess to the same degree, they might learn from each other and correct each other in friendly ways. Such variegated relations between friends, some between just and moderate people, others between more or less virtuous people, make up the infrastructure of the common good, to which each citizen makes a contribution, in Aristotle's *Politics* [44], pp. 184–219 (III, 2, 1276b–1281a).

The sort of friendship between those who are at the peak of their lives, which Aristotle mentions at the beginning of his two books on *philia*, could be an example of such a diversified relationship: even though they are in the most flourishing phase of life, and Aristotle employs the same term for this peak, *akmē*, as when he compares complete pleasure to “the bloom every year”, the friends, who accompany each other along the way, become still more powerful in action and in thought [31], p. 136 (VIII, 1, 1155a). This is only possible if the friends are not completely alike but complement each other in well-proportioned ways which allow them to reach even higher than the peak at which they find themselves in life. Here *philia* becomes much more than just an external supply: It is interwoven with the possibilities of the friends and enhances their powers and virtues when they go together and accompany each other.

4. Conclusions

Returning to the three critical questions aimed at Heidegger's incomplete reading of Aristotelian ethics, we found, in our reinterpretation of Aristotle's two books on *philia*, that this relationship, in its good form, has an elevating and enlightening effect on human beings, who are turned toward themselves and get a chance of raising their self-awareness and well-being by becoming good friends. Friendship intervenes in the possibilities and the realization of the activities of each friend, whose existence becomes enhanced by being together with others. This means that there is a way for humans to face and find themselves well in the presence of each other: by becoming good friends, who assist and empower each other, they make it possible to live richer and more joyful lives than the ones they would have lived had they been living on their own.

The Heideggerian notion of *Befindlichkeit*, developed from Aristotelian concepts, suggests that how humans are and find themselves in the world is not fully transparent to them. It is not completely foreign to them either, as finding oneself affected by and faced with existence entails a disclosure of one's own being through moods that pervade one's own being so fully that there is no room or only very little room for reflection while being in them. Yet, that each human being does not have a privileged access to their own being does not mean that it is up to anyone else to decide how somebody is. The question of one's *Befindlichkeit* remains a complex and ultimately open question that cannot be answered once and for all by oneself or other people. It can be directed at someone, who, on being asked how they find themselves in some situation or in life as such, may come to realize something about themselves that they were not aware of; or maybe the person who asks sees something in the other person that could change their view on their own *Befindlichkeit*. Could they be better or worse off than they think? Is it possible that some people make themselves or their life situations better or worse than they actually are and that upon listening to a good friend's advice, they change their outlook on life and how they see themselves?

Whether this leads to well-being for the person in question cannot be decided on beforehand, but given that it is a good friend, who wishes the best for the other friend, it is a possibility worth taking into consideration, as other scholars have done. While building his case that nobody is an authority with sufficient sovereignty and transparency to choose aptly in matters of well-being, Daniel Haybron briefly makes the following comment regarding two people who have committed a prudential mistake and are now worse off: “I think their more perceptive friends would, quite plausibly, say that they are living in conflict with who they are” [18], p. 180. The two people do not see the conflict, and a friend can, of course, be wrong, but given that their friends are “more perceptive”, as Haybron

remarks, they may offer in what they say an insight into the two friends' existence which neither of them would have had access to without their friends.

In this way, friends have an impact on how humans find themselves in the world and how they understand themselves by the way they talk to each other. In our search for contributors to well-being, the three fundamental modes of world openness, according to Heidegger, become three ways of opening oneself to one's friends affectively in joy, understandingly in heightened self-awareness and in an articulate manner by sharing thoughts through dialogue. We have argued that these modes of being together in good friendship open up the possibility for human well-being, while Heidegger closes this possibility off by confronting human existence with its own finiteness through singularizing *Stimmungen*, such as anxiety, which leaves no room for the sort of heightened mode of being that he highlighted in his early lecture on Aristotle but did not return to in *Being and Time*.

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Notes

- ¹ The division between subjective and objective well-being is the point of departure for several anthologies on well-being, see [1–3], for classical and more recent studies within the science of subjective well-being which rely on self-report, statistical measurement and experimental evidence. These three anthologies also contain studies on objective well-being, a topic which can be found in studies on eudaimonistic and capability approaches as well, see [4–6], pp. 118–125.
- ² For Kierkegaard's critique of objectivity, see first of all [7], pp. 21–34, and Jeffrey Hanson's paper on Kierkegaard in the present issue [8]. In the same critical vein and also turned against Hegel, Nietzsche rhetorically asks in [9], p. 105, "Or is it not selflessness when the historical man lets himself be emptied until he is no more than an objective sheet of plate glass?" Revisions of the subject-object dichotomy within the growing literature on well-being can be found in [10], p. 7: "One cannot conceive of subjectivity adequately from an objective point of view", and in [11], p. 79, Clark argues that we "should stop using a distinction between subjective and objective theories, because those terms mean too many different things." A recent discussion of hybrid and holistic theories of well-being can be found in [12].
- ³ For objections of arbitrariness, see [13], pp. 67–68, [14], pp. 64–68, and [15], pp. 180–186.
- ⁴ For arguments against atomism, see [16,17].
- ⁵ In [18], p. 51, Daniel Haybron asserts that "happiness appears in many contexts to serve as a proxy for well-being."
- ⁶ In relation to well-being, Plato's arguments against hedonism and desire theories are prominent in *Theaitetus* 178a–183b, although variants of these arguments can also be found in other Platonic dialogues. In [19], Eric Brown sums up Socrates' counterarguments, especially against Protagoreanism, including other theories which do not distinguish between appearance and being.
- ⁷ My translation of this and the following quotations from Heidegger's early lectures. How central this worldly affectedness of *es geht mich an* remains for Heidegger in *Being and Time* and perhaps also in his later thinking has been documented by Hubert Dreyfus, who in [21], p. 239, recalls how Heidegger, in a private conversation, said to him that by introducing the concept of *Sorge*, which refers to being involved in a caring concern for the world, "he wanted to name the very general fact that "*Sein geht mich an*" [. . .]"
- ⁸ In [21], p. 141, Dreyfus states that Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* still has "a decidedly Husserlian ring", as if he had substituted "one absolute source for another". Decades before in [24], p. 35, Hannah Arendt had declared *Dasein* to be "meaningless" in "its absolute isolation", and Tugendhat in [25], p. 172, levels a similar critique at Heidegger for replacing human beings with *Dasein*, "a *singulare tantum*, upheld by a peculiar egocentrism of nonsense." (My translations) In [26], where he discusses the semantics of *Dasein*, Martin covers part of this discussion in the English-speaking world.
- ⁹ Heidegger's ontological account of space and time in *Being and Time* follows more or less the bipartite division of *Being and Time*: In the first part he is mainly concerned with world and space, whereas in the second part he focuses almost exclusively on time and history. Towards the end of the second part in § 70, he establishes a connection between space and time and gives priority to the latter based on *Dasein's* concern about its own being, but as Hubert Dreyfus has pointed out in [21], pp. 132–133, space and time can hardly be deduced from the ontological structure of *Dasein*, something which Heidegger later recognized himself.
- ¹⁰ In [27], p. 566, and [28], p. 669, Elpidorou and Elpidorou and Freeman offer a critical review of the different translations of *Befindlichkeit* which should either remain untranslated or, if translated, come as close as possible to the meaning of the German term. See also [29], p. 157–158, for further critique of misguided translations of *Befindlichkeit*.

- ¹¹ In [32], Pasqualin makes the case that *Befindlichkeit* constitutes the “pathic” ground for understanding. Pocaï insists in his reading of *Being of Time* in [33], pp. 21–35 that *Befindlichkeit* is at least as original as understanding, but that it is the latter which becomes the driving force for human existence.
- ¹² For Tugendhat in [25], p. 195, p. 238, “the concept of the good is missing” as well as “any relation to it” in *Being and Time*. Other scholars have attempted to demonstrate the ethical significance of *Mitsein* and *Fürsorge*, but even they recognize in [34], p. 6, and [35], p. 8, that it takes some serious “development” and “construction” of what Heidegger did not explain or what he ought to have said in order to uncover the ethical implications of these concepts. Hodge is the one, who most explicitly declares in [36], p. 2, that “the well-being of human beings” is of no concern to her, since such an approach “takes the question of human flourishing in isolation from the wider context in which humans find themselves.” The present paper can be seen as an attempt to prove her wrong by widening the ontological investigation of *Befindlichkeit* sufficiently to also take into account what is called *Wohlbefinden* in German.
- ¹³ Nozick and Parfit use thought experiments to display how counterintuitive the most restrictive theories of hedonism and desire theories are: Nozick challenges hedonism by posing the question whether it is worthwhile to be plugged into a machine which could produce any experience you would like, or if “real life” experiences are to be preferred? Parfit argues against desire theories by offering the example of somebody, who desires that a stranger be cured of an illness, but without knowing the result. If the stranger gets cured, will the person, who desires it, be better off? Although these thought experiments may not have the final word in this on-going debate, they push hedonists and desire theorists to revise whether it is reasonable to conceptualize human well-being without explicit reference to the world, to other people or to relevant future events. See [13], pp. 27–29, 43–46, for a discussion of these and similar debates.
- ¹⁴ This is how Veltman [43] interprets the friends mirroring each other, which leads her into a discussion of Aristotle’s enigmatic dictum of the friend being “another self”. The meaning and implications of this dictum cannot be dealt with here.

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