
THE PRIMACY OF SPACE IN HEIDEGGER AND TAYLOR: TOWARDS A UNIFIED ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract:

My aim is to explore how the question of personhood is tied to the notion of space—both physical and moral space. In particular, I argue against the Cartesian view of the disengaged/disembodied self and in favour of Charles Taylor's and Martin Heidegger's view of the engaged and embedded self. I contend that space, as the transcendental condition for the possibility of human agency, is the place where questions of identity are possible and where answers, if any, are to be found. Thus, personal identity and space are inexorably tied and dependent on one another.

Keywords:

Background, cogito, dwelling, disengaged, engaged, fourfold, framework, Martin Heidegger, Mitda-sein, personal identity, self, space, standing, Charles Taylor

1. Introduction

In this paper I do not propose a definition of personal identity. Rather, I explore the transcendental conditions that are required for the question of personal identity to emerge as a meaningful one. I contend that a more complete answer to the question of personal identity must answer not only *who* we are but *what* kind of beings we are. And if we want to know *who* and *what* we are, then we need to look, at least initially, into the space where we *stand* and that we move in. I argue that because Charles Taylor and Martin Heidegger are two philosophers that give the notion of space a prominent role, it will follow that they are in the best position to articulate what it means to be a being that lives on this earth and that attempts to forge an identity for itself. For them the question of personal identity cannot be answered by mere introspection. I argue that there is a fundamental ontological agreement between Heidegger and Taylor. This agreement lies in that, for both philosophers, the question of human identity cannot be answered by mere introspection. The identity of the self is not discoverable by looking inward—as Descartes would have us do. If we want to know *what* and *who* we are, then we need to look, at least initially, outside of us into the space (or more specifically, the *spaces*) where we *stand* and that we move in and occupy.

Heidegger argues that space is where our *facticity* is actualised. That is to say, space is where we exist. Taylor argues that space—both physical and moral

space ('moral' understood in the broad sense so as to include all cognition) is where we make sense of and give meaning to our lives. Consequently, while the *Heideggerian* space primarily refers to a physical *factual* space, the *Taylorite* space—while also referring to the physical space—incorporates the moral, cultural, cognitive and social space that we live *in*. As a result, Taylor's conception of space is broader and more comprehensive. Keeping this in mind, I will show how we can reconcile and complement these two views of space in such way that, taken together, they can provide for a fuller, richer and more inclusive view of human existence and personal identity. In this way, by unifying the *Heideggerian* factual space and the *Taylorite* moral space we can learn to appreciate space as a continuum that allows us to simultaneously answer the questions of *what* we are and *who* we are.

2. Heidegger

The existential analysis that Heidegger proposes, aims to answer (at least initially) what it means to *be* a being that questions its own being while being-in-the-world. In other words, it aims to answer the *whatness* of human existence by providing a phenomenological and ontological account of our existence. Here, I use the word 'what' with certain apprehension. For Heidegger, as beings that are there *in* the world and that question our own being, we are not objects; we are not a 'what'. We are prior to the object/subject distinction; what we are is *in* the world, as an integral part of it and this is what constitutes our *facticity*. As long as we keep this clarification in mind at all times, we can continue to refer to our *whatness* as way of differentiating Heidegger's discussion of space from that of Taylor's.

For Heidegger space can be approached in two ways: first, in its relation to locations and second, in its relation to human beings. In order to grasp the character of *space* in relation to locations, Heidegger takes us to the root of the word. In German, the word *Raum* means 'a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary' (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought* 152). The idea here is that space is *created* by the drawing of a boundary. Heidegger is telling us, counter-intuitively, that boundaries create space not by enclosing a place but

by making *room for* and *clearing* that place. In other words, boundaries are not a limiting force, they are a creative force. In effect, 'a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*' (152). What Heidegger is telling us here is that spaces come to being with the creation of locations. And locations are created by *building* (151), insofar as building makes possible the drawing of boundaries that then become the horizons from which those spaces emerge and arise.

On the relation between human beings and space, Heidegger tells us that this relation is inherent in our character as dwellers (155). As dwellers, we build and create the locations that draw boundaries that give rise to spaces but we can only do so because as dwellers *we are already* spatial beings. A good way to understand this is by considering the following example: we can only build a house of stone, because there are first stones *in the world*. We gather the stones, we arrange the stones and we create the house from the stones but this is only possible because the stones are *there*; we do not create stones in order to build houses of stone. However, insofar as the stones already exist *outside* of us, the analogy fails to capture the authentic relation between humans and space. In our relation with space, space is not outside of us—even though by creating locations we *make room for* and *create* space (similar to how we *create* a house of stone). Indeed, we do not make space *ex-nihilo*; we can only make room for space because space is already there and we are always already in it. As a consequence, space should not be understood as *something* that stands in front of us and which we consequently walk into and find ourselves immersed in. But neither is space to be understood as something internal that we project onto the world. In effect, space 'is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space*' (154). The point here is that space is so essentially interwoven into the essence of what it means to be a human being that separating it from us and turning it into an object is a purely *rational* exercise.

Yoko Arisaka points out that 'unlike Kant, who defines space as an *a priori* feature of our *mind*, Heidegger attributes it [space] to our active being and our practical involvements in the world. Heidegger goes on to investigate our ordinary spatial activities *without* imposing the subject-object framework and the associated language' (Arisaka 'On Heidegger' 3). In effect, the practice of *objectifying* space (as 'something' internal or

external) is only possible because we ourselves are already spatial beings. This is why Heidegger can say that 'when I say 'a man', and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name 'man' I already name the stay within the fourfold among things' (Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought* 154). In other words, Heidegger reminds us that we do not simply exist *in* space but that when we think of ourselves we *already* think of ourselves as spatial beings living *in* the world (or what he calls the *fourfold*). This is why we can say that space is a transcendental condition for our existence—it is part of 'what' we are. In effect, when we think 'human' we think *world* and we think *space* even before we think about the other features that make us human (for example thought, language, emotions, etc.). As we just saw in the quote above, this transcendental spatial condition is brought out by Heidegger in his concepts of *dwelling* and *fourfold*. That is to say, we are always already dwellers within the fourfold. What exactly, then, does Heidegger want to show when he says that we are *dwellers* and why does he refer to the world as a *fourfold*?

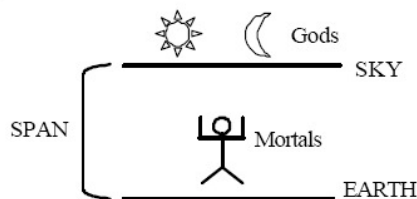
3. *Dwelling and the Fourfold*

First, we need to look at the concept of *dwelling*. Today, we tend to understand the word dwelling as an *inhabiting*. By dwelling we mean, for example, *occupying* a house or a building. This understanding of the word has traditionally pointed to 'one form of human behaviour alongside many others' (212). In other words, we tend to view dwelling as something that we do just like we do many other things in our daily lives—like drinking a cup of coffee or walking to the store. But these activities are done *in addition* to existing; drinking coffee is not a condition of our existence. Rather, drinking coffee is only possible *because* we exist.

Heidegger wants us to look at dwelling in a different way; he wants to say that dwelling *is* a condition of our existence. In order to do this, he takes us to the root of the word in order to see what it points to. He tells us that the German word *Bauen* means *to build* and that originally, it comes from the Old German and Old English word *buan* which means *to dwell*. Furthermore, the word *bin* such as it is used in the phrase *ich bin* (I am) also has its origin in *buan*—dwelling. Put in other words, *I am* and *building* both trace their roots to dwelling (145). Thus, if—as Heidegger argues—language is what reveals the true nature of our relations to the world, then because building *is* dwelling and dwellers *is* what we are (as the German phrase *ich bin* tells us) it follows that, as dwellers, we are also essentially *builders*.

Yet, in what way are we all builders? Again, the modern use of the word 'building' does little to capture the essence of building. While today building usually refers to the act of physically making something, of constructing, Heidegger tells us that building is more than that. It is more than assembling, more than just erecting structures. In effect, properly understood, building refers to all 'works made by man's hands and through his arrangements' (215). In the broad sense, then, building refers to all forms of care and cultivating. This means that serving a cup of coffee, writing a note, cultivating farmland, growing tomatoes, having an idea and/or constructing a five-story building are all forms of *building*. Thus, if we understand building in this way, then any activity we do is always a building and also always a dwelling insofar as—originally—building and dwelling were the same thing.

As the dwellers that we are, the world appears to us as a *fourfold*. This is to say that the world we are *in* (where we dwell) is apprehended by us as being constituted by four elements. These four elements are grasped by us as a unity, as a 'primal oneness' (147) that grounds us as the *earthly*, mortal beings we are. These four elements are: (1) the *earth* where we live as (2) *mortals* beneath the (3) *sky* where the (4) *gods* stay (147). These four elements provide us with a complete picture of ourselves as mortals that dwell and build on the earth below the mysteries of the sky. The following graphic provides an illustration of the fourfold:



This being *in* the fourfold is an inescapable condition of our lives!. Consequently, 'even when mortals turn 'inward', taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging to the fourfold' (155) for when we introspect, we introspect while being *in* the world. We can never step outside of it. In this way, then, Heidegger aims to strike at the heart of the Cartesian *cogito*. By arguing that we never, not even when we retreat into the *cogito*, abandon our place *in* space *in* the fourfold, he shows that our condition as spatial beings is inescapable, fundamental, foundational and more primary than the *cogito*. In other words, there is a *cogito* insofar as we are spatial beings, as we are dwellers. The space in this fourfold (what

Heidegger calls the *span*) is thus essential to our realising that we are mortals that dwell on this earth.

Crucial to the argument against the disengaged, isolated and solipsistic *cogito* is the idea of an actively engaged and connected self in a world always shared with *others*. As the graphic illustration of the fourfold may suggest, there is the danger of viewing our being-in-the-world as an individual affair. The dweller is, it might seem, a single isolated atomistic dweller. Heidegger foresaw this potential misunderstanding which is why he explicitly argued that our dwelling, our *being-in-the-world* is in fact never an individual, solipsistic affair. This is an important point to consider because by arguing for a dwelling in a *shared world*, Heidegger provides much of the ground that Taylor then uses to build his own arguments against disengaged reason.

4. *Mitda-sein*

The idea of a *shared world* is expressed in the concept of *Mitda-sein*. *Mitda-sein* is to be understood as an existential condition that points to our co-existence with *others*, as a *being-with* others (Heidegger *Being and Time* 113). Special care must be taken with the word 'others'. While the idea of the 'other' suggests the idea of 'somebody else', of a being that is outside and separated from the self, Heidegger wants to explicitly caution against this understanding. This is why he says that the idea of the *other* 'does not mean everybody else but me—those from whom the I distinguishes itself. They are, rather, those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too' (111). The argument here is that there does not, at least initially, exist a self and then alongside, foreign and distinct *other* selves. The existential condition of *Mitda-sein* is not apprehended through mere aggregation of selves; it is not an arithmetic operation. On the contrary, Heidegger wants to tell us that as a dweller and as a being that is always already *in* the world, what follows is that the *other* is also a dweller and as such, the *other* is not initially distinguished from the self. As such we are all beings that share the existential condition of being-in-the world. In this way, *Mitda-sein* (being-with others) is the existential condition that points to our sharing, our *being-there-too* with them in the world (111,112).

As evidenced by Descartes, the idea of a disengaged and *closeted cogito* inevitably leads to radical scepticism about the existence of the external world and of the *others* that appear in the world. Certainty about the self (the *cogito*) does not necessarily lead to certainty about the external world because there is a presupposed distance between the

two. And this distance needs to be bridged in order to obtain certainty about the external world. By contrast, the idea of *Mitda-sein* inserts the self back in a shared and common world where certainty about the self and the world necessarily leads to a certainty about the existence of the others. There is thus no need to bridge the gap between the self and the world. This is because on the one hand, the *others* are constituents of the world in the same way that the self is. And on the other hand, because our condition of being-in-the-world presupposes no gap between the self and the *external* world it follows that our experience of the world (and of the others we encounter *in* the world) is always at the root of our existence. Consequently, only by denying the self can the external world be denied. By the same token, if we assert the self then the world is also necessarily asserted.

This is the exact same idea that Merleau-Ponty² pointed out when, criticising Cartesian rationalism, he said that it 'would be contradictory to assert that the world is constituted by me and that, out of this constitutive operation, I can grasp no more than the outline' of the world (Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* 437). Rational explanations and justification for the existence of the world arise as something fundamentally necessary only with the view of a subject (the self) that is removed from its object (the world). Such removal requires and begs for an objective *study* of the world because the world is encountered as *foreign* and *alien*. But, as we have seen thus far, Heidegger argues that our being-in-the-world is prior to any subject/object distinction, it is prior to any idea about our removal from the world. As such, the subject/object distinction is not a fundamental or existential distinction. It is a distinction that is only possible insofar as we are first *in* the world.

Essential to Heidegger's argument of a world always already inhabited by dwellers, is the idea of encountering 'objects' in the world. Here, by 'objects', we refer to all the products of human intervention. In effect, we refer to *building* in the broad sense of dwelling as already explored in the previous pages. When we encounter these 'objects' in the world, we do not *just* encounter a thing objectively present in the world, *just* sitting there waiting for us to objectify it or explain it. When we encounter an object we also encounter *others*. This is because the objects that we encounter in the world fundamentally point to the presence of others. The reason for this is that before an encountered object can be studied in order to discover its usefulness or purpose, the very existence of that object reveals to

us that it owes its presence in the world to other people. Heidegger tells us that, for example,

the field (...) along which we walk 'outside' shows itself as belonging to such and such a person who keeps it in good order, the book which we bought at such and such a place, given by such and such a person, and so on. The boat anchored at the shore refers in its being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes his voyages with it, but as a 'boat strange to us,' it also points to others. The others who are 'encountered' in the context of useful things in the surrounding world at hand are not somehow added on in thought to an initially merely objective present thing, but these 'things' are encountered from the world in which they are at hand for the others (Heidegger *Being and Time* 111).

Consider the example that Heidegger gives us of the boat that we see on the shore. While the boat is undeniably an object that has a use and a purpose, *that* purpose (be it fishing or pleasure) is only graspable insofar as the boat first points us to the existence of an *other*. This is because it is that *other* that uses the boat, gives the boat a purpose and that has left the boat *there* on the shore for us to subsequently encounter as an *object* or as a 'thing'. Thus, initially and primordially, the encountered boat tells us that there is an *other*. And only after the idea of the other is made possible by the presence of the boat can we proceed to objectify the boat as a *thing* that is used for a purpose by that *other*. This shows that when we encounter the boat *in* the world we do not simply *add* on the idea of another other person to the boat *after* we perceive the boat. The boat as a boat and can only *be* a boat insofar as the idea of the *other* is already contained within the idea of the boat itself.

Mitda-sein, is thus not to be understood as relation that is established between a 'me' and a 'not me' (an *other*). This is a negative account, it is an account that separates and establishes a distance between the self and the others. It is an account that reduces the others to an aggregate of subjects, of 'numerals' (118). The danger with such a reduction is that it puts a distance between the self and the *other* and by putting this distance between the self and the *other* it also puts a distance between the self and the world. This invariably leads to disengagement and to disembodied views of the self which is precisely what Heidegger wants to avoid. Yet, even if such a reduction was desirable on some analytical account, that reduction would only be possible insofar as that *other* is essentially and firstly encountered together with and at the same time as the rest of the world (118). As dwellers that are always already in the world, the *other* is also always already encountered in the world and in this way the

other is a constituent of the world. Recall that for Heidegger all subject/object distinctions are not fundamental existential distinctions. They are only *a posteriori* distinctions. *Mitda-sein* thus sets much of the groundwork for the idea of engaged and embedded agency that is central to the later works of Taylor.

5. Taylor

Taylor agrees with Heidegger in that all the questions that arise about ourselves and our place in the world are only answerable insofar as we are beings already embedded *in* the world. In other words, it is not that there is the world outside and then, in addition, there is us enclosed *inside* ourselves and standing outside of the world. This necessary embedment and engagement with the world is what makes it impossible for us to abstract ourselves from it. As a consequence of this, the world and our engagement in it constitute the *inescapable background* that makes all our thoughts and judgements possible. Everything we say about the world is always done from the *background* of the world.

This means that all of our moral and philosophical questions are necessarily always answered against this background and horizon—or what Taylor also calls *framework*. Our dependence on this framework is so great that to do without it is ‘utterly impossible for us’ (Taylor *Sources* 27). Taylor argues that although we could imagine a life-form without frameworks, imagining it would be ‘tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognise as integral, that is undamaged human personhood’ (27). To imagine human life outside and separate from the world would require us to rethink our understanding of what it means to be a human person. In effect, we would no longer be talking about a human life-form, we would no longer be talking about *dwellers*. We would be talking about a distinct life-form, about some abstract entity that exists outside of the world and looks *into it*, or as Heidegger said, *faces it* (perhaps an entity like the Cartesian *cogito*).

Much in the same direction that Heidegger pointed us to, Taylor wants to say that, as engaged agents, the physical space we occupy plays a central role in giving moral and *spiritual* direction to our lives. So essential is our physical being-in-the-world to our sense of humanity that ‘we couldn’t conceive of a human life form where one day people came to reflect that, since they were spatial beings, they ought after all to develop a sense of up and down, right and left and find landmarks which would enable to get around reflections which might be disputed by others (...) we can’t distance ourselves from the

issue of spatial orientation or fail to stumble on it’ (31). In other words, we can’t conceive of ourselves as *first* existing and *then* realising that there is a space we have to make sense of. The sense of spatial direction is something we have in virtue of our existence as embodied agents (Taylor *Arguments* 68).

The importance of space is such that certain moral intuitions that operate in our background translate into concrete physical manifestations. For example, one moral intuition that operates from our background is that of human dignity. The specific content of what dignity entails need not be made explicit for us to show how it impacts and conditions our spatial attitudes. Indeed, we may feel worthy of dignity and respect or we may feel unworthy. Whatever the case may be, what does follow is that we will either move in the world as if demanding respect or we will move as if we did not deserve it. The idea of dignity is constantly at work in our background—without our being consciously aware of it at all time—and in so doing it determines how we *move* in the world. According to Taylor:

The very way we walk, move, gesture, speak is shaped from the earliest moments by our awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of respect or contempt, of pride or shame. Our style of movement expresses how we see ourselves as enjoying respect or lacking it, as commanding it or failing to do so. Some people flit through public space as though avoiding it, others rush through as though hoping to sidestep the issue of how they appear in it by the very serious purpose with which they transit through it; others again saunter through with assurance, savouring their moment within it; still others swagger, confident of how their presence marks it: think of the carefully leisurely way the policeman gets out of his car, having stopped you for speeding, and the slow, swaying walk over as he comes to demand your licence (Taylor *Sources* 15).

In effect, if we were not spatial beings necessarily embedded *in* the world, how would we manifest our sense of dignity to others? Admittedly, it is possible to come up with thought experiments to illustrate how dignity—and other moral intuitions—could be expressed in the absence of a physical body occupying a physical world, but that is not the fundamental point. The point is that such thought experiments require us to rethink our understanding of what a human being *is*. We would be talking about a *different* kind of being altogether. We would no longer be talking about dwellers inhabiting the fourfold. Rather, we would be talking about disembodied spirits or minds; we would be talking about the Cartesian *cogito*. In effect, we would be essentially *reformulating* our identities.

Furthermore, even if such reformulations have their merits, it is still the case that, as Heidegger pointed out, such reformulations are only possible insofar as we are always already embedded *in* the world. In this way, the primacy of space emerges as the transcendental condition for the possibility of our identities—even for the possibility of disembodied identities.

The importance of the frameworks that emerge from our background is not just about how they condition us as spatial beings. Frameworks do more than give us a spatial context. In addition to this context, they also provide ‘the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions or reactions’ (26). Frameworks give us a sense of psychological orientation as well. Taylor wants to say that behind all our questions and behind all of our attempts to give our selves an identity and our lives meaning, there lies a set of unarticulated assumptions. And these assumptions are what provide the necessary background that makes meaningful discussion possible.

What, then, is the actual content of our frameworks? What is included *in* them, what are those unarticulated assumptions that allow us to make sense of the world? Although Taylor tells us that ‘the framework with which we act and judge doesn’t need to be articulated theoretically’ (20), it turns out that even if we wanted fully to articulate our background, we would be unable to do so. The reason for this is not that this is just a difficult thing to do. Nor is it an epistemic problem. Taylor argues that it is actually incoherent fully to articulate our background. In other words, we cannot bring the background to the foreground (via description and/or articulation) because once we do so it ceases to be a background (Taylor *Arguments* 69). And if—as Heidegger and Taylor have told us—we are essentially engaged beings that cannot make sense of our lives by stepping outside of the world, then whenever we articulate our background we always do so *from* another background; this is to say that we always talk about our world while being *in* the world. Anything we say can only be understood if what we say is said within a context. What would it be like to say something about the world while standing outside of it? Does that possibility even make sense? It does not seem coherent for us to step outside of our world in order to talk about a world—*our* world—that we are always already *in*. Where would we be standing if not *in* space, *in* our world? This is why Taylor tells us that ‘bringing [the background] to articulation still [and always] supposes a background’ (69).

This is why the framework is so essential for our lives. Not ‘to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless’ (18). The key idea here is that without frameworks our human lives would lack sense, direction and meaning. With no framework, it follows that questions on morality, meaning and personal identity would be questions issued in a sort of void and we would be unable to know where to even start looking for answers. This is why such essential and fundamental questions about personal identity are always dependent on the presence of a *background* from which we can draw out the meaning of the questions themselves. The mere possibility of *asking* and finding an answer to the question of personal identity presupposes that we exist within a determined context. Existing within that context is what makes it possible for us to ask and answer the question in a meaningful way. As a consequence, if I am to explore questions that relate to my personal identity and if I seek to define myself in any way, then that is only possible by first ‘defining where I speak from’ not just in the physical space but ‘in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions’ (Taylor *Sources* 35). In other words, to answer *who* I am I must first know *where* I stand—where I stand in history *and* in physical space. Who are my ancestors and how do I stand in relation to them? Where do I currently live and how do I stand, feel and relate to my current place of residency? We do not need to know all the answers to these questions. What matters is that we are at *some* level aware of these social, historical and moral relations—even if it is only to deny them.

Consequently, no matter what we articulate, say, believe and/or want to argue for (for example, if we want to argue for a disengaged *cogito*) it is still the case that we can only do so from a situation (or as Taylor would say, from a *background*). I can only assess a situation and evaluate it from my vantage point, from my *standing*. Only then can I articulate a position. And no matter how much we want to deny, negate or objectify our situation and our standing, we can only do so from another *situation*, from another standing. This is why Taylor argued for backgrounds as being *inescapable*.

The relation between physical space and moral space is a mutually dependent one. As a consequence, whatever happens in one space has effects on the other space. This is why we can say that, for example, disorientation in physical space can also lead to disorientation in the moral space and vice-versa. Indeed, ‘an identity crisis [is] an acute form of disorientation (...) which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where [we] stand’ (27). In

cases of acute identity crisis, then, it is often the case that not only are we unable to answer *who* we are but we are often unable to answer *where* we are (for example, we would ask things like, *where* am I? *What* place is this?). Taylor gives us the example of a person with 'narcissistic personality disorder' (28). He says that such a person, aside from being disoriented in the psychological space, is often also disoriented in the physical space, *in* the world (28).

There are signs that the link with spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche. In some very extreme cases of what are described as 'narcissistic personality disorders', which take the form of a radical uncertainty about oneself and about what is of value to one, patients show signs of spatial disorientation as well at moments of acute crisis. This disorientation and uncertainty about where one stands as a person seems to spill over into a loss of grip on one's stance in physical space' (28).

This relation between moral and physical space is thus essential. As the example of the person with 'narcissistic personality disorder' highlights, physical space and moral space are closely intertwined. In fact, this relation is such that any attempt to separate the two in order to consider one of them in isolation can, at best, provide a limited understanding of what it means to be an engaged human being. A complete and full picture of embedded agency requires that we consider both the moral and the physical space as the constituents of identity. Furthermore, it is not enough to consider both spaces as being *just* equal but separate spheres. On the contrary, both spaces are not *just* equal; they are intertwined in such a way that they leak into one another. Moral space manifests itself in the physical space and physical space makes our morals concrete.

6. The unity of space and personal identity

We have seen how Heidegger and Taylor help us achieve a more complete understanding of what it means to be a human being. Recall that for these philosophers we require horizons that allow space to emerge and they said that we always stand *in* that space, in a *situation*. Given that they acknowledge that, as human beings, we are essentially engaged and embedded *in* the world, we can appreciate why the very idea of space would be so essential to them. Yet, while Heidegger's and Taylor's understanding of the importance of space is fundamentally the same, they both differed in the specific role they gave to space. This is the *whatness* and *whoness* distinction that I drew at the start of this paper. The main argument throughout this paper has been to twofold. I showed how for Taylor the question of personal identity—the *who* I am—can only be

answered insofar as there is a moral framework in our background.

I also showed that Heidegger did not purport to answer the question of personal identity—the *who* I am. His concern was more primordial than this. He wanted to find out what makes us the kind of beings we are. He wanted to know what kind of being asks about his own being while being embedded *in* the world. And through an analytic of what it means to exist in the world, an answer to our *whatness* becomes possible (we are dwellers).

I have argued throughout this paper that if we are to attempt a more complete and thorough answer to our identity, then considering our *whoness* and *whatness* together offers the best opportunity. In this regard I contended that if I am to be a person with a personal identity, then my identity is possible only insofar as I understand that I am primordially a being that exists in *space*. Ultimately, questions of personal identity (*who* we are) can only be answered by looking at our orientations in a moral *and* physical space. These two spaces constitute the transcendental and often unarticulated background that underlies and conditions all of our talk about what it means to be a human being.

The very question of personal identity is a question that in itself already presupposes a context that makes the question intelligible. You understand the question and you know where possible answers may come from. In effect, as Taylor said, 'to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what one *wants* to answer' (29). As a consequence, without this often unarticulated background, no question would be possible, let alone an answer. Whenever we are asked who we are, we first look at *where* we stand *in* physical and moral space.

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Notes

1. It is essential that we grasp man's place as being *on* earth and *beneath* the sky (in the *fourfold*). This being

beneath the sky is important because the strange, the unknown and the mysterious have always come to us not from the earth, but from the above, from the sky. This is the way it has been since time immemorial. Since humans have roamed the earth, the sky has been the source of the divine and of the gods. We have always looked to the stars, the sun and the moon for *images* of the unknown, the mystical and the divine. By looking up towards the unknown, we humans have created a kind of dichotomy. This is because while the alien is above, beyond our power and our grasp, on this earth we have the world at our grasp and we have the power to *build*. Here, we roam, we dwell, we express care, concern, we cultivate and we build. Here, we live and die; here we have the power to do all of this and to make a home for ourselves. There in the sky, by contrast, we are powerless; it is an alien world where the unknown resides. Thus, there inevitably arises a separation, a distance between the earth and the sky.

This distance, this dimension that exists between earth and sky, is what Heidegger calls the *span*. We humans live in this span, between the earth and the sky—more specifically, *on* the earth and beneath the sky. Furthermore, we know that we are on this earth precisely by looking *up to* the sky towards the unknown. And this act of directing our gaze *up to* the sky towards the unknown is what allows us to take heed of the span we find ourselves immersed in, the span that is essential to our existence.

Heidegger goes on to argue that this span, this *in between*, is only made intelligible to us by poetry. Based on the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, he argues that poetry makes the span intelligible by *measuring* it. Thus, what the poet measures is the dimension that exists between the earth and the sky. This is why we can say that poetry is, essentially, measure taking (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 219). In order to fully understand what measuring means, we need to rid ourselves of the traditional way of thinking about measuring. Heidegger is not talking about measuring a distance; he is not talking about units, numbers or lengths. Measuring here is not a grasping or a scientific gauging. In effect, quantifying the span is but a specific activity that in and of itself is only made possible by a prior dwelling. Consequently, as opposed to scientific measuring, in poetic measuring, 'man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being' (219). In other words, poetic measuring tells us that we exist here on earth as mortals; poetic measuring tells us *where we stand*. The poet measures the *in between* of the earth and the sky and by so doing points to our fundamental nature as mortal dwellers *on* this earth. This is why our dwelling is essentially a poetic dwelling.

If poetic measuring is not about quantification, then how does the poet measure the span? How does the poet reveal to us our nature as dwellers? While we look up towards the unknown sky, the poet is the one that measures that observable span by bringing the unknown *as* the unknown down to earth for us to

observe. In other words, the poet looks to the skies, to the above and he sees the dreams, the fantasies, the emotions and the divine elements that inhabit the skies. The poet sees this and he brings them down for us, he brings the mysterious down to earth and shows it to us *as* the mysterious. Heidegger tells us that the poetic images are 'imaginings that are visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar' (223). This means that the poet does not unravel the mystery; he does not reveal the true nature of dreams, the mysterious or being. Rather, the poet presents the mysterious to us *as* the mysterious, as that which we can never know. In this way, by bringing the mysterious down to us from above, poetry is the primordial and authentic way of measuring the distance between earth and sky. Further, by bringing the mysterious down to us, poets remind us of our place here on earth and of our own mortality as beings that inhabit and dwell on this earth beneath the sky. Measuring, then, is a way of reminding us of our true nature as mortals. And by telling us about our true measure as mortals, poetry is what allows, what makes possible all other building. Poetry is, the 'primal form of building (...) the original admission of dwelling' (225).

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty was particularly strong in pointing out that the Cartesian cogito—as a disengaged and foundational cogito—can lead to incoherencies. Specifically, a disengaged cogito that is in isolation from the world cannot, as it turns out, doubt the external world. Recall that for Descartes, the world of the senses was deceitful and certainty was only found *in* the self, *in* the cogito. Merleau-Ponty, however, pointed out that it 'would be contradictory to assert that the world is constituted by me and that, out of this constitutive operation, I can grasp no more than the outline' (Merleau-Ponty, 437). This means that if, as Descartes argued, the cogito is the foundational and indubitable source of the self, then insofar as I cannot doubt the self (the thinking self) then I should not be able to doubt what the self perceives (because the self is the source of said perceptions, the source of the 'thinking', of the 'world'). Furthermore, the *cogito* should be in a position to perceive more than just 'outlines' of things. This line of reasoning is meant to show that as beings that are always *in* the world, we cannot make coherent sense of the world by retreating into the disengaged and disembodied self. In effect, *we cannot even doubt it (the world)*. The Cartesian idea of disengaged reason, then, leads to inconsistency. The main point of Merleau-Ponty's critique, however, is not to deny that the self *thinks*. The self does think. Rather, the main point is that the self can think only insofar as it thinks *in* the world. In effect, 'the primary truth is indeed 'I think', but only (...) while belonging to the world' (474). Thus, Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Cartesian cogito is undoubtedly one of the primary philosophical sources that pave the way for the engaged and embedded self that Taylor argues for with particular force in his discussions of the self.