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AN EXISTENTIAL CONCEPTION OF CULTURE

Abstract. This paper articulates an existential conception of culture using as an analogy the existential conception of science as formulated by Heidegger. As with the existential conception of science, the existential conception of culture corresponds to a mode of existence of *Dasein*. This distinguishes the existential conception of culture from other prevalent notions of culture that view culture as present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. However culture is not simply a mode of *Dasein*'s existence. It is a mode of existence that discloses that very mode of existence. More precisely, in culture *Dasein* discloses its very being by concretely working it out. Moreover, it is argued that the task of culture is to exist in such a way that one realizes values in an uncommon manner.

Keywords: culture, values, science, existence, existentialism, neo-Kantianism, Heidegger

This paper attempts to articulate an existential conception of culture analogous to Heidegger's existential conception of science. Culture has been analyzed using the critical tools of Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, the "politics of difference" of race, class and gender, contemporary pragmatism, among others¹. Very little has been written on Heidegger's notion of culture. This is understandable since, aside from his earliest work, Heidegger has had little to say with respect to the analysis of culture. This is curious because culture

¹ Cf. *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. J. Storey, St. Martin's Press Inc., New York 1996; Ch. Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, SAGE Publications Ltd., London 2000; Ch. Barker, *Making Sense of Cultural Studies: Central Problems and Critical Debates*, SAGE Publications Ltd., London 2002.

played a significant role in the neo-Kantian philosophies that provided the backdrop for Heidegger's early philosophy. At the same time, Heidegger had a tendency to downplay notions that he believed had become theoretical tropes or catchwords of prior philosophies. When Heidegger does engage with the issue of culture it is almost always in a negative fashion. For instance, he criticizes any attempt to approach the ontology of human being, i.e., of *Dasein*, by means of an analysis of culture(s), primitive or otherwise, and he fails to articulate to any significant degree a positive, fundamental ontological account of culture². This is in contrast to his relatively extensive, positive, fundamental ontological account of science. That Heidegger largely neglected the issue of culture is unfortunate since an existential analysis of culture provides important insights into the nature of culture and of the role of culture in human existence, including discourse and communication, art, social institutions, etc.

The goal of the present paper is to begin to flesh out a fundamental ontological or existential account of culture. This will be accomplished by analyzing culture alongside and analogous to Heidegger's existential analysis of science. To this end, it will be helpful to remind the reader of the framework of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Heidegger articulates three manners of being, namely, being present-at-hand, being ready-to-hand and being as our own kind of being, i.e., the being of *Dasein*, which is existence (*existenz*) or that being "that in each case (...) has its Being to be, and has it as its own"³ and for which its being "is an *issue* for this entity in its very being"⁴. The first two manners of being circumscribe the being of entities within the world and are, roughly and respectively, the being of the kind of entities that are objects and the being of equipment or entities the being of which essentially includes a reference to something other than the entity it-

² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, Harper & Row, New York 1962, 76–77; M. Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, transl. J. van Buren, Indiana UP, Bloomington 1999, 30.

³ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 32–33.

⁴ Ibid., 67.

self. According to Heidegger, the third way of being characterizes our being, but also, for instance, the being of scientific research⁵.

That scientific research should have existence as its manner of being may at first seem mysterious. Yet once one realizes that the fundamental manner of *Dasein*'s existence as being-in-the-world is that it is a "for-the-sake-of-which", and, in fact, the ultimate for-the-sake-of-which, one can see how scientific research itself could also be for-the-sake-of-which and therefore have the manner of being of *Dasein*. Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time* that *Dasein* may exist "in the way of scientific research" and that the existential conception of science "understands science as a way of existence and thus as a mode of Being-in-the-world, which discovers or discloses either entities or Being"⁶. More fully, in scientific research *Dasein* exists for-the-sake-of discovering or disclosing either entities or their being and, in this way, scientific research is neither an object nor equipment, neither something present-at-hand or ready-to-hand, but rather a task to be achieved. Scientific research is the manner in which *Dasein* exists in the world in such a way that it discloses entities and their being for the sake of such disclosure. Although it has at its disposal equipment and directs itself toward objects, scientific research is a mode of existence and consequently has the kind of being of *Dasein*.

Before turning in detail to the existentialist conception of science and of culture it would be helpful to examine by contrast a number of present-at-hand and ready-to-hand notions of science along with parallel understandings of culture. As Heidegger notes, science is commonly reduced to the products of scientific research rather than to its mode of existence. Thereby, scientific research as a task and way of being of *Dasein* is concealed. More specifically, Heidegger contrasts the existential conception of science from the "logical" conception which understands science with regard to its results and defines it as 'something established on an interconnection of true propositions –

⁵ Ibid., 408.

⁶ Ibid.

that is, propositions counted as valid”⁷. Heidegger refers to this as the “logical” conception of science because it was common at the time, especially among neo-Kantians, to see the role of epistemology, and in many cases the role of philosophy as such, as consisting of the logical analysis of the intellectual constructs or acquisitions of science. Thinkers differed significantly on what such a logical analysis must or should consist of. For instance, it could consist of a quite formal logical analysis of scientific concepts or, perhaps, a more substantial, transcendental examination of the conditions for the possibility of scientific concepts and constructs. In many ways, a similar approach remains one of the dominant trends in the philosophy of science.

From the perspective of fundamental ontology this view of science is the result of *Dasein*'s fallenness into the world whereby phenomena are objectified as entities present-at-hand within the world, thus concealing the essential connection between science and *Dasein*. In other words, the logical conception of science approaches the essence of science by means of a thematic examination of the cognitive products or acquisitions of the activity of scientific research, which, being thematically grasped through an objectivizing theoretical reflection, are understood independent of their being situated within human existence. In this manner, scientific concepts, constructs, judgments, theories, etc. are entities of a peculiar kind that are capable of both ontical and ontological analysis and differentiation. For instance, from an ontological perspective scientific concepts, constructs, judgments and theories are theoretical entities distinct from other kinds of entities. Ontically speaking, scientific entities are compared with one another according to appropriate and applicable criteria such as validity, evidential fitness, explanatory power, etc. According to fundamental ontology these ontic and ontological analyses reside entirely within the horizon of that which is present-at-hand.

A similar “logical” analysis of culture is possible. In fact this sort of analysis of culture was popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and continues to influence present day accounts of culture

⁷ Ibid.

in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, etc. as well as everyday conceptions of culture. Of course, as is the case with the logical analysis of science, there exist a great variety of actual and possible present-at-hand conceptions of culture. In Heidegger's day culture was commonly modeled on the notion of an organism and studied using a morphological analysis of different cultures, i.e., by comparing and contrasting different cultures in order to generate typologies of culture analogous to the method one would use in a morphological analysis of plant life.

In his early work Heidegger is highly critical of this morphological approach to the analysis and understanding of culture. He says of this approach that, "As a closed organism with its own life, a culture (multiplicity of such cultures) stands on its own. In this multiplicity of cultures which surge forth from tradition and within a definite interpretation, each one is in accord with the character of its ownmost being *put on a par* with all the others (like plants). In terms of its being, no past Dasein has priority over any other. Like the one culture, the others must also be presented"⁸.

Heidegger's criticism in this instance is not that the difference between cultures have been flattened out to such a degree that no determination can be made regarding which cultures are better or worse, although that may in fact be the case. Rather, his criticism is that in this instance culture has been conceived as a particular kind of object and, qua that kind, all cultures must at a fundamental ontological level present themselves in an identical fashion. That is, the task of understanding culture is finding the principles and ordering by which cultures can be individuated and differentiated one from another. In this case, the study of culture strips from the conception of culture its essential historicity and, more significantly, its necessary connection to human being and human existence. Although perhaps the most straightforward and positivistic objectification of culture, it is not an uncommon way in which the concept of culture has been understood.

⁸ M. Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, op. cit., 30.

Alongside the analyses of culture that focused upon organizing and systematizing individual instances of concrete cultures, there were also more nuanced “objective” analyses of culture. For many, culture was thought to be the “objective” expression of an underlying subjective or spiritual reality. The goal of the study of culture was to understand the underlying subjective or spiritual reality through the interpretation of its expression. Culture represents the unifying principle of the many interconnected and interrelated strands of subjective and spiritual life, including communication practices, art, literature and philosophy, social institutions, etc. In more modern parlance, culture represented the unifying principle of an underlying context and form of life with its corresponding social practices. For example, according to Spengler, culture is the characteristic style of a form of life.

The most philosophically nuanced versions of this form of analysis of culture was embodied in two of the driving philosophical movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, namely, *Weltanschauung* philosophy and value philosophy, represented by the work of Dilthey and Rickert respectively. These treated culture from the perspective of its role as one of the fundamental concepts and organizing principles of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and thus were situated within the *Methodenstreit* between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. Many wished to approach the human sciences, i.e., the study of humanity characteristic of disciplines such as history, anthropology, psychology, literature, etc., in the fashion of a positive, natural science and as an attempt to formulate generalized laws that circumscribed the phenomenon under investigation. *Weltanschauung* philosophy and value philosophy rejected this approach to the human sciences and the study of human existence. A central concern of these philosophies was that meaning and significance, which they argued is the fundamental characteristic of human life and essential to peculiarly human activities such as discourse, communication, art, etc., could not be captured in generalized laws. On the contrary, meaning and significance could only be grasped in and through its individual social and historical context. They argued that culture represented the overarch-

ing context that grounded meaning and significance in any given age and, thus, culture was one of the proper and fundamental objects of the human sciences.

Nor is this approach to culture uncommon today. Many contemporary accounts of culture view culture as more or less pervading the complex of interrelated social practices, institutions, and political power relations that constitute particular historical situations and the individuals within those situations⁹. According to many, the study of culture consists of reflectively exhibiting the nexus of interrelated elements that constitute a culture so that we can better understand the forms and structures that influence human life, discourse, art, social institutions, etc. However, according to Heidegger's fundamental ontological scheme, in this case culture is something present-at-hand. For example, the being of culture as such and of individual cultures is not essentially characterized by a reference, i.e., as being essentially *for* something, as would be the case if it were something ready-to-hand. On the contrary, this notion of culture represents an objectification of culture. This is due to the fact that culture is approached in a reflective, theoretical fashion and as an object of theoretical inspection and study.

This helps to place in relief a second conception of science and of culture. Regarding science, this conception interprets science according to the manner of being of entities ready-to-hand, viz., as equipment. As such, the essence and nature of science is fundamentally instrumental. Science is capable of being deployed for the sake of any number of ends, e.g., the production of knowledge or technology, improving the human condition through mastery of nature, social utility, etc. Heidegger's later description of the technological domination wrought by modern science is based on his retelling of the genesis of science and of its manner of disclosure as developing from out of the "essence of modern technology". In the spirit of Bacon, science is the human activity that seeks to dominate nature and circumstances for our own purposes. Many contemporary understandings of science consist

⁹ S. Hall, *Cultural studies: two paradigms*, in: *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. J. Storey, op. cit., 31–48.

of instrumental accounts of science as well as of scientific concepts and constructs.

An instrumentalist, ready-to-hand view is also a prevalent feature of many accounts of culture. For example, Gadamer describes a humanistic view of culture (*Bildung*) according to which it is an instrument for and means to the formation of individuals¹⁰. In other words, culture is the instrument by which human beings are “formed” through the cultivation of particular talents. In contrast to this, Gadamer emphasizes a non-instrumentalist notion of *Bildung* that resembles “Greek physis” that “has no goals outside of itself”¹¹. Gadamer says that in this case “the concept of *Bildung* transcends that of the mere cultivation of given talents”¹² and represents the openness to what is alien through which an openness toward oneself is achieved.

Contemporary accounts of culture are replete with instrumentalist overtones. Under the influence of Gramsci’s radicalization of Marxian thought in which the dichotomy between theory and *praxis* is undermined and Foucault’s politics of power, many contemporary analyses of culture situate cultural phenomenon within the process of social and political struggle. That is, culture is fundamentally characterized in terms of its instrumental role as a means of political *praxis*, particularly political exclusion, domination, oppression, and, alternately, liberation and inclusion. On this reading, the elements traditionally associated with culture, e.g., communication, art, media, social institutions, etc., are essentially and wholly instruments deployed for political ends. For instance, ways of communicating, works of art, and all the other components of culture act to exclude, oppress, liberate, etc.

The instrumental and political implications of this contemporary approach to culture is well represented in Richard Johnson’s three-fold characterization of culture: “The first is that cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations

¹⁰ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., transl. J. Weinsheimer, D.G. Marshall, Continuum, New York – London 2003, 9–19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial structuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency. The second is that culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs. And third, which follows the other two, is that culture is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences”¹³.

One way to interpret Johnson’s understanding of culture is to see it as merely another version of the present-at-hand conception of culture, one that views culture as exclusively and wholly a principle of differentiation rather than of individuation and unification. However, if one digs a bit deeper, one recognizes that the very conception of culture described serves a political purpose and self-consciously so. No longer do theory and *praxis* circumscribe dichotomous regions. Rather, theory is fundamentally “intellectual labor” and, as with all labor, is caught up in the political processes and struggles in which it is situated. In the present case, the theoretical analysis and conceptualization of culture is a form of intellectual *praxis* and as such necessarily serves political ends.

Quite clearly we have, in this instance, culture as something ready-to-hand. The very notion of culture makes essential reference to political purposes. In this way, culture does not have the manner of being of a mode of *Dasein*’s existence, i.e., it is not a for-the-sake-of-which, but a means to an end, in this case, an instrument of political power. There are clear affinities between this conception of culture and the ready-to-hand account of scientific research as work in the service of social or pragmatic utility and/or technological advancement and innovation. Both science and culture are fundamentally characterized as instruments *for* achieving some purpose.

Heidegger’s existential conception of science and the possibility of it being misunderstood as something merely present-at-hand or ready-to-hand helps to set in relief the existential conception of culture. Heidegger says that according to its existential conception “*scientific*

¹³ R. Johnson, *What is Cultural Studies Anyway?*, in: *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, op. cit., 76.

knowing is characterized by the fact that the existing *Dasein* sets before itself, as a freely chosen task, the uncovering of the beings which are already somehow accessible, *for the sake of their being uncovered*¹⁴. Understood as ready-to-hand, scientific research is no longer a manner of existence that disclosively uncovers entities and their being for its own sake, but is work in the service of some separate for-the-sake-of-which. Viewed in a present-at-hand fashion, science is nothing more than a collection of scientific entities, e.g., a system of interconnected concepts and propositions. For the most part, culture has traditionally been conceived along the lines of something ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. The question now before us is what would an existentialist conception of culture look like?

Most of Heidegger's later remarks concerning culture are almost exclusively critical. On the other hand, early in his career Heidegger remarks that the two defining moments of culture is that it is historical and an achievement,¹⁵ a description that brings the being of culture squarely in line with existence rather than being present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. Following clues from Heidegger's existential conception of science, and as a first approximation of an existential conception of culture, we can characterize culture existentially as a mode of *Dasein*'s existence and, more specifically, as a "freely chosen task" of disclosure for its own sake. Let me emphasize that this existential conception of culture distinguishes it from something present-at-hand and as something ready-to-hand. Specifically, in its existential conception, culture is a *task*.

It is important to note that when Heidegger describes scientific research as a "freely chosen task" he does not intend to imply that scientific research is an endeavor that can be chosen in a voluntaristic fashion. Rather, it is freely chosen insofar as it is not an activity that is determined by past circumstances, but is rather a futural projection into

¹⁴ M. Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. P. Emad, K. Maly, Indiana UP, Bloomington 1997, 24.

¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, transl. T. Sadler, Continuum, London – New York 2000, 110–116.

possibilities of action. In other words, as the for-the-sake-of-which according to which one acts the futural and projective nature of the task is fundamental in determining the meaning and significance of the actual process and activity of scientific research. This can be made more clear by contrasting it with a conception that would have scientific research determined by past circumstances, e.g., Kuhn's conception that the movement of science is determined by felt difficulties within present paradigms or by a pragmatic conception of science for which it is in the service of present wants, needs and desires. Similarly, to describe culture as a "freely chosen task" is not to subscribe to the view that one is able to voluntaristically construct or choose one's culture. Rather, it indicates that culture is fundamentally a futural projection of possibilities of action and existence and not a past or present determination of action.

Equally important is the manner in which the existential conception of culture is to be distinguished from the existential conception of science. The best way to do so is to discuss the nature of the disclosure that takes place in culture, namely, to consider the question of what is disclosed in culture and how it is disclosed? This question is best approached by examining Heidegger's critique of his mentor's attempt to articulate a philosophical science of culture and value. I speak here of Heinrich Rickert's effort to specify the scientific foundations of what he called the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*). Rickert avoided the term *Geisteswissenschaften* largely to distance his project from that of Dilthey who thought the distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* lie in the substantial distinction between nature and spirit (*Geist*). Rickert, on the contrary, thought that the distinction was grounded in the manner by which each of the different sciences formed their concepts. The *Naturwissenschaften* formed concepts in accord with universal, mathematical laws, i.e., nomological concepts, and the *Kulturwissenschaften* formed concepts that were individualizing and "value-related". In other words, the cultural sciences were guided by concepts that were essentially related to valuation. Values were, on Rickert's view, embodied in culture. Rickert hoped to

discover the universal and transcendental values that unified all values and, consequently, all cultures¹⁶.

In criticizing Rickert, Heidegger focused on the manner in which values or norms are disclosed¹⁷. Rickert recognized that values and norms were not objects, but according to Heidegger he never raised the question of how values are given. Rather, Rickert took it for granted that values could be given in a theoretical fashion. In 1919 Heidegger describes the issue this way: “The value ‘is’ not, but rather it ‘values’ in an intransitive sense: in being worth-taking (*Wertnehmen*), ‘it values’ for me, for the value-experiencing subject”¹⁸. Thus the manner in which values and their being is disclosed is qualitatively different than the manner in which objects and their being is disclosed. Key to understanding the existential conception of culture is to see that values are disclosed in existing and are disclosed as such and for the sake of disclosure through culture.

As has been mentioned, Heidegger notes that the two characteristic moments of culture is that it is historical and an achievement. Regarding the former he remarks that: “only where historical consciousness is awake can the idea of culture as process of formation and formative aim of human creative life penetrate into reflective consciousness. In going back to the driving forces that bring about the concept of culture as a conscious interpretive element of life, we are led to the idea of historical consciousness, the idea of historicity”¹⁹.

Heidegger is arguing not just that culture is historical in the sense that it is a historical phenomenon. In that sense, scientific research is a historical phenomenon. Rather, he argues that culture is an interpretive element of life, i.e., an interpretative understanding of the formation and formative aim of human life in its historicity. In other words, culture

¹⁶ See, for instance, H. Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences* (abridged version), transl. G. Oakes, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1986.

¹⁷ M. Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, op. cit., 38–39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

and what it discloses is something that in its very essence is historical and temporally structured. As Heidegger says, “The historically experiencing consciousness grasps the historical world – including its own period of the present – in its development, motivation, teleological formation and achievement. An age that is stirred by this consciousness sees its own life-aim in pressing forward to reality itself, to real Being”²⁰.

Put in the language of *Being and Time*, culture discloses *Dasein* as it exists in the manner of its formation according to formative aims. More specifically, culture discloses modes or manners of existing *Dasein* according to futural projections of possibilities of its being. This represents the existential connection between culture and values. Traditionally, values are seen as *present* determiners of action. That is, one holds certain values and this determines one’s actions. According to an existential conception, values are that for-the-sake-of-which one acts. More precisely, values embody future possibilities of *Dasein*’s being. Correspondingly, culture is not a present determiner of action, but the for-the-sake-of-which according to which one acts.

Consistent with this Heidegger defines culture as an achievement. Heidegger says that the achievement of culture is the “uncommon achievement of value”²¹. That is, culture discloses *Dasein* as it exists in its formation according to formative aims, not just in any manner, but in the uncommon achievement of value. In other words, there are a variety of modes in which *Dasein* as existing can be formed according to formative aims that do not represent the achievement of culture. For instance, existent *Dasein* can be formed according to the aim of fulfilling the common daily routines of life. This is not an instance of what is disclosed or achieved in culture, at least not according to the present conception. Interestingly, Heidegger uses as an example of culture the formation and aspirations of the nineteenth century for which “natural science became the pride of an epoch, the tendency of its consciousness”²² and later speaks of “the orientation of modern life to particular achievements in

²⁰ Ibid., 115–116.

²¹ Ibid., 111.

²² Ibid.

the area of practical empirical life, the development of technology in the widest sense"²³. The uncommon achievement of value in these two cases is, respectively, the achievement of the value of scientific truth and of the value of technological development.

The disclosure that is culture is not having before oneself a representation of *Dasein*'s existence. The only way to disclose a manner of *Dasein*'s existence is to realize it through embodying it existingly. Put differently, the task of culture is not the task of formulating and articulating an ideal of existence, which would amount to nothing more than disclosing an idea or representation. On the contrary, the task of culture is to exist in such a way that one is realizing values in an uncommon manner. Understood in this way, culture is not a *means* to an end, i.e., an instrument for achieving a particular end. Rather, culture discloses future possibilities of *Dasein*'s being or possible modes of *Dasein*'s existence. Consequently, culture discloses a mode of *Dasein*'s existence as such.

Earlier it was mentioned that scientific research has the being of *Dasein*, i.e., that it is a manner in which *Dasein* can exist. Yet science does not disclose a mode of *Dasein*'s existence. Science is a mode of *Dasein*'s existence in which entities other than *Dasein* are disclosed. Culture is a mode of being of *Dasein* in a unique way. Culture is not simply a mode of *Dasein*'s existence, but is a mode of existence that discloses that very mode of existence. For instance, the "culture of science" discloses scientific existence, i.e., the disclosing entities other than *Dasein* for the sake of such disclosure, as a possibility of *Dasein*'s existence. In culture, *Dasein* discloses its very being by concretely working it out. In doing so, the very being of *Dasein*'s world and its being-in-the-world is at stake. For, as the context of its involvement, the world is structured by culture. That is, to have culture is to have a world whereby the totality of referential significations that constitute *Dasein*'s world serve to allow *Dasein* to exist in the manner of forming itself according to the uncommon achievement of value.

The existential conception of culture has broad implications for our understanding of cultural phenomenon. For one, the existential con-

²³ Ibid., 116.

ception of culture implies that culture cannot be reduced to a theoretical enterprise. Accordingly, the traditional association of culture with *praxis*, understood now broadly as human existence and activity rather than narrowly construed as political action, is made clear. Unlike so many contemporary accounts of culture, the existential conception of culture maintains the intimate connection between culture and human existence without reducing culture to a mere means to an end. Secondly, the existential conception of culture also helps to explain why crises of culture hold such great significance for us and are so disruptive. A crisis of culture is a crisis in our very existence. In other words, cultural crises are not merely interim stages in which one particular, concrete culture is discarded in place of another, but the interruption of *Dasein's* task of existing. Finally, the existential conception of culture has implications for our understanding of those elements that are traditionally seen as constitutive of culture, namely, discourse, communication, art, social institutions, etc. These can be seen as disclosing entities other than *Dasein* and, in this way, they stand side by side with scientific disclosure. In fact, attempting to distinguish the manner in which these disclose entities differently from that of scientific disclosure was at the heart of the *Methodenstreit* between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. Seen from the perspective of the existential conception of culture, this largely misses the mark. Understood existentially the constitutive elements of culture disclose possibilities of *Dasein's* existence, not entities other than *Dasein*. This also helps us to move away from the all too common, contemporary understanding of discourse, communication, art, and social institutions as merely tools or instruments of political struggle.

Modeled on Heidegger's existential conception of science, the existential conception of culture provides us with a fundamentally new way of understanding culture and cultural phenomenon. It allows us to understand the integral and important role that culture plays in our existence. More precisely, it implies that culture lies at the core of human existence.

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