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Is someone in coma Dasein?

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IS SOMEONE IN COMA DASEIN?

by

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ABSTRACT

Is Someone In Coma Dasein?

by

Joan Raines Phillips

An ontological investigation into the way of Being for someone in irreversible coma through Martin Heidegger’s Dasein-analysis. Ambiguity in the designation ‘human being’ leads to the conceptual confusion one experiences when encountering someone in irreversible coma, because the designation of ‘human being’ indicates both ‘Homo Sapien’ and ‘Homo Sapien plus Dasein’. However, considering what he requires for Dasein, Heidegger’s Dasein-analysis supports a higher brain function definition of death. Thus on an Heideggerian interpretation, someone in irreversible coma has died as Dasein, remaining in the world as a ‘living corpse’.
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Introduction

Martin Heidegger describes a particular way of Being he calls 'Dasein'. Two segments make up this term; 'Da', or in English, 'there', and 'Sein' or 'being'. He chooses this word because it describes a way of Being he wants to get at. To be 'Dasein', one must meet several criteria. For instance, one must be interested in one's self as a being in the world, with a particular way of Being. Furthermore, one must be 'in the world' in the Heideggerian sense, engaged in and part of it in the ways only Dasein can be. In the Dasein-analysis, Heidegger explores the requirements for this individual for whom 'Being' is important.

In *Being and Time* he says;

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. (32)

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1 The physicality we call 'human being' is not required for Dasein, although Heidegger expects we think this. He leaves open the possibility for a Dasein we would not recognize, explaining why being a human being is not necessary for Being-Dasein. This is why those greatly disfigured individuals do not face the same kinds of problems for Being-Dasein that individuals discussed in this paper do. Heidegger refutes purely mentalistic requirements for Being-Dasein, those dependent on a rationalistic, cognitively oriented tradition. The individuals I explore are still 'living' human beings within a biological definition of 'life' because they are alive in a purely biological sense, and embodied in human form. In fact, this leads to the conceptual confusion we feel when we deal with them. However, what we mean by 'human'-ness, that to which we grant rights, respect and value, is 'Dasein' and not 'human being'.
Although Heidegger's work is extensive, there are questions he did not anticipate, important if we are to fully understand 'Dasein'. Can a mechanically dependent individual with irreversible coma and no hope of ever awakening be 'Dasein'? What about someone in a persistent vegetative state whose illness may appear different clinically, but who is nonetheless equally brain dead?

I shall argue these categories of individuals not only fail to fulfill requirements for 'Dasein', but that Heidegger's Dasein-analysis supports a higher brain function definition for death. If I am correct, there can be death of 'Dasein' prior to 'death' of the body. Thus we are left with a living corpse, one not yet cold; both 'alive' and 'dead' concurrently.

Following this framework, there are three potential ways of Being. One can be alive biologically and as Dasein, dead as both, or dead as Dasein but still alive biologically. This latter way of Being is an intermediate stage between the other two, including within it those who are brain dead or in profound and irreversible coma. Confusion arises because all of these ways of Being are 'human'.

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2 Ambiguity in the term 'human being' leads to much conceptual confusion. When we say 'human being' we most likely mean 'person', defined as rational being or agent, or the Being of Dasein. However, 'human being' also designates Homo Sapien, a biological means for identifying a species.
I will show how these individuals are unlike either the corpse or the living person. Those comatose and mechanically dependent differ from those in a persistent vegetative state in significant ways, but neither meets Heidegger’s requirements for ‘Dasein’. Once there are areas of the brain necessary for a particular way of Being that no longer use oxygen, in other words once the higher brain ceases to function; Dasein has died.

Guided by his ‘Dasein-analysis, I need to explore how Heidegger might have classified these individuals. There are ambiguities in the word ‘coma’, so I will show how I use the term in this context. Individuals ‘in a coma’ range along a spectrum. They may be temporarily non-conscious (like one asleep and able to respond to external stimuli), have a prolonged diminished sensorium (as in a chemically induced and thus temporarily altered state of consciousness whereby one is not easily arousable),\(^3\) or they may be comatose and mechanically dependent, so neurologically injured as to be absolutely non-recoverable. I will single out those individuals closest to this last level of coma

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\(^3\) While the sleeping person is arousable, someone in a chemically induced state of altered consciousness may not be. However, once the chemicals wear off (even if a short period of mechanical ventilation is required) the person will awaken. Perhaps Dasein ‘flees’ temporarily, but it ‘returns’ when this individual is no longer in a condition of coma. Dasein is just a mode of Being. However, it is the one we regard as ‘human’. If it has gone permanently, ‘died’ and not ‘fled’, so has our concept of Being-human.
because they present the greatest challenge to 'Being-
Dasein'.

In Chapter One I lay out the terms of my argument. I
explain how I will be using 'irreversible coma' and
distinguish this way of Being from other ways appearing
similar. In the second section, I introduce topics
receiving more extensive treatment in the chapters that
follow. Chapters Two and Three are an indepth exploration
of the issues raised. I conclude with a confirmation of my
thesis, that Heidegger's Dasein-analysis supports a higher
brain function definition for death, and assess where that
leads.

\footnote{This is an analysis of those in irreversible coma within
an Heideggerian framework, exploring the Being of these
individuals with respect to Dasein.}
Chapter One

I

Levels of 'coma' range from transient loss of consciousness from which one fully recovers, to neurological devastation so vast that the individuals involved never awaken and must depend on mechanical support for continued 'life'. In focusing on individuals at this latter end, those for whom coma is irreversible, I will review others in the category of 'the permanently comatose' showing where significant differences lie, and why all persons in 'coma' cannot be considered in the same way.

Classifying someone as 'mechanically dependent and comatose' indicates s/he has suffered fatal neurological insult loosing the ability to remain 'alive', even biologic-

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5 I use quotation marks around this word because I question whether this individual is really 'living'. While s/he has several bodily systems which continue functioning, it is not clear we want to call this a 'life'. The only connection this individual has with 'life' is that s/he had not yet died in purely biological terms. Personal 'life' includes things like awareness of personal identity, engaging in moral agency and interacting with the world and with others. It also includes Being-Dasein. The individual in irreversible coma is unable to do these things, and s/he never will be again. We hesitate to call this a 'life' not only because the capacity for agency, cognition and rationality is gone, but also because these individuals are no longer Dasein.

6 It is not important whether the irreversible coma is caused by hypoxia, trauma or degeneration. If coma is terminal and irreversible, with associated cessation of higher brain functioning, my conclusions are the same.
ally, without mechanical support. Even with support, these individuals have a multi-system prognosis of only days to weeks.

What singles out this type of coma is that those in it cannot breath on their own, and they will never awaken. The injury they sustained is fatal. This is the most profound level of coma, involving enough of the brain to render these individuals dependent in every way on chemical and mechanical support. Furthermore, professionals are required to

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7 Attempting to establish legal guidelines concerning individuals like this, the 1980 President’s Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research recommended a Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA) as follows:

An individudal who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards. ([5],p.2). (Zaner.2)

Nonetheless, it takes time to 'determine death in accordance with accepted medical standards' and during this time we are left with individuals not legally pronounced dead. Before we can 'pull the plug' on these individuals it must be determined via a changeable and often ambiguous set of criteria that they really do fit this description. Meanwhile, and if portions of the testing yield equivocal results, these individuals remain legally 'alive' exhibiting signs of biological life; there is at least a heart beat and a blood pressure, even if these are maintained by chemicals like pressor agents.

8 Most likely because of diffuse cerebral edema and/or brain stem herniation, soon one or more major body systems fails. Claiming the actual 'cause' of death is not the brain injury but some other system failure is begging the question. Probably without this brain insult other system failures would not occur when and as they do.
provide their care.\textsuperscript{9}

Someone comatose and mechanically dependent is not always brain dead. For example, s/he could have a transient loss of consciousness because of a head injury occurring concurrently with a spinal cord injury, the latter causing respiratory system paralysis. In this situation, other system involvement forces the mechanical dependency. However, if there is a chance the brain will recover because damage to it is not complete, this individual does not fit my criteria for irreversible coma.

Persons in a persistent vegetative state range from those unable to respond in any overt way to those who, although immobile for the most part, are restless and appear able to focus and follow simple directions. Regardless of where they may fall within this range, all these individuals are at some significantly debilitating, long-term level of coma and they need others to care for their basic needs.

In many ways, individuals in a persistent vegetative state appear similar to the profoundly comatose and mechanically dependent; neither can care for themselves, neither communicates or interacts in any of the ways we expect this to be done,\textsuperscript{10} and neither appears aware of

\textsuperscript{9} I make this distinction because this is the only level of coma requiring professional caretakers. It is significant as a means for differentiation.

\textsuperscript{10} I hesitantly include this claim about communication because my meaning is easily misconstrued. One could raise many questions about what to call 'communicating'.
him/herself or his/her surroundings. However, those in persistent vegetative state may not require elaborate technological support to remain 'alive'. They could, and probably would, live (for a short time at least) without anyone else around. Furthermore, their caretakers do not have to be professionals. What they require can be given effectively by anyone willing to do so.\(^{11}\) Of even greater consequence, some can potentially come out of coma.\(^{12}\) Nonetheless, with the use of diagnostic equipment now available, we can determine which of those in persistent

I request permission to use this word loosely, indicating things like speaking, listening, and conscious or overt uses of body language.

\(^{11}\) Possibly these individuals are cared for by someone with personal connections to them, like a relative, a loved one, or a private duty caregiver. Since this is a long-term affliction, families have time to adjust and caregivers have time to form bonds. Being comatose and mechanically dependent is a transient state, lasting only weeks at the longest. The onset is acute and the devastation is terminal. Caretakers do not have much time for forming personal connections. Furthermore, these latter individuals must receive care in a high tech intensive care unit by professionals usually focused on addressing their physiological needs with little time for anything else.

\(^{12}\) Occassionally individuals in a persistent vegetative state do awaken, even years after they become comatose. For a detailed study of this potential for awakening, see an article by Levin et al, published in the Archives of Neurology, vol 48, June 1991, pp.580-585. In this study, 84 patients discharged from hospitals in a persistent vegetative state were followed up. Of these, 41% became conscious by 6 months, 52% by 1 year, and 58% within 3 years. This is in contrast to those individuals in irreversible coma that I focus on who are 100% non-recoverable.
coma are unaware of anything and which are least likely to awaken.\textsuperscript{13}

In some primitive ways, individuals in persistent vegetative state remain the kind of beings they were prior to coma. As Lamb says;

Their eyes are periodically open, and they show sleep wake sequences. They may exhibit yawning and chewing movements and may swallow spontaneously...[also this individual] has a potential cardiac prognosis of months to years. \textsuperscript{(6)}

These are only further signs of biological 'life', they are not indications of higher brain activity. At best these signs suggest that some 'life'-sustaining mechanisms are still present. Most importantly, those in persistent vegetative state can breath on their own. Such remanents of his/her past cannot be found in the mechanically dependent comatose individual. However, these gross motor functions are attributable to any number of other living species. While these functions indicate differences between these two levels of coma, they do not impact this exploration.

Those mechanically dependent and comatose are unlike others in coma in crucial ways (for example, they cannot even breathe independently). Yet all individuals in permanent and irreversible coma share not-Being-Dasein. The

\textsuperscript{13} Use of the PET scan has proven both useful and successful in providing information for making this distinction. For further details about this diagnostic technique see; John C. Mazziotta and Sid Gilman, ed. \textit{Clinical Brain Imaging: Principles and Applications}. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1992.
irreversibility and the permanent loss of higher brain function are what is at issue here. Furthermore, there are persons with irreversible disease processes that are mistakenly labeled 'comatose' because of how they appear clinically and these individuals, too, must be eliminated from our discussion. We see 'false' coma in individuals with degenerative muscular or neurological diseases like Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (A.L.S.). Due to the clinical presentation of A.L.S., persons in the final stages of this disease may appear comatose. However, they retain active mental faculties. Since their higher brains do function, they are capable of being aware of things around them. They may be as physically dependent on others as someone in irreversible coma is, but persons with A.L.S. are lucid and awake. Although they have a greatly limited capacity to act, this capacity is restricted, not gone. Furthermore, the ways of acting left open to them include consciousness of their physical being, as well as awareness of the Being that they now have.

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15 I leave out individuals comatose since birth because of congenital anomalies or birth trauma since they fall into another category altogether. They differ from those in irreversible coma because they have not already been Dasein.
II

To understand 'Dasein' we must get beyond what we commonly refer to as 'human being', or what Heidegger calls 'man'. In the Dasein-analysis, Heidegger is not exploring 'human being-ness' or what it is like to be a being that is human. Instead he is trying to get at something primordial to 'human being'; the way of Being of the 'human being'.

He maintains that:

Those entities which serve phenomenologically as our preliminary theme - in this case, those which are used or which are to be found in the course of production - become accessible when we put ourselves into the position of concerning ourselves with them in some such way. Taken strictly, this talk about "putting ourselves into such a position" is misleading; for the kind of Being with belongs to such concernful dealings is not one into which we need to put ourselves first. This is the way in which everyday Dasein already is: when I open the door, for instances, I use the latch. The achieving of phenomenological access to the entities which we encounter, consists rather in thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies, which keep thrusting themselves upon us and running along with us, and which conceal not only the phenomenon of such 'concern', but even more those entities themselves as encountered of their own accord in our concern with them.

(B.T.96)

Heidegger begins with a notion of involved acting in the world, using the things that are found there (Dreyfus.46).

Being-Dasein is not to first perceive something, then

Therefore they are subjects for another discussion.

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16 Heidegger capitalizes 'being' to indicate the difference between a being (ie - the individual or thing) and the Being of that being (ie - what it means 'to Be' a being of that kind). I follow his protocol.
synthesize it into an object which is eventually assigned a function according to its physical properties. What Dasein does is manipulate things it finds in a world that is "already organized in terms of purposes" (Ibid).

What differentiates Dasein from all other beings (and/or things in the world) is that it can be aware of itself as a being and care about that. In other words, its Being is an issue for it. In fact this is part of Dasein's ontological structure. As Heidegger says:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it...It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological. (B.T.32)

Heidegger is investigating the meaning of Being. However, if there is to be such a question, there must be an inquirer capable of doing this questioning. This inquirer is Dasein. Furthermore, Dasein is the only being that can inquire into its own Being. Thus it is fundamentally different from beings that cannot do this. Not only can Dasein question, it can also be aware of itself as questioner. Through this process, it is capable of realizing it has different possible ways of Being, and this too becomes a concern for it.

Furthermore,

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of a possibility of itself; to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself
into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. (B.T.33)

Dasein decides how to Be; either by pursing its possibilities (or at least appearing to do so) or neglecting them. Claiming permanently and profoundly comatose individuals are 'neglecting' their possibilities begs the question. In order to neglect something, one must either be able to attend to that something and choose not dealing with it; and these individuals have made no such conscious choice. Or one must avoid or ignore these possibilities by 'falling' into the world, and neither is this the case.

Individuals in irreversible coma are not aware of themselves as beings. Nor can they know, or even 'live' the Being of that being. They cannot inquire about this (or anything else) and their Being cannot be an issue for them. With A.L.S. there is consciousness of being and this Being is surely an issue for these individuals, especially since it is overwhelmed by a disease process they cannot control. If someone in a persistent vegetative state awakens they may

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17 "Falling" into the world "means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity" (B.T.220). Dasein 'falls' away from "itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self" (Ibid), getting lost in the 'they'. When Dasein falls in this way, it is essentially 'fleeing' in the face of itself "as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-itself" (B.T. 229). Getting 'lost' like this is a possibility for Dasein. Those in irreversible coma cannot 'get lost' in this way because their way of Being contains no possibilities at all in the Heideggerian sense.
meet this requirement. Evidence gathered from individuals previously in this condition shows many of them were aware of themselves (and often other things) during coma.\(^\text{18}\) When awakening remains a possibility, and since this would open up the horizon\(^\text{19}\) for other possibilities, these individuals might once again exist 'as' Dasein. Those dying before they awaken cannot qualify in the same way.

Other essentials for Dasein do not present such a clear cut case for my thesis. For example, Heidegger tells us "to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially" (B.T.33) and these individuals are surely 'in a world', although this 'world' is quite different from the one in which most of us find ourselves.

However, physically remaining 'in a world' is not what Heidegger means by Being-in-the-world, because;

When Being-in-the-world is exhibited phenomenologically, disguises and concealments are rejected

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\(^{18}\) For an example of how often these individuals awaken, see footnote #9 this text. For more indepth reading on this topic, see Plum, Fred and Jerome Posner. *The Diagnosis of Stupor and Coma*. 3rd ed., Philadelphia: Davis, 1980.

\(^{19}\) Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by stating that his "Provisional aim is the Interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (1). 'Horizon' is something Dasein cannot extend beyond or expand. It "provides the limits for certain intellectual activities performed 'within' it" (Footnote #4, B.T.1). Dasein has a 'horizontal schema'. First Dasein comes toward itself futurally, either authentically or inauthentically, in the "for-the-sake-of-which". Secondly, Dasein is "disclosed to itself in a state-of-mind as thrown...that in the face of which it has been thrown and that to which it has been abandoned"; the schema of 'what has been', or Dasein's past. Thirdly, the schema of Dasein's present is the "in-order-to" (B.T.416).
because this phenomenom itself always gets 'seen' in a certain way in every Dasein. And it gets 'seen' because it makes up a basic state of Dasein, and in every case is already disclosed for Dasein's understanding of Being, and disclosed along with that Being itself. (B.T.85)

Dasein is involved in the world, discovers it, can inquire about it. Dasein can 'know' the world because it can come to 'have'\textsuperscript{20}it and avail itself of it. Clearly someone in irreversible coma cannot do these things.

Dasein's Being actually "finds its meaning in temporality" (B.T.41). Dasein is its past and even the possibilities for its future are always grounded in this past.

We are told that;

Only in so far as Dasein is an "I-am-as-having-been", can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that the futural Dasein can be its ownmost 'as-it-already-was' - that is to say, its 'been'...As authentically futural, Dasein is authentically as 'having been'. (B.T.373)

One might claim those in irreversible coma remain Dasein through being seen 'as' the beings they were prior to their injury. While indiviudals at any level of coma benefit by this evaluation, it is crucial for those who contain their only link to Dasein in their past. However, as I will show this link is not enough.

A fourth criterion for Being-Dasein is Being-with-others. Dasein is essentially with others. In its every-

\textsuperscript{20} Dasein "can explicitly discover those entities which it encounters environmentally, it can know them, it can avail itself of them" and in this sense it can 'have' the world' (B.T.84).
dayness, Dasein is not an 'I myself', but instead looks for
its identity through the inputs of others. When living its
day to day life in an inauthentic\(^\text{21}\) manner, Dasein avoids
inquiring into its own Being and allows others around it to
define what and who it is. In fact, there is not even a gap
to bridge with other minds. First and foremost, Dasein is a
way of Being which is undifferentiated, a part of the crowd,
the infamous 'they'.

There are ways individuals in irreversible coma are
more 'for' others and 'with' others than any other being.
Yet their way of Being 'for' others is only metaphorical
(although they might be maintained purely 'for' the sake of
these others). Fundamentally, someone in irreversible coma
is required to be 'with'\(^\text{22}\) others because continuation of

\(^{21}\) Inauthenticity does not mean Dasein is 'fake' or 'false'.
'Inauthentic' Dasein tries to avoid facing its own-ness by
getting lost in the crowd of others and in the processes of
daily living. This designation is not normative.

\(^{22}\) This is not what Heidegger means by Being-with others.
Because there is no isolated 'I', Dasein is also essentially
Being-with. If Dasein is to be at all, it has Being-with-one-
another as its kind of Being. But this 'with' is more than
just a physical presence. Dasein is 'with' others necessar-
ily, the presence of these others is all around and unavoid-
able. Dasein engages with these others in a particular way
in its daily activities, whether this 'engagement' includes
an awareness of them or not. The world of Dasein is a with-
world, Being-in is Being-with Others. Heidegger says that
"by reason of this with-like Being-in-the-world, the world
is always the one that I share with Others" (B.T.155).
However, 'others' are not everyone else but me. I do not
'stand out' against them. "They are rather those from whom,
for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself - those
among whom one is too" (Ibid). This 'too' means that we all
have a sameness of Being as "circumspectively concernful".
his/her biological 'life' depends on them. However, this
'Being-with' is that of 'thing-ness' and not of Being-Dasein
since,

Not only is being toward Others an autonomous,
irreducible relationship of Being: this relation-
ship, as Being-with, is one which, with Dasein’s
Being, already is. Of course it is indisputable
that a lively mutual acquaintanceship on the basis
of Being-with, often depends upon how far one’s
own Dasein has understood itself at the time; but
this means that it depends only upon how far one’s
essential Being with Others has made itself trans-
parent and has not disguised itself. (B.T.162)

Dasein is 'with' others in that it understands itself
through them, recognizes them as also 'Dasein', may involve
itself with them.

In explaining the world in which Dasein finds itself,
Heidegger says;

In the 'description of that environment which is
closest to us - the work-world of the craftsman,
for example - the outcome is that along with the
equipment to be found when one is at work, those
Others for whom the 'work' is destined are 'en-
countered' too. (B.T.153)

Dasein is the ultimate for-the-sake-of-which; the work done
is by Dasein and for Dasein, as are the things created by
this work. For instance, the shoe-maker uses tools made by
Dasein for this use, and the shoes are themselves for
Dasein. The presence of others is thus both necessary and
unavoidable. In fact, many of the things Dasein encounters
are there because of others. Yet things found in the world
such as these shoes and tools are there for Dasein, even
gaining their designation through use by Dasein. Dasein has
these 'things' because others have made them, and Dasein makes things for these others. As Heidegger adds:

Dasein in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world of involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being, and which can thus make themselves known as they are in themselves. (B.T.120)

Dasein submits itself to the world of 'things' as the Being that can encounter and identify them. Things around it are 'for-the-sake-of' Dasein because it can discover what these 'things' are through their 'readiness-to-hand'. This way of discovering does not equally apply to how it encounters other Dasein because Dasein can never be a readiness-to-hand. Nonetheless, Dasein recognizes these other things; and other Dasein as different from them.

Since Dasein is with others essentially, everything it does reflects this. As the example of the shoe-maker shows, the work Dasein does is for others and the objects Dasein encounters are made by others for others. Thus the presence of others is always already there in the world and Dasein cannot avoid it. Even though Dasein cannot escape these others, much of the time in its everyday life Dasein encounters these others in a mode of indifference. It does what there is to be done with what is to be used for this purpose, and often does not pay attention to the others around it doing the same thing. In fact, much of the time Dasein does not even pay attention to the others directly benefitting from its labors.
Heidegger gives an example of a weaver, aware on some level both that what s/he is weaving must essentially be fitted for an other to wear and that the loom being used is available because of some other. However, this is not first and foremost in the weaver’s mind as s/he functions in her/his daily work as ‘weaver’. This mode of Being belongs to the very essence or Being of the task itself. In addition to the indifference of everydayness, Dasein deals with others in various other ways. For example, there is ‘leaping-in’ which is a domination of the other; or ‘leaping-ahead’, a drawing out of the potential of the other.

The role of the other belongs to the very structure of Dasein. Even Dasein’s self-knowledge emerges from its Being-with others in the world. According to Heidegger the world is a public one in which meaning is shared, where there cannot be a private language requiring, or even allowing, privileged access. What is disclosed to Dasein is available inter-subjectively because all space in the world is publically available. Since this is the case, Dasein has a specific kind of sociality.

Dasein is part of a contextual ‘fabric’ (so to speak), intrinsically intertwined with others in every way, engaged in Being-with, in ‘intertwining’. Dasein is inter-woven through its Being-Dasein. The individual in irreversible coma may be intertwined in this ‘fabric’ but s/he is not
also intertwining. Even a stone, as a thing in the world, is similarly intertwined, but the resemblance is not parallel.\textsuperscript{23}

Part of what Dasein is is constituted by its relations but Dasein can also be 'itself' in ways that things like stones never can because:

The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which 'looks' so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that. All the Being-as-it-is which this entity possesses is primarily Being. So when we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its "what" (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being. (B.T.67)

The essence of a stone is its "what".

In describing world-hood, Heidegger talks about things other than 'Dasein' that Dasein finds in the world. Dasein encounters these other things through uncovering them as ready-to-hand while involving itself in its work. In other words, these things show themselves to Dasein in their

\textsuperscript{23} The stone might be part of the whole fabric, but it is not intrinsically dependent on specific other threads in the way someone in irreversible coma is. If not sustained by particular others this individual cannot retain his/her way of Being; the stone can. This metaphor is invoked for bringing out two things. First, it shows the kind of intrinsic 'intertwinement' required for someone in irreversible coma to remain as such. Secondly, it displays how Dasein's involvement differs.
usefulness. Dasein accesses these things by actually using them, not just looking at them or trying to evaluate them as they are independent of their use.

A thing's serviceability or its 'readiness-to-hand' is its 'in-itself'. Heidegger explicitly says Dasein is never a ready-too-hand, but those in irreversible coma seem to be. To explore this we will look at Heidegger's exploration of a broken hammer where he claims this hammer is in a deficient mode of Being. Those in irreversible coma also appear to be in a deficient mode of Being. In fact, their Being-Dasein is 'broken' beyond recognition; as a careful comparison to Heidegger's 'hammer' example will later show.

Things have a presence-at-hand. This provides a foundation for readiness-to-hand because when something is available for use (ie - present-at-hand), Dasein can encounter and identify it. However, when things around it are present-at-hand Dasein may overlook them. These things become so familiar in both their appearance and their use Dasein takes them for granted. Dasein goes into its

24 Although some things can be used in a number of different ways.

25 Heidegger calls something's Being its "existentialia". This indicates the terms for its Being or its presence-at-hand. Dasein differs from 'things' in that its essence lies in its existence because existence is a priori to Dasein. Furthermore, "those characteristics which can be exhibited in [Dasein] are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which 'looks' a certain way and is present-at-hand itself (B.T.67). When something is present-at-hand the only possibilities it has are the properties it has. Dasein differs in that Dasein is its possibilities.
workshop, picks up its hammer, and drives in some nails, often 'unaware' that the tool employed is a 'hammer'; that is, until the hammer is either missing or becomes unusable for some reason. If missing, Dasein comes to recognize that that which is now gone was a 'hammer'. When so broken as to be unusable, Dasein sees this thing as 'that which used to be hammer'. Dasein becomes aware of 'hammer' because it expected to use it and is now unable to do so. This inability jolts Dasein into recognizing something previously taken for granted.

When Dasein takes 'things' for granted, it accepts them as in-themselves'. Dasein has particular expectations for things which it actualizes through using them. These expectations become so deeply entrenched, Dasein encounters and employs things without thinking about them. According to Heidegger;

In a peculiar and obvious manner, the 'things' which are closest to us are 'in-themselves': and they are encountered as 'in-themselves' in the concern which makes use of them without noticing them explicitly - the concern which can come up against something unuseable. (B.T.105)

As I will show, those in irreversible coma are 'useable' in ways that Dasein is not, but things ready-too-hand are.

When something that was ready-to-hand is found missing,

This makes a break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time what the missing article was ready-to-hand with and what it was ready-to-hand for. (Ibid)
Even though the missing thing is unavailable, it does not cease to be what it was before its mode changed. The same goes for a thing which has been broken and thus is not useable as it once was. When exploring deficient modes of readiness-to-hand, we often find that a thing once present and complete does not become something other than it was prior to this deficiency, as with Heidegger’s ‘broken hammer’.

However, there are various ways a hammer can be ‘broken’. Its handle may fall off, in which case it is repairable. Or the head might crack so that it looses some of its ‘useability’, but regardless of this it is still ‘hammer’. Even if one of the prongs is missing and cannot be replaced, its ‘hammer-ness’ is not gone. Yet the hammer may be so destroyed (burned and melted for example) it can never again function as what it once was. At this point, it no longer fulfills the requirements for ‘hammer’ and it never will again. Although Dasein’s Being extends beyond the ‘thing’-ness of a hammer, it can be equally destroyed: as it has been in the individual in irreversible coma.

The missing hammer’s facticity does not change simply because it has become less than serviceable. The thing itself, wherever it may be, still has ‘hammer-ness’. This also holds for Dasein that is missing in the same way because ‘missing’ indicates that what is not available has relocated for some reason, not that it has been broken or
destroyed. The hammer's readiness-to-hand may be gone, but its presence-at-hand-in-the-world is not.

Heidegger tells us that:

In our previous analysis, the range of what is encountered within-the-world was, in the first instance, narrowed down to equipment ready-to-hand or Nature present-at-hand, and thus to entities with a character other than that of Dasein. (B.T.154)

And he adds:

This restriction was necessary not only for the purpose of simplifying our explication but above all because the kind of Being which belongs to the Dasein of Others, as we encounter it within-the-world, differs from readiness-to-hand. Thus Dasein's world frees entities which not only are quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also - in accordance with their kind of Being as Dasein themselves - are 'in' the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are 'in' it by way of Being-in-the-world. (Ibid)

Dasein is more than simply a 'thing' for itself or for others. The essence of a 'thing' in a deficient mode of Being remains unchanged up to a point, but if the deficiency is profound the 'thing' cannot be what it once was (for example, the hammer remains 'hammer' within certain parameters). However, the same is true for Dasein. When destroyed, both leave behind something that has changed in

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26 I will not explore ways Dasein can be 'missing' although this in itself is an intriguing discussion. One might claim Dasein is indeed 'missing' in the individual with irreversible coma. However, this only indicates that the 'missing' Dasein has 'relocated', giving Dasein the potential for some independent, ethereal existence. Heidegger does not give us license for that.
fundamental ways.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{27} This is a far from complete list of Heidegger's requirements for Dasein. It is not presented as such, nor do I claim it is even sufficient to represent all Heidegger's analysis is getting at. However, it is enough to confirm my thesis while remaining faithful to Heidegger's most crucial arguments.
Chapter Two

Dasein’s Being is ‘Being-in-the-world’. As Heidegger says; "of course Being-in-the-world is a state of Dasein which is necessary a priori" (B.T.79). It is intrinsically part of Being-Dasein. However, we must understand what Heidegger means by 'world' and 'Being-in'. He explains 'world' as essentially a category of Dasein's Being, not a thing in and or itself. Dasein comes to know 'world' through various ways of coming into contact with the things in it. Against the unthemetic background of 'world', Dasein sees these things 'as' something in particular. Dasein encounters the world through its 'Being-for-the-sake-of-which', coming in contact with things as 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand'. This does not mean the world contains things which are 'mental presentations' or 'conscious objects' existing only in Dasein's mind. These things are really there, inter-subjectively available to other Dasein.

Dasein's way of Being-in-the-world differs from that of 'things'. 'Things' or 'objects' are isolated and determinate substances, referred to by Heidegger as present-at-hand (Dreyfus.40). Dasein's Being-in differs in that:

Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has already dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, understanding, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining...All these ways of Being-
in have concern as their kind of Being... (B.T.83)

Hubert Dreyfus claims Heidegger has four senses of 'world', all of which are significant for specific reasons worth reviewing. First there is the "ontical-categorical sense" whereby "world can be used to mean a universe, conceived of as a totality of objects of a certain kind" (Dreyfus.89). According to Krell "ontic refers to any manner of dealing with beings which does not raise the ontological question" (Krell.53). For example, an ontic question about science is asked from within the science and is concerned with things the science itself is concerned with. Whereas, an ontological question about science is asked from outside the discipline and inquires about the 'science' itself. 'Categorical' is understood as a tool for grouping purposes. In this sense, 'world' can refer to any specific physical or abstract 'object' that fits into a universe of 'discourse' or of 'things', like a 'world' of physical objects.

Dreyfus says Heidegger's second sense of world is an ontological-categorical one, which is "a set of particulars specified in terms of the essential characteristics of the entities that make up the set" (Dreyfus.89). This defines

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28 Neither Dreyfus nor I claim Heidegger presents us with various or possible worlds to consider. Dreyfus argues that Heidegger gives us different 'senses' of the term 'world' that show Dasein's various relationships to it. This is helpful for accessing what Heidegger is getting at.
what each set’s 'way of being' is. For instance, what the set of physical objects all have in common is their 'physical'-ness, and what the set of all living things have in common is their 'living'-ness.

These two senses of world display how it is that Dasein is within them. Since Dasein is ontically a 'physical object', it is a part of the 'world of things with physicalness'. And because an essential quality for Dasein as 'Being-in-the-world' is that it is alive, it is ontologically within the 'world of living things'. Thus the first sense of 'world' locates Dasein according to its ontic way of Being and the second according to its ontological, defining 'world' by what is found in it. The next two senses of world focus on Dasein's involvement in them. There is a difference between Dasein's being 'included' in a world and being 'involved' with it. Dasein is 'included' in one sense of world according to its physical makeup, the way it chooses to live its life, or according to different facts about it or its way of Being. Dasein is 'involved' in a world when it interacts with or explores it. Dasein can be 'included' in a world with which it does not become 'involved' and vice versa.⁹

The first sense of 'world' Dasein can be involved in is

⁹ For example, Dasein can be 'included' in the world of potential carpenters but never become 'involved' in this particular world. Or Dasein can be 'involved' in the 'world of mathematics' and never be 'included' in it.
an ontical-existential one. This world is "that wherein a
factual Dasein as such can be said to 'live'" (Ibid). The
term 'existential' "designate[s] the way Dasein in any
given case actually exists by realizing or ignoring its
various possibilities - in other words, by living its life"
(Krell.55). The 'world of medicine' is an example of this
sense.

Dreyfus' final sense of 'world' for Dasein is an onto-
logical-existential one, which he claims includes the
"worldliness of world". He says "this is the way of being
common to our most general system of equipment and practices
and to any of its subregions" (Dreyfus.91).

Individuals in irreversible coma 'live' in a particular
way. They maintain a biological 'life' whereby there are
obtainable vital signs and physiological functions compa-
table with biological 'existence'.

According to Heidegger "'existence' formally indicated that Dasein is as an
understanding potentiality-for-Being, which in its Being,
makes an issue of the Being itself" (B.T.274). Someone in
irreversible coma cannot 'exist' in this way. His/her way
of 'living' positions them in a 'world' they become part of,
but clearly they are not 'in' any world in the Heideggerian
sense. For example, they cannot become involved with it as
Dasein can. In their biological mode of 'living', however,

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^30 Not to be confused with what Heidegger means by 'exist-
tence. Dasein exists 'as' Dasein, incorporating all the re-
quirements going along with this designation.
they occupy space and extend over time, although they do not take any interactive role in the 'living' process. Thus saying these individuals 'live in any specific 'world' is only to say they can be found there, 'alive' biologically: only because they are not yet legally dead.

Clearly those in irreversible coma are 'in' the world in the ontical-categorical sense. They fit the 'world of physical objects' and the 'world of living things'. That they fit the second sense of world is not so obvious. There is a certain 'way of Being' when one is in such a coma, but this is not the Heideggerian sense of Being necessary for Dasein. However, these individuals do have a particular set of essential characteristics leading to the diagnosis of coma. They also have specific biological components like all other 'living' things.

Dasein is 'included' in these senses of 'world' according to its physical makeup, the way it chooses to live its life, or according to different facts about it or its way of Being. Persons in irreversible coma can only be 'included' in a world because they are found there and share some characteristics with others like them in various ways.

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31 Biological life is not the same as the 'life' of Dasein. Dasein might also have the physical structure necessary for this way of living, but it 'lives' its life in ways those in irreversible coma cannot. Dasein has the possibility of taking an active role in its 'living' and being concerned about it. Furthermore, Dasein's life is full of choices and potentials, as well as the possibilities which Dasein is. The same is not true for the individual in irreversible coma.
These individuals cannot be 'included' through any conscious decision making or because of any possibilities they contain in their way of Being.\textsuperscript{32}

Dasein is 'involved' in the world because it interacts with or explores it, through Dasein the readiness-to-hand of something is encountered as "discovered in its involvement" in being its way of Being. This is not the same as Dasein's being 'included' in a world. Dasein's way of being involved is through uncovering the Being of something ready-to-hand on the basis of the prior discovery "of a totality of involvements" (B.T.118). Someone in irreversible coma cannot be 'involved' in a 'world' in any of Dreyfus' possible senses for Dasein and s/he cannot interact with the world or the things in it. These individuals are just in the world physically, the way other things are. The only possible 'involvement' individuals in irreversible coma can have is that which anything ready-to-hand has.

Dasein is 'in' the world. In fact, its way of Being toward the world is 'care'; this is its existential meaning. Dasein exhibits this as concern. Heidegger tells us:

\[\ldots\text{the expression 'concern' will be used in this investigation [of Dasein] as an ontological term for an existentiale, and will designate the Being}\]

\textsuperscript{32} These individuals may have purposely engaged in some activity resulting in irreversible coma. However, one is hard pressed to come up with a plausible argument showing s/he thus 'chose' to be this way. Even if s/he harmed him/herself intentionally, perhaps while attempting suicide, this is quite seldom, if ever, the end result s/he planned for or intended.
of a possible way of Being-in-the-world. This term has been chosen not because Dasein happens to be proximally and to a large extent 'practical' and economic, but because the Being of Dasein itself is to be make visible as care. This expression too is to be taken as an ontological structural concept. It has nothing to do with 'tribulations', 'melancholy', or the 'cares of life', though ontically one can come across these in every Dasein. These - like their opposites, 'gaiety' and 'freedom from care' - are ontically possible only because Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care. (B.T.84)

Dasein 'cares' about both its being and its Being, and 'cares' about other beings as well. Someone in irreversible coma cannot 'care' in any sense of this word, and there is no potential for 'concern'. According to Heidegger 'concern' could mean carrying out something, getting it done, or straightening it out. It can also indicate providing oneself with something. Or it might imply something like apprehensiveness (B.T.83). Those in irreversible coma do not even physically 'care' for themselves, let alone get anything done, carried or straightened out; and clearly they cannot have anything like apprehension.

Dasein finds its meaning in its temporality. It is its past; but it is also its future. Those in irreversible coma were Dasein. This is an essential part of their facticity. Furthermore, when they die they will be remembered as once-a-Dasein, something no other thing or object can lay claim to. However, Dasein does not only 'have' its past as part of its factual makeup, it also 'has' its past because this contains the possibilities for its future. Saying the
injury leading to coma is a part of the past of those in irreversible coma and that this contains the possibilities for their future, is to misunderstand Heidegger. These individuals do not 'have' anything like a 'possibility' in Heidegger's sense.

First of all, they cannot 'have' them because they can never know what these possibilities are. One of Dasein's possibilities is that it can know that it has 'possibilities' available (and unavailable). Furthermore, those in irreversible coma cannot have 'possibilities' because their future is already decided. They will remain in a coma until they die. When Heidegger talks of Dasein's having possibilities, what he means is that:

The kind of Being which Dasein has, as potentiality-for-Being, lies existentially in understanding. Dasein is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-possible. Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility. The Being-possible which is essential for Dasein, pertains to the ways of its solicitude for Others and of its concern with the 'world',...; and in all these, and always, it pertains to Dasein's potentiality-for-Being toward itself, for the sake of itself. (B.T.183)

Heidegger says that in its factual Being, any Dasein is as it already was, and it is 'what' it already was. However, he is introducing this in the context of Dasein's 'historicity', placing Dasein in the worlds of sense three and four. Where and when Dasein finds itself directly effects what its possibilities will be because not everything is
possible at all times, and Dasein is a product of its particular time. This is the ‘existentiell’ Dasein, how it ‘lives’ its life in the world it is in.

Someone in irreversible coma may remain biologically the same, as a ‘living’ human being (as opposed to a dead one), but s/he is not ‘what’ they were when they were Dasein; biological life is not the life of Dasein. S/he is present in the world but cannot find him/herself there, nor can s/he be ‘concerned’ about these things. S/he is alive but not ‘as’ Dasein, because s/he is unable to live as Dasein does.

Dasein is its possibilities. This makes its Being of such concern to it. This is especially true with respect to Dasein’s possibility for awareness of itself as ‘mortal’. Death is the one possibility Dasein cannot avoid; once Dasein is born, it must die. Dasein can face its own mortality by living in an authentic mode of Being-toward-death but this is something Dasein often avoids. Dasein

33 Heidegger talks about Dasein having a particular ‘mood’. He means that "in having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be" (B.T.173). Dasein is born into a particular time and place to specific parents, and its possibilities are governed by this. For example, Dasein born in the United States in 1954 does not have the possibility of living its life like someone in ancient Rome. Dasein’s possibilities are limited by its facticity.

34 Part of what Heidegger means by ‘authentic’ is seen with Dasein’s Being-toward-death. In doing this, Dasein accepts its own mortality. Dasein is ‘authentic’ when it is something of its own (B.T.68). However, in Being-to-
gets involved in the world in a mode of everydayness\(^35\) so as to ignore itself and, along with this, its finitude. Someone in irreversible coma will also die, but s/he is not aware of this, nor can s/he ever be. For him/her, death is only a logical or 'technical' possibility, something that is inevitable.

Dasein cannot give someone in irreversible coma 'possibilities'. Heidegger says that:

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\text{In each case Dasein is its possibility and it 'has' this possibility, but not just as a property, as something present-at-hand would. And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. (B.T.68)}
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'Possibilities' requiring maintenance by others can only be

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\(^35\) 'Everydayness' is the way Dasein lives its day to day life in the world where it finds itself. In an 'inauthentic' mode, Dasein gets 'lost in the crowd' so as to avoid its own mortality. This is where much of its 'everydayness' is spent. Dasein fears facing its mortality and attempts to 'escape' acknowledging it by 'falling'. Heidegger says; "Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize the way in which, in its everyday manner, Dasein is its 'there' - the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world. As definite existential characteristics, these are not present-at-hand in Dasein, but help make up its Being. In these, and in the way they are interconnected in their Being, there is revealed a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness; we call this the "falling" of Dasein" (B.T.219). Dasein 'falls' into what it does so it does not have to think about its mortality, can ignore its possibilities and can live its life as a part of the crowd. There is comfort in this for Dasein.
'properties', things that are attributable to something simply because of its presence-at-hand. The only 'things' those in irreversible coma could 'have' are those that are innate to them biologically. These are not 'possibilities', but inevitabilities.\(^{36}\)

Heidegger explicitly says "Dasein's Being is not to be deduced from an idea of man [human being]" (B.T.226). I bracket the term 'human being' to show Heidegger equates the two. We cannot gain access to Dasein through any kind of 'experience' because this does not give any clues to what Dasein is. And Heidegger avoids terms like 'life' and 'man' as he designates Dasein's 'way of Being'. He is not doing anthropology, biology, or even psychology, since 'Dasein' is primordial to these things; as the necessary condition for these ways of evaluation and classification coming about. Heidegger's project is to get at the Being of a being which may be instantiated as 'human'. Nonetheless, even though human beings can be Dasein, Being-human is not Being-Dasein. Thus we have a way of Being that is human, and a way of Being that is Dasein.

II

Another thing that those in irreversible coma cannot do

\(^{36}\) For example it is 'innate' to human beings that they have certain reflexes built into them because they are human, such as swallowing and blinking. Things like reflexes occur because of the biological 'way of Being' we have.
which Dasein can is 'lose' themselves. They may be 'lost' i
that the only way they function is physiologically, but this
did not come about because they chose it or 'fled' into
everydayness. Nonetheless, they are clearly lost 'as'
Dasein (albeit not yet 'as' biological human beings).
Dasein is not only its past, it is also its future.
Individuals in irreversible coma may have been Dasein, but
they are not Dasein any longer; nor will they ever be again.
Heidegger’s example of the broken hammer helps illuminate
where this splitting occurs. He says that:

When we concern ourselves with something, the
entities which are most clearly ready-to-hand
may be met as something unusable, not proper-
ly adapted for the use we have decided upon.
The tool turns out to be damaged, or the mat-
erial unsuitable. In each of these cases,
equipment is here, ready-to-hand. We discover
its unusability, however, not by looking at it
and establishing its properties, but rather by
the circumspection of the dealings in which we
use it. When its unusability is thus discover-
ed, equipment becomes conspicuous...it shows it-
self as an equipmental Thing which looks so and
so, and which, in its readiness-to-hand as look-
ing this way, has constantly been present-at-
hand too... This presence-at-hand of something
that cannot be used is still not devoid of all
readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which
is present-at-hand in this way is still not
just a Thing which occurs somewhere. The
damage to the equipment is still not a mere
alteration of a Thing - not a change of pro-
perties which just occurs in something present-
at-hand. (B.T.102-103)

Yet something can be so broken it no longer is what it once
was. Thus we must draw a line between Being-the-same and
no-longer-Being-as-it-was. Clearly a hammer melted down
into a pile of metal and wood spinters is no longer
'hammer', although this condition is a 'broken' one. Instead we should say that this hammer is destroyed; to the effect that it is no longer 'hammer'. It does not matter that what once formed the hammer is still present-at-hand, its form of presence-at-hand has changed. Its 'hammer-ness' is gone, destroyed. It leaves behind something altogether different. What is now present-at-hand is 'pile of splinters and chunk of melted metal'.

The same kind of change occurs in individuals in irreversible coma. Being-Dasein is equally destroyed. What Dasein leaves behind in this case is something that 'used to be' Dasein but which is now altogether different. There is the presence-at-hand of tissue and bone, the biological components of 'human being', but there is not 'Dasein' (although we frequently mistake this individual as such). Every essential quality for Being-Dasein has been destroyed. S/he has become like the melted metal and splinters, and not the 'broken' hammer. When something cannot fulfill the requirements for Being the being that it once was, its fundamental way of Being changes.

This change does not occur arbitrarily, although the point at which it happens can be elusive, especially with reference to Dasein. Clearly the point of change is easiest to find with things like hammers. We see them for what they are by employing them. If the handle breaks off or a screw falls out, the hammer can be fixed. During its time of ill-
repair, the hammer does not lose its 'hammer-ness'. It may look a little different for a while, but we still recognize is as 'hammer'. Furthermore, it has not lost its potential to be 'hammer'. With some adjusting it can re-aquire all its previous presence-at-hand. Therefore, it has not lost its ability to fulfill the requirements for 'hammer'.

However, if destroyed to the extent that it is neither recognizable or repairable, what was once 'hammer' is 'hammer' no longer. There are several stages of breakage the hammer could go through, many allowing it to keep its original identity. We 'see' the thing as 'hammer' as long as it maintains the essential qualities required for this mode of Being.\(^\text{37}\) It is not until fundamental requirements for 'hammer-ness' are gone that it conceptually 'dies' as hammer.\(^\text{38}\)

There is a similar dichotomy for Dasein. Dasein may be in a deficient mode and still be Dasein. We can see that someone with an acute psychosis cannot function 'in' the world 'as' Dasein can on every level. Yet this individual still meets enough of the requirements for Being-Dasein to

\(^{37}\) A hammer is not only a hammer when someone actually 'sees' it with their eyes. Blind persons can use hammers by 'seeing' them with their hands and Dasein 'sees' things by 'seeing' them through their use. The physical act of 'looking' is not important. It is the 'seeing-as-something' of a thing that matters.

\(^{38}\) Obviously a hammer cannot 'die' literally, but it can do so conceptually. It dies 'as' hammer.
remain Dasein. For example, s/he remains 'with' others in ways possible for Dsein. The acutely psychotic individual may be partially 'broken' as Dasein, but his/her Being-Dasein is still there. The same is true for the individual 'broken' physically, even if this 'break' is profound. Someone with quadraplegia does not stop Being-Dasein even though his/her mode of Being is clearly 'broken' quite severely. 39 Perhaps in some sense, even in fleeing Dasein is in a 'deficient' mode of Being. However, during these times Dasein does not lose its Being-Dasein. Dasein is 'repaired' by attending to the sphere(s) where it functions deficiently and either 'fixing' the deficiency or 'replac-ing' it with something else.

Nonetheless there is a point at which Dasein becomes like the destroyed hammer and not the broken one. When all the essential qualities for Being-Dasein are gone forever, Dasein 'dies'. The physicality of the 'used to be Dasein' need not change at all for this conceptual break to occur since the requirements for Being-Dasein are not physical properties.

That is a crucial difference between the 'destroyed' hammer and the 'destroyed' Dasein. The former does not

39 I am not using these examples to show that 'human' deficiencies are also 'Dasein' deficiencies. This may or may not be the case. However, when someone is in a deficient mode of Being-human this effects their ability for Being-Dasein.
resemble what it once was, and its identity depends on its outward appearance. When we look at it, we do not see 'hammer', but 'pile of splintered wood and metal'. If we saw the hammer destroyed and therefore knew for certain what is was before, we might claim we still 'see' hammer. However, this is only recognizing it 'as' hammer dependent of what we know of its past. All we really have visual access to is 'used to be hammer'.

Dasein's death is less easily recognizable, partly because we expect the human body to die when Dasein does. Therefore, when looking at someone in irreversible coma, we still believe we see 'Dasein' (this is especially true if we knew this individual prior to coma). We expect Dasein to look a particular way and we recognize that this individual is 'like us' in his/her outward appearance. However, what we actually see is 'used to be Dasein', although we may not want to accept this. We can grasp what conceptually constitutes 'hammer' without much difficulty; the concept of 'Dasein' is not so easily accessed. We quickly pronounce the 'dead' hammer, but we struggle with doing the same thing for the 'dead' Dasein when it leaves a 'living' body behind.

We can be deceived by something physically looking 'like' what we expect Dasein's physicality to look like.

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40 Claiming we still 'see' hammer is only saying we have a 'mental image' of hammer-that-used-to-be. This 'thing' is no longer 'hammer' as an intersubjectively available readiness-to-hand, and it is no longer present-at-hand 'as' hammer either.
Take, for example, a statue sculpted to look like Dasein, a photograph taken of Dasein or a painting in Dasein’s image. Dasein looks at these things and sees resemblance, a 'like'-ness to the way it looks, and in fact might call these things 'Dasein'. However, these representations are just that, 'representations'. Their only 'like'-ness to Dasein is in their exterior form. Here, 'like'-ness reduces to 'looking like', not 'same as' or even 'similar to'. This same thing occurs when Dasein encounters someone in irreversible coma.

When Dasein dies:

This something which was just-present-at-hand-and-no-more is 'more' than a lifeless material Thing. In it we encounter something unalive, which has lost its life. (B.T.282)

Dasein "'has' its death, of the kind appropriate to any thing that lives; and it has it, not in ontical isolation, but as codetermined by its primordial kind of Being (B.T.-291). Death is the one possibility Dasein cannot choose to ignore. Dasein is going toward this possibility from the time it begins its life. In fact:

In death, Dasein has not been fulfilled nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished nor is it wholly at one’s disposal as something ready-to-hand. On the contrary, just as Dasein is already its "not yet", and is its "not yet" constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The "ending" which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end, but Being-toward-the-end of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. (B.T.289)
It is within Dasein's 'way of Being' to die. It must die for itself, by itself, and of itself. However, human beings 'as' Dasein can 'die' twice, We can die as 'Dasein', and we can die as 'human being'. Such is the case for those in irreversible coma: death of 'Dasein' and death of 'human being' need not occur simultaneously.
Chapter Three

There are various ways one might argue that individuals in irreversible coma are not ‘destroyed’ in their Being-Dasein. One could claim that perhaps those in irreversible coma still fit some criteria for ‘being-with-others’. However, there is a distinction between being-with and Being-with. In the former, Dasein can be ‘with’ by simply retaining its physical presence in the vicinity of others. Someone in irreversible coma is capable of this. S/he cannot equal fill the role of Being-with. The presence s/he maintains is only the ‘with’-ness of objects or things. One more correctly calls this Being ‘among’ others.

Nonetheless, when analyzing Daen, Heidegger says of Others that:

Yet Being-alone ‘among’ many does not mean that with regard to their Being they are merely present-at-hand there alongside us. Even in our Being ‘among’ them they are there with us.
(B.T.157)

Dasein has the possibility of relating to the others it is ‘among’ even if it chooses not to acknowledge them, or to ignore them. Those in irreversible coma do not. They are only ‘among’ others in that they occupy space in places where others are. Dasein may also occupy space and it essentially extends over time, but Dasein is also a projection of its possibilities. Dasein knows how to deal with things (and others) it is among and is able to do this. If those in irreversible coma are ‘Being-alone’, they do so in
the mode of something present-at-hand. Their 'alone'-ness is due to their deficient mode of Being and not an indifferent one. The opposite is true for Dasein's 'alone'-ness even if it is 'among'.

Nonetheless, those in irreversible coma do make certain claims on others by their very presence 'among' through their facility as 'having-been-Dasein'. A cat placed on a ventilator does not have the same sense of 'among'-ness (even though it is equally dependent on others), and it does not elicit the same responses. The distinction is that someone's death 'as' Dasein, while reducing him/her to presence-at-handness in a new mode, still commands certain respect both because of his/her 'used to be' Dasein and because s/he remains a human being that has not biologically died as such.

The eliciting of respect comes from two directions. First of all, prior to this individual dying 'as' Dasein, s/he had the kind of Being underlying what we commonly call 'human'. This element is over and above the biological, social or psychological aspects of our physical makeup. There is a way of Being that is essential to the beings that we are, that of Being-Dasein. By dispensing with our usual assumptions about 'human'-ness and replacing them with the mode of our Being we tend to overlook, Heidegger shows a way of being fundamental to the kind of being we have. We do live our daily lives functioning in ways other beings can-
not, often oblivious to the things we do. We get completely absorbed in the matters at hand, using things around us because of their readiness-to-hand; not on some rational level, but on a primordial one a priori to our way of Being in the world. We could never get anything done if each step of the 'doing process' required sorting out in some cognitive way. Being-Dasein is included in our concept of 'human'-ness.

When Dasein dies, something intrinsic to our way of Being is gone. We do not often think about the possibility for separation of 'Dasein' and 'human body' because the two usually die concurrently. When they do not, we approach the physicality left behind as if it were Dasein, but it is the Being-Dasein we are deferent to. Desecrating the 'living corpse' is something we do not like doing because of its 'used to be Dasein'.

Individuals in irreversible coma, the both 'dead' and not yet dead, can be harmed by us in the same ways Dasein can if we agree with Aristotle when he says:

We do not say, then, that someone is happy during the time he is dead,...but rather that when a human being has died, we can safely pronounce [that he was] blessed [before he died], on the assumption that he is now finally beyond evils and misfortunes.

Still, even this claim is disputable. For if a living person has good or evil of which he is not aware, than a dead person also, it seems, has good and evil when, e.g., he receives honours and dishonours...(N.M.24)

The dead can be harmed by evil they are not aware of. How-
ever, Aristotle never had the notion of a 'living corpse'. The ‘death’ which Aristotles’s claims apply to is the death of 'Dasein' and not the death of the body. Clearly someone in irreversible coma can have physical 'evils' befall them before they die biologically; and they can fall victim to the kinds of 'evils’ Aristotle talks about in the same ways that dead corpses can. Every day in anatomy or pathology laboratories, physical 'evils' befall corpses that are 'fully' dead. In these circumstances we so not believe what we do is wrong. Autopsies are acceptable because the 'victim' of such 'evils' is only some physical 'thing'.

Even harvesting organs from corpses is heralded as altruistic, and yet some of these 'corpses' have not yet died biologically (and thus are still 'living'). However, these 'evils' do not distress us because they affect only the physicality of the individual. What we wish to avoid bestowing 'evil' upon is someone's 'human-ness' which equates to their Being-Dasein, not a pile of biological remains. 41

In fact, individuals in irreversible coma are often used in a variety of ways we would call wrong for Dasein.

41 When we say it is wrong to 'dance of someone’s grave' it is not because we are afraid they will damage the physicality buried beneath them. What we find unacceptable is this dancer’s lack of respect for the 'used-to-be-'human'-ness' of the body under the ground. The 'damage' we resent is to the 'dead-used-to-Be-Dasein' and not the tissue and bones left behind.
Since each time this must be done without this individual’s permission, those in irreversible coma ‘submit’ to whatever we want them to, and often we are quite comfortable with this.

Regardless of what we may do to them in a clinical setting, those in irreversible coma ‘command’ certain responses from us, both because they are ‘living’ human beings, and because they are ‘dead’ Dasein. While they remain biologically alive and thus ‘among’ us, we, as Dasein, are not completely distinguished from them because of our Being-with. Being-with is essential to Dasein. Others have this same way of Being, and we are aware of this. Therefore, out of respect for each other we often treat those in irreversible coma as if they are still Dasein, because it makes us all feel better.\(^{42}\) Acting differently can often evoke discomfort, pain or sorrow and we like avoiding these things.

II

Dasein interacts with others in various ways. For instances, it may engage in ‘leaping-in’, which is either the domination of Dasein by an other, or vice versa. Those in

\(^{42}\) Treating those in irreversible coma as if they are still Dasein does not always mean we treat them with respect, dignity or any other such acknowledgement. We do not always treat Dasein in these ways. However, we can use someone in irreversible coma as a receptical for transplantable organs when we acknowledge that Being-Dasein has died, because ‘Dasein’ is what we mean to show respect and dignity to.
irreversible coma can only be dominated. They cannot decide how or even if we treat them and they are physically 'dominated' by others (as well as by any machinery and equipment necessary to sustain their biological 'life'). Their bodies cannot even control doing what they 'want' to do physiologically. However, there is ambiguity in the word 'domination'. One expects domination to demand (or at least require) submission. Someone in irreversible coma cannot truly 'submit' to the whims of others. 'Submitting' suggests an active role in the process and that cannot happen. Nonetheless, these individuals yield to others, if only through non-interference. Submission is a passive-type response and those in irreversible coma exemplify total passivity. Thus submission is intrinsically tied to their way of Being.

Dasein also interacts with others through 'leaping-ahead', by attempting to draw out their potential. Often this is how those in irreversible coma are approached. The effort put forth to sustain biological life displays this. By keeping these individuals alive others primarily draw 'on' their potentiality, but they also draw it 'out' by acting like these individuals still have possibilities. Dasein may even try liberating those in irreversible coma by

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43 All of these modes of interacting are presented as metaphor. According to this someone in irreversible coma, especially if s/he is mechanically dependent, can be said to 'want' to die physiologically, because that is what s/he will readily do if left alone.
'giving them back' their Being-Dasein through acknowledging them as such. However, this is misdirected acknowledgement.

Dasein expresses 'solicitude' for others through exhibiting 'care' while 'leaping-in' or 'leaping-ahead'. The "Being of Dasein in general is to be defined" as 'care' (B.T.157). 'Care' is the phenomenology of Dasein as a whole, answering the question about what Dasein's fundamental 'Being' is. Dasein is essentially 'caring' because it 'cares' about its own Being necessarily. Even when lost in everydayness, Dasein cannot avoid 'caring'. This is how Dasein interacts with others and thus a part of its 'Being-with'. In fact:

This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care - that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a "what" with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it. (B.T.158)

Clearly those in irreversible coma cannot 'become transparent' to themselves through the 'care' of Dasein. Nor can they become 'free for it'. These individuals cannot 'become' anything. They have no possibilities other than logical or technical ones. They will die the biological death because human beings cannot avoid this, but they do not 'have' this possibility the way Dasein does.

The only 'possibilities' those in irreversible coma

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44 Being in irreversible coma as I define it is a possibility for a human body, but it is not a possibility for Dasein. It is a way Dasein cannot be.
have are projected onto them by others. This happens in a number of ways. For instance, although it can never happen, someone may truly believe such an individual will awaken. That does not mean another can give someone in coma a possibility. Any 'possibility' this other 'gives' clearly belongs to the giver and not the intended receiver. The 'possibility' never transfers at all.\footnote{Dasein does not open up possibilities for another. Any possibility appearing to transfer was already contained in the other.}

Accepting that possibilities are transferable diminishes all boundaries. One could visualize a LaMarkian placing her/his pet ape on a ventilator and waiting anxiously for it to evolve, and being quick to condemn this 'imagined possibility' as absurd. Nonetheless, there is as much chance for the ape to evolve as there is for someone in irreversible coma to awaken. Thus believing this will happen is equally absurd. We are just more hesitant about acknowledging this.

Dasein is the only Being not getting its possibilities through use by others. As Heidegger tell us:

\begin{quote}
Dasein does not have at all the kind of Being of something ready-to-hand-within-the-world. The togetherness of an entity of the kind which Dasein is 'in running its course' until that 'course' has been completed, is not constituted by a 'continuing' piecing on of entities which, somehow and somewhere, are ready-to-hand already in their own right. (B.T.287)
\end{quote}

As I have shown, those in irreversible coma are often 'used'. Furthermore, they may be kept biologically alive
because this fosters hope they might recover, in which case
their presence is 'used' for the consolation of others.
This happens when loved ones will not accept the grim prog-
nosis, or when health-care professionals maintain the in-
dividual for personal or medico-legal reasons.46

Often those who love(d) someone in irreversible coma
try retaining them 'in the world' as long as they can (as
unintentional means to their own ends).47 Thus individuals
in irreversible coma are placed within the category of
'things' of value. Conceptual confusion causes this. What
others wish to sustain is not a living corpse. They are
simply unaware that is all there is left once Dasein dies.
When others look at someone in irreversible coma, they see
'living' being, not 'dead' Dasein. Dasein can also be
'used' and remain oblivious to it (as with cases of un-
requited love). However, what differentiates the 'using' of
Dasein from the 'using' of someone in irreversible coma is
that the former has the possibility of stopping this; the

46 Perhaps the health-care professional sees someone in
irreversible coma as either a failure of the health-care
system or of him/herself. Or s/he may fear facing his/her
own mortality and postpone the biological death of another
to avoid acknowledging his/her own finitude. Thirdly, someone
in irreversible coma exhibits the limitations of medical
science, something the health-care professional may be un-
willing to accept. Thus the health-care professional 'flees'
into the 'world of health-care' and hides in its everyday-
ness.

47 Often those in irreversible coma are maintained for this
reason. As long as individuals in irreversible coma remain
biologically 'alive', some claim there is hope for recovery
and those who love(d) them cling to this as long as possible.
latter does not.

His/her usability reduces someone in irreversible coma to the level of readiness-to-hand. Yet Heidegger states:

The kind of Being which equipment possesses - in which it manifests itself in its own right - we call "readiness-to-hand". Only because equipment this 'Being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. (B.T.98)

Individuals in irreversible coma are also so manipulable as to be "at our disposal". While not a piece of 'equipment' in the same way hammers and ventilators are, s/he is usable as such for experimentation or research, or as a receptical housing organs for donation.

Heidegger adds:

No matter how sharply we just look at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form it takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. (Ibid)

We can scrutinize someone in irreversible coma carefully and be unaware of his/her readiness-to-hand until we begin 'using' them. We can even convince ourselves we treat them as Dasein, but our actions dismiss our claims. Someone in irreversible coma is 'for' others, never 'for' him/herself.
Conclusion

The essence of Dasein is Being-in-the-world in a particular way and Being-with others. Dasein fundamentally 'cares' about its Being and about itself as a being, and it 'cares' about the others it is with. Because it is born in a particular place and time, thus having a certain historicity and facticity, Dasein has limited possibilities; however, it 'has' these possibilities in a way no other being does. Furthermore, Being-aware is a possibility for Dasein although it can choose this possibility, or it can ignore it. Dasein defines its world by using the things around it. Dasein 'sees' things 'as' what they are by discovering their readiness-to-hand through this use. Therefore, in order to Be 'Dasein', higher brain functions must be intact; not because consciousness is necessary for Being-Dasein, but because the essential requirements for 'Dasein' cannot be met when an individual is only capable of the most primitive body functions.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that Dasein is more than a physical structure with a certain biological makeup, happening to be present in the world. He says that:

> Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein's Being; it is an existential. So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' an entity which is present-at-hand. (B.T.79)

Someone in irreversible coma cannot fulfill the requirements for Dasein, even though there was a time when s/he could and
Historically we have used various terms for the essence of 'human'-ness; like 'soul', 'person-hood', 'rational being', or 'Homo Sapien'. However, when followed through upon these designations fail to address something lying between 'biological life' and 'the life of the mind'. 'Soul' is a spiritual entity, capable of existence independent of the body in which it resides during its 'time on earth'. What 'soul' is prior to birth or conception plays out in different ways, but whether or not it 'exists' before biological life, it always continues after biological death. While preserving a sense of continuity and continuation for a particular kind of 'self', this concept posits some ethereal entity not requiring embodiment. Since the soul never dies, when biological or brain death occurs is arbitrary. 'Soul' does not help us answer difficult ethical questions surrounding someone in irreversible coma.

Another way we try to access 'human'-ness is through a designation of 'person-hood', focusing on issues of agency like responsibility, accountability, and blame. However, these are all 'mental' activities, dragging problems of motivation and intentionality in their wake. Traditional arguments concerning rights of, and respect for, persons, often draw on some semblence of the designation of 'person-hood'. Someone in irreversible coma has lost the ability to act, but we still feel morally obligated to treat the in-
dividual with respect for having once been an independent and autonomous agent. Ultimately we are unable to dis-ambiguate what all this means. So we argue over whether this is a person or not and what is in his/her best inter-
est: and usually biological death occurs before we can sort through the rhetorical rubble.

If we equate 'human'-ness with 'rational being', 'ra-
tional being', we avoid a few of the problems surrounding the two kinds of 'human'-ness (that which includes Being-Dasein and purely biological 'life'). Since individuals in irreversible coma are brain dead, they cannot be 'rational' anymore. That does not mean they have become irrational. Instead they are a-rational because potentiality for any cognitive thinking is gone. Accepting that this is the measure for Being-human makes questions surrounding those in irreversible coma easier. As rational being they are dead, and thus maintaining them is not necessary. However, saying this is our way of Being harbors its own problems. Dis-
cussions of 'rationality' may supply us with ways to talk about all kinds of mental activities, but in the process of this talking we ignore what underlies these things: the primordial way of Being that we have. Even human beings we call 'irrational' on this model function in the world in ways other beings cannot.

Equating 'human'-ness with 'Homo Sapien' lets us avoid the problems inherent in dealing with issues of spiritual-
ity, psychology and cognition. However, this equation carries its own dilemma. 'Homo Sapien' can designate both 'living Dasein' and 'dead Dasein, living corpse'. If this is the only necessary condition for Being-human, one discovers or discounts 'human'-ness at the bedside or under a microscope. Neurophysiologists even offer us a promissory note for dealing with all these issues in a biochemical laboratory.

In this mode, we simply see the individual in irreversible coma as a member of the species Homo Sapien. And we evaluate him/her according to his/her ability to fulfill the biological requirements as such (although those in irreversible coma vary in that some require mechanical support and others do not). Certain body systems may work more efficiently than others, but individuals in irreversible coma make urine, metabolize, digest nutrients and have obtainable vital signs. We may bicker about whether biological death occurs when the brain dies or when the heart stops, but in the meanwhile Being-human is still present; Being-Dasein is not. We cannot make decisions about the 'human'-ness of individuals in irreversible coma with criteria for 'Homo Sapien' because it gets us nowhere. Obviously we cannot advance beyond the biological questions.

The analysis of Dasein lets us go to a meta-level of all these conditions for Being-human. When we bracket away spirituality, rationality, agency, and biology, there is
still something remaining essential to our way of Being. Exploring Dasein shows us what we have left out. When we encounter someone in irreversible coma, we are not sure how to approach them. Clearly something fundamental is gone, but each time we try defining what that is, we come up short. Whatever else we claim, those in irreversible coma have died as Dasein. Therefore, they fail to fulfill the most primordial requirements for the Being of 'human'-ness.
Bibliography


