
For the Heideggerian critique of epistemological foundationalism see Charles Guignon, Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1983), esp. pp. 150-82.


Modern philosophy turns away from things in the world and zeroes in on the human self that grasps them in thought and transforms them in action. The self becomes the repository of both their truth and their ultimate purposes. By the same token, the human self is given the status of the self-grounding ground of reality. In this new and exalted status, the self ceases to be viewed as part and parcel of some independent order of things. Beginning with Descartes's cogito, the self withdraws from the world and falls back on its own experiences and thoughts. The subjectivity of the self supplies both the point of departure and the validating ground for various philosophical attempts at a reconstruction of our knowledge of the world.

One of Heidegger's aims in Being and Time was to question and to overcome this subjectivist tradition of modern philosophy. I hope to show, however, that in Division II of Being and Time Heidegger reveals himself as an heir to that tradition and to its model of the human self.

THE HUMAN SELF

In the very first section of Division II (BT 274-8) Heidegger makes two claims whose importance to the entire philosophical project he is pursuing in his opus magnum cannot be overestimated. In the first...
place, since the aim of this project is to investigate the meaning of being in general, and since the meaning of being in general is disclosed by Dasein, the ultimate clarification of the meaning of being demands an appropriately ultimate ("primordial") interpretation of Dasein. In other terms, we cannot be satisfied with this or that partial or approximate view of Dasein; we must achieve the grasp of Dasein as a whole. In the second place, and as we shall see more clearly later, from the present vantage point "one thing has become unmistakable: our existential analysis of Dasein up till now cannot lay claim to primordiality. Its fore-having never included more than the inauthentic Being of Dasein, and of Dasein as less than a whole [als unganzes]" [BT 276]. The entire Division I, then, must now be considered profoundly incomplete, since it failed to give us the required insight into both the totality and the authenticity of Dasein [BT 276].

Even at this, still provisional and still quite general stage of Heidegger's analysis, the joint appearance of "totality" and "authenticity" can be given some justification. For the authentic life [in contrast to the inauthentic life] is one in which not just this or that aspect of Dasein, but Dasein as a whole, comes to expression. And if, as it will soon become clear, Dasein's authenticity requires the lucid acceptance of one's own death, it is precisely because Dasein's totality can be revealed only in its being-toward-death.

This last statement can first be taken in its obvious and least controversial sense. As long as a human individual is alive — as long as he continues to take a stand on what it means to be — his identity is not a settled matter, for it is open to constant revision and reinterpretation. At every stage of my life I can always take this rather than that option open to me — and, in so doing, not only do I determine what the course of my life will be from now on, but I also reshape and redefine the meaning of what my life was all about until now. This is so because the options that I take shed light on what was important to me all along, on the endurance and the strength of my commitments (or lack thereof), and so on. To shift back to Heidegger's terminology: as long as Dasein is, it can choose its possibilities; hence, as long as this "ahead-of-itself" item in the structure of Dasein is not extinguished, Dasein will be characterized by a "lack of totality" [BT 279]. And since death does extinguish — ultimately and irrevocably — man's ability to choose his possibilities, death puts to rest the ongoing process of reshaping and redefining an individual's identity. What his life was all about becomes now a settled matter.

So far, however, this characterization of death has been offered from a third-person standpoint, and this cannot be satisfying to Heidegger. We must ask about "the ontological meaning of dying of the person who dies, as a possibility-of-Being which belongs to his Being" [BT 283]. Elsewhere (HCT 308–9), Heidegger spells out in more detail both the thinking behind this requirement and the difficulty it immediately leads to. Since Dasein is defined as being in each instance mine, the emergence of death as totalizing my life must appear from within my own first-person standpoint. But this requirement seems impossible to satisfy, for as long as I envision things from my own standpoint, I have not yet reached my totality, and, conversely, when I have reached my totality, there is no standpoint of mine from which to gain the experience of that totality. To put it plainly, if my identity is in principle incomplete while I am alive, then I cannot see what it would even mean to say, "This is what my life was all about," unless I construe my death as an event witnessed and interpreted by other people. But by doing this I eo ipso abandon the first-person account of my own death.

But the dilemma we have just noted — either I am, and then any talk about the completion of my identity is meaningless from my own standpoint, or such talk is meaningful, but then it is not conducted from my own standpoint — is a false alternative. It results entirely from our conception of death as a present-at-hand item, that is, as an event within the world [BT 280]. I have assumed that in order to gain the first-person sense of what it would mean to say (irrevocably), "This is what my life was all about," I would have to wait until that event of my death actually takes place; the insurmountable alternative we have seen to emerge is then a foregone conclusion. But this need not be so. To be sure, I cannot grasp just what my complete identity will be. But I nevertheless know, even from within my own standpoint, how to view my life as something I have the potential to realize.

In effect, I do not have to wait until my life runs its course to gain a sense of being exposed to, and defined by, the power of death. For the cogito sum, we remember from the epigraph, must be restated as moribundus sum: I am only in that I find myself, at every moment
of my life, powerless to escape the possibility of dying at precisely that particular moment (and not only tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, etc.). As will be shown later, this is the one truth that I cannot doubt, though I may try to conceal it and cover it up. And as we shall see shortly, my ability to doubt all truths is itself dependent on that unshakable truth about my being always totally vulnerable to the power of death.

At the same time — and due to the very same circumstance of my total vulnerability to death — the complete identity that I envision as attributable to me remains my identity. For my first-person sense of death establishes my life not only as a totality, but also as uniquely mine — that is, not as an intersection of social and natural roles and functions that I share, or may share, with others.

Heidegger's justification of this important connection — death gives my life its “totality” and its “mineness” (Erscheinung) as well — is simple [BT 283–4]. Being a member of the public world I can be easily replaced (“represented”) by another person. Somebody else could have filled the position I occupy in society; somebody else could have been the husband of the woman I married, the father of her children, and so on. Now this possibility of being “represented” by another individual breaks down in one case and in one case only: in the case of my death. It is true, of course, that when we speak loosely we can easily point to a number of other cases in which, apparently, our personal presence is indispensable; no one, it seems, can replace me at that operating table when the surgeon is about to perform an operation on me, or in that imposing office of the dean, who expects from me an explanation of my repeated absences from the university functions, and so on. But it is also easy to see why such counterexamples can have no bearing whatsoever on Heidegger’s point about death, for I can always avoid the experiences I have just described: I can decide to take my chances without the surgery, or in that imposing office of the dean, who expects from me an explanation of my repeated absences from the university functions, and so on. My presence or absence on those occasions is a matter of my own choice: if I think that I have lived long enough anyway, or if I don’t care much about keeping my job, I will not find it difficult, and certainly not impossible, to miss my appointments with both surgeon and the dean. But in no case can I avoid appearing before the tribunal of death. In all other cases where it seems that no one can replace me, changing my own goals will make me capable of avoiding those experiences. But there is no goal and no strategy that would allow me to maneuver myself out of my rendezvous with death.

We can understand now why Heidegger attributes to death the power of both totalizing and individualizing Dasein. Death totalizes me, for due to death my identity will become complete. Death individualizes me, for it imposes upon me the one and only experience that is inescapably mine. Thus, “if ‘ending,’ as dying, is constitutive for Dasein’s totality, then the Being of this wholeness itself must be conceived as an existential phenomenon which is in each case one’s own” [BT 284, my emphasis]. But although these two functions of death — to complete my identity and to establish it as uniquely mine — are inseparable, they nevertheless remain distinct. Since somebody else could have filled in for me with each and every one of the experiences making up my life history, all of these experiences are uniquely mine only because that life history as a whole is individuated independently of them by its ultimate term: by death. Of the latter, it can only be said that it is “in every case mine insofar as it is at all” [BT 284]. Thus, our first-person encounter with the menace of death, demands the repudiation of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles: I am this particular person not on account of the totality of determinations attributable to me, but due to the “mineness” of death, where the mineness at issue is an undervived and primitive term distinguished only by its sheer “thisness,” and not by any property or set of properties.

We can now see with more clarity Heidegger’s reliance on the modern idea of subjectivity, indeed his profound kinship with Descartes. For both philosophers, the human individual is thrown back upon his own self by a sense of total powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of an ultimate threat (of, respectively, the evil demon and death). I shall return to this idea later. But there is an immediate difficulty standing in the way of that parallel, just noted, between Descartes and Heidegger. If in Descartes the threat of the evil demon seems indeed inescapable (at least before the self’s discovery of God), it is because the demon is said to deceive me constantly. Thus, the demon gives me no respite and no escape; his power holds me in its grip without the slightest letup or slackening. And it seems equally obvious, at least to common sense, that death does not have this sort of power over me. I can be said to be under death’s real threat when I wake up in a hospital bed, after a complicated and
dangerous operation. But I seem to confront no such threat at all when, healthy, vigorous, and fresh from my yearly medical checkup, I find myself walking leisurely on a sandy beach. Death does not seem to threaten me "constantly." And so it follows that the "mineness" I was said to acquire through the exposure to death's menace cannot be one of the core characteristics of human selfhood. Yet such was precisely the status attributed to this characteristic at the very beginning of Heidegger's analytic of Dasein.

The difficulty is genuine, but it stems from a misunderstanding of Heidegger's interpretation of death. The difficulty is raised from within the commonsensical view of death, while for Heidegger, the commonsensical view of death is a gross distortion of the actual state of affairs. When that actual state of affairs - that is, the true face of death - is brought out and articulated, the threat of death reveals itself as being indeed constant and all-pervasive.

Heidegger's analytic of death takes off with a reminder that "care is the basic state of Dasein" [BT 293]. For if death is to have the constancy and the all-pervasiveness required by its function of individualizing the human self, that status of death must be made clear in terms of the very basic state of Dasein. This is indeed the route Heidegger now takes. He has already, at the earlier stages of his analytic of human finitude, defined care as composed of "existence," "facticity," and "falling." He will now show how all these three aspects of care reveal the constancy and the all-pervasiveness of man's exposure to the threat of death.

But the essential connection between care and death can be grasped on a more general level as well. Dasein is care, for Dasein is always concerned about its being. My life (both in its "that" and in its "what") is not something indifferent to me, something that leaves me cold, as it were; on the contrary, it is something that matters to me. Now my life matters to me - indeed must matter to me - only because I am aware that I don't have it "forever" and "once for all"; life matters only because I am aware that it can be snatched away from me by the power of death. And so care is Dasein's basic state only because Dasein is, and understands itself as being, a mortal creature: "I am this I can die at any moment. . . . I myself am this constant and utmost possibility of myself, namely, to be no more. Care, which is essentially care about the being of Dasein, at its innermost is nothing but this being-ahead-of-itself in

the uttermost possibility of its own can-be" [HCT 313]. Conversely, just as Dasein's (basic) state of care is dependent on Dasein's sense of being a mortal creature so, too, "as regards its ontological possibility, dying is grounded in care" [BT 296]. In other terms, the mere conception of a mortal creature that would remain unaffected by, and indifferent to, its own perishability is not at all logically contradictory. If death moves us to show concern about our life, it is because man's "basic state" is indeed care - and not some sort of total obliviousness to his own finitude. To summarize, if we were not threatened by death, our basic state would not be care; but if our basic state were not care, our death would not be felt as threatening. Care and the sense of one's mortality are thus, to use one of Heidegger's favorite terms, "equiprimordial."

Now since care is the basic state of Dasein - that is, the state in which Dasein always is, the state that underlies all of Dasein's experiences - and since care implies one's exposure to the menace of death, this exposure must be just as constant and all-pervasive as care itself. For if I could remove the menace of death from a certain stretch of my life, then at least within that stretch I would not have to worry about my life being snatched away from me [I could say, "I will think about crossing that bridge when I get to it - when I get sick, old, and so on."] and thus care would cease to permeate all of my experiences. If, then, care is to remain the "basic state" of Dasein, the threat of death must be constant to Dasein.

Now the constancy of death's threat to Dasein reveals itself with a particular clarity in the first and most fundamental aspect of care: in Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself, projected toward a field of its possibilities. Death is constant insofar as it is the only pure possibility of Dasein, that is, the sort of possibility free of any admixture of actuality and of necessity as well. Ordinarily, Heidegger argues [BT 305-7], we lack any understanding of such a pure possibility - including the possibility of our own dying - for our control-oriented stance toward the world is bent on reducing every possibility to a predictable and manageable event or process. Owing to this stance, possibility loses its character of possibility and it becomes possible only "relatively to" certain circumstances and conditions. A possibility whose occurrence is thus made dependent on the actuality of such and such conditions becomes something less than a possibility to the precise degree to which it becomes more connected with actual-
ity. To appear in all the purity of its character \textit{qua} possibility, a possibility must thus be equally possible under any conditions whatever.

But this does not mean that such a possibility becomes transformed into a 	extit{necessity}. There are two kinds of necessity to be considered, and rejected, in this connection. If we try to connect [or, worse still, to reduce] the possibility of dying to some \textit{real} necessity produced by the operation of causal laws in our universe, then we are once again on our way to depriving possibility of its quality of possibility by making it dependent on something foreign and external to it. If it is necessary that I die at some point given certain facts and laws of human biology then, by the same token, I will not die unless and until all the required conditions have actually taken place. But then I can anticipate [at least to some degree] when and how I am likely to die and I can make my plans accordingly. So if death is viewed as occurring due to a real necessity, then death is not always equally possible – and then its character of pure possibility is, once again, glossed over. On the other hand – and this is the second sense of necessity to be considered here and rejected – the constancy and the all-pervasiveness of the threat of death to us is not a matter of \textit{logical} necessity either. Given certain general facts about the human condition, the threat of death must indeed shadow every individual at every stage of his life. But it is not logically necessary that these general facts about the human condition be such as they are.

The all-pervasiveness and omnipresence of death's threat to an individual is captured by Heidegger with the term "indefiniteness" \textit{(Unbestimmtheit)}. The possibility of death is indefinite, for it is not confined to any particular moment or time span. The possibility of death can materialize at any moment. Furthermore, since Heidegger argues [in § 70 of \textit{Being and Time}] that space is encountered from within the temporal project of Dasein, the indefiniteness of death's "when" [BT 302] implies its lack of connection with any particular "here" or "there." This is why the threat disclosed in anxiety – the threat of death [BT 310] – is perceived as coming at us from "\textit{nowhere}" [BT 231]. Now, since due to its indefiniteness, the possibility of death is disclosed to us as a "constant threat" [BT 310], the parallel we have drawn between the threat of the evil demon in Descartes and the threat of death in Heidegger is vindicated. Both threats are indeed constant and all-pervasive, both threats reveal to the individual the powerlessness and the vulnerability of his condition.

But there is an even stronger kinship to be discovered between the \textit{cogito sum} of Descartes and the existential \textit{moribundus sum} of Heidegger. Insofar as I view myself in the light of the possibility of being misled by the evil demon, I suspend my reliance on the truths of everyday life; but at the same time, I discover the unshakable truth of my subjectivity: "There is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, who ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think I am something." In a similar vein, my coming face to face with the [indefinite] possibility of death not only forces me to abandon the ordinary, everyday framework of intelligibility and truth, but at the same time leads me to discover the unshakable certainty and truth of my \textit{sum}. Let us consider these two steps one by one.

In the first place, then, insofar as anxiety brings an individual face to face with the indefiniteness of death's threat to him, his public world is suddenly discovered as failing him. For the public world cannot protect an individual against death, and so this world as a whole proves to be unreliable. The tie between the individual and his public world is broken; the individual does not "find" himself in the latter, the meanings and the truths making up the fabric of the world become alien to the individual: "anxiety . . . takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the world and the way things have been publicly interpreted" [BT 232].

But – in the second place – insofar as the individual thus withdraws his assent to the intelligibility and truth of the public interpretation of reality, he discovers and falls back upon the unshakable evidence of the existential \textit{moribundus sum}. Not only is this evidence subjectively "certain" [BT 309] but – just as in the case of the Cartesian \textit{cogito} – it has "truth" as well [BT 309]. To be sure, Heidegger warns us explicitly [BT 309] not to attribute to the certainty and truth of death the character of "apodictic evidence." But it is even more important to pay close attention to what he means by this warning, and how he justifies it. The passage is worth quoting in full:
Dasein must first have lost itself in the factual circumstances [Sachverhalte] [this can be one of care's own tasks and possibilities] if it is to obtain the pure objectivity – that is to say, the indifference – of apodictic evidence. If being certain in relation to death does not have this character, this does not mean that it is of a lower grade, but that it does not belong at all to the graded order of the kinds of evidence we can have about the present-at-hand.

Holding death for true [death is just one's own] shows another kind of certainty, and is more primordial than any certainty which relates to entities encountered within-the-world, or to formal objects, for it is certain of Being-in-the-world. As such, holding death for true does not demand just one definite kind of behavior in Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence. [BT 309-10]

In this crucial passage, Heidegger clearly spells out several things. In the first place, whereas the certainty and the truth of death should not indeed be confused with the “apodictic evidence” that characterizes our mental grasp of “formal objects” – that is, of objects of pure mathematics or else of the pure essences of things – death's omnipresent threat to us does not have, for that reason, a “lower” kind of evidence and truth. Quite the contrary, as Heidegger leads us to understand in the last part of the passage, our “holding death for true” permeates all of our attitudes and stances, while the truth attributed to, say, the axioms and theorems of mathematics is attributed in a special “theoretical” attitude, which – Heidegger argues in Being and Time – is not even basic and primordial to Dasein. To put it plainly, under certain circumstances, Dasein can withdraw its endorsement of the intelligibility and truth of “formal objects,” while under no circumstances whatever is it possible for Dasein to liberate itself from the gnawing sense of its mortality.6 And, in effect, the very same anxiety that alienates Dasein from the meanings and the truths of the public world – and hence also from the meaning and truth of “formal objects” – brings Dasein face to face with its moribundus sum. The evidence and the truth of that proposition are unique in that all other forms of evidence and truth are objects of assent or doubt performed by a creature that, throughout all those acts of assent and doubt, continues to acknowledge [authentically or inauthentically] its own mortality.

Now insofar as the evidence of Descartes's cogito is interpreted as a case of “apodictic evidence” accompanying our mental grasp of a present-at-hand item – of our own ego – then indeed there can be no analogy between Descartes's cogito sum and Heidegger's moribundus sum. In addition, there can be no doubt that this is how Descartes's claims were often understood and developed; and it is also true that there is ample support for this sort of interpretation in Descartes's own writings. Not only is the “ego” of the ego cogito interpreted as a [mental] substance, but our cognitive mode of access to that substance often exhibits the character of an “apodictic evidence” enjoyed by mathematical entities.

But there is another, and more correct, way of analyzing Descartes's cogito, and this analysis brings him very close to Heidegger's thinking on the sum. Jaakko Hintikka argued that Descartes's fundamental and self-founding principle has in fact a performatory character.6 The “I am” is neither deduced from the “I think” nor logically true all by itself. Rather, when I say, “I do not exist,” this sentence (or thought) is “existentially inconsistent” with my uttering this sentence or entertaining that thought.7 What implies my existence, then, is not the thought itself, but my performance of the act of thinking that particular thought [or any other thought denying my being]. Similarly, if we are prepared to agree with Heidegger’s dictum “The MORIBUNDUS first gives the SUM its sense,” then every attitude and stance of mine – including my very attempts, in whatever form, to deny my mortality – testifies to my existence as a mortal self. The structure of the argument is the same in both Descartes and Heidegger.

TIME AND HISTORY

Our endorsement of that Heideggerian dictum “The MORIBUNDUS first gives the SUM its sense” allows us to see why the instantaneousity of the Cartesian cogito must be replaced with the inherently temporal character of Dasein. Mine is a finite, limited existence – the sort of existence that, inevitably, must meet its ultimate end. And this is another way of saying that I am aware of having a certain definite destiny ahead of me. Furthermore, my sense of that future destiny is instrumental in bringing me face to face with my past. For when I say that my life is bound to come to its end, I imply that I am a determinate self, a self endowed with a particular life history, with such and such social and cultural background, and so on. All of these
items refer to my past and all of them come alive for me as making up my identity when I confront the finite future. This is why my sense of my past is dependent on my sense of that finite future [BT 373, 435].

Since death is revealed in anxiety and since my sense of death as my ultimate end imposes upon my experiences their temporal structure, it is only to be expected that the latter, too, will have its roots in anxiety. And, in effect, Heidegger speaks explicitly of the temporaity of anxiety, which he carefully distinguishes from both the inauthentic and authentic forms of temporality:

In contrast to this making-present which is not held on to [this is the inauthentic present, the present in which Dasein loses and disperses itself], the Present of anxiety is held on to. . . . But even though the Present of anxiety is held on to, it does not as yet have the character of the moment of vision which temporalizes itself in a resolution. [BT 394]

This bringing-back has neither the character of an evasive forgetting nor that of a remembering. But just as little does anxiety imply that one has already taken over one's existence into one's resolution and done so by a repeating. [BT 394]

In the first of these passages Heidegger opposes both the inauthentic present (the "making-present") and the authentic present (the "moment of vision") to the present of anxiety. In the second passage, he draws a similar contrast between the inauthentic past (evasive forgetting, remembering) and the authentic past (repeating), on the one hand, and the past of anxiety, on the other hand.

The temporality of anxiety is the underlying ground of both authentic and inauthentic temporality. Whereas inauthentic temporality expresses Dasein's flight from its anxious anticipation of death, authentic temporality is built upon a stance in which one confronts what is revealed in the temporality of anxiety and expresses this in one's attitude toward one's entire life, from birth to death.

Let us try to get some grip on the basic concepts with the aid of which Heidegger attempts to articulate the structure of human temporalizing. Let us begin with inauthentic temporality, for this form of temporalizing represents the understanding of time characteristic of the ordinary, commonsensical Dasein. Since the entire commonsensical way of life expresses Dasein's attempt to turn away from the ever-present menace of death, the inauthentic future takes the form of a [hopeful, fearful, etc.] "awaiting" and "expecting" [BT 386–7]. In the general strategy of an inauthentic Dasein, our sense of radical vulnerability and powerlessness becomes glossed over and made manageable by being projected onto the world. Whatever threatens to our existence there may be, they are now viewed as threatening us from within the world. In conformity with this overall strategy, our entire future is seen as a pursuit of a secure acceptance by the world of the "they" (das Man). This understanding of the future entails a selective, highly utilitarian attitude toward one's past. Since successes and failures on the road of the inauthentic future are defined by the trends and pressures of the public world, an inauthentic Dasein's past will be disclosed through "forgetting." An individual will repress and relegate into oblivion such parts of his past as may prove detrimental to his search for success in the rapidly changing world of the "they" with all of this world's trends, fashions, and cliches. Conversely, whatever it is that this type of individual retains from his past only what serves his pursuit of a secure acceptance by the public world, he remembers A only insofar as he forgets B, or C, or D. Finally, the overall attitude of "expecting" one's future and of "forgetting" one's past shapes one's inauthentic stance toward the present, the stance of "making-present." The inauthentic Dasein's search for security is reflected in a collection of entities — of persons, things, goods, and so on — with which this sort of Dasein surrounds itself (and thus "makes present" these entities) in order to gain a sense of having a place within the reassuring world of the "they."

In authentic temporality, the temporality of anxiety is incorporated into Dasein's self-interpretation. In the "anticipated" (authentic) future, an individual faces up to the ever-threatening menace of death as the meaning of what lies ahead. By thus confronting the limitedness and the finiteness of his existence, he finds himself brought back to his past. This authentic sense of acknowledging one's past is gained in "repetition." Finally, in the authentic present's "moment of vision" (Augenblick) an individual can open up to the present realities of his life, since his abandonment of the single-minded pursuit of social acceptance allows him to adopt a free, nonmanipulative attitude toward his present situation.

Viewed merely as items in the temporality of Dasein, the future,
past, and present are disclosed in “ecstases” — in Dasein’s ways of reaching out toward its death, its roots, and its surroundings. The ordering of these ecstases is prior to and independent of any temporal chronology [BT 375-6]. The ecstatic future is not “later” than the ecstatic present, for at any moment of my life I am equally vulnerable to the power of death, and hence that vulnerability of mine is always an actual, live issue for me. My past, too, is not something that has simply elapsed and is now left behind, something existing “no longer now – but earlier” [BT 375]. This is so because my past is nothing other than my “thrownness” — that is, my rootedness in a culture, my already established preferences, skills, habits, and so on — and it is precisely in terms of this thrownness that my present experiences get to be organized and endowed with a meaning. Nor does the ecstasis of the present derive its name from its position within a chronological order. In this ecstasis, in this “being-alongside [entities encountered within-the-world],” I am “present” to those entities and I thus allow them to “have presence” to me — in the sense of being available to me, of being at my disposal.

Just as the ordering of the ecstases is independent of any chronological relations, so too the becoming of the ecstases (thus, the present becomes the past, the future becomes the present, etc.) is not a chronologically determinable alteration either. Indeed, temporality’s “essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstases” [BT 377, my emphasis]. And this dynamic, process-like character of temporality both precedes and conditions all our notions of temporal flow as chronologically understood.

But then how can Heidegger derive our ordinary, chronologically understood notion of time from the temporality of Dasein? We have already seen how the temporality of anxiety gets perverted into inauthentic temporality — into the temporality of a Dasein unwilling to confront its ontological powerlessness and vulnerability. This form of temporality is at the source of time as ordinarily understood: “ ‘Time’ as ordinarily understood . . . arises from inauthentic temporality” [BT 374]. We must now try to understand this claim in more detail.

Human temporality in general is mapped onto the world through the horizontal schemata of the three temporal ecstases. We have already noted that the ecstases are Dasein’s ways of being “outside itself.” This last expression includes an implicit reference to the horizontal-schematic structure of the ecstases: “There belongs to each ecstasis a ‘whither’ to which one is carried away” [BT 416]. Now this “whither” is nothing other than the worldly counterpart of each ecstasis. For example, the horizontal schema of the past is defined as “that in the face of which” Dasein has been thrown. This means that my relationship to my past presupposes a reference to a certain condition of the world: to the society and the institutions within which I was born and raised, to my family environment, to my childhood friends, and so on. My past is thus mirrored in the past of the world. Heidegger gives a similar account of the link between the ecstases of the present and the future, on the one hand, and their own worldly counterparts, on the other hand.

Due to its grounding in human temporality, the world gains a temporal structure of its own. However, we are still one step short of accounting for the emergence of the temporal chronology. For example, “that in the face of which Dasein has been thrown” [the horizontal schema of the past] does not yet mean “earlier” than the horizontal schema of the present. But this still outstanding gap is rendered irrelevant within the context of the existential analytic of Dasein. For Dasein’s temporality is schematized onto the world due to Dasein’s practical, everyday absorption within the world, and this practical, everyday stance of Dasein imposes on it the necessity of “reckoning” with time, of taking time into account in all of our daily plans and projects [BT 456-7]. And in order to respond to that necessity of reckoning with time we must date actions and events that take place in it. This is why the horizons and the schemata of the ecstases must be assigned a chronological standing vis-à-vis one another. And this is also why the origin of the temporal chronology must be looked for in the commonsensical, inauthentic temporality of Dasein. “In the ‘then’ concern expresses itself as awaiting [i.e., as the inauthentic future], in the ‘on that former occasion,’ as retaining [as the inauthentic past]” [BT 458]. Only now can the horizons and the schemata of temporality receive the chronological significance they have been lacking so far: “The horizon for the retaining which expresses itself in the ‘on that former occasion’ is the ‘earlier’; the horizon for the ‘now’ is the ‘today’ ” [BT 459]. From this stage on, when I think of the circumstances and conditions in the face of which I was thrown [the horizontal schema of the past], I think of them as being “earlier” than such and such circumstances and condi-
tions that I confront right now or am about to confront in the near future, and so on.

The substitution of the moribundus sum for Descartes's cogito sum had proved to be instrumental in replacing the instantaneousity of the Cartesian cogito with the temporality of Dasein. A further implication of this substitution is the rediscovery of the historical dimension of the human self. The reason is still the same: when I anticipate and endure the menace of death I find myself to be a limited, determinate self, and this means also a self with certain definite historical roots, a self with a "heritage" and a "fate" (BT 335). But in thus imposing upon Dasein a historical dimension, death works jointly with several other items in the structure of Dasein. "Only if death, guilt, conscience, freedom and finitude reside together equimodially in the Being of an entity as they do in care, can that entity exist in the mode of fate, that is to say only then can it be historical in the very depths of its existence" (BT 337).

Let us first say something about the "call of conscience" [Ruf des Gewissens], which imposes on the plain, ordinary Dasein a "demand" (BT 311) to turn away from the conformisms of the "they" and to live up to its authenticity and wholeness. What does the ordinary, everyday Dasein hear in the message delivered in the call of conscience? The answer to this question represents the next stage in Heidegger's deepening hermeneutics of conscience. In the message delivered in the call, the ordinary Dasein is told about its own guilt.

But while Dasein, as the addressee and the bearer of this message of guilt, is indeed the ordinary Dasein, the guilt in question is not ordinary guilt. The latter is always specific and determinate: I am guilty of violating traffic regulations, I am guilty of having crossed that intersection at the red light, I am guilty of not paying child support, or I am as a driver am guilty of violating traffic regulations, and so on. Under such circumstances the predicate "guilty" would not apply to me qua merely being, but qua being only this or that. But the call of conscience tells me I am guilty insofar as I (merely) am.

Now Dasein is guilty in its [mere] being, for, to begin with, "Dasein is not itself the basis of being" (BT 300). While I can achieve a measure of mastery and control over various items making up my environment, I can achieve no mastery and no control at all over the basis of my life. Thus, for Dasein to exist means "never to have power over one's ownmost Being from the ground up. This 'not' belongs to the existential meaning of 'thrownness'" (BT 330); and therefore our thrownness is shot through with "nullity" (Nichtigkeit). This connection of thrownness with nullity is also discovered through one's anxious anticipation of death: "The 'nothing' with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death" (BT 356).

In effect, in order to recognize myself as being thrown into death, I must come to see myself as a finite, limited, and hence a determinate self. What makes me such a determinate, concrete self is my social and historical background, my personal life history, my habits, and so on. Thrownness encompasses all of these established characteristics of mine, that is, my entire past (BT 373). And if my thrownness is the source of guilt, I must be guilty for having adopted the wrong attitude toward my entire past self. This does not mean that there is something special about my past that makes me guilty (if such were the case we would be back to the ordinary sense of guilt), but this does imply that I am guilty not as some empty form of a mortal self "in general," but as a determinate self.

But how can my thrownness represent a source of guilt for me? Where have I failed — where can I fail — in taking up an attitude toward my thrownness?

But I can fail and, as an ordinary Dasein, I have failed in my attitude toward my thrownness. "The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can never get that basis into its power; and yet, as making me guilty. If it were otherwise, I would have to refer to myself (at least implicitly) through some additional and still other predicates; I would have to say, "I as the father of a child am guilty of not paying child support," or "I as a driver am guilty of violating traffic regulations," and so on. Under such circumstances the predicate "guilty" would not apply to me qua merely being, but qua being only this or that. But the call of conscience tells me I am guilty insofar as I (merely) am.
existing, it must take over Being-a-basis” (BT 330). The accusation of guilt understood in that “primordial ontological meaning” is addressed to me insofar as I fail to respond to that task of shaping my life within a thrownness that I can never master and control.

The groundwork is now laid for man’s acceptance of his historical roots. Once again, and quite predictably, the strategy of denial – the strategy of the inauthentic Dasein – will be brought to its end by Dasein’s anxious encounter with the same menace of death:

As a way of Being for Dasein, history has its roots so essentially in the future that death, as that possibility of Dasein which we have already characterized, throws anticipatory existence back upon its factual thrownness, and so for the first time imparts to having-been its peculiarly privileged position in the historical. Authentic being-towards-death – that is to say, the finitude of temporality – is the hidden basis of Dasein’s historicality. (BT 438)

What is still required is man’s active response – in anticipatory resoluteness – to the call of conscience, to his guilt vis-à-vis his thrownness. Through such an active response an individual situates himself within the historical background of his life. In addition, this historical background – the individual’s “heritage” – now ceases to be viewed as open either to one’s attempts at control or to (“detached” and “objective”) justification. As of now, the individual is ready to accept his heritage in the latter’s full contingency and groundlessness (“nullity”). This stance toward one’s historical past is its “repetition.”

Now to find himself free for such a repetition of his heritage, an individual must first free himself from the conformism and the pressures of the “they” world. In this respect, too, death plays the pivotal role. First, death “shatters all one’s tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached” (BT 308): insofar as I find myself exposed to the indefinite and constant threat of death, all of my ordinary ties and attachments cease to offer me any security and they thus lose their hold over me. Second, death gives me a “freedom which has been released from the illusions of the ‘they’” (BT 311), for due to my anxious grasp of death I come to see the everyday world as a stage dominated by impersonal pressures and conformism.

Repetition allows Dasein to have a “fate” (Schicksal), a “destiny” (Geschick), as well as a “hero” (Held). In repeating my heritage I find myself endowed with a fate, for I acknowledge that my life can express itself only within a certain spectrum of values and traditions. I now realize that I cannot be “anything and everything,” since my life is bound up with such and such (and not any other) historical roots. For the same reason, I have a destiny: my life is part and parcel of a broader current of life of the historical community to which I belong. And since both my fate and my destiny must be lived in a concrete possibility of existence, my historical past will provide me with a pool of role models (“heroes”) to choose from. Whereas by having a fate, a destiny, and a hero, I can act with loyalty toward my historical past, the inauthentic Dasein – a Dasein bent on finding secure acceptance within the ever-shifting trends of the “they” world – will remain disloyal to its past and helpless to resist the tyranny of the “they.”

But Dasein’s linkup with a historical community does not remove from Dasein’s structure its dimension of subjectivity. On the contrary, Dasein reveals itself as rooted in its historical community only by exploring the full depths of its own subjectivity – of its finitude, its freedom, its guilt, and so on. And these themes – the key themes of Division II of Being and Time – can be found not only in the classical writers of the subjectivist tradition (in Descartes, Kant, Fichte), but indeed, in its final and most radical version, in existentialism. One is thus perfectly legitimate in drawing parallels between Heidegger and such radically subjectivistic writers as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus. In fact, one of the tasks of Heidegger scholarship remains the task of coming to terms with the tension between those individualistic and subjectivistic aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy, on the one hand, and his simultaneous stress on the inevitably public character of intelligibility and significance, on the other.3

NOTES

1 For more detail, the reader may consult my book Doubt, Time, Violence (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).


3 “We are ourselves the entities to be analysed. The being of any such entity is in each case mine” (BT 67).
5 For this reason alone our certainty of death cannot be an empirical certainty either [BT 301-2].
7 Ibid., p. 25.

8 Authenticity, moral values, and psychotherapy

Heidegger’s influence on psychotherapy in the English-speaking world has followed a convoluted path. The Swiss physician and therapist Medard Boss tells us that Heidegger expressed the hope that “his thinking would escape the confines of the philosopher’s study and become of benefit to wider circles, in particular to a large number of suffering human beings.”¹ His participation in Boss’s seminars for medical students and therapists from 1946 on was motivated by this concern.² Yet when his writings became more widely known among professionals in the field, it was less through this route than through the impact of existentialism in the fifties and sixties. As a result, though Heidegger’s thought is often treated as the cornerstone of existential psychotherapy,³ what one usually finds is a Heidegger refracted through the lens of the far more accessible writings of Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus. In the mouth of this “existentialized” Heidegger, the ideal of authenticity is pictured as the stance of the rugged individualist who, upon experiencing anxiety in the face of the ultimate absurdity of life, lives intensely in the present and creates his or her own world through leaps of radical freedom.

As the enthusiasm for existentialism has waned over the past two decades, however, so has the initial motivation for thinking that Heidegger has something important to contribute to therapy. The decline of existentialism can be attributed, I believe, to the growing suspicion that its image of the human condition is too limited to capture the concrete realities of actual existence. The