

AUTHENTICITY AND *MITDA-SEIN*: ON AN INTERSUBJECTIVIST MODEL OF THE SELF IN HEIDEGGER'S *BEING AND TIME*

Sharin N. Elkholy

Heidegger overturns the traditional notion of a self-sufficient subject and thinks of the human being as a "Da-sein," a "being-in-the-world" that exists inseparably from its relations to others and its shared projects. To capture the phenomenon of being with others in the world Heidegger coins the term "Mitda-sein," a being-there-with other Da-seins. But despite his emphasis on the existential-ontological category of Mitda-sein, Heidegger is too often criticized for failing to account for a genuine inter-relational model of the self in *Being and Time*. Michael Theunissen, for example, argues that Heidegger has a purely formal account of Mitda-sein, as Da-sein is in the world and, as such, in the world with others (Theunissen 1994, 189). Indeed, the signal trait of authenticity that first materializes in Heidegger's discussion of "being-toward-death" in *Angst* is Da-sein's freedom from others, the everyday opinions of the "They," or the herd. It is therefore not surprising that the standard interpretation of authenticity is along the lines of a subjectivism that has served to divide Heidegger's thinking into two parts: An "earlier Heidegger" that is still caught in the cycle of subjectivist thinking, and a "later Heidegger" who has displaced the subject as the origin of truth.

I want to argue, to the contrary, that not only is Heidegger's notion of Mitda-sein integral to the being of Da-sein ;but, more importantly, Mitda-sein comes before any awareness of Da-sein's individual selfhood. I will show that Da-sein's inter-subjective awareness is prior to its individual subjective awareness. My argument will be made in two steps. Through a strict phenomenological analysis of "being-toward-death" I show that *Angst* works to rob Da-sein of its sense of individual self-understanding. Being-toward-death in *Angst* dissolves Da-sein's self-relation, signalled by the loss of Da-sein's relations to others and to its everyday possibilities. This interpretation stands radically opposed to the traditional reading of being-toward-death as the moment in which Da-sein gains its sense of individual self-understanding in *Angst*. In the second step I show how Heidegger re-establishes the self out of a being-toward-death through its relations in the world with others, thereby joining the fate of the individual to the fate of other Da-seins in the community of those who are mutually attuned in *Angst*. In this way, Da-sein's authentic self is first born as *Mitda-sein*. Da-sein moves from the "They" to We in Authenticity.

Heidegger characterizes inauthentic Da-sein by its fixation on the surface, or material and objective qualities of its relations. Inauthentic Da-sein is shallow. Throwing out the old to make way for the new, the They are always busying itself with matters that are closest to hand. This signal feature of inauthenticity Heidegger attributes to a fleeing from death and the mood of *Angst* that discloses it. By focusing its energies on what can be accomplished, the tangible and manageable affairs of its everyday life, Da-sein shields itself from its being-toward-death. "In this entangled being together with. . .; the flight from uncanniness makes itself known, that is, the flight *from* its ownmost being-toward-

death” (BT 252/233). Thus for Heidegger the They’s everyday business as usual is itself a testament to the covering over of what belongs to Da-sein essentially: being-toward-death that is disclosed in *Angst*. “This uncanniness constantly pursues Da-sein and threatens its everyday lostness in the they, although not explicitly” (BT 189/177). The explicit confrontation with *Angst* occurs in an authentic being-toward-death.

In *Angst* Da-sein is turned away from its everyday practical concerns toward the nothing. “Nothing of that which is at hand and objectively present within the world, functions as what *Angst* is anxious about. The totality of relevance discovered within the world of things at hand and objectively present is completely without importance. It collapses. The world has the character of complete insignificance” (BT 186/174). The world that had once provided the familiar context from out of which Da-sein encounters beings and busies itself is lost in *Angst*. *Angst* displaces the web of relations that makes sense of, and gives meaning to Da-sein’s everyday concerns and relations to others, and replaces it with an ‘uncanny feeling a feeling of ‘not-being-at-home’” (BT 188/176).

In *Angst*, then, Da-sein is removed from its everyday relations and being with others. It is uprooted from the world by the loss of the context of meaning that used to ground its understanding of its everyday relations. In *Angst* Da-sein is confronted with the nothing. It is paralyzed. But if being with others and with innerworldly beings is no longer possible in *Angst* because the world cannot disclose any meaning to Da-sein, or be disclosed to Da-sein as meaningful, then Da-sein is also rendered meaningless, as Da-sein is a being-in-the-world and always understands itself in terms of its possibilities and relations with others. “As long as it is, Da-sein always has understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities” (BT 145/136). “Da-sein understands itself and being in general in terms of the ‘world’” (BT 21-22/19).

Importantly, however, in *Angst* the world is disclosed as utterly insignificant. It therefore cannot ground the understanding of anything at all, including, and here is my main point, Da-sein’s own self-understanding. Together with the loss of all possibilities and meaning in the world goes any sense of self-understanding specific to Da-sein because Da-sein exists as a being-in-the-world, and its understanding of its self is inseparable from its situatedness in the world. “Existing, Da-sein is its ground, that is, in such a way that it understands itself in terms of possibilities and, thus, understanding itself is thrown being” (BT 285/262). Without possibilities and relations to others, Da-sein loses a sense of the overall meaning of its existence. It is unhinged. It is in *Angst*.

Therefore, in being-toward-death there is not an individualized, reflective self. Da-sein cannot gain any certain understanding of itself as a being-in-the-world in *Angst* because Da-sein is its possibilities. In robbing Da-sein of its possibilities and meaningful relations *Angst* characterizes a phenomenological description of the existential of being-toward-death: “*the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general*. As possibility, death gives Da-sein nothing to be actualized and nothing which it itself could *be* as something real. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every mode of being toward . . . , of every way of existing” (BT 263/242). With the impossibility of “every mode of being toward”

and “every way of existing,” the possibility of all relations belonging to Da-sein disappears, including, and this is important, its own self-relation. When beings lose all relevance, the world is stripped of its significance. And when the world loses all significance, it cannot provide the context of meaning for anything at all, including the meaning of Da-sein's own particular existence. In this way (and perhaps only this way, since death is not an option of experience) Da-sein can existentially approach death in *Angst* through the loss of all possibilities, including the possibility of its own self-understanding.

Indeed, the epistemological value of *Angst* lies in the “existential identity” it establishes between Da-sein and world. “*The existential identity of disclosing and what is disclosed so that in what is disclosed the world is disclosed as world, being-in, individualized pure, thrown potentiality for being, makes it clear that with the phenomenon of Angst a distinctive kind of attunement has become the theme of our interpretation*” (BT188/176). It is this notion of an “individualized pure, thrown potentiality for being” disclosed in *Angst* that misleads interpreters of Heidegger toward an individualistic and subjectivist model of authenticity. This individuation, however, does not characterize an individual subject, but individuates the whole of the being of the world with the whole of the being of Da-sein in and as a totality.

Angst discloses the whole of the being of Da-sein isomorphically with the whole of the being of the world in an existential identity that is characterized by the nothing. However, this existential identity of the whole of the world and the being of Da-sein cannot be said to belong to a particular Da-sein with an identifiable, or personal, self. In being-toward-death there is no individual Da-sein to speak of because Da-sein cannot actualize any possibilities on the basis of the disclosure of the world as such, and Da-sein is its possibilities; it is the relation of disclosure to what is disclosed in its relations in the world. “[F]or Da-sein to be able to have something to do with a context of useful things, it must understand something like relevance, even if unthematically. A world must be disclosed to it” (BT 364/333).

But in the attunement of *Angst* there are no possibilities toward which Da-sein is attuned. In *Angst*, Da-sein is immobilized. There is only stillness. This is why Heidegger repeatedly states that being-toward-death is “non-relational” (BT 259/240; 266/249; 307/283). In *Angst* Da-sein is not in a being-toward anything at all, and certainty not in a being-toward itself in a mode of subjective self-reflection or awareness. Da-sein is immobilized in *Angst* and essentially not there. “Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being- able-to-be-there” (BT 250/232)¹

Nevertheless, Heidegger claims that in addition to freeing Da-sein from its inauthentic possibilities, *Angst* indicates the character of Da-sein's authentic possibilities. “*Angst* frees him from ‘null’ possibilities and lets him become free for authentic ones” (BT 344/316). But what authentic possibilities does *Angst* point Da-sein toward? In deciding to use phenomenology as the method for investigating the meaning of the being of Da-sein Heidegger commits himself to staying within the boundaries of Da-sein's lived

experiences. “Essentially, nothing else stands ‘behind’ the phenomena of phenomenology” (BT 36/31). But what stands behind the nothing? Is the nothingness of *Angst* a ground? And if it is a ground, how are we to move from the nothingness of *Angst* to an understanding of the meaning of this nothing as the place wherein the possibility of things at hand in general lies? To simply declare the nothing as a ground is to make a metaphysical claim.

Heidegger does, in fact, deem the nothing to be a ground beginning with his lecture “What is Metaphysics?” (1929) and in his “Postscript” to this lecture (1943).² There he equates the concealment of Being with the nothing, and joins the nothing to Da-sein through the attunement of *Angst*. But nowhere in *Being and Time* does Heidegger state that the nothing discloses Being. What he does establish is an existential identity between Da-sein and world in *Angst*. In this existential identity of the whole of the being of the world and the whole of the being of Da-sein disclosed in *Angst* Da-sein essentially stands cleared. Da-sein “is itself the clearing” (BT 133/125).

Heidegger exhorts authentic Da-sein to “choose,” to relate, to endure and to be ready for *Angst*. “The most extreme not-yet has the character of something to which Da-sein relates” (BT 250/231). Indeed, to have a conscience is to accept *Angst*. (296/272). I want to propose that the way that Da-sein relates to the nothing, to its being-toward-death, is by holding the nothing open as the horizon of its possibilities. Holding open the nothing is akin to what the later Heidegger will call letting be. As a horizon the nothing does not limit possibilities but is itself limited by virtue of the possibilities that it circumscribes. This horizon is what characterizes temporality. Temporality, therefore, grounds the groundless nothing. “*Ecstatic temporality clears the There primordially*” (BT 351/321). Yet, it is only through Da-sein’s relations with others and lived possibilities that the nothing may be made into something, the groundless ground of all of Da-seins possibilities.

Heidegger tells us that possibilities are “not to be taken from death” (BT 383/350). Consequently, “we must ask whence in general can the possibilities be drawn upon which Da-sein factually projects itself?” (BT 383/350) Heidegger’s answer is tradition. Temporality returns Da-sein back to its traditions and to its heritage. *Angst* clears the ground so that the world that has always been there, the historical world into which Da-sein has been thrown, may be taken up as a future in the present. At least this is the story that Heidegger is trying to tell. “*Authentic being-toward-death, that is, the finitude of temporality, is the concealed ground of the historicity of Da-sein*” (BT 386/353).

The finitude of existence thus ceased upon tears one back out of the endless multiplicity of possibilities offering themselves nearest by—those of comfort, shirking and taking things easy—and brings Da-sein to the simplicity of its *fate*. This is how we designate the primordial occurrence of Da-sein that lies in authentic resoluteness in which it *hands itself down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility that it inherited and yet has chosen (BT 384/351).

In the temporalization of *Angst* Da-sein's future meets its history in the present and the selfhood of Da-sein is born—significantly—together with that of its fellow Da-seins. The meaning of temporality is therefore co-attunement. Encompassing the historicity of the world, temporality shows itself as a “retrieve which is futurally in the process of having-been” (BT 391/357). The existential identity of the whole of the being of the world and the whole of the being of Da-sein unfolds as a pre-reflective attunement to the historical world into which Da-sein has been thrown and must “retrieve.” “*The occurrence of history is the occurrence of being-in-the-world.*” The historicity of Da-sein is essentially the historicity of the world which, on the basis of its ecstatic and horizontal temporality, belongs to the temporalizing of that temporality” (BT 388/355).

Because the being of Da-sein shows itself as temporality its tradition is opened up to it as a ground that it must take over: “*only a being that, as futural, is equiprimordially having-been*” can be delivered over to its “*inherited possibility.*” (BT 385/352)³ Coming toward its possibilities from the horizon of its heritage is the meaning of temporality. Being ahead of itself in such a way that it directs itself back to its thrownness means “*handing oneself over*” to traditional possibilities, although not necessarily as traditional ones” (BT 383/351). It means handing oneself over to the world of traditional possibilities belonging to one's ancestors in the “stillness” of *Angst* that allows the world to show itself as it has always been. It is from this world that “has-been there” that Da-sein must “retrieve” its authentic possibilities. Not the relics or remnants of the past, but “the *world* within which they were encountered as things at hand belonging to a context of useful things and used by Da-sein existing-in-the-world” (BT 380/348). This world is a with-world that extends over many generations.

Indeed, authentic Da-sein is not only attuned to other present Da-seins, but to Da-seins that have been there before and will be there in the future. These others belong to its *Mitda-sein*. In Da-sein's ability to respond to others that have been there, Da-sein attains its authenticity through a loyalty to the world that has been there. “*Retrieve is explicit handing down, that is, going back to the possibilities of the Da-sein that has been there*” (BT 385/352). To retrieve possibilities is not to relate to things dead and past. “*Rather retrieve responds to the possibility of existence that has-been-there*” (BT 386/352-353, Heidegger's emphasis). It responds to the world belonging to others before. Thus to take up one's historicity authentically means to be in a dialogue with those who have been there before by way of responding to the world from which these others understood their possibilities, a world whose influence is there in the remnants and ways of being that have been left behind. But this is possible only in a co-attunement: in the community of those who find themselves mutually attuned to the same horizon of possibilities.⁴

To choose handing oneself down to traditional possibilities is how Da-sein exists futurally as fate: “in the basis of its being it *is* fate” (BT 384/351). As a member of the community, Da-sein struggles to preserve its world—what Heidegger calls “the loyalty to what can be retrieved,” and to understand its present possibilities on the horizon of its heritage (BT 385/352). “As resoluteness ready for *Angst*, loyalty is at the same time a possible reverence for the sole authority that a free existence can have, for the

possibilities of existence that can be retrieved" (BT 391/357). Inseparable from Da-sein's fate is its "destiny." It is in conjunction with Da-sein's destiny, its community, that Heidegger discusses the personal identity of an individual Da-sein, or what he calls the "occurrence of Da-sein," the constancy of the self, or "the who of Da-sein" (BT 375/344). "But if fateful Da-sein essentially exists as being-in-the-world in being-with others, its occurrence is an occurrence-with and is determined as *destiny*. With this term, we designate the occurrence of the community, of a people" (BT 384/352).

Contrary to the standard interpretation, then, Heidegger does not fail to account for *Mitda-sein*, or for being-with others in his model of authenticity.⁵ The self of Da-sein dissolved in the nothing of being-toward-death is reconstituted in relation to others in a loyalty to its traditions. "Destiny is not composed of individual fates, nor can being-with-one-another be conceived of as the mutual occurrence of several subjects. These fates are already guided beforehand in being-with-one-another in the same world and in the resoluteness for definite possibilities" (BT 384/352). In Heidegger's model of Da-sein, the boundaries of the self are inseparable from the boundaries of the community, which extend to those who have been there, as well as to those who are yet to come. "The fateful destiny of Da-sein in and with its 'generation' constitutes the complete, authentic occurrence of Da-sein" (BT 385/352). It is here that the authentic self of Da-sein is born. Not in isolation from others, but in the community of those who are mutually attuned. In sharing a world with others, past, future and present Da-sein's authentic self is born as *Mitda-sein*.

NOTES

1. Heidegger underscores the non-particularity of the being disclosed in *Angst* in "What is Metaphysics" (1929). "At bottom therefore it is not as though 'you' or 'I' feel uncanny; rather, it is that way for some 'one.' In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold on to, pure Da-sein is all that is there." Martin Heidegger, Trans. David Farrel Krell, Ed. William McNeill, *Pathmarks*, 89.

2. "Being held out into the nothing—as Da-sein is—on the ground of concealed anxiety makes the human being the lieutenant of the nothing." Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics," *Pathmarks*, 93.

In his 'Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?"' (1943) Heidegger writes: "we must prepare ourselves solely in readiness to experience in the nothing the pervasive expanse of that which gives every being the warrant to be." Martin Heidegger, Trans. David Farrel Krell, Ed. William McNeill, "Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?" *Pathmarks*, 233.

3. The same structure of temporality is depicted in Heidegger's 1964 lecture, "Time and Being," where he discusses the finitude of Being in terms of historical epochs. "Approaching, being not yet present, at the same time gives and brings about what is no longer present, the past, and conversely what has been offers future to itself. The reciprocal relation of both at the same time gives and brings about the present." Martin Heidegger, Trans. Joan Stambaugh, "Time and Being," *On Time and Being*, 13.

4. I discuss this idea of co-attunement and the implications of mood as a pre-reflective ground joining individuals into a community and equally excluding others from a community in my book *Heidegger and a Metaphysics of Feeling: Angst and the Finitude of Being* (Continuum: 2008).

5. Taylor Carman, for example, asks: "How is it possible, indeed *is* it possible, to come to understand myself as others understand me, as an intraworldly character whose life concludes with my eventual earthly demise?" Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity*, Being and Time, 269. Carman runs into the problem that many before him have of how others may impact Da-sein's authentic self-relation because of his understanding of being-toward-death. Carman therefore concludes: "Apparently, what Heidegger fails to account for is the intersubjective dimension of selfhood." Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity*, Being and Time, 268. See also 269, 271, 301, 312, 313. But the question is rather the opposite. What is the possibility of listening to, or caring for someone who is differently attuned and engaged in "foreign" possibilities, that is, someone who is not part of one's *Mitda-sein*?

WORKS CITED

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans.. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State U of New York P, 1996.

Theunissen, Michael. *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*. Trans. Christopher Macann. Massachusetts and London: The MIT P, 1984.