

MARTIN HEIDEGGER ON AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

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Abstract: The main text on which this research has revolved is Martin Heidegger's master piece, *Being and Time*. The objectives of the study were; to investigate the phenomenological method utilized in *Being and Time*; to examine the concept of Dasein and to analyze authentic existence. This research study addresses the problem of the widespread inauthenticity prevailing in the world. It is evident that countless people are living under the dictatorship of the "One" – we judge as *one* judge, we behave as *one* behaves. In this conformism to what others do, we lose our unique self. In the exploration of Martin Heidegger's theme of authenticity, it has been sufficiently established that for Heidegger, authentic existence entails; authentic being-towards-death, angst (dread or anxiety), conscience and guilt, resoluteness and anticipatory resoluteness. Nonetheless, it is vitally important to note that although authentic existence is possible and important, it does not completely eradicate inauthenticity – authentic existence is only possible as a modification of inauthentic existence. The results of this study will be of great service in our human voyage towards authenticity and civilization.

Keywords: Angst, Anticipation, Authentic existence, Inauthentic existence, Being, Conscience, Dasein, das Man, Guilt, Hermeneutic, Phenomenology, Resoluteness, Uncanny.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The question of human existence in philosophy is ancient and new. Ancient in the sense that it has been addressed since the Pre-Socratics especially the Pythagoreans and new in the sense that it is still significantly addressed by contemporary philosophers to date. In this article, the author's concern with human existence is ultimately in regard to authentic existence. I uphold the hypothesis that, we would be better people having a far better world if each human being lived an authentic existence. On the contrary, it is common knowledge that authentic existence is a far cry from reality. This propelled me to engage a philosophical analysis of Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein in his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time* published in 1927 so as to elucidate the meaning of authentic existence; with a clear foresight that this knowledge will serve a crucial purpose in our human journey to authentic existence.

1.1 THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF BEING

Heidegger's aim in *Being and Time*, plainly stated, was to raise anew the question of the meaning of Being,¹ that on the basis of which beings are understood.² Heidegger states that, at the very dawn of philosophy, Greek thinkers like Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides did pose the question of Being correctly. In their wonder, which is the beginning of all philosophy, they sought to explain the "Being of beings," which is the chief preoccupation of philosophy. But with the coming of Plato and Aristotle on the scene and ever since then to the present time, philosophy has diverted its attention from the Being of beings (das Sein des Seiendes) and has concentrated its efforts on this or that being. Therefore, a "destruction of ontology" is necessary, in order that we may concern ourselves with the real problem of philosophy. In that regard, Heidegger proclaimed his task as the creation of a new ontology which would supplant the past twenty-five centuries of metaphysical thinking. This new ontology would have as its object, the study of the Being of beings and its particular method would be phenomenology.³

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (1927). Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), p. 19. Henceforth it will be referred to as Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

² Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (Eds.), *A Companion to Heidegger: An Introduction to His Thought, Work and Life*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 3.

³ Francis J. Lescoe, *Existentialism: With or Without God*, (New York: Alba House, 1974), pp. 184, 186, 197, 221. Henceforth it will be referred to as Lescoe, *Existentialism*.

1.2 HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology means to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. Heidegger states that, this is the formal meaning of that branch of research which calls itself phenomenology.⁴ The phenomena of phenomenology are not beings but the being of beings. Phenomenology is the method, the way, in which being, the subject matter of ontology, can be approached and brought to self-showing.⁵ Furthermore, Heidegger says that, the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation".⁶ Implying that, Heidegger's phenomenology is hermeneutic.⁷ We speak of interpreting in two senses; first, interpreting as revealing facts or telling signs, such as experimental data, medical symptoms, or clues to a crime. Another kind of interpretation, aims to express the meaning or significance of something that already had it prior to any investigation and the task of interpretation is to figure out and re-express, as nearly as possible, whatever that meaning was. Hermeneutics is interpretation only in this second sense: re-expressing more accessibly what something already means in the context of some way of life. Hermeneutics is not limited to texts, for Dasein is in fact the original form and source of all meaningful phenomena that admit hermeneutic interpretation.⁸ Heidegger generalizes hermeneutics from interpreting authoritative texts to a way of understanding human beings themselves.⁹

1.3 THE CONCEPT OF DASEIN

In order to address the question of being properly, Heidegger started with a preliminary phenomenological investigation of the being for whom its being is an issue, the human being whom he called Dasein.¹⁰ Dasein is itself that very being whose mode of being must first be investigated if there is to be anything like a satisfactory approach to the meaning of being in general.¹¹ For Heidegger, using Dasein as starting point is the best possible way in which he can conduct his quest for the Being of beings. By analyzing minutely this particular being, Heidegger hopes to be able to arrive at the object of his new ontology, i.e., the Being of beings.¹² There are two interpretations of *Dasein* by Heidegger's *Being and Time* scholars. The first interpretation is of those who consider *Dasein* to stand for man, so that whenever we meet the term *Dasein* in *Being and Time* we should understand it to stand for man. The second interpretation is of those commentators who perceive in the term *Dasein* a deeper meaning than just the single individual man.¹³ Magda King asserts that, the word *man* gives only the ontic meaning of the essentially two dimensional, ontic-ontological term *Da-sein*.¹⁴ Additionally, Okello notes that, Dasein has two basic meanings: Dasein as man and Dasein as the Being of man – the ontological structural complex of existence.¹⁵ Furthermore, Heidegger analyses the essential features of the structure of *Dasein* which he refers to as *existentiale* (or *existentialia* in plural form).¹⁶ These existentials are a priori conditions under which Dasein's existence is made meaningful.¹⁷

1.4 EXISTENCE

⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 58.

⁵Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, Edited by John Llewelyn, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 112-113. Henceforth it will be referred to as Magda, *A Guide to Heidegger's*.

⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 61.

⁷Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Revised Edition, (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 38. Henceforth it will be referred to as Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's*.

⁸Joseph Rouse, (Ed.), *Dasein Disclosed: John Hangeland's Heidegger*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 71-72.

⁹Christina Lafont, *Hermeneutics*; In: Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, *A Companion to Heidegger*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), p. 265.

¹⁰Emmanuel Kelechi Iwuagwu, *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Being*; Journal of Integrative Humanism, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2017, pp. 25-48. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327387872>. Accessed on December 27, 2020.

¹¹Christopher Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 60. Henceforth it will be referred to as Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*.

¹²Lescoe, *Existentialism*, p. 192.

¹³Stephen Okello, *The Distinction Between Dasein and Man in Heidegger's Being and Time*, pp. 1-5. <https://www.academia.edu/43525201>/Accessed on February 15, 2021. Henceforth it will be referred to as Okello, *The Distinction Between Dasein and Man*.

¹⁴Magda, *A Guide to Heidegger's*, p. 49.

¹⁵Okello, *The Distinction Between Dasein and Man*, pp. 1-5.

¹⁶Jack Reynolds, *Understanding Existentialism*, (Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 25. Henceforth it will be referred to as Reynolds, *Understanding Existentialism*.

¹⁷Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's*, p. 15.

The expressions to exist and existence are in *Being and Time* exclusively reserved for man. The “real existence” of beings other than man is called by Heidegger “real being” or “objective being”, and the structure of this mode of being is called “reality”. Therefore the basic distinction drawn in *Being and Time* is between the existence of Dasein and the reality of beings that are not Dasein. “To exist” and “to be real” are the two main ways in which beings can be.¹⁸ Heidegger maintains that there are two basic ways in which Dasein can exist in the world, namely (1) authentically and (2) inauthentically.¹⁹ These can be regarded as owned and disowned respectively; or of being one’s own self and of being a disowned self respectively.²⁰ In so far as Dasein is itself it is authentic, in so far as it fails to be itself, it is inauthentic.²¹

1.5 INAUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

Inauthentic existence, comprises of three aspects: the “One” or the “They” and Everydayness; Falling or fallenness and inauthentic being-towards-death. First of all, in inauthentic existence, Dasein’s possibilities or ways of existing are under the dictatorship or mastery of the “One” or “They” (*das Man*). This is basically a conformism to what others are concerned with and do; inauthentic existence is in the sense of my possibilities not being chosen by me but by others (*das Man*). Secondly, falling or fallenness implies Dasein being lost in the world, absorbed in entities and in being-with-one-another. More specifically, falling is absorption in being-with-one-another in so far as this is governed by what Heidegger calls ‘idle talk’, ‘curiosity’ and ‘ambiguity’.²² Thirdly, inauthentic being-towards-death is when Dasein treats death only as an actuality, never as a possibility.²³ Treating death only as an actuality means that it is not thought of as happening to you.²⁴

1.6 AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

Our main concern is authentic existence which comprises of four aspects: authentic being-towards-death; Angst; conscience and guilt; and resoluteness and anticipatory resoluteness. (1) First of all, authentic being-towards-death not only emphasizes that it is we ourselves who are going to die and not the they-self; it also emphasizes that we must not see death as an actual event but always as a possibility of our own Being.²⁵ In authenticity Dasein regards death as his ownmost, non-relational and unsurpassable possibility. (2) Angst (anxiety or dread). In Angst one is not-at-home (uncanny) and the everyday familiarity with and at-homeness in the world is broken.²⁶ Our capacity for being individuals – entities who can own their actions and own up to what they are – is something that is first revealed in the mood of anxiety. In the mood of anxiety, we discover ourselves as individualized, as *solus ipse*, in the sense that our usual dependence on the world and others breaks down and we find that our lives are up to us alone to live.²⁷

(3) Conscience and Guilt. First of all, conscience is a call,²⁸ and the self that does the calling is in dread (Angst) - uncanny; it is a self that has lost the comfortable feeling of belonging with the crowd.²⁹ The called in conscience is also the self but the self as falling, lost in the One, the One-self. What it is summoned to is authentic existence, the possibility of being that is most its own. Therefore, the call of conscience summons me to authentic existence; choosing to choose my possibilities of being rather than having them chosen for me by the One. Regarding guilt, according to Heidegger, to exist is to be guilty. In this ontological sense of guilt, being-guilty belongs to my being as Dasein and guilt in this sense is: the null being-the-ground of a nullity. The call of conscience declares Dasein to be

¹⁸ Magda, *A Guide to Heidegger’s*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Lescoe, *Existentialism*, p. 210.

²⁰ Magda, *A Guide to Heidegger’s*, p. 40.

²¹ Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*, p. 61.

²² Paul Gerner, *Heidegger’s Being and Time: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 107, 111. Henceforth it will be referred to as Gerner, *Heidegger’s Being and Time*.

²³ Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s*, p. 150.

²⁴ Reynolds, *Understanding Existentialism*, p. 42.

²⁵ Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s*, p. 152.

²⁶ Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 111. Henceforth it will be referred to as Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger*.

²⁷ Charles Guignon, *Authenticity and the Question of Being*: In: Denis McManus (Ed.), *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 15. Henceforth it will be referred to as Guignon, *Authenticity and the Question of Being*.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 313.

²⁹ Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s*, p. 163.

guilty in this ontological sense. But the call of conscience is also a summons. Thus in it Dasein is being summoned to be guilty. It summons Dasein to be authentically the 'guilty' it already is. In the call of conscience one might say Dasein is being summoned to recognize or acknowledge, to take ownership of, its essential guilt, its ontological guilt.³⁰

(4) Resoluteness is 'the reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost being-guilty in which we are ready for anxiety'.³¹ The resolute man is guilty, he knows that he is guilty, and he wants to have a conscience. In fact, it is in realizing the nature of his conscience and his guilt that he becomes resolute.³² Resoluteness is resolving to act in the concrete situation;³³ and consists in a kind of focused engagement with things, and with others.³⁴ (5) Finally, anticipatory resoluteness develops from authentic Being-towards-death which is anticipation; and Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being which is resoluteness.³⁵ In its resoluteness Dasein projects itself authentically onto possibilities of being but such authenticity is at its most authentic when Dasein's projecting of itself onto concrete possibilities is underpinned by the projection of that possibility which is most its own, that is, death.³⁶ As Being-towards-the-end which understands - that is to say, as anticipation of death - resoluteness becomes authentically what it can be.³⁷ In anticipatory resoluteness people individuate themselves, and their lives compose a genuine disclosure of the way being-in-the-world takes place.³⁸

After this analysis, it is vitally important to note five aspects about authentic existence according to Martin Heidegger. First, authenticity is not a matter of realizing the true substantive core of one's personal desires and aspirations, but rather a matter of recognizing and living in recognition of the structure of the self as such.³⁹ Second, the idea of an authentic existence is crucial for disclosing our Being, and that in turn is supposed to provide a path to working out the overall project of *Being and Time*, which is disclosing the meaning of Being in general. Heidegger wants to show that the goal of understanding the meaning of Being - that is, the job of "fundamental ontology" - is something that can be achieved only by a person who is, or at least fully understands what it is to be, authentic.⁴⁰

Third, authentic existence, although possible, is only possible as a modification of inauthentic existence. For the "One" is an existential and authentic being-one's-self is an existentiellmodification of the "One". Even resoluteness which is the authentic mode of disclosedness does not put inauthentic existence behind it. Resoluteness is a modification of inauthentic disclosedness.⁴¹ This implies that inauthenticity remains a constant possibility and a constant threat to Dasein's authentic existence. Fourth, all morality is rooted in an authentic experience of being the self. No one else can make you moral. If you want to be moral, then the decision must be taken and put into practice by you and by you alone.⁴² Besides that, essential being-guilty (which is a matter of authenticity) is the existential condition of the possibility of the 'morally' good and evil, of morality as such.⁴³ Fifth, "to be authentically one's self," does not imply a detachment or isolation from others in the world, or from Being-in-the-world. For the self, after all, even the authentic self, is by nature with others and in the world. Therefore, authenticity never implies hermit-like loneliness or stoic detachment from world events.⁴⁴ Authenticity is first, last and always intrinsically

³⁰Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, pp. 137-140.

³¹*Ibid*, p. 143.

³²Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's*, p. 166.

³³Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, p. 144.

³⁴Taylor Carman, *Authenticity*; In: Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, (Eds.), *A Companion to Heidegger*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), p. 291.

³⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 349.

³⁶Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, p. 144.

³⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 353.

³⁸Charles E. Scott, *Care and Authenticity*; In: Bret W. Davis, (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger Key Concepts*, (Durham: Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2010), p. 66. Henceforth it will be referred to as Scott, *Care and Authenticity*.

³⁹Mark A. Wrathall, *Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Self*; In: Denis McManus (Ed.), *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 201.

⁴⁰Guignon, *Authenticity and the Question of Being*, pp. 8-9, 16.

⁴¹Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, pp. 109-110, 143.

⁴²Richard Sembera, *Rephrasing Heidegger: A Companion to Being and Time*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008), pp. 184, 186.

⁴³Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, p. 140.

⁴⁴Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's*, p. 166.

social, cultural and historical.⁴⁵ Authenticity implies independent judgment, but not a life that can do without other people.⁴⁶

1.7 CONCLUSION

It is significant to note that, according to Heidegger, authentic existence is not a prerogative of some class. Authenticity can take place in all cultures and on the part of extremely different people. Dasein “calls” or “summons” individuals out of their everyday oblivion and to one’s “ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self” whatever their circumstances. As we forget our ontological inheritance in our everyday inauthentic existence, Dasein “calls” (call of conscience) us back to the basics of our being.⁴⁷ All human beings are capable of living authentically or inauthentically: either they are lost in the distractions of the “they-self” (while retaining the capacity for wrenching themselves away from it), or they have realized the existentiell possibilities that give expression to their real individuality (while remaining vulnerable to a falling back into loss of self).⁴⁸ In our human existence we should always strive for authentic existence which entails a clear awareness of the self as a self, and a realization that one alone is responsible for the way one exists, and it avoids the slavery of the “they-self”.⁴⁹ The splendor of Heideggerian authentic existence is freedom and independence; implying that, you can make your own choices not the choices of others, your own judgments not judgments of others, you can have your own tastes not the tastes of others, and you can live your life not the life of others – authentic existence means you take charge of your existence and possibilities.

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⁴⁵Scott, *Care and Authenticity*, p. 64.

⁴⁶Ulrich Steinworth, *A Secular Absolute: How Modern Philosophy Discovered Authenticity*, (Hamburg: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 133.

⁴⁷Scott, *Care and Authenticity*, p. 64.

⁴⁸Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger*, p. 144.

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