

Gregor Moder*

“Held Out into the Nothingness of Being”: Heidegger and the Grim Reaper

Being, in the proper meaning of the term

There seems to be a general agreement among both critics and followers of Heidegger that he was a conservative existentialist philosopher of angst, guilt, and death. Especially in the English language literature, though not only there, this image is still the dominating one, even though it has been years, decades, since it was demonstrated that this is a very narrow, if not completely mistaken interpretation of his work. Carol White described two major reasons for the confusion among the Anglo-Saxon readership. Firstly, there is the problem of English translation which consistently pushes toward the reading of Dasein as a person or individual, even though Heidegger made it very clear that his project is to formulate the explicit question of being itself (White 2002: 337). She pointed out that one should always bear in mind that the term *Eigentlichkeit*, translated as authenticity, is etymologically close to the term *eigenst*. She writes: “Dasein is ‘*eigentlich*’ or ‘properly’ or ‘authentically’ itself when it makes an issue of Being rather than taking the understanding of Being for granted. The etymological connection between ‘*eigenst*’ and ‘*eigentlich*’ should not be forgotten” (White 2002: 334). Even though the problem of the translation of Heidegger is overwhelming, the second reason for the confusion is even more devastating. As White claims, it was Heidegger himself who contributed to the ambiguity of his writing about death (White 2002: 336). In this, her reading is supported by many other researchers, such as Dreyfus and Wrathal who edited the Blackwell companion to Heidegger. They write: “Although there can be no question that death plays a central role in the architectonic of *Being and Time*, certain features of Heidegger’s account of death make it unclear what exactly it is that ‘death’ refers to” (Dreyfus, Wrathal 2002: xv).

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Indeed, it is the concept of being-toward-death that seems to justify the image of Heidegger, the conservative. This is because being-toward-death is usually and predominantly interpreted as the concept of human finality. After Heidegger, –

* Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

or so this line of argument wishes to demonstrate – it is impossible to conceive human being as immortal or eternal, since the radical finality is inscribed in its very being. It is not only the body that is perishable, while in essence humans are eternal: human existence as such is final. Being-toward-death therefore designates existence which already involves the possibility of death; death itself is a part of human existence. Of course, a position of such radical finality contradicts the metaphysical tradition, in which final things and beings were considered ontologically secondary and scientifically less important than eternal beings such as gods. But on the other hand, and this is what I find to be the most obvious flaw of this reading, the idea of the human being as essentially mortal is far from revolutionary. In fact, the religious tradition that embodies one of the greatest sources of European metaphysics, Christianity, insisted, and to this day insists, precisely on the premise of human mortality. If Heidegger was to say something radically new, it would be better to say the opposite: that the existence itself is immortal. Indeed, in the reading I wish to present here, *Dasein*, in the proper meaning of the term, does not die. As counter-intuitive as it may sound, the concept of being-toward-death is precisely Heidegger's formulation of something undying that pertains to and persists within human existence, not of something eternal in the metaphysical meaning of the word, but of something un-dead nonetheless.

But first, I want to demonstrate the scope of the problem of the dominant readings of Heidegger. These readings tend to start from the proper ontological premises, but then, unfortunately, orient themselves toward a moral interpretation of those premises, or else toward some kind of psychology of existence. Charles Guignon, the editor of the Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, understands *Eigentlichkeit* as a question of an ethical demand for an authentic life: “It would appear, then, that authenticity is not so much a matter of the ‘content’ of a life as it is of the ‘style’ with which one lives” (Guignon 2002: 204). One is baffled by the ease with which Guignon replaces the ontological concept of *Eigentlichkeit* with the mundane distinction between the content and the style with which one lives. In another classic example of miscomprehension of the task at hand, the same author writes: “As being-toward-death, human existence is an unfolding movement *toward* the realization of one's identity or being as a person” (Guignon 2005: 395). It is fascinating how Guignon detects the importance of the wording “toward”, but then completely fails to grasp its ontological status, which remains beyond any psychology or theory of identity.

Some readers, like Stephen Mulhall, are quite content with ascribing immense philosophical value to statements that don't properly belong to philosophy: "If anything, what [Heidegger] is more concerned to stress is that the non-relational nature of death highlights an aspect of Dasein's comportment to any and all of its existential possibilities; for in making concrete Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself, the fact that no one can die our death for us merely recalls us to the fact that our life is ours alone to live" (Mulhall 2005: 304). Thus the immense effort of ontological analysis is reduced to a profane wisdom; precisely what Heidegger warned us against. Mulhall concludes: "In short, an authentic confrontation with death reveals Dasein as related to its own being in such a way as to hold open the possibility, and impose the responsibility, of living a life that is authentically individual and authentically whole – a life of integrity, an authentic life" (Mulhall 2005: 306). The ontological considerations are thus translated into the moral category of integrity. Let me conclude this overview of the shocking state of affairs in Heidegger scholarship with this crown jewel, delivered by Hoffman: "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. [...] Life matters only because I am aware that it can be snatched away from me by the power of death" (Hoffman 1993: 200). Did we really need Heidegger to tell us that life matters because it is fragile and that someday, death will take us? In fact, did we really need a philosopher for this, a thinker? Could not a simple country priest have done this job just as well?

The mistake that all these interpreters made was that they got stuck at certain phrases and statements that sounded familiar and therefore made sense; such as, for instance, the banalities about death. What they overlooked, apparently, is that these banalities were the starting point of Heidegger's analysis which sought to explain the ontological premises that allowed them as banalities, as vulgarities, in the first place. Let us consider, for a moment, the vulgar understanding of time as a sequence of nows. Was Heidegger trying to tell us that time is a sequence of nows? No, of course not! He attempted to provide an ontological analysis of the vulgar concept of time and thus open the possibility of transforming that concept. Let us now take a look at the vulgar understanding of death. Is Heidegger trying to tell us that we will all die someday, or that we all fear death, or that no one can die in our place? Of course not! His project is,

again, to expose the ontological structure of existence itself and thus open it to rethinking, to reinterpretation, to reformulation.¹

But perhaps we should not judge these commentators too harshly, since it was already pointed out that it was Heidegger himself who allowed for an ambiguous reading of his concepts of *Eigentlichkeit* and being-toward-death. Perhaps we should go even further and say that even Heidegger himself read Heidegger naively and was thus the first who misunderstood himself. The misleading qualities of Heidegger's text itself, especially those that surround the concepts of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*, force us to introduce a provisional distinction between the authentic and inauthentic Heidegger, where the authentic Heidegger is faithful to his ontological task, while his own failings to do so are the workings of the inauthentic Heidegger. The inauthentic Heidegger is, in principle, a philosopher of death as the vulgar caricature, a philosopher of the Grim Reaper, and we must be very cautious not to succumb to his metaphysical charm.

Whether we ascribe the relapse to the vulgar or metaphysical understanding of death, time, and being to Heidegger himself or not, this is clearly a problem that transcends that of simple reading naïveté or accidental misinterpretation. We are dealing here with a specific resistance of metaphysics itself to the procedure of explicit analysis, not entirely unlike the resistance of Freud's patients to psychoanalytical treatment. Instead of starting with vulgar and banal knowledge and orienting ourselves toward ontological exposure and transformation of it, we end up doing precisely the opposite: we keep our metaphysical understanding and even reaffirm it, orienting our argument from the ontological structure of existence toward the average and closest vulgar wisdom. In short, traditional metaphysics is able to use Heideggerian phenomenology – designed as a tool of transformation of metaphysics into thinking – as an argument in its own favour. This is, then, the real reason why the vulgar understanding of death is so persistent in Heideggerian scholarship: because we have been trained for centuries in it and are very used to hearing and understanding certain “truths”. Let me point out two rare cases of honesty in the long line of scholars who consistently trans-

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¹ It is Catherine Malabou who most consistently and thoroughly argued for the utmost importance of the question of transformation in reading Heidegger. She writes: “what Heidegger thinks under the heading of ontology is the structure of transformation alone. Being is nothing but (its) transformability” (Malabou 2001, 73).

lated Heidegger's ontological endeavours back into metaphysical vulgarities. First is by Dostal, who writes from within the field of vulgar miscomprehension:

What the future holds for any and every Dasein is death. Another definition of Dasein is therefore provided: being-toward-death. In the authentic moment, we recognize and accept our mortality. Heidegger's story of Dasein is, in this regard, not so unlike the Christian story of fallen human nature (though Heidegger denies that his story is just another version of original sin). (Dostal 1993: 169)

Isn't it marvellous, how Dostal recognizes that Heidegger did not want his story to be mistaken for the paradigmatic example of Christian metaphysics, and yet insists on reinterpreting it as such? I find this quote absolutely brilliant because it puts the finger exactly on what is problematic in the naive reading of Heidegger's concept of being-toward-death as the idea of human mortality: this idea is absolutely the same as the principle idea of Christian theology. If this is what Heidegger's philosophy leads up to, then we should discard it as just another attempt of the Western metaphysics to impose itself as something other than what it is. But it was none other than the famous John Caputo who made the most honest case in favour of the inauthentic Heidegger. He writes:

The task of theology, armed now with the Heideggerian analytic of existence, is to deconstruct and demythologize the canonical Gospels in order to retrieve their *kerygma*, the living-existential Christian message, one of existential conversion (*metanoia*), of becoming authentic in the face of our finitude and guilt, a task that faces every human being. (Caputo 1993: 275)

Caputo makes it perfectly clear: the Heideggerian analytic of existence is an armament, a tool to be used in combat. If we fail to strictly follow Heidegger's ontological task and deconstruct the vulgar, metaphysical concepts that still guide the predominant discourse of truth, if we fail to point out the existential, ontological character that they nevertheless reveal in themselves, then all we did was provide theology with a powerful weapon; theology can *reverse* the orientation of the deconstruction and claim that Heidegger in fact only provided the fundamental ontological grounds for the beliefs and morals that it (theology) held in the first place.

Human, all too human

Let us now take a closer look at what Heidegger actually wrote. In *Being and Time*, the first reference to the concept of Dasein is in §2, where Heidegger analyses the formal structure of the question of being. He distinguishes three moments: first, the object of inquiry, second, the instance that is researched, the “interrogated”, and third, the concept which is the result of the inquiry. Now, the object of inquiry is obviously being, and the concept which is sought is the meaning of being. Things get interesting when Heidegger determines the instance interrogated. He asks himself:

In *which* being is the meaning of being to be found [...]? Which is this exemplary being and in which sense does it have priority? (Heidegger 1996: §2, 5)

The answer Heidegger provides to his own question is quite brilliant. Since an explicit concept is sought, the specific being that is to be interrogated about its being must be capable of an explicit analysis. Therefore, the specific being that must be interrogated is precisely the being that asks the question of being. Now, who or what is this being *par excellence*?

This being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being we formulate terminologically as Dasein. The explicit and lucid formulation of the question of the meaning of being requires a prior suitable explication of a being (Dasein) with regard to its being. (Heidegger 1996: §2, 6)

Who are “we ourselves”? A possible way to read these lines would be to say that, for Heidegger, the human being is a being with priority over other beings because it has, among other capacities, also the capacity to analyse, to explicitly ask, to inquire, – in short, because it has the capacity to *think*. Such reading would have much support in the entire oeuvre of Martin Heidegger; in this passage, precisely in the usage of the word “we”.² However, this is not the reading I would argue for. What strikes me as remarkable in these lines is that they do not so much provide an answer to the question of which exactly is the being that

² Quite explicitly for instance in *Identität und Differenz* where he declares that thinking is a capacity of man (when elaborating on Parmenides’ quote that it is the same thing to think and to be).

we should interrogate about its being, as they give a terminological formulation of the curious self-referential character of the question of being. Heidegger does not say that it is the human being that must be asked about its being; but rather, he declares that his technical term for the specific being that is necessarily, structurally involved in the question of being, is Dasein.

There are two details we can list in support of this reading. First, let's take a closer look at the second sentence. What exactly is the function of the parenthesis which holds only one word, Dasein? Does it provide some additional, more specific information to what was already said with the words "a being"? Or is the word in parenthesis a clarification which only supplies a different term? The reading I propose follows the latter option: what Heidegger lists in the parenthesis is nothing but the technical term for "a being", the very technical term he introduced in the previous sentence. The term Dasein, at this point of the analysis in *Being and Time*, does not yet carry any other meaning but this: it is a being (*eines Seienden*), to be distinguished from being itself (*das Sein*). Dasein is therefore not one being among other beings, picked out for its special characteristics; rather it designates the determinate existence in general. The formal structure of the question of being leads to this distinction, to the difference between Sein and Dasein, to the difference between being qua being and determinate existence. In the question of being, Sein and Dasein are separated just as much as they belong to one another.

This takes us directly to the second detail, to the Todtนาuberg note, which reads as follows:

Da-sein: being held out into the nothingness of being, held as relation. (Heidegger 1996: §2, 6 (footnote))³

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First of all, in this note, Da-sein is spelled with a hyphen which underscores the self-referential character of the relation between Dasein and Sein; Sein is at the same time the same and not the same as Dasein. Secondly, the determination of Dasein as "being held out", *Hineingehaltenheit*, gives us an almost pictorial grasp of the relationship: Dasein is dipped or thrown into the void of being. But

³ In German: "Da-sein: als Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts von Seyn, als Verhältnis gehalten" (Heidegger 2001: 439).

this should not be misunderstood as if Dasein is first something independent of being and of its relation to it and only accidentally comes into relation with it; on the contrary, Dasein is only and precisely the “being-held-out”, it is only and precisely this relation to being, this relation to the nothingness of being. Finally, and above all, the Todtนาuberg note leaves no doubt that Dasein, essentially, has nothing to do with humans. At this initial stage in *Being and Time*, the humanness of “we ourselves” is reduced to the capacity of thinking, to be more precise, to the capacity to question, and even this capacity is relevant only insofar as it is explicitly bound to the question of being. Because of this, we must insist on the claim that Dasein is not human, even though it is true that it is humans who exhibit the possibility of holding a place for the question of being. Beside these two details one should also mention that Heidegger devoted an entire paragraph, §10, to the delimitation of the interest of his analysis in the fields of biology and psychology, but also in that of anthropology (Heidegger 1996: §10, 42–47). Furthermore, if we recall the famous *Letter on Humanism*, there should be no doubt that his project was not a humanist project. He wrote: “what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of the human being is determined, is that it is ‘humanistic.’ Accordingly, every humanism remains metaphysical” (Heidegger 1998: 245). For Heidegger’s question of being, the entire history of philosophy as metaphysics is insufficient; or rather, it provides too many answers and by doing so avoids the question. All these anti-humanist references are important because they indicate that the problem of death that Heidegger inevitably links to Dasein at certain points has nothing to do with the grisly downfall of a human being, but rather, as I hope to demonstrate, with that *Hineingehaltenheit*, with being held out into the nothingness of being, with being dipped or thrown into the void of being. Again: even though thinking is the capacity of humans, Dasein is not simply an alternative and rather eccentric term for “human being”; rather, it denotes the capacity of thinking itself, as *capacity*, regardless of whether any one human being is actually thinking or not.⁴

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⁴ The notorious question, reopened some years ago by Meillasoux (2010), whether the world is independent of humans who think it, is thus rendered impertinent. Of course it exists independently of any one human being and of all of them, and it has existed before any human had the capacity to think it! However, any concept of world or time is already mediated by the category of thinking, even the basic idea of the existence of the world and worldly beings. And even the concept of the human being – as something other than the world – is mediated, determined and made possible by the category of thinking.

Let me make two brief asides, a Parmenidian and a Hegelian one. One of the most famous philosophical statements of all time is that of Parmenides, that being is the same as thinking. I believe this is precisely what is in question in the initial paragraphs of *Being and Time*; the self-referential, even circular structure of the question of being points to it. The capacity to inquire and analyse is the capacity to think; hence, the question of being is what binds being and thinking into oneness. The term *Dasein* is the mark of their belonging to each other. However, by the same structure of the question of being, thinking and being are also set apart. *Dasein* is the there-ness of being, the determinateness of being, not the being itself. The spelling *Da-sein* evokes this image of unity and separation, sameness and difference. Perhaps one could argue that one must think the sentence of Parmenides necessarily with such interplay of sameness and difference; Hegel, however, did not. In *Science of Logic*, Hegel declares that pure being, without any further determination, is a Parmenidian concept. But at the same time, he argues, Parmenides failed to see that pure being has already become pure nothingness. For Hegel, the sameness and difference of pure being and pure nothing is becoming; and what follows is determinate existence, in German: *Dasein*. We should read Heidegger's concept of *Da-sein*, spelled with the hyphen, as belonging to the same considerations of *Sein* and *Dasein* as were those of Hegel. The relationship between logical categories of being and existence (*Sein* and *Dasein*) is principally the same for Hegel and Heidegger: being is pure void, nothingness, while existence is the there-ness of being, its determinateness. This detour through Hegel hopefully underscores the logical nature of the relationship between being and *Dasein* that Heidegger renders explicit in his analysis of the formal structure of the question of being; there is no place here for the human stain.

Being in the world

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Let us now proceed to the concept of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), which Heidegger introduces as the fundamental constitution of *Dasein*. To start with, he proposes yet another formulation of the circular, self-referential relation between *Sein* and *Dasein*, between being and its there-ness, this time even more explicitly reducing the thinking being to its relationship with being itself.

The being whose analysis our task is, is always we ourselves. The being of this being is always *mine*. In the being of this being it is related to its being. As the being

of this being, it is entrusted to its own being. It is being about which this being is concerned. (Heidegger 1996: §9, 39–40)

The most important change in the terminology is the replacement of the “we” with the “I”. In the introduction, Heidegger was referring to Dasein in a slightly more generalized way, claiming that its capacity to think was one capacity among others (*unter anderem*). Here, however, the self-referential character of being is underscored with the formulation, that it is being itself about which this being is concerned in its very being. The shift from “we” to “I” is an indicator of the reduction of Dasein to its minimal condition, to its proper formulation of the there-ness of being. So much so that Heidegger invents the term *Jemeinigkeit* (translated as *always-being-my-own-being*). In another Todtนาuberg side-note, Heidegger even emphasized the “I”, correcting, so to speak, the first sentence of the quote and replacing the “always we” with “always I”. It is precisely the “I” who is always there in any thought. In philosophy, there is a well-known claim that it is the subject of thinking that is always present in any thinking whatsoever, that it is irreducible from it. But Heidegger is trying to make an even stronger case – otherwise, he could have simply used the term subject and not go through all the trouble with the term Dasein. It is not enough to say that the subject of thinking is irreducible in thinking. Heidegger’s point here – at least in my reading – is purely logical, or if you prefer, Parmenidian: it is the being itself which is irreducible from the thinking itself. There is no thinking save from the thinking that is also the thinking of being. Thinking is always already thinking of being.

The general meaning of the concept of being-in-the-world can be explained with the help of the following joke. A man gets home from work early and finds his wife naked in the bedroom. He walks to the closet to take off his clothes, only to find his best friend there, naked. He says to him: “What are you doing here?!” The naked friend in the closet shrugs and says: “Well, you have to be somewhere.” The naked man refers to the basic Heideggerian position, whereby existence is always already a determinate existence, an existence in some world. It is completely wrong to assume that originally one is, and then only later steps into the world; one only exists in some way, *somewhere*. On this level, being-in-the-world is a conceptual development of the *Da* of the *Da-sein*, of its necessary there-ness.

The entire first section of the book develops the theme of being-in-the-world. The theme opens with the concepts of *Entfernung* and *Ausrichtung*. The strat-

egy is breath-taking. These concepts obviously refer to distance and direction as qualities of space and immediately evoke the Cartesian and Newtonian understanding of space; but, at the same time, it is also obvious that Heidegger suggests a re-interpretation of these qualities. *Entfernung* is therefore not distance, but as *Ent-fernung* quite the opposite, it is de-distancing, it is the principle of making the distance go away. And *Ausrichtung* is not the direction in which an object moves in relation to point zero, but rather the principle of always already being oriented in the world. The general point is that Dasein does not move "in" space, according to spatial coordinates of length, width and height, but that it carries, in a manner of speaking, its spatiality and its orientation with itself wherever it goes (Heidegger 1996: 101). Perhaps this point needs further refining. Heidegger warns us not to understand this as subjectivism. The spatiality of Dasein is not explained merely by the change of the point of reference from Earth to the subject; we can't simply say that instead of the subject moving in relation to the Earth, the Earth and everything else moves in relation to the subject, which rests in its place. The mere change of the reference point does not bring about the change of the concept of space, which remains Galilean. What is at stake for Heidegger is the idea that existence in the proper meaning of the term cannot be abstracted from its place and orientation, that existence is always already existence in some place and in some way. This is, in principle, also the Spinozist understanding of existence. Spinoza famously distinguished between the one universal substance, infinity of attributes, and specific modes. And modes should be understood as modifications of the substance under some attribute. A mode is a way, a fashion in which the substance is there. In this sense, modes imply the there-ness of the substance. Perhaps we could go as far as to suggest that what Spinoza calls the mode of the substance is expressed, to an extent, with what Heidegger calls *Seinsart* or *Seinsmodus*. *Modus substantiae*, *Seinsmodus* – these concepts are not incommensurable. Of course, with Spinoza, there is always the question of the indifference of the substance: while modes are dependent on the substance, the substance exists independently of the modes – at least in the reading of Hegel and even in that of Deleuze. For Heidegger, however, it is clear that being is not indifferent to its factual understanding, to its there-ness.

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Temporality of the ...-toward-...

Let us proceed with the analysis of care as the being of Da-sein. Here, the theme of the void comes explicitly to the fore once again. Firstly, in order to grasp the

totality of Dasein as being-in-the-world, Heidegger proposes to examine the feeling of angst as the perfect starting point, because it expresses the world itself. He claims that in angst we are afraid of nothing in particular and the fear comes from nowhere. It comes from nothing and nowhere because in angst we are reduced to Dasein as the being in whose being its own being is at stake. Far from introducing the colourful clutter of humans and attaching it to the formal, logical structure of Dasein, Heidegger takes the most singularizing of all feelings and explains it as the structure of Da-sein, written with hyphen. This first step therefore repeats the gesture of the Introduction to *Being and Time*, where the question of being is explained as the question that binds being to its there-ness. The second step is the attempt to express the entire structure with one concept: care. He re-articulates the self-referential character of Dasein as its “being ahead of itself” (Heidegger 1996: 179) and concludes: “The being of Da-sein means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings encountered)” (Heidegger 1996: 179–180).

The nothing and nowhere turn out to be the true place of Dasein. Of course, this nothingness is precisely the nothingness of being as such, the void of being into which Dasein is immersed. What is essentially new in the formulation of Dasein as being ahead of itself is the implicit temporal dimension. There is Dasein ahead of Dasein. This redoubling reminds us of Hegel’s formula of the beginning as identity of identity and non-identity (Hegel 2010: 51).⁵ For Heidegger, however, the redoubling of the Dasein is not a purely logical one. The pure, unsubstantial difference that is inscribed in Dasein, the hyphen between its there-ness and its being, marks the fundamental temporality of Dasein. The reason why the idea of angst is insufficient to Heidegger is, in my opinion, because it doesn’t involve temporality quite as clearly as the idea of care does.

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In any case, the idea of care is the glue that binds the two sections of *Being and Time*, it is the bridge that connects the fundamental analysis of Dasein with the analysis of its temporality. With regard to the spatiality of Dasein, the point was that Dasein carries it with itself, that it is always already somewhere. It seems

⁵ However, in Heidegger, the two moments of Dasein, Dasein itself and the Dasein which is ahead of itself, don’t designate the same concept. The former is the concept of pure self-reference, the relation of the nothingness of being to itself. The latter, which is ahead of itself, is the concept of the there-ness of being, of the being-in-the-world.

most logical to conclude that Dasein's temporality is in the same way primordial, that Dasein is always already temporal.

This leads us finally to the concept of being-toward-death which opens the section on temporality. I think we should be able to anticipate, even before getting to the text itself, that the existential analysis will demonstrate that Dasein does not appear in time, just as it does not move in space, but that it always already exists temporally. Furthermore, this original temporality should not be mistaken for a determined length in time, just as its original spatiality does not imply a fixed area in space; rather the point is that Dasein as the there-ness of being is also its then-ness. And finally, we should not mistake the existential temporality of Dasein with subjectivism, we should not reduce it to a simple claim that the length of time is measured relative to the time of the subject. Instead, what is at stake is the idea that existence is always already temporalized.

But let us go to the text. The reason why death appears in the book in the first place is because Heidegger is interested in exposing the totality of the existential structure of Dasein and therefore demands a concept of an end: "The 'end' of being-in-the-world is death. This end, belonging to the potentiality-of-being, that is, to existence, limits and defines the possible totality of Da-sein" (Heidegger 1996: §45, 216). What Heidegger is concerned with is not the biological notion of death, nor is it the psychological, sociological, or anthropological one. The rituals of burial are no more relevant than the biological decay: all this pertains to human beings, yes, but must be strictly separated from the formal structure of Dasein. Death has something in common with the feeling of angst: they both isolate existence and force it to face itself and to recognize itself in the nothingness, in the void of its own being. Heidegger underscores the fact that death is eminently "our own". Immediately, we recall the vulgar wisdom that sounds so "true". This phrase seems to point to the individualizing, singularizing character of the phenomenon of death and is therefore especially beloved by metaphysicians. If an actor dies during a performance, they die their own death, not that of the person they are performing. If someone changes places with us and saves us from dying, they will still die their own death and we will still die our own at some later time. But ... can anyone breathe in our place? Can anyone drink in our place? Can anyone urinate in our place? No? Does that make breathing, drinking or urinating singularizing phenomena, eminently "our own"? What Heidegger means by claiming that death is ours alone must be something completely different.

One of the most famous quotes from *Being and Time* goes thusly: “Da-sein is unable to bypass the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein. [...] Being-toward-the-end becomes phenomenally clearer as being toward [this] eminent possibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 1996: 232). The point is *not* that humans become what they are only in their death. Insofar as the concept of death explains Dasein in its being-ahead-of-itself, it is a structural moment of care and it brings us closer to the concreteness of the required concept of being-toward-the-end. I want to draw attention to the dialectical move that Heidegger makes here in explicating death as a positive possibility, even as a possibility *par excellence*: on account of it being the possibility of the absolute impossibility.⁶ The most eminent, fundamental capacity of this being is its non-being. This is the crucial move of all Christian metaphysics and Hegel would have been proud to have claimed a phrase like this one. Heidegger’s entire argument is oriented against the usual pathetic declarations about human finality and limitedness toward the explication of the formal structure of Dasein as being-toward-the-end. This demands that we understand death in the logical meaning (dialectical meaning, to be more precise) of the possibility of non-being. What makes this possibility an eminent one is that it is not a possibility among other possibilities, but possibility as such: potentially, Dasein is *not*.

Perhaps one may wonder how exactly this conforms to my previous declaration that Dasein is the there-ness of being. If the most fundamental possibility of Dasein is *not* to be, then how is it the concept of existence as such? I believe this question is very easily resolved. The *negation* of being, the *no* of the non-being, the *no* to all possibilities is precisely the nothingness of being itself, the void of being that Dasein is held out into. The original and authentic concept of Dasein can indeed be explained with an analysis of the phenomenon of death, because this analysis reveals precisely the structure of Da-sein, written with hyphen, the structure of the being itself and its there-ness.

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But then, what was actually gained by the analysis of angst and death, if they only refer us back to the formal, logical structure of Dasein and away from the

⁶ I call this a dialectical move since it is clear that, in basic analytical logic, this is a contradiction. See also Blattner’s scrupulous analysis, where he finds a way to avoid it without actually resolving it (Blattner 2002). My own reading is much simpler, and I believe also much more honest: we must insist precisely on the fact that this is a contradiction, and resolve it with a dialectical move.

trials of human existence? What was gained was the further development of the idea of the unstable being of Dasein. What most commentators seem to overlook is that the concept of being-toward-death is not important because of the term death, but because of the term *toward*. The concept of being ahead of itself resonates in the term "toward" and gains an even more explicit meaning. We could say that the there-ness of Dasein (its "Da") is further explained as its toward-ness, as its "zu". Toward-ness implies not only the spatiality, but also the temporality of Dasein.

Let me briefly comment on another concept that Heidegger analyses: the call of conscience. Again, this concept sounds quite suspicious and moralistic. But far from dealing with articulated moral demands of such a call, and far from picturing the caller as a person or god (Heidegger 1996: 254), Heidegger is clearly interested in the call of conscience only because it reveals, in yet further terms, the formal structure of Dasein. The call of the conscience is wordless: "conscience speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence" (Heidegger 1996: 252). This is because the one who is calling Dasein in the conscience, the caller, is Dasein itself. Again, it is the absence, the negation of utterances and words, it is the silence, which reveal the fundamental structure of Dasein, the structure of being dipped or thrown into the void of being. Being ahead of itself, calling itself, Dasein should fundamentally be grasped in its toward-ness, in its "zu".

This allows us to proceed to the final formulation of the temporality of Dasein in Heidegger's *Being and Time* – the future. It should be clear where all my reading leads: the primordial, proper temporality of Dasein is precisely the temporality of the toward-ness, of the "zu": it is the future as *Zu-kunft*. One must warn again that the future should not be misinterpreted as a specific temporality of what has not yet come to pass. It should be understood on the ontological level: as the coming into being, as the answering to the call of being, as being held out into the nothingness of being. This *Hineingehaltenheit*, this constitutional torsion of Dasein is finally revealed as temporality. The fundamental toward-ness of Da-sein, the hyphen between being and its there-ness, is revealed as time. The whole idea of the future as the primordial temporality rests on the understanding of the toward-ness of Dasein as time.

Teleiosis

To conclude, I would like to make a detour through Franz Brentano. In his *Philosophical Investigations on Space, Time and the Continuum* (2010), Brentano introduced two concepts to help explain his notion of the continuum: plerosis and teleiosis. Imagine there are two disks, one is a disk of completely blue colour and the other is a disk parcelled into four quadrants: white, blue, red and yellow. The centre of the sectored disk, if observed as the outer boundary of the blue sector, has only a quarter of the plerosis, compared to the full plerosis of the centre of the completely blue disk (Brentano 2010: 8). We may add that the geometer must decide whether the centre point is white or blue or red or yellow. This is because a point, for geometer, is completely independent of the whole it belongs to, and so one can easily either count it in or subtract it from the continuum. A Brentanian, on the contrary, can claim that the centre point is shared by all four sectors of the disk, with the stipulation that for each sector, the centre has only a quarter of plerosis, which is also differently oriented. This is why, in Brentanian geometry, we can draw not only one, but infinitely many straight lines between two points – but their pleroses are only partial and oriented differently (Brentano 2010: 8). The concept of teleiosis is even more interesting, insofar as it generalizes the idea of the variability of plerosis from the outer boundaries of a continuum to all boundaries, that is to say, also to the inner boundaries of a continuum. This is what really makes boundary the crucial determination of the continuum. Let us imagine a rectangle of gradual colour transition from blue on the one side to red on the other side (Brentano 2010: 15). Let us compare the colour of any of the horizontal lines (that is, lines that pass from blue colour to red) with the colour of the diagonal in the point of their intersection. From the abstract mathematical point of view, the colour of the diagonal and the colour of the horizontal line in their intersection is the same, since this intersection is exactly one point which is independent from the lines that intersect in it and is certainly of the colour identical to itself. But if we observe the intersection as the inner boundary of the diagonal and compare it to the intersection as the inner boundary of the horizontal line, then, in Brentanian geometry, its teleiosis is different. The diagonal is longer than the horizontal line, and therefore the grade of the colour transition is different: this is why the teleiosis of the intersection depends on the line it belongs to. And if we compare the blue vertical line of the beginning of the rectangle of colour transition to any vertical line of a completely blue rectangle, their teleiosis is also different. The outer boundary on the

blue side is not completely blue, just as the outer boundary on the red side is not completely red, as one may conclude on the basis of an abstract representation. For every vertical line of the rectangle of continuous colour transition we must assert that it is *in itself on the way* from blue to red.

Why are these little known Brentanian concepts important in the analysis of Heidegger's *Being and Time*? First of all, the strategy to understand the continuum from its boundary strongly resembles Heidegger's strategy to understand the totality of Dasein by examining it through its "end". Secondly, the concept of teliosis, which carries the name "telos" in its core, is the complete geometrical correlation to Heidegger's concept of being-toward-the-end. Teleiosis as the concept of transition from one side toward the other expresses precisely the fundamental toward-ness of Heideggerian Dasein. In this sense, it is the perfect geometrical basis for the ontological analysis of Dasein. And thirdly, the concept of plerosis – of the fullness or plenitude of a boundary – is another geometrical tool to help us understand the structure of Da-sein. Brentano's concept of plerosis allows us to speak about a point in time when the movement begins: it belongs both to the continuum of movement *and* to the continuum of rest, just not with the full plerosis. Let us take the example of the temporal line of human life, stretched from the moment of birth to the moment of death – as indeed Brentano does. It is especially interesting to observe the end-points of this line. For Aristotle, the end-points of a line, its outer boundaries, are paradoxical. But with the help of Brentano, one can properly claim that both end-points belong to the line of existence – just not in full plerosis. The end-point is not fully there. Its plerosis is shared with the void. Or, to put it differently, the end-point somehow includes the nothingness from which it delimits. What I want to propose is the claim that Heidegger's Dasein is precisely the idea of the plerosis of the end-point. Dasein is held out into the void precisely in the sense of Brentanian geometry. Heidegger's ontology is properly explained with the help of Brentanian geometry.

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It would be a terrible mistake to immediately try to suture thinking of pure being to everyday existence. To ask ourselves how fundamental ontology can help us resolve our everyday moral dilemmas is to completely misunderstand and fail the task of thinking. Fundamental ontology is transformative and has the capacity to produce morality; we should never demote it to a simple tool of justifying the existing morality, to an armament in the hands of the average and predominant understanding of being.

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