

## Heidegger's Philosophy of Death

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The aim of this paper is to achieve a preliminary understanding of Heidegger's philosophy of death. Inquiry into the meaning of Heidegger's philosophy of death, as presented in Division Two, Chapter One, of *Being and Time*, reveals a terminology of distinctions. Thus, an effective approach to bringing out the meaning of his wisdom on death is a study of terms and distinctions.

Understanding Heidegger's philosophy of death hinges upon understanding the following key terms, phrases and distinctions: (i) Being-at-an-end/Being-towards-and-end; (ii) Ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped; (iii) Theyself/ authentic self, falling/fleeing in the face of death, anxiety/fear, potentiality-for-Being: authentic/inauthentic; (iv) inauthentic-Being-towards-death/authentic-Being-towards-death; and (v) freedom towards death. The definitions of the above terms bring out the meaning of Division Two, Chapter One of *Being and Time*.

Part one of this paper defines the above key Heideggerian terms, taken from Division Two, Chapter One, of *Sein und Zeit*. Part two, brings out the meaning of, and provides a preliminary sketch of, his philosophy of death.

First, a few brief remarks placing Division Two, Chapter One, in the context of *Being and Time*. *Being and Time* is separated into two divisions. Division One, a preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein, studies the ways in which a human being exists. Division Two, entitled "Dasein and Temporality", no longer a preparatory analysis, is more ontological because it is concerned with what it means to be. Death, authentic existence, and time are the three major subject matters of Division Two. Heidegger thinks that it is precisely the nature of one's awareness of death that allows the inquiry to shift from the ways of existence to what it means to be. Division Two, Chapter One, entitled "Dasein's possibility of being-a-whole, and Being-towards-death", contains Heidegger's philosophy of death.

### I

Before outlining the terms and distinctions, it is necessary to summarize Heidegger's discussion of death up to this point. Heidegger has already explained that as long as Dasein is, there is a "not yet"...which is constantly...outstanding" belonging to Dasein (242). He stated that the "coming-to-an-end" of "what-is-not-yet-at-an-end" has the character of "no-longer-Dasein" (242). Also, the Dasein cannot be represented by someone else in "coming-to-an-end" (242).

The first important Heideggerian distinction requiring definition is the difference between *Being-at-an-end* and *Being-towards-the-end*. When Heidegger speaks of death, the ending he has in mind does not signify our *Being-at-an-end*. Death is not conceived of as the ending of us. Dying cannot be understood in the sense of an ending, since this conception would treat humans as something present-at-hand or ready-to-hand which we are not. Heidegger already explained that as long as we are there is a *not-yet* belonging to us.

In death, Dasein has not been fulfilled nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished... just as Dasein is already its "not-yet"...constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. (245)

Death is a way to be, not a way to end. The end toward which we are as existing "remains inappropriately defined by the notion of a 'Being-at-an-end'" (245). The term *Being-at-an-end* does not mean death, instead it signifies a non-existent human. *Being-towards-the-end*, signifying death, refers to the way in which an existing human can be.

The three key terms, *ownmost*, *non-relational* and *not to be outstripped*, are also central to understanding Heidegger's philosophy of death. These three terms are used throughout the latter part of Division Two, Chapter One, but they are made concrete when Heidegger uses them in the following passage: "[D]eath reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*. (250) The term *ownmost* is used by Heidegger to signify that my death is my own. I alone will die my death. Since only I can know what it means for me to be going to die, death cannot be shared by anyone. Thus, death has the characteristic of being *non-relational*. The phrase *not to be outstripped* refers to the inevitable possibility of death. "Death is something that stands before us--something impending" (250). Each term, *ownmost*, *non-relational* and *not to be outstripped*, is a characteristic of death.

The following inter-related distinctions also play an important role in Heidegger's philosophy of death: *theyself/authentic-self*, *falling/fleeing*, *anxiety/fear*, and the *potentiality-for-Being: authentic and inauthentic*. In Section 45, the introduction to Division Two, appearing before Chapter One, the term *potentiality-for-Being* is outlined. Heidegger defines the idea of existence as a *potentiality-for-Being*--"a potentiality which understands, and for which its own Being is an issue" (232). This *potentiality-for-Being* is "free either for *authenticity* or for *inauthenticity* or for a mode in which neither of these has been differentiated" (232) {emphasis added}. Thus, we exist in a way that things in the world do not. We have this potentiality for being authentic or inauthentic, and we are freedom. So, how does this potentiality for being authentic or inauthentic apply to the issue of death?

In Heidegger's discussion of death he differentiates between the *they-self*, and the authentic self. He calls the self of everydayness *das Man*, the they. The they is constituted by public interpretation expressed by idle talk. "Idle talk must accordingly make manifest the way in which everyday Dasein interprets for itself its *Being-towards-death* (252). Through temptation, tranquillization, and alienation, the *they-self* convinces us to treat death as an actuality, an event, and not as a possibility. The *they-self* tempts us to convince ourselves that death is not really our own, tranquillises us against death-awareness because it cannot be shared by others, and thus alienates us from our authentic self by concealing death.

But temptation, tranquillization, and alienation are distinguishing marks of the kind of Being called "*falling*". As falling, everyday *Being-towards-death* is a constant *fleeing in the face of death*. *Being-towards-the-end* has the mode of *evasion in the face of it*--giving new explanations for it, understanding it inauthentically, and concealing it. (254)

Heidegger thinks, although we are dying as long as we

exist, most of us do so by way of falling. We flee death by way of falling. Thus, another characteristic of death is its *fallenness*, the tendency of us to exist in the they-self.

Our state-of-mind also tells us something about death, thus the difference between *anxiety* and *fear* is relevant to the discussion of death. Heidegger explains that death is not something chosen by us, rather we are thrown into it. The thrownness of our existence is revealed in the awareness that we are going to die. The mood that reveals this death-awareness is anxiety not fear. "Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise" (251). Heidegger considers fear as an accidental or random mood of weakness in some individual. "Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety in the face of that potentiality-for-Being which is one's ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped...Being-in-the-world" (251).

Existence, facticity, and falling characterize Being-towards-the-end, and are therefore constitutive for the existential conception of Death. (251)

The above distinctions and terms lead right into the important Heideggerian distinction between *Inauthentic Being-towards-death* and *Authentic Being-towards-death*. The *inauthentic Being-towards-death* is characterized by the mode of the they-self. The they-self treats death as an actuality, not a possibility, by seducing us to convince ourselves that death is not really our own, but an event experienced by others, tranquilizing ourselves against death-awareness and alienating us from our authentic self by concealing death. "Our everyday falling evasion in the face of death is an *inauthentic Being-towards-death*. But *inauthenticity* is based on the possibility of authenticity" (259). *Authentic Being-towards-death* is stated by Heidegger as follows:

*Authentic Being-towards-death can not evade its ownmost non-relational possibility, or cover up this possibility by thus fleeing from it, or give a new explanation for it to accord with the common sense of the "they".* (260)

The difference between authentic and inauthentic Being-towards-death rests upon the difference between *possibility* and *actuality*. In authentic Being-towards-death possibility "must not be weakened": it must be "understood", "cultivated" "put up with" as possibility (261). The difference between *expecting* and *anticipating* also explains the difference between authentic and inauthentic Being-towards-death. Expecting is waiting for actualization. "Our terminology for such Being towards...possibility is 'anticipation' of this possibility" (262). He explains that "[t]he closest closeness which one may have in Being towards death as possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual" (262). Heidegger thinks that, understood genuinely, this possibility is the understanding of "the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all" (262). Anticipation is "the possibility of understanding one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being--that is to say, the possibility of authentic existence" (26). Thus, the phenomenon of death reveals authentic Dasein.

The final important term revealing Heidegger's philosophy of death is *freedom towards death*. The meaning of the phrase "freedom towards death" is clear based upon the above definitions of authentic Being-towards-death and anticipation. By "freedom towards death", Heidegger means

the freedom to grasp fully that we are capable of being and not-being.

[A]nticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily un-supported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned freedom towards death--a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the "they" and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious. (266)

To be fully aware of one's ability to be is to exist authentically.

## II

The combination of the above definitions brings out the meaning, constituting a preliminary sketch, of Heidegger's philosophy of death. The key points made regarding each of the terms and distinctions are as follows. Death is not the end of us, since Being-towards-the-end signifies the way which an existing human being can be. We die alone and death cannot be shared. Death stands before us as something impending. We can fear this impending death or be anxious about it. We can treat death as actual, an event, or as a possibility. We can flee death by way of denying its possibility and affirming its actuality. We can flee death by way of falling, or we can exist authentically. We can anticipate death and exist authentically or expect death and exist inauthentically. We are free towards death. Free to grasp fully that we are capable of not-being and being. Free to be aware of our ability to be and exist authentically.

It is precisely the linking up of these key distinctions and definitions that brings out the meaning of Heidegger's philosophy of death. For Heidegger death is a phenomenon of life that reveals the way in which a human being exists and what it means to be. He interprets death as a meaningful possibility by showing that death is an existential awareness of possible not-being.

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All quotations are from Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962). The numbers in parentheses represent the margin pagination.

## Democracy and the General Will

Charles Morgan

Any discussion of the "democratic" nature of Rousseau's formulations in *The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and *The Social Contract* must involve an enormous qualification of the term "democracy". For the general will is truly democratic only if we discard what democracy has come to mean. Indeed, the concept of the general will is so far removed from the government systems we normally describe as democratic that we can more accurately equate it with the Platonic notion of aristocracy developed in the *Republic*. This is not to say that Rousseau "regresses" in the *Social Contract* to some form of ancient elitism. Rather, while remaining consistent with his