Anxiety, Deferral, Dying in Heidegger

by

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According to Martin Heidegger, to be anxious is to feel the weight of one’s existence and at the same time one’s essential relation to non-existence, nothingness, as vulnerability to death. Human existence, “Dasein”, is defined by the intimacy of this relation. Consequently, Heidegger describes anxiety as the fundamental mood of the human experience. This project seeks to motivate these claims by way of investigating the existential structures of Dasein as well as the ontology of mood and world given in several of Heidegger’s major works. The final section of the thesis employs the heirloom object, viewed through the lens of Freudian fetish theory, as a means of discussing ways in which Dasein’s everyday engagements with objects express the anxiety latent in its experience of world. Additionally, this analysis of the heirloom object points to limitations with Heidegger’s thinking of the object in Being and Time.
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Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of Contents iv
Introduction 1-2
Chapter 1: Being-in-the-World 3-24
Chapter 2: Attunement and Disclosure 25-41
   I. Heidegger’s Ontology of Mood
   II. Mood as Disclosing Being-in-the-world
   III. Mood as Disclosing Thrownness
Chapter 3: Anxiety 42-60
Chapter 4: (In)Authenticity and Objectality 61-82
   I. Dying and Deferral
   II. The Heirloom as Fetish
   III. More than mere Object
Conclusion 83
Works Cited 84-85
Introduction

This project investigates anxiety as it is presented in the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. The focus of the project is on Heidegger’s major work *Being and Time* but also refers to seminal essays including “What is Metaphysics?”, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, as well as the lecture series compiled in the publication *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Anxiety is for Heidegger a necessary mode of being-in-the-world, or of being attuned to the world. It is posited as the fundamental mood of Dasein and an inevitable aspect of the human experience, produced by our very ontological structure as thrown projection and as finite. Despite the claimed inevitability of anxiety, the experience of anxiety is consistently deferred by Dasein who flees from confronting what anxiety discloses. Indeed this very flight is said to be a necessary feature of being-in-the-world.

Thus the paradox of Heidegger’s Dasein is that it is a being uniquely capable of self-knowledge, as the kind of being for whom its being is an issue, and as the only being who dies “as such”, whilst at the same time it is always turning away from itself, failing to live up to this capability, and failing to properly die in favour of merely perishing. It is precisely because Dasein can die – that is has a relation to its own mortality – that it experiences anxiety. To be anxious is to feel the weight of one’s existence and at the same time one’s essential relation to non-existence, nothingness, as one’s vulnerability to death. To live anxiously, rather than to flee
in the face of one’s essential anxiety, is to take up an authentic mode of being and an authentic relation to death.

The claim I make in this work is one about the status of Dasein’s relation to objects with respect to its fundamental anxiety. Heidegger maintains the position in *Being and Time* that Dasein, in error, mistakes beings for being by allowing itself to be fascinated by objects of material culture; for him this fascination constitutes a form of fleeing from anxiety. The first three chapters of this thesis are dedicated to the exegetical analysis of key concepts in *Being and Time*: first, Dasein and world, second, attunement and disclosure, and thirdly, anxiety. In the final section of the project I leverage Heidegger’s discussion of the workly character of art in “The Origin of the Work of Art” in combination with Freud’s theory of the fetish object to present objects of material culture – specifically the heirloom object – as objects which perform a double function in both deferring and marking Dasein’s confrontation with nothingness.
1. Being-in-the-world

In order to understand why anxiety has so central a role in *Being and Time*, why Heidegger identifies it as the “fundamental mood”,¹ ² it will be necessary to explain Heidegger’s “Dasein”, that term which designates human existence, through describing its ontological structures. Describing these features as “ontological” means that they are the structures constitutive of Dasein’s being - they are features of human existence which, in Heidegger’s view, all share in and which set the human apart from other kinds of beings. Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* is to bring these basic structures to the fore by carefully examining the particular human experience of being. He calls this project the performance of an “existential analytic” of Dasein.³ The major aim of this chapter is to provide a sketch of this project and its methodology, focusing on the explanation of two fundamental and interrelated concepts – Dasein and world.

The question motivating Heidegger’s existential analytic is “the question of the meaning of being.”⁴ Heidegger will return to this guiding question throughout the text. To pursue it, he holds, belongs essentially to the kind of being that we ourselves are. He supports this claim with

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1 A note on the citations: Each footnote citation for Heidegger’s *Being and Time* lists two page numbers separated by a forward slash figure, i.e. “Heidegger, *Being and Time*, A/B. Here “A” represents the page number in Heidegger’s original German text, “B” represents the page number in the Macquarrie/Robinson translation which I have used throughout.
3 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13/34.
recourse to Meno’s paradox; by showing that inquiry is always “guided beforehand by what is sought”\textsuperscript{5} he asserts that posing the question discloses that the meaning of being already be available to the enquirer in some abstract way. That one is even capable of wondering about the meaning of being – its own being as well as in a more general sense – demonstrates that one already has a sense of its significance, that its meaning is already in some way present, intuited and yet to be worked out, prior to reaching the level of articulation. Heidegger calls this Dasein’s “pre-ontological understanding” of being.\textsuperscript{6} “Pre-ontological” here means prior to the explicit performance of theoretical ontology, a sort of precondition of Dasein’s thematization, objectification of beings: \textsuperscript{7} “the essential feature of every science – philosophy included – is that it constitutes itself in the objectification of something already in some way unveiled, antecedently given.”\textsuperscript{8} For Heidegger, Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding indicates its unique relation to being – an intimacy which sets it apart from other species.

Understanding is meant by Heidegger here in a non-cognitive sense. He intends Dasein’s precognitive understanding as a basic mode of Dasein’s existing,\textsuperscript{9} in light of which it comports itself towards other beings. “To understand,” Heidegger writes, “means, more precisely, to project oneself upon a possibility.”\textsuperscript{10} Entities and beings are encountered by Dasein as opportunities or possibilities for acting and engaging; things are such that they are there to be taken up or not to be taken up, according to Dasein’s mood and intention. “In all comportment towards beings – whether it is specifically cognitive, which is most frequently theoretical, or

\textsuperscript{5} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 5/25.
\textsuperscript{6} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 15-16/36-37.
\textsuperscript{7} Martin Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, trans. Albert Hofstader (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1982), 281.
\textsuperscript{8} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 281.
\textsuperscript{9} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 276-278.
\textsuperscript{10} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 277.
whether practical-technical – an understanding of being is already involved.”\textsuperscript{11} In and through this understanding, being-towards beings Dasein is shown to itself as “a can-be,”\textsuperscript{12} a being who is open to possibility and who is capable of deciding with respect to the possibilities it engages. Dasein’s choosing between is an expression of its freedom of will. It is through choice-making that Dasein engages self-creation: “The Dasein becomes what it is in and through this understanding; and it is always only that which it has chosen itself to be, that which it understands itself to be in the projection of its ownmost ability to be.”\textsuperscript{13}

The pre-ontological understanding of being assumes methodological significance in light of Heidegger’s appropriation of the so-called “Meno paradox”: it is a prerequisite for the existential analytic and for thematic engagement in ontological inquiry generally. This kind of intuitive grasp of being motivates ontology in the first place; pre-ontological understanding indicates a relation with being which allows for Dasein’s confronting and questioning. Thus, writes Heidegger, “the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself – the pre-ontological understanding of Being.”\textsuperscript{14} It follows from this statement that Dasein, in its essential understanding, is likewise essentially ontological. It is a being that is not only capable of ontological inquiry, but that is ontological in nature:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, its being is an issue for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein’s being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards being…And this means further that there is some way...

\textsuperscript{11} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 275
\textsuperscript{12} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 277.
\textsuperscript{13} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 278.
\textsuperscript{14} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 15/35.
in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological.\(^\text{15}\)

“Ontic” is a term used by Heidegger in opposition to “ontological”. Where “ontological” signifies the underlying structures of Dasein’s (or any being’s) existence, “ontic” refers to the specific existence of Dasein (or any being) in its concreteness. To say that “Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological” is to say that human beings are of a different kind than other concrete beings – animals and plants and rocks, for example – by virtue of their additional capacity for determining such underlying structures of reality in light of an understanding of being. This understanding is in some sense reflexive in that it involves the recognition of one’s own being. Hence, as quoted in the above passage, “with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it.”

To disclose means to allow something to be shown, to reveal or uncover it. It is a term with special ontological and epistemological significance in Heidegger’s thought. Being is accessible to Dasein in pre-ontological understanding on the basis of being’s self-disclosure. It is only insofar as Dasein is receptive or open to possibilities of disclosure that it can it be said to be related to being in understanding, that being can appear to it at all. Thus an initial disposition of openness and receptivity to possibility is intimately related to its capacity for understanding. This disposition is what Heidegger calls “care,” \textit{Sorge}, another ontological characteristic of Dasein.\(^\text{16}\)

We should be careful here to divorce “care” of its usual ethical connotations, thinking of it rather

\(^{15}\) Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 12/32.

\(^{16}\) Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 57/83-84.
in terms of intentionality, a directedness or purposiveness with which Dasein approaches entities. That being is not merely disclosed to Dasein but that it is also disclosed as (in)significant, (ir)relevant or as (not) mattering has its basis in Dasein’s caring.

Thus far the discussion of being in this section has remained abstract. But being is never disclosed as such, “in itself”, it is disclosed as the being of beings, in and through its manifestation in concrete entities. Dasein can only know being through beings; it is only through intentional engagement with entities that it can have something like an understanding of being.

The name Heidegger chooses for his subject in *Being and Time*, “Dasein,” literally meaning “being-there,” captures the essential relation of Dasein to its environment, its situation. Insofar as Dasein is, it is somewhere, sometime; it is always a being of the “there,” a “being-in-the-world.”17 “Being-in-the-world” is the activity of Dasein’s existing.18 “In” here is not meant in the common prepositional sense of the term. It is not the geographical position or spatial inclusion of an object. The “in” of being-in-the-world should rather be taken as involvement or engagement with. Hubert Dreyfus offers that “in” as involvement is an existential rather than a categorial term. Consider phrases like “he is in love”, “she is in shock” where “in” indicates a state of being rather than a geographical location (“in the library”, “in Canada”). “In” in the existential sense reflects Dasein’s caring whereas the categorial sense is characterized by indifference.19 Another way of understanding Dreyfus’ distinction: “existential” designates the characteristics of Dasein which reflect its particular ontological structures (such as care, understanding). “Categorial” designates a characteristic which is not particular to Dasein.20 For

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17 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13/33.
example, a lamp could be said to be “in” the room in the spatial sense, but not in the existential
sense. Objects are in the world in a rather different way than Dasein.21

“In” as involvement also better captures the character of Dasein’s relatedness to its world,
expressing active, practical occupation with entities. Dasein is essentially in-the-world not
merely in terms of its factual existing somewhere but in its openness towards and engagements
with other beings or entities.

By “world” Heidegger means something beyond a totality of entities. “World” is not, or
is not merely, the physical things that surround Dasein, presenting themselves in terms of
possibilities for engagement: “neither the ontical depiction of entities within the world nor the
ontological interpretation of their Being is such as to reach the phenomenon of the ‘world’.”22
World is perhaps better conceived as that which allows for a range of meaningful possibilities to
appear: as that which renders entities meaningful, legible for Dasein. It is a complex
Heideggerian concept. This is undoubtedly due in part to its being used in multiple senses, both
throughout Being and Time and Heidegger’s larger oeuvre. Heidegger outlines four distinct,
though interconnected, senses of the term in Division 1 Section 3 of Being and Time. There is
firstly world as an ontical concept, which refers to the beings of the world. This would be world
in the common sense of a physical world: a totality including all of the things that exist in the
world. The second, ontological concept of world refers to the Being of beings in the world. This
sense of world is commonly used to group like entities together based on a particular shared
feature of their Being. In this sense one might speak of the bat, the bases, the outfield as entities
belonging to the world of the baseball player, based their being objects with a shared relevance
to the sport. A third sense of world designates Dasein’s “wherein.” This is the world that Dasein

22 Heidegger, Being and Time, 64/92.
inhabits although it does not refer the physical world. This sense is employed when we use phrases like “the world of academia” to signify “a constellation of equipment, practices and concerns” with particular meanings for a particular group. The fourth sense discussed by Heidegger in this passage is the most difficult. It designates the world’s “ontological existential worldhood.” World in its worldhood is what I take to be the “how” of an entity’s appearance. That something appears to Dasein as relevant, significant, meaningful has its basis in worldhood; it is a necessary precondition for world in the third sense – the world of our everyday concern, the lived world.23

It is worth highlighting that in Being and Time Heidegger does not intend world in the ontical sense of the physical world. While the first two senses are used to describe beings, these second two pertain to being-in-the-world. Again, Dreyfus suggests grouping the four senses in terms of categoriality and existentiality.24 The second two should be said to be existential senses because they posit Dasein in relation of involvement. But Dasein is more than “involved” in world; Dasein and world are co-constituted, there is no world without Dasein and there can be no Dasein without world, since most basically Dasein is being-in-the-world. Thus, “ontologically, ‘world’ is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself.”25 Only world as existential concept, rather than categorial, can capture this sense.

A closer look at the kinds of entities that are there for Dasein and the possibilities revealed to it through these entities can help illuminate world as an existential concept. Heidegger approaches entities through a phenomenological exploration of Dasein’s dealings with them in its everyday life. The being of entities is revealed through Dasein’s engagements with

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23 Heidegger, Being and Time, 64-65/93.
25 Heidegger, Being and Time, 64/92.
them. Achieving phenomenological access to entities depends on “thrusting aside interpretive tendencies”, in other words performing the phenomenological reduction, the epoché. The phenomenological method requires, as a preliminary step, the bracketing of one’s common sense notions, ridding oneself of the theoretical baggage with which one normally approaches things. If this can be done – surely it is not easy - the inquirer proceeds with a disposition of openness-towards, allowing the entity to disclose itself in its being more truthfully, i.e. in such a way that is informed by Dasein’s lived experience of it, not prefigured by the dominant historical views of it. Heidegger’s study of entities, then, must begin from Dasein’s being-in-the-world and a careful investigation of Dasein’s way of being towards them.

To sum up what has been already said, Dasein’s caring being-in-the-world involves an intentional orientation towards other beings which requires understanding. It is from this pre-ontological understanding that Dasein always begins: “If understanding is a basic determination of existence, it is as such the condition of possibility for all of the Dasein’s particular possible manners of comportment.” Heidegger will claim that Dasein’s primary comportment towards entities is its engagement in concernful dealings. “Dealings,” essentially, are intentional activities. The kind of dealing which is closest to, or, most properly Dasein’s is “not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather a kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use.” Dasein, in projecting itself upon possibilities, encounters entities as (ir)relevant vis à vis their use value or functionality within the context of a larger project or goal. It is on the basis of this claim that Heidegger constructs a taxonomy of entities.

26 Heidegger, Being and Time, 67/95.
27 Heidegger, Being and Time, 67/96.
28 Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, 276.
29 Heidegger, Being and Time, 67/95.
Broadly, entities have the character of being either a “what” or a “who”.30 “What” entities, beings of a different ontological structure than Dasein, are of two types: “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand”. Entities that are present-at-hand are things that exist and are there for Dasein. They are observable and exist as possible encounters of theoretical study or practical engagement. The present-at-hand are objects which constitute our environment but remain at a peripheral level. They at any time could be taken up and be made objects of engagement but insofar as they remain present-at-hand they remain outside of the scope of Dasein’s immediate concern. Music and lighting, for example, go a long way in “setting the scene”, or creating an ambience within which some dramatic action might take place on screen or on stage. In general, these “background” elements do not hold the focus of the audience, who are meant to engage primarily with the actors’ dialogue. Sometimes though, those ambient elements which frame the drama come to the fore. When a viewer recognizes a song in the filmic soundtrack for example, the action becomes secondary to their effort to place the song. What distinguishes entities that are present-at-hand from entities that are ready-to-hand is the actualization of the possibility of engagement, Dasein’s objectification of them. Ready-to-hand is the term Heidegger uses to describe the Being of entities with which we are preoccupied in practical engagement; they are “what gets used, what gets produced, and so forth.”31

Ready-to-hand entities are named “equipment.” Equipment is constituted by functionality;32 it is something used “in order to,” it is directed towards something other than itself and thus exists in reference or in assignment to other equipment entities.33 The category encompasses

everything that Dasein makes use of in domestic and public life.\textsuperscript{34} Heidegger explains equipmentality through the careful description of a specific concernful dealing: the craftman’s activity of hammering with a hammer. In this kind of dealing, one does not apprehend the hammer as an occurrent something independent of the task at hand. Neither is Dasein reflectively aware of the hammer’s status as part of a structure of equipmentality. Without reflection, or, as “second nature”, the skilled carpenter grasps the hammer and puts it to use, “[appropriating] this equipment in a way which could not be more suitable.”\textsuperscript{35} But the hammer-entity is not the focus of the carpenter; the tool is just a means to an end. Presumably the work itself is what occupies the forefront of his mind, or maybe he is thinking about what he will eat for lunch that day. The work of the carpenter, the project that he aims at completing by hammering, “bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered” in use.\textsuperscript{36} The key feature of the carpenter’s encounter with the hammer is its use-value. The hammer is really only understood in his putting it to use:

The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is — as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific ‘manipulability’ of the hammer.\textsuperscript{37}

The hammer discloses itself in hammering. On the basis of this passage, it seems that Dasein’s understanding of equipment is gleaned through a practical engagement with it that exhibits its proper functioning. In a later passage however Heidegger convincingly shows that equipment is more fully revealed in its Being precisely when it ceases to function.

\textsuperscript{34} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 292.
\textsuperscript{35} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 69/98.
\textsuperscript{36} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 69/99.
\textsuperscript{37} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 69/98.
Damage may impair the proper functioning of equipment, rendering it unusable. Or, the required equipment might be missing, absent from the context that you had expected to find it in. These are examples of an entity’s being un-ready-to-hand. Un-readiness-to-hand is something which Dasein finds unsettling.\textsuperscript{38} When unusable, equipment’s “constitutive assignment of the ‘in-order-to-be’, ‘towards-this’ has been disturbed.”\textsuperscript{39} But, interestingly, it is usually only in the case of a disturbance that the entity’s assignment is rendered explicit to Dasein. The broken equipment makes the project for which its use was intended conspicuous. It makes salient the necessity of the role of the hammer as well as the hammer’s relatedness to the nail, the wood, and end product. It makes salient the act of hammering’s fitting in to a network of many other ways of being human.\textsuperscript{40} The seamless and interdependent functioning of equipment on which the success of the project depended is suddenly illuminated, the hammer’s potential becomes clearest when it is impossible to use and the project comes into clearest view when it must be put on hold.

When there is a break in the equipment-entity’s referential context: “The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself.”\textsuperscript{41} Such circumspection is like Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being – vague and intuitive and implicit. When circumspection is confronted with failure, disappointment, emptiness, one’s expectations come into sharper focus along with a matrix of other factors upon which the expectations’ fulfillment relied. Or, sticking with Heidegger’s example, the hammer’s meaning is intelligible, its being is disclosed most fully, when it is viewed in terms of its “referential

\textsuperscript{38} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 74/103.  
\textsuperscript{39} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 75/105.  
\textsuperscript{40} Dreyfus, \textit{Being-in-the-World}, 98.  
\textsuperscript{41} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 75/105.
totality”. This referential totality is “world” in Dreyfus’ existential sense, as that which renders entities meaningful or intelligible for Dasein. It is only on the basis of this sense of world that entities can be grasped ontologically, that they can be encountered and show themselves in their being.\textsuperscript{42}

When Dasein puts equipment to use, the equipment actualizes its use-potential; it fulfils its proper function. Heidegger calls this “letting something be” or “freeing something,” i.e. for disclosure or showing itself in its being. In the case of Heidegger’s carpenter, Dasein lets the hammer be a hammer by hammering with it. “Ontologically such letting be requires already knowing how the thing fits into the involvement whole, and in this sense ‘previously freeing’ it for all particular ontical uses.”\textsuperscript{43} Dasein’s “already knowing” is its pre-ontological grasping of world which makes its use of equipment in particular concrete situations possible. Letting be means knowing how to use equipment, seeing how it relates meaningfully to a wider equipmental context and the “involvement whole” of human purposiveness and activities like building and dwelling. Basically, we can take this passage to mean that apprehending an entity as useful, equipmentality generally, depends on already having a world as a referential totality on the basis of which things makes sense in terms of their relational position within the whole. The hammer appears, and appears as relevant, in its “for the sake of which” which does not appear but is intuited before the hammer is seized:

The ‘for the sake of which’ signifies an ‘in-order-to’; this in turn, a ‘towards-with’; the latter, an ‘in which’ of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the ‘with-which’ of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying [Be-deuten] in which Dasein gives itself

\textsuperscript{42} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 72-76/102-106.
\textsuperscript{43} Dreyfus, \textit{Being-in-the-World}, 96.
beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we call ‘significance’. This is what makes up the structure of the world – the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.⁴⁴

So, an entity’s being intelligible as what it is for Dasein depends on world. It is with this conception of world as a totality which lends significance in mind that we should return to the proper subject of the existential analytic: Dasein’s being-in-the-world.

Dasein as being-in-the-world is posited as inseparable from world, situated firmly and inextricably in a context of meaning. Positioning human being as being-in-the-world is arguably Being and Time’s most significant contribution to the philosophical landscape, marking a departure from the metaphysical position which Heidegger designates as “Cartesianism” which relies on the dualism of subject/object dichotomy. It is a philosophical position based in the maintenance of this strict dichotomy and, according to Heidegger, “the radical separation of God, the ‘I’, and ‘the world’”⁴⁵ where “world” is employed as an ontical concept: the world is res extensa, ontologically defined by extension, by entities which occupy space. Human being is that unique entity which is both res cogitans and res extensa. Recall that Descartes conceives of the human being as an ego cogito, a thinking self over and against a physical world which does not think. Heidegger holds that on this view “the road is completely blocked to seeing the founded character of all sensory and intellective awareness and its understanding these as possibilities of Being-in-the-world.”⁴⁶ Instead, a chasm is posited between subject and object. The “Cartesian” subject is in the world (in the ontic, physical sense of world) and simultaneously radically other than, beyond the world owing to its God-like intellectual powers.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, Being and Time, 87/120.
⁴⁵ Heidegger, Being and Time, 95/128.
⁴⁶ Heidegger, Being and Time, 98/130-131.
At the heart of Heidegger’s critique of this metaphysical view is the rejection of the claim that there can be a knowing subject independent of the “external” world. He opposes the model of knowing as the relation between subject and object and explicitly seeks to distinguish his epistemology from it stating that: “subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world.” Knowledge and understanding are born from Dasein’s engagement with entities and arise out of Being-in-the-world. The detached, meaning-giving, knowing subject of Cartesianism is replaced by Heidegger with a notion of subjectivity that is embodied and engaged in practical concerns, a subject whose activity is motivated by care. It is not the case, though, that for Heidegger practical “doing” supplants thinking as a means for gaining understanding:

“Heidegger does not want to make practical activity primary; he wants to show (pace Husserl) that neither practical activity not contemplative knowing can be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient mind and an independent world.”

Dasein’s engaged Being-in-the-world is more than a coincidence or confrontation between subject and object: “it is not the being-occurrent-together of a subject and an object.” Being-in-the-world is rather a concept which attempts to express the fundamental interdependence of Dasein and world. There is not world without Dasein. Recall that we are conceiving of world as a significance-lending referential totality through which things appear as having meaning, being useful etc. But the significance that is worldhood is disclosed in Dasein. If world is that through which being is rendered meaningful it must have its counterpart in Dasein – that being which is unique insofar as being appears to it and being is an issue for it.

47 Heidegger, Being and Time, 60/87.
48 Heidegger, Being and Time, 60/87.
49 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 49.
50 Heidegger, Being and Time, 176/221
52 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 18
World as that which organizes the sense-making of being in terms of an ordered whole must then only be such for Dasein. World cannot exist independently of Dasein. It is more difficult to grasp, however, that there is no Dasein without world. Interpreting this claim depends on realizing Dasein as a self-interpreting being. In order to avoid the pitfalls of “Cartesianism” Heidegger is careful to avoid characterizing Dasein in terms of self-conscious subjectivity, despite describing Dasein as a kind of entity akin to an “I”: Dasein is in each “mine.” Dasein is that kind of being which I myself always am; it has the character, for me, of a Self.\(^53\)

Dasein’s selfhood, though, is unlike familiar philosophical conceptions of the self as subject. It is not prior to world, something which underlies Dasein’s relational acting in the world. Rather it is that which occurs through relating and engaging, or, through world. Dasein is self-reflective and self-interpreting but its reflexivity is grounded in its being-in-the-world: “Dasein finds itself proximally in what it does, uses, expects, avoids – in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with which it is proximally concerned.”\(^54\) Dasein finds itself in its concernful dealings with entities rather than a retreat into self-contemplation. Self-understanding, and understanding more generally, is garnered through the projects that Dasein pursues and the things for which it cares. Dasein returns to itself and understands itself from its experiences of meaning in world. One’s practical engagements always point back towards oneself: I reach for the hammer to hammer with it because of its practical relevance to the larger task of building because I want to provide shelter for myself and others because I have a concern for our protection, and so on and so forth. This chain of “for-the-sake-of-whichs” by which we interpret equipmentality always leads back to Dasein. In the same way that the hammer’s significance is located in the “for-the-sake-of-which” which connects it to other entities and projects, Dasein

\(^53\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 114/149
\(^54\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118/155.
finds its own meaning in terms of how it sees itself fitting into a relational whole. We have a tendency to interpret ourselves in terms of the roles we see ourselves as fulfilling, for example, as student, daughter, friend, artist. Our acting in the world and the way that we comport ourselves towards equipment is tied up with how we choose to fulfill these various roles. But the roles that are available to Dasein, the range of possibilities available to Dasein, is not unlimited. This range depends on the world Dasein finds itself in.

The world that Dasein inhabits is not one of its own choosing. Dasein is born into a particular context, electing neither the “being” nor the “there” of its being-there. It is “thrown”, thrust into a world. In this sense world is predetermined or pre-given and things reveal themselves to Dasein in ways that are consistent with this pre-given world. Dasein in turn responds to entities on the basis of a shared code of conduct or recognized cultural norms. There is no world that is strictly “mine” in the sense of a private sphere of meaning or experience. Heidegger’s notion of world does not allow for this kind of solipsism. Being-in-the-world must always refer to a shared world. When we say we are born into a world, we say that we are born into a way of making sense of our surroundings which coheres as a cultural unit; we are born into a life of pre-established sense-making: “Dasein’s familiarity with significance depends on Dasein’s taking-over-the-for-the-sake-of-whichs provided by society.” It is against a shared sociocultural backdrop, then, that Dasein engages with entities and others.

Think, for example, of the way that things seem to call to Dasein, demanding specific ways of being and acting towards them. The hammer appears as a piece of equipment that can be used to pummel nails into wood on the basis of an understanding of building which does not

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belong to a singular Dasein but is held in common.\textsuperscript{58} Consider an ordinary daily activity like attending a lecture. Upon entering the room you encounter a variety of equipment which appears as possibilities which could be taken up in action: the chalkboard, the lectern, the chairs in the classroom. Presuming that you enter the classroom in the role of a student and not an instructor, of these options only the chair appears to you as equipment relevant to your project as a learner. Given this context, the chair seems to demand that you sit down in it. Later that night, however, if, for example, you need a jar from the top cupboard of your pantry, a nearly identical chair appears in a different light as a platform which calls for you to stand on it. Dasein navigates these shifts in contexts fluidly and without reflection, adapting its being-towards entities on the basis of its for-the-sake-of-which.

What is important to take away from these examples, though, is that world is (1) always shared with others and (2) contingent, given the nature of Dasein’s thrownness, the unchosen fact of the matter of its being-there. It is conceivable, for example, that the possibility of walking into a lecture theatre in the first place is only available to me given the particular social/political/cultural/historical context that I was fortunate enough to have been born into. In another time or place, the chances are good that I might be denied this possibility on the basis of my sex. Dasein’s world restricts the range of meaningful possibilities from which Dasein can choose, thus limiting what Dasein can do and can be. It is in this sense that Dasein is dependent on world, or put more strongly, Dasein is world.

The shared character of world as a meaning-lending context has ontological consequences for Dasein: Being-in-the-world is always at the same time being-with (others), \textit{Mitsein}.\textsuperscript{59} Dasein’s “familiarity with the world not only allows particular things to show up as

\textsuperscript{58} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 118/155.  
\textsuperscript{59} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 118/155.
available [ready-to-hand] or occurrent [present-at-hand], as being-with it also makes possible the encounter of others as Dasein-with.” An encounter with another human being has a fundamentally different character than Dasein’s encounter with things or equipment; “the kind of Being which belongs to the Dasein of Others, as we encounter it within the world, differs from readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand.” If Dasein’s engaging with concrete entities has the character of a being-towards, engaging with others has the ontological structure of being-with. Dasein always approaches the other from the standpoint of an I whose being is its own. But the other is not defined by Heidegger in its alterity; an encounter between Dasein is ultimately one borne from recognition: “we must notice in what sense we are talking about ‘the Others’. By ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too.” Although the relation between self and other is indeed founded in recognition, Heidegger is careful to point out that it is not merely a projection of one’s own being-towards oneself onto the other, duplicating the Self and mapping it onto someone else. Rather, being-with is an independent and irreducible relation. Other Dasein are those beings who we are there-with-too in the world, where ‘with’ and ‘too’ are considered existentially rather than categorically.

A consequence of positing being-with as a structure of Dasein’s being is that Dasein is being-with even when no other Dasein are physically present to it; being-with is not tantamount to actually being there with other Dasein (Heidegger calls this Dasein-with or Mitdasein).

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60 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 150.
61 Heidegger, Being and Time, 118/154.
62 Heidegger, Being and Time, 118/154
63 Heidegger, Being and Time, 125/162
64 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 151.
65 Heidegger, Being and Time, 120/156
Rather, when one is alone they remain in the mode of Being-with, albeit deficiently.\textsuperscript{66} Being in the absence of an other, being-alone, is possible on the basis of the ontological structure of being-with. Further, because it is ontologically being-with, Dasein encounters others vis à vis non-human entities.\textsuperscript{67} This means that, although being-towards objects is of a different kind than being-with others, engagements with the present-at-hand and ready-to-hand seem always to refer to other Dasein.\textsuperscript{68} The book in my hand suggests a multiplicity of other Dasein; the author of the book, the employees of the publishing house and printing press, the bookseller, etc. In this way, others are encountered in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment.\textsuperscript{69} But even when Dasein is not using equipment it is Being-with; it always has the constitution of readiness for dealing with others. This follows from what we have said about the inseparability of Dasein from world: “In clarifying Being-in-the-world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated ‘I’ without Others is just as far from being proximally given.”\textsuperscript{70}

Heidegger’s disavowal of the isolation of the “I” in this passage also has a spatial/temporal facet. Dasein transcends the “I-here-now” structure of many other theories of subjectivity.\textsuperscript{71} Dasein is constantly surpassing the here and now in its for-the-sake-of-which structure. Thus Heidegger indicates the “yonder” as the dwelling place of Dasein’s concern. Dasein is futurally directed towards the yonder as openness to possibility but at the same time it is indebted to history, whatever is pre-given to it in world (insofar as this history controls its

\textsuperscript{66} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 120/157
\textsuperscript{67} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 272.
\textsuperscript{68} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 118/154.
\textsuperscript{69} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 118/154.
\textsuperscript{70} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 116/152.
\textsuperscript{71} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 119/155.
possibilities, for example); Dasein is, then, “thrown projection,” a description which captures this unique relation to temporality.

How Dasein carries out its thrown projection, the choices one makes with respect to the possibilities that are revealed via entities bears on one’s self-interpretation and self-understanding. For Heidegger, in taking up a possibility one is always at the same time choosing for oneself, or, rather, choosing oneself or not choosing oneself: “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself.”\textsuperscript{72} Since being is in each case “mine,” the possibilities presented through world bear on this mineness. In each case of engagement with entities and with others Dasein decides in its own existence by taking hold of or neglecting the fact that its being is its own.\textsuperscript{73} “Proximally and for the most part,” writes Heidegger, Dasein neglects it. Heidegger calls Dasein inauthentic when it does not understand itself “primarily by that apprehended possibility of itself which is particularly its own”.\textsuperscript{74} Because Dasein is in the world and with others in the world, its choosing is not generally its own.

As with its dealings with equipment, indeed more so, Dasein’s being-with others influences its self-interpretation. Interactions and engagements with others are integral to one’s self-creation and self-understanding. Friendship, professional, familial and romantic relations do a great deal in making one who they are:

Because by its concept understanding is free self-understanding by way of an apprehended possibility of one’s own factual being-in-the-world, it has the possibility of shifting in various directions. This means that factual Dasein can understand itself

\textsuperscript{72} Heidegger, Being and Time, 12/33.
\textsuperscript{73} Heidegger, Being and Time, 12/33.
\textsuperscript{74} Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, 279.
primarily via intraworldly beings which it encounters. It can let its existence be
determined primarily not by itself but by things and by circumstances and by others.\textsuperscript{75}

Dasein comports itself towards others with the disposition of solicitude. This is a form of care
which can be taken up authentically, inauthentically or deficiently.\textsuperscript{76} Heidegger appears to make
competing claims about which of these relations to others Dasein is in for the most part. One
passage declares that proximally we are in the deficient mode of passing one another by, of not
mattering to one another.\textsuperscript{77} Later he states that “Dasein, as everyday Being with one another,
stands in subjection to Others”;\textsuperscript{78} that Dasein’s being is taken over by others.\textsuperscript{79} But Dasein is
oblivious to the structure of this relation, which Heidegger uses fairly violent language to
describe. It is blind to the fact that its possibilities for being are every day “stripped away” by
others. The inconspicuousness of this kind of domination is compared by Heidegger to the
structure of Dasein’s relation to equipment in that it does not become salient until there is a
rupture in its proper functioning.\textsuperscript{80} The others who dominate “are not definite Others. On the
contrary, any Other can represent them. What is decisive is just that inconspicuous domination
by Others which has already been taken over unawares from Dasein as Being-with. One belongs
to Others oneself and enhances their power.”\textsuperscript{81} Owing to the indefinite and massive character of
this dominating group Heidegger refers to them as \textit{das Man}, the public, “the they.”\textsuperscript{82} This kind of

\textsuperscript{75} Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, 279.
\textsuperscript{76} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 121/158.
\textsuperscript{77} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 121/158.
\textsuperscript{78} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 126/164.
\textsuperscript{79} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 126/164.
\textsuperscript{80} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 121/158.
\textsuperscript{81} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 126/164.
\textsuperscript{82} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 126/164.
being-with effectively “dissolves one’s own Dasein” such that one is levelled down to a level of mediocrity and is suppressed in its uniqueness or priority.\(^{83}\)

The Dasein dominated by the they is a they-self; it is deprived of its agency or responsibility because the they leaps-in for it, choosing its way of being for it.\(^{84}\) This inauthentic relation with others is thus at the same time an inauthentic relation with one’s own Dasein; Dasein fails to take up its possibilities in a way that is meaningfully its own. Under the grip of the they, Dasein is given to itself. Only in wresting itself from this grip can Dasein recover an authentic mode of Being. “If Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being then this discovery of the world and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way.”\(^{85}\) Dasein will never be apart from the they insofar as it is necessarily Being-with. It can however adapt its way of being-with in respect to them such that it lives in recognition of the essential mineness of its being.

But the mineness of one’s own being does not entail that Dasein lives in transparency with regard to its ontological structures. “Ontically, of course, Dasein is not only close to us – even that which is closest: we are it, each of us, each of us, we ourselves. In spite of this, or rather for just this reason, it is ontologically that which is furthest.”\(^{86}\) Dasein’s authenticity will require the kind of self-understanding which involves choosing in a way that is consistent with the ontological structures of its being – precisely its mineness, its thrownness, its anxiety and its mortality. The upcoming sections will explore these themes in relation to Dasein’s self-understanding and authentic selfhood.

\(^{83}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 127/164.
\(^{86}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 15/36.
2. Attunement and Disclosure

This chapter explores the presentation of mood in *Being and Time* Section 1.5 ¶29. The initial description of being-in-the-world in the previous section established Dasein as a being situated in a shared context, namely the world which lends significance to entities and projects with which Dasein engages. Though the world is shared, we should remind ourselves that Dasein is in the world from a distinct “there,” from a perspective which is unique and individual and has its own disclosive power. This perspective, though “mine,” is not fixed but fluid, and constantly transforming. One way in which this perspective shifts is through mood. This chapter will investigate mood as a primary mode of disclosure through which Dasein has access not only to entities in the world but to the world as such. Additionally, it is uniquely through mood that Dasein is capable of self-encounter. On the basis of this disclosive potency moods are of epistemological and ontological import for the investigation of Dasein. This section explores moods in their central methodological significance in terms of Heidegger’s existential analytic.

I. Heidegger’s ontology of mood

Recall that Dasein is most basically being-there, or, put differently, a being of the “there”. The “there” of Dasein’s being-there is constituted through two particular existential modes, or, two ways of being. These are understanding and *Befindlichkeit*.\(^87\) Readers of German will indicate that there is no precise translation of this term in English. John Macquarrie and Edward

\(^{87}\text{Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 133/171.}
Robinson offer the translation “state-of-mind” despite their footnoted admission that it does not accurately capture what is intimated by *Befindlichkeit*, which might be rendered, albeit clumsily, as “how-one-is-ness.”88 *Befindlichkeit* indicates that Dasein is not merely “there” in the world but that it is there in varying ways. Dasein might find that it is faring well, for example, or, conversely, that it is faring poorly. How Dasein is (feeling) is of consequence for the way in which Dasein is in relation to its “there” or its world. Our ability to take up objects and projects depends a great deal on “how we are”. Contrary to what Macquarrie and Robinson seem to indicate with “state-of-mind”, Heidegger is explicit that *Befindlichkeit* is non-cognitive:89 how one is is not the same as what they know. Joan Stambaugh’s translation of *Befindlichkeit* as “attunement,” then, is perhaps more apt. Attunement, more so than “state of mind,” intimates a relation: for something to be attuned is for it to be “tuned in” to something else. Attunement, a term borrowed from music, means to resonate to a pitch. In the sense of *Befindlichkeit*, Dasein is attuned or tuned in to its world through its affective state; attunement, then, should be understood as Dasein’s affective resonance or relation to its world. This is an ontological structure of Dasein’s existence:90 insofar as Dasein is in the world, it is affected. Attunement is the basic existential way in which Dasein is “there.”91

Attunement is a structural concept which manifests itself ontically as Dasein’s having moods. It is by virtue of the existential attunement that Heidegger accounts for Dasein’s lived experiences of mood-having – experiences of joy, sorrow, fear and anxiety. To have a mood is to be disposed in a certain way towards other persons and things. As affective dispositions, moods colour our engagements in the world; they affect our perspective on the world. Thus our

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interactions and responses to phenomena are always conditioned by the mood one finds oneself in. One’s sensitivity to one’s surroundings is heightened or decreased by virtue of one’s mood. Take, for example, the experience of feeling nervous. Say that you are about to present a talk to a room full of people whose professional opinions you respect. All that you can focus on is whether or not you will embarrass yourself, whether you will be able to respond intelligently to questions; you may be second guessing the coherency or relevance of your talk altogether. When the talk is over and your nervousness subsides, within minutes, you realize all of sudden that you are very hungry. What becomes clear is that the demands of your body, its basic physiological condition, have been blurred out of focus by your nervousness; now, these needs come back into the fore of your bodily experience. It is not the case that these needs, which you experience as urgent, appear out of nowhere – they have likely been gradually building in their intensity throughout the time you’ve been presenting. You might even remember that you had intended to eat something at the first sign of hunger, before your nervousness set in. Because you were so nervous, though, for the duration of the talk this concern about eating was gone. What this example illustrates is how particularly powerful experiences of mood-having obscure phenomena and alter our responses to them. Thus while mood is capable of disclosing, at the same time, it “correspondingly closes itself off more stubbornly than any not-perceiving.”92 In a particularly strong formulation of this sentiment, Heidegger writes that in bad moods Dasein is rendered blind to itself and its surroundings.93 Perhaps the phrase “blind with rage” captures something about the phenomenology of mood-having. Moods can have this kind of totalizing character such that when one is disgruntled, for example, everything is disgruntling. But that moods can “close us off” seems to be equally true for less intense experiences of mood. Consider the effect moods

92 Heidegger, Being and Time, 136/175.
93 Heidegger, Being and Time, 136/175.
can have on our aesthetic engagements in the everyday. You might find it difficult to appreciate art or music, for example, when feeling even just slightly “off”. When feeling irritated a song that you once liked might seem repetitive and obnoxious; likewise a favourite print on the office wall is ignored on most days. Likewise, we tend to consider some moods as kinds of prerequisites for certain activities. When planning an evening out with a friend: “I’m in the mood to see a film tonight”, when a sexual partner comes on to you “I’m not in the mood….” In these cases possibilities for acting are taken up or rejected by virtue of the mood one finds oneself in. What we normally fail to consider, however, is that mood-having is a prerequisite for one’s being able to act in the first place.

Attunement is related essentially to Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of “world”. Encountering entities and taking up projects relies on this grasping of “world” as a significance-lending referential totality. In our earlier discussion of the hammer it was shown that encountering ready-to-hand entities involves circumspection, or experiencing the entity within a matrix of other significances, “it is not just sensing something, or staring at it.” Rather, “it implies a circumspective concern, and has the character of being affected in some way; we can see this more precisely from the standpoint of state of mind”, or attunement.94 One way of interpreting this passage is to reflect on the state of frustration one finds oneself in when the hammer resists our putting it to use. When the hammer is broken or “unserviceable,” our agitated mood reveals the structure of the “for-the-sake-of-which” integral to it. Affectivity is thus a primary mode of being through which the world is revealed.

But to be affected by the unserviceable, resistant, or threatening character of that which is ready-to-hand, becomes ontologically possible only insofar as Being-in as such has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-

94 Heidegger, Being and Time, 137/176.
world can “matter” to it in this way. The fact that this sort of thing can “matter” to [Dasein] is grounded in state of mind.\textsuperscript{95}

Here, Heidegger posits attunement as ontologically prior to Dasein’s intentionality or directedness towards entities.\textsuperscript{96} Things reveal themselves as useful, valuable, significant because Dasein is tuned in to the world. Dasein’s attunement is such that it is disposed towards the world with a special sensitivity such that it can be affected, things can matter to it. This attuned disposition is also connected to the concept “openness”: “Dasein’s openness to world is constituted existentially by the attunement of state of mind.”\textsuperscript{97} It is because Dasein is opened to the world – in other words, because it is a being that cares - that it can be affected. Further, Dasein’s openness allows for the discernment of discrete possibilities i.e. of courses of action available to take up with respect to entities.

Heidegger’s characterization of moods, then, in the above passages, affords them a substantial ontological and epistemological significance. This move marks \textit{Being and Time} as a departure from a tradition dominated by rationalism. Heidegger positions himself as responding to what he sees to be a rationalist dismissal of moods, informed by a dualistic ontology, the subject/object dichotomy, which he seeks to overcome via phenomenology. Heidegger continues in the “non-rationalist” analysis of mood and emotion central to phenomenology from the beginning. In the sections where Heidegger criticizes “Cartesianism,” he opposes the subjectivist view of mood as feelings which serve as obstacles to the objective rationality that may be believed to ground philosophical truths. Holding this world view supports the dismissal of mood’s epistemological significance, and more broadly, the dismissal of mood as philosophically irrelevant. Heidegger’s worry about this dismissal is that it encourages a way of

\textsuperscript{95} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 137/176.  
\textsuperscript{96} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 137/176.  
\textsuperscript{97} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 137/176.
thinking about moods that is impoverished: moods then “sink to the level of accompanying phenomena”\textsuperscript{98} rather than being regarded as primordial ways of knowing in their own right. A mood’s irrationality should not rule it out of our philosophical consideration. Indeed moods qua irrational afford access to aspects of our lived experience that cognition cannot: “When irrationalism, as the counter-play of rationalism, talks about the things to which rationalism is blind, it does so only with a squint.”\textsuperscript{99} The ocular metaphor in this passage indicates that our rational, cognitive processes are inadequate resources on their own. There are things about Dasein and its world to which reason remains blind, things which intuition and affect, as “irrational,” can illuminate but cannot explain: the scope of a mood’s disclosure extends beyond rationality.\textsuperscript{100} To illustrate this point Heidegger notes that only such “irrational” modes of being could determine something to be threatening;\textsuperscript{101} no amount of “bare perception” or “pure beholding” could approximate the kind of knowledge that comes by way of feeling threatened. This example calls to mind a familiar trope of the crime drama genre wherein the victim often testifies to having ignored the sense of a threat because there was no “rational” reason, no objective physical evidence (“He looked and sounded like a nice guy”), to support that feeling.

When I refer to reason and rationality in the above section I intend to invoke the view caricatured by Heidegger in Section V. This is the view that things can be known in themselves, and that access to that “objective” knowledge comes by way of bracketing affective and emotional responses in pursuit of achieving a purely theoretical, uncorrupted perspective on things “as they really are.” My aim is not to determine whether or not this view has been incorrectly or unfairly characterized by Heidegger, but to tease out his own epistemological

\textsuperscript{98} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 139/178.  
\textsuperscript{99} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 136/175.  
\textsuperscript{100} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 136/175.  
\textsuperscript{101} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 137/177.
position which he presents in contrast to it. Heidegger writes that “by looking at the world theoretically, we have already dimmed it down to the uniformity of what is purely present-at-hand.”

What is lost by abstracting or detaching oneself from mood-having is the character of being-in-the-world in a way that is intentional and practically engaged: “it is precisely when we see the ‘world’ unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods, that the ready-to-hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day.”

Besides, the goal of attaining objective, scientific knowledge is unfeasible in the first place. Because Dasein is being-in-the-world it can never leave affect behind: “any cognitive determining has its existential-ontological constitution in the state-of-mind of Being-in-the-world.” Consequently there can be no “in itself.” Things are there for Dasein and are encountered as mattering or meaning by virtue of Dasein’s attunement.

For Heidegger moods are not purely “inner,” subjective states, nor are they “outer”, matter of fact objective phenomena. They are qualities of Dasein’s being-in and being-with. Heidegger writes that “a mood assails us” – it irrupts within Dasein’s being-in-the-world. The forceful language that Heidegger uses here indicates that moods are unchosen. For the most part one does not elect to feel a certain way, it is rather that one always finds oneself already in a mood; in a sense we are hapless, vulnerable to their assault. And, it is true, our experience of mood-having can be violent, as we will see in the next chapter when we investigate anxiety.

In our discussion of mood thus far, a tension has been emerging between the shared world of significance and an individual experience: that moods thrust themselves upon me by virtue of my relation to a world which is shared might seem at odds with an experience of mood.

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which is deeply personal. Moods alter and affect the relation to world which is mine; it is my perspective that they determine. This could pose a problem, as Dreyfus points out, if this fact runs the risk of putting Heidegger back in a position that “is dangerously close to Cartesianism.” The worry, for Dreyfus, is that presenting mood as coloring my take on the world slides Heidegger into the kind of individuated subjectivism that he has been so careful to avoid. Dreyfus asks how it could be possible for “you and I be said to be open to the same situation if what each of us is in is threatening to me and exhilarating to you?” Let’s consider another example to draw out Dreyfus’ point here. You and your roommate Martha go to a party hosted by a mutual friend. Martha has been looking forward to the party all week but you have been reluctant about it. You heard through the grapevine that an ex-boyfriend of yours will be there with whom you are not on good terms. You feel somewhat obligated to attend the party though, and tell yourself that you will have a good time in spite of his being there. He does not show up at the party. Still, you spend your entire night thinking about the trauma of the break-up and dreading his arrival – he could walk through the door at any minute, as you frequently remind yourself. When you and Martha leave the party, she gushes the whole way home about the incredible night she has had. She was able to catch up with old friends and she met new, interesting people, one of whom owns a gallery and offered to show her paintings in an upcoming exhibit. Meanwhile, all of your interactions at the party were tinged by your sour mood. You did not have a good time. So, you and Martha were “attuned” to the same party in one sense, your context was shared – you had the same punch, were in the same room, etc. - but in another sense it was as if you attended two different parties in that the ways you were attuned to the environment produced two diverse experiences. Martha, excited and open, took up

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possibilities for new friendships and artistic projects. You, reluctant and strained, on the other hand, were prevented from realizing that these same opportunities were also open to you because you were so narrowly tuned in to the possibility that you dreaded, namely the arrival of your ex-boyfriend. This dread hindered you from tuning in to the collective mood of the party, the party vibe. This is not to say that it is impossible for Dasein to will itself to come into another mood, but that making the transition to a counter-mood is rarely smooth. Given Heidegger’s ontology of mood, though, and to avoid Dreyfus’ worry, we are prevented from viewing the dread you feel during the party as something merely subjective. Rather, your feeling dread should be viewed as a (quite appropriate) response to a state of affairs in your world of concern. It assailed you. The mood was not “in” you so much as you were “in” it. In light of this, “mood-inhabiting” may be a more appropriate descriptor of Dasein’s affective relation to world than “mood-having”, which connotes the possession and control of a subject.

The feeling of dread in the example above was perhaps an isolating experience of mood. But the example also points to the experience of participating in a collective mood, which is explored by Dreyfus’ discussion of Heidegger’s 1929 lecture series in which he considers the social dimension of moods. It may be useful to consider this contemporaneous text as an addendum to Being and Time’s focus on the individual experience of mood having. In it, Heidegger writes:

A – as we say – well-disposed person brings a good mood to a group. In this case does he produce in himself a psychic experience, in order to transfer it to others, like the way infectious germs wander from one organism to others?... Or another person is in a group that in its manner of being dampens and depresses everything; no one is outgoing. What

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108 Heidegger, Being and Time, 136/175.
do we learn from this? Moods are *not accompanying phenomena*; rather, they are the sort of thing that determines being-with-one-another in advance. It seems as if, so to speak, a mood is in each case already there, like an atmosphere, in which we are steeped and by which we are thoroughly determined.\textsuperscript{110}  

At the beginning of the passage Heidegger replicates the subjectivist view of mood as “psychic experience” going on to suggest a more public character of moods in which individuals participate through attunement. That a mood could be experienced collectively does seem to accord with lived experience. Heidegger’s mention of contagion in the above passage is meant to perjure the individuated subjectivist view of mood-having, but it is telling that it also appears often in commonplace descriptions of mooded experience, i.e. “her laughter is contagious.” Transformations in individual moods do seem to be affected by relating to others, why else do we seek out friends to “pick us up”, “lift our moods” when feeling rotten? These collective experiences of mood point beyond the subjectivist view.

Moods thus occupy an ontological status between subjective and objective. And yet, though they may be shared, they are always “mine,” experienced from the perspective of an “I”, a self. One way of sussing out the “mineness” of mood is to consider the physical dimension of the experience. Curiously, Heidegger does not much discuss the body despite its obvious centrality in the experience of inhabiting a mood. Consider the cringe as an example. This gesture seems to be a symptomatic phenomenon – one in which the body reacts in a way which reveals Dasein’s mood: the experience of revulsion the body manifests its disgust in contortion: you recoil, your stomach is pulled backwards towards your spine, arching the back into convexity. Your face, too, reacts, as if it is scrunching up into itself. Your eyes squint and eyebrows furrow. The corners of your mouth are drawn inwards. All of this, of course, is

\textsuperscript{110} Heidegger quoted by Dreyfus in *Being-in-the-World*, 171.
unpremeditated and involuntary. In the cringe the body responds to the world without the reflective consultation or direction of the mind. Cringing is a kind of intuited response, a being-towards akin to the craftsman’s manipulation of the hammer. In the dialogue between object and body, world and Dasein, the hammer invites and the hand responds. But the hammer only appears as inviting, as useful through mood: “having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons.”

To hold this subjectivist view mischaracterizes the ontological priority of mood-having. A mood is borne of Dasein’s encountering, and attunement, Dasein’s capacity for mood-having, is what makes this encountering possible.

Further, as we saw in our discussion in the previous chapter, human knowledge is founded in praxis; we know what a hammer is through our practical engaging with it, by putting it to use. Moods, then, are foundational in Heidegger’s epistemology. They are prior to and required for Dasein’s understanding and cognition of entities. By virtue of Dasein’s attunement, which founds its understanding of world, things appear as mattering for Dasein. That attunement and its ontical correlate, mood, allow things to appear in a certain manner is at the heart of this epistemological significance. As has already been intimated in this chapter, moods are disclosive: “For Heidegger, ontical experiences of mood, or of certain moods, are ontologically revelatory.” In other words it is through our experience of moods that we gain access to our own existential, ontological structures. Phenomenological analyses of our experiences of mood shed light on the kind of beings we are. Moods provide the possibility of self-encounter. It is in having a mood that one finds oneself (feeling) in a particular way. Thus they have a particular

111 Heidegger, Being and Time, 137/176.

significance in terms of Heidegger’s methodology.\textsuperscript{113} In an important sense, the existential analytic relies upon the disclosure of mood: “like any ontological Interpretation whatsoever, this analytic can only, so to speak, ‘listen in’ to some previously disclosed entity as regards it Being…Phenomenological Interpretation must make it possible for Dasein itself to disclose things primordially; it must, as it were, let Dasein interpret itself.”\textsuperscript{114} Heidegger’s aim is to mine the phenomenological richness of mood’s disclosure and to bring the “phenomenal content” latent in self-encounter to a theoretical, conceptual level.\textsuperscript{115} In other words, he attempts to express in language the ineffable moment of self-encounter inherent in mood-having. Through this method, Heidegger shows that mood discloses two essential features of Dasein’s existential constitution: its being-in-the-world and its “thrownness.”

II. Mood as Disclosing Being-in-the-World

Each of Heidegger’s iterations of the ontological significance of mood seem to involve describing mood’s functioning as a middle term between Dasein and world. As we have said, “mood” describes Dasein’s affective disposition towards entities within the world and it is through mood that worldhood is most primordially disclosed. Moods and affectivity are a primary mode of Dasein’s relation to world. But despite Dasein’s having moods, they are not properly “Dasein’s” in that they are not wholly on the side of “the subject”; moods arise out of Dasein’s engaged being-in-the-world. It might, then, be more suitable to think of Dasein as being in a mood, rather than having a mood. Dasein is in a mood in the same way that it is in the world – these are ontological structures of one’s being. Thus, it is unsurprising that moods should reveal Dasein to itself as a being which is being-in-the-world. In moods, says Heidegger, the inextricability and essentiality of the Dasein-world relation is realized. “Being-in-the-world”

\textsuperscript{113} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 139/178.
\textsuperscript{114} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 139/179.
\textsuperscript{115} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 139/179.
expresses a relation which is pre-reflective and immersive. As moods direct us towards entities, making things “matter” for us, they are a kind of inertia which draws Dasein into its world. In a mood, Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern: “precisely what they do is assail Dasein in its unreflecting devotion to the ‘world’ within which it is concerned and on which it expends itself.”116 Ultimately what this “unreflecting devotion” signals is Dasein’s surrender to the world. On the basis of Dasein’s particular mood, certain things appear as significant, and certain possibilities are made available to Dasein. Dasein’s undertaking of these possibilities involves a tacit acceptance of what is presented to it in the world through mood. Heidegger calls this a “submission” to the world: “Existentially, a state of mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.”117 To be-in-the-world is necessarily to submit to it. Only in submission can entities and possibilities appear as salient. While submission is ontologically required both by being in a mood and being-in-the-world, ontically its consequences can be positive or negative.

On one hand, submission is essential for Dasein’s becoming free for possibilities: Dasein can choose between meaningful possibilities and projects for itself only because these possibilities are properly disclosed to it through the submission entailed by mood-having. Submitting to the world means allowing the world to reveal itself in its manifold possibilities. Freedom requires a receptivity and openness to possibility which is itself effectively submission. As we will see more clearly in the upcoming chapters, Dasein is considered free, and properly authentic, when it elects possibilities and projects for itself. One’s orientation towards possibilities – one’s willingness to submit – is of considerable existential consequence.

116 Heidegger, Being and Time, 136/175.
117 Heidegger, Being and Time, 137/177.
On the other hand, in its submission Dasein can be, and for the most part is, led away from itself and away from its freedom. “A state of mind…is itself an existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the ‘world’ and lets the ‘world’ ‘matter’ to it in such a way that Dasein evades its very self.”\textsuperscript{118} Dasein is not properly itself when it does not choose for itself. Surrendering to the world might indeed entail surrendering to the “they”. In submission, Dasein is absorbed in the world. For the most part, writes Heidegger, this absorption amounts to a “being-lost” in which Dasein does not have a sense of itself as an individual potentiality-for-Being and is, rather, “lost in the publicness of the ‘they’.”\textsuperscript{119} The they restricts the range of meaningful possibilities which Dasein can take up. In its lostness and as a they-self, Dasein undertakes possibilities which are not properly its own. It does what “they” demand and in so doing is carried along by them. This being carried along occurs insofar as one is disburdened from choice, and therefore from freedom and responsibility, in allowing others, the public, the they, to decide for her, to stand-in for her. On this account of submission, absorption in the world, also referred to by Heidegger as falling, constitutes a manner of being which is inauthentic.\textsuperscript{120} Paradoxically, then, the submission to world entailed by mood, is both that which allows Dasein to seize upon its potentiality-for-being in freedom as well as the condition for Dasein’s self-evasion and subjection to the they. It is a condition for Dasein’s authenticity as well as its inauthenticity.

III. Mood as Disclosing Dasein’s Thrownness

That Dasein is “thrown” refers to the ‘that it is’ character of Dasein’s being. Dasein is and has to be. Its being here in the world is unelected; it is as if Dasein were thrown into its existence, its context. The concept “thrownness” expresses the fact that Dasein is delivered over

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\item \textsuperscript{118} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 139/178.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 176/220.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 176/220.
\end{itemize}
to its “there,” the world into which it is thrown.\textsuperscript{121} It inherits a world and as such is indebted to a history that it unwittingly takes on. Being-in-the-world is like having a task thrust upon us that we are responsible for managing. We have not volunteered for this task and are unaware of what it will demand of us. The implication of Dasein’s thrownness is that Dasein feels the weight of its being as a burden. The burdensome character of Dasein’s being\textsuperscript{122} is sometimes brought to light in its experiences of mood-having. But a mood’s disclosure does not explain Dasein’s burden; to say that the burdensome character of being is disclosed is not to say that it is known, only that it is felt.\textsuperscript{123} The weight of Dasein’s having to be is disclosed through the “pallid, evenly balanced lack of mood” of Dasein’s everydayness,\textsuperscript{124} and, counter-intuitively, in elation whereby this very burden is alleviated. Thus, the burden of being is disclosed in Dasein’s very evasion of it.

For the most part, Dasein goes about its life in a kind of non-mood – neither happy nor sad, “up” nor “down” but in a kind of affective neutrality from which one slips into non-neutral affective states.\textsuperscript{125} But this average “lack of mood” is still a mood. In it, Dasein remains attuned to the world. The world is as much “coloured” by the neutrality of the non-mood as it is by anger, frustration or joy. Through it, thrownness is disclosed. It is in this state, writes Heidegger, “that Dasein becomes satiated with itself.”\textsuperscript{126} To be satiated is to feel full, satisfied, to lack nothing. Heidegger has called this the “tranquilization” of Dasein in the everyday elsewhere,\textsuperscript{127} a description which invokes the trope of suburbanites who find their bliss in pre-fabricated IKEA furniture and five dollar cups of coffee, made popular (or perhaps unpopular) by films like

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\item\textsuperscript{121} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 135/174.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 134/173.
\item\textsuperscript{123} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 134/173.
\item\textsuperscript{124} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 134/173.
\item\textsuperscript{125} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 134/173.
\item\textsuperscript{126} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 134/173.
\item\textsuperscript{127} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 178/222.
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American Beauty or Fight Club. The ease of this satisfaction betrays the burden of their being. Dasein’s being satiated does not own up to the fact of its thrownness. Thus such satisfaction can and will be disrupted: “even in the most indifferent and inoffensive everydayness the Being of Dasein can burst forth as a naked ‘that it is and has to be.’”¹²⁸ This feeling sneaks up on you, seemingly unmotivated or from “out of nowhere.” In this feeling the “pure ‘that it is’” of being “shows itself, but the whence and whither remain in darkness.”¹²⁹ You cannot explain what has happened but you are destabilized, sensing that something is not quite right, that your satiation is unjustified. You are momentarily unsettled, and then, for the most part, you carry on as usual, returning to the comfortable satiation of the non-mood.

Dasein does not “give in” to this mysterious moment of discomfort. It resists submission and seeks mastery through dismissal.¹³⁰ For Heidegger this dismissal is telling; one’s unwillingness to confront what has been disclosed is itself revealing. This evasion says something about the kind of being Dasein is. Namely, that Dasein is delivered over to its being-there: that it must submit to the world in which it is thrown but lives in denial of this fact, preferring instead the convenient gratification of the non-mood. Convenient gratification sounds great. But as long as Dasein defers confrontation with the task of its being this gratification remains superficial. Whilst in the everyday non-mood Dasein evades the centering thrust of its thrownness. However, it is at the same time the non-mood which discloses thrownness in its fostering evasion. The same can be said for Dasein’s experience of the mood of elation. In the weightless joy of elation Dasein feels alleviated of the burden of being.¹³¹ When elated Dasein is distracted from its ontological reality, it has no sense of its being as a task which must be

¹²⁸ Heidegger, Being and Time, 134/173.
¹²⁹ Heidegger, Being and Time, 134/173.
¹³⁰ Heidegger, Being and Time, 134-135/173.
¹³¹ Heidegger, Being and Time, 135/174.
performed. Like the neutral non-mood, elation discloses thrownness by way of diversion: “the way in which the mood discloses is not one in which we look at thrownness, but one in which we turn towards or away. For the most part the mood does not turn towards the burdensome character of Dasein which is manifest in it.” Curiously, then, it seems that moods as disclosive reveal Dasein’s ontological structure and at the same time foster Dasein’s evasion of it.

Both submission and thrownness share in this tension. Thus while moods disclose possibilities for access to these ontological structures, they also foreclose them; revealing Dasein to itself and concealing Dasein from itself at one and the same time. For the most part, though, as Heidegger points out repeatedly, Dasein in the everyday turns away from the radical possibilities which being-in-the-world and thrownness provide by way of mood. Furthermore, Heidegger’s claim is that it is only under a particular mood, that of anxiety, and its specific disclosive power that Dasein seizes upon these radical possibilities, taking them up as its own. The next section will be dedicated to an exploration of Heidegger’s phenomenology of anxiety.

Heidegger, Being and Time, 135/174.
3. Anxiety

This chapter positions anxiety, or Angst, as Dasein’s fundamental mood and explores its centrality in Being and Time as well as in the 1929 lecture What is Metaphysics? In the previous chapter moods were posited as relational affective states – neither subjective nor objective – which allow for, and, to an extent, determine, Dasein’s disclosure of world. It was also shown that moods are reflexive, revealing how one is and occasioning moments of self-encounter. The discussion of anxiety in this chapter will focus on this potential for self-disclosure inherent in this particular mood and show that anxiety is the mood of self-encounter par excellence. It is through anxiety that Dasein is revealed to itself as in terms of its ownmost possibility: its own death. In the face of its own mortality Dasein is occasioned with an existential dilemma. The dilemma demands that Dasein choose between an authentic or inauthentic response to the fact of death. Indeed this choice is ultimately one of how to manage the anxiety that our condition as Dasein requires. This is what is indicated by Heidegger’s baptism of anxiety as the fundamental mood of Dasein: that it is necessary, given the existential structures we have outlined thus far - being-in-the-world, being-with, thrownness. Heidegger’s use of the term anxiety deviates from what is indicated by it more commonly. Anxiety is decisively not fear or nervousness.\(^{133}\) It is unlike these and the various other moods mentioned previously in that it does not refer to things in the world – either objects, states of affairs or particular others. Rather, anxiety is a wholly existential mood. Heidegger does not use this terminology, although it is present in some

\(^{133}\) Heidegger, Being and Time, 186/230.
secondary literature. To clarify in what sense I use it here, I turn to Matthew Ratcliffe’s paper “The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling” where existential feelings are defined in terms of the “experienced possibility” central to them.¹³⁴ I understand anxiety in the Heideggerian sense of the term to be intimately related to the experience of one’s own possibilities. Motivating this understanding of anxiety and its characterization as an experience of possibility will be a secondary task of this chapter.

Heidegger distinguishes anxiety from fear by virtue of its character as indefinite. One is fearful in the face of a particular thing or situation in the world, but anxiety has no such concrete object for Heidegger. In anxiety, like in fear, Dasein is threatened. But that which threatens in anxiety is not a something but a nothing.¹³⁵ One is not anxious, in the specific existential sense of Angst, about a first date or a difficult exam. On the contrary, existential anxiety is precisely about nothing. A more obvious interpretation of this claim is that anxiety has no object: “nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious.”¹³⁶ The “nothing” then is literally no thing, an absence or lack. One cannot pinpoint the source or ground of their anxiety; although people try in vain to attach anxiety to concrete objects, there is no specific thing that makes one anxious.¹³⁷ A less obvious interpretation is that anxiety discloses the nothing.¹³⁸ This interpretation entails a positive conception of nothingness, i.e. that it is such that it can be disclosed. What is Metaphysics? considers such a nothing. Normally, nothing is discussed in its negative relation to some positive phenomena, i.e. non-being is understood as the negation or privation of being. For Heidegger,

¹³⁵ Heidegger, Being and Time, 190/234.
¹³⁶ Heidegger, Being and Time, 186/231
¹³⁷ Heidegger, Being and Time, 186-188/230-232.
however, nothing is itself an originary phenomenon, ontologically prior to the “not” of negation. Negation depends on the nothing in the first place; to say that something “is not” already requires having some notion of nothingness. Further, it is by virtue of the originary nothing that beings are disclosed as beings – as things which are something rather than nothing. In a sense then “nothing” and “something” are co-constitutive: “the nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of being; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such,” it is an aspect of being. In addition, Heidegger writes that “if the nothing itself is to be questioned…then it must be given beforehand. We must be able to encounter it.” Here, again, Heidegger seems to be invoking Meno’s paradox. Meno asks Socrates: “How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?” Heidegger’s allusion to this question indicates that we have a pre-theoretical understanding of nothing or nonbeing in the same sense that we have a pre-theoretical understanding of being. Recall that posing Heidegger’s initial question regarding the meaning of being depends on this pre-theoretical understanding. The same is so regarding his questioning of nothingness. Dasein’s having such an understanding of nothing could only be informed by an experience of or encounter with it. It is worth taking notice of Heidegger’s method here once more; the account of the nothing in What is Metaphysics? is an attempt to make explicit through phenomenological description what is already present in the intuitive understanding which informs our everyday dealings. First, then, a reflection on our encounters with nothing is necessitated.

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139 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 97-98.
140 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 104.
141 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 98.
As with any encountered phenomenon, the nothing is disclosed by virtue of Dasein’s being attuned. Thus far we have only discussed the ways in which Dasein is attuned to beings (as opposed to non-being) by moods. In What is Metaphysics? Heidegger elaborates on this point to say that moods attune Dasein to beings “as a whole”. “No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be…it always deals with beings in a unity of the “whole,” if only in a shadowy way.” Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 99. Thusly moods disclose beings but never as discrete from the “whole” of which they are parts. “Whole” here refers to Heidegger’s notion of world as a referential totality. For example, mood has a role to play in Dasein’s apprehension of the hammer as useful in terms of its relation to the wider context of the activity of building. Moods can illuminate that particular things share in meaning by virtue of their belonging to a unity or a whole-structure. But “just when moods…bring us face to face with beings as a whole they conceal from us the nothing we are seeking.” Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 100. But, there is “a correspondingly original mood which in the most proper sense of unveiling reveals the nothing.” Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 101. This unique mood which reveals the nothing is anxiety. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 101. Thus, reflecting on an experience of the nothing will amount to a phenomenological analysis of Dasein in the mood of anxiety.

Primarily, anxiety feels oppressive. So much so that one can feel crushed under its weight, debilitated, paralyzed. It is at once “so close that it stifle’s one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere” in that its source remains indeterminate. The inability to locate anxiety’s source renders us vulnerable at all times. Anxiety “needs no unusual event to rouse it. Its sway is as thoroughgoing as its possible occasions are trivial. It is always ready, though it only seldom

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144 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 100.
145 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 100.
147 Heidegger, Being and Time, 186/231.
springs, and we are snatched away and left hanging.”¹⁴⁸ What we are snatched away from are our worldly preoccupations. In anxiety things are held at a distance as if we were suspended above them, “left hanging” in such a way that acting upon these things feels impossible. In this kind of divorce or detachment from world the nothing is disclosed in and through such things: “the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings precisely as a slipping away from the whole.”¹⁴⁹ When the sense of one’s ability to engage with entities and others is lost in the suspension of anxiety it is difficult to situate them in terms of their “for-the-sake-of-which.” Meaning “slips away” insofar as the things can no longer be reconciled with their whole. What anxiety signals through the revelation of nothing is the groundlessness of Dasein’s world, and ultimately the contingency and shakiness of the meanings generated by world. When entities are disclosed in anxiety without world they are meaningless. They do not “matter”; they are bereft of any sense of practical significance or relevance with respect to other entities and to Dasein’s projects. They are stripped down to the bareness of the in-itself, merely “there” as opposed to there for any reason relevant to me or to others. In themselves entities are unintelligible. When revealed in their unadorned thing-ness they appear to Dasein as strange, foreign, and radically other.¹⁵⁰ Further, anxiety not only renders things meaningless by cutting them off from worldhood: the meaning of Dasein, of being itself, is suspended. Dasein is shown to itself as unmattering.

What this bizarre encounter makes salient is the relation between Dasein, entities and world: the entities are not meaningful in themselves but are imbued with significance by virtue of their participation in a referential totality. Further, the relationship between an entity and its significance is not necessary but contingent. Meanings are disclosed through world, however,

¹⁵⁰ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 103.
they are always such that they could have been otherwise. Recall that Dasein is thrust or thrown into a world in which meanings are given to him or her. Dasein inherits a way of being with respect to entities that it learns as it navigates its world. One is socialized into a way of being which allows for the disclosure of certain kinds of significances. Context conditions the meanings which are available to Dasein. But Dasein’s thrownness makes it such that these meanings are arbitrary insofar as one’s context is circumstantial, such that it could have been otherwise. This arbitrariness is a manifestation of the nothingness at the heart of world. What is revealed in anxiety then is “the obstinacy of the nothing and nowhere within the world,”¹⁵¹ the groundlessness of meaning. The nothing’s appearance within the world of meaning has consequences for Dasein ontologically given that its own being is integrally related to world. Since “the world belongs essentially to Dasein’s being as being-in-the-world…if the “nothing” – that is, the world as such – exhibits itself as that in the face of which one has anxiety, this means that Being-in-the-world itself is that in the face of which anxiety is anxious.”¹⁵² Anxiety is identified by Heidegger as the basic and fundamental mood of Dasein because it belongs to our very ontological structure as being-in-the-world: our being is necessarily anxious, necessarily oppressive.

If it is true that “anxiety is always latent in being-in-the-world”¹⁵³ how should we make sense of the earlier claim that “it only seldom springs”¹⁵⁴? To explain this paradox we should consider that the existential analytic is concerned with Dasein in the mode of everydayness. In its average everyday character Dasein is absorbed in the world in such a way that it denies the nothing. For the most part we are immersed in the tasks we take up; “the more we turn towards

beings in our preoccupations the less we let beings as a whole slip away as such and the more we
turn away from the nothing. Just as surely do we hasten into the public superﬁces of
existence.” Everyday being is an episode of Seinfeld. Seinfeld is, ironically, billed as “a show
about nothing.” Heidegger would disagree. Rather Seinfeld succeeds in its deft expression of the
utter absurdity of our absorption. We are obsessed with the utterly trivial, organizing our lives
around the minutiae of existence: a bowl of cereal thrills while a particular tone of voice causes
enough displeasure to ruin my day. The fault of Dasein in the everyday is that of misprioritizing
beings above being and, worse, ﬁnding fulﬁllment in distraction. To encounter the nothing in the
midst of this absorption is deeply unsettling. The nothing repels Dasein in its total alterity.
Typically one responds by turning away, denying the encounter and returning to the task at hand.
We shrug it off: “it was nothing”. But this dismissal, says Heidegger, only testiﬁes to the
signiﬁcance of the nothing and the pervasiveness of anxiety. “The original anxiety in existence is
usually repressed. Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through
Dasein.” Anxiety is repressed in order to conceal the nothing as much as this is possible. This
repression makes it such that Dasein is constantly anxious, but rarely experiences anxiety. For
the most part this concealing is achieved in the hustle of daily life. The deferral of anxiety
offered through distraction is necessary. It is a means of ﬂeeing from that which threatens Dasein
the most – namely, the nothing. The nothing threatens in two distinct though related senses.
Firstly, it disturbs our sense of being at home in the world. Secondly, it threatens Dasein’s very

155 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 104.
being. It is in encountering the nothing in the experience of anxiety that Dasein “finds itself face
to face with the nothing of the possibility of its existence.”158

For the most part Dasein enjoys a sense of comfort and belonging in the world of its concern. Having been inculcated through socialization Dasein deftly navigates daily life in accordance with the norms and values of its inherited world. The smooth functioning of society in general relies upon Dasein’s learning and accepting these norms. Dasein, too, relies upon these norms in order to make sense of entities and incorporate them, as well as other persons, into its life plans. We treat these norms as if they were truths, manifestations of some natural law. But the stability of these norms is undermined in Dasein’s experience of anxiety which reveals their total contingency. For example, a cardinal value of liberal democracy is the equality of persons. The ethos of such a society is reflected in the norms which encourage behaviour that respect this “fact.” The status of these norms as reflecting facts is put into question when Dasein realizes its thrownness in anxiety. Had I been born a century earlier, or in another geographic region, the principle of the equality of persons might seem laughable, given the dominance of conflicting norms which champion the inherent superiority of a particular race, nation or gender. Anxiety satirizes the apparent stability of these norms by showing Dasein’s unreflective reliance on them to be a pathetic manifestation of the complacency engendered by “being at home.” In the mode of its average everydayness the character of Dasein’s being-in is “brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the “they”, which brings tranquilized self-assurance – ‘Being-at-home’, with all its obliviousness…On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the ‘world’. Everyday familiarity collapses…Being-

158 Heidegger, Being and Time, 343/393.
in enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the “not-at-home.”” In this mode Dasein gains a critical distance from its inherited world and the meanings and values given by it. This distance opens up on the basis of the nothing and illuminates Dasein’s embeddedness in world. From this position of critical distance Dasein can choose to affirm or reject the norms which circumstance has thrust upon it. In deciding for itself Dasein takes up a comportment of authenticity.

In anxiety, the existential structure of Dasein and its world is disclosed. As such, I have identified anxiety as the mood of Dasein’s self-encounter par excellence. It is only through engaging with its latent anxiety that Dasein can really come to know itself – both ontologically on the special level (What kind of being am I?) and ontically on the level of the individual (Who am I?). Anxiety is that “state of mind through which Dasein discloses itself to itself in a simplified way; its very simplicity is what allows it to give Dasein access to itself as a structural totality.” Our very being-in-the-world, as thrown potentiality-for-Being, makes us anxious. We are, always, in a state of anxiety – and respond to this fundamental mood either authentically or inauthentically. Anxiety, then, confronts one with a choice: to flee from anxiety, into the tranquilized comfort of the they-self, or, to acknowledge and own one’s anxiety. Because anxiety makes this choice salient, anxiety reveals myself to me as potentiality for Being. In occupying itself with the kind of uninhibited hustle and idle talk of fallenness, Dasein denies its anxiety, and ultimately denies itself: since anxiety is that mood which discloses Dasein to itself, brings Dasein before itself.

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159 Heidegger, Being and Time, 188/233.
160 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 103.
162 Heidegger, Being and Time, 186/230.
163 Heidegger, Being and Time, 181/225.
‘world’ of its concern, make manifest something like a fleeing of Dasein in the face of itself – of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-self.”¹⁶⁴ In inauthenticity, Dasein turns away from itself and towards the world, particularly things in the world. Inauthenticity, for Heidegger, is a mode of being in untruth.¹⁶⁵ When anxiety is taken up authentically, it brings Dasein back from its absorption in the world. When it is taken seriously, Dasein can no longer live under the tranquilized assumption of the they-self. It no longer feels quite as at home in the world it was absorbed in.¹⁶⁶ A confrontation with anxiety is a traumatic break with the comfort of the they. In disclosing Dasein’s nature as finite, thrown possibility – anxiety singles out Dasein, it individualizes it. Anxiety reveals Dasein as being-possible in two distinct but related ways: firstly, in terms of Dasein’s possibility for authentic being, and secondly, in terms of the possibility of Dasein’s impossibility (its death). Both authentic-being and death are described by Heidegger as Dasein’s ownmost possibilities and as non-relational possibilities. To say that these are Dasein’s “ownmost” possibilities is to say that they are possibilities which pertain to the species Dasein. Only Dasein can die in the special sense which Heidegger uses the term, and only Dasein can be considered (in)authentic. To say that authenticity and death are “non-relational” possibilities means that they are possibilities which concern individual Dasein particularly. Anxiety, then, is fundamentally an experience of one’s possibilities.

To say that Dasein is a being-possible speaks to its temporal structure; anxiety makes this temporal structure salient. That Dasein is a “being-possible” indicates that it is a being which is related to its own future. This ability to relate to the future distinguishes it from other kinds of beings. Dasein plans and anticipates, organizing its activity in order to achieve particular ends.

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¹⁶⁴ Heidegger, Being and Time, 184/229.
¹⁶⁵ Heidegger, Being and Time, 222/264.
¹⁶⁶ Heidegger, Being and Time, 189/233.
This openness towards the future requires that Dasein can be-towards that which is not yet actual. In other words, that it can act in light of an experience of possibility. This ability to surpass what is given to Dasein empirically in the here and now Heidegger calls transcendence. Dasein is essentially oriented towards the future, constantly ahead of itself.\(^{167}\) This has been implied in much of what has been said up until now: things have significance by virtue of their relation to the referential totality of world which allows Dasein to situate them as “for-the-sake-of,” as relevant to a particular project or aim. So Dasein is always reaching forward into its future, pressing into possibilities by taking up projects. But Dasein is also essentially related to its past. The past into which Dasein is thrown, history, determines the kinds of possibilities which are open to Dasein by constRICTING its way of being and its way of disclosing. And, individually, insofar as Dasein is, it is as a having been.\(^{168}\) It is a being with a particular and unique past which it is connected to by memory. History in this second more personal sense also conditions our comportment towards the present and the future. Persons who have endured abuse, for example, might be disposed towards particular objects, sounds, environments in a radically different way from persons who have not. That Dasein experiences its present as both intimately connected to its past whilst simultaneously projecting forward into its future Heidegger calls \textit{ekstasis}. This ecstatic temporal structure makes it such that Dasein has a special and unique relation to its own being and to its own death. It is by virtue of this unique relation that Heidegger asserts only Dasein can die, all other beings merely perish. Death, then, is more than the biological event. Death is that inevitable aspect of Dasein’s future which limits and constrains. Only because Dasein is a transcendent being-toward can it begin to grasp its

\(^{167}\) Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 337/386.

\(^{168}\) Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 328/376.
finitude. Wrapping one’s head around this final and essential limitation begins with an experience of nothingness in anxiety. This alien encounter awakens Dasein to the possibility of its own ceasing to be possible; the possibility of its impossibility. According to Heidegger, there is no greater degree of authentic human existence, no greater freedom, than that which comes with living in light of this essential possibility. The truly authentic person is she whose anticipation of the future encompasses her own nonbeing.

Authenticity is a concept intimately bound up with the notion of mineness. Authentic comportments to anxiety and to death for Heidegger must be taken up by Dasein as an individual. This entails a wilful recognition of the self as discrete from others. Authenticity in each case is possible only in a separation from the they-self which categorizes one’s everydayness. To be authentic is to testify to one’s being as one’s own – that my being-in-the-world is my own task to bear and something for which I alone am responsible. Authentically confronting anxiety and death entails owning up to one’s existential structure as an individuated agent of being-possible. It necessitates a reflection about whether the life I lead adequately reflects this fact: which of the possibilities that I have actualized, the projects that I have pursued were freely chosen and which were tacitly accepted? “Proximally and for the most part” it is the case that we are carried along by the they. This being carried along makes it such that our choices are not genuinely our own inasmuch as they are “theirs,” as they are fixed by the dominant social values of the world we find ourselves in. In this way the they denies Dasein its being-possible. As long as Dasein accepts this denial it is disburdened. To be disburdened, though, is to forfeit the “has to be” which is integral to Dasein’s being, integral to being human. We forfeit a piece of our humanity, then, when we submerge our individuality in the they and

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170 Heidegger, Being and Time, 268/312.
lose ourselves in the world of our concern. A life can only be considered authentic when it is self-directed, when one’s individuality is asserted by choosing. Authenticity is a concept relevant to the category of the self, the individual, in which, through the exercise of free will in choice, the individual attempts to “transcend the ethos and attain a personal and subjective pathos which expresses their individuality as human beings who become what they singularly are.”

Authenticity requires individuality which is constituted by free choice. Slavishness to the thrown nature of one’s being, the unreflective acceptance and enactment of an inherited way of being indicates the unfreedom of the they-self. Individuality is wholly submerged in the collective. Though Dasein’s thrownness points to the unchosen and unfree character of its being the very world that Dasein is thrust into is one of possibility. It is a world that can be acted upon and manipulated, a world which is susceptible to Dasein’s essential freedom as openness. Heidegger calls freedom a way of relating to the possibilities presented by world: “freedom is only in the choice of one possibility – that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them.”

Anxiety brings one back to oneself, awakening a capacity for self-creation and self-assertion through choosing for oneself resolutely. Authentic-being pertains, as we’ve seen, to taking up rather than fleeing from anxiety. It also pertains to assuming a particular relation with the fact of mortality, that is, in assuming an authentic comportment to death. Firstly, authentic comportment lies in the grasping of death as a possibility which is one’s own, in coming to terms with death as irreducibly “mine”. The fact of mortality is constitutive of Dasein’s self-understanding. But in its average everydayness, Dasein as they-self relates to death as an

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impending event, rather than as an omnipresent possibility. Further, Dasein as they-self relates to death through bearing witness to the deaths of others (again, as events), not as a possibility which is “mine”. But “my death, like my body, remains fundamentally different for me precisely by standing in this unique relation to me, its owner.” Death is ontologically constituted by its mineness. Further, on the death of the other, commentator Stephen Mulhall writes, “the loss suffered by those who remain gives us no access to the loss (the loss of being as such) suffered by the dying or dead person. Her death, understood as a possibility-of-being that belongs to her own being – death as the end of life – remains opaque to us.” While owning up to one’s death is for Heidegger an essential aspect of self-understanding, one’s death is at the same time that which resists understanding insofar as it can never be properly encountered or experienced by Dasein as its own. It can never be nothing. Thus, the nothingness of nonbeing persists as an impenetrable alterity. Talking about death intelligibly from the phenomenological perspective then requires that it be understood as pure possibility. Authentic comportment towards death as one’s “ownmost” possibility does not consist in an expectation of actualization, or in bringing about its actualization by bringing about one’s own demise (suicide). Instead, taking up the possibility of death authentically lies in in one’s comportment to death precisely as a possibility, in a kind of anticipation which Heidegger calls being-towards-death. Heidegger writes, “In this kind of coming close…one does not tend towards concernfully making available something actual; but as one comes closer understandingly, the possibility of this possibility become greater. The closest closeness which one may have in being-towards-death as possibility is as far

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176 Mulhall, “Human Mortality”, 300.
177 Heidegger, Being and Time, 261 /305.
178 Heidegger, Being and Time, 262 /306.
as possible from anything actual.”\textsuperscript{179} Death as a possibility gives nothing to be actualized, it is not something that Dasein can ever be. Being-towards-death means relating to death precisely as possibility. Dasein’s authentic comportment towards death, then, does not evade death as its ownmost possibility through flight towards the world, or in the false explanations of the they: being-towards-death is non-relational, and must be taken up as an individual.

Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case, with death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being… Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been fully assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone.\textsuperscript{180}

And, Heidegger writes later in the section, even more emphatically, “all Being-with-others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality for Being is the issue.”\textsuperscript{181} In grasping death as its ownmost possibility, Dasein is wrenched from the they.\textsuperscript{182} Its being-toward-death is taken up purely for the sake of itself and of its own accord. Further, in authentic anticipation, Dasein for the first time realizes its lostness in the they-self and is brought face to face with itself in “an empassioned freedom towards death – a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the they, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.”\textsuperscript{183} Hitherto, the they has held Dasein back from grasping its nature as potentiality-for-Being and from taking hold of its ownmost possibilities, i.e by trapping it in inauthenticity. This process can be reversed only when Dasein intentionally wrests itself from its lostness in the they through seizing upon its

\textsuperscript{179} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 262/306-307.
\textsuperscript{180} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 250/294.
\textsuperscript{181} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 263/308.
\textsuperscript{182} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 263/307.
\textsuperscript{183} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 266/311.
fundamental anxiety. The they-self must be modified and transformed into authentic being through the act of choosing. But if Dasein is in the first place lost in its absorption in the world and tranquilized by the illusion of the they, what awakens it to its possibility for authentic being? In order to find its way out of the labyrinth of the they, Dasein must be shown to itself in its possible authenticity. Attestation to this possibility comes from within Dasein itself, in the form of a silent but persistent inner voice which appeals to it – this is what Heidegger refers to as the call of conscience.

Conscience, as Heidegger understands it, parallels anxiety in that it is always present but seldom experienced. Additionally, the call of conscience besets Dasein. It is a happening which Dasein does not authorize or will. Thus Dasein’s experience of conscience has the paradoxical character of being at once utterly and irreducibly mine, an inner voice uttered from the entity which I myself am, and at the same time alien to me. “What could be more alien to the ‘they’ – lost in the manifold ‘world’ of its concern, than the Self which has been individualized down to itself in uncanniness…?” This ownmost alien appeal of the voice of conscience singles out Dasein and demands that the domination of the they-self be denied. Like anxiety, the voice of conscience demands that Dasein respond: it must either flee from its appeal into the world of distraction or answer by acknowledging its Being-guilty (guilty for ignoring the call thus far, for succumbing to the they-self inauthentically). Responding to the call of conscience indicates a wanting to have a conscience and a receptiveness to Dasein’s fundamental anxiety; in

184 Heidegger, Being and Time, 268/312.  
185 Heidegger, Being and Time, 268/313.  
186 Heidegger, Being and Time, 268/313.  
187 Heidegger, Being and Time, 269-278/314-322.  
188 Heidegger, Being and Time, 277/321-322.  
189 Heidegger, Being and Time, 278/323.  
190 Heidegger, Being and Time, 288/334.
Heidegger’s terminology, this condition of openness signifies Dasein’s resoluteness, which I take to be the pinnacle of authentic being.

Here it is perhaps necessary to qualify in what sense being-authentic constitutes self-assertion and self-creation, a claim made earlier in this section. Properly being-authentic in the Heideggerian sense of answering to a call would seem to involve Dasein’s reception to meaning rather than creation of meaning. However the call “only reaches him who wants to be brought back.”

Dasein’s self-possession is in choosing to open oneself to the meaning revealed by the call, in choosing to be directed by what really matters and to let it matter.

But what, after all, is at stake in Dasein’s inauthentic everydayness? In its average and inauthentic mode of being, Dasein, as we have seen, is in a state of ignorance of its existential structure which prevents it from taking up its fundamental anxiety in an authentic relation to death. Authentic being-towards-death, as Dasein’s ownmost and non-relational possibility, has as much, if not more, bearing on the way that Dasein relates to life than on the way that it relates to death. Recognition of death’s irreducible mineness reminds Dasein that her life is hers alone to live. Living in awareness of death as an omnipresent possibility, rather than a distant event, bears on the choices Dasein makes in life, it bears on its way of being-in-the-world. As Stephen Mulhall puts it, “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.”

Ultimately, an authentic life is one that embraces Dasein’s freedom and consequently its

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193 Mulhall, “Human Mortality”, 304.
responsibility. In choosing for itself Dasein freely assumes the burden of the task of being. The individual must decide how she will take up this task in a way that is true to herself. She will bear responsibility for this choice; she is accountable, first and foremost, to herself. Only she will testify to the authenticity of her existence. Authenticity does not necessitate a rejection of one’s inherited world. It requires acting beyond complacency. It is no longer enough to be carried along by the expectations of one’s family, institutions, or culture. To be authentic is to choose expectations and goals for oneself and to fulfill them in a way that is true to the existential structure of Dasein. Ultimately, to be authentic involves taking up and responding to the question of one’s being in light of the fact of mortality. Bearing witness to the nothingness first opens up this space of questioning. Dasein is the “sole and authoritative witness” of the nothing; its anxiety testifies to this.\textsuperscript{195} It is “only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein [that] the total strangeness of beings overwhelm[s] us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder – the revelation of the nothing – does the “why” loom before us.”\textsuperscript{196} The instability of meaning disclosed by the nothing calls for Dasein’s concern. It puts the world into question, it puts oneself into question.\textsuperscript{197} Self-examination is prompted by anxiety. To evade this prompt is to live in ignorance of the nature of being human, which is to say, of being finite.

Death could not occupy so central a role in Heidegger’s existential analytic if it were not intimately connected with his notion of the nothing. Death is for Heidegger the possibility of impossibility. Impossibility as in total nothingness, a total cessation. Death could not have the same existential potency if Heidegger took seriously any notion of life after death, including

\textsuperscript{195} Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 105.
\textsuperscript{196} Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 109.
\textsuperscript{197} Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 109.
monotheism’s heaven and hell or Hinduism and Buddhism’s reincarnation. Heidegger rules these out entirely by positioning death as nonbeing, taking seriously Nietzsche’s claim that God is dead.
4. (In)Authenticity and Objectality

My aim in this chapter is to reconsider the relationship that Dasein has with objects in light of its fundamental anxiety. The reading of Being and Time that I have presented thus far presents objects as vehicles for Dasein’s denial of its essential finitude; objects have been considered primarily as those things towards which Dasein flees in its inauthenticity - they distract. It is in this being distracted that Dasein is said to be lost or “absorbed” in the world. Thus although Dasein is fundamentally anxious it rarely experiences anxiety. For Heidegger, however, it is only in experiencing anxiety that an authentic relation to death is made possible. Dasein’s everyday evasion of its anxiety is the cause of its inauthenticity.

If, as I have posited earlier, anxiety is a necessary condition of Dasein (given its existential structure) then it would be impossible for Dasein to evade it altogether. Dasein’s immersion in the world can only defer that encounter with nothingness which characterizes the experience of anxiety. Where the previous chapter described such deferral as a forfeiture of Dasein’s humanity, this chapter will consider deferral as that gesture which is most properly human. My argument will rest on the claim that Dasein’s relation to material culture – things, objects, stuff - rather than an evasion of its existential reality, is more properly a manifestation of that existential reality; to be fixated on objects testifies to Dasein’s fundamental anxiety, the impetus to defer is symptomatic of Dasein’s unique existential position as “the sole authoritative
witness of the revelation of the nothing." To be authentic is to live up to the task of bearing witness. My project will be to deliberate on whether Dasein’s relation to material culture – the heirloom object in particular - might constitute the testimony of such a witness.

I. Dying and Deferral

The capacity to die, more than any other, defines Dasein’s existential position. Whereas all life forms perish, only Dasein can die, according to Heidegger. For Heidegger, this is Dasein’s ownmost, or, proper, possibility. Dying is properly Dasein’s on both an individual and a general level. In the first, individual sense, my death is mine – no one will die on my behalf. Recall that for Heidegger experiencing the death of another does not shed light on the experience of my own death. Dying my death is entirely my own task to bear. I am in a sense responsible for my death as I am responsible for my life. In a second, more general sense, dying is a possibility which belongs to Dasein as a species - human being - alone. Heidegger makes this claim based on a conceptual distinction between dying and perishing, where perishing is defined as the biological or physical end of the organism. The capacity for dying signals an ability to relate to one’s death “as such”, he claims. The “as such” here is enigmatic. I take it to mean the ability to relate to one’s own death as an existential possibility, the possibility of impossibility. For Heidegger, this capacity for a relation to the “as such” of death is what separates human from non-human life. Only Dasein can anticipate, fear, or live toward their death. Doing so entails an understanding of death in terms of its mineness, its finality, its inevitability.

To die, to relate to death as such, is possible only insofar as one has an experience of the nothing. This experience informs our understanding of the impossibility that is what it is to die - after death there is only nothing. As I suggested in closing the previous chapter, we must take up this view of death if we are to understand what I called death’s “existential potency”. Sami

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Pihlström elaborates that “the philosophical significance of death lies in its being the subject’s final encounter with her or his (or, rather, my) world.”\footnote{Sami Pihlström, “Death – mine or other’s? On the possibility of philosophical thanatology” in \textit{Mortality} 6.3, (2010), pp. 265-286, 267.} Death is, then, the end of the world (for me). If this is the case, “for Dasein to acknowledge its mortality – to anticipate death – is for it to acknowledge one of the most fundamental limits or conditions of its existence,”\footnote{Mulhall quoted by Sami Pihlström in “Death – mine or other’s? On the possibility of philosophical thanatology”, 271.} impervious or immune to that special capacity of Dasein’s called transcendence. Death is described here as at the same time a limitation and condition insofar as in marking the ending of a life it thereby constitutes that life as a discrete totality.\footnote{Sami Pihlström “Death – mine or other’s? On the Possibility of Philosophical Thanatology”, 271.} As we have seen, conceiving of death as the end of life - as the ultimate limit on my possibility, as nothingness - is also constitutive for Dasein in another fundamental way, namely in its disclosing the possibility of my authenticity. As Pihlström puts it: “death, or mortality, is a necessary condition for the possibility, of the meaningfulness or authenticity (or meaninglessness or inauthenticity) of human life.”\footnote{Sami Pihlström “Death – mine or other’s? On the Possibility of Philosophical Thanatology”, 267.} What seems implied by this formulation of death’s significance is that philosophy requires mortality: if we lived forever, would we wonder about what constitutes a good life? Could we pose Heidegger’s question - the question of the meaning of being, without an intimate relation to our own non-being? It would seem that it is Dasein’s finitude, its limitation, which precipitates these questions. At the same time asking these questions is integral to authentic being: one can only be authentic on the basis of their pursuit of meaning. Authenticity requires an active seeking of meaning. However, this seeking depends first on recognizing the contingent and arbitrary character of the meaning first presented in one’s inherited world. It depends on sensing the
deficiency of its passivity. This kind of recognition is borne from Dasein’s encounter with
meaninglessness – the nothing – in anxiety. John Russon writes that:

In authenticity, one recognizes that these things can only “mean” in the way they do on
the basis of a prior setting of the terms of care by oneself. Anxiety is the initial discovery
that the meaningful weight of things is not inherent to them but can be stripped away, and
authenticity is owning up to one’s own reality as the founding meaning-giving power
here. In authenticity, then, one can no longer “go along with” the simple “way things are”
but recognizes oneself as the one who must set the terms of care.\textsuperscript{203}

In other words, authentic Dasein must choose to let things matter that appear as mattering to her
and can do so only on the basis of its attunement to nothingness in anxiety. The experience of
nothingness is what enables Dasein to choose to open itself to meaning.

Thus far I have been trying to describe ways in which death and the experience of
nothingness by which we understand death are constitutive - how they make us the kind of
beings that we are, how they inform Dasein’s ontological constitution and existential
possibilities. It would seem odd, then, that these same things are those which I have also
described as oppressive, threatening, distressing and traumatizing. Recall Heidegger’s
description of the nothing in \textit{Being and Time}: “That which threatens cannot bring itself close
from a definite direction…it is already ‘there,’ and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive
and stifles one’s breath and yet it is nowhere.”\textsuperscript{204} And in \textit{What is Metaphysics}?:
The saturation of existence by nihilative behaviour testifies to the constant though
doubtlessly obscured manifestation of the nothing that only anxiety originally reveals.

But this implies that the original anxiety in existence is usually repressed. Anxiety is

\textsuperscript{203} John Russon, “The Self as Resolution”, 100.
\textsuperscript{204} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 186/231.
there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through Dasein… It is always ready, though it only seldom springs, and we are snatched away and left hanging.²⁰⁵

Nothing, which threatens Dasein from nowhere, bears down on Dasein with a weight that betrays its immateriality. Its effects are felt on the body as much as the psyche. Heidegger’s accounts of the experience of anxiety in both texts highlight the compulsion to evade the threat of the nothing and, at the same time, the vanity of the very attempt to evade – the nothing is as pervasive and inescapable as death is inevitable. The remainder of this project will be focussed on attempting to understand the impulse to evade by way of its specific manifestation in Dasein’s object worship.

Firstly, we should further explore the matter of whether the impulse to evade anxiety is a phenomenon born from Dasein’s ontological makeup. Positioning Dasein as the “sole, authoritative…witness to the nothing” and as the only being which properly dies are claims about Dasein as a species. Does Dasein’s tendency to deny its role as witness – inauthentically – have the same special universality? In other words, is it “human nature” to defer or behaviour learnt in tacit agreement with the dominant values of a particular world? Heidegger identifies falling as an ontological structure of Dasein, so for him human beings are – proximally and for the most part – inauthentic regardless of their particular context. He writes, “we would… misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontic property of which perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.”²⁰⁶ Dasein’s falling, then, is not the product of unfortunate cultural circumstance, but is structurally consistent with sociality generally, with Dasein’s Mitsein or being-with. Rather than reading Heidegger’s description of inauthentic everydayness as cultural critique, this passage supports the interpretation of inauthenticity as a necessary by-

²⁰⁵ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 106.
²⁰⁶ Heidegger, Being and Time, 176/220.
product of Dasein’s constitution as being-in-the-world. Falling, writes Heidegger, is existentially
determinative for being-in-the-world, \(^{207}\) or in other words, “being-in-the-world is always
fallen.”\(^ {208}\) This is a rather strong formulation. At least, it is uncontroversial to say for Heidegger
being-in-the-world tempts Dasein into falling, that being-in-the-world is necessarily tempting.\(^ {209}\)

It does seem, though, that context has a role to play in Dasein’s susceptibility to this
temptation. And, in spite of the passage quoted above asserting the ontological character of
inauthenticity, it is not outlandish to hold the view that sections in *Being and Time* and *What is
Metaphysics*? in particular those which focus on inauthenticity - function as social commentary
or cultural critique. After all, Heidegger himself is writing from within a particular world of
concern. We should not be surprised to find that this context has entered into his writings. For
example, *What is Metaphysics*? is basically a text which calls upon its reader to question the
domination of science and technology over metaphysical inquiry. It seems plain in this text that
Heidegger is responding to a particular(ly Western) intellectual history when he decries Dasein’s
“scientific existence” for its neglect of the nothing.\(^ {210}\) While Heidegger neglects to acknowledge
this, editor David Farrell Krell does so explicitly in his foreword.\(^ {211}\)

Furthermore, there is a considerable volume of scholarship which is dedicated to
producing comparative studies of Heidegger’s texts and Eastern thought. The gist of this
comparative analysis, to put it very generally, is to demonstrate that there are several points of
contact between Heideggerian thought and certain Eastern traditional beliefs, particularly

\(^ {207}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 179/223.
\(^ {208}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 181/2225.
\(^ {209}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 177/221.
\(^ {210}\) Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”, 95.
\(^ {211}\) David Farrell Krell, Introductory notes to “What is Metaphysics?” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* ed. David Farrell Krell, 90.
regarding mortality and nothingness. As I understand it, the view is that, if we are to read Heidegger’s analysis of authentic being as prescriptive (though I do not commit myself here to the position that we should), adopting certain traditional beliefs and practices, other than those we have found ourselves thrown into, might bring us into a “healthier,” more authentic relation with respect to the fact of our mortality. To accept impermanence – of all materiality, including the impermanence of one’s own body - is a central teaching of Buddhism. One should practice detachment from materiality, and admire the ascetic as a paradigm of virtue. Indeed the comportment of the Buddhist seems compatible with Heidegger’s description of the authentic and resolute anticipation of death. However, there are also many inconsistencies to be taken into account, including the belief in the immortality of the soul which is perhaps the most glaringly at odds with Being and Time’s existentialist tone.

Nonetheless, it is useful to remind oneself here of the obvious fact that an individual’s attitudes towards death are culturally informed, given being-in-the-world. And that, although Heidegger describes inauthentic falling as a general existential structure, “it is taken up, and lived out, in particular contexts in especially (to him) egregious ways.” If this is the case, perhaps (in)authenticity should be considered in an analog sense rather than digital, on a sort of sliding scale in which there are infinite ways of enacting inauthenticity, some being more egregious than others. Of course, the contemporary North American cultural climate seems to be a shining example of Heideggerian inauthenticity, likely more egregious than not.

Speaking very generally, as a culture we seem to be guilty of the kind of flight from

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215 Karen Houle, advisory committee feedback, October 7, 2015.
anxiety which characterizes the inauthentic. This is made evident by what Lewis Lapham describes as “the substituting of the promise of technology for the consolations of philosophy.” Here deferral is a project taken to a new extreme. The overwhelming message is that aging is a process which should be halted. Or, when we acquiesce that getting older is unavoidable, we should try our best to appear as though it were not. Consider the multitude of anti-aging cosmetic products currently available – wrinkle creams, hair plugs, face lifts etc. Youth, we are promised, is only a botox injection, a nip and a tuck away. That we buy into this promise belies a desperate attempt to resist our bodies – we want not to grow old; we want very badly not to die. And it seems that this desire is manifested most clearly in fields of medicine and biotechnology in their constant search for solutions to postpone, and even eliminate, the fact of death. Our species has never lived longer lifespans than we do now, thanks to the millions of dollars dedicated to medical research pursuing cures for ailments ranging from the common cold to aggressive cancers. But to live longer and healthier lives seems no longer to be good enough: last summer Russian multimillionaire Dmitry Itskov presented a “solution” for human mortality at the Global Future 2045 conference in New York City which involves the creation of a digital “neohumanity.” Itskov’s project proposes that the functions of the human mind be reproduced on “nonbiological substrates,” and that the human body be replaced with cybernetic body-like holograms. In Itskov’s words, the goal is to “change the bodily nature of a human being, and make them immortal...independent of limitations of space and time.” That his proposal is being met with considerable financial support in the United States points to a gross level of American discomfort with mortality. Perhaps, as Susan Sontag has suggested, it is the great faith placed in science and technology by advanced industrial societies that has contributed to the

American inability to come to terms with death. But it is precisely the “limitations” that Itskov points to which make us Dasein.

To view mortality as a “problem” which might be overcome, as a disease which needs to be cured, is to misunderstand what it is to be human. This vulnerability is constitutive. It is only because we are the kinds of beings that can feel threatened by death that we experience anxiety in confrontation with nothingness. Authenticity necessitates owning up to this condition of vulnerability via an embrace of mortality. It must be clear by now that for Heidegger, “properly dying” belongs to the proper and authentic being-able of Dasein, to that which one must testify and attest.” Dasein’s unique being-able to relate to the “as such” of death is at the same time the ability to testify to death and the fact of mortality. What remains unclear, however, is what authentic “testifying” might require. I consider whether deferral itself might constitute the kind of testimony Heidegger has in mind. Specifically, I wonder about the deferral Dasein enacts in its relation to objects.

As long as humans have been dying they have been deferring their confrontations with death, sometimes by trying to cheat it altogether. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, considered to be the oldest surviving piece of literature, Gilgamesh, shaken with grief at the death of his friend, undertakes a quest for immortality despite his knowing the task’s futility. Gilgamesh’s consistent deferral of an inevitable confrontation with his own death is an indication of his anxiety. In psychology literature, this might be referred to as “avoidance coping,” a maladaptive coping strategy wherein the specific situations, persons, things which trigger discomfort or anxiety are avoided altogether, often causing an increase in stress or anxiety in the

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Recall that under Heidegger’s analysis, anxiety is not triggered by any particular situation, person, or thing but permeates Dasein’s experience as thrown-projection and as being-in-the-world. Despite this crucial difference, avoidance coping can tend to sound like Heideggerian inauthenticity. Recall that, Heidegger frames inauthenticity as a “flight” from anxiety. But the *Epic of Gilgamesh*’s age is of import here as it seems to reinforce Heidegger’s claim that anxiety, and consequently deferral, is an existential structure (rather than ontic) and, thus, cannot be culturally dependent. In other words, the anti-aging culture and obvious discomfort with mortality in contemporary Western societies is the expression of something fundamental and unchanging about the human experience. We might consider Dmitry Itskov the modern day Gilgamesh. The point that I wish to make here is that the tendency to defer is tied inextricably to the experience of anxiety. And it is on the basis of this claim that I refer to deferral as “the most human gesture” in refutation of the suggestion that to avoid confrontation with the fact of mortality constitutes a forfeiture of one’s humanity. Rather I contend that it is a testament to one’s being human, to one’s being anxious. Additionally, deferral seems intimately connected to Dasein’s unique relationship to and experience of time, described in the previous chapter as a relation of transcendence. It is only because of Dasein’s *ekstasis*, its predominantly futural orientation or “projection”, as a being which self-defines in terms of its possibilities as a “can-be”, that the “putting off”, the delay implicit in deferral is possible.

II. Heirloom as Fetish

My focus here is on various ways in which engaging with mortality is deferred through the relationship one has with the objects that they understand to be permanent. In the remainder of this chapter, I am interested in pursuing a phenomenological study of this relationship. In

particular I am interested in the heirloom object – that which is left behind, something which is

to be passed down through a familial lineage as symbolic of a particular person or group of

persons who are deceased. The heirloom is an object both secular and sacred. It is tied

inextricably with memories, anecdotes, lore of those it symbolizes. It is usually kept separate,
sometimes hidden away in a “safe place”, sometimes displayed prominently, on a mantle, on the

wall, etc. We feel a pang of panic when we believe it to be jeopardized – when we think we may

have lost it, for example. We are only its temporary guardian, responsible stewards who will pass

it on, along with its inseparable stories and secrets. In some other cases, the object is carried on

the body of the bearer either perpetually, becoming something that the bearer feels naked and

uneasy without, or as a talisman, worn for protection or luck on special occasions. In almost all

cases, the heirloom is cherished and as such is treated with a kind of reverence that distinguishes

it from other possessions. I think that this unique relation between possession and possessor can

be illuminating with respect to what has been said thus far about mortality anxiety. The heirloom

confers comfort on the bearer of the object in its status as that which transcends one’s own

lifetime. It serves a dual function in its aiding Dasein’s deferral. First, it stands in for an other

who is absent in death and protects the bearer from the experience of nothing in their grief and

loss. Second, it assuages the bearer’s own anxiety about mortality by assuring that she will

persist beyond her life; she will not be erased, forgotten, gone entirely insofar as the object

persists in its durability.

On the death of the other: A friend once recounted a vivid childhood memory to me. His

family home was burgled when he was around age 10. Nobody was home at the time of the

intrusion. He remembered his mother and father cataloguing missing items for the police. Many

things were stolen but there was a kind of detachment in his mother’s description of the stolen
objects – with one exception: a necklace which had been his grandmother’s. He had never met her; she died when his mother was a barely a teenager. My friend explained that he could not quite understand back then why this particular object was so different from the others. It was not expensive; his mother didn’t even wear it all that often. Still, she was devastated and seemed to enter a period of mourning for the loss of the necklace; it was as if she were experiencing the death of her mother all over again. My friend explained to me that the necklace had been a means of avoiding the experience of loss, absence, nothingness at the time of his grandmother’s death. It is not as though she had denied the death of her mother – she acknowledged it verbally (“She’s gone now”) and likely thought of it often (“I wish she was here”) – but the loss of the necklace opened her to experience the nothing in a new way. The trauma of the original loss had been displaced onto the material vestiges that remained. The necklace had been necessary in protecting her from a grief which was too much for her to bear in her youth. On one hand, her mother remained present in the object. On the other hand, precisely in its functioning as a symbol, the object preserved her mother’s absence, her being-no-longer-here, her death. This likewise seems to be the case for those who treat the heirloom as a talismanic object. My brother, for example, carried my grandfather’s sailing knife with him at the hospital during the birth of his son, as well as when he walked my mother down the aisle at her wedding. In my grandfather’s absence, the object signified his enduring presence if only in a tenuous, symbolic sense. More accurately, though, the knife as talisman demonstrates a felt absence, a lack or nothing that one feels compelled to compensate for by way of the heirloom. This is not at all uncommon. One of the things often repeated in personal descriptions of heirloom objects is that in possessing the object the bearer maintains a material and tactile relation with the absent other, i.e. “I carry her with me” etc. The materiality and physicality of the heirloom is important insofar
as it guarantees the potential for durability. Ultimately the capability of the object to endure – to persist in time beyond the bearer, both in past and in future – is at the heart of what fascinates us about the heirloom.

According to Heidegger, in being fascinated with entities, absorbed in the world, Dasein mistakes beings for Being. This is inauthentic; we forfeit a piece of our humanity when we submerge our individuality in entities. I have offered that this kind of forfeiture is perhaps the most human gesture available to us insofar as it testifies to the powerful impact mortality has on the human psyche. The investiture of anxiety into particular objects, like the heirloom, is an effective coping mechanism, a means of disburdening oneself from overpowering feelings of loss and grief. Or, perhaps, a means of coping with precisely the Angst that Heidegger has in mind. To be sure, the fact of mortality is anxiety inducing. It confers a kind of weight onto me by its very nature as the ultimate limitation on my freedom, on my very being. The unfathomability of my own non-being, which is at the same time an inevitability, might seem more manageable if I am confident in my being able to leave something behind – a favourite piece of jewellery, a work of art, or a journal, a hat, anything which is mine and bears the mark of that mineness. In doing so, heirlooms trace personal histories but also serve as vessels for displacing an encounter with the nothing. This kind of story about the way we relate to objects may sound familiar to readers acquainted with psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud’s writings on the fetish object inform my interpretation of the heirloom as a vehicle for coping with mortality. Freud’s highly influential theory of fetishism, informed by his writings on the Oedipal complex, emphasized the power of the object to reveal important truths concerning human nature. For Freud, analysis of the fetish object, which was imbued by the subject with a mysterious and erotic power, could expose desires and fears repressed deep within the subconscious. The fetish arises out of a
“unique originating event,” usually traumatic, which has a profound effect on the identity formation of the subject who experiences the event. The fetish is ultimately a neurotic response to this originating event; a fixation on the event which brings disparate elements into a hyper-relational identity.\textsuperscript{222} The fetish object is a crystallization of the event, in which desires, beliefs and personal history are fixed.\textsuperscript{223} This process is perhaps explicated more clearly in theories of sexual fetishism, which explore how the originating event structures sexual desire and in which the fetish object acts as the focus of a traumatic fixation and source of repetition and compulsion for the subject.\textsuperscript{224} Freud diagnoses the originating event as the first recognition of sexual difference between the male and female body. This recognition, he says, fundamentally forms the subject’s sexuality.\textsuperscript{225} In the moment that a young boy first apprehends the naked female body, presumably his mother’s, he is struck with fear, perceiving his mother’s sexual organ to be a lack or an absence of the phallus resulting from castration. Already deeply attached to his penis, the young boy’s fear of castration replaces his desire for the female body with terror.\textsuperscript{226} This terror is compounded by a fear of the wrath of his father and feeling of incestual guilt due to the male child’s innate Oedipal complex. The sexual fetishist channels these emotions into an object that is linked in some way with the originating event. Classic Freudian examples of fetish objects include shoes, hair or fur and lingerie, each of which corresponds to the child’s apprehension of the female sex organ. The fetish effectively “stands for the missing penis of the

woman.” As the child develops, the fetish object serves as a reminder of the originating event and becomes inextricable from the deep-seated male fear of castration. Thus the power of the fetish object becomes “precisely the power to repeat its originating act of forging an identity of articulated relations between certain otherwise heterogenous things,” between the female genitals and the fetish object. As a stand-in for the absent female phallus, the fetish object is at once a recognition and preservation of the originating event, and at the same time a function of disavowal. Disavowal, similar to repression, signals the child’s unwillingness to accept the sexual difference of his mother. The fetish then, as substitute for the female phallus, is established in terms of both an affirmation and disavowal of the traumatic discovery of the female genital as a lack.

In his later writings Freud widened the scope of his analysis of the disavowal at the heart of fetishism. According to James Strachey’s foreword to “Fetishism” in volume XXI of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, in an unfinished and posthumously published paper, “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence,” and in the last paragraphs of Chapter VIII of An Outline of Psychoanalysis “Freud… points out that this ‘splitting of the ego’ is not peculiar to fetishism but is in fact to be found in many other situations in which the ego is faced with the necessity of constructing a defence, and that it occurs not only in disavowal but also in repression.” It seems that Heidegger’s description of the trauma inherent in the experience of anxiety – that is, the experience of nothingness – would constitute the kind of situation that Strachey describes above in which a defense is constructed via engagement with objects as

229 Freud, “Fetishism,” 156.
fortification. The heirloom object functions in a similar way to the Freudian fetish object: on the one hand tangibly marking a traumatic encounter and at the same time serving as a means of covering over the traumatic encounter.

To care for these objects, to value them in a special way, may not be a deferral of anxiety after all. It seems likely to me that one’s relation to them adequately testifies to that anxiety which is essentially and fundamentally human. Objects of this nature mediate anxiety, but do not and cannot displace it altogether. Thus, I position our relation to such objects not as a means of rejecting or fleeing anxiety – as I think Heidegger would – but as a means of wrestling with it. To grapple with one’s anxiety, with one’s mortality in this way, not to overcome it, seems to me to be at the heart of Heideggerian authenticity. There are means of engaging anxiety which involve being-with objects in a way that Heidegger does not account for, taking the heirloom as one such example.

III. More than mere object

In highlighting the heirloom as an object of particular relevance I notice, along with Heidegger, that the deferral of anxiety often takes place by way of our preoccupation with entities in the world of our concern, our everyday dealings with things. What is overlooked by him, though, is that the manner in which this very deferral invests entities with something - a kind of subjectivity perhaps – which ultimately denies objects their thinghood such that they are no longer just things. They are invested with memories, with feelings of sadness, loneliness, resentment, joy and love, parts of our experiences and ourselves. This kind of investiture makes it such that it becomes impossible to engage with the enchanted object in a way that refuses its enchantment by treating it merely as a thing. Instead the thing is always more than mere object,
becoming a symbol for the time, place, person or self that it cannot help but signify. This “more than”, this excess, grants the heirloom a rather unique ontological status.

If my description of it thus far has been accurate, the heirloom resists both of the neat conceptual categories that Heidegger has provided for our thinking about objects. These categories were presented in the first section as the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand. Present-at-hand objects are those things that exist in the periphery of my practical engagements: they are the coffee mug on my desk, the chair that I am sitting on. They make up my environment but are not at the forefront of my experience since I am directed in a task which involves other, more primary equipment – namely the keyboard that I type on and the notes I refer to. These are the ready-to-hand, whose usefulness I rely on in the accomplishment of my task. They are the “for-the-sake-of”, tools or equipment whose value is primarily determined by their usefulness. But even if the heirloom object is technically “useful”, this practicality should not be mistaken as the reason for its being meaningful. The sailing knife, for example, is certainly a useful object though I very much doubt that it will be used to cut again. As heirloom, the knife means differently; Dasein’s relation to it has transformed.

Further, what distinguishes the heirloom-object from the ready-to-hand is its apparent irreplaceability. Where Heidegger’s description of the hammer gives it the impression of being a commodity of mass-production, ordinary and interchangeable, the heirloom is decidedly a one-off. Thus no other gold necklaces and no other sailing knives, no matter how similar, have the same kind of significance that the heirloom object does by virtue of its unique status as stand-in and as fetish. The heirloom object is cherished by virtue of its being previously owned, previously used, previously loved and its ability to link us to the other of that “previously.”
common sense of the heirloom’s irreplaceability serves to increase the possessor’s reverence of it and underscores its distinction from other possessions.

Discussing the heirloom object’s “meaning” or “significance” requires special caution in order to preserve the ontological structure laid out in the first chapter. On the “meaning” of entities Heidegger writes that there is no such thing: “Meaning is an existentiale of Dasein, not a property attached to entities…Dasein only ‘has’ meaning, so far as the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world can be ‘filled in’ by the entities discoverable in that disclosedness… all entities whose kind of being is other than Dasein’s must be conceived of as unmeaning, essentially devoid of any meaning at all.”

I interpret this passage in terms of meaning’s occurrence as a happening in the relation of Dasein to objects as engagement in the world. Crucially, Dasein does not “give” meaning, nor do objects “have” meaning in themselves. Rather Dasein’s constitutional openness, its caring, provides the opportunity for the emergence of meaning via world.

*Being and Time* emphasises the significance of objects in terms of their instrumentality, their “for-the-sake-of.” While the notion of the ready-to-hand has been immensely influential, even cited by some as *Being and Time*’s greatest philosophical contribution, in providing conceptual vocabulary for discussing equipmentality, it does not helpfully account for the important differences between specific entities. Graham Harman identifies this as a major weakness in Heidegger’s thought. As he puts it: “You may find resources in Heidegger for the philosophy of technology, but you’ll have to deal with the fact that the gas chambers in Auschwitz, hydrogen bombs, Adidas shoes, plastic cups are all essentially the same [for

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Heidegger].” The taxonomy given in *Being and Time* which identifies non-human entities as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand elucidates only two kinds of experience (of two kinds of entities) but cannot account for differences in experience within these kinds: despite their sharing in the category of “equipment,” nobody would agree that the experiences of gas chambers, bombs, sneakers, or cups are at all comparable.

For the purposes of this project, Harman’s insight into the limitations of the ready-to-hand is helpful but could be expanded, for example, insofar as *Being and Time*’s focus on the object’s equipmental functioning and use-value cannot account for the anthropomorphized character of heirlooms or our experience of them as more-than-mere-object. It is in this type of thing the aporia of the subject/object dichotomy is most tenuous. In the fetish object, signifier and signified are conflated such that the subject is reified and the object is animated. In the case of the heirloom, the object stands in for a subject who was, as well as a subject (myself) who will no longer be. My relation to such an object speaks to the temporal structure of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, and the existential anxiety resulting from that structure.

That objects of material culture (knives, necklaces, etc.) and one’s relation to them have the power to illuminate structures of being is recognized in *Being and Time* (though not outright) and is a theme explored more richly in later texts. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger at least implicitly acknowledges the object’s revelatory capacity in his taking of the hammer as the paradigm of the ready-to-hand. Ultimately he relies on this object, and Dasein’s being-towards it, to explicate the nature of being-in-the-world and the practical, pre-theoretical understanding that Dasein always already navigates the world with. *The Origin of the Work of Art* demonstrates an expanse in Heidegger’s thinking of objects beyond the equipmental. In this essay he discusses

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another kind of thing – the work of art – which is considered valuable not in its instrumentality or reliability but in its capacity to reveal truths. Perhaps the best-known passage from this text is Heidegger’s brilliant and poetic analysis of Vincent van Gogh’s oil paintings of peasant shoes. The true character of the peasant’s shoes, precisely their equipmentality, is revealed not by reflecting on the shoes themselves in actuality but in considering van Gogh’s rendering of them in the work. Heidegger writes:

From Van Gogh’s painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they belong – only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil from the field or the field-path sticking to the, which would at least hint at their use. A pair of peasant’s shoes and nothing more. And yet… In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the world of the peasant woman certainty of bread, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding meance of death…But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice this about the shoes. The peasant woman, on the other hand, simply wears them.²³⁵

It is in her wearing them, in putting them to use, that the shoes become what it is that they are, writes Heidegger. But it is the work’s evocation of them that brings the truth of their being to the fore: “this painting [speaks]” and “in the nearness of the work we [are] suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.”²³⁶ The work of art articulates the truth of being most precisely. In the case of Van Gogh’s paintings, the work being analyzed as capable of unconcealing being is itself an object. Perhaps the heirloom object has the power to wield the same kind of truths. This

is not to suggest that the heirloom is itself a work of art, but I bring up *The Origin of the Work of Art* in order to demonstrate a precedent in Heidegger’s œuvre for a way of talking about objects which affords them the power to reveal truths. I propose that the heirloom object shares in this workly power, in that it reveals a truth about the nature of Dasein’s being temporal. If experiencing the work of art better allows us to understand the peasant’s shoes, the heirloom may help us better understand ourselves by opening us to the anxiety latent in our relation to it.

Opening oneself to the experience of anxiety, bearing witness to nothingness, is ultimately at the heart of Dasein’s authenticity. If this is the case, we may begin to question Heidegger’s assertion that becoming-authentic is an enterprise pertaining solely to the individual, indeed solipsistic in its nature. That is, that striving for authenticity properly occurs in the divestment from other beings and in the interiority required by the call of conscience. He emphasizes that, “conscience, in its basis and essence, is in each case mine – not only in the sense that in each case the appeal is to one’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being, but because the call comes from that entity which I myself am.”\(^{237}\) I wonder whether something is being lost in emphasizing the “mineness” of the experience of being called by conscience to authentic-being. We should not forget that the space for this experience is opened up vis-a-vis world and Dasein’s engagements as a caring being-in and a being-with. As I have attempted to show throughout this chapter, struggling with anxiety occurs precisely in one’s relations with other beings, citing the heirloom specifically, which I have identified as that object which marks Dasein’s unique relation to (its) death. To think of authentic Dasein as a being cut off from these objects would be to abstract her from world, and from her lived experience more generally – Dasein would cease to be being-in-the-world.

Throughout this project I have characterized authenticity as a way of being in which Dasein seizes upon its ownmost possibilities upon coming to terms with its being mortal. On the

\(^{237}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 278/323.
one hand, the heirloom object, in its perceived permanence, may help one come to terms with this fact. On the other, it remains a means of deferral and of Dasein’s clinging to being, to presence in the face of nothingness. If this clinging to presence means that Dasein remains inauthentic, then I am inclined to think that inauthentic is all that we are capable of being – that deferral is a necessity given our fundamental anxiety. Jacques Derrida defiantly stated in his famous last interview that deferral is a process integral to survival. Derrida acknowledged in deferral an affirmation of life. He stated “to feel joy and to lament the spectre of death, for me is the same thing.”  

This affirmation of life could be read as an inauthentic flight from the anxiety surrounding his impending death, although perhaps it is better interpreted as a resolute and complex assertion born from that anxiety.

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Conclusion

My interest in the heirloom object lies in the complexity of Dasein’s relation to it, though I do not doubt that there are many other kinds of things which serve the same sort of dual function that I have described – occasioning both the embrace and the deferral of Dasein’s anxiety. Alongside the widespread secularization of mourning practices, the heirloom persists as an emblem of Dasein’s unique relation to non-being as well as an object which connects Dasein to others (past, present and future) despite the experience of alienation inherent in anxiety. Fascination with objects like this indicates something beyond sentimentality, namely Dasein’s persistent struggling to come to terms with the limitations of temporality informed by a pre-ontological understanding of non-being in the experience of anxiety. *Being and Time*’s focus, and the focus of much subsequent scholarship, however, is rather on those relations informed by Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being – in equipmentality, for example. Considering how a fundamental experience of nothingness can shape the nature of the human relation to objects of material culture may be a valuable contribution to continuing Heidegger scholarship, in that it can give greater insight into the ways in which mortality anxiety is manifest in Dasein’s daily life and the ways in which Dasein’s navigation of anxiety influence its self-understanding.
Works Cited


