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For Whom the Bell Tolls? Notes for a Psychoanalytic Reading of Heidegger's Being-towards-Death

Summary: *In this article the author analyses Heidegger's account on "being-towards-death" as it is discussed in Being and Time. Beginning with comparison of the relation between reality and oblivion in Heidegger and Freud, the author investigates the way in which these conceptions demonstrate both "Ptolomaic" and "Copernican" moments. In the second part of the article, the focus is on Heidegger's personalistic phenomenology of Dasein: the author argues that in order to comprehend the meaning of "being-towards-death" it must be taken together with analyses of "thrown projection" and the sphere of Befindlichkeit. The author concludes that Levinas's critique of Heidegger's existential solipsism is strongly founded and also that it does not oppose, in its most significant aspects, a psychoanalytic reading of Heidegger's understanding of ownership and death.*
Key words: *being-towards-death, Dasein, thrownness, separation, otherness, existential solipsism.*

Reality and Oblivion

Perhaps it is more than a matter of mere chance that for both Heidegger and Freud the question of *reality* comes up as a question of *remembrance* in the urgent situation in which "all cows are black" and we have forgotten even our own oblivion. Furthermore, it is not the case that only a few or many fall in this big sleep. We all *fall*. While in Heidegger this is described as the alert situation of "forgetting of the forgetting" of the question of Being and demonstrated as the constant turbulence between inauthentic and authentic existence of *Dasein*, in Freud it signifies the degree of presence of the neurotic/psychotic symptoms. What is at stake in both cases is the issue of the *loss of reality*, the disturbing fact of *human amnesia*, in contrast to which it appears as necessary to *restore the earlier state of things*, both in the context of recollection and of "renewal" of presence.

However, the question that should be put forward concerns the following: are we dealing here with *oblivion of reality* or *reality of oblivion* i.e. is it

not rather the case that both Heidegger and Freud undertake ambivalent and somewhat paradoxical projects which are simultaneously motivated by a desire to strongly affirm *reality as presence*, as a structure which can be reflexively comprehended, conceived as essentially fixed, and, on the other side, remain highly aware of the limits and impossibility of such an undertaking? In Heidegger, the first, “Ptolemaic” moment, is articulated through thinking of *reality as authenticity*, the act of one’s decision and authority of the author, while the “Copernican”, and precisely a *deconstructive* turn, concerns the inauthentic mode of existence, in which *Dasein* exists for the most time and which in no manner should be understood as a bad ontic state or a lower level of reality.¹

From one aspect, therefore, the target of Heidegger’s phenomenological/ontological/ hermeneutical analysis is, similar to Freud’s engagement, to examine and interpret the condition of oblivion of *Dasein* and to enable its radical awakening and remembrance - understood in a manner of heroically facing presence and taking up one’s own destiny. This unfolds as the actual meaning of unconcealing and letting that which shows itself be seen from itself. Furthermore, the question is, as in the psychoanalytic treatment, whether one wants *to be or not to be himself*. The issue, as in Freud, is that the oblivion refers to the fact that the one has *lost* himself, that a loss of reality (in this case “Being”), has taken place and that this is due to the *prevalence of the actions of others* upon the human being. These others are to a great extent *unknown* and *enigmatic* but still greatly determine the entire course of *Dasein’s* existence, while he, at the same time, remains mostly unaware of this process. In this respect one should keep in mind Heidegger’s statement that the existence of *Dasein* is characterized by *thrownness* precisely because *Dasein* exists *with others* (*Mitsein* and *Mitdasein*).

On the other side, somewhat ironically and paradoxically, Heidegger’s de(con)structivism and the decisive break with the tradition consists exactly - together with the insight that philosophy is existentially motivated and, therefore, begins in facticity - in this moment that the “beginning” contains “two” and not “one” and that this is the very reason why the human condition is described in terms of *falling* (*Verfallen*) and *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*). For Heidegger, however, aside from the positive aspect of the “groundless floating”, this also means that in such a situation one is everything but a *master* of his own actions. He is

¹ This way, both Freud and Heidegger break with the Cartesian *cogito* (Fichte’s “I think”, Hegel’s “Spirit” and every form of identification of the subject with consciousness, self-consciousness and reflection) as well as with positivism - understanding them exactly as forms of oblivion. Derrida’s analysis, convincingly demonstrates the presence of these irreconcilable tendencies in both authors: recognition of interrelatedness of “rational” and “irrational” factors, of knowledge as an open structure and of involvement of the entire human existence but also the moment of remaining within the framework of logocentrism. See Derrida, J., *Writing and Difference*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992. pp. 196-232.

dependant, shaped and constituted by others. Even more, it is a situation of absorption in and by the world where 'everyone is the other and no one is himself.' A situation of alienation that calls upon decisive action.

From "two" to "one": Heidegger vs Freud

This way *Dasein* in Heidegger's personalistic phenomenology is in an important sense not only dispersed but radically *split*. It is driven by two forces which function like Freud's two principles: one of inertia, passivity, vulnerability, going with the flow, a determination by and through *others* and one of activity, decisiveness, break through projection of one's own possibilities and realization of "*selfhood*". The point is, however, in the fact that the life and the death drive function *in a reverse manner* in Heidegger and Freud. In other words, while Heidegger's discourse on inauthenticity irresistibly reminds of what Freud would call a "normal" state of things (slightly neurotic, for it is the cost of civilization after all), a state of being-with-others, of business and occupation in the world, the desired condition of authentic existence and its major determinations from a psychoanalytic perspective arise as highly problematic. *Vice versa* as well: inauthentic mode of existence for Heidegger in an important sense signifies a movement of giving up on life, of letting things be and withdrawing, a silent "death drive", while the main feature and shift that is suppose to occur with being-towards-death is affirmation of one's own individual life.

One of the paradigmatic examples where Heidegger articulates the theme of human ambivalence is the statement that *Dasein* is a "*thrown projection*", and as such, a being which always within itself carries two principles. Significantly enough, this is first of all realized in the sphere of *Befindlichkeit*² which, needles to say, points exactly to *the body*³. "To be" and "not to be" exist, therefore, simultaneously, which means that the human being also *always within itself carries the tendency toward non-being* – and this moment is directly linked to its *past*. *To*

2 The most common English translation of *Befindlichkeit* is "state-of-mind." Since in our opinion this misses perhaps the most significant aspect of this concept which moves between "*sensuality*", "*sensitivity*" and "*affectivity*" we will use the original German term. The specificity of *Befindlichkeit*, also, is that it always means reaching being "in a situation," pointing to a specific "situatedness" that differs from the merely subjective character of feelings precisely in the sense that it demonstrates the "objective" moment within it, and *vice versa* and the particular forms of Da-sein's "Da".

3 In Heidegger's polemic with Cassirer we read that what Heidegger calls *Dasein* is determined essentially not only by spirit but rather as the original unity and *immanent structure of human capability of relation*, and that the human being is furthermore, in a certain way *imprisoned in the body*. Certainly, it remains a question why Heidegger did not, except partly in the Nietzsche lectures, fully discuss the problem of the body. Bofre's answer that this is because to articulate the body and bring it to the level of speech is "very hard" remains more than insufficient.

be “thrown” is to be determined by that which already has been. Also, it is *thrownness* that most of all shows itself as determination by *the body*.

Awkwardly enough, it at first appears that all of this has almost nothing to do with *death*. For the concept of death falls precisely in the other “half”, not connected to thrownness but to projection, not to past but to future and primarily not to body at all. Death is that which exemplifies the incompleteness of the first division, of inauthenticity as the mode of *Dasein*’s being as well as the relation to the formal *structure of interpretation*: in the first part we have not seen how it is possible to grasp *Dasein* as a *whole*.

First of all, it relates to the moment that *Dasein* can through projection throw away its own thrownness in the name of the future and become *something else*. However, even when this attempt is made in a manner of a decision it always (already) remains a fact that *Dasein* can never fully coincide with itself. The only possibility for this is death, but even death can have (and usually has) an inauthentic form. And it is precisely because of the radical determination by the “having been” that *Dasein* experiences the present as a delay, as a deferral that *produces* the desire to “step outside” and master the future course of events, becoming a “being-towards-death”. In Heidegger’s terminology, projection is, seemingly paradoxically derived exactly from thrownness, as the instinct to overcome its own determined condition, unfolding in that sense as ‘the other of the same’.

Certainly, an important break occurs with projection, for it refers to the action of *Dasein* taking over its own possibilities. This step to projection, significantly, happens through *anxiety* (Angst), which Heidegger describes as a feeling of *insignificance* of the “world” and, as such, the necessary ‘state-of-mind’ through which the human being reaches its “*selfhood*” that is, by its concept, a *solus ipse*.

Since this “insignificance” refers to insignificance of *others* in relation to which my own “importance” is build, almost in a manner of crossing out everything but “myself”, in an act of canceling, revoking and refusing the “outside reality” – and furthermore doing this in order to produce a “*new reality*” which is *mine* – it must be noticed that, speaking in psychoanalytic terms, Heidegger’s existential solipsism irresistibly reminds of a *psychotic* straying where the disturbance and disorder is exactly the one between the ego and the external world. For it represents exactly the rebellious desire to stand “against” and not be “dictated” by reality, the incapacity of adapting to it, of refusing it and a decision to remodel it - of *disavow* itself. For Freud such a movement figures as a *par excellence* example of detachment from reality, of withdrawing from a piece of reality and therefore possibly a good signal of psychosis⁴.

4 Alternatively, one could say that it is perhaps more adequate – if this movement is understood as the conflict between the ego and the superego – to describe it in terms of “narcissistic psychoneuroses”. In favor of the first determination, however, it could also be added that what is distinc-

If for the moment now we leave aside the extreme cases of “proper” sickness, it seems, paradoxically, even more significant and enigmatic how this process is actualized in the “normal” experiences and their relation to reality. Somewhat contrary to the action of *solus ipse*, the regular and most common behavior of human beings is not the ‘authoritative production’ of the real (with the exception of dreams in which this psychotic dimension is released precisely because it is the condition where the ego is detached from the reality of the external world) in a manner of *ex nihilo*, but rather one of finding a way in the existing. However, it is as though every contact with the real – and the real is represented through *others* – leaves the subject traumatized in a certain sense and, furthermore, that it is this latent traumatism that serves as a guarantee of the real.

In contrast to this, however, in Heidegger’s anxiety *Dasein* paradoxically attempts to jump over its own interrelational and intersubjective constitution and become a “free” *solus ipse*. Further analysis in *Being and Time* demonstrates that this anxiety is the first impulse of authenticity because in this mood *Dasein* is concerned only about its own proper existence. That anxiety is conceived here merely as a condition of wondering about the world, its questionability (and as such a philosophical gesture), a state of bringing into question our own existence but rather exactly as a strong tendency toward affirmation of *Jemeigenheit* up to the point of radically excluding, canceling and annulling everything but one’s own existence, becomes clear when contextually situated in the discourse on authenticity.

Authentic *Dasein* is at certain times in a mood of anxiety while in other times it is in a joyful mood: in both cases, however, and precisely in their interrelation the psychotic structure (where there is nothing but “me”) is clearly demonstrated. Then it just becomes a question whether I successfully accomplish to become an “authority” or remain entirely frustrated if not. Now, it is exactly in such a way that anxiety actually signifies the proper attunement for becoming a *being-towards-death*.

In this respect Levinas’s critique of Heidegger (from *Time and the Other* up to 1975 lectures and *La mort et le temps*) appears as convincing and justified: the “face-to-face” relation in Heidegger is realized as a movement of the one *toward himself*, locked in a henological and monadological bias, without ever actually encountering the other. This is revealed in Heidegger’s description of the mood

tive about it is, as Heidegger underlines, the generation of *anxiety*. Also, importantly enough, for Freud, anxiety is always a sign that the process of remodeling is “carried through against forces which oppose it violently.” See Freud, S., “Neuroses and Psychosis”, p. 152 and “The Loss of Reality in Neuroses and Psychoses”, p. 186 in *Collected Papers*, vol.2. The Hogarth Press, 1948. In any case it remains a clear deformation of the ego, entirely or partly psychotic.

of anxiety, where *Dasein* “finds itself *face to face* with the nothing of the possible impossibility of its existence.”⁵ The term “projection” is also far more suitable for the described process than Heidegger could have ever imagined – it is the action of “creation”, “change of reality”, self-proclaimed “authorship” for interpretation that corresponds to “one’s own possibilities.” Furthermore, Heidegger writes that “understanding as *self-projection* is the crucial way through which the event of Being takes place.”⁶

At this occasion we cannot attempt to draw all the possible consequences of such a statement if it is analyzed in the suggested direction. Still, it is evident that the act of “solipsistic self-creation” refers, therefore, not only to the attempt to affirm one’s “mineness” by existing the world, but that this process is one of realization of Reality *qua* Being, of *Sein* as *Da-Sein*. On the other side, *Dasein* did not bring itself to its “*Da*”. It exists in possibilities which it has not given to itself and of which it is not the author. This is the reason why *Dasein* can never entirely “have itself” (let alone the world) and is not the “master” of Being. However, it still has, somewhat paradoxically, the possibility of *self-ownership*.

Ownership and Death

The way in which Heidegger set up the context for the analysis of “being-towards-death”, demonstrates that it is precisely through this concept that the path to authentic existence, authentic *life*, opens up. But who’s life? One that is exclusively mine and belongs only to me. This is the manner in which self-ownership, life and death converge. What enables *Dasein* to become a “whole”, a totality, is the possibility to stand up and existentially understand its own death – in difference to the death of *others* which for Heidegger appears merely as a “remarkable phenomenon” of change of entity, an event in which *Dasein* is transformed into something present-at-hand.⁷

It is exactly concerning this issue that, thinking along Levinas’s lines about Heidegger’s treatment of the other becomes most plausible: the discourse on the death of others clearly demonstrates that “my” position is one of observer and not participant. And not because I am not the one experiencing it (for I can even less “experience” my own death in the strict sense), but because the actual meaning of being just “there alongside” by itself refers to distance and indifference. For this reason death of others appears as “objective” and actually not very different from the way we speak of “the moon”. Furthermore, it is from *my* per-

5 Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, New York and Evanston, 1962. p.248.

6 Ibid., p.287.

7 Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, p. 238.

spective that the dying other is becoming a “thing”, it is me who objectifies and alienates him. For Heidegger death of others is irrelevant because it (at least for him) has nothing to do with my individuation. The already determined task is to find a mode though which *Dasein* can reach itself and become the author of its existence. And it is exactly authentic being-towards-death that opens the path to an authentic *Dasein* itself. Which means, consequently, that it is the proper way of relating to Being. Originating from anxiety, this attitude of awareness about the possibility of my non-existence is a factor which, by itself, ought to provoke a different attunement to the world (or, rather, attunement of the world to me) in the forms of authentic selfhood.

Again, however, the way of achieving this supposed “individuation” arises as highly problematic, since it rests on the presupposition that death is the paradigmatic example of self-ownership because it cannot be *substituted*. If Heidegger is to remain consequent, both in respect of analyzing death not in a biological and physiological manner, which he indisputably tends to avoid, and moreover, to see death not as an ‘event’ but a way of existence, not being ‘at an end’ but – as ripened fruit – being ‘toward an end’, then it certainly must be admitted that I can *die for the other* and the other can die for me.⁸

Heidegger insists that to die for the other does not mean to dye in the place of the other. Most significant is the following: in order to demonstrate the phenomenon of death as a possibility which is exclusively mine, Heidegger must refute the possibility of substitution: to stand for the death of the other has to be declared as impossible for, indeed, his entire conception would collapse. Furthermore, he must refute not only the “strong” idea of possibility of dying for the other but even the much “weaker” and practically plausible standpoint that the death of the close other is not only something that causes extreme suffering but also indeed represents itself a strong experience of death.

The given argument that in such cases I am still (biologically) alive and still have to die my own death appears as not only unconvincing but precisely the type of argument that Heidegger wishes to avoid – one that operates as a provisional conception. Moreover, this brings into question the entire issue about the distinction between the ontic and ontological, so crucially relevant for Heidegger. It appears as no longer clear can such a division be sustained at all.

The problem is, therefore, that *phenomenologically* this can be argued only when one has already presupposed a monadological standpoint i.e. Heidegger’s

8 In a certain sense this is the meaning of love, which always remains absent from Heidegger’s analysis. Love would appear as the *par excellence* example of inauthenticity. It would therefore go along with other examples of inauthentic being-towards-death – of putting death into the hands of the other, which, in Heidegger’s view, equals something like “surrendering”.

main concern, of founding an authentic *solus ipse* has already been determined. In the same manner it has already been assumed that individuation is a “self-event” (or, rather – self-process) that in a strange way is suppose to arrive from “nothing”, from an internal nothingness and from/by/through others. That is also why death must be entirely internalized in order to overcome incompleteness and establish “wholeness” and the price for this is the exclusion of others.

Also, this is probably the reason why Heidegger excludes *historical* analysis of the phenomenon of death, since certain periods indisputably – let us just remember 18 and 19 century - give priority precisely to death of the other and therefore cannot fit into Heidegger’s conception. It seems that Heidegger’s phenomenological/ontological formal interpretation deliberately sets up a historical and cultural vacuum which enables him to rule out the “issue” of death of/for/with other – and that for such a reason arises more as ‘static’ and less as ‘genetic’ phenomenology of death.⁹

That is why the analysis of anxiety, as the proper *Stimmung* for becoming a “being-towards-death” structurally had to precede the discussion on death. To exist towards death, for Heidegger – and in the same manner of, now even more affirmed psychotic straying - means to realize the *power* of one’s own being, for in such a standing *all relations to others and to the world* come to an end. That is the meaning of the claim that death ‘stands before’ (*Bevorstand*) each *Dasein* as *its ownmost, non-relational and uttermost possibility*. And that is, for Heidegger, something which one is really anxious about. It is the most proper possibility that represents the deliverance of possibilities, opening them up to the force of decision.¹⁰ Anxiety brings *Dasein* face-to-face with death in such a way that it realizes that its being-towards-death, its *life* is haunted by this (im)possibility and through it appropriates its life which suddenly appears is its *own*.

The issue is, therefore, not simply that death arises as the highest manifestation of life, its *spiritus movens*, its existential condition of possibility that simultaneously stimulates and frees *Dasein*, but that being-towards-death appears as a *self-legitimizing, self-founding and self-productive* action to a significant extent based on determination of “private property” - and a conception of life under-

9 This is further particularly problematic when considered together with the determination of being-towards-death as the ‘bases of *Dasein*’s historicity i.e. as the actual beginning of history. Derrida rightly argues that Heidegger in no manner addresses the question of the “cultures of death” and that the distinction between the existential-ontological and cultural analysis becomes hard to defend (without repeating the essential motifs of ontotheology). See Derrida, J., *The Gift of Death*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995. Levinas and Derrida, although in different manners, both address the question of the “cultures of death”.

10 In this respect, it could be noted that Blachot, probably under the influence of Levinas, turns around Heidegger’s “being-towards-death”: in his work death becomes the impossible of the possible, the indetermination of every determination and the incertitude of every certitude.

stood as appropriation of oneself in the name of realization of new and above all “my” reality *qua* an irreplaceable *Dasein*. The meaning of appropriation (*Ereignis*), which become one of the crucial concepts for Heidegger, is exactly coming to one’s own as the proper place where one belongs and in this sense *Dasein*’s self-realization. This is the way in which Heidegger’s ontology unfolds on the terrain of exclusive selfhood, in the ‘original time’ which discovers the nothingness upon which it is based – primarily meaning that it rests upon nothing other than itself.

This is why it is exactly in being-towards-death that *Jemeinigkeit* is constituted: the individual identity is *given* by death, but I cannot (or, rather, should not?) give anyone the *gift* of death. In this respect, therefore, we can justly turn around Derrida’s analysis and say that there is no *gift* of death for Heidegger. In *The Gift of Death* Derrida largely subordinates Levinas to Heidegger, even indicating that Levinas’s juxtaposition of *sacrifice* to Heideggerian being-towards-death entirely misses the point i.e. that Heidegger paid constant attention to the fundamental possibility of sacrifice. However, Derrida later implicitly admits that this has more to do with his own analysis than with Heidegger.¹¹

Exactly because the character and inner structure of authentic being-towards-death reveals that even temporality is viewed as one’s “ownmost”, it is supposed to be assured that there is something one gives to himself without involving the gift that comes from the other. But this means that what is actually at stake is more than giving death: it concerns the entire relation to the other, the way it is formed (as non-relational) in the authentic existence. To say that there is no gift of death means to say that *there is no gift of the self*. If anything at all life/death is my own: the bell “tolls for me.”

Facing life and death

Doubtlessly, for both Heidegger and Freud mortality arises as a fundamental structure of human life and for such a reason the frequent common-sense view in which Eros and Thanatos appear as dichotomous and separate arguably does not function. However, the way that they are interconnected and even more, the existential, ethical and political consequences to be drawn from this, arise as different, almost reverse, when being-towards-death is conceived in relation to the death drive.

11 But in spite this Derrida still does not address the issue, which Heidegger certainly does not answer – of the sacrifice for the other. Levinas renewed the philosophical significance of this moment, insisting that the death of the other is a source not just of understanding of death but also of my responsibility – and in such a way radically altered the meaning of singularity.

In Heidegger it is precisely being-towards-death that establishes and ensures the non-relational potential, which, from the “subjective” side points to a movement of “egology” and a certain gesture that highly resembles a psychotic straying, while, on the “objective” side, speaks of the way through which ontology is actualized as philosophy of *power*.

If Heidegger’s and Freud’s undertakings appear as similar in the sense that they both recognize the selfishness of the ego and, consequently, the *economy* governed by satisfaction of needs that follows from it, Heidegger’s “selfhood” that becomes through being-towards-death is constituted not only as “autonomous” but as autarchic: it becomes its own lawgiver for which the appropriation of its freedom, the possibility of its performance *ex nihilo* and therefore the realization of its own, proper, irreplaceable power becomes a higher value than justice.

Za kim zvona zvone?

(Beleške za psihoanalitičko čitanje Hajdegerovog “bitka-prema-smrti”)

Sažetak: U ovom članku autor analizira Hajdegerovo shvatanje “bitka-prema-smrti” u *Bitku i Vremenu*. Kreće se od poređenja Hajdegerovog i Frojdovog odnosa između zbilje i zaborava i načina na koji obe koncepcije izražavaju i “ptolomejske” i “kopernikanske” momente. U drugom delu članka, akcentat je stavljen na Hajdegerovu personalističku fenomenologiju *Dasein-a*: autor argumentiše da razumevanje “bitka-prema-smrti” zahteva analizu ideje o “bačenosti” i “projekciji” i celokupne sfere *Befindlichkeit-a*. Autor zaključuje da je Levinasova kritika Hajdegerovog egzistencijalnog solipsizma vrlo utemeljena, kao i da ova vrsta analize u najznačajnijim aspektima nije u suprotnosti sa psihonanalitičkim čitanjem Hajdegerovog razumevanja posedovanja i smrti. **Ključne reči:** bitak-prema-smrti, *Dasein*, bačenost, podeljenost, drugost, egzistencijalni solipsizam.