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## In the Shadow of Death Beyond Heidegger's Subjectivity

*Sanjit Chakraborty*

According to Mary Warnock, the existentialists like Spinoza, who having shown what man's place in the universe is, have shown, thereby, a new way to look at human emotions and human understanding. In Kierkegaard's writings we find that he, as an existentialist, above all, wants to free readers of the illusion of objectivity. To him the aim of philosophy is to discover subjectivity which is concrete and not an abstraction. From Kierkegaard to modern existentialists, all of them have taken the idea of "subjectivity" as the starting point of their philosophies. Kierkegaard says:

The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing . . . it leads to abstract thought, to Mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds, and always it leads away from the subject whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view, quite rightly becomes infinitely indifferent.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper my main purpose is to bring out a dimension of the idea of death deriving from the concept of subjectivity in Heidegger's philosophy. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is one of the key figures in modern existentialism. He exhibits an intimate relation of death with the idea of historicity and transcendence from a phenomenological point of view. Here I will try to decipher his thoughts with analysis and arguments.

The problem of "Being", is the ultimate problem in Heidegger's thinking about the central question of philosophy. Heidegger remarks:

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<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard 1941.

All efforts of the existential analytic have one goal, to find a possibility of answering the question of the meaning of Being.<sup>2</sup>

Human understanding is no doubt a part of what it means to be a human being. When one asks the question "What is Being?", Heidegger urges one to look at his own Being. Heidegger understands the idea of "Being" as disclosing itself in an idea of Dasein. Heidegger makes a distinction between ontical existence and ontological existence of Being. The ontical existence is something which enables the human to engage in everyday existence and the ontological existence is something which encourages human beings to raise a query about their own Being. According to Heidegger the fundamental condition of Dasein is a "Being-in-the-world". In this context Reinhardt Grossmann comments:

It is fundamental condition of being a person to have a world around you. The traditional idea of course is that the mind is intentional. A mind is always related to something. A mind always comes with object.<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger explicates the idea of "worldhood of the world" in terms of "Being-in-the-world". Here in the expression Being-in-the-world, "in" has a surplus significance. It refers to the spatial dimension of world. We cannot separate "I" from this contemporary world. The word "I" is to be understood only in the sense of a non-committal formal indicator. We cannot think of an existence just as an "it", here the existent also refers to "I". This personal pronoun lays claim not only to a unique place, but also to a unique Being. John Macquarrie takes up this issue in his writing. He says:

"Mineness" is a term that has sometimes been used to express the awareness that my existence is unique and distinct from the existence of everyone else. I am not just a specimen of a class. I am I.<sup>4</sup>

Here Heidegger's purpose is not to make a juxtaposition between "Dasein" and "Being-in-the-world". He goes on to say that Dasein is a Being-in-the world, i.e. the "essence" of Dasein lies in its existence.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger 1978: 424.

<sup>3</sup> Grossmann, 1984: 157.

<sup>4</sup> Macquarrie 1985: 72-73.

He mainly stresses on subjectivity. There is a necessary connection, which we may find between Dasein and the world, but there is no such necessary connection between Dasein and entities in the world. Here by entities of the world we mean all the surrounding objects in this world. Actually Heidegger points out the conception of the world in the sense of categorical and existential frameworks which is distinguished from an ontical sense which is generally related with entities. Heidegger does not believe that world is the totality of entities but he considers that world is also the system of reference. World is characterized the way in which Dasein exists.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger thinks of Dasein as "The Being with which this kind of Being is concerned (*sorge*) is always my own".<sup>5</sup> Here existence and caring are fundamentally equivalent forms of Being. Now we may also find out two specific ways in which we express our concerns with the world. Mood and understanding are these two specific ways. By "mood" Heidegger means roughly emotion as opposed to intellect. Mood also reveals that I always find myself to be in some state. For him it is disclosed in a primordial sense or the way in which we are in the world. Fear is a mood of emotion. "Anxiety" is also a fundamental mood which is a distinguished disclosure of human being.<sup>6</sup> To Heidegger anxiety is the *Grundbefindlichkeit* — the basic way in which one finds oneself in this cosmic world. In the case of understanding Heidegger suggests that anything in the world is understood as a part of our totality of our involvements. Understanding is a grasp of my possibility for future. When we want to know about "Mineness", existence, facticity and fallenness — these three ideas are considered as characteristics of a human being. He thinks that Dasein is always understood in terms of its existence. Here it is important to note that the existentialists believe that "Existence precedes essence". Heidegger thinks that only self-interpreting Being exists for him; existence is not something which is simply real. Human beings have the capacity to essentially interpret themselves. Here the fact is that the *Homo sapiens* bodies are the same in all cultures but each culture has given some different specific meaning. Now facticity is also an important characteristic of Dasein, since Being perceives himself in a particular atmosphere as Being-in-

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger 1978: 67.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 228.

the-world and this cannot be changed. Being-in-the-world as fallenness is also self-alienating and thrusting Dasein or Mineness into inauthentic existence. It is actually an absorption in entities and losing oneself in concrete world.

We cannot think of an idea of Being without an idea of physical body. Similarly the concept of world without human being is valueless and a human being without world is merely an abstraction. Heidegger's unique contribution in this field consists in using a method, which he called "Hermeneutic phenomenology". Hermeneutic phenomenology is a kind of method by which Being perceives the world from an intellectual point of view. Here the term "phenomenology" expresses a maxim, which takes us back "To the things themselves". Mary Warnock explains this method in *Existentialism* which is as follows:

The phenomenological method is said to be "hermeneutical" just because it does reveal significance. The world is thought of as a code or set of symbols and the purpose of the phenomenological method is to interpret it.<sup>7</sup>

However a question arises — what is the goal of Dasein? Heidegger argues that space is the external mode of Dasein while time or temporality is the internal mode of Dasein. We normally think that time is finite. He says, "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old to die". But Heidegger also believes that if we think of Dasein as an entity, it can never reach its wholeness. So he is opposed to the attempt to think of Dasein as an entity. M.K. Bhadra thinks:

He (Heidegger) wants to draw a preliminary sketch of the existential ontological structure of death. Being towards death and the everydayness of Dasein, everyday being towards death, the full existential conception of death is an existential projection of an authentic Being-towards-death.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger comments that we cannot surely select our death. Death is something which is totally dependent on uncertainty and possibility. If death is the ultimate way of Dasein, then is the division between authentic existence and inauthentic existence important in this context?

<sup>7</sup> Warnock 1970: 54.

<sup>8</sup> Bhadra 1990: 318.

If we accept this division, it would be better to call inauthentic existence as mental death and authentic existence as physical death.

Heidegger talks of two different moods of existing of a Dasein — authentic and inauthentic. Inauthentic existence is the existence in which man forgets his own Being. Here man's full attention is directed tendency towards our day-to-day life. He takes on the prejudices of our society. According to Mary Warnock, the insight of Heidegger's point of view leads us to the conclusion:

A man who is leading an inauthentic existence is in a condition of *Verfallensein* (fallenness). He is in a fallen state. Such a man ignores the reality of his own relation to the world. He cannot straightforwardly form any opinion and his statements are partly his own, partly those of people in general.<sup>9</sup>

Here Heidegger's thinking is totally opposed to the thinking of Kierkegaard. To Kierkegaard, the fallen state is just like a sin. On the other hand, when a man realizes what he is, the first step towards authentic existence is indicated. The concept of authentic existence makes a clear point about subjectivity. M.K. Bhadra comments:

Authenticity depends on an adequate ontological recognition of one's existing, facticity and fallenness. Authenticity is something for which one has to strive.<sup>10</sup>

In authentic existence a man finds himself alone in this world. He shall have to fulfil his own problems and possibilities. Heidegger thinks:

Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its being-free for (proposition in . . .) the authenticity of its being.<sup>11</sup>

Anxiety rescues the lonely Being from the ocean of nothingness. Heidegger thinks:

Being is thought in relation to man and conceived according to a human shape. It is taken "anthropomorphically" and thereby humanized. We do not come into relation with being

<sup>9</sup> Warnock, 1970: 57.

<sup>10</sup> Bhadra 1990: 325.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger 1978: 232.

itself, but at best with what we humans represent to ourselves as being.<sup>12</sup>

Now we find a difference between Advaita Vedānta and Heidegger's view. Advaita Vedānta considers that liberation is an extinction of the individual self in the absolute. When an individual realizes the perfect knowledge of *Ātman*, he feels oneness with the ultimate reality. Actions are useless in achieving liberation. Realization is the state of actionlessness. But Heidegger's thinking is far away from Advaita Vedāntin's thinking. Heidegger does not think that the realization of the authentic existence brings perfection in our death, though he believes that realizing the authentic existence moves our life towards perfection. It is conscience, which pushes us towards the authentic life. Conscience calls us to an authentic existence. Conscience is also regarded as a mood of a silence expression. It is not a supernatural call. Here I am actually talking to myself.

Heidegger also considers that anxiety of nothingness and temporality are the primary concepts related to the idea of death. Mary Warnock argues:

Heidegger also regards this genuine acceptance of the future non-existence of himself as the first step towards the authentic way of life.<sup>13</sup>

According to Heidegger, anxiety is the first step, when a human being realizes that he is confronted by nothingness. For him, it is the *Grundbefindlichkeit* — the basic way in which one finds oneself. According to Heidegger:

The man who has gone furthest in analysing the concept of anxiety . . . is Soren Kierkegaard.<sup>14</sup>

Kierkegaard makes this point especially clear in his writings. Sartre himself says:

Kierkegaard describing anxiety in the face of what one lacks characterizes it as anxiety in the face of freedom. But

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger 1993: 67.

<sup>13</sup> Warnock 1970: 59.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger 1978: 492



Heidegger considers anxiety instead as the apprehension of nothingness.<sup>15</sup>

Dasein found himself in the context of the nothingness, moves towards his own end in death. Temporality and Desein, in Heidegger's view, are not separable from one another. Temporality is the name of the way in which time exists primordially in human existence. Our intention in this changing world makes us aware of the facticity of ourselves and of our concern (*sorge*) with the world. Heidegger converges the present with the insight of past and future. But future is more important because we are concerned about our mortality. Heidegger is one of the prominent philosophers who have discussed the existential meaning of death in details. To Heidegger, death is the end of Dasein. Here we face a difficulty. But how is death to be considered as an end of human existence?

Heidegger tries to answer this in the following way. According to Heidegger, Being-towards-death is grounded in concern. We already know that concern is a complete phenomenon. We have to face a tension, which arises from three different ways. Dasein is always understood in terms of existence, in terms of possibility of itself — to be itself and not to be itself. Our existence always directs ourselves to choose a particular attitude from "Being-in-the-world" into which the existence is already thrown. In this context Heidegger argues that our existence is always arranged of possibilities in relation to facticity. The term fallenness is something, which is partly related with possibility and facticity. When man is not able to understand his own existence, i.e. what he is in reality and absorb himself in the problems of everyday life, then it will be seen that he has already entered into the world of fallenness. From Heidegger's point of view, death can be understood in relation to these three moments of concern.

First of all, Heidegger says that death is the ultimate possibility of human existence. M.K. Bhadra expresses it more clearly. He argues:

Death as possible is not possible as something ready to hand or present at hand. It is a possibility of Dasein's Being. But Being towards death and Being towards possibility is to orient

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<sup>15</sup> Sartre 1956: 29.

oneself towards death so that death reveals itself as a possibility.<sup>16</sup>

Next Heidegger attempts to show how death is related to the second constitutive moment in concern, viz. facticity. Human being exists in the world just for a particular time. Heidegger tells us that without the concept of time we cannot recognize our existence in this external world. We find ourselves living in this society — a station in our life where we are thrown at a particular time. I have the freedom to leave this place but I do not have the power to encounter my existence on that particular time when I was born in the world. My past life, my family status, where I was born, my physical fitness, all these are undetermined by my facticity, over which I do not have any choice. The third constitutive moment is fallenness. In this state man lives an inauthentic life. He thinks that everyone is the other and no one is himself. He has no capacity to take decision in his private life. Now an important question arises — how does death reveal itself as a possibility?

We are well acquainted with the concept of possibility. When we are to decide something but are faced with two different ways, we face the idea of possibility. In this situation we have the ability to move away from many possibilities. We may take the concept of suicide as an example. Here we may find a possibility for a man to commit suicide or not. But in our existential place, we have not got any freedom to choose an immortal life. Beside we can say death is just a limit of our existence. But we cannot say that death brings the ultimate fulfilment in our life. Because in present life we may find that death makes our life incomplete. If we did not face death, there would be no possibility of becoming something more. Actually here Heidegger thinks that death makes Dasein whole. Death allows Heidegger to grasp human existence in its totality. Heidegger thinks that death is man's only possibility, which he cannot overcome. But in common sense death is not a possibility, it just destroys our all possibilities. We can prepare ourselves and wait for a train journey but we cannot prepare ourselves for death as no one exactly knows the time when death appears silently. It is outside of any possibility because we cannot wait for death . . . I am not free to die.<sup>17</sup> Sartre also supports this

<sup>16</sup> Bhadra 1990: 323.

<sup>17</sup> Satre 1956: 532-39.

view. He thinks that death is always beyond our subjectivity. It transforms our self into an object which will be the ultimate limit of our freedom. Heidegger condemns the idea of suicide. He considers that death is a certain possibility which a person cannot overcome or commit to occur. It is something natural. So we have not any freedom about our death. We can perceive others to die but in our own case we cannot perceive it. Death is something that may come at any time. Dasein is always pursuing its own death and death is profoundly individuating for Dasein.

John Macquarrie takes a line from Heidegger's famous book *Being and Time* and shows in his own writing that Death is the last possibility of all the possibilities that makes impossible any further possibilities whatever.<sup>18</sup>

Historicity and transcendence are the other two concepts which are related to Heidegger's thinking on death. He thinks that human existence is itself the theme of history. Human beings reveal all the objects in the world which have history. Human beings are the only creatures who can apply their past existences in their present and through it can express concern about their future. So the future of any social group lies in a historical content. We can find still another way of talking about existence moving towards death. Heidegger concerns about the matter of historicity. For him, history is a coherence and continued following of becoming. The concept of historicity is deeply related with temporality which concern about Dasein's past. The question of historicity is considered as an ontological inquiry. Our existence of a human being finds itself in between: having become what it is and attempted towards its own end or death. So standing between birth and death from a temporal perspective, we can consider a human being as historical. Being of Dasein is called transcendence. Because it is more than its actual circumstances and also forms of life yet it is related with possibilities rather than actuality. So we may call Dasein as a self-transcending actualizer of possibilities. In general, the temporality is considered as a basis of Dasein's transcendence. To talk of the "transcendence" of the human existence is simply to point again to the fact that man is at any moment going beyond what he is in that moment. Three different steps are involved here:

<sup>18</sup> Macquarrie 1985: 196.

1. For complete understanding of a fact we need to go beyond it.
2. A Being is required to transcend the fact.
3. The present of an object is also required beyond which the subject being will move. By becoming aware of *transcendence*, man is said to transcend his finiteness and directed to freedom, which is inseparable from that transcendence.

In conclusion I would say that Heidegger's philosophical thinking is no doubt a masterpiece. The higher nature in man always seeks to move towards transcendence and this transcendence is justified by a certain approach to death. It is no doubt undeniable that Heidegger's existentialism offers us a frame of reference against which we can interpret and also evaluate the perplexing events of the contemporary world. We have learnt that without the knowledge of our own existence (Being), we cannot arrive at any knowledge merely through the speculation of essence. His style of philosophizing begins from man rather than from world. Heidegger has spoken about the inseparable relation between Being and world, so he uses the term "Being-in-the-world". Dasein is always understood in terms of its own existence. But we find death as a necessary possibility, which clarify that "Being-toward-death" means "Being-towards-the-end". Death as a real possibility is an actual reality. Heidegger also suggests that the essentiality of Dasein consists between language and world. Only human being who establishes word-subject relation by the essential force of its Being exposed to the things themselves. We may call it hermeneutical unity. Heidegger considers that language is the house of Being. Language is actually the ontic-ontological reflection of Dasein which lived in our experience. Dasein enters into the reality of world as a totality of Being associated with linguistic background. Language appears to Dasein as psycho-physical units which are regarded as words. Without language we cannot imagine a Dasein. Linguistic expression of Dasein reveals that Dasein is not any isolated Being but it is related with Being-other in our linguistic community. Only by the existential means of words production, a human being overcomes the threat of non-being. Therefore, language is regarded as self-creative existential but the word formative procedure does not able to negate the unsurpassable reality of death. Man's freedom

is concerned with death and also his quest for an authentic life make him active and optimist.

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