

The Deconstruction of Religious Dogmatism in Heidegger's Call to Authenticity

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In section six of *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger writes that “being true as discovering is a manner of being of Dasein” (203). Truth as discovering is not an a priori endeavor, but rather a process of disclosures available by virtue of being in the world in the way that the world is. Discovering truth in this way appears incongruent with traditional notions of religious truth-seeking; dogmas proclaiming universal truths generally attest to those truths existing outside of our being, applied somewhat arbitrarily by an omniscient presence. Indeed, I argue that Heidegger’s truth is incongruous with dogmatic notions of religion ascribing to pre-decided realities and ways of being in the world. I further argue, however, that Heidegger’s theories are not incongruous with spirituality, which concept I will specially define. A phenomenological investigation of truth as disclosure reveals the process of truth-seeking and making to be a rescued form of spirituality. A Heideggerian understanding of truth rescues the truth-seeker from religious dogmatism by disclosing potentialities for being and therefore constitutes a spiritual, if not religious, revival. To substantiate this argument, I will begin by discussing religious dogmatism and its limits. I will engage with scholars to justify a spiritual discussion of *Being and Time* which will pre-set my argument concerning being-towards-death and the call of conscience which invokes authenticity. I will conclude with Heidegger’s discussion of truth as disclosure which I contest to be a “redemption” of spirituality to pure authenticity.

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Religious Dogmatism

In discussing religion and spirituality, I must clarify my usages of the terms. For the purposes of this paper, I use religion to refer to prescriptive establishments (theological distinctions among which I do not attend to) that set out to normatively make sense of life with reference to a supreme creator(s) and specific doctrines mandating moral correctness, dependent on a super-sensory world. I use spirituality, contrarily, to refer to that which suggests genuine felt experience in connection with something beyond the temporality of being in the world but which locates the being in an embodied, sensory state, allowing spiritual experience to be phenomenological and not necessarily metaphysical.

Heidegger wrote a good deal about religion outside of *Being and Time*, including a book titled *The Phenomenology of Religious Experience*. His views, however, are mixed. While I will be focusing this discussion on ideas found in *Being and Time*, situating Heidegger in the more general conversation of religious discourse is useful. Matheson Russell wrote of Heidegger's "take" on religion, "It must be said that Heidegger has bequeathed to philosophy and theology difficult substantive and methodological questions" (654). Scholars generally agree with Russell, noting Heidegger's apparent wish to divorce philosophy and religion from each other at least methodologically. Pertinent to my discussion of *Being and Time*, however, I wish to hone in on a particular Heideggerian critique of religion not explicitly stated by scholars: dogmatism as a credence of the 'they.'

One of the concepts central to *Being and Time* is that of Das Man, or the 'they.' The 'they' refers to the general conception of normalcy held by individuals. The 'they' does not have specific intentional objects in its constitution. It represents simply the tacit rules and normative sets of expectations which make up Dasein's conception of the normal and acceptable. When we "fall in" to the 'they,' we are giving up our own autonomous authenticity and allowing ourselves to be defined by the broad categories of correctness dictated to us. In this place, Dasein is not forced to take accountability for its own being and choices; its potentialities are surrendered to the 'they,' its states of being overtaken by the broadness of social normalizing. I argue that in some important ways, religion is implicitly tied to the 'they.' Religious mantras which condition congregants to think and behave in certain ways are not oppressive or limiting per se, but nor are they explicitly inviting individuals to search after their own meaning in the dregs of mortality. Because much of religion as an entity is focused on supposedly a priori truths existing universally, the phenomenal experience of the religious participant is often secondary to the creeds which they pay homage to. The dogmatism of reinforced mantras becomes a monotony

that limits authenticity because of its normative objectives carving the way for individual Daseins.

This barrier to autonomy or authenticity is impressive, but it is not impossible to reconcile through further attention to *Being and Time*; many philosophers have contributed impressively to philosophical scholarship regarding that exact project. It is not my intention in this paper to attempt to engage in that particular debate, however. Having located within a general discussion of religion and a Heideggerian criticism of its limits, I acknowledge the difficulties in reconciling religion as a prescriptive entity with Heidegger's call of release from the entanglements of the 'they' towards authenticity, and focus now on spirituality, which I believe to be divorced from the characterization of religion I have given. I will focus on the phenomenology of spirituality, distinctly not religion, as the place of greatest potentiality for being.

Spiritual Investigation of *Being and Time*

In his article "Heidegger's Notion of Religion: The Limits of Being-Understanding," Angus Brook considers the question of Heidegger's own religious influences and how religion played into his phenomenological investigations. He firstly points to Heidegger's early statements about religion, drawing on them to say that Heidegger "delimits the notion of religion to an experience of the truth of being" (Brook 62). He argues additionally that this notion of religion precludes traditional religions from being authentic by Heidegger's terms (57). His concluding argument is a criticism of Heidegger's work, suggesting that conceptualizing Dasein as the being that understands is fundamentally flawed (62). To do this, he begins by defining the term 'religion' for his usage. He writes that "religion is a phenomenon in precisely the way that Heidegger defines a phenomenon in *Being and Time*: 'the showing-itself-in-itself of the being of entities'" (47). He goes on to suggest that the phenomenon of religion belongs to and discloses the being of humans, insofar as it is a venue through which humans disclose meaning and purpose for their being (47). If the phenomenon of religion is a place of disclosing meaning, Brook asks, surely relegating it to the dungeons of philosophical discourse is a disclosure of what could be learned about Dasein's being. I add to this argument that the 'religious' questions Brook is suggesting more closely resemble my definition of spirituality.

Brook goes on to discuss Heidegger's *The Phenomenology of Religion*, stating that Heidegger attempts here to discuss religion ontologically (47). Heidegger, he states, conceives of the meaning of religion to be in potential

authenticity: authenticity to a potential God-Dasein relation, and yet authenticity as an awareness of what it is to be truly and fully human in Dasein (51). This is a tricky distinction, one which constitutes much of Heidegger's mixed reviews of the merits of religion holistically. He is essentially saying that as a phenomenon, religion cannot be authentic unless it is still grounded in Dasein's authentic experience as a mortal, temporal, factual being. Since the entire experience of religion is at least traditionally very tied to metaphysical speculations uprooted from a sense of finite mortality, authenticity in both a divine relational sense *and* a truth to Dasein's being sense is difficult to manage, thus Heidegger's skepticism toward religion as an authentic experience. Brook criticizes this skepticism, however, arguing that "the phenomenon of religion reveals something about being human that exceeds the limits of Dasein, namely: our capacity to be in relation to the truth as otherwise than being, via the questions of the possibility of good and meaning\purpose" (62). According to Brook, religion poses questions—spiritual questions—that transcend Dasein's being-in-the-world, or at least constitute a different sort of relationship (62). There is a potentiality in this capacity that Dasein's truth as disclosure seems to insufficiently treat. Brook concludes his article by stating ontological questions religion can pose to Dasein *outside* of Dasein's being: "Who are we in our being, that the otherwise than being is an issue for us?" (63). Religion, as per this view, actually deepens Dasein's sense of authenticity because it illuminates Dasein's being in vastly different and transcendent ways. The fact that we are concerned with *not* being illuminates being.

In conversation with Brook, Roxana Baiasu's intent in her paper "How is Philosophy Supposed to Engage with Religion?" is to argue that Heidegger's well-known assertions promoting the divorce of philosophy and religion are unfounded by way of his discussion in *Being and Time* (113). She argues that "spiritual comportment is an essential aspect of life" and that "philosophy can be religiously neutral and, at the same time, speak about spirituality as an open question within a shared space" (113). Speaking to Brook's point that religion poses questions to Dasein which illuminate aspects of its being because of its investigation of non-being, Baiasu argues that Heidegger's discussion of death neither confirms nor denies the possibility for an afterlife (118). There are no ontic or ontological discussions concerning post-death because Dasein is concerned with being as such. Religious views elaborating a post-death state, therefore, are suspended in Heidegger's investigation. *Being and Time* focuses on illuminating the being of Dasein, and part of the being of Dasein for millions of Daseins includes relating to deity in some way. Baiasu's interest in this question leads to her investigation of an existential-ontological component of being that relates to God (125). She concludes by saying that "the relation to the divine is

regarded as a possibility which necessarily belongs to the kind of existence humans have” and that “insofar as we accept Heidegger’s hermeneutical view that philosophy is the self-interpretation of existence, philosophy must engage with, and talk about, the religious” (135).

Awakening to Authenticity

Talking about the religious, however, is still quite nuanced in the above theorists’ definitions. In no sense are they discussing religion by way of rote repetitions and thoughtless habits void of conviction or integrity, some of the problems I attribute to religion in its dogmatic sense. The theorists I have presented are discussing religion in a *spiritual* sense, a phenomenological sense, in the way that it invokes questions about the meaning of being both beyond and within temporality. They are arguing that Heidegger’s philosophy is open to this spiritual investigation insofar as it does not lead to Dasein’s falling in to inauthenticity by way of the ‘they.’ Authenticity in spiritual experience, then, rescues what otherwise appears to be a negative account of Heidegger on religion. To begin the discussion of authenticity, I turn to the concept of being-toward-death.

To understand authenticity in being-toward-death, we must first understand Heidegger’s picture of death. First, Heidegger proves that conceiving of death as an end or termination is insufficient to explain our real relation to it (233). Death in the sense of an ending gives a holistic sense to life in its totality, yet it is impossible to grasp this experience of dying in its actuality. It is an ontic understanding; the fact that all humans die is undeniable, but this is an ontic observation and not an ontological lived experience for a Dasein that is still existing. Making sense of our lives holistically is therefore the project of an existential analysis of being-toward-death. We relate to death not literally in the sense of a temporal end, but as a possibility. This grounds the validity of our examination of death existentially, not ontically.

The existential analysis begins by attempting to bring Dasein authentically before itself in everyday being. All of Dasein’s projects and concerns are necessarily focused on the future. Indeed, in projecting ourselves continually toward the future, the past and present are veiled. Our past engagements appear in mental remembrances as pieces projected *toward* the future, and present engagements are completed with an eye towards the future as motivation. Existence, therefore, is essentially futural. There is always something outstanding, not yet realized and existing outside of our immediate temporality, that keeps us from being whole in any given moment. With this background, we can now understand Heidegger’s claim

that we move towards *possibilities* and the cessation of possibilities, not towards ends. In relating to death as a possibility or potentiality for being, we are disclosing ourselves most authentically. Indeed, death paradoxically makes possible all other possibilities; death is Dasein's ownmost possibility in that it discloses Dasein to itself. It forces Dasein back to an individual understanding, separate from the entanglements of the 'they.' Dasein in regarding its ownmost possibility towards death realizes the gravity of its ownmost choices and responsibilities. It awakens Dasein to a sense of its own temporality and therefore calls it to authenticity. It is also non-relational in that death ceases all relations as we know them, a distinct separation from the world of relations in which we now live. Lastly, it is unsurpassable; death is the possibility beyond which there can be no possibilities. Being-towards-death, then, is being toward our upmost potentiality for being with the greatest authenticity.

Huaiya Wang uses this background of being-toward-death to further discuss authenticity. In his article, "Conscience and the Aporia of *Being and Time*," he argues that conscience is central to our authenticity in being-toward-death. Conscience, Wang suggests, is the "call of care" to Dasein (357). It is the pivotal figure in allowing Dasein to disclose itself to itself, operating as the attestation of Dasein's authenticity. He clarifies what he considers to be a "persistent misunderstanding" of conscience as used in *Being and Time*, that the work proclaims itself to be a revoking of the Western metaphysical tradition, yet ends up recalling it (358). This "aporia," as he calls it, exists primarily in Heidegger's casting of conscience, which Wang terms a "double attestation" (358). On one hand, conscience attests to Dasein's existential possibility for authenticity in any given moment, and on the other it attests to Dasein's possibility for being-toward-death as the ontological possibility of being wholly realized (Wang 358). In this sense, conscience is somewhat cyclical in its nature; it discloses and realizes Dasein in both a temporal and holistic sense so that the distinction between the two nearly disappears. Importantly, "the call of conscience only reaches him who wants to be brought back" (Wang 358), meaning that authenticity operates in relation to conscience insofar as Dasein heeds it. Wang begins his argument by clarifying conscience as a call: conscience is fundamentally tied to truth in Wang's usage because it calls Dasein to its upmost authenticity, truth in the sense of real disclosure, in that Dasein disclosed is in the truth (358). When Dasein is inauthentic, or silencing the voice of conscience, she is falling in, "evading the burden of being by turning away into the everyday entanglement among the they" (Wang 359). The call of conscience rescues Dasein from this entanglement that dissolves into the 'they' and makes Dasein individual again, responsible and aware of its *own* being-toward-death.

All of this being-toward-death comes by way of the “call of conscience” that awakens Dasein from its entanglement in the ‘they.’ Wang concludes his article by arguing that

the call of conscience “comes from me, and yet over me,” because “Dasein calls itself in conscience” and the “self is brought to itself by the call.” Dasein does call itself into being by virtue of conscience which awakens it to authenticity and a being-toward-death, and in doing so conscience calls Dasein further into a self-knowing and actualization of being. In this sense, conscience reveals Dasein as the place of truth in its disclosure. (Wang 384)

It is in this space that Dasein is the locus of truth—truth in the sense of disclosure. By being fully aware of our ownmost possibility toward death, we are disclosing ourselves to ourselves.

Truth as Disclosure

A self-disclosure as a place of truth is radically different from a place of truth disclosed arbitrarily or external to Dasein itself. Here again I differentiate between religion and spirituality; on one hand religion prescribes truth externally, and on the other hand, yearning questions about being turn Dasein back into itself exactly as Heidegger describes the process of disclosure to evolve. To further authenticate this distinction and to appreciate the importance of truth as disclosure, I will clarify Heidegger’s unique conception of truth. Mark Wrathall discusses Heidegger’s theory of truth by protecting its status as a sort of correspondence theory. He argues that by defining truth as unconcealment, Heidegger is not departing from the correspondence theory of truth widely accepted in philosophical discourse (Wrathall 70). Instead, he argues that Heidegger critiques the correspondence theory of truth insofar as it reduces things to mere agreement between ideas and objects (70). He asserts that Heidegger’s account of truth as unconcealment grounds a notion of propositional truth (70). He begins by arguing that Heidegger divorces the term ‘truth’ from its correlation to mere agreements (70). In other words, Heidegger responds to Aristotle’s correspondence theory of truth which very basically states that our linguistic assertions must match the realities of objects. Heidegger does not abandon this theory, but he does elaborate upon it: if Aristotle’s correspondence theory does in fact define truth, it is still the case that truth necessarily rests upon a relationship that is disclosive. Put simply, making an assertion about an object requires some level of mental differentiation between that object and another. Viewing and asserting something about

one object disclosed it in a certain way *in relation* to any other object. Additionally, making distinctions and assertions is only possible by virtue of some being who can make those distinctions and assertions—a disclosive being (Wrathall 79). That being is Dasein. Dasein, thus, is the place where disclosure happens. In this sense, Heidegger rejects absolute truth as an a priori reality, and also rejects complete relativity. Truth, he is asserting, is phenomenological. It is what is disclosed to us in authenticity, and because it requires a disclosing being, Dasein is in the place of truth.

Wrathall's defense of Heidegger's truth now emerges more clearly: he is arguing that Heidegger is simply deeming unconcealment as a condition which is necessary for the correspondence theory to work. He is not divorcing them. Indeed, Wrathall goes on to say that "Heidegger is generally careful to distinguish the 'two senses of truth: truth as unconcealment (openness of what is) and then as assimilation of a representation to what is'" (70). In other words, truth is the place of discernment, uncovering and disclosing things as they exist authentically, and *in that relational disclosure* also corresponding to its representation.

William Blattner expands the discussion of truth by proposing a Heideggarian ontology of the human which relies on anxiety to provoke Dasein's disclosure. In his article, "Existence and Self-Understanding in *Being and Time*," he captures what I have previously clarified about death. He writes, "'death,' as Heidegger uses it, does not pick out the event that happens at the end of every human being's life. It denotes, rather, a certain condition in which one can find oneself, the condition of not" (Blattner 108). He argues that Heidegger interprets Dasein's characteristics in terms of abilities—not states of being but capacities to do (97). Death is a state of disability, or a lack of possibilities. He considers the example of understanding: to say that a person *understands* herself in a Heideggarian sense to be something is to say that she is capable of being that thing: "Understanding is the existential being of Dasein's own ability to be" (Blattner 99). He adds to this by pointing out the similarities between being-towards-death and being anxious: "To be anxious is to find all ways to be Dasein equally irrelevant or uninteresting. Such an affective disposition would disable Dasein from being anyone, because Dasein would not have the affective grounds for exercising any particular ability-to-be" (Blattner 108). Anxiety is not a disclosure in the sense that it reveals an object of truth. Indeed, we are never quite sure what we are anxious about except that it's a vague notion of ways in which being-towards-possibility can end. Anxiety therefore calls to authenticity because it awakens Dasein to view itself in terms of limited possibilities. Heidegger writes that "in anxiety there lies the possibility of a distinctive disclosure, since anxiety individualizes" (184). Because anxiety forces us to look at our own choices

and their temporal consequences, authenticity as a subsequent to anxiety comes by way of temporality; the fact that death exists as a kind of closure in the ambiguous future gives weight and value to choices in the immediate presence. We can disclose ourselves truthfully as we are aware of ourselves. For example, I am not truthful in disclosure when I aggressively procrastinate for three hours something I could have done in thirty minutes. Blattner's argument continues by describing the being of Dasein in two nuanced ways: possessing both unattainable potentialities and self-interpretative ability characteristics (109). Continuing from what he stated previously, if Dasein interprets itself by way of its potentialities for doing and being, the unattainability of potentiality in its fullness is important (109). If we could fulfill potentialities, death as an end would be an unnecessary component of our being-towards the cessation of possibilities. Because we are futural beings however, projecting ourselves into possibility constitutes the work of the past and the present. Therefore, the unattainability of potentialities in their fullness preserves Dasein's authenticity. Dasein as possessing a self-interpretative ability refers to Dasein's ability to reflect upon its own being (the work of authenticity).

Heidegger writes that "to say that a statement is true means that it discovers the beings in themselves. It asserts, it shows, it lets being 'be seen' in their discoveredness. The *being true (truth)* of the statement must be understood as *discovering*" (202). Discovering truth as an experiential phenomenon is still not relative. Heidegger has not deconstructed truth to the realms of complete subjectivity; he has clarified its actual phenomenological function in the world and through Dasein as its place of happening. Dasein as the place of truth is thus marvelously poised. Truth as disclosure is not truth which is arbitrarily discovered a priori. I argue that this place of truth realized in authenticity is the ripeness of spiritual experience. I began this paper by defining spirituality as that which suggests a connection to something beyond the temporality of being in the world. Heidegger's conception of truth as disclosure certainly matches this yearning for discovery beyond that which is dogmatically prescribed.

Conclusion

Spirituality, freed from the entanglements of the 'they' and called to authenticity through conscience, provokes an experience of authentic disclosure which is truth. In truth as disclosure, Heidegger redeems spirituality from a falling-in-with-the-they that makes normative the unique Dasein's experiences. Heidegger's renewed conception of truth illuminates the being of beings to be beyond what is ontic and factual.

Spirituality as an ontology manifests itself through Dasein's disclosures, pushing Dasein towards authenticity in its purest and most potential form—the unknown and imagined, the ownmost possibility of death that concludes the temporality of Dasein.

Works Cited

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