

DISCUSSION

NON-EPISTEMIC SELF-AWARENESS. ON HEIDEGGER'S READING OF KANT'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

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I. Introduction

In what follows, I intend to show how Heidegger interprets and reformulates the practical dimension in Kant's philosophy as an ontological problematic. For a proper understanding of this interpretation I shall explain first, Heidegger's general concept of subjectivity and self-awareness (*II*), and second, the special status that affectivity has in his conception of self-awareness (*III*), all of which are expressly developed in *Being and Time*, as well as in his Marburg lecture courses (given between 1923 and 1928). I shall then show, more specifically, how Heidegger transforms Kant's idea of respect into his own idea of angst (*IV*). Angst, I shall conclude, is the *ontological interpretation of respect*, which Heidegger tries to conceive as a mode of existence of the self, through which we appear to ourselves as self-determined, resolute beings (*V*).

II. Self-Awareness as Self-Understanding

I shall begin by explaining Heidegger's general conception of self-awareness and subjectivity. As many scholars know, Heidegger reinterprets the traditional concept of self-awareness with the term "disclosedness". Heidegger uses the term "disclosedness" to refer both to our relation to things in the world as well as to our relation to ourselves, and he conceives both forms of disclosedness as *non-reflectively co-present*. Consider what Heidegger insists in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

The self which the Dasein is, is there somehow in and along with all intentional comportments. To intentionality belongs, not only a self-directing-toward which it is directed, but also the *associated unveiling of the self* which is comporting itself here. Intentional self-direction-toward is not simply and act-ray issuing from an ego-center, which would have to be related to the ego only afterward, in such a way that in a second act this ego would turn back to the first one (the first self-directing-toward). Rather, the *co-disclosure of the self* belongs to intentionality. But the question remains, *In what way is the self given?* (*Basic Problems*, 158; underlining my emphasis).

In this central passage, one finds Heidegger's basic intuitions – which are in play in *Being and Time* – expressed in a nutshell. Basically, three ideas are expressed: [i] every intentional comportment presupposes a self-awareness (or disclosedness) of itself; [ii] this self-awareness is pre-reflective (see *Basic Problems*, 159: "The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, *before all reflection*"), and [iii] this pre-reflective consciousness is not an abstract or empty structure; rather, it can be conceived and analyzed as a *concrete* whole of self-

references and self-performances. In his lecture from 1926, Heidegger calls this “totality” the “subjectivity of a subject” (*Metaphysical Foundations*, 165), and in *Being and Time*, as is well known, he calls it “Dasein.” According to Heidegger, then, the main task of phenomenology is to analyze “how this being shows itself to itself in its factual existence” (*Basic Problems*, 159), or, to put it in other words, to analyze how we understand our own existence (being) both while we are existing (performing our existence), and as existence (being) (See also *Basic Problems*, 173pp).

I shall briefly illustrate this Heideggerian idea by using a concrete phenomenon with which we are all familiar, namely, the feeling of sadness. Usually, we would claim that sadness is a feeling or “mental state,” in which we feel somehow that we lost something. If we would furthermore hold a theory that claims that feelings are intentional acts, then we might think that we are directed in feeling “acts” towards an object or value.¹ We could also think that sadness is a *sign* of something else, such as the state of affairs or proposition *that* we did something wrong (“I feel that ‘p’ is the case”). In this case, we would interpret the feeling of sadness as an *epistemic* phenomenon. While Heidegger does not claim that these approaches are wrong within a *cognitive* interpretation of our mind, he does claim that these interpretations miss the presupposed, *basic sense* of the phenomenon of sadness, which can be made visible through phenomenology. In short, the basic sense of the *phenomenon* of sadness, according to Heidegger, consists in an immediate and pre-reflective *understanding* of our own being (existence) and its temporal structure. For the *first* thing that is given in sadness is not an object, referent or proposition; rather, the first sense that is, in Heideggerian terms, “disclosed” in the feeling of sadness, is nothing else but my *own self*. In being sad we are able to *understand* our own situation, our own lives, and therefore our own *self as a whole*. Put simply, in being sad we are pre-reflectively aware of ourselves as beings who are delivered over from our past and thus as beings to which our past *belongs*. In contrast, a cognitive interpretation *overlooks* the fact that our past belongs to and is part of our own *present*. But if we ask “*how* are we given to ourselves when we are sad?” then we become aware that our past is something that we actually *are*, whereas we usually misconceptualize our own reality by claiming that the past “*is gone*” and therefore something that *we are not*.²

This dimension of a self-consciousness that manifests itself as a confrontation with itself was totally overlooked by Heidegger’s forerunners, especially Husserl. For although Husserl analyzed the relation between the ego and that which it *is not* (non-ego, things), he never analyzed the relation that the ego has to *itself*, that is to say, to that which *it is*.³ Exactly this oversight leads to Heidegger’s claim that the tradition misconceived subjectivity as a substance, thereby failing to work out an appropriate ontological interpretation of human reality. In other words, the tradition (including Husserl) conceived subjectivity as a *thing*. It should become immediately clear why Heidegger looks to Kant’s practical philosophy, especially the *Groundwork*, since there the ontological distinction between *personhood* and *thing* is dealt with (See, exemplarily, *Practical Philosophy*, 79/4: 428). For in the *Groundwork* Kant, and this seems to be particularly interesting from a Heideggerian perspective, tries to find an *internal* (but not a theological) criterion, which demonstrates that the dignity and very essence of human beings lay *beyond* thinghood. Kant’s position is well known: our ability to perform the moral law and to act morally show that human beings not only transcend the being of entities, but are totally *different* than all entities that they *are not*. This Kantian attempt to use the moral dimension of subjectivity for ontological considerations is similar to Heidegger’s own approach that he presents in *Being and Time*.⁴

III. Feelings and Affections as Practical Modes of Self-Awareness

Having considered, at a general level, Heidegger's conception of subjectivity, we are now in a position to see the special role that emotions and affections play within his analysis, which, in turn, will allow us to understand Heidegger's interest in Kant's conception of the *feeling of respect*.

As I mentioned before, Heidegger claims that prior to my intentional and epistemic reference to objects in the world, there are pre-reflective modes of self-awareness, in which we are given *to ourselves*.⁵ However, we must still consider *how* we are *in general* given to ourselves and *how* we are *pre-reflectively* self-aware. Heidegger's claim is unique: we are pre-reflectively self-aware in emotions and even more fundamentally, in what he calls "Befindlichkeit," which could be rendered into English as "disposition." In other words, the primary ways in which we are aware of ourselves are by way of affections, feelings, emotions, and, more basically, by way of our dispositions, all of which are prior to cognitive self-awareness. So, before we are able to reflect on our own existence, that is, before we begin to think and say something *about* ourselves, and before we are propositionally related to our own lives, we are aware of ourselves through our affections, which are, therefore, always conceived at the same time as *self-affections*.

Let me briefly explain Heidegger's thesis. According to Heidegger, in order to have feelings, emotions and affections, we must presuppose a consciousness or a *living through* these affections, which he calls "self-feelings" (*Basic Problems*, 133). In other words, the fact that *Dasein* not only *has* affections or mental events, but is in some way *aware* of them, presupposes a prior level of consciousness within which the subject is confronted with its *own* "living through" affections. In this way, affections and feelings are ultimately identical with self-awareness as such, because in feelings and affections the subject not only feels something *other than itself* but it feels *itself*. Accordingly, when we are awake, we always have *basic* affections, or, to put it in Heidegger's words, we are always somehow *attuned* in feelings, through which we are given to ourselves. This affective self-awareness, as stated before, should not be conceived, however, as an empty relation; rather, it must be analyzed as a *concrete* awareness (of) my own temporal situation. Ultimately Heidegger shifts the focus of his analysis to a consideration of the *basic* sense of our feelings, emotions and moods. Affections are characterized not only by an intentional component through which the self is affected by something *other than itself*, but also through its own affectivity, on the basis of which the self opens up towards the world and *reveals itself to itself*. There is, as Heidegger puts it, "a feeling of *self* in having a feeling for something" (*Basic Problems*, 132).

Consider our example again: when I am sad about something, I am not only directed to the object of my sadness (for instance the loss of a person), but I am also given to myself through my sadness, which affects my whole situation in such a moment. Consequently, I am actually *confronted* with my own being through the feeling of sadness, though I am primarily *not confronted* with the *object* of my sadness. In other words, I feel *myself* being sad about something and in this way I am confronted with the *past* dimension of my life, which shows up in the affectedness of myself, and which can, therefore, be described as a *finding* myself (see quote above) and as the temporal dimension of my "having been".

IV. Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant's Practical Philosophy and the Phenomenon of Respect

I would like to turn now to a consideration of Heidegger's examination of the feeling of respect in Kant. On the basis of the prior analysis, it should have become clear why Heidegger shifts the focus in his Kant lecture courses to a consideration of the phenomenon of respect, which, according to Heidegger, is (implicitly) Kant's ontological analysis of our own being. Through respect, Heidegger maintains, we become aware of our own ontological status, which ultimately takes the form of the insight that our own being is *beyond* any kind of "thinghood" and, in addition, that our being is realized through the possibility of acting in accordance with the moral law. Obviously, Heidegger tries to develop an interpretation of Kant that is compatible with his own philosophy, and as such he gives an *ontological* interpretation of moral or practical consciousness that is meant finally to answer the phenomenological question of how the subject that Kant *presupposes* in his practical philosophy should be described. Or, to put it in other words, Heidegger not only asks "*who* performs the categorical imperative?" but also "*how* is the imperative actually given?" Heidegger's answer is simply this: the moral law, and therefore our own being and essence, is *present* and given in respect. Accordingly, in respect we are confronted with our own self *as itself*. In respect "I am," as Heidegger puts it, "myself." In what follows, I would like to support this thesis.⁶

In the feeling of respect I subject myself to the categorical imperative, which, because of its absolute worth, lets me transcend nature and things in the way of a "submissive self-elevation" (*Basic Problems*, 135). In other words, in the feeling of respect I am given to myself as something that has absolute worth *if* I give the moral law to myself and if I can at one and the same time be the subject *and* the object of the moral law: *law giver and law receiver*. In Heidegger's words, "respect is the mode of the ego's being-with-itself" (*Basic Problems*, 135). The thought behind Heidegger's claim is an ontological one. According to Heidegger, the categorical imperative is not simply a rule. Neither is it simply a principle nor is it of instrumental help in finding the appropriate way of acting morally; rather, the categorical imperative shows the decisive characteristic and ultimate essence of humankind itself. Everyone, as Kant himself claims, must already have access to the moral law, to practical reason, and to "*Sittlichkeit*" in general. Hence, what we encounter when we determine our self and become autonomous is not a cognitive application of a principle or an abstract ability to use our reason; rather, we confront ourselves with our own "authentic" self, namely with what we already *are*. In other words, only in performing the categorical imperative are we able to demonstrate, or better, realize, *that* we are human beings. The difference, we could add, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, between person and thing, or between freedom and nature, is a practical or ethical problem.⁷ "[T]his feeling of respect," as Heidegger writes, "is the true mode in which man's existence becomes manifest" (*Basic Problems*, 137).⁸

In the last step of my paper I shall turn my attention back to Heidegger's own philosophy.

V. Heidegger's Ontological Re-Interpretation of Respect as Angst

We might be compelled to ask at this point in which disposition, according to Heidegger, is the subject's being and its ontological status given. Surprisingly, we must come to the conclusion that for Heidegger the phenomenon of respect could be analyzed in terms of fear and angst.

What does Heidegger mean when he claims that we can understand ourselves as being *beyond things*? In a central passage, Heidegger writes: “Dasein is its possibility, and it ‘has’ this possibility, but not just as a property [*eigenschaftlich*], as something present-at-hand would” (*Being and Time*, 68). What Heidegger has in mind here is the distinction of something that *has* possibilities (epistemic or modal possibilities) and something that *is* its possibility (practical possibility, can-be, able-to-be: “*Seinkennen*”). Put simply, on the one hand, we can understand our own existence as *a thing with properties*. On the other hand, we can understand ourselves as “entities” that create our own possibilities *through* acts of self-understanding. In this case we no longer understand our own existence as entities; rather, we recognize that we transcend things in the absolute sense.

This thesis helps us to answer Heidegger’s question “*How* are we given, and *what* is given when we understand ourselves as abilities to be?” His answer, quite simply, is this: whenever I experience my possibilities as abilities to be, a pre-reflective confrontation with myself occurs. As explained before, pre-reflective confrontations with myself are given through affections and dispositions. According to Heidegger, *angst* is the *special disposition* through which I am confronted with myself as the ability to be. Consequently, in angst, then, I understand my *ontological status*, which means that I am aware that I transcend the mere being of entities.

But what has any of this to do with the phenomenon of respect? The main reason for Heidegger’s turn from respect to angst and the ontological problematic, can be found in Kant’s own description and interpretation of the feeling of respect, to which Heidegger appeals. In the *Groundwork*, Kant surprisingly claims (in a footnote) that respect is analogous to dispositions such as fear (*Practical Philosophy*, 56/4:402).⁹ On the one hand, in fear we usually have the tendency of fleeing and escaping. On the other hand, while we are afraid of something, the object about which we are afraid shows up even more intensively. Consider this example: if I would be afraid of going to the dentist, then I would not only have the desire to escape the situation, the dentist-situation would take up my attention in a most alarming and intensive way. According to Heidegger, Kant thinks that the moral law, which is given in respect, is not only something from which it lets us attempt to escape, but also, given its sublime nature, something that lets us *strive towards it*, as it calls for our attention, so that we are finally forced to face the situation *while* we try to escape it.¹⁰

For Heideggerian scholars, Kant’s remark should become immediately interesting, especially since in *Being and Time* Heidegger not only differentiates fear and angst, but he also tries to show that angst is a disposition in which the self becomes “elevated” to itself. This elevation, as we now know, constitutes an understanding of oneself as the *ability to be*, which excludes understanding oneself as a thing. One again, in angst we become aware of our ontological status, which is *beyond* every thing. However, the question remains: “how does the pre-reflective awareness that I have in angst help to push me into this understanding?”

Whereas in fear I am intentionally directed to objects in my world that cause me to try to *escape* from my own self, angst *confronts* me with my own self and my own being. In fear, as Heidegger puts it, we conceive our possibilities in certain situations as *external* possibilities. Hence in fear we are heteronomous, insofar as we are in some sense controlled or determined by the objects and things about which we are afraid. *They* determine our actions. For instance, in panic we are not really aware of our own possibilities; rather, in such a situation we *forget* ourselves and follow possibilities that are given to us by way of *external* conditions. In contrast, in having angst, according to Heidegger, I lose all intentional references to the world. To put it

in other words, fear is inauthentic angst and angst authentic fear. For instance, when we really *face a life decision* we must understand all given possibilities as *our own* possibilities; for there are no *things* to which we can direct our anxiety. Thus in angst we *find our own selves*, which we usually forget in our everyday lives. Angst, we can therefore conclude, can be seen to play in Heidegger's analysis the same role that respect plays in Kant's practical philosophy. For angst, like respect in Kant – as Heidegger interprets it – is a form of non-epistemic self-understanding, through which we are confronted with our own self and our own being.

VI. Consequence

As a consequence of this analysis we could – from a Heideggerian perspective – phenomenologically claim that in a situation in which we decide to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, which would result in an act that is rooted in respect (both for ourselves and for the moral law), we are *thrown back to ourselves*, that is to say, we are practically self-related. This is to say that acts rooted in respect throw us into an affective awareness within which our whole existence comes into play, just *as if we were in angst*, and which we can analyze within an existential framework. In other words, *angst* is the existential dimension of what Kant calls “respect”. We could, in fact, use Heidegger's analysis of the Dasein who experiences angst as a *description of the moral actor* who is presupposed in the Kantian theory.

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References

1. Husserl unfolds his value theory in *Hua XXVIII*, within which he deals with the question of whether emotional acts are directed towards genuine values or towards an underlying object-intending act. Scheler unfolds a whole theory about the relation of feelings and emotions to values in his main work *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (1913), which unfortunately (in my view) does not receive much attention by current scholars in phenomenology. I use the following abbreviations: *Being and Time* = Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, tr. Macquarrie/Robinson, New York: Harper 1962; *Basic Problems* = Heidegger, Martin 1988, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Bloomington: Indiana UP; *Metaphysical Foundations* = Heidegger, Martin, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Bloomington: Indiana UP 1992. *Hua* = Husserl, Edmund, *Husserliana*, Gesammelte Werke, Dordrecht, 1952ff.; *Practical Philosophy* = Kant, Immanuel, *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge UP 1996.
2. To summarize, Heidegger would claim that it is *the self and its present past life* that shows up in the “feeling” of sadness, which is, essentially, a confrontation of the self with itself. According to Heidegger, above all we are able to understand and make present through sadness the *temporal dimension of our own past*, which Heidegger calls “thrownness.” I shall return to this later when I further elaborate on Heidegger's approach to affections, emotions and feelings. Already in section 6, Heidegger claims that Dasein's “own past [...] is not something which follows along after Dasein” (*Being and Time*, 41).
3. As far as I can see, Husserl only reconsiders his theory in his *Kaizo* articles from 1923, within which he conceives ethical decisions, which he calls “renewals,” as events that change the whole reference system of someone's life. An ethical decision affects not only a part of one's life story, but infects “every act” (*Hua XXVII*, 29) and “every pulse of life” (*Hua XXVII*, 97; my translation).
4. Dasein, as Heidegger puts it, does not “come across in the same way as we come across what is present-at-händ” (*Being and Time*, 68p). Heidegger's approach is, therefore, as William Blattner nicely puts it, based in a “dualistic understanding of an entity” (Blattner,

William, *Existence and Self-Understanding in Being and Time*, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 56, No. 1., March 1996, 109).

5. Some of these modes are analyzed in *Being and Time*. However, Heidegger does not claim that his analysis in *Being and Time* covers all phenomena of human reality. Angst and fear are chosen, as he clearly states in section 40, for *methodological* reasons (see *Being and Time*, 230). In addition, an existential analysis must be able to interpret other phenomena like hope, joy or enthusiasm (see *Being and Time*, 395).
6. The form of subjectivity that Kant thematizes in his practical philosophy, according to Heidegger, must be conceived as a “specific modification of self-consciousness” (*Basic Problems*, 132). As Heidegger further explains, this specific kind of consciousness is – as we called it before – Kant’s *non-epistemic* approach to the self.
7. In consequence, Dasein would be the very dimension through which we are able to understand ourselves as persons (authentically) or as things (inauthentically).
8. A similar formulation reads as follows: “In this feeling of respect the moral self-consciousness, *personalitas moralis*, *man’s true personality*, must reveal itself” (*Basic Problems*, 133; emphasis mine)
9. I cannot go into detail about this Kantian problematic here, since to do so would take us too far afield from the central concern of this paper. In short, the feeling of respect is on the one hand problematic because Kant claims that respect is an *intellectual* feeling, while on the other hand he claims that every feeling has a *sensual* basis. However, according to Kant, a *sensual* basis can never be a motivational basis for the recognition of the moral law.
10. According to Heidegger, this mode of the phenomenon would show the phenomenon in a *negative, privative* way. See for this distinction section 7 of *Being and Time*.