

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

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This work moves toward an understanding of the power of imagination as an attempt to elucidate a shift in personal meaning. Discussion is grounded in philosophical insights provided in *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger.¹ By moving through the ontological meaning of Being one comes to appreciate the power invested in *Dasein's* being, that of its possibilities. We are our possibilities. We are dynamic beings, continually changing, frequently seeking different or alternative possibilities. A possibility is a way of Being that is open to *Dasein* in some situation into which it can move forward. One spring source of our possibility of a shift in personal meaning is through our capacity of imagination. But imagination is not in itself enough. To become one must live that possibility.

How can we live our possibilities? Heidegger says that when *Dasein* resides in the authentic mode of existence the self is owned. *Dasein* through its projective capacity dis-closes possibilities as mine. The capacity of imagination is a way to shift a person's present understanding from the merely actual to the possible. Often this shift is not as easy to accomplish as it sounds. It is something we cannot achieve alone.

Looking at others and their ability to be an influence upon the development and direction of the self begins with the sociality of our existence and its irrefutable primordality. Heidegger's analysis of the "they" self and the "authentic" self can be seen as highly sensitive to shared living. One result of this social nature is that we may find ourselves Being-with-others and yet experience a feeling of alienation. This is only one way of Being-with-others. For Heidegger:

The phenomenological assertion that "Dasein is essentially Being-with" has an existential-ontological meaning. . . . Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-with in the world. The Other can *be missing* only *in* and *for* a Being-with. Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with; its very possibility is the proof of this.²

The experience of alienation is a deficient mode of Being-with. Others are always-already there even though our experience may set us apart from them. This displays the power of imagination in that even though no one is near "they"³ are with us because we are *in* a world where Being-with⁴ is an existential statement as to its essence. As Heidegger says:

Being missing and 'Being away' [Das Fehlen und "Fortsein"] are modes of Dasein-with, and are possible only because Dasein as Being-with lets the Dasein of Others be encountered in its world. Being-with is in every

case a characteristic of one's own Dasein; Dasein-with characterizes the Dasein of Others to the extent that it is freed by its world for a Being-with. Only so far as one's own Dasein has the essential structure of Being-with, is it Dasein-with as encounterable for Others.⁵

With this ground, let us now focus on what this can mean for the therapeutic situation. Through imagination there is a freeing for different or alternative modes of Being ourselves as we are encountered and as we encounter. We provide reflections not only of ourselves but of the other as our meaning is appropriated by each other. The authenticity, found in the therapeutic presence, enables the client to give meaning and direction to existence. In this therapeutic light the possible freeing for, of another's presence, clearly emerges.

We can say that Heidegger's insight into the nature of *Dasein-with* and the Being-with of others is crucial in the therapeutic encounter. By freeing the client for possibilities the therapist provides opportunities for a shift in personal meaning. This speaks of a participating therapist who activates the imagination of the client for different or alternative possibilities of knowing and being one's own self. With this possibility the client can move toward the future in an authentic manner, to own personal existence and to become responsible for it.

Heidegger's philosophical ground of self-responsibility of the authentic self is fundamental to the therapeutic process. This movement toward the authentic self, the consciousness of one's own self, one's possibilities, one's finitude, is the ground for the therapeutic encounter. The activation of the projective function of consciousness releases our capacity of imagination.

The question now is how does imagination free energies for essential change? The human being is not static but a dynamic being and is continuous yet of constant change. Imagination reverberates in the person's consciousness and uncovers possibilities. It is dynamic in its effect while communicating with the person. This is the power of imagination as condensed, shared and lived-through meaning. Even though *Dasein* often resides in the "they" there is a possibility of "*mineness*"⁶ (*Jemeinigkeit*). In discourse, the authentic mode of therapeutic encounter, *Dasein* is called to return to itself. Heidegger says it this way:

If discourse, as the Articulation of the intelligibility of the "there", is a primordial *existentiale* of disclosedness, and if disclosedness is primarily constituted by Being-in-the-world, then discourse too must have essentially a kind of Being which is specifically *worldly*. The intelligibility of Being-in-the-world—an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-

mind—*expresses itself as discourse*. The totality-of-significations of intelligibility is *put into words*.⁷

By way of “mood”⁸ *Dasein* gives rise to a primordial possibility of finding different or alternative modes of expression through discourse. A state-of-mind is upon the release of a throw. Imagination is not a state-of-mind it is existence itself, it is an existential state, in which *Dasein* is disclosed, it is the communication of existential possibilities. In each person’s experience of “*mineness*” there is also found a shared world of meaning derived from and subject to imagination expressed through discourse. The very word discourse has implicit in it more than one meaning. It is shared communication. Discourse is a lighting up of possibilities rather than a closing-off such as idle chatter.

Discourse is an existential state in which *Dasein* is disclosed. It is constitutive for *Dasein*’s existence. It becomes a “for-the-sake-of”⁹ (*um-willen*) *Dasein* in meaning-giving. The way in which discourse gets expressed is language. As Heidegger says:

Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-state-of-mind and a co-understanding. In discourse Being-with becomes ‘explicitly’ *shared*; that is to say, it *is* already, but it is unshared as something that has not been taken hold of and appropriated.¹⁰

It is through discourse with others that we come to know and understand ourselves and the world in which we live. The word reveals itself to be the immediate mode of becoming as *Dasein*. The word is the giver, not the given, which gives. The dialogal nature of discourse is quite prominent in any attempt to understand not only the value of authentic modes of communication but for the power of imagination. Imagination is directly pertinent to a psychological understanding of our sociality, of our Being-with-others, it is an existential state of *Dasein*’s existence.

Heidegger’s unique statements on the experience of delusion take us even further. Our attention is called by Heidegger to the positive value rather than the negative by saying:

. . . if we make evaluations which are so unjustified ontologically, we shall completely fail to recognize the existentially positive character of the capacity for delusion. It is precisely when we see the ‘world’ unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods, that the ready-to-hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day.¹¹

In the world of psychological thought this is particularly important for recognizing existential possibilities of human living. Freeing a person for

these possibilities is therapeutic. Imagination opens the door, so to speak, for one's possibility to move out of or away from the experience of being stuck.

A client's call for help gives recognition that things need not be as they are. Inherent in this recognition is a primordial awakening to a universal capacity for personal change. The existential question is root-meaning in the existentiell. This gives human beings a way of moving with existing struggles. Awakening one's capacity of imagination opens the possibility that things can be different.

The question now is how can therapists help to re-establish and vitalize this capacity in their clients? Heidegger's statements on solicitude offer the foundation for a caring mode of presence:

. . . there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [ihm *vorausspringt*] in his existentiell potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a "*what*" with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it.¹²

With this approach *Dasein* is in search of its ownmost meaning. To set forth the meaning of care is to follow the projection that its upon-which may be seen. It is through care which arises from being together authentically that meaning is dis-closed. Heidegger says it this way:

. . . when they devote themselves to the same affair in common, their doing so is determined by the manner in which their *Dasein*, each in its own way, has been taken hold of. They thus become *authentically* bound together, and this makes possible the right kind of objectivity [die rechte Sachlichkeit], which frees the Other in his freedom for himself.¹³

This is so for Heidegger, as *Dasein* is "vulnerable" to meaning outside itself. *Dasein* takes hold of itself in its own way yet meaning from the outside can reach and affect it. *Dasein's* openness is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind. For Heidegger, "*Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.*"¹⁴

Yet the world can matter in such a way that *Dasein* evades its very self. In this way *Dasein* does not approach any horizon of its own accord unless it gets brought back from its lostness by a resolution dis-closed in the moment of vision which is held on to. The moment of vision, for Heidegger, brings existence into the situation and dis-closes the authentic there.

Projecting itself into its possibilities, *Dasein* can dis-close meaning which signifies the upon-which. Meaning signifies the upon-which of the primary projection of Being. Projecting as already-in the future opens the moment of vision and decision. For Heidegger, “That which was projected in the primordial existential projection of existence has revealed itself as anticipatory resoluteness.”¹⁵ In this way *Dasein*’s “ahead-of-itself” and “anticipation” are with regard to its existentiell possibility.

As futural *Dasein* is free for its death. It can let itself be thrown back upon its factual there, against death. As futural *Dasein* is equiprimordially in the process of having-been. It can then take over its own thrownness and be in the moment of vision.

“Levelling down”¹⁶ (*Einebnung*) this capacity brings serious consequences to bear upon one’s ability to cope with the world or the struggle which is sometimes referred to as living. Heidegger’s poet of poets, Friedrich Hölderlin, says it this way:

High my spirit aspired, truly, however, love
Pulled it earthward; and grief lower still bows it down.
So I follow the arc of
Life and return to my starting-place.¹⁷

Notes

- 1) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- 2) *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.
- 3) Authentic experience of self returns the person to Self through reflection. The inauthentic experience of self, the “they,” where one is caught up in social meanings are accepted, unquestioned and taken-for-granted. *Dasein* can choose or lose itself.
- 4) Being-with is an existential structure. It is essential to human existence. Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with. This means that experiences of alienation describe a deficient mode of Being-with. The other can influence a shift in our development and direction to an authentic possibility of heights and depths which can be attained only insofar as *Dasein* chooses itself.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 6) Heidegger’s use of “*mineness*” displays our personal existence, “Because *Dasein* has *in each case mineness* [*Jemeinigkeit*], one must always use a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it: ‘I am’, ‘you are’.” *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 8) Heidegger’s use of “mood” displays *Dasein*’s way of Being-attuned in the world, “What we indicate *ontologically* by the term ‘state-of-mind’ is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned.” *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 9) Heidegger’s use of “for-the-sake-of” displays how the world “matters” to *Dasein*, “. . . ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*.” *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 205. Keeping silent is another possibility of discourse. It has the same existential foundation.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 177. The positive nature of delusion referred to by Heidegger places emphasis upon the imagination of possibilities of delusion in contrast to the negative “deluded” possibilities often found in pathological states. The upliftment provided by imagination restores

and enhances the human potential for a dynamic shift in personal meaning.

- 12) *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 177. Heidegger's thought gives rise to the possibility that imagination is present before one can bring something about.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 372.
- 16) *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 17) Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans., bi-lingual edition, preface, intro., notes Michael Hamburger (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 43. This poem, "The Course of Life" displays not only the end in its beginning, the "return to" but reminds us of our humanness.