A Joyful Path to *Dasein*?

Michael R. Miller

Martin Heidegger certainly had a great interest in Being. Heidegger's concern in Being, however, was not centered upon the study of individual entities or certain types of being in the world. Heidegger believed that the great majority of philosophers who examined being in such a manner failed to produce meaningful answers, for their investigations did not properly consider the contexts in which beings lie. So, rather than center upon particular examples of being or certain characteristics of particular types of being, Heidegger instead paid close attention to being in relation. His investigation of being naturally lead to an investigation of humans, for he recognized that it is human beings who ask the question 'What is Being?' Heidegger's search ultimately brought him to seek a transcendental unity with beings. Achieving this radical union with beings themselves, Heidegger freely admitted, is a difficult task for it demands an original occurrence, which Heidegger called an irruption, to break beings open and allow beings to "show what they are and how they are."[1] However, once having 'woken up' from the fragmented pre-occupations that consume daily life, humans transcend particular concerns of individual beings and are able "to 'see' all things more simply, more vividly, and in a more sustained manner."[2] That is, once we are metaphysically awake, we are transformed into *Dasein*, which is in each case beyond beings as a whole.

Although one cannot control when this irruption may occur, Heidegger recognizes the powerful role our emotional life plays in providing the condition of the irruption. In fact, much of Heidegger's work focuses upon the study of moods that, depending upon certain circumstances, either bring us face to face with beings as a whole or conceal from us the very object of our desire. Heidegger stresses the importance of moods (or as he preferred to call them, 'attunements')

[1] Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 83. Trans. by David Farrell Krell, and edited and revised by David Farrell Krell and William McNeill. Heidegger's address was originally delivered at the University of Freiburg, July 24, 1929. The address was published in English in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1977), pp. 95–112.

[2] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 23.

© The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2005, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

in his 1929 inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg, entitled *What is Metaphysics?* In that short essay he noted that attunements not only bring forth being as a whole but that they actually determine who we are, for they let us "find ourselves among being as a whole."[3] That is, "Finding ourselves attuned not only unveils beings as a whole in various ways, but this unveiling – far from being merely incidental – is also the fundamental occurrence of our *Da-sein*."[4] Heidegger likewise stresses the importance of attunement in his 1929–30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* when he writes that the task of philosophizing depends upon being gripped by the subject we wish to comprehend. Heidegger writes:

> All such being gripped, however, comes from and remains in an *attunement* [Stimmung]. To the extent that conceptual comprehending and philosophizing is not some arbitrary enterprise alongside others, but happens in the *ground* [Grunde] of human Dasein, the attunements out of which our being gripped philosophically and our philosophical comprehension arise are always necessarily *fundamental attunements* [Grundstimmungen] of Dasein. They are of the kind that constantly, essentially, and thoroughly attune human beings, without human beings necessarily always recognizing them as such. *Philosophy in each case happens in a fundamental attunement*.[5]

So, attunements not only actively define who we are by marking our relationship with the world at large, but they provide the means in which we discover ourselves, our *Dasein*. Remarkably, this transforming power of mood happens even if we are not fully aware of our own moods or how they attune us. Clearly, Heidegger considers moods and the accompanying attunements to be remarkable, necessary and fruitful things.

The majority of Heidegger's readers likely first learned of attunements when reading *Being in Time*, where he offers the distinctive mood of anxiety as an example of how attunements reveal *Dasein*. Heidegger stressed the importance of focusing upon 'bad moods' because "in bad moods, Da-sein becomes blind to itself."[6] This blindness serves an important role, for our mood of self-non-reflection is assailed by the inner awareness of being-in-the-world that is always present in the very same mood. This attack compels us toward something. That is, our attempt to reject being paradoxically repels us toward a positive insight that contains "a more penetrating understanding of the worldliness of the world."[7] Once affected we are no longer simply in the 'bad mood,' for we are now gripped by a particular

[3] "What is Metaphysics?," p. 87.
[4] Ibid.
[5] *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 7.
[6] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: The State University of New York, 1996), p. 128 [p. 128 in original German edition].
[7] *Being and Time*, p. 129 [p. 137].

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

attunement that allows us to encounter the inner-worldliness of things. Heidegger stresses the negative aspect of the mood as the key which unlocks the world of *Dasein* through an irruption. Addressing the preparatory power of a negative mood Heidegger writes:

> . . . being affected by the unserviceable, resistant, and threatening character of things at hand is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can *matter* to it in this way. This mattering to it is grounded in attunement, and as attunement it has disclosed the world, for example, as something by which it can be threatened. Only something which is the attunement of fearing, or fearlessness, can discover things at hand in the surrounding world as being threatening. The moodedness of attunement constitutes existentially the openness to world of Da-sein.[8]

Thus, human beings would not attune to being-in-the-world if certain prefigured moods did not already highlight some things in the world as things that matter to us.

As mentioned above, anxiety typically serves as Heidegger's primary example of how a mood leads one to transcend the ordinary world of being to where "all utterance of the 'is' falls silent."[9] Anxiety, Heidegger notes, is fundamentally different than fear because anxiety is always an indeterminate mood. That is, whereas the feeling of fear always focuses our attention upon a particular being, anxiety is the completely general feeling of being ill at ease that removes us from being as a whole. Not a simple worry, true anxiety provokes a profound separation from being. We 'slip away' and 'hover' in anxiety so strongly that we even slip away from ourselves, for the mood makes clear that we are simply another being that we cannot hold onto. Heidegger recognizes both the cost and the benefit of such an attunement, for he writes that "In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there."[10]

Although Heidegger once again centers his attention upon the mood of anxiety in *What is Metaphysics?* (as one would expect given the pivotal role it plays in *Being and Time*), he introduces the notion that the mood of profound boredom also creates an irruption. Similar in features and effect to anxiety, profound boredom is not directed to a particular event or moment and it too separates us from ourselves. Profound boredom, Heidegger writes, "drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and ourselves along with it into a remarkable

[8] Ibid., p. 129 [p. 137].
[9] "What is Metaphysics?," p. 89.
[10] Ibid.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole."[11] Unfortunately, Heidegger does not provide many details how profound boredom serves as an attunement in this work. A more detailed study of how profound boredom serves as an attunement, however, is provided in his subsequent work entitled *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics*. Here Heidegger argues that profound boredom is not only another form of attunement along with anxiety, but that "*profound boredom* is the *fundamental attunement*."[12] Although one may question the sincerity of this declaration, given that Heidegger clearly states just one section earlier that he has not ascertained a fundamental attunement and that it is impossible to do so,[13] it is important to recognize that Heidegger clearly recognizes that at least another fundamental attunement other than anxiety awakens human *Dasein*.

So, it is clear that Heidegger recognized that at least two moods help us transcend being by surpassing beings as a whole and putting "us, the questioners, ourselves in question."[14] Both metaphysical paths find their ground in the strangeness of being that both shocks us from our ontological slumber and makes us face the decisive question 'Why?' Our inquiry into this question ultimately leads us to understand ourselves, our *Dasein*. Thus, this potential for transcendence is the fundamental characteristic of moods that lead to attunement, which, according to Heidegger, awaken "for the first time the proper formulation of the metaphysical question concerning the Being of beings."[15]

And yet, Heidegger knows that anxiety and pure boredom are not the only ways to awaken our metaphysical awareness. Although both of these moods are certainly extremely effective beginnings of attunement, Heidegger occasionally notes that other feelings must also be recognized as valuable components in the revelation of being as a whole. For example, in *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics* Heidegger lists several feelings – including "joy, contentment, bliss,

[11] Ibid., p. 87.
[12] *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 80.
[13] Heidegger writes on p. 79 (Part I, Chapter 2, Section 19) of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: "By drawing attention to this profound boredom, it now seems as though we have done what we were attempting to avoid from the outset, namely ascertaining a fundamental attunement. Yet have we ascertained a fundamental attunement? By no means. We cannot ascertain one at all; indeed we are quite unable to do so, since it is entirely possible for everyone to deny that such an attunement is there. We have not ascertained one at all – indeed everyone will say we have arbitrarily asserted that such an attunement is at hand. *Yet what is at issue is not whether we deny it or assert it*. Let us simply recall what we asked: Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?" Italics added.
[14] "What is Metaphysics?," p. 96.
[15] Ibid., p. 94.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

sadness, melancholy, anger" – as attunements,[16] and he suggest that they all play an important role in awakening one to *Dasein*.[17] Heidegger provided no such list in *Being and Time*, nor did he make any suggestions there that any mood other than anxiety may mirror the awakening brought forth by anxiety. However, he did refer to joy twice in the text – a surprising move given the emphasis he places on anxiety in his major work. Heidegger's first reference makes clear that there is a certain "unshakable joy" when one recognizes that you are about to possess the individualized potentiality-of-being that anxiety has brought forth.[18] The second simply compares several moods (hope, joy, enthusiasm and gaiety) and addresses the temporality of these feelings *vis à vis* anxiety.[19] Even though these passages do not state that feelings like joy, hope, melancholy or anger actually lead to *Dasein*, their association with *Dasein* is made clear.[20]

Heidegger makes his strongest claim that feelings other that anxiety and profound boredom assist in reaching a transcendental moment of attunement in *What is Metaphysics?* Late in the address, after discussing the limitations of trying to grasp the nothing by simply removing all objects of thought until only the nothing remains, Heidegger goes on to say that, "No matter how much or in how many ways negation, expressed or implied, permeates all thought, it is by no means the sole authoritative witness of the manifestness of the nothing belonging essentially to Dasein. For negation cannot claim to be either the sole or the leading kind of nihilative component in which Dasein remains shaken by the nihilation of the nothing."[21] Thus said, the question arises: if negation is not the sole or leading behavior that causes the irruption, then what is? Interestingly enough, Heidegger goes on to mention that several 'nihilative comportments' – unyielding antagonism, stinging rebukes, galling failures, merciless prohibitions and bitter privations –are said to speak out "in the 'no' and in negation" and to reveal the barrenness and the range of negation for the first time.[22] In fact, Heidegger

[16] Heidegger states definitively in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that "Attunements are feelings," p. 65.

[17] *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 64. Heidegger notes in this section that attunements belong to the being of man and that attunements are somehow connected to the peculiar manner of being 'there and not there' which is attributed to Dasein (pp. 63–65).

[18] *Being and Time*, p. 286 [p. 310].

[19] Ibid., pp. 316–7 [p. 345].

[20] Quentin Smith correctly notes that scholars have long failed to recognize the authentic 'findedness' as being joyful in Heidegger's work (see, "On Heidegger's Theory of Moods" in *The Modern Schoolman*, Vol. 63, no. 4, May 1981) and he is the first philosopher I am aware of to recognize Heidegger's claim that *Dasein* must find itself in a variety of moods and not just anxiety and pure boredom.

[21] "What is Metaphysics?," p. 92.

[22] Ibid., p. 93.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

suggests that these negative feelings associated with these events are somehow necessary to bring forth the original anxiety that is usually repressed in existence, even though these 'bad feelings' cannot force the irruption of *Dasein* by themselves. As Heidegger explains, this relationship between these 'bad feelings' and the nothing implies that "the originary anxiety in Dasein is usually repressed" but that it can be awaken at any moment for "it needs no unusual event to rouse it."[23] In this way, the typical 'bad feelings' of everyday life sometimes serve as the spring that reveals the anxiety always lurking in *Dasein*.

Heidegger mentions one other feeling in *What is Metaphysics?* that is somewhat surprising. Although his comments about the feeling itself and its relationship to an irruption of *Dasein* are few, they are telling. Directly after explaining how the mood of pure boredom reveals being as a whole, Heidegger notes:

> Another possibility of such manifestation is concealed in our joy in the presence of the Dasein – and not simply of the person – of a human being whom we love. Such being attuned, in which we "are" one way or another and which determines us through and through, lets us find ourselves among beings as a whole. Finding ourselves attuned not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this unveiling – far from being merely incidental – is also the fundamental occurrence of our Da-Sein.[24]

The frankness of this comment is somewhat surprising, for in it Heidegger clearly states that the feeling of joy (and not only anxiety and pure boredom, or the 'bad feelings' mentioned above) also plays an important role in the revealing of *Dasein*. Somehow joy, the authentic bliss we find in the present existence of another person whom we love, attunes our understanding of ourselves and helps us recognize our relationship with beings as a whole. No longer restricted to certain 'nihilistic behaviors,' Heidegger reveals that at least one 'good mood' can bring us to the nothing that we seek by bringing us "face to face with beings as a whole."[25] Even though Heidegger does not provide an explanation of how joy actually achieves this transformation, I think it safe to assume that joy would awaken *Dasein* in a manner different from anxiety or boredom, given the profound differences in these moods. However, one does not need to assume, since it is stated, that Heidegger thinks that the mood of joy acts as an attunement which can bring one to *Dasein*.

It is important to note here that nothing in Heidegger's brief comments in *What is Metaphysics?* about joy or other feelings take anything away from the importance of anxiety as a fundamental means to *Dasein*. In fact, Heidegger sees an important link between

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 87.
[25] Ibid.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

anxiety and joy. He writes that the anxiety of those that long for greatness "cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment of tranquilized bustle" but in fact must stand "out-side all such opposition – in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing."[26] So, rather than standing apart from anxiety, it appears that the feeling of joy (like the contrasting feelings more typically associated with nihilism) actually plays a role in helping the fundamental mood of anxiety reveal itself.

It is also important to note that the good and bad feelings mentioned above stand in sharp contrast to the completely general moods of anxiety and profound boredom. That is, both the good and bad feelings are most certainly linked to particular objects or events, for no one can feel the pain associated with one of the 'bad feelings' or experience joy in the existence of another without having a particular event, object or person in mind. Even though these feelings do not have the detachment common to anxiety or profound boredom (which is an essential characteristic for attunement), I see no great difficulty in accepting Heidegger's explanation that the feelings of nihilistic behavior effectively trigger the anxiety that is always present in *Dasein*. Although these 'bad feelings' themselves cannot cast us out into the nothing, I accept that they can effectively prepare us for that transformation by preparing us to feel anxiety or boredom because the feelings themselves are akin to nihilistic thought.

I must admit, however, that I have a much harder time recognizing how joy in the existence of a particular person will likewise prepare us to experience the nothing. The experience of joy, to my mind, appears to work against the revelation of the nothing, for joy focuses the attention on the existence of the particular one loved or the experience producing the joy. Take for example the birth of a child, which typically produces feelings of intense joy for a parent. Such a feeling does not cast one into the nothing, but rivets one to the child just born. Even if one accepts Heidegger's example of joy, that is, taking delight in the existence of one loved and not in the person himself or herself, such attention still roots one in the momentary existence of a particular person, which appears to be antithetical to the impartial attitude of anxiety or profound boredom required to awaken *Dasein*. Joy always attends to the particular, to a being. How then does joy wake one up to being as a whole? Given this difficulty, I am sometimes tempted to ignore the claims Heidegger makes about joy in *What is Metaphysics?* Considering the lack of discussion on Heidegger's statements on joy in his 1927 address, I venture to say that others are just as puzzled by Heidegger's comments as I am. Sometimes I even think that maybe Heidegger's claims about the role

[26] Ibid., p. 93.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

of joy must be rejected, for he must not have caught the contradiction in his own thinking.

Although I do not have a definitive solution to my problem with Heidegger's use of joy, I take some comfort in the fact that Heidegger never clearly tried to explain how joy does what he says it does. In fact, Heidegger admits that the answer itself is hidden. Quoting again from Heidegger's most significant passage on the effect of joy, he states that "Another possibility of such manifestation is *concealed* in our joy in the presence of the Dasein – and not simply of the person – of a human being whom we love."[27] So, I think it clear that Heidegger is suggesting that somehow joy can play a significant role in the revelation of beings as a whole. What is not clear – what is concealed – is how joy fulfills this role.

Clearly, Heidegger works hard to explain how anxiety awakens us from our metaphysical slumber in *Being in Time*. He works equally hard in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* to explain the mechanism of profound boredom, which he briefly introduced in *What is Metaphysics?* Although I have no doubt that Heidegger could have provided a similar detailed study of joy, the fact remains he did not.

The closest Heidegger ever came to explaining how joy leads one to an irruption of *Dasein* is in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In this work Heidegger does not actually focus upon joy, but upon fundamental attunements in general, with profound boredom being his primary example. However, his comments about attunements in general provide some answers to why he did not believe a detailed discussion about the connection between joy and *Dasein* was necessary or fruitful.

In Part I of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger explains that the most basic task of philosophy is to wake up the fundamental attunements that are concealed in contemporary *Dasein*.[28] He understands that such a goal leads one to ask which fundamental attunements should be awaken. In short, his answer in this section is the attunement that fundamentally pervades the contemporary culture. Yet Heidegger recognizes that we can never determine this attunement unless we first understand the situation in which we find ourselves. Heidegger explains that the explicit characteristics of his contemporary situation are well known and can be summarized in the slogan, the "decline of the West."[29] Heidegger proceeds to explicate four interpretations of this slogan, each fundamentally pointing back to Nietzsche as the common source. Not especially concerned if these four interpretations of his situation are correct or not, Heidegger is more interested in providing

[27] Ibid., p. 87; italics added.
[28] *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 59.
[29] Ibid., p. 70.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

a diagnosis of the contemporary situation, and a subsequent prognosis. Together, this diagnosis/prognosis provide the details necessary to see where we now stand. Or, to be more accurate, this investigation into the philosophy of culture leads us not to ask 'Where do we stand?' but 'How do things stand with us?' Heidegger reminds his reader that no one has to prove the prognosis/diagnosis right or wrong to answer the question of 'How things stand with us?' Rather, "We already know enough about our situation merely by ascertaining that there are these interpretations – the prevalence of philosophy of culture – and that they determine our existence [Dasein] in many ways, even if we cannot say precisely how."[30] The determination, Heidegger explains, is given through an awareness of pertinent and driving moods. So, Heidegger is trying to convince his reader that in order to find and awaken the fundamental attunement which will bring us to *Dasein* we must first understand which mood or moods have influence in our contemporary situation.

This means that in profoundly different situations, we would expect to discover that different moods move us. I suspect Heidegger focused upon anxiety and profound boredom precisely because they are now how things stand with us. That is, living in a Nietzschean world already collapsing we would expect the mood of anxiety (and the related mood of profound boredom) to be the one which moves us, to be the cure of our forgetfulness. If anxiety is the fundamental mood of our situation today, Heidegger is correct in focusing his attention on that mood and no other. To study any other mood in greater detail – such as joy – would be a waste of effort, for the mood would not speak to us today.

This does not mean, however, that a mood foreign to our contemporary situation like joy could not have been a fundamental attunement in a different time and place. Instead, I suspect that the fundamental attunement of joy would have had a large effect in a time when the West did not see itself as declining, but flourishing. For example, I imagine that the medieval world of high scholasticism would have been much more 'in-tune' with joy than anxiety. Thomas Aquinas may serve as a fine example here. He would have been much more moved to an irruption by joy – which he believed to be the feeling of delight associated with reason and God, the totality of being – than a feeling of being held out into the nothing.[31] In fact,

[30] Ibid., pp. 76–77.

[31] See *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 31, a. 3. Although the nothing may not have moved Aquinas to any kind of raised self-awareness, it is interesting to note that Aquinas believed that a person transcends her natural state when she either is raised to a higher knowledge by God, or when she is cast down into debasement, by violent passions or madness. (See *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 28, a. 3). Although I find it very interesting that Heidegger actually held what some may believe to be a very un-Heideggerian position (that joy can be a fundamental attunement that reveals *Dasein*), I find it just as interesting to note that the Angelic Doctor agreed with Heidegger that some 'bad moods' may actually bring one to transcendence.

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Aquinas would have had a very hard time even conceiving that the nothing could do anything at all, since nothing is not simply what remains when you remove all beings, but the privation of all being. Given his strong education in Catholic thought, Heidegger undoubtedly knew that his description of anxiety would have been ignored in the middle ages, as it is by some contemporary Christians. In the same way, he might have realized that a detailed study of the fundamental attunement of joy would have been absolutely foreign to his contemporaries. This does not mean, however, that joy is not a fundamental attunement, just like anxiety or profound boredom. It just means that the fundamental attunement of joy would not effectively speak to his Nietzschean age.

Dr Michael R. Miller
Mount St Mary's University
Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727. USA

© The Dominican Council 2005

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2005.00093.x Published online by Cambridge University Press