

Governing Moods: Anxiety, Boredom, and the Ontological Overcoming of Politics in Heidegger

JONATHAN MCKENZIE *Purdue University*

Attunements are not side-effects, but are something which
in advance determine our being with one another.

(Heidegger, 1995: 67)

Much recent scholarship explores the consequences of Heidegger's transformation of philosophic thinking for our understanding of political theory at the edge of modernity (Salem-Wiseman, 2003; Blitz, 2000; Villa, 1995; Thiele, 1995). How can Heidegger be appropriated for contemporary political theory? Responses range from Blitz's argument that political philosophy can demonstrate the limits cases of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* and contemporary world picture (Blitz, 2000: 169) to Salem-Wiseman's declaration that Heidegger's *Dasein* is a concept of self similar in many ways to the self that anchors liberal political theory (Salem-Wiseman, 2003: 549–53).

This essay makes two claims to strengthen the understanding of Heidegger's early philosophy as political theory. First, those who appropriate Heidegger's *Being and Time* as political theory insufficiently account for the socio-political core of the text, the ontic/ontological distinction. Second, two of Heidegger's most important moods, anxiety and boredom, reveal this distinction to us in a way that sheds light on Heidegger's alternative to the communitarian/liberal divide in political theory. With these distinctions, I aim to make clear the ways in which Heidegger's early work disregards the liberal/communitarian divide in contemporary political theory in favour of an *existential* reflectivity that fully

Acknowledgments: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2007 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois. The author wishes to thank Michael A. Weinstein, Daniel W. Smith, and Thierno Thiam for help and constructive criticism throughout.

Jonathan McKenzie, Department of Political Science, Purdue University, 100 N. University, West Lafayette, Indiana, 47907 USA, jemckenz@purdue.edu.

Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique

41:3 (September/septembre 2008) 569–585 doi:10.1017/S0008423908080803

© 2008 Canadian Political Science Association (l'Association canadienne de science politique)
and/et la Société québécoise de science politique

engages human finitude, the sorrows of modernity, and the impossibility of engaging *ontologically* with a collectivity.

To do this, I first address the communitarian/liberal divide on Heidegger; then I show how the two basic moods of modernity, anxiety and boredom, are radically existential responses to politics; and finally, I use these two fundamental moods to examine the core of Heidegger's phenomenology, the ontic/ontological distinction.

I argue that Heidegger's two fundamental moods, boredom and anxiety, are anchored by a reclusive privileging of the "ontological," or objectless, experience that *Dasein* can undergo by itself and for itself. Boredom and anxiety contribute to our understanding of Heidegger's critique of the "metaphysics of presence" and supply us with a sense in which the ontological experience of *Dasein*'s authenticity always already includes the absence that will take the form of nothingness (anxiety) or emptiness (boredom). In each case, *Dasein* detaches itself from *das Man* ("the social one") to become an independent actor in the appropriation of its own finitude. This reclusive turn, which can only be taken by *Dasein* and for *Dasein*, suspends the possibility of experiencing the community *authentically*.¹ In addition, Heidegger's fundamental ontology awakens us to the way in which a radically existential philosophy of being cannot uphold the values of a liberal community.

Dasein's Community: Being and Time as Political Theory

Blattner's recent commentary on Heidegger's *Being and Time* attempts to understand the role of Heidegger's concept of *das Man* (interpreted by him as "the Anyone") to the understanding of the sociological aspects of Heidegger's phenomenology. What Blattner finds, to no surprise, is that we cannot interpret *das Man* as a concretely constituted social community but as a distinctly anonymous group of roles:

The others are not a community constituted by common commitments, but rather the Anyone. The shared social horizon, the with-world, is made up not of some definite group, a sum of persons, but rather by a social structure, a web of paraphernalia-roles, tasks, and for-the-sakes-of-which. (Blattner, 2006: 69)

Blattner hits upon a central concern for political theorists regarding Heidegger's *Being and Time*. That is, in a work that concentrates on the fundamental structures of human existence, to what degree can we call the "with-world" a collectivity *in the political sense*? This discussion organizes fundamental debates over Heidegger's political philosophy. Most political theorists tend to align Heidegger with the communitarian camp (Young, 1997; Thiele, 1997, 1995; Dostal, 1992; Sluga, 1993) while a select few undermine the communitarian reading with disruptive agonistic

Abstract. Much recent scholarship explores the consequences of Heidegger's transformation of philosophic thinking for our understanding of political theory at the edge of modernity. In a response to recent readings, this essay argues that the contemporary literature on Heidegger fails to account for two fundamental concerns: the ontic/ontological distinction and the importance of moods, particularly anxiety and boredom. Utilizing these moods, this essay explores the ways in which Heidegger's thought escapes politics through a privileging of the ontological, or object-less, experience, relying on a reclusive reflection as the way to authenticity. Instead of fostering a strong community or strong liberal sense of self, Heidegger leaves us with the nothingness of anxiety and the emptiness of boredom as our alternatives. By transcending the ontic in favor of the ontological, Heidegger divorces himself from politics in the everyday sense and posits an existential response to political theory that is unable to foster authentic collective life.

Résumé. Une part importante de la littérature récente explore les conséquences de la transformation de la pensée philosophique amenée par Heidegger et ses effets sur notre compréhension de la théorie politique à l'aube de l'ère moderne. En réponse à de récentes lectures, cet essai relève deux manquements fondamentaux dans la littérature contemporaine sur Heidegger. Le premier concerne la distinction entre l'ontique et l'ontologique et le deuxième a trait à l'importance des humeurs, plus particulièrement l'anxiété et l'ennui. En explorant ces humeurs, cet essai dévoile les manières dont la pensée de Heidegger échappe à la politique en privilégiant l'expérience ontologique ou immatérielle et en se fondant sur la réflexion recluse, voie qui mène à l'authenticité. Au lieu de favoriser une communauté forte ou un sens profond et libéral de soi, Heidegger nous laisse comme options de rechange le néant de l'anxiété et le vide de l'ennui. En transcendant l'ontique en faveur de l'ontologique, Heidegger se sépare de la politique au sens premier du terme pour donner une réponse existentielle à une théorie politique incapable de forger une vie collective authentique.

politics (Smith, 1996)² or a retreat to contemporary liberal theories of the self (Salem-Wiseman, 2003).

Communitarian readings of Heidegger specialize in liquefying the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* and moulding it into an understanding of Heidegger's concrete political alignments with National Socialism (Sluga, 1993; Dostal, 1992). These readings fail to take account for the way in which *Dasein*, while always already in the world, is not constituted ideologically, but practically through its roles. Even those, such as Dallmayr, which attempt to avoid the vilification of Heidegger's "personal" politics rely on a deconstructive reading of *Being and Time* that contends that Heidegger's *Dasein* refers not to us humans but to existence in the project of understanding being (Dallmayr, 1984: 534–36). With this move, Dallmayr's communitarian reading of Heidegger posits that *Dasein* itself transcends subjectivity and intersubjectivity, instead treading the new ground of "being-in-the-world" that refuses to take a stance on the subject/object divide. This move is untenable for several reasons, the most important of which is that Heidegger's *Dasein*, in its appropriation of mood, takes a reflective stance *toward* existence that cannot be accomplished through a collectivity of commitments (which, as we wallow in postmodernity, seems increasingly improbable) but by

the human being for the human being. We can see evidence of this in the fact that Heidegger devotes attention in *Being and Time* to the impossibility of “dying-with,” which cements non-being as a thoroughly individual possibility—one’s “ownmost possibility,” in fact (Heidegger, 1962: 237–41).

In response, Salem-Wiseman’s important essay does much to disrupt Heidegger’s reception as a communitarian political thinker. While acknowledging that Heidegger’s later work could certainly substantiate communitarian claims, Salem-Wiseman reserves Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as a forerunner of liberal theories of the subject (2003: 533–34). Salem-Wiseman relies on Heidegger’s refusal to construct a concept of the good (or a plurality of goods) as evidence that his phenomenology cannot align itself with the communitarian political theories of, say, MacIntyre or Sandel: “Heidegger is philosophically much closer to modern liberals who also reject teleology and the consequent priority of the good in political life” (Salem-Wiseman, 2003: 539). Heidegger’s insistence that *Being and Time* is not a work of ethics, Salem-Wiseman contends, devastates the neo-Aristotelianism assumed present in the work. By leaving *Dasein* open to its possibilities (in fact defining openness to possibility as *Dasein*’s freedom) Salem-Wiseman accords an air of liberal legalism to the work.

Salem-Wiseman’s work, while important in its deconstruction, fails to give us anything substantial other than a “coincidental” liberalism that is forged by accidental similarities. Salem-Wiseman’s constructive argument relies too heavily on what could have been meant by what *was never said* in Heidegger; in fact, one comes away from the reading with the sense that, at best, Heidegger’s “liberal” forerunning is a mixture of Jamesian pluralism and hermeneutic method (545–53). By concentrating on the particularly existential conception of political life, this essay rejects both readings in favour of an analysis of *Being and Time* that discards the liberal-legal and communitarian-constitutive political world of exchange in favour of an ontic/ontological distinction of self-affirmation through resolute resignation.

This is grasped most clearly through the difficult moods of anxiety and boredom, the two ways in which Heidegger’s *Dasein* can suspend itself amid the socio-political world of modernity. Two basic rejoinders can be made regarding Heidegger’s political potential: *Dasein can do nothing of existential consequence while absorbed in the world of others and the mood of profound boredom cancels “care,” the early Heidegger’s most routinely “political” concept*. Even when *Dasein* takes its turn toward a resigned freedom through anxiety, it is not the liberal concept of self-liberty that occupies western thought. With this in mind, I turn to Heidegger’s conception of moods, particularly the two of most important to us in this study.

Being-in-the-Mood: Anxiety, Boredom, and Politics

Heidegger's fundamental ontology advances Husserl's phenomenological project through a move to understand the way in which the human being, *Dasein*, actually is in order to appropriate the possibility of understanding its Being. At the forefront of *Dasein*'s being is the notion that it is always in some mood. Heidegger notes that moods, from the circumspensive "fear" to the reflective "anxiety" inform *Dasein*'s encounters with equipment in the world and the nothingness of its future as a being. Much can be made of Heidegger's appropriation of moods—or, as interpreted by Heidegger's translators, "attunements," to the understanding of political life. One particular attunement reveals itself as the "fundamental" mood of *Dasein*: anxiety. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to anxiety as *the* fundamental attunement of *Dasein* (1962: 229, 310). Anxiety, as a state-of-mind, is *Dasein*'s way of authentically taking a resolute stance toward "the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of its existence" (310). Anxiety is the mood in which *Dasein* takes a stance toward its own death. In this sense, anxiety is an ontological emancipation from the ideologies of finitude's forgetting of itself.³

We can better understand the difficulties of appropriating our "Being" in late modernity from a companion analysis of another of Heidegger's moods: boredom (Heidegger, 1995; Thiele, 1997). Other than anxiety, boredom is the only attunement which Heidegger considered *fundamental* to understanding *Dasein*'s Being (1995: 79). While anxiety promises liberation by placing *Dasein* face to face with the "possibility of the impossibility," boredom is a mood that is brought on by *Dasein*'s search to find meaning for itself amidst the suffocating directive of "world trade, technology, and the economy" (1995: 77). In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger turns his focus to the concept of boredom as an "ontological hole" at the bottom of being. As a result of this interesting turn in Heidegger's philosophical mood, this section will perform three tasks: 1) an examination of *attunement* as fundamental to understanding being; 2) a brief explication of anxiety and boredom in Heidegger's thought; and 3) an analysis of the "nothingness" of anxiety and the "emptiness" of boredom as exemplary philosophical tools of late modernity.

The Phenomenology of the State-of-Mind: Heidegger on Moods

Heidegger confronts *Dasein*'s being from the standpoint of moods. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Heidegger notes that moods are not something trivial to understanding *Dasein*; in fact, they are the only way in which we can confront being: "Attunement belongs to the being of man" (Heidegger, 1995: 63). Moods

can be awakened in *Dasein*, which suggests that they are always there, even when they are not “present.” The mood of joy, for instance, is not created anew each time I feel a sensation in my body of warmth or comfort. Indeed, the mood is always present in the human being—it is merely *sleeping* when we are not currently “in” it (1995: 66). Heidegger suggests that moods co-constitute *Dasein*’s very being—they tell us, for instance, “where *Dasein* is” when *Dasein* confronts its environment or its possibility (1995: 63). Further, attunement discloses itself as a fundamental mode of *Dasein*’s sociality: “Attunement is not some being that appears in the soul as an experience, but the way of our being there with one another” (1995: 66).

Since attunement is part of *Dasein*’s being and relates *Dasein* to environment and the social world, Heidegger notes that *Dasein* can never escape attunement altogether; in fact, only a change in attunement is possible (1995: 68). Even the seeming lack of attunement, “indifference,” appears to Heidegger to carry some semblance of *Dasein*’s other moods—most importantly, that indifference acts as a forerunner of the interpretation of experience. Being-attuned is *Dasein*’s way of apprehending the world and its place within the world: “having a mood brings *Dasein* face to face with its thrownness in such a manner that this thrownness is not known as such but disclosed ... in ‘how one is’” (Heidegger, 1962: 389). Moods always relate themselves to the past, such that they are primarily “bringing one back” to something (1962: 390). The inauthentic moods (fear, hope) provide an escape from *Dasein*’s “ownmost possibility” of its being-towards-death; the *authentic* moods (anxiety, guilt) provide *Dasein* with a state of mind in which it can confront the possibility of the impossible—its own death—with resoluteness.

How can we differ between the inauthentic and authentic moods? What makes a mood authentic, and what type of claim is Heidegger making with this distinction? Heidegger relies on a variant on the concept of “alienation,” suggesting that moods differ by the degree to which they engage the human being’s “homelessness” in the world. Through the discussion of moods, we find evidence of Heidegger’s insistence on *Dasein* as “fallen away” from itself. Steiner notes, “This bold antinomy, this view of the ‘positivity’ of alienation, sets Martin Heidegger’s thought sharply apart from that of the two other great models of man’s fall in modern western culture: the Marxist and the therapeutic... ‘Fallenness’ is the inevitable quality which characterizes an individual’s involvement with others and with the phenomenal world. There can be no cure from being” (1989: 98).

Inauthenticity is a primary component of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world. Through its dealings with others *Dasein* becomes alienated from itself and forms identifications with other human beings and with the world of phenomena. How does this inauthenticity reveal itself in moods?

Take, for instance, the mood of fear. Fear induces a backing-away of *Dasein* from a “factual potentiality-for-Being” of its own (1962: 392). With its backing-away from its ownmost potentiality, *Dasein*'s fearfulness is, for the most part, a forgetting: “in the face of this potentiality one backs away in bewilderment, and this kind of forgetting oneself is what constitutes the existential-temporal meaning of fear” (1962: 392). Fear is inauthentic because it backs away from itself and it does not *take hold* of any definite possibility. The same can be said for hope, which clamours for an object in the face of *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility of its death. The space for distinction between *Dasein*'s authenticity and inauthenticity, revealed through mood, is the way in which *Dasein* confronts its own death: with resolute clarity (anxiety) or escapism (fear, hope).

Heidegger's moods open *Dasein* to confront its own being with a circumspective or reflective gaze from its past and toward its future. The temporality of moods suggests that *Dasein* enters into a mood looking back at “what has been”; in other words, *Dasein* is always already incorporating its past into the analysis of its futurity. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic moods provides us with some idea how *Dasein* should appropriate its states of mind in pursuit of an understanding of being. Anxiety, as the authentic liberation of *Dasein* from its inauthenticity and toward its resoluteness, is a *fundamental* mood, close to *Dasein*'s essence. Can there be any other mood besides anxiety which is fundamental to *Dasein*? If so, what can this mood provide *Dasein* without attaching itself to an object? And what do these moods mean for modern “community”? Simply put, anxiety and boredom uncover the way in which *Dasein* overcomes the world of politics *ontologically*; that is, they reveal that fundamental moods reveal the world of politics as alive, but that politics, as an *ontic* exercise, involves itself in the covering up of *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility. Anxiety and profound boredom clear the path for the self-appropriation of existence, which is constituted through the affirmation of being-unto-death in the face of (and in direct response to) placid, inauthentic affirmations that *being is good*.

Bored with Boredom? Anxious for the End? On the Relation of Two Fundamental Attunements

How does *Dasein* rise to anxiety? We are best served through a concentration on Heidegger's employment of the term “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) as an explanation. As mentioned above, Heidegger's anxiety reveals what Steiner calls the “positivity of alienation” in hopes of uncovering the authenticity behind existential reflection. In contrast to fallenness, *Dasein*'s authentic being-in-the-world, exposed through anxiety, arises out of a feeling of the “uncanny”: “As we have said earlier, a state of mind makes

manifest 'how one is.' In anxiety one feels 'uncanny.' Here the particular indefiniteness of that which *Dasein* finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to the expression: the 'nothing and nowhere.' But here 'uncanniness' also means 'not-being-at-home'" (Heidegger, 1962: 233).

Through uncanniness, best realized as "being a stranger in the world," *Dasein* feels its anxiety toward the possible impossibility of its Existence. To exist within a world in which *Dasein* does not feel as if it belongs brings about the feeling of anxiety, which itself is directed toward the Nothing of its ownmost possibility. Despite the "uncanniness" of its own existence, *Dasein* within the grasp of anxiety has the opportunity to realize "the true being of the self is fundamentally *unheimlich*" (Nishitani, 1990: 166). Because anxiety is a mood of authentic being, it does not hide this fact from *Dasein* but, rather, forces *Dasein* to face the reality of its own nothingness.

Anxiety reveals itself as the fundamental attunement of *Dasein*'s authentic stand toward its own existence. As Nishitani notes, "Anxiety does not mean a rational grasp of nihility. It means that we encounter nihility in the experience of having beings-as-a-whole gradually withdraw and slide away from us, assuming a strangely alienating aspect.... The attack of nihility does not signify the negating of beings: negating means power, whereas anxiety means a complete powerlessness in relation to beings" (1990: 167). Anxiety as a liberatory mechanism of *Dasein* does not reveal itself as any sort of power; instead, anxiety is best realized as resolute resignation to the possibility of the impossibility of Existence. Anxiety is the mood of the Nothing, and the actions *Dasein* takes out of its anxious state (which are the way in which *Dasein* authentically deals in its temporality) reveal the necessity of resignation to death, without necessarily ceding responsibility for life. In one of the great paradoxes of *Being and Time*, anxiety forces *Dasein* to take responsibility for its life, even though it is not in control of it.

In contrast to the analysis of anxiety, Heidegger's other fundamental attunement, boredom, reveals a much more insolent nature. While Heidegger could separate fear and anxiety through the utilization of ontic/ontological distinction and the authenticity/inauthenticity divide, boredom is a much more troubling mood. For starters, boredom can relate itself to nothing in particular or can be directed toward an object (becoming bored with a television program, for instance). Thus, it reveals *both* ontic and ontological dimensions. Secondly, although anxiety is the much more well-known mood of *Dasein*, boredom appears to be the more prevalent; in fact, as one Heidegger scholar notes, boredom is the "basic mood of our age" (Thiele, 1997: 490). Indeed, in Heidegger's words, boredom is "an insidious creature which maintains its monstrous essence in our *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1995: 91).

According to Thiele, boredom is the fundamental attunement of *Dasein* in postmodernity. Profound boredom (that is, being-bored-with, which lacks an object) exposes the holes in modern life by a refusal to be enticed *ontologically* by being. Since one encounters a world in which it is not compelled to choose authentically, *Dasein* finds itself “coping” with objects and other human beings in a world that is of no interest to it. Heidegger’s basic question in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is: precisely what kind of meaning can be found for *Dasein* amidst world trade, technology, and increasingly prescient economic structures? When *Dasein* is “carried along” by these dominating forces, exactly where can it turn to achieve meaning for itself *authentically*? Perhaps one would think that the increasing mechanization of human life would be a cause for great care to, in Weinstein’s words, “defend the flesh against the abuses of culture” (Weinstein, 1995: 7). Instead, what Heidegger finds, is that meaning all but vanishes before the “emptiness” of *Dasein*’s choices within-the-world. Heidegger’s employment of boredom as the fundamental attunement of post-industrial society suggests that the triviality of choice negates the presence of *actual, authentic life-choice*. This is the ground on which boredom rests, as “a silent fog in the abyss of *Dasein*” (1995: 78).

Boredom penetrates *Dasein* through two separate paths. *Dasein* can either *become bored with something* (such as a technological device, friend, or situation) or can *be bored with* (a case in which there is no object to call “boring” but only the emptiness of *Dasein*’s choices). In the first form of boredom, we find that this attunement is tied closely (as with anxiety) to *Dasein*’s experience of temporality. Boredom, simply put, is one way in which time *temporalizes*. When *Dasein* finds itself in a bored state of mind, this simply suggests that “time becomes long for us” (Heidegger, 1995: 80). When we are in the state of becoming bored with something, we are becoming bored because the object, person, or situation no longer passes the time. In this case, *Dasein* simply looks for something else that will pass the time—or in other words, reverse the speed of temporality in a particular case. When *Dasein* is bored with an object, its relation to the object is one of “holding-in-limbo” of time with the object itself “leaving us empty” (1995: 87). Heidegger gives the example of *Dasein* waiting for a train in a train station for three hours. In this case, *Dasein* is held in limbo by time and the space (the train station) leaves *Dasein* empty. This combination of being held in limbo and leaving-empty simply *awakens* the dormant feeling of boredom always already present in *Dasein*’s essence.

In the first instance, *Dasein* confronts its boredom with something that will *speed up time*. Usually, this is accomplished through occupation (in this case, perhaps through a crossword puzzle, a leisurely walk, or conversation with a stranger). However, this response can only tempo-

rarily speed the temporality of time itself and cannot provide *Dasein* with an authentic response to the “leaving-empty” of the environing world. In these cases, *Dasein* has to confront the slowness of time, attempting in any way possible to speed time up in order to escape the grasp of boredom; it does not necessarily matter how *long* one is in the train station, only that the time cannot be filled by anything the station has to offer to *Dasein*: “The length of time plays no role, not because time is too long, i.e., not because the measurable stretch of time which we objectively plot on our watch is too great—not because the progress of time is slow, but because it is too slow. We fight against the progress of time which is slowing down and is too slow for us, and which in boredom holds us in limbo” (1995: 97).

The slowness of time *Dasein* feels while waiting prompts the feeling of boredom, which becomes a dark cloud over *Dasein*’s experience within the particular time and space. Heidegger’s phenomenology of boredom highlights a fundamental characteristic of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world: the incessant occupation with others, *Dasein*’s fallenness to *das Man*, is an originary reason for *and* response to the challenge of boredom. *Dasein*’s everydayness is full of playing the game of averting boredom that inevitably arises. And, as *Dasein*’s existence becomes more mechanized, the opportunities for escaping boredom (through novelty) become more routine and, as a result, less compelling. This is Heidegger’s exposition of contemporary community; while we find ourselves occupied with others, a “silent fog” of boredom prevails over political life.

Behind either conception of boredom is the realization of *Dasein*’s emptiness with relation to the social world and its own possibility. Chronic boredom, which Heidegger calls “profound” boredom, lacks a fundamental object in the way that “becoming bored by” something relates itself to an *article*. In profound boredom, objects are not what is boring; indeed, “they are coincidentally that with which we *ourselves* are bored” (1995: 113). In profound boredom, Heidegger finds that *Dasein* takes a *casualness* toward its own being, such that it does not particularly care what it does in a given situation, or how it passes the time (1995: 117). For instance, if one attends a party on a Saturday evening, and “goes through the motions” during the party, one still leaves feeling somewhat *empty*. But it was not the company, the hors d’oeuvres, or the music that bored *Dasein*; instead, *Dasein* is bored with itself and as a result takes a *casual* stance towards its commitments and possibilities. This is the state at which boredom becomes profound—when *Dasein* feels a persistent emptiness *without an object*. In such cases, according to Heidegger, “there arises a *slipping away, away from ourselves* toward whatever is happening” (1995: 118). At this point we realize something very important: although boredom is a fundamental attunement of *Dasein*, it does not present an authen-

tic response to *Dasein's* being-towards-death; in fact, it appears to provide precisely the opposite function as anxiety. Profound boredom is a slipping away of *Dasein* from itself—not a fallenness, which is *Dasein's* original position, but a recession from the slowness of time toward complete resignation.

Profound boredom, like the ethical-religious despair of Kierkegaard, does not relate to objects at all but to the presentation of being to the self. The profound boredom forsakes an attachment to the object in favour of an ontological determination concerning the worthiness of the world (Heidegger, 1995: 116–20). Heidegger's analysis of profound boredom centres on the ontological indication of the mood suggested by the inability of objects to provide *Dasein* with any substantive quality: "Boredom becomes more and more concentrated on us, on our situation as such, whereby the individual details of the situation are of no consequence; they are only coincidentally that *which* we *ourselves* are bored, they are not *that which* bores us" (Heidegger, 1995: 113). In the case of profound boredom, the presence or absence of a particular object is of no consequence; profound boredom is *Dasein's* judgment concerning the world directed back toward *Dasein* itself. The way in which the world offers nothing, and *Dasein* sees emptiness, in an ontological sense, are part of the way in which existence becomes precluded by the numbing effects of mass technology and mass society (Tuttle, 1996).

For Heidegger, the two forms of boredom provide insight into the way in which time temporalizes and the response *Dasein* sustains to this phenomenon. Once *Dasein* finds itself in complex relations, fully ensconced in the force of economy, trade, and mechanization of the mind and body, the floodgates open for the awakening of a profound boredom. This boredom, which arises from *Dasein's* emptiness toward its own possibility, cements *Dasein* within space and time, providing no liberation or escape. When *Dasein* finds itself in the clutches of profound boredom, it resigns itself to its fate as *unheimlich*, without any type of resolution or redemption. Boredom is the fundamental attunement of *Dasein* in contemporary life—an empty mood for a period devoid of meaning.

Emptiness and Nothingness: Toward a Dialogue

Anxiety, through a resignation toward *nothingness*, is the way in which *Dasein* frees itself, authentically, from ontic flights into unreality or object-centred fear toward its own being. In this sense, anxiety is liberation for *Dasein*: "anxiety liberates him *from* possibilities which 'count for nothing,' and lets him become free *for* those which are authentic" (Heidegger, 1962: 395). Anxiety, although always already grounded in the past,

springs from the “resoluteness of the future” and becomes the standpoint from which the world is engaged. As a step in *Dasein*’s individualization, anxiety provides a response to nothingness as, to pose another paradox, *resolute resignation in the face of nothingness*—an acceptance of *Dasein*’s fate *without* a resignation to abandon possibility. In this sense, the *nothingness* confronted by an anxious *Dasein* is not necessarily *negative*—indeed, it is *Dasein*’s way back to himself.

We can contrast the positivity of nothingness with the negativity of *emptiness* in Heidegger’s analysis of boredom. While anxiety is a resolute resignation to the nothingness of its ownmost possibility, boredom is always already “stuck” in the emptiness of life-choice for the post-modern *Dasein*. Unlike anxiety, boredom is not a mood which provides an escape from some form of inauthenticity. Its many modes (becoming bored by, being bored with, and so forth) provide circles which are not *hermeneutic*—they cannot be traversed and they can only scarcely be understood. To feel the bite of emptiness is, in no way, redemptive for *Dasein*. Boredom, particularly profound boredom, demonstrates the power of emptiness over the social world of *Dasein*. There is no line toward return—no exit from the emptiness of a post-industrial existence. As human life increases in its mechanical complexity, *Dasein* becomes further and further removed from its concern with itself and its world. Profound boredom, experienced as living the feeling of emptiness, is a paralyzing force that afflicts *Dasein* at all corners. There is no redemption, no light at the end of the tunnel—only momentary reprieve made laconic through postmodernity’s “routinization of novelty” (Thiele, 1997).

Nothingness and emptiness are the two ways in which *Dasein* reaches from its past toward its future as possibilities. Nothingness is *the nothingness of the past, becoming the nothingness of the future*; emptiness, however, is the emptiness of the past stuck in the present, and *projected* onto the future. Through the analysis of Heidegger’s philosophy of moods, we have been able to trace the way in which attunement affects *Dasein*. Further, we have been able to isolate two fundamental moods—*anxiety* and *boredom*—as the best examples of the way in which *Dasein* “is.” Finally, we have seen how the nothingness of anxiety and the emptiness of boredom confront each other in *Dasein*’s temporality. If these two attunements are indeed the fundamental ways in which *Dasein* is, we can see them working against each other within ourselves. Boredom is, more than anything, the resignation from the possibility of resoluteness; in other words, boredom *deadens* the possibility of anxiety. Anxiety, as liberation from irrelevant possibilities, seeks to awaken itself from the grip of post-modernity by drawing *Dasein back toward its ownmost possibility*, which is not dependent on a particular epoch. Emptiness may be our particular cultural condition, but anxiety reveals itself as *Dasein*’s ownmost mood

of freedom regardless of the level of mechanization present in everyday life.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's *Dasein* becomes a being without a ground in the present—a being with the opportunity of experiencing its existential absence through anticipatory resoluteness (anxiety) or a slipping-away toward emptiness (boredom). Heidegger's moods devalorize presence in favour of a politics of lack; *Dasein* becomes engaged with projecting its possibility from the ashes of the past to the uncertainty of its future, which it must meet head on, despite the negation of the possibility of transcending its limit. The nothingness which becomes the payoff of *Dasein*'s investigation into its own being, hanging on through the thread of "care," becomes tenuous when related to the possible emptiness of profound boredom which, as an ontological attunement, also releases *Dasein* into its ownmost possibility within advanced technological society. *Dasein*'s ecstatic time, which relies on anxiety as the strand of continuity from the past through the projected future, could conceptually crumble with the advance of profound boredom.

The Ontic/Ontological Distinction: Reflection and the Erasing of the Political

What we find, through the analysis of moods and the display of nothingness as the liberation of *Dasein*, as well as emptiness as a threat, is that the distinction between authentic and inauthentic moods, that is, the ontological/ontic distinction, is the backbone of Heidegger's phenomenology. Everything which makes *Dasein* the reticent being-in-the-world transforms through the establishment of a mood that resigns *Dasein* to its fate without giving in. All of this takes place as *Dasein* moves from one mood to another. While *Dasein* is always already involved in its dealings with the world, it is at the point of transcendence, when *Dasein*'s circumstances become its opportunities, that the human being reaches the actuality of its being—that is, through the cognizance of its finitude. Behind *Dasein*'s moods is nothing more than the ontic/ontological divide, which, on its own, is solely based on whether the mood contains an object.

The absence of an object informs us that through mood *Dasein* moves outside the ontic world and toward a sphere that is its own. Profound (ontological) boredom, for example, cancels "care," Heidegger's structural realization of being-in-the-world (and, perhaps, the last gasp of a political possibility within *Being and Time*). When *Dasein* becomes profoundly bored, it has no recourse to the care structure that makes up its ontological grounding. Heidegger's appropriation of *guilt* as the mobilization of a conscience of care recedes under the terrifying coldness of a human being who is profoundly bored with itself, with its life, and with

its own experience of boredom. The resolute resignation of anxiety, which is so important to Heidegger's "absent heroism" of *Being and Time*, loses its ground under boredom: "Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escape, fabricated for the 'overcoming' of death; it is rather that understanding which follows the call of conscience and which frees for death the power over *Dasein*'s existence and of basically dispersing all fugitive self-concealments" (Heidegger, 1962: 310; Zimmerman, 1986: 139). Heidegger's insistence on the use of the call of conscience as the backbone of care appears to be an indispensable portion of his heroic turn toward allowing finitude to wash over one's self. While anxiety remains the way in which *Dasein* experiences authenticity through its own death, profound boredom, as the most powerful *counter-mood*, replaces the positivity of nothingness with the detachment of emptiness, thereby *cancelling* the care-structure and political power. This is the most important move in *Dasein*'s analysis of profound boredom; it is indeed the one mood in which *Dasein*'s ontological ground forfeits itself to the discontent of its own being.

Anxiety's absent heroism and boredom's cancelling of care elucidate the way in which Heideggerian authenticity bases itself on the absence of an object. The fact that boredom and anxiety are fundamental to *Dasein*'s being because they lack an object suggests much about the possibility of a postmodern political community within Heidegger's ontology. The vacuous community *Dasein* engages in its "dealings" with the world *must be overcome in order to appropriate being*. The human being's average everyday involvement, through the vehicle of *das Man*, is little more than a negation of the importance of "being-with" as a device of existential freedom. *Dasein* must release itself from its community to achieve a modicum of authenticity. As long as *Dasein*'s being concerns itself with beings, it cannot become the political actor it needs in order to deal effectively with its finite existence. Even profound boredom, an obstructive mood, must be appropriated through the individualization of *Dasein*, which occurs through the disintegration of (and detachment from) collective life.

The ontic/ontological distinction highlights one component of Heidegger's phenomenology often overlooked: the reliance on radical separation of *Dasein* from its world as the consequence of authenticity. As mentioned above, many efforts have been made within political theory to demonstrate the ability of Heidegger to transform either the communitarian ideals of social justice or the liberal conception of the self. Instead, what we see through this analysis of Heidegger's phenomenology is the transformation of community through the reflective turn, which serves to detach *Dasein* from the traditional trappings of collective existence. With no common ideologies, the call to community (which is, in its own way, a call to conscience) falls on deaf ears. All collective life, in which

Dasein is either bored or becoming bored, is done in the realm of the inauthentic. Though *Dasein* becomes itself in a world and with others, it is not *through* others that *Dasein* realizes itself. In fact, I take quite the opposite to be the case.

Conclusion

This essay began with the question of Heidegger's appropriateness to the study of political theory. The myriad ways of interpreting Heidegger's potential as a political thinker tend to focus on the ability to transform his thought into the communitarian camp or the liberalist camp. The most compelling factor in Heidegger's ontology, however, is the way in which *Dasein's* mood relates us to a socio-political scene which is bereft of ethical grounds for citizenship or a social structure that invites any type of identity politics. Indeed, Heidegger's *Being and Time* places *Dasein* within a world; this "with-world," however, is not enough to constitute a community in the liberal or communitarian political sense.⁴ The *Dasein* of *Being and Time* and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* contains no "we," no ideological foundation as an organized community of values. Instead, we have the vacuity of being-toward-death and the impossibility of bridging the divide of finitude except through resolute resignation, which is always carried out *by Dasein* and *for Dasein*. The relation with others is relegated to the *ontic* and can thus form no ontological foundation for a political order.

In *Being and Time*, when Heidegger espouses the phenomenology of *being-with*, we find evidence to support the claim that any collective existence—any political revolution—operating within the world is going to be a "levelling off" of potentialities of *Dasein*. The "with-world" is indifferent, and certainly does not contain the radical political potentiality of a communitarian utopia (Smith, 1996: 204). The claims made by Thiele (1995) and others, that Heidegger's radical philosophy could conceivably support a politics of postmodern "togetherness" fails to understand the way in which *Being and Time* declines ethical potentialities in favour of existential authenticity realized through an individuated radical separation. Heidegger's philosophy is not communitarian or liberal; it is, to be sure, *timely* in a political sense, but its potentiality lies in revealing the fundamental antinomies of political life, magnifying Kant's claim that we are unsociable social beings.

Instead of appropriating Heidegger's ontology for contemporary political philosophies, this essay has attempted to demonstrate the way in which Heidegger chooses the absent heroism available through the analysis of anxiety, in which the lonely *Dasein* faces its own finitude. As a contrast, the mood of boredom highlights Heidegger's discontent with the empti-

ness of postmodern existence and the challenge of an ontological mood which seems to cancel the kernels of concern present in *Dasein's* being. Heidegger reminds us that mood is the way in which we are with one another most fundamentally (1995: 66). Anxiety provides *Dasein* with the ability to stand at the edge of modernity and take a leap toward the disintegration of community through the resolute resignation of its own finitude. Boredom takes away the possibility of acting authentically, in an existential-political sense, replacing this “call of conscience” with a “being-bored-with” that emanates from its very being. For Heidegger, social and political questions come down to the essential distinction of *Being and Time*, the ontic/ontological distinction, and can only be understood through *Dasein's* mediating moods. *Dasein can do nothing of existential consequence while absorbed in the world of others*. Even when *Dasein* takes its turn toward a resigned freedom through anxiety, it is not the liberal concept of self-liberty that occupies western thought. The only freedom of consequence for Heidegger's *Dasein* is *existential freedom*.⁵ What awaits *Dasein* once it has taken the step toward authenticity? Not community, but nothingness and emptiness—the ontological holes in being. Once we take stock of the severity of this turn, Heidegger's potentiality as a liberal theorist or a communitarian voice is significantly damaged.

Notes

- 1 Clearly, Heidegger's *Being and Time* includes some degree of the “authentic” *Mitsein*, but it is a “being-with” that is not morally or collectively constituted *concretely*; in other words, being-with is not composed of selves, but of *ontological roles* (such as fate).
- 2 Smith poses the important question of whether Heidegger's phenomenology has created a community in which all collective belonging is a “leveling off.” Since Heidegger's *Mitsein* (being-with) is largely indifferent, Smith is unable to provide an affirmative answer to the question (1996: 203–05).
- 3 Two of the more interesting analyses of anxiety, namely Kierkegaard and Freud, both share the ontological frame that separates anxiety from fear. The “uncanniness” that accompanies anxiety is not directed toward an object in Kierkegaard, Freud, or Heidegger, which makes anxiety an ontological mood that responds to the finite being's “remembering” of its own finitude. See Kierkegaard (1981) and Freud (1959).
- 4 For an alternative view, see Thiele (1995: ch. 2).
- 5 For a great explication of the meaning of existential freedom, see Merleau-Ponty (2002: 504–530).

References

- Blattner, William. 2006. *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide*. London: Routledge.
- Blitz, Mark. 2000. “Heidegger and the Political.” *Political Theory* 28(2): 167–96.
- Dallmayr, Fred. 1984. “Ontology of Freedom: Heidegger and Political Philosophy.” *Political Theory* 12(2): 204–34.

- Dostal, Robert. 1992. "Friendship and Politics: Heidegger's Failing." *Political Theory* 20(3): 399–423.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1959. *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Alix Strachey. New York: Norton Publishers.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. 1981. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Nishitani, Keiji. 1990. *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Salem-Wiseman, Jonathan. 2003. "Heidegger's *Dasein* and the Liberal Conception of the Self." *Political Theory* 31(4): 533–57.
- Sluga, Hans. 1993. *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Gregory Bruce. 1996. *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Transition to Postmodernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Steiner, George. 1989. *Martin Heidegger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thiele, Leslie Paul. 1995. *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Thiele, Leslie Paul. 1997. "Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology." *Polity* 29(4): 489–517.
- Tuttle, Howard. 1996. *The Crowd is Untruth: The Existential Critique of Mass Society in the Thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Ortega y Gasset*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Villa, Dana. 1995. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Weinstein, Michael. 1995. *Culture/Flesh: Explorations of Post-Civilized Modernity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Young, Julian. 1997. *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zimmerman, Michael. 1986. *Eclipse of Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.-