

References

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Jan Sheppard

Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude

Carol J White. (2005). Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate.

Carol White's book probably stands as the most scholarly publication on Heidegger's analysis of death that is currently available. Including an indispensable foreword to the book, the noted Heidegger scholar, Hubert Dreyfus, identifies no less than eight positions on death and dying that various philosophers read into the relevant sections of *Being and Time*, concisely illuminating the arguments and counter-arguments for each stance. This provides us with a context for this publication, but it is also used as a testament to the towering contribution made by White, since Dreyfus argues that her position is the most compelling interpretation of Heidegger's account on death, based not just on the philosopher's earlier work, but consistent with writings produced throughout his life. I agree with this assessment. Given the thoroughness of her research, I was also left wondering how much more White could have contributed to this area had she herself lived longer. After all, this study was still a working project right up to the time of her sudden death. Thankfully, there is more available to us than the book itself; whilst we are provided here with five published chapters (excluding the Introduction), we have another two chapters that have been omitted from print and that are available on the internet, if one is so inclined to pursue this.

The book is also a remarkable piece of work given the author's own life circumstances. As the preface informs us, Carol White had lost the use of her hands and legs at the age of 13, after being paralysed by a tumour. Each letter and sentence was subsequently typed with the use of a wooden spoon. This became painful after a time, prompting White to organise support from students and colleagues, both for the execution of words into electronic text and for gathering relevant research material that she required in the course of her work.

White's book, I think, illuminates two main things. One is the fact that Heidegger's existential-ontological idea of death in *Being and Time* is prone to be rather unclear to us once we probe further into the actual text itself. Commentators have attributed various reasons for this: that Heidegger rushed it, or that he himself had an unclear sense of what he was trying to

say. These are plausible explanations, but the fact remains that we are still left with the question of what to make of the relevant passages in Division Two of his major work. A completely wrong reading of it, for example, can be attributed to Sartre, who reads Heidegger's articulation of death as 'demise'. Heidegger is very clear that, whilst he accepts that we are mortal beings and that this is anxiety-provoking for each of us, this is not the account of death that he is trying to articulate. Once we too are clear on this, and see ourselves on occasion as falling into such a similar Sartrean error, we are left with the question, 'Well, what *is* it, then, that Heidegger is groping for here?' This relates to the second thing to mention, which is that White's approach, based on the idea that we can interpret Heidegger's characterization of death by referring to all of his writings (right up to the last publication, *Time and Being*), provides us with a more coherent understanding of the phenomenon of existential (being towards) death.

White deftly argues in Chapter Two that authentic being towards death is to be understood in terms of the 'world-collapse' that grips a culture, and dying is the active struggling to preserve that world in the face of its collapse (think of 'world' as a context of meaning or significance). If there is any further interest in seeing how such a cultural perspective intertwines with human experience, I strongly recommend reading Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope* as a supplement to this book. However, I think that, from a therapeutic point of view, we might relate to this as a time in which we have reached a numbing end-point in our lives (our relationship has ended, or we have suddenly been told that our job is now redundant, for example), such that possibilities in that world have 'died'. But this is closer to a Kierkegaardian account of authentic being toward death, says White; what makes Heidegger's account different is its communal emphasis rather than remaining solely at the level of the individual subject (hence my Lear book recommendation, which I think ties the individual and communal together well). Here, as in so many other parts of the book, we are also treated to footnotes that warrant book-length explorations all of their own; White simply leaves us with trails of thought that potentially enlarge or widen the scope of the study, and then simply returns to the focus of her work.

Since the notion of time is crucial to Heidegger's account, White devotes Chapters Three and Four to an analysis of 'The Timeliness of Dasein' and 'The Derivation of Time' respectively. If you have struggled with Heidegger's contorted language in Division Two, this part of the book is an invaluable guide through those sections. What is so commendable about White is her ability to get to the heart of the text without over-simplifying the central ideas that Heidegger was presumably trying to flesh out. Where she does encounter the limits of her understanding in certain passages, she says so, but then never shies away from putting together her own rendition of what Heidegger might have been trying to say. This is all well and good, we

might say, but the real import of this is how illuminating her understandings really are, particularly in view of the numerous places in Heidegger's writings that vindicate such interpretations.

Chapter Five, titled 'The Time of Being', moves us more towards Heidegger's later philosophy, but in a way that refers us back to Being and Time and the ideas of authenticity, the moment of vision (*Augenblick*) and appropriation. Here again, White uncompromisingly explores the ideas behind the terms (or jargon, if you prefer), leaving the reader with a significantly richer and more coherent understanding of Heidegger's overall project, and, I might add, an appreciation of the crucial importance of finitude in the corpus of his thought as a whole.

References

Chapters 6 and 7 accessed at www.scu.edu/philosophy/CWhite.htm.
 Lear, J. (2006). *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*.
 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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The Therapist As Listener: Martin Heidegger and the Missing Dimension of Counselling and Psychotherapy Training

Peter Wilberg. (2004). New Gnosis Publications.

I get very fed up with 'trailers' showing all the best bits of programmes. I don't want to do that here – you need to read the book yourself. It is very exciting and stimulating. I am retired now and it caused me to want to rush out and start practicing again.

First impression: how hard have I worked over the years just to listen – to be with – to sit on my hands and count to 10? Wilberg says (p162): 'We hear, not the ear'. Oh, yes. Memories come flooding back of that listening with the whole of me – so exciting – so all involving. I'm thinking about how I think I listen and I don't – I fade in and out – I'm only human.

But first, a criticism: I can't find an accreditation for the picture on the cover, who I know to be Heidegger – but not everyone will. I can't find a description of the author, either. Not very welcoming for people new to this way of thinking.

The book starts with a paradox between how we are trained – the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and what it means in Heideggerian terms to be in the world, to be with other people. How might we reconcile this dilemma? Can we hold two ideas at the same time? Wilberg asks us to think of listening as relating – and he sets out to enlighten us and to consider 'the intrinsically therapeutic character of *listening*' (p1) (his italics). Wilberg asks us as therapists to explore our 'fully embodied presence' (p2) as