

ON BEING, NOTHINGNESS AND ONTOLOGICAL HOMELESSNESS: AN HEIDEGGERIAN INQUIRY INTO AUTHENTICITY

Prashan Ranasinghe

Abstract: This article claims that Martin Heidegger places significant importance on the ontological homelessness of beings, by which he means that beings are distanced and separated from their very essence and thus live inauthentic lives. Heidegger views this as more concerning than ontic homelessness, the condition of being without housing in the material sense. To explicate this, the article examines the fundamental attunements of profound boredom and anxiety and illustrates the way Heidegger relies upon them to underline the meaning of existence as nothingness. The article explicates the way Heidegger thinks about nothingness as a feeling or sense that things are not quite right and articulates how this not-quite-rightness is, in turn, read as the homelessness of being. The article reads the condition of being homeful (of having a home and being fulfilled) alongside and against the condition of ontic homelessness (via the example of contemporary homelessness,) to draw attention to the meaning of existence and to underline insights about being that can be culled from the condition of contemporary homelessness, insights, the article argues, the homeful would do well to pay heed to.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger; Being; Nothingness; Homelessness; Homecoming; “Homeful”; Time-Space; Profound Boredom; Anxiety; Authenticity; Ontology.

INTRODUCTION

The voluminous writings of Martin Heidegger could be described as eclectic in form and substance, but it is difficult to deny that the concern over being (penned in English translations as *Being*) unites the corpus of his work (see, Gelven, 1989: 4; Käufer, 2005). The concern over being is an ontological inquiry premised upon the being of entities, the “Being of beings” as Heidegger (2000/1935: 38) frequently puts it. Such an inquiry is specifically directed:

rather than focusing on the existence of beings (whether beings exist or what kinds of beings exist), the focus is on an even more fundamental issue, namely, the *meaning* of existence, that is, what does it mean to be (see, Gelven, 1989: 6-10)? As Heidegger explicates, though often quite cryptically, the meaning of being *is* nothingness – or, at least, that it is possible to think of being *as* nothingness (see, Käufer, 2005). By nothingness, Heidegger means a sense or feeling about the existence of life – an uneasy, nagging, feeling, so to speak – that is difficult, if not impossible, (for the subject) to fully explicate. In other words, it is an inkling that something (or things) are not quite right, but what exactly this is and why such a feeling persists is (largely) inexplicable. Michael Gelven describes this as follows:

But what is it that I dread? I cannot put my finger on one single object. [...] I cannot say what it is that bothers me [...]. In fact, if one were to ask me what bothers me, I would probably say, “Nothing.” In saying that I do not mean that I am not bothered at all, but there is no *thing* that bothers me. What bothers me is my *existence* (Gelven, 1989: 116; emphases in original).

Thus, if, as I seek to explicate, nothingness is pervasive in the lives of beings, then, the ability of beings to fully comprehend and come to terms with nothingness is, while certainly not compromised, nevertheless rendered difficult. In Heidegger’s words: “Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing, or in the end *entirely* so. The word ‘Being’ is then finally just an empty word. It means nothing actual, tangible, real. Its meaning is an unreal vapor” (Heidegger, 2000/1935: 38; emphasis in original).

Despite these limitations, Heidegger is clear that nothingness helps illuminate the being of beings. Specifically, nothingness brings beings face-to-face with their condition of homelessness. In other words, that nagging feeling that something is not quite right – what bothers beings, as Gelven (1989: 116) puts it – concerns the homelessness of beings, the homelessness, that is, of their existence. This is not the state of homelessness in the ontic sense, to use Heidegger’s phrase, where a being is unhoused – though this is certainly important. Rather, it refers to homelessness as an ontological issue. In other words, nothingness casts light upon the homelessness of humans and humanity and illuminates that shelter (e.g., a house) is not *the* precondition for being at home: one could be housed (and, in a home) in the everyday, ontic, sense, and

nevertheless be ontologically homeless (for a discussion on the (dis)connection between dwelling and homelessness, see Young, 2000; see also, Rose, 2012).

Heidegger explains this as such:

However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the proper plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses. [...] The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals each search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the proper plight of dwelling as the plight? Yet as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling (Heidegger, 2008/1954: 363; emphases omitted; see also, 2008/1947).

For Heidegger, then, ontological homelessness – illuminated through the nothingness of being – is crucial because it shines light on the inauthenticity of beings, that is, that beings are distant and far from their authentic state and, framed as such, is constructed as more important than material homelessness.¹ By an authentic state, Heidegger refers to the state where beings are aware of the meaning of their existence and understand the possibilities that lie ahead once such meaning is made sense of (see, Gelven, 1989: 73-110). The quest for the homecoming of beings – to bring beings to their authentic state – is what preoccupies Heidegger's philosophical inquiry (see, Mugerauer, 2008; O'Donoghue, 2011; see also, Eubanks and Gauthier, 2011; Lumsden, 2015).

In this article, drawing largely upon the early work of Heidegger,² I explicate the being of beings as nothingness and the way nothingness shines light upon the homelessness of beings while simultaneously setting the stage (or, at least the possibility) for a homecoming. To so do, I take as my point of discussion homelessness in the material sense, what I will refer to as

¹ Heidegger wrote briefly of the absence or loss of home and place in the material sense, for example, the housing shortage that ravaged his homeland shortly after the second World War (Heidegger, 2008/1954: 363), as well as of the import of particular places and locales, as when, for example, he appears to venerate his hometown, especially his cabin, where he spent a great deal of time devoted to his writing (see, Mugerauer, 2008: 478-541; O'Donoghue, 2011: 124-128).

² The early period of Heidegger is considered to be up to about 1930. The article also draws, though not as prominently, upon work from his middle and late stages. The focus, however, as noted, is upon Heidegger's earlier period.

contemporary homelessness. This is a somewhat difficult term to define and describe because it is quite ambiguous (see, Rossi, 1989: 10-13; 45-81; Hopper, 2003: 15-25). Acknowledging these issues, by contemporary homelessness I refer to visible poverty as found among numerous persons who are displaced from home for a plethora of reasons and find themselves occupying public and/or quasi-public spaces (e.g., sidewalks, parks and shelters) to live. The beggar seated on a pavement with an outstretched hand in anticipation of spare change is a vivid example of this phenomenon.³

I commence with a discussion of the way boredom constitutes the experiences of the contemporary homeless. Next, I explicate two “fundamental attunements” as Heidegger puts it, namely, profound boredom and anxiety, in order to explicate that being is nothingness (or, at least, that nothingness is an aspect of being). This lengthy discussion, unfolding in two sections, also demonstrates the relation between nothingness and ontological homelessness: nothingness illuminates the ontological homelessness of beings. Based upon this discussion, I return to the phenomenon of contemporary homelessness by reading this condition against the condition of being housed, what I refer to – in a nod to Heidegger’s call for neologisms when so required (Käufer, 2005: 493; Gelven, 1989: 24-25) – as the “homeful.” This term is meant to capture not simply that beings are housed – in a home or some other form of permanent shelter – but the predominant belief that being housed is the fulfilment of self (one is not simply full but *fulfilled* when one has a home, especially if one owns that property). Against this orthodoxy, I read contemporary homelessness as possibly serving as an opening of, or disclosing, the possibilities of being in its authentic form. Thus, I read the statuses of contemporary homelessness and the homeful to illustrate the way that rather than necessarily seeking to only import specific homeful qualities (discipline, rigour, work ethic, consumption etc., none of which are necessarily problematic) upon the condition of contemporary

³ The displacement of myriad persons from their home(lands) and found in various refugee camps or those persons who are the subjects of what is known as irregular migration are not considered here. The focus is limited to homelessness as found in North America and other Western nations.

homelessness (where it is often claimed that the absence of such values leads to the predicament of homelessness), it can be insightful to also import particular qualities of contemporary homelessness (freedom, openness, the absence of rigidities etc.) upon the homeful. This has the potential to shine light upon the possibilities that the homeful life could be oppressive, that is, inauthentic in Heidegger's terminology. What follows does not glorify contemporary homelessness. Rather, it probes what contemporary homelessness could possibly illustrate and bring to the fore about ontological homelessness by focusing upon the homeful and perhaps how far from authenticity their lives are situated. This does not mean that contemporary homelessness is an authentic state and that this is the state that humanity must strive towards; rather, what is claimed is that the often claimed position – that the contemporary homeless can learn from, and must comport themselves along the lines of, the homeful, especially so in public (see, Ranasinghe, 2011) – itself might need reconsideration. In this vein, I claim that the phenomenon of contemporary homelessness can shed meaningful insight upon the condition of the homeful and ontological homelessness as a whole.

BOREDOM AND THE EXPERIENCE OF CONTEMPORARY HOMELESSNESS

There are numerous aspects to the face of contemporary homelessness, but undoubtedly one commonality is boredom (e.g., O'Neill, 2017). Based on fieldwork from a variety of camps, "the face of profound boredom" (Stone, 1994: 3) has been vividly illuminated. For example, the observations at a soup kitchen lead Irene Glasser to describe the homeless life as one "filled with boredom and despair" (1988: 20), while Elliot Liebow speaks of boredom as "one of the great trials of homelessness" (1993: 29). Profound boredom is directly tied to a relationality with time, that is, how time passes and how it is spent. Based on the observations at a homeless shelter, for example, Robert Desjarlais describes the ways numerous "routines dulled over time" and the ways "People measured time" (1997: 91; 128). Thus, "many homeless have to fritter away [...] unscheduled time" in order to "ward off boredom" (Snow and Anderson, 1993: 210; 127), which amounts "to go[ing] out on the street and

kill[ing] time – *really kill[ing] time* [...]” (Liebow, 1993: 29; emphases added). This involves a variety of activities and techniques – smoking, drinking, telling stories, for example (Snow and Anderson, 1993: 127; Desjarlais, 1997: 93).

The profound boredom that constitutes the experience of contemporary homelessness has a particular implication, namely, it renders the being of homelessness as one of nothingness. Desjarlais, for example, describes how the need to pass time leads the homeless to do something and yet “end up not doing anything besides existing in an acutely stationary state of being or thinking” (1997: 92; see also, Ranasinghe, 2017: 103-108). This being and thinking, as I seek elucidate, is tied to a particular feeling that something is not quite right, that the meaning of being is, itself, unclear.⁴ In order to bring to light this notion of nothingness, I examine the way Heidegger relies upon profound boredom (and, later, anxiety) to illuminate the being of beings as one of nothingness.

THE FOG AND THE ABYSS OF RESTLESSNESS: BEING AND THE DEPTHS OF NOTHINGNESS

Heidegger’s concern over being, specifically, the meaning of what it means to be, leads him to the conclusion that the being of beings is nothingness (or, stated differently, that the being of beings can be seen as nothingness). Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger, 2000/1935) is one example that outlines the *means* (that is, method) by which the question of being (and its relation to nothingness) ought to be posed and considered:

The question about what is not and about Nothing has gone side by side with the question of what is, since its inception. But it does not do so superficially, as an accompanying phenomenon; instead, the question about Nothing takes shape in accordance with the breadth, depth and originality with which the question about beings is asked on each occasion [...]. The manner of asking about Nothing can

⁴ In some ways, this is an empirical question, that is, it is not whether nothingness permeates the lives of the homeless that is at issue, but whether the homeless themselves can see and appreciate this nothingness (cf., Desjarlais, 1997: 87-94; 123-128), that is, and to put it in Heideggerian terms, whether they are cognizant that such nothingness is crucial to the being of their beings. I return to this issue in the final section of the article.

serve as a gauge and criterion for the manner of asking about beings (Heidegger, 2000/1935: 26).

From here, Heidegger notes that “if we want to lay hold of Being it is always as if we were reaching into a void. The Being that we are asking about is almost like Nothing [...]” (Heidegger, 2000/1935: 38). In other words,

together with the path of Being, the path of Nothing must expressly be *considered*, that is consequently a misunderstanding of the question of Being if one turns one’s back on Nothing with the assurance that Nothing is obviously not. (That Nothing is not a being, however, by no means prevents it from belonging to Being in its own manner) (Heidegger, 2000/1935: 117; emphasis in original).

There is little, if any, doubt – even controversy – that for Heidegger, the being of being is nothingness (see also, Käufer, 2005; Gelven, 1989: 114-119). What is important for present purposes, however, is to shed light upon how Heidegger comes to this position. In order to explicate the being of beings – especially given, as noted above, it is like looking into a void, perhaps even grappling with a void – Heidegger relies upon Dasein to explicate being. When he so does, he unequivocally connects being to nothingness, as when he states, for example, that “Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 103), and that “Dasein can relate itself to beings only by holding itself out into the nothing and can exist only thus [...]” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 104).

Heidegger explicates Dasein as “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being [...]” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 27). In colloquial German, Dasein translates closely to “everyday human existence” (Dreyfus, 1991: 13), which in English translations is penned as “being-there”: “We name the being of man being-there, Da-sein” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 63; emphases omitted). As such, “Heidegger is interested in the human *way of being* [...]” (Dreyfus, 1991: 14; emphases in original). To put this differently, “Heidegger thinks of the being that raises questions. He names it Dasein, the kind of being that is open to Being” (Krell, 2008: 32). For present purposes, then, Dasein can be thought of as a way of being that has as its concern the meaning of existence: that is, what it means to be.

Given this, what needs explication is the way Dasein comes to shine light on the meaning of being, in particular, the relation between being and

nothingness. Here, Heidegger's discussion of profound boredom is a propitious place to commence (the appropriateness speaks for itself given the preceding section which situated the homeless condition as one of profound boredom). There is a voluminous literature on boredom that is not canvassed here (e.g., Gardiner and Haladyn, 2017), as there are insightful works that examine Heidegger's theorization of boredom (see, Emad, 1985; Goodstein, 2005: 281-333; Svendsen, 2005: 107-132). The focus here is not to provide a detailed schematic of Heidegger's discussion but to extrapolate pertinent points to move the discussion forward.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930), Heidegger undertakes a detailed discussion of boredom to explicate the way time constitutes being and how being, then, comes to make sense of nothingness. For Heidegger, "we are driven in our homesickness: to being as a whole. Our very being is this restlessness" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 5). Making sense of and coming to terms with this restlessness, including overcoming it, Heidegger states, necessitates understanding the way various fundamental attunements shine light upon the nature of being. An attunement, Heidegger explains, "has to do with the innermost essence of man's being, with his Dasein. Attunement belongs to the being of man" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 63; emphases omitted). To put this differently: "Attunements are the 'how' according to which one is in such and such a way" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 67; emphasis in original).

Heidegger describes three types of boredom – "becoming bored by," "being bored with" and "profound boredom" – to explicate the way boredom is a fundamental attunement of Dasein.⁵ Heidegger states that "*a profound boredom draws us back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein [...]*" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 77; emphases in original) – this is posed as a question both here and in the very next page, though for all practical purposes, Heidegger answers

⁵ Heidegger uses the examples of passing time in a train station and an evening at a dinner party to explicate the first two (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 78-131) and examines the last without a concrete example (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 132-167) because, he claims, one is not possible (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 135). While Heidegger labels the third form of boredom profound, his discussion shows that even the second form is profound, though not as profound as the third (see also, Emad, 1985).

it in the affirmative. Heidegger's position is that profound boredom illuminates being: "boredom ultimately grasps at the roots of Dasein, i.e., prevails in the ownmost ground of Dasein" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 96; emphases omitted). Yet, and what is problematic for being, is that "the essence of attunement remains concealed or hidden [...]" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 68), and this drives Heidegger in search of awakening this fundamental attunement (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 77), that is, to bring it to light and to the fore in order to illuminate the restlessness that constitutes being: "it becomes clear that awakening attunements is a manner and means of grasping Da-sein with respect to the specific 'way' in which it is, of grasping Da-sein as Da-sein, or better: of letting Da-sein be as it is, or can be, as Da-sein" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 68).

The tropes of the fog and abyss are, thus, evoked precisely to bring to the fore the inconspicuousness of the importance of the "the *depth* of boredom" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 107; emphasis in original), that is, its intensity, hence its *profound* nature. As Heidegger states, "the more profound the boredom, the *more silent*, the less public, the *quieter*, the *more inconspicuous* and *wide-ranging* it is" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 134; emphases added; see also, Dreyfus, 1991: 22), and this is so despite its "overpowering nature" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 136; emphases omitted). A fog reduces vision by reducing visibility, especially in terms of distance – anyone who has driven in a fog can attest to this. The adjective "silent" which describes or qualifies the fog is crucially important. With the phrase "silent fog," Heidegger seeks to capture the difficulty, even impossibility, of seeing not simply because it is foggy, but because the fog is silent (elsewhere, Heidegger refers to it as "a muffling fog [...]" (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 99), with the qualifier "muffling" meant to capture the same difficulty or impossibility though in regards to hearing). In other words, it is not simply that vision is impaired, but that this very impairment is itself impaired. This is why Heidegger claims that the essence of attunements – in this case profound boredom, but as will become apparent, anxiety as well – are hidden or concealed from beings or, at least, not fully revealed, so that "we do not know this depth [of concealment and impairment] and even less pay attention to it" (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 157; emphases

omitted). Thus, in the same ways that a fog reduces vision by hindering visibility, thereby making it difficult or impossible to see, Heidegger suggests that the failure to appreciate and embrace the *profoundness* of boredom similarly renders it difficult or impossible to see and appreciate the essence of beings, an essence that is separated and distanced from being. Thus – and, as explicated below – the real issue is not boredom or its profound nature. The real issue is the inability to see and make sense of the *import* of profound boredom to making sense of the being of beings and, thus, the constant and incessant desire to counteract boredom. As will become apparent, Heidegger’s concern is to undertake a “clearing” of this fog so to speak, so that a “tendency towards ‘seeing’” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 214) can be brought to the fore.

For Heidegger, “Boredom springs from the temporality of Dasein. Boredom [...] arises from a quite determinate way and manner in which our own temporality temporalizes itself. [...] [B]oredom is only possible because every thing, and more fundamentally every Dasein as such, has its time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 127; emphases omitted). Particularly, Heidegger claims that “the more profound it [boredom] becomes, the more completely boredom is rooted in time – in time that we ourselves are” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 133; emphases omitted). What unfolds with – and, in – boredom, then, is that as “time becomes drawn out, becomes long”, beings find themselves “making an effort, whether consciously or unconsciously to pass the time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 78; emphasis omitted), that is, to endure it. The pressing urge to pass or endure time, as will become apparent, becomes inimical to the essence of beings so that “*being [is] affected in a paralysing way by time [...]*” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 98; emphases in original). This enduring Heidegger calls “the problem of time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 80) and refers to it in various ways as a “confrontation with time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 96; emphases omitted) because “what is at issue in passing the time is wanting to overcome the vacillation of time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 98; emphases omitted). The vacillation of time speaks to the means by which beings go back and forth into the abysses of boredom, its depth, in other words, which incessantly drowns or paralyzes both beings and their being.

As alluded to above, the concern for Heidegger is not the profoundness of

boredom – in some ways, at least, the clearing he desires, which would open the possibilities of seeing authenticity, necessitates that beings come to terms with the importance of profound boredom to make sense of their being. The problem for Heidegger rather, is the incessant effort on the part of beings to “counteract” boredom (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 160) in order to endure the long nature of time, that is, its dragging quality. Heidegger is – or, at least appears to be – sympathetic to the plight of beings on this matter. He concedes that “Boredom in the ordinary sense is [said to be] disturbing, unpleasant, and unbearable” and, to make matters worse, “Becoming bored is [believed to be] a sign of shallowness and superficiality” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 158). For this reason, Heidegger admits that “it is difficult not to be opposed to profound boredom, difficult to let oneself be attuned through and through by it, so as to hear something essential from it” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 160; emphases omitted). Yet, this is precisely what Heidegger claims needs to happen. Thus, Heidegger cautions that “if such a thing as boredom is understood in the ordinary sense, then it is precisely the dominance of this understanding that suppresses profound boredom [...]” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 159; emphases omitted). The trope of the fog, to return to it once more, illuminates this: it is not simply that profound boredom is made difficult or impossible to see and appreciate but, more crucially, the very inability to see and appreciate its import eviscerates the possibility of seeing the essence of being. What results is that beings sink further and deeper into oppression (or, paralysis), where they are drawn further and further away from their essence. It is here that the significance of the trope of the abyss is illuminated. If an abyss can be thought of as a deep chasm or hole, even something that is bottomless (recall Heidegger’s description of reaching into a void), then, it is possible to appreciate the depth, that is, degree, of oppression that beings face in not being face to face with being. To put this differently: profound boredom provides one avenue to see and appreciate the bottomlessness (that is, the depth) of the restlessness (that is, oppression) that constitutes the paralysis of beings (their distance from their essence, their being, their homelessness). This would mean wholeheartedly embracing profound boredom, and Heidegger’s quest is to awaken fundamental attunements so that beings can see the essence of their being. Heidegger is

unequivocal, however, that “This profound boredom only becomes *awake* if we do not counteract it” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 160; emphasis in original).

If profound boredom is allowed to take its rightful course what materializes is particularly acute: “there persists an *emptiness*”, writes Heidegger (1995/1929-1930: 121; emphasis in original), “an emptiness as a whole” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 162), one that is “quite unambiguous and straightforward” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 137). “It is an emptiness”, he continues, “precisely where [...] we want *nothing* from the particular beings in the contingent situation as these very beings” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 137; emphasis added). In other words, the emptiness that emerges from awakening this fundamental attunement “takes us back to the point where all and everything appears *indifferent* to us” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 137; emphasis added). This, Heidegger describes as such: “Beings have [...] become indifferent as a whole. Beings as a whole do not disappear[,] however, but show themselves precisely as such in their indifference. The emptiness accordingly here consists in the indifference enveloping beings as a whole” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 137; emphases omitted) – the import of indifference will reveal itself shortly, when anxiety, another fundamental attunement, is examined.

If beings, thus, are left empty, this very emptiness is the precipitator towards nothingness: “in boredom we are *bound* precisely by – nothing” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 97; emphasis in original), and this nothingness, ironically, is the source of restlessness that oppresses beings and highlights their homelessness to them. “Profound boredom”, Heidegger says, is “a homesickness” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 80), alluding to the yearning of beings to be at home, that is, their essence or authentic state. The connection, however, between emptiness and nothingness and, in particular, being and nothingness is somewhat ambiguously and quite abstrusely explicated, as for example, when Heidegger writes that “In boredom [...] nothing happens through the fact that we have taken time [...] and] it is ultimately the very fact that we have taken time that gives time the possibility of holding us in limbo and indeed in a more profound way” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 121; emphases omitted). Lars Svendsen seeks to illuminate the connection between profound boredom and nothingness that Heidegger refers to when he notes that “In boredom, we experience the reality

of nothingness, or rather the *nothingness of reality*. [...] The nothingness of boredom seems ultimately to be the only phenomenon that has relevance to us” (Svendsen, 2005: 129-130; emphases added; see also, Thiele, 1997: 502-504). Despite this effort, Heidegger’s discussion of boredom and nothingness does not fully (or, clearly) reveal how it is that nothingness comes to explicate the being of beings as homeless. Fortunately, however, Heidegger’s discussion of another fundamental attunement, namely, anxiety, is a clearer exposition of the relation between being and nothingness, to which attention now shifts.

ANXIETY, NOTHINGNESS AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF BEING

For Heidegger, “the basic state-of-mind of anxiety [i]s a distinctive way in which Dasein is disclosed” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 228). What is significant about anxiety – similar to profound boredom – is that in some ways it is not fully subject to explication (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 231; see also, Ranasinghe, 2019). This is because “we can never comprehend absolutely the whole of beings in themselves [...]” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 99; see also, Dreyfus, 1991: 22) and this is because particular moods are fundamental attunements of being, which is to say they exist primordially, that is, within beings themselves. Anxiety, like profound boredom, is one such mood (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 102). As explicated earlier, if profound boredom renders subjects indifferent (itself a product of the emptiness that swallows beings, which, in turn, highlights, although somewhat abstrusely, the nothingness of being), then, “Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with [...] the authenticity of its Being [...]” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 232). It is important to underline that, for Heidegger, anxiety is an ontological category that illuminates the being of beings – and, Heidegger is clear that “‘real’ anxiety is rare” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 234). This does not mean, however, that anxiety as a psychological or emotional aspect is bereft in Heidegger’s discussion. In fact, a close reading shows that the psychological component is present, as when, for example, he speaks of the “malaise of anxiety” (Heidegger, 2008/1929/101; see also 1962/1927: 234). That said, the key to underline is that anxiety, for Heidegger, cannot be strictly reduced to psychological terms, but must be situated within the broader concern of ontological inquiry. It is this method that helps shine light on the nothingness of being.

“Anxiety”, Heidegger says, “reveals the nothing” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 101). This is because even though a feeling of unease exists, even persists – that something is not quite right – it is difficult, if not impossible, to explicate why such a feeling envelops, permeates, consumes and swallows one (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 231). This is because anxiety, like profound boredom, emanates from within and, therefore, nothing tangible exists to point towards in order to comprehend and explicate this feeling – this is different from fear, for example, which comes from without and is, therefore, easy (or, easier) to pin point (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 179-194). This inability to fully articulate what is transpiring takes hold of a person and, by extension, begins to oppress that person. “We can” Heidegger says, “get no hold on things” and, thus, “In the slipping away of beings only this ‘no hold on things’ comes over us and remains” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 101). What this means, Heidegger says, is that “anxiety leaves us hanging [...]” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 101) and rather unsettled, that is, without firm footing or ground(ing), to know and understand life. “In this altogether unsettling experience [...]” he writes, “there is nothing to hold on to [...]” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 101), even though one is still “hanging” or, at least has a profound sense or need to hang (onto something) – in other words, one is hanging onto, nothing. What remains, then, is an emptiness, that is, nothingness:

Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of nothing. That anxiety reveals the nothing man himself immediately demonstrates when anxiety has dissolved. In the lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance we must say that that in the face of which and for which we were anxious was ‘properly’ – nothing. Indeed: the nothing itself – as such was there (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 101; see also, Heidegger, 1962/1927: 225-235).

Crucially, then, this means that beings are taken over and overcome by a sense of “utter insignificance” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 231; see also, Käufer, 2005: 487) because what is brought to the fore is not simply the very meaning of existence but also the illumination that existence is empty, is nothingness.

By nothingness Heidegger does not mean that beings do not exist, that they are *no-thing*. “In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of

beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing” (Heidegger, 2008/1929: 103). In this sense, there is an important difference between nothingness and nihilism in Heideggerian thought (see O’Donoghue, 2011: 191-197). If nihilism is taken to mean that things do not matter – that existence is meaningless – then, Heidegger is the antithesis of a nihilist because, as Gelven articulates well, the very probing of the being of beings, of what it means to be, already presupposes that existence has meaning, that it is meaningful (Gelven, 1989: 10-14; see also, Macquarrie, 1965: 45-57). In fact, Heidegger is unequivocal on this, evinced, for example, in his distinction between nothingness and nihilism, one that illuminates the meaningfulness of the inquiry about the meaning of being:

But where is the real nihilism at work? Where one clings to current beings and believes it is enough to take beings, as before, just as the beings that they are. But with this, one rejects the question of Being and treats Being as a nothing (*nihil*) [...]. Merely to chase after beings in the midst of the oblivion of Being – that is nihilism. [...] *In contrast*, to go expressly up to the limit of Nothing in the *question* of Being, and to take Nothing into the question of Being – this is the first and only fruitful step toward the true overcoming of nihilism (Heidegger, 2000/1935: 217-218; emphases in original).

As noted earlier, nothingness, for Heidegger, speaks to a sense that things are not quite right and this not-quite-rightness, so to speak, is the homelessness of beings, that is, that beings exist in an inauthentic state. “In anxiety” Heidegger states, “one feels ‘*uncanny*’” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 233; emphasis in original). Reading the notion of the “uncanny” first presented by Sigmund Freud (1997/1919), Heidegger expands upon it to underline its intangible nature. With the uncanny, Heidegger says, “the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the ‘nothing and nowhere.’ But here ‘uncanniness’ also means ‘not-being-at-home’” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 233). This is brought to light well in Gelven’s reading of Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety (which Gelven calls dread) and homelessness:

We dread our *being able to be ourselves*. Since dread puts us before ourselves, naked, as it were, we now are aware of our possibilities: either to be genuinely ourselves, or to lose ourselves once more in the comforting chatter of the ‘they.’ It is in tranquility and everydayness that one can *avoid* the confrontation of the self, but

in dread one cannot *avoid* one's self, though one can turn away from it. That's what dread is. It is the uncanny awareness of the self as free to be either authentic or inauthentic (Gelven, 1989: 118).

In other words, anxiety compels beings to examine their very being, and this examination, if engaged in,⁶ is far from pleasant because of what it reveals: the inauthenticity of the life of beings.

The mood of anxiety, then, better aids Heidegger to illuminate a certain inexplicability concerning fundamental attunements than does profound boredom. With profound boredom, Heidegger is only able to come close, as for example, when discussing how a dinner party guest comes to realize that s/he was profoundly bored during the entirety of the event *only after* arriving home (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 106-128). The example of profound boredom, in other words, does not resonate (very well). Yet, with anxiety, it is easier for Heidegger to vividly and penetratingly capture the way the source of anxiousness always remains partially concealed, especially when contrasted to fear (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 174-194; 225-235). Thus, it is through the example of anxiety that being as nothingness is fully and clearly brought to light because it is easier to comprehend that the persistence of the inexplicability of anxiousness means that beings are constantly holding onto "something" that is, in fact, nothing. As Heidegger puts it:

in anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualizes. This individualization brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being. These basic possibilities of Dasein [...] show themselves in anxiety as they are in themselves – undisguised [...] (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 235).

Reading profound boredom alongside anxiety, then, provides a fertile ground to see and appreciate the nothingness of being.

Though evident by now, it is important to underline that the equation of being as nothingness should not be read negatively, that is, as a pejoration of being (see, Ranasinghe, forthcoming). Heidegger is explicit about this, stating, for example, "With regard to Dasein, 'that nothing ensues' signifies something

⁶ Heidegger claims that beings have a choice to either undertake this examination or shy away from it, the latter more common than the former.

positive” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 324; emphases omitted). That nothingness is far from negative is evinced well in Heidegger’s discussion of profound boredom, where he claims that it “does not have the character of despair” because “profound boredom *never* leads to despair” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 140; emphasis added). As noted before, profound boredom permits an appreciation of the emptiness of being that translates itself into nothingness. This is why Heidegger writes that “being left empty ultimately resonates in our Dasein [...]” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 163; emphases omitted), suggesting that profound boredom draws beings closer to the realization that they are ontologically homeless. This, however, necessitates that profound boredom is allowed to be awakened and not counteracted: “The fundamental attunement of a profound boredom, once awakened, can manifest to us the absence of such oppressiveness and this moment of vision at the same time” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 172; emphasis omitted). This is what drives Heidegger: “It is the liberation of Dasein in man that is at issue here” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 172; emphasis omitted), that is, a liberation where Dasein can grasp Dasein as Dasein (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 68). The oppressiveness that Heidegger speaks of is not profound boredom, but what manifests itself when it is counteracted. It is this attempt to counteract what on the surface looks like oppression that is far more oppressive and removes beings from their essence: “The absence of oppressiveness is what fundamentally oppresses [...]” (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 164; emphases omitted). This is brought to light well in how Heidegger envisions anxiety: “He who is resolute [despite mortality] knows no fear; but understands the possibility of anxiety as the possibility of the very mood which neither inhabits nor bewilders him. Anxiety liberates him from possibilities which ‘count for nothing’, and lets him become free for those which are authentic” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 395; emphases omitted).

THE HOMEFUL, THE CONTEMPORARY HOMELESS AND DISCLOSING ONTOLOGICAL HOMELESSNESS

As explicated, Heidegger’s preoccupation with the essence of beings concerns the status of their ontological homelessness, a state which he arrives at via an

examination of the being of beings as nothingness. As also noted, for Heidegger, ontological homelessness is far more concerning than the condition of ontic homelessness (what is referred to as contemporary homelessness) – just how grave it is, is evinced in the fact that it is the contemporary homeless who are without housing, and despite this, Heidegger claims that ontological homelessness renders beings far more homeless than any other form, because it is in this form that beings are distanced and separated from *themselves*.

To situate the import of ontological homelessness to Heidegger's overall concerns, it is worth probing what it means to be homeful (as explicated before, to have a home and be housed). It is fair to claim that the status of being homeful in everyday life – in the “they-self” as Heidegger (1962/1927: 149-168) puts it – is constructed as the fulfillment of life (a truly authentic state, to draw upon Heidegger again).⁷ In other words, the home (and its physical structure, the house) is envisioned as fulfillment. Diligent planning and hard work, it is claimed, open the possibilities of purchasing a home, eventually one's “dream” home (and in the present day it is not unusual for many to have more than one house, which often serves as a rental property). In this dream home, life unfolds and along with it, the meaning of life is engraved in the memories that are intimately linked to the home (inside – and sometimes on – the four walls of the house). There is ample research illustrating the intimate manner in which beings relate to their property, whether a dog, a vehicle or even furniture (see, Parr, 1999; Rybczynski, 1986), so that property (almost) becomes an extension of the self (the mobile phone is an apt example, functioning as an extension of the hand, so that a hand bereft of a phone is akin to a hand that has been amputated). The home, then, is the apotheosis of (the glorification of) property. This is evinced not simply in the fact that the home is the most costly purchase, but is also extremely costly to maintain. This is also visible in the way the home is furnished, decorated and essentially beautified. The point, then, is that in everyday life, the home is the fulfillment of being, of life, that is.

There is nothing necessarily problematic with the equation of the home

⁷ It is important to keep in mind that for Heidegger, the “they-self” is an inauthentic state: “The self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*” (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 167; emphases in original).

(and the homeful life) with the fulfillment of being. Rather, the concern is that such an equation could possibly foreclose the potential of seeing being differently. To put this another way, does the homeful life make beings complacent to the point that it prohibits disclosure of other pertinent matters of and about life? (and, to exacerbate matters, are beings complicit in this foreclosure of possibilities?). More pressingly, does the homeful life as the status of fulfillment foreclose the possibility of seeing and appreciating that the homeful condition, while certainly (or, possibly) full, might not necessarily be the fulfillment of being? The homeful life, in other words, is possibly one condition towards fulfilment, but is not exhaustive of it: “‘Dwelling’ is practically and technically regarded as the possession of accommodation and housing. Such things indeed belong to dwelling, yet they *do not fulfill or ground its essence*” (Heidegger, 1996/1942: 20; emphases added; 2008/1954). Heidegger, then, is engaging in a clearing (Heidegger, 1962/1927: 214) which would aid beings see and realize that the homeful life is, while certainly capable of being full, not the precondition for fulfillment. Authenticity, in other words, is not necessarily met via the status of being homeful.

To appreciate this, it is worth examining the home, specifically, the structure of a house. A home is not simply a house. The home, and to be homeful, rather than to be merely housed, is to bring together everything about one’s life – family, personal and private matters and their relation to public matters, along with a whole host of memories, joys, hopes, desires, disappointments, failures etc. – into one comforting and comfortable setting (at least this is how it can be thought of, though often, as in the case of abuse, the ideal fails to resonate with reality). The home, thus, “contains” these things and emotions in the structure of the house, the four walls and roof. Symbolically, then, the home represents enclosure (it is an entity that encloses). This enclosure is not merely an enclosure of the inside from the outside (it keeps the outside, outside, that is, away from the inside), but reciprocally, the outside from the inside. In other words, as much as the house entails the protection of the inside from the outside (e.g., safety, noise or inclement weather), it also cocoons the inside from its own because the enclosure is also meant to keep the inside, inside, that is, away from the outside. Thus, the house can also be thought of as an entity that traps, that

is, it restricts and binds beings and things (this is, for example, how women who have been subjected to violence in the home narrate their experiences and the way they envision the home and its physical structures) (e.g., Harr and Reed, 1996; Martin, 2008). This does not mean that freedom is inexistent: dwellers are free to enter and leave as they please, unlike outsiders who may only enter upon an invitation. Yet, the point is that as much as the home keeps the outside, outside, it also keeps the inside, inside (cf., Colomina, 1992; Lopez and Sanchez-Criado, 2009).

The foregoing is not intended to castigate the home or the homeful life. Rather, the purpose is to claim that while the home is a source of safety, security, comfort, love, hope, joy etc., it can also be a source of violence, harm, discomfort, anxiety, pain etc., which might not be realized or fully brought to life. This is not simply because of the relationships in the house, but because of the structure of the house itself that tends to shield. The point, then, is that the condition of being homeful could also be viewed as containing particular problems, issues or concerns. According to Heidegger, as noted before, one could certainly be housed (and be at home) but still be homeless if and when one does not realize the potential for these issues – that is, where one is unaware of the absence of an authentic state. What is claimed here is that the desire in life to see the homeful as the fulfillment of life (in the same ways that marriage or having children is thought of), might need rethinking because a homeful life need not necessarily be fulfilling and thus, the fulfillment of life.

One need not be homeless in the ontic sense to understand the meaning of life and live authentically – this is not what is claimed nor suggested. What is claimed, rather, is that reading the condition of ontic homelessness alongside (and against) the condition of the homeful provides a portal through which to examine the meaning of life in a different manner and so doing helps shine light not simply on the state of the homeful but on ontological homelessness itself.

Contemporary homelessness, at least facially, is a life that is free of the rigidities and enclosures of the homeful. There are no walls and roofs to enclose life. This, of course, is a problem in and of itself, not simply in terms of safety but also in terms of protection from inclement weather or noise, for example. Equally, the lack of such a physical structure also means that the homeless are

enclosed in, and limited to, public space, and this means that their access to private spaces is limited and this makes life precarious (see, Waldron, 1991). These issues aside, the contemporary homeless are not trapped in the same ways as the homeful. There is a sense of freedom and openness, an openness of the road that does not succumb to, and is not restricted by, the everyday life of being-in-the-world. Specifically, there is a freedom of not being subjected to a (rigid) schedule or worrying about paying a mortgage or tending to the myriad chores that come with home ownership. Being without a home has numerous issues, worries and concerns, but the foregoing do not apply to the contemporary homeless (see, Ranasinghe, 2017: 28-36; 192-195). The condition of contemporary homelessness, then, illuminates a different sense of what it means to be free (and trapped) when read alongside and against what it means to be homeful.

Specifically, and again at least facially, there is a particular aesthetic that frames the condition of contemporary homelessness and temporality. The vast amount of time at the disposal of the contemporary homeless could possibly lead to a state where this time is devoted to examining the meaning(fulness/lessness) of life. It matters little whether this is actually so. What matters, rather, is that such a possibility is extant in the homeless life, certainly far more than in the homeful life (a family which strives to tend to work, children and household chores, is a perfect example). Time, then, is, at least facially, less a luxury for the contemporary homeless than the homeful (a busy family, unlike the contemporary homeless, is uninterested in “killing time”: it desperately needs more time).

Yet, it is the way time is acted upon that puts into perspective not simply how dire the contemporary homeless life is, but perhaps even more disconcertingly, the homeful life itself. As elucidated before, the life of the contemporary homeless is a life of profound boredom. Perhaps more than any other group, the contemporary homeless epitomize and represent the need to endure the dragging of time, and for them, this dragging is extraordinarily long and persistent, which is why, and again unlike most others, they feel that they must address it head-on and almost incessantly. They are, thus, brought directly and palpably into a confrontation with time (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 96).

This confrontation necessitates passing time, but for many homeless, killing it as well (see, Liebow, 1993: 29). The problem, however, is that time cannot be killed, it can only be endured (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 96). Heidegger is unequivocal on this:

As the phrase says, we pass the time. Yet what does it mean here to pass the time? We cannot, after all, shake time off. To pass here means to make it pass by, to propel it, drive it on so that it passes. Our passing the time, however, is in itself really a passing of boredom, where passing now means driving away, shaking off. Passing the time is a driving away of boredom that drives time on (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 93; emphases omitted).

Yet, this is precisely what the homeless engage in, an effort to kill time or, shake it off in the Heideggerian sense (see, Desjarlais, 1997: 87-94; 123-128; Liebow, 1993: 29-32). This very attempt to kill time eviscerates the potential to appreciate the nothingness of being, because, as Heidegger warns, the essence of being can only be appreciated if profound boredom is not counteracted but allowed to awaken the true sense of being (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 160; 172).

This means that while the contemporary homeless are perhaps best situated to appreciate the nothingness of their lives – given their freedom and the absence of many constraints from, and of, the “they-self” – this opportunity fails to materialize because they counteract boredom. My claim, then, is that this is a vital lesson that is applicable not simply to the contemporary homeless, but, and perhaps more importantly, to the homeful themselves. This is because if a group that is apt and poised to make sense of the essence of being is, nevertheless, simply because of being-in-the-world, removed from this opportunity, then the opportunity to make sense of the essence of being for other groups, such as the homeful, whose fulfillment is said to cohere with their status of being housed, becomes almost an impossibility. The homeful, in other words, need to work that much harder to understand the meaning of their existence. It is as if, and to return to the tropes of the fog and the abyss, the impairment of their impairment of the meaning of their existence is that much deeper (foggier and almost bottomless) for them than perhaps the contemporary homeless.

The foregoing, to underline again, is not a glorification of contemporary

homelessness. In many ways, it is a lamentation of such a condition. This is a precarious life filled with uncertainty and insecurity. Even the daily struggle to feed oneself puts this into perspective – the outstretched hand of a beggar is an apt example. Thus, the claim is not that contemporary homelessness is the realization of authentic life. The claim, rather, is that such a condition illuminates the problem of seeing and understanding authenticity even when conditions for such vision and cognizance might be ripe. Particular lifestyles of being-in-the-world, then, make it difficult for Dasein to appreciate Dasein as Dasein (Heidegger, 1995/1929-1930: 68), which means that it is difficult for beings to make sense of their lives as possibly inauthentic.

My claim is that the homeful have much to learn from the condition of contemporary homelessness. This is a lesson not merely about the fate or luck of the homeful, that their situation is a blessing and that the predicament of contemporary homelessness might also fall upon them (or could have fallen upon them), or that their status, in some ways at least, is dependent upon the way society is structured, one that has little empathy for the downtrodden. Rather, my claim is that contemporary homelessness is a reminder that the homeful life is (or, can be) far from authentic. In other words, the condition of being in a home, of being housed, does not mean that one is not (or, cannot be) homeless, an ontological homelessness that is, as Heidegger demonstrates, far more oppressive and problematic than any form of ontic homelessness can be. This is because the homeful have perhaps failed to notice that their lives, in their homes as such, are possibly inauthentic: they have fallen victim to the “they-self.” Such a life cannot understand the import of nothingness to being: it fails to see the import of profound boredom (and other fundamental attunements) to this predicament and seeks to counteract it. In other words, while the homeful might look upon contemporary homelessness and believe that the condition of the homeful is far superior – and in many ways it is – such complacency will foreclose the opportunity of the homeful to realize how far, in fact, they are from home and authenticity: how far, that is, they are distanced and separated from their very selves. Contemporary homelessness is a daily reminder of this: that it is not simply the contemporary homeless who might be ontologically homeless, but that even the housed – the homeful – are quite

possibly in the same condition, in fact, possibly in even dire straits. Thus, while particular narratives about contemporary homelessness suggest that the contemporary homeless can and ought to look at the homeful as the model to emulate – e.g., work ethic, discipline, rigour etc., values which are virtuous to say the least – what I claim is that the opposite also ought to take place: the homeful ought to take a thorough and closer look at the meaning of their lives and do so by first casting attention on the condition of contemporary homelessness, a condition that possibly reveals the ontological homelessness of even those who are housed.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have claimed that ontological homelessness is of serious concern to Heidegger, certainly far more than the condition of ontic homelessness. To this end, I have explored the importance of ontological homelessness to the being of beings by examining the way the fundamental attunements of profound boredom and anxiety shine light upon the nothingness of being. This nothingness, I have suggested, discloses the ontology of being, one of homelessness: beings are separated and distanced from their very essence and thus, lead inauthentic lives.

In reading the condition of the homeful alongside and against the condition of contemporary homelessness, I have sought to illuminate not simply the import of ontological homelessness, but how it is possible to approach this inquiry, that is, to disclose an ontological status. Specifically, and in so doing, I have inverted traditional reflections of homelessness: that the contemporary homeless have much to learn from the homeful. While this is certainly true, I have underscored something equally (or, more) important: that it is the homeful who have much to learn from the life of contemporary homelessness because the latter can help underline just how far the homeful perhaps are from authenticity.

Prashan Ranasinghe
University of Ottawa, Canada
prashan.ranasinghe@uottawa.ca

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