Latent Angst, Disclosure, and Attunement: On Heidegger's Grounding of Falling in Fleeing

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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that even when the feeling of angst is not experienced it remains latent. Fear, he maintains, is simply inauthentic angst. Likewise, he claims that the fact that we “fall” into the world, are fascinated by it, define ourselves in terms of it, and care about our place within it is a manifestation of “fleeing” from ourselves in response to angst. While some commentators have not seen these claims as problematic, why they are justified is not readily apparent, leading some to reject or dispute the grounding of fear in angst and the argument that falling and entanglement are modes of fleeing. In the following, I show how these claims are justified by Heidegger's phenomenological method and why they are best understood in connection with the concepts of attunement, understanding, and disclosure.

Attunement, Understanding, and Interpretation

Who but the person asked can authoritatively answer the question “how are you?” Admittedly, etiquette dictates that we are always “fine,” yet we possess the capacity to answering such a question honestly, also. We answer to indicate the kind of mood we are in. For Heidegger, this is philosophically signifi-
Cant. He writes:

One possibility of being for Da-sein is to give ontic “information” about itself as a being. Such information is possible only in the disclosedness belonging to Da-sein which is based on attunement and understanding. (Heidegger 1996, 172[184])

What this means is that our ability to give information about our mood implies we understand moods, meaning the conditions for the possibility of moods must be given in such a way that allows us to access the spectrum of possible emotional states a priori. Also, moods determine our being so that we are not always aware of what mood we are in until asked. Heidegger insists we are always in a mood, whether we experience it explicitly or not, and he terms the particular determination of our being by our mood Befindlichkeit, which literally means “how-you-are-ness” (although I have chosen to render it as “attunement”). Thus, Heidegger, following Kierkegaard, can phenomenologically inquire into moods by means of a transcendental argument, heading into a territory the philosophical tradition hitherto dismissed or confined to the purview of aesthetics and literature. To understand the significance of this mode of inquiry, we should first make sure we understand Heidegger’s phenomenological method.

Heidegger’s phenomenology rests on the “ontological difference” between beings and Being. “Beings,” that is, what we are aware of in perception, are understood on the basis of “Being,” that is, the a priori conditions for the possibility of encountering any beings whatsoever as meaningful. The term “ontic” corresponds to “beings” and “ontological” corresponds to “Being.” “Being” represents the transcendental, i.e. the conditions for the possibility of beings as such, notions familiar from Kant and Husserl. What is unique about Heidegger’s approach is that Kant and Husserl deal with problems such as the conditions for the possibility of arithmetic, the apperception of a die as three di-
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mensional, or the logical foundation of the ego, while Heidegger deals with problems connected to lived, everyday experience, such as the conditions for understanding how to swing a hammer, integrate into a social group, or recognize a car’s turn indicator while driving. In any experience of beings, certain information must be disclosed to our understanding non-thematically and a priori. “Disclosed does not, as such, mean to be known,” though (Heidegger 1996, 127). Juxtaposed to the Kantian “categories” that comprise the conditions for the possibility of representations and rational judgments about them are the Heideggerian “existentials” that comprise the conditions for the possibility of our existence in the world as such (being-in-the-world) and the particular “existentiells” or actualizations of the possibilities granted to us (Heidegger 1996, 42[44-45]). The disclosed are what we bring with us to a specific experience implicitly.

Following this method, “mood” ontically indicates an existentiell of what is present in one’s existential “attunement” and ontologically determines what is always present as a mood, whether one explicitly grasps what mood one is in or not. For instance, if one is in a bad mood one’s attention would be directed ontically to the mood itself or causes such as the weather or one’s fatigue. However, our attunements show the meaning of our moods to be the following: First, moods disclose the circumstances of each of our “selves” [Dasein] in our being “there” [da] as a burden in need of alleviation. Thus, being-there as a burden is fundamental to every attunement. As it is, we are born “thrown” into our lives such that we must bear the weight of our Being, even if we blame our moods on things outside of ourselves.

This constitutes the second feature of attunement: moods seem to come from the world itself—our relationships, jobs, or activities—and bad moods sometimes seem to carry the entire world with them. At other times, moods seem to cut off the rest of the world and direct us to a single matter of concern. Phenomenologically, this entails that we “turn” away from consciousness of our burdensome being-there towards the world.
Heidegger calls this turning towards the world “falling.” This third feature of attunement reveals that we fundamentally exist in such a way that the world “matters” to us such that it can affect our mood, instead of just floating by as thought it were a meaningless rush of color, light, and sound. Things can be fearsome, lovely, sentimental, or dreary. Attunement means our moods connect us a priori to the world, in such a way that they disclose our being-there, our “falling” into the world, and that things we encounter necessarily “matter” to us in an affective way (Heidegger 1996, 126-131[134-141]).

Alongside attunement is always an understanding which is not always explicit. It includes what is circumspectively disclosed to us as well as that which is explicitly apparent. Additionally, it can disclose our attunement to us, alongside all of the possibilities contained therein. For instance, Heidegger writes of experiencing fear:

Circumspection sees what is fearsome because it is in the attunement of fear. As a dormant possibility of attuned being-in-the-world, fearing, “fearfulness” has already disclosed the world with regard to the fact that something like a fearful thing can draw near to us from this fearfulness. (Heidegger 1996, 132[141])

We can become terrified at any time, which means that the possibility of the fearsome is disclosed to us. Interpretation is an act by which it is possible to make one’s understanding explicit by allowing a concept or symbol to stand “as” one’s experience or attunement. Sometimes what is disclosed is interpreted as something else and “covered up” by language so that it becomes trivialized. The purpose of Heidegger’s phenomenology is to rediscover such disclosures and uncover them.

In order to discuss Heidegger’s analysis of angst, we should first understand the purpose of his inquiry. Everyday human dealings and our various attunements, entangle us constantly in the world. Furthermore, everything that matters to us in every-
dayness seems to involve a kind of running away from ourselves and into the world. We then interpret ourselves in terms of our attachments to it—e.g. our jobs, what we do, and the kind of people we think we fit in with. We no longer see ourselves as separate entities. Heidegger's goal is to demonstrate ontologically (that is, in a way that demonstrates the meaning) that falling and entanglement in the world are modes of fleeing from oneself. The direction of motion (away) is apparent, but this merely ontically describes falling as fleeing. This interpretation of falling can only be ontologically significant if we explain the significance of fleeing’s direction. Because of the close connection between attunement and understanding, particular attunements strike close to relevant ontological data, disclosing it, and allowing us to interpret it. Angst, specifically, offers a way to approach the phenomenon of falling, and can thus disclose its character. This is because angst represents an inability to fall, as will be demonstrated.

Attuning to Angst

Because of the way attunement and understanding operate, Heidegger must merely demonstrate that the feeling of angst is possible in order to illustrate its character. He can because our understanding discloses these moods as possible for us. It seems that we are capable of taking on the perspective of someone experiencing an attunement prior to exposure to that mood. When we say “I can imagine how she feels,” we are saying that we know how the world must look from within her attunement. In literature we read about all kinds of situations that we have not undergone personally, and yet we can understand what the character is feeling by imagining that we are there in his shoes, that we share his attachments to the world. We “find ourselves” there and understand what mood he must be in. That the understandings disclosed in every particular attunement are ontologically determined a priori merely means that we have the ability to empathize with any attunement. Therefore, if Heidegger’s ar-
argument strikes deep within us so that we feel angst when we contemplate it, then he will have sufficiently demonstrated the phenomenon to us.\textsuperscript{10}

*Ich habe Angst* literally means “I have fear” in German, but Heidegger is following Kierkegaard by qualifying its use.\textsuperscript{11} Heidegger distinguishes these attunements from each other because fear ontically “turns away” from what threatens it and flees and is “about” the thing it flees from. Angst, on the other hand, is not about innerworldly beings. Instead, Dasein wishes to flee itself. “That about which one has Angst is being in the world as such” (Heidegger 1996, 174[186]). Angst finds the whole prospect of being-in-the-world-as-such overwhelming and terrifying, which means that angst does not have a specific object within the world, nor is angst afraid of a specific possibility in the future. It is afraid of possibility as such. “What *Angst* is about is completely indefinite” (Heidegger 1996, 174[186]). In the grip of angst, we are overwhelmed by the task of living.

Nothing of that which is at hand and objectively present within the world functions as what angst is about. The totality of relevance discovered within the world of things at hand and objectively present is completely without importance. It collapses. The world has the character of complete insignificance. In *Angst* we do not even encounter this or that thing, which, as threatening, could be relevant. (Heidegger 1996, 174[186])

Additionally, angst has a spatial component. Unlike fear, its object does not approach from afar—what is threatening is “nowhere,” which does not mean nothing; rather, “region in general lies therein, and disclosedness of the world in general for essentially spatial being-in” (Heidegger 1996, 174[186]). If we recall Heidegger’s description of spatiality, we will remember that Dasein does not move from point A to B as if it were moving across Newtonian space, but rather “de-distances” itself by moving a part of the world closer to it. Insofar as all possibilities
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(including the possibility of de-distancing) terrify Dasein as such, angst is, as it were, simultaneously claustrophobia and agoraphobia—one feels trapped by the infinite and overwhelmed by the openness of one’s confines. “It is so near that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath—yet it is nowhere” (Heidegger 1996, 174[186]). For one with angst, things within the world, possible spatial directions, and the interest that they used to spark has faded. “What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the possibility of things-at-hand in general, that is, the world itself” (Heidegger 1996, 175[187]).

Thus, Heidegger says that when we say “it was really nothing,” we get at the ontic nature of what angst is about; that is, it contains neither the ontic sum of every possible being nor a particular being. This nothing of the sum total is not nonexistent, but it is a nothing because angst has skipped over all things and advanced to the condition of their possibility—the world. It is anxious about existing in the world in general (Heidegger 2008, 101). Angst renders us speechless. We cannot say anything about what ails us, because it does not appear against the background of the world we live in. Instead, it is our existence within the world as such that we find so frightening. We cannot put it into the context of our lives because it lies outside of and scaffolds that context. In passing moments of depression as in angst, one is often prone to wish to break the silence in one’s mind by “changing the topic” to something utterable or even by speaking under one’s breath.

Angst as Disclosure: World as World, Individualized Possibility as Such, and Unheimlichkeit

So where do we find ourselves when we are attuned to angst? Recall that what is disclosed is not necessarily conceptualized by the experiencing subject, but is the implicit content of an experience that can be pointed to by the phenomenologist. What is disclosed in angst is the world as world, precisely because
“the world can offer nothing more, nor can the *Mitda-sein* of others” (Heidegger 1996, 175[187]). What one feels (the phenomenon now open for study) is a breakdown in one’s usual directedness towards a particular object in the world, insofar as the mood of angst is unable to find any joy or significance in the distraction of activity. Dasein feels entirely unable to go on. The world itself becomes obtrusive. What is disclosed here is the collapsed bridge, as it were, between Dasein's being and the world, insofar as the world no longer is able to draw Dasein into it.

Thus angst takes away from Da-sein the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the “world” and the public way of being interpreted. It throws Da-sein back upon that for which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. (Heidegger 1996, 175-6[187])

But what is this essential bridge between being and world? Precisely Dasein's ability to “project” itself upon possibilities of being (Heidegger 1996, 136-139[145-149]). This “projection” is disclosed in angst, precisely because Dasein could try to project itself into an activity in the world but cannot. Thus, the independence of Dasein's projection is disclosed. Normally, Dasein is so involved in the world that its possibilities are moot. In angst, however, as in boredom (Heidegger 2008, 99), one is unprojected and thus fully exposed to one’s being as dynamic potential. Also, and most importantly, this *individuates* Dasein because it is concentrated on its own *personal* being-in-the-world. In despairing its condition, Dasein is brought face-to-face with the kind of being that it is: a single individual. Thus, Heidegger writes:

*Angst* individualizes and thus discloses Dasein as “*solus ipse.*” This existential “solipsism,” however, is so far from transposing an isolated subject-thing into the harmless vacuum of a worldless occurrence that it brings Da-sein
in an extreme sense precisely before its world as world, and thus itself before itself as being-in-the-world. (Heidegger 1996, 176[188])

Dasein, in angst, feels itself as *solus ipse*, that is, as an “alone self.” Heidegger calls this feeling *existential* solipsism. We cannot understand this in the anachronistic sense of “aloneness of existence” inherited from existentialism, but rather in Heidegger's qualified use of *existential* as referring to a structural component of Dasein's existence rather than a particular mode of existing within that structure (designated existentiell). This is evident from the use of “discloses,” which means we are looking at the phenomenological structure, not at Dasein's direct experience of something akin to solipsism (Dreyfus, 177). If the world can no longer provide one with comfort, one feels alone. Not only that, but we can now distinguish individuality as an existential structure (Heidegger 1996, 122[130]).

This individuation lays the groundwork for authenticity. Angst discloses Dasein's freedom to grasp itself authentically, insofar as in the absence of tranquillization Dasein recognizes its choice of possibilities. This is not to say that Dasein necessarily grasps itself as able to choose new possibilities for itself in a robust sense, but that it discloses to the phenomenologist that Dasein has a way of determining these possibilities for itself. Let us say, for instance, I have been swept into a job as a postal worker by culture and circumstance. I then have a major psychological breakdown which I attribute to my job, so that I consider changing my career. To the phenomenologist, this demonstrates that a degree of freedom and the power of determinacy with regard to existentiell possibilities are part of Dasein's existential structure. But I need not grasp this myself.

Lastly, angst discloses that Dasein's existence *unheimlich* (uncanny), the etymological construction of which is not-at-home. Insofar as attunement is an answer to “how one is,” angst’s reply is “*unheimlich*.” Recall that angst is “nowhere” spatially and “nothing” content-wise. In analyzing Dasein's struc-
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ture, Heidegger pointed to the way we dwell “at home” in the world when tranquilized by our activities.

Dasein is still in the world while it is feeling angst, it simply loses its ability to find meaning within that world. Thus, all of the structural components remain during angst, but Dasein cannot find relief in the world. Thus, Dasein is located in the world, but does not feel it belongs.

Remember we are examining angst because it promises to disclose the flight of Dasein from itself in an ontologically significant way rather than a merely ontically characterizing Dasein's path of motion. But why choose this specific attunement? Heidegger writes:

It is true that it is the nature of every kind of attunement to disclose complete being-in-the-world in all its constitutive factors (world, being-in, self). However, in Angst there lies the possibility of a distinctive disclosure, since Angst individualizes. This individualizing fetches Da-sein back from its falling prey and reveals to it authenticity and inauthenticity as possibilities of its being. The fundamental possibilities of Da-sein, which are always my own, show themselves in Angst as they are, undistorted by innerworldly beings to which Da-sein, initially and for the most part, clings.14

The Grounding of Falling in Fleeing

So now we have shown that angst discloses Dasein’s structural individualism, dynamic potential for actualization through possibilities offered by the world, and sense of fundamental uncanniness. But Heidegger's purpose here was to ground fleeing in falling ontologically. Has the disclosure of angst accomplished this?

The argument requires two movements. First, Heidegger must demonstrate that the phenomenon of angst reveals falling to be fleeing.15 Second, Heidegger must demonstrate that ordinary falling structurally is also fleeing, which he will do by argu-
ing that angst is always present, whether felt or latent. The first is simple and has been alluded to throughout. Heidegger writes:

...What falling prey, as flight, is fleeing from becomes phenomenally visible. It is not a flight from innerworldly beings, but precisely toward them as the beings among which taking care of things, lost in the they [das Man], can linger in tranquilized familiarity. Entangled flight into the being-at-home of publicness is flight from not-being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in Da-sein as thrown, as being-in-the-world entrusted to itself in its being. (Heidegger 1996, 176-177[189])

This is readily apparent in the case of depression; what lifts depression is taking one’s mind from the matter. This demonstrates a desire to flee the feeling of not being at home by feeling at home again in the world. However, Heidegger immediately makes the second move, by adding:

This uncanniness constantly pursues Da-sein and threatens his everyday lostness in the they [das Man], although not explicitly. This threat can factically go along with complete security and self-sufficiency of the everyday way of taking care of things. Angst can arise in the most harmless situations. (Heidegger 1996, 177[189])

But what does Heidegger mean by this? Does Heidegger imply that the desire to flee from angst is a psychological motivation underlying all human behavior?

Here are the claims Heidegger makes. First, he writes: “If we interpret the uncanniness of Da-sein existentially and ontologically as a threat which concerns Da-sein itself and which comes from itself, we are not asserting that uncanniness has always already understood in factical Angst in this sense” (Heidegger 1996, 177[189]). Heidegger is making interpretive claims about the meaning of Da-sein’s uncanniness instead of implying this to be the way Dasein interprets its angst. Rather, “The everyday-
ness way in which Da-sein understands uncanniness is the entangled turning away which “phases out” not-being-at-home” (Heidegger 1996, 177[189]). In fact, Dasein does not interpret its angst as anything, because it reflexively “phases out” its angst by turning away. This reflex betrays Dasein’s understanding, that which is non-thematically, non-interpretively disclosed to Dasein as definite possibilities. Also, recall that “attunement always has its understanding, even if only by suppressing it. Understanding is always attuned” (Heidegger 1996, 134[142-43]). This means that because angst is a possible attunement in the mode of everydayness, every other attunement of everydayness is in effect suppressed angst as well. Heidegger believes this to be sufficient ground for asserting it as being the case.

The everydayness of this fleeing, however, shows phenomenally that Angst as a fundamental kind of attunement belongs to the essential constitution of Da-sein in being-in-the-world which, as an existential one, is never objectively present, but is itself always in the mode of factual Da-sein, that is, in the mode of attunement. Tranquilized, familiar being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness of Da-sein, not the other way around. (Heidegger 1996, 177[189])

Think of the actual attunement of angst as a magnification of the being of Dasein within which we get to see the moment that Dasein turns from itself into the world. We see that the alternative to everydayness is something that Dasein wishes to avoid, and which can arise at any time. We see that Dasein avoids this by fleeing into the world. Also, fleeing into the world is characteristic of all of Dasein’s inauthentic behavior. Thus, we can conclude that any time inauthentic Dasein is not fleeing, Dasein is experiencing angst. We can conclude that if Dasein were not involved in the world, Dasein would experience itself as uncanny.

The juxtaposition itself is not enough to justify the privileging of uncanniness, yet Heidegger insists that “Not-being-at-home must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more pri-
mordial phenomenon” (Heidegger 1996, 177[189]). This is why attunement is such an important method for Heidegger, because it can let us draw things that are normally disclosed as merely possible in understanding close by circumspection. Therefore, we can establish that uncanniness so far from signifying the opposite of the “falling” of everyday being-in-the-world, is premised and reliant upon the negation of it. We know this because involvement as negated angst is a phenomenon in which uncanniness is disclosed. “Da-sein is anxious in the very ground of its being” (Heidegger 1996, 177[190]). Its typical negation despite its fundamentality explains the rarity of real angst.

Its possibility is most explicitly grasped when we get bored or restless due to the threat of losing all interest in anything. All of this demonstrates that we flee into the world away from ourselves, because involvement is fundamentally a reaction to the possibility of feeling that we are not quite at home here; that is, we struggle to fit in because at our core we do not feel like we fit in.

On the grounds of this analysis, Heidegger defines the being of everyday Dasein as Sorge. In German this means “worry,” although it is translated as “care” because it should be taken to have a neutral connotation. Heidegger views the play between the angst of not being absorbed in the world and the “worry” that maintains Dasein's connection to the world as both natural and ineluctable.

**Conclusion**

Thus, Heidegger does not declare that angst is latent to posit it as a motivational or psychological justification of falling. Although the meaning of falling is fleeing, this simply means that phenomenology discloses that when Dasein feels angst, it comes face to face with itself and the feeling that it in no way feels at home in the world. Insofar as angst is negated by the tranquillization of turning towards the world, as long as Dasein remains absorbed in the world, angst does not threaten it. Dasein must be circumspectly leery of the fact that it could face its uncanniness
at any given time, although as long as Dasein cares about things in the world, the uncanniness subsides because it no longer comes before itself as an individual out of place in the world. Rather than being a motivational or psychological account, Heidegger’s account of angst treats it as something that Dasein \textit{brings with it} to the world. It is inevitable, but since it is dealt with most of the time, its status is not thematically clear in Heidegger’s work.
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Notes


3. References to German page numbers given in brackets.

4. Cf. (Kierkegaard, 14[IV 296-7]).


8. Circumspection [*umsehen*] refers to what is understood but not interpreted, such as what is known by a person who can pick up a hammer and swing it without any kind of training, but also to what is implicitly understood without explication in general.

9. E.g., through the “idle chatter” of *das Man*. Cf. (Heidegger, 157-59[167-71]).

10. It has been suggested that the rarity of angst makes empa-thizing with the feeling difficult (King, 93).

11. This is sometimes translated as “anxiety,” which is misleading because “anxiety” fits the colloquial use of *Sorge* (Care) better than it does Heidegger's terminological usage of *die Angst*. “Angst” literally means “fear.” One might say, “Ich habe Angst für Spinnen,” which would literally be “I have fear for spiders.” This is why Heidegger is careful to distinguish Angst from the phenomenon of fear [*Furcht*], following
Kierkegaard's usage of *Angst* in Danish. The sense of “angst” used in “teen angst” in English has its etymological roots in early translations of existentialism. The German use of *Angst* for the medical condition of anxiety is etymologically rooted in English’s concept of existential angst, making it a double loanword. See Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Angst*.

12. William Blattner rightly connects angst with depression. It should be noted, however, that Heidegger distinguishes the ontological (phenomenological) description of angst from the physiological description, the condition for the possibility of which is that “Da-sein is anxious in the very ground of its being” (Blattner, 141-42) & (Heidegger 1996, 177[189-90].

13. See Dreyfus’s *Sein und Zeit*, 177. Dreyfus points to the usage of the verb *aufdrängen* on page 187 of *Sein und Zeit*, which he believes refers back to the word *Aufdringlichkeit* on page 73, which comprises a major part of his reading of Heidegger. It must be maintained that like in the breakdown of equipment, what is disclosed is not cognized in the experience or revealed to Dasein in the experience, as Dreyfus correctly points out. However, it is not that socially articulated norms become revealed or disclosed as a conspiracy and falsification, but that one cannot draw pleasure from them.

14. See (Heidegger 1996, 178[190-91]); cf. (Dreyfus, 180); and (Blattner, 139).

15. That is, shows the meaning of this falling to be Dasein running away from itself.

**References**


