World, Affectivity, Trauma: Heidegger and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis

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1
Introduction
*Existential Analysis, Daseinanalysis, and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis*

The aim of this book is to show how Heidegger’s (1927) existential philosophy enriches post-Cartesian psychoanalysis and how post-Cartesian psychoanalysis enriches Heidegger’s existential philosophy. It is thus intended as a contribution to both psychoanalysis and philosophy.

Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss were two early pioneers who saw the value of Heidegger’s analysis of existence for psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. They both proceeded “from the top down”—that is, they started with Heidegger’s philosophical delineation of essential existential structures (Being-in-the-world, care, authenticity-inauthenticity, *das Man*, thrownness, existential anxiety, existential guilt, potentialities-for-Being, etc.) and applied these to clinical phenomena and the therapeutic situation. Although Binswanger’s (1946) existential analysis produced some brilliant phenomenological descriptions of the “world-designs” underlying various forms of psychopathology, and Boss’s (1963) Daseinanalysis freed the psychoanalytic theory of therapy from the dehumanizing causal-mechanistic assumptions of Freudian metapsychology, neither effort brought about a radicalization of psychoanalytic practice itself or of the psychoanalytic process.

The evolution of my collaborators’ and my post-Cartesian psychoanalytic perspective (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002), by contrast, proceeded “from the bottom up.” It was born of our studies of the subjective origins of psychoanalytic theories and developed out of our concurrent efforts to rethink psychoanalysis as a form of phenomenological inquiry and to illuminate the phenomenology of the psychoanalytic process itself. Our dedication to phenomenological inquiry, in turn, let us to a contextualist theoretical perspective, and we subsequently found philosophical support in Heidegger’s existential analytic for what we had illuminated.

Our post-Cartesian psychoanalytic perspective highlighted three closely interrelated features of the psychoanalytic method. It is phenomenological—its focus is on worlds of emotional experience. It is hermeneutic—it seeks interpretively to illuminate the structures of meaning that organize worlds of experience. And it is contextual—it grasps experience and its horizons as being constituted within formative contextual systems. In Chapter 2, I show that Heidegger’s investigative method in *Being and Time* is also a unique blending of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and contextualism and thus has great potential for providing a philosophical grounding for post-Cartesian psychoanalysis.

Intersubjective-systems theory, the term my collaborators and I coined to name our evolving perspective, is a phenomenological contextualism. It is phenomenological, as I said, in that it investigates and illuminates organizations of worlds of emotional experience. It is contextual in that it holds that such organizations of emotional experience take form, both developmentally and in the psychoanalytic situation, in
constitutive relational or intersubjective contexts. In Chapter 3, I present an overview of
the historical evolution and basic concepts of our phenomenological contextualism.

In Chapter 4, I show how Heidegger’s existential analytic can provide a philosophical
grounding for an understanding of the phenomenology of emotional trauma. I claim that
emotional trauma produces an affective state whose central features bear a close
similarity to the central elements in Heidegger’s existential interpretation of anxiety, and
that it accomplishes this by exposing the traumatized person to a constituent of our
existence heretofore concealed—namely, our Being-toward-death. If the painful affective
state produced by such exposure can find a relational home in which it can be held and
integrated, I suggest, then trauma can eventuate in an enhancement of authentic existing.

Drawing on a clinical vignette, Harry Potter, Friedrich Nietzsche, and my own
experience of emotional trauma, I seek in Chapter 5 to rethink the concept of dissociation
in terms of the devastating impact of trauma on our experience of temporality.
Dissociation, I contend, just is traumatic temporality.

Having illuminated trauma’s contextuality and its existentiality, I find in Chapter 6 a
path for synthesizing these two themes into a broader unity that can encompass them
both. Just as finitude is fundamental to our existential constitution (Heidegger), so too is
it constitutive of our existence that we meet each other as “siblings in the same darkness,”
deeply connected with one another in virtue of our common finitude. Our existential
kinship-in-finitude is the condition for the possibility both of the contextuality of
emotional trauma and of forming bonds of deep emotional attunement and understanding
in which traumatized states can be held, transformed, and integrated.

In Chapter 7, I seek to relationalize Heidegger’s conception of finitude by developing
the claims that Being-toward-death always includes Being-toward-loss of the other and
that death and loss are existentially equiprimordial. The chapter draws on Derrida’s
work on friendship and mourning to support its claims.

In Chapter 8, I show that our kinship-in-finitude and the relationality of finitude, as
disclosed in my investigations of emotional trauma, provide a basis for substantially
expanding Heidegger’s conception of authentic Being-with, the existential ground of
relationality. This enriched conception of Being-with, I contend, holds significant ethical
implications.

In Chapter 9, I present a collaborative psychobiographical study of Heidegger’s fall
into Nazism, illuminating the salient themes that dominated Heidegger’s personal
psychological world and how these themes left their imprint on both his philosophy
and his version of Nazi ideology. The chapter illustrates the part played by emotional
trauma, even madness, in the creation of philosophical and ideological frameworks. The
chapter closes with a section, “A Distant Mirror,” on the importance of
psychobiographical studies for a post-Cartesian grasp of philosophical and theoretical
ideas.

In Chapter 10, I conclude that the previous chapters show both how Heidegger’s
existential philosophy enriches post-Cartesian psychoanalysis and how post-Cartesian
psychoanalysis enriches Heidegger’s existential philosophy. The discussion draws on
Heidegger’s (1927) use of the interplay of the ontical and the ontological in *Being and
Time*. 