

The Enigma of Everydayness

The sun is new everyday

Heraclitus

That which is ontically so familiar in the way Dasein has been factically interpreted that we never pay any heed to it, hides enigma after enigma existential-ontologically.

Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*

What is everydayness? Is it simply what the history books call “everyday life”: a set of practices that govern private and public life at a specific time and for a specific people? Is it not first of all a constitutive structure, original and unavoidable, of all Being-in-the-world? In everydayness, Heidegger says, Being-with-others prevails over the Being-one’s-self which we could be. We are other than our own possible selfness. In everyday encounters and affairs, we act, think, and are like the “they” is: I am spontaneously like anyone else would be in my place. Everydayness refers to an indefinite substitutability of roles, situations, gestures, and words, which, far from remaining external to me, constitute my first “my”-self. From day to day we are not only like the “they” is, but, in our most intimate being, we are the “they”-self. The anonymous structures of the world push me aside, eclipse and replace me as “subject.” To be in the mode of everydayness is thus not simply to conform, to be *like* everybody else, to be guided by the most commonly accepted behavior. It is, rather, to be *first of*

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all other than oneself, not to have subjectivity for oneself. “Proximally, it is not ‘I’, in the sense of my own Self, that ‘am’, but rather the Others, whose way is that of the ‘they’”.² Proximally (*zunächst*), even when I say “I”, what I express and do belongs to a “we-they think, a we-they act, a we-they live in such and such a way.” This is one of the meanings of *Verfallenheit*, fallenness, the other being *Dasein*’s self-identification with a *thing of the world*, either a being simply given there present-at-hand (*Vorhandenes*) or a tool or instrument ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenes*).

What is enigmatic about the phenomenon of everydayness if not the fact that it is *inaugural and secret* (that it goes unnoticed or is considered “normal”)? Does the enigma of the everyday thus stem simply from its self-dissimulation? But would this not then be the enigma proper to all truth understood as a process of unconcealment whose heart is concealed? Perhaps we can get closer to the enigma by asking: But why *must* it be this way? No doubt because this dimension of the everyday is primordial and necessary. But why then *must Dasein* fall from the start into the grips of the others and become subjected to the hidden tyranny of thingness and the “they”? Why is it that it is not only the existence that just “hangs on from day to day”, that abandons itself to chance and is thereby lessened, weakened, and tired but also *all existence* subject to the rhythm of daily life and “ephemeral” in the literal sense is given over to this destitution or abasement in which it “contents” itself, as Heidegger says, to a Being-with-others that is common, levelled, and indifferent to its own alienation? Because under the famous rubric “Being-with-others” the analytic is not a “critique” of repeated gestures, sedimented habits, or the constant rehashing of the same words and ideas. It has to do, rather, with a *first destitution* which is *prior* to Being-one’s-self. Everyday Being-in-the world forces us from the start to make *our own* the paths already laid out and trodden, the behaviors already prescribe, the ideas already accepted. So once again, why is this, since it seems that everyone wants honestly, lucidly, and with all his energy to “find himself” (as the “they” says!)? Why, since everyone flatters himself with having his own opinion about what is said in the papers and considers himself to have a certain degree of personal “leeway” within the “social” constraints which no one challenges? For does not everyone believe himself capable of escaping the

2 Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit*, 9a. ed., Max Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1960, p. 129.

"average and ordinary" (*durchschnittlich*) being which, he thinks, is proposed to him without being imposed upon him?

But how in fact would one escape it, Heidegger asks. Through entertainment, work, solitude, travel, romance? Would this not still be to follow the "models" of behavior dictated by the "they," ways of behaving that have been "prescribed by Being-with-one-another"?³

Why is Being-together spontaneously and fundamentally diverted from authentic self-accomplishment? Why is it initially difficult, if not impossible, for us in everydayness to bring to each other mutual enrichment such that through an exchange with others we might discover our own particularity?

Is not the heideggerian depreciation of collective existence, "public" in the sense of simply Being-with, the continuation of a theme obscurely derived from the Platonic distrust of *doxa*, that is, of the opinion of the majority or the masses? Is not the fact that everydayness is seen as a denial of the self, an ontological "apostasy",⁴ a retaking up of the traditional theme of the *Many* as the fall, dispersion and bad fragmentation of the *One* or the *Good*?

The first section of *Sein und Zeit* shows that the "they" is an unavoidable ontological structure of *Dasein*. Even if it can, "in an existentiell manner, 'surmount' everydayness",⁵ —that is, overcome it here and there personally or concretely through some stroke of genius, some creative gesture or burst of inspiration, or, who knows, through some sort of aberrant behavior— the everyday fundamentally dominates and determines it. The "they" always constitutes the first and essential being of *Dasein* in relation to which any deviation is marginal and from which any exceptional act, bound to be recuperated sooner or later, detaches itself only for a brief moment.

Dasein does not escape the everyday, even and especially if it refuses to be guided by it. "Everydayness is determinative for *Dasein* even when it has not chosen the 'they' for its 'hero'"⁶ Thus the attempt to escape the authority of the "they," through, for example, entertainment, would still

3 *Idem*, p. 370.

4 The word is taken from Robert Brisart. "La métaphysique de Heidegger". in *Heidegger et l'idée de la phénoménologie*: Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1988, p. 219

5 Heidegger, M., *op. cit.* p. 370.

6 *Idem*, p. 371.

be a recognition of its domination over the Dasein which I am (or can be). The same thing goes for abandoning oneself to the "they," for being sick of it or wanting to master it. "In everydayness Dasein can undergo dull 'suffering', sink away in the dullness of it, or evade it by seeking new ways in which its dispersion in its affairs may be further dispersed. In the moment of vision, indeed, and often just 'for that moment', existence can even gain the mastery over the 'everyday';⁷ but it can never extinguish it (*auslöschen*)".⁸

(Just as I can leave one *Stimmung* only by means of a counter-*Stimmung*, so I can leave the everyday only by means of a counter-everyday. If we are burning in the heart of everydayness from a monotonous though inextinguishable fire which constantly overtakes us, is it not because this is the obscure flame of temporality that touches us *zunächst und zumeist*, proximally and for the most part, to use the expression constantly repeated in *Sein und Zeit*?

But why? Why can we dominate the everyday only for an *instant*? Is this instant already the "moment of vision" (*Augenblick*) of authentic temporality wherein future, present, and past are found melded together in an *ektasis*? But why then does this instant not "hold" like the moment of resoluteness? Why is it itself ephemeral? Why, especially, this first fall, prior to all mineness? Why is the enigmatic "fallenness" of an ownness not yet known or attained? Why is *Dasein*, if it *can* win itself, or can "never win itself; or can do so only 'in appearance'",⁹ always *already* dispersed into various worldly "concerns"? As much as Heidegger emphasizes in section 9 of *Sein und Zeit* that the two modes of *authentic* and *inauthentic* Being do not express a difference of more to less, of a greater to a lesser or more inferior Being, the description of the "they" in sections 26 and 27 is largely pejorative since inauthentic, everyday-Being is called "deficient", and the "they" is said to obscure, smother, and level all true possibility for Being by reducing any discovery to the already-known.

The enigma of everydayness is thus multiple. The *original* lowering of *Dasein* cannot be deduced but can only be phenomenologically noted and described. Enigmatic as well is the attachment, the irresistible inclination,

7 Cf. *idem*, p. 56: "Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in."

8 *Idem*, *ibidem*.

9 *Idem*, p. 42.

the "temptation", as Heidegger says, which *Dasein* has for its own loss in the "they". Is this because the "they" doesn't die? Is it because the "they" is able to provide a reassuring explanation for all phenomena? But if *Dasein* is *Jemeinigkeit*, in each case mine, how can and must it fall from the beginning into non-mineness and, thus, forget its own essence? No doubt it is once again possible to respond that this fall comes from the fact that mineness produces anxiety. But what could be meant by an a priori fleeing in the face of an anxiety which 'one' (or the "they") has never known?! A strange *Dasein* it is that exists always already in a time that is not its own, even though it can never really become an authentic self, able to have itself in its entirety, except through an experience of the anxiety-ridden annihilation of all that is around it, through the trauma caused by the disintegration of the everyday world (pleonasm!) in its entirety! And enigmatic yet again is the primacy of facticity over transcendence; facticity first in the sense of a raw fact of Being, then in the sense of being surrounded or imprisoned by the Being of natural beings, and finally in the sense of being caught up in the paths, destinations, identities, and realities already established.

If *Dasein* is not a being of the world, if its Being is light, openness, *Lichtung*, how can it be fallen to the level of substances and things, deprived of its "natural" light, since its essence is to ek-sist far from itself, in view of itself, outside of itself? This self-reifying in-sistence of the ek-sistent is indeed enigmatic. Enigmatic also is the possible and initially non-voluntary conversion through anxiety of an existence primordially fallen. Enigmatic too is the fact that our daily immediacy must make such a long detour, passing by a sphere so distant that it in fact envelops the entire world itself. Enigmatic finally (but is this the last enigma?) is the endless and inevitable oscillation between the ownness possibly won or rewon and the profound Neuter in which all existence is bathed. Because even if *Dasein* is authentic, that is, resolved to project upon the finite horizon of its own mortality the possibilities of the world that it has appropriated and has the courage to retake up and repeat again and again, it can never escape nor release itself once and for all from the everyday!

But is everydayness *really original*? Is there not concerning this crucial point an underlying doubt that gives to the entire work its impetus to push further on? The first section of *Sein und Zeit* clearly gives ontological primacy to the We-They. In the we-they the analysis discovers the source of all significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*), that is, of the set of the systems of rela-

tions which constitute the world. Functioning like a transcendental subject, the "'Realest' subject of everydayness",¹⁰ but concrete, factual, endowed with the highest concretion, (it is even designated as "*ens realissimum*"),¹¹ "the 'they' itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest" and it "itself articulates the referential context of significance."¹² So it is not surprising to read on the following page that the "they" is found at the origin of the meaning of the Being of *all* worldly beings —first, because the being simply *presente-at-hand* (*Vorhandenes*) is the result of a reduction (of a reduced vision of the being available or ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenes*); and, second, because in the common interpretation of everydayness *Dasein* is itself interpreted as a being simply present-at-hand. The refusal to understand the authentic one's-self as simply present-at-hand cannot make the "they" as supremely real subject disappear. That is why "*Authentic Being-one's-self* does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from de 'they'; it is rather an *existentiell modification of the 'they'* —of the 'they' as an *essential existentielle*".¹³ Notice that Heidegger says: "an *existentiell modification*". And yet in the second section, after having gained both the existential possibility for *Dasein* to be an authentic totality through Being-toward-death and the *existentiell* possibility to be an authentic whole through anticipated resoluteness, it appears that these truly original possibilities had been *covered over* by the interpretations of the "they." From the moment when a "being-possible-as-a-whole" comes to light, *the analysis shifts*. The "they", public time, and the world now get their meaning from this new ground which is clearly not a supporting ground (a substance or a subject) but *Dasein* as possibility. My own possibility is *higher* than the solidified reality of the "they". This latter is "an *existentiell modification of the authentic Self*".¹⁴ The contradiction in the words is only in appearance insofar as the "they" was only in appearance the realest subject.

It would thus be possible to show that the reversal that governs the entire architectonic of *Sein und Zeit* rests upon a presupposition which is

10 *Idem*, p. 128.

11 *Idem, ibidem*.

12 *Idem*, p. 129.

13 *Idem*, p. 130.

14 *Idem*, p. 317 (emphasis mine)

non-phenomenological, since it is not originally derived from a mere description of the phenomena of the *world* but from a preconceived notion of *Dasein*. This presupposition is none other than that of an authentic Self. The “they” is derivative from ownness. It is the appearance whose essence is ownness, the unshakable and nonhypothetical ground, the unique source of the world. From the first sketches of *Sein und Zeit* onward, Heidegger’s principle of analysis is that manifest and polymorphous phenomenality hides and *covers over* the Originary-One. Being and truth are to be rewon from the coverings-over which are part of the movement and structure of manifestation. Thus Heidegger writes as early as 1923: “To everydayness belongs a certain averageness (*durch-schnittlichkeit*), the ‘they’, in which the ownness (*Eigenheit*) and the possible authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) are kept covered over (*sich verdeckt halt*)”,¹⁵ Heideggerian phenomenology consists in discovering this true primordial ownness which the tradition, fallenness and forgetting, but also the unfolding of the world itself, keep covered over. The deconstruction of everydayness will thus have to reveal its *specific* mode of covering over. So what is this powerful mechanism, this great force of forgetting which works to dissimulate ownness? It is not, paradoxically, indifference to oneself but indifference to the other.¹⁶ And this, in the very coming together of acting-with or caring-with.

A double covering over of the Other in work and in “ethics” constitutes the foundation of the everyday. Indeed, *Dasein* forgets its own possible care (*Sorge*), the concern to be itself and to unify its own time, by throwing itself into *Besorgen*, busied activity always looking to produce something or other, and *Fürsorge*, solicitude always looking to procure something for the other. These two activities are always for and with others, but in truth they are indifferent to the Other. There is no everydayness without the alterity of the Other being implied, invoked, or used, and yet at the same time, repressed, neglected, and finally denied. Everydayness is founded upon a “deficient” mode of Being-with-one-another (*Miteinandersein*).

The reality of everydayness is the world itself understood as a system of practical ends, as the network of functional and operational relations,

¹⁵ Heidegger, M., Gesamtausgabe, vol. 63, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M., 1975 ff., p. 85.

¹⁶ Indifference also because of a lack of distinction. Cf. *Sein und Zeit*, p. 118: “The Others are those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself —those among whom one is too.”

that is, the world as a system of calls, to everyone in general and no one in particular, to work with a view toward something. In the *Prolegomena*, everydayness is more precisely defined as "the busied activity in the world with-one-another".¹⁷ If the primordial discovery of the world is linked to affectivity (anxiety, fear, joy), everydayness is characterized by the affective neutrality that has always already admitted that the only thing that counts is the task to be accomplished. The being of the everyday world is in accord with the work to be done; it is joined in the common interest and it works to reactivate and reiterate the relations of functional interaction. *Dasein* ceases to be everyday when it is idle! Its everyday name is that of its occupation. Well before the analyses of Jünger (*The Worker*, 1932), Heidegger affirms that the *common* name of man is the worker. "In its everyday preoccupations *Dasein* is proximally and for the most part, always and each time, that at which it works (*das was es betreibt*). One is what *one* does. (*Man selbst ist was man macht*). The everyday interpretation of *Dasein* derives from that which each time constitutes its occupation as the horizon of this interpretation and its denomination. *One* is a shoemaker, tailor, professor, or banker".¹⁸ What characterizes everyday *Dasein* is the fact that it has no *proper* name: its name changes according to the work it does. Work and everydayness are identical; those who work and share their everydayness are interchangeable.

In its daily work *Dasein* is intrinsically anonymous; it has no identity or interiority of its own. It is essentially replaceable by others insofar as they can perform the same tasks as it. Thus everydayness does not at all include the private sphere; familial relations, for example, remain indetermined as far as their possible authenticity is concerned. Everyday existence is always *outside, extrovert, public*.¹⁹ The everyday is not the home. Must we then say, like Blanchot, that "if it is anywhere, it is in the streets"?²⁰ Is it not rather everywhere that one works? Everydayness would thus be in offices and workshops but not in museums and churches! It would be more *dense* in the city than in the country, a function of the *density* of work and of the instrumental and operational net-

17 Heidegger, M., *Gesamtausgabe*, op. cit., vol. 20, p. 336.

18 *Idem*, vol. 20, p. 336.

19 "No one in everydayness is himself" ... The averageness of everyday Being-there implies no reflection on the 'I'. ("Le concept de temps," in *Heidegger* (L'Herne, Paris, 1983, pp. 30-31).

20 Maurice Blanchot, *L'entretien infini*, Gallimard, Paris, 1959, p. 362.

works. In any case, everydayness signifies “publicness,” that is to say, an interpretation that is common, exterior, irresponsible and necessarily superficial: “insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness”,²¹ “publicness” establishes a false transparency which “obscures everything”. It passes off all the phenomena of the world as having been, for a long time already, “well known and accessible to everyone”, precisely because their equipmental meaning and practical uses are evident. Thus excluded from the definition of everydayness are, first of all, non-work-related attitudes and familiar gestures which are continually rebegun, for example, sleeping, getting up, washing, dressing, eating, reading, *etc.* (To which mode of *Dasein* do they belong if not to a *neutral* model with respect to authenticity or inauthenticity? Must we say that eating out in a restaurant belongs to everydayness because one needs professionals, but that preparing a meal alone for oneself does not belong to it?) Excluded as well is all that belongs to a nonequipmental relation with nature, as, for example, taking a walk in a garden. (Would swimming in a pool be closer to everydayness than swimming in the ocean? And what about hunting and fishing as nonlucrative “sporting” activities which do not aim at procuring food? Would fishing be a sort of parody of everyday life which is supposed to be utilitarian, teleological, and serious?) The everyday must belong to an “intersubjective” human world, as Husserl would say. If it is understandable that the earth as the substructure of the world that escapes the world (except for the artist or the poet, as Heidegger will later say) be excluded from the everyday, it is odd that the alternation of day and night does not belong as such to everydayness, no more than the sun, the light, the seasons, the rain, or the wind do.

Houses and shelters against the rain, boats and airplanes, belong to everydayness, but not the rain, the heat and the cold, the sea, and the air themselves. The sun is an exception in that it marks the beginning and the end of the work day and lends itself to counting the hours, either directly on a sundial or indirectly on a watch. In *Sein und Zeit* the sun is considered phenomenologically as a nonfabricated “tool”, a sort of instrument of work given by nature.²² Everydayness is extranatural. Its daily sense is determined solely by

21 Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit*, op. cit., p. 127.

22 Michel Haar, *Le chant de la terre*, L'Horne, Paris, 1987, pp.56-58, and *Sein und Zeit* op. cit., p.80.

the day of the world and not by the light of the day. In everydayness the sun is not new everyday; it shines upon nothing new because everything that is of public utility ceases to be new the moment it functions.

Everydayness, if it is outside of nature, is not, however, "social." It is founded upon a Being-with-others which existentially determines *Dasein*, even if no Other is in fact present-at-hand. "Even *Dasein*'s Being-alone is Being-with in the world. The Other can be missing only in and for a Being-with".²³ "So far as *Dasein* is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being".²⁴ This Being-with originally takes, because of the primacy of praxis and equipmentality, the mode of Being of *common* "concerns". "Concern" (*Besorgen*) means ontically to be concerned with such and such an affair, to tend to such and such a need, to be involved in an activity aimed at procuring such and such a thing in the world. Ontologically, as an existential, it is to project one's "care" into the world. But procuring something for another *Dasein* is the result not only of concern (being preoccupied by the "material" availability of things, by the techniques for working with what is at hand), but of "solicitude" (*Fürsorge*). "Concern is a character-of-Being which Being-with cannot have as its own...".²⁵ *The Other calls for solicitude*. To be concerned (even if only for oneself) by food and clothing comes from solicitude and concerns Being-with—even more so when it is a question of feeding, clothing, caring for or helping others. But as the analysis notes, "... *Dasein* maintains itself proximally and for the most part in the deficient modes of solicitude".²⁶ What is this deficiency? It is nothing other than the "indifference" that characterizes ordinary solicitude. Ordinary solicitude is indifferent not to the objects to be provided but to the *place* of the Others in the concern that concerns them directly. It is indifferent not to that which the Other needs but to the "care" which the Other should take upon himself in this activity of procuring something. While concentrating on things, inauthentic solicitude seeks in fact to substitute itself for the Other in order to dominate him. "This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself".²⁷ Heidegger opposes to this "substitutive-dominating solicitude" an "antici-

23 Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

24 *Idem*, p. 125.

25 *Idem*, p. 121.

26 *Idem*, *ibidem*.

27 *Idem*, p. 122.

patory-liberating solicitude", that does not claim to take away from the Other his "care"; rather it helps him clearly understand it so that he can go freely toward it.

The various modes of Being of the "they" described in section 27, i.e., the inauthentic care to differentiate oneself from others, complacency regarding averageness, levelling, "publicness" that renders everything accessible and on the same level, all these various modes come from the *in-difference* with which *Dasein* endeavors to be *nobody*, to tear itself away from its own situations and decisions. "The 'they' has always kept *Dasein* from taking hold of these possibilities of Being. The 'they' even hides the manner in which it has tacitly relieved *Dasein* of the burden of explicitly *choosing* these possibilities".²⁸

Does not the heideggerian analysis amount to saying that the fall into everydayness is useful, pragmatically necessary, but "immoral"? The Good is elsewhere, in the Unique that I alone can discover; it is to be found not "in me", in my interiority, but in the world through the constant projection of my own temporality. Heidegger carries out a critique of the 'I' as substance, but he considers, perhaps in obedience to an exigency that comes from the oldest metaphysical source, that the complete unification of *Dasein* is the absolute *telos*. *Dasein* must be "protected (*schützen*) against its tendencies toward fragmentation (*Zersplitterung*)".²⁹ The bad plurality of affairs, concerns, or *pragmata* is opposed to the good singularity of my care in the face of my own possibility for death. Resoluteness turns its back on this fluttering about, on this constant pursuit of novelty, on indifference, in order to attach itself to the repetition of possibilities taken up as my own, in order to find the "constancy of Self", the "stability of existence", "the Self's resoluteness *against* the inconstancy of dispersion".³⁰

The whole question is lodged in this refusal: Can I find my own being *against* everydayness? Why is it necessary to exclude "everyday things" from the authentic experience of Being? Is not authenticity modelled after the *myth of the hero*, the cult of the exceptional state, as the *instant* when existing *Dasein* sees itself ecstatically in its totality? Does not Heidegger expressly say that in the authentic retaking up of past possibilities "*Dasein*

28 *Idem*, p. 268.

29 *Idem*, p. 351.

30 *Idem*, p. 390 (emphasis mine)

may choose its hero"?³¹ Is it not rather that it chooses itself as its only hero?

Is it not necessary, in order to be done with Platonism, with the eternal schism, to learn anew to *love* the everyday? How could we, even from Heidegger's point of view, project only what we have chosen? What would we then do with facticity and chance? Is not *de amor fati* which teaches to "will that which I was forced to do", wiser than the radical and total depreciation of the everyday, wiser than the struggle with and suspicion of *ordinary Being*?

If authenticity were an heroic fiction, would not its counterpart, "everydayness", be just as fictive?

Listen to what seems to be Nietzsche's anticipated, albeit excessive, protest against this fiction, a protest just as intense and violent as the fiction itself and as the entire tradition:

The fantastic and delirious *pathos* with which we have valorized the most exceptional acts has as its counterpart the absurd indifference and contempt in which we enshroud obscure and everyday actions. We are the dupes of rarity and we have thus depreciated even our daily bread.³²

31 *Idem*, p. 385.

32 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Aurore, Posthumous Fragments*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 353-54; also in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. 9, 3, (89), Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1980), 70.