

DISEASES AND NEW MORAL ORDER IN SOCIETY

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Abstract

To a great degree of validity, it can be postulated along Heideggerian pattern of reasoning that being human inevitably means being an entity that sometimes experiences disease-conditions in its lifetime. This implies that the absence of such possibility renders individuals non-human. Indeed, it would also be inappropriate to conceive them as living organisms, for it is in the general structure of the organisms to stand the chance of being so afflicted sometimes. And the chance forms one of the factors that cause individuals to appreciate the finitude of their existence as it takes them close to another fact of life, which is death. Death hovers around every ailing individual and becomes the possible difference between their seeking-for, responding and not responding to clinical treatments. Given individuals' realisation of the finitude of their lives as a consequence of disease affliction, it is typical of them to evaluate their moral lives during illnesses especially with respect to how best or worst they had related with fellow individuals and the environment. With the assessment, sometimes, comes a desire to survive so as to amend their moral approaches, especially where they adjudge themselves reprehensible. That amendment, sometimes, involves desiring to be more benevolent than malevolent; creating a humane society.

This is because it dawns on diseased-individuals that life is short, nasty and vain. Hence, it is more meaningful to be benevolent than already lived. This essay deploys analytic method of philosophic discourses to explore human disease-condition as a stimulus for a new moral order in society.

Keywords: Human being, Disease, New moral order, Society

Introduction

When the question “what is man?” is raised, a myriad of responses comes to mind. Some of them are anthropological, bearing various empirical notions of human nature that unify understanding of individuals as both creatures of their environment and creators of their own values. Others are existential, bearing notions of essential structures of average everyday life that characterise the ontological nature of general human being. With the former idea, definitions are to reveal individuals as entities engaged in different occupations and stations of life such as medicine and surgery as physicians, engineering as engineers, academics as teachers, the home-front as parents and children, etc. And the latter idea is to reveal individuals as entities who live out experiences that can be distinctively characterised as human – in contradistinction to those of non-humans. Existential experience is something universal to all human beings despite differences in their occupations and stations of life.

This essay aims at deploying analytic method of philosophic discourses to describe humankind in both ways. It, however, commences with the latter approach and describes individuals as entities whose being it is

to sometimes be afflicted by diseases. This is done in line with Martin Heidegger's pattern of reasoning on human existence. Then the essay transits to anthropological description of diseased or ailing individuals as entities that sometimes reconsider to reform their senses of moral values and the environment due to their realisation of the finitude of existence as occasioned by fear of death, which sometimes characterises the affliction.

From this outset, it is imperative to clarify that analysis of a philosophical discourse – as the method utilised in the essay – involves breaking down of complex terms, notions, concepts, or views into simple ideas in order to present them and explain their implications more understandably than they were in the complex form (Etukudoh, 2017, p. 47). It is in accordance with this technique, therefore, that this paper approaches its subject of discourse.

Man as a Being-Towards-disease

Martin Heidegger's very important literature, *Being and Time* (1962), is a work that lays bare fundamental ontological considerations about what it means for humankind to exist – distinctively as human beings. Due to its depth of analysis and meaning, the literature has since attracted a wider range of applications in interpreting, explaining, and justifying various modes of human being, even including those not discussed by Heidegger. This is evident in the works of scholars like Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Lawrence Hass, and the present essay.

In analysing what it means for humankind to be human being, Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, was primarily concerned with a more foundational necessity of responding to a perennially perplexing question of the general meaning of Being. And in that concern, he discovered through his studies that the perplexity can only be adequately unraveled following one science – the *logos*(account) of *onta* (the Being of beings or being insofar as it is being) or Ontology (Heidegger, 1977, p. 5). Having studied Husserl's brand of phenomenology and being aware of its methodic emphasis on 'going to the things themselves' in describing phenomena, Heidegger chose to apply the method in his ontological project– to let his subject of research (i.e. Being) manifest itself exactly as it is in itself. This is because he considered very strongly that only as phenomenology is ontology possible (Heidegger, 1962, p. 60).

Still, in order to give the analysis an accurate direction, Heidegger (1962, p. 26) considered that one important question which needed to be addressed first before full analysis was: where and with what being should the question of Being begin? And the answer, in his view, lay in both the nature of the question and its inquirer. This is because he considered that both the question of Being and the one who asks the question are relevant to unraveling the meaning of Being (Heidegger, 1962, pp.24-27). The question, to him, is often raised in a certain way and by a certain being (Heidegger, 1962, p.26). While, for the purpose of this essay however, it is needless to focus on analysing the nature of question of Being, it is imperative to focus on the nature of the questioner. This is because the nature of the question is not as important to the

substantiation of this essay's position as is the nature of the questioner.

With this focus, the next important question to this essay is: who is the questioner of Being? Heidegger responds to this by asserting that it is human beings that pose the question humanly in transcendence (Heidegger, 1962, p.26). Explaining this more succinctly, Unah (1996, p. 10) and Azenabor (1996, p. 266) aver that, apart from human beings, no other being interrogates the meaning of existence. Given this reasoning, it can be further interpreted that insofar as it is human beings that raise questions concerning Being it is imperative that attempts at understanding meaning of Being should begin with an analysis of their own being. It is this reasoning, therefore, that led Heidegger to a concrete posing of the question of Being (Krell, 1977, p.18) – with the concreteness referring to investigation of human ways of existing, both partially and completely, in their average everydayness (Heidegger, 1962, p. 37-38). It also made his phenomenological investigation of human ontology to become an exercise in fundamental ontology.

Taking up his fundamental ontological project and maintaining focus on answering the question “what is man?” or, alternatively, “what is the being of the questioner?” Heidegger found that existing ways of responding to the question would not offer the result he desired. That is because those traditional ways, right from Aristotle, erroneously reduced general character of human existence to particular, fragmented, scientifically-specialised, regional or ontical descriptions of man (Unah, 2010, p. 7). They described the general being of man from

rational, economic, biological, historical, etc, perspectives. And that led to a *reductio absurdum*, for some individuals exist that may not adequately share the specific traits. Hence, to avoid such error, Heidegger had to approach his response to the question in a different, but proper and most general way, which all individuals share. Accordingly, he postulated that a human being is to be considered as a dynamic entity which has the capacity to be what it is not and not to be what it is (Heidegger, 1962, pp.24-27). Humankind – as an inquirer – is not fixed. He “...is always – in no matter how vague a way – aware of his being in the world... (He) questions his own Being and that of other things in the world” (Krell, 1977, p.19). That necessity to vary his conception of “Man” from those of traditional ontologies also informed Heidegger to differentiate his neologism for the concept as well as the objective of his project from existing inquiries into human nature. Accordingly, he invented the concept of *Dasein* to replace “man”, “humankind,” “human being,” “the individual,” or “the inquirer” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 32). Then, the rest of his vocation became activities in *Dasein* analysis. Indeed, Heidegger (1962, p. 34) asserted that any meaningful discussion about meaning of Being is to be presented only within the framework of existential analysis of *Dasein*. And such presentation is to concentrate on analysing the characteristics (*existentiale*) of “essential structures” (*existentialia*) of *Dasein*’s average daily modes of being as against that of existing Aristotelian “categories” (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 35-37). This is because analysis of essential structures of average daily living is precisely for *Dasein* and that of Aristotelian categories can be extended to other entities in the world (Hass, 1988, p. 82). Following

that reasoning, Heidegger then proceeded to identify various *existentialia* of *Dasein* which *existentialia* he also analysed.

Of all *existentialia*, the first and major one is “Being-in-the-world,” which all other stake their *locus* from (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 78-80). This essay anchors its position on the theory. It, however, also deploys the theory of “Being-with-others,” which is an ancillary of “Being-in-the-world,” for a deeper and clearer intelligibility of the discourse. Accordingly, whereas “Being-in-the-world” presents the framework for describing human beings as entities that can sometimes be afflicted by diseases, “Being-with-others” presents the framework for explaining the possibility of ailing human beings desiring to re-invent values and their environment. But we concentrate on the first theory, presently.

Dasein – as a Being-in-the-world – would ordinarily be considered as an entity that necessarily exists in some place, namely, the world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 79). But this kind of existence, which appeals as “Being-in” makes *Dasein* a present-at-hand kind of entity – sharing its “in-the-worldness” with other non-*Dasein* entities. It gives the impression of “in-the-worldness” that is akin to:
... ‘Being in something’ ... as the water is “in” the glass, or the garment is “in” the cupboard. By this “in” we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended “in” space have to

each other with regard to
their location in that space...
in the sense of a definite
location (Heidegger, 1962, p.
79).

Accordingly, *Dasein*'s present-at-hand "Being-in-the-world" takes the form of existence that humankind possess as objects in the world. Human beings are locatable 'inside' the world – just like other non-human entities. This constitutes the sense of existence in which one speaks of trees, stones, houses, cars, etc, as existing – in the same way as human beings. Yet, this is not the only kind of "Being-in" the world character that *Dasein* has, for in addition to this kind of character *it* also has a ready-to-hand mode of "Being-in" that distinguishes it from other non-*Dasein* entities.

The second and distinctive trait of "Being-in" of *Dasein*'s "Being-in-the-world" is an existential description of its essential state of dwelling in the world. To dwell in the world is, according to Heidegger (1962, pp. 81-82), to belong there or to have a *familiar* place there. It is like:
...producing something, attending to something and
looking after it, making use of something, giving something
up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing,
interrogating, considering, discussing, determining...All

these kind of ways of Being-
in have concern (Bersorgen)
as their kind of Being
(Heidegger, 1962, p. 83).

Such sense of familiarity with the world makes *Dasein* an essential entity, which understands and interprets phenomena and the world. It makes the world to acquire through *Dasein* the meaning that it has at any point in time. This is why Heidegger (1962, p. 80) sometimes uses the term *dwelling* to express the distinctive ready-to-hand nature in which *Da-sein* is in the world. To dwell in the world (like a house), for instance, is not merely to be inside it spatially; it is also to be able to understand and interpret the meaning of the world or house as a dwelling place, its purpose for dwelling, and the purpose of the dweller in the dwelling. The world of a physician, for example, is not only the hospital as a healthcare facility, building, place, location or world space. It is also the purpose of the place as a healthcare facility as well as the entirety of the physician's occupation as a professional.

Being-in-the-world as a ready-to-hand entity, for *Dasein*, lies in the essence of having to do or be concerned with phenomena in a familiar way. That concern and familiarity lies in thought (Heidegger, 1971, p. 10). *Dasein* is the only entity that thinks (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 193-194). All non-*Dasein* entities do not think. Hence, it is as thought that *Dasein* can be said to exist in a distinctively ready-to-hand sense. All non-*Dasein* entities do not exist as such.

With thought, *Dasein*'s being is identical with the world. This is because the world is as *Dasein* thinks that it is. To be *Dasein* at all is to be worldly – i.e. to be *involved* in a link of network of intelligibility with the world (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 193-194). And, conversely, to be worldly is to be *Dasein*. As a worldly entity *Dasein* is a consciousness that is not only conscious of phenomena outside itself but, either partially or completely, is also conscious that it is consciousness. This means that *Dasein* is the meaning-maker of the world (Unah, 1996, p. 10). Indeed, it is the unified territory that involves meaning itself. Human being-in-the-world is the totality of *Dasein*'s involvement or absorption with activity of thinking and existing (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 5).

With the foregoing, it is to be deduced from Heidegger's analyses of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world that being human means being a conscious consciousness, a meaning-maker of the world, dwelling in the world in some familiar way or being meaning itself. But these are positive modes of describing human worldly being for, with respect to them, individuals are expected – at least, by Heidegger – to engage in activities of existing normally and maintain healthy average everyday approach to things in ways that are distinctively human. To be conscious implies dwelling in the world or thinking in ways that normal or healthy average everyday individuals exist, making-meaning of phenomena and events and being meaning themselves – as emulable models. Unconsciousness – the opposite – therefore, implies lacking in such normalcy or health. An unconscious individual, although remains a *Dasein* in the present-at-hand sense of “Being-in-the-world,” lacks the presence of mind necessary for discerning-thinking,

meaning-making, and being a meaning. To be an emulable model requires the presence and serenity of mind, which an unconscious individual lacks. Meaning-making or dwelling in the world in some familiar mode of consciousness or getting absorbed in the world in the Heideggerian sense of reasoning requires *Dasein*'s physical, mental and social well-being. And the lack or absence of such well-being implies *Dasein*'s loss of the capability for meaning-making, dwelling and absorption in the world.

This is how Heidegger's positive description of individuals as meaning-making beings-in-the-world also mirrors their negative possibility of lacking-the-well-being for it. But it must be noted in line with Heidegger's pattern of reasoning that the positivity and negativity of *Dasein*'s possibilities in the afore-described directions are not to be interpreted morally as good or bad. This is because neither *Dasein*'s positive mode of being-in-the-world as conscious consciousness, meaning-maker, dwelling in the world in some familiar way or being meaning itself nor its negative mode of lacking the well-being for the positivity is a moral category that should be commended (in the case of the positive one) or condemned (in the case of the negative one). They are simply the essential characters of human being in the world. They point to the idea that human ready-to-hand existence in the world is characterised by both healthiness and unhealthiness. And every individual is ontologically composed of both modes of being. In contrast to healthiness, an unhealthy individual is one who sometimes experiences absence of health. This is because *Dasein* is not and cannot be healthy at all times. Time, in the pattern of Heidegger's thought, is tied to

individuals' possibility of healthiness and unhealthiness. Time is "the transcendental horizon with which man tacitly understands and interprets Being in terms of its own temporal being" (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 39-41). Given this, individuals experience unhealthiness as a trait that has always been in the structure of humankind since the beginning of life; is always presently with them; and shall continue to be with them. Indeed, as *Dasein* discovered itself in and, fundamentally, with the world, it did, always does and shall continue to do so in both healthiness and unhealthiness.

Biologically, health is "an absence of signs and symptoms associated with any disease" (Ahmed et al., 2007, p. 1). Unhealthiness, accordingly, is the presence of signs and symptoms associated with a disease. A disease is "any abnormality or failure of the body to function properly and this may require medical treatment" (Ahmed et al., 2007, p. 1). And there are a myriad of such abnormalities or bodily dysfunctions that may require medical treatment including, but not limited to, ailments such as Malaria fever, Typhoid fever, Lassa fever, Hepatitis, Ebola, and COVID-19. All of them, insofar as they afflict human beings, are possibilities identifiable with the being itself – especially as a living organism.

But describing health in this way fails to accord human being the distinctiveness that distinguishes it from other living entities, for other living entities also experience biological disease-conditions, sometimes. Non-human animals and plants are known to also ail through biological abnormalities or bodily dysfunction. Does that, therefore, mean that there is no way that human beings ail

in a distinctively human character? There is, for according to the above fundamental ontology of both healthy and unhealthy individuals, it is to be re-emphasised that human beings are unhealthy or diseased when they lack the presence and serenity of mind to be conscious consciousnesses, meaning-makers of the world, and dwellers in the world in some familiar way or emulable models. Even research in biological science reveals that there are possibilities of complications in limiting the description of human health to biological interpretations as there are circumstances where individuals could be biologically ill yet lack detectable indications of disease (Ahmed et al., p. 1). There are also circumstances where individuals may appear biologically well, yet detailed examination of their system would reveal serious disease(s) in them (Ahmed et al., p. 1). It is on these bases, therefore, that the World Health Organisation (WHO) guides that health should be conceived as *a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease* (Ahmed et al., p. 1). And the conception agrees with our ontological conception of health above. It also reinforces our analysis of human beings as beings-towards-disease, for it is in human nature not to always be so well – even if in one of the dimensions of life.

Human Diseased-Beings as Reformers of Moral Values

As beings-in-the-world which sometimes falls ill, human beings have the proclivity to desire reformation of moral values and their environment, especially where the episode of illness is critical. This is because the criticality is characterised by serious physical weakness, social and emotional withdrawal, which together, occasion a

realisation of the shortness, nastiness and vanity of life. The realisation deepens as the criticality advances and fear of death begins to descend on the ailing individual.

Death is, biologically, the cessation of vital processes of the body – like heartbeat and respiration (Black, 1977, p. 136). It is also a state of irreversible coma where, “on two occasions 24 hours apart, there is unreceptivity and unresponsivity to all stimuli, lack of movement or spontaneous breathing, lack of reflex, a flat electroencephalogram, and an absence of hypothermia or drug overdosage as preceding events” (Ad Hoc Committee, 1968, p. 85). But these definitions only present ontic descriptions of individuals’ death. They do not also account also an ontological, existential or essential way which they distinctively die as human beings. With the biological descriptions, death becomes a condition of being that other living entities also share with human beings. Indeed, human beings are described as living organisms because, like other living organisms, it is one of their characteristics to die. However, there is a distinctive way that human beings die, which other entities do not experience. And that is as termination of all possibilities for *Daseins* (Unah, 2002, p. 107). As thought par excellence, human beings begin to die when all their transcendental possibilities begin to dwindle; and actually die when the possibilities come to an end. Human death is an experience that characterises social aspect of “Being-in-the-world.” This is because, first, individuals learn from the death of fellow individuals that the experience is a capital extinguisher of all possibilities. It is impossible for anyone to experience by themselves what it means to die (like they do other lived experiences). No

dead individual knows that they are dead when they die. Experience of death is often inferred from the death of other individuals. And it is the inference that communicates the experience to living individuals as an inevitable possibility for all *Daseins*. That is why death, for Heidegger (1962, p. 307), is “the possibility of the impossibility for any existence at all,”

Second, from the understanding of death as an inevitable end of individuals’ existence, individuals realise the shortness or finitude of life. With the realisation, they live with utmost determination to accomplish projects, including being emulable models, serving the self (in greed), or serving humanity (in selflessness), etc. The determination is motivated by the fear that they may die at anytime, for individuals are beings-towards-death (Heidegger, 1962, p. 290). They begin to die as soon as they are born because death is latent in both their biological and essential structures.

Third, the fear of dying anytime, together with the realisation of the finitude of life, reconnects individuals with their conscience, making them reflect judgmentally on how they have lived in themselves and in relation to other people and the environment. Conscientious assessment of life is one of the states of individuals being. Conscience is the innermost voice of individuals’ judgmental minds, which summons them to the reticence of themselves (Heidegger, 1962, p.319). And the summoning is often strongest during episodes of critical illnesses, which drag individuals to the brink of death. The fear of dying anytime, together with the realisation of the finitude of life, makes them reflect judgmentally on how they have lived in

relation to other people and the environment prior to the illness. Then the self-judgmental reflection stimulates a desire to amend the relationship, especially in good direction. It also has the tendency to stimulate a desire to amend the relationship in bad direction.

All these are, as a matter of focus, possible because human being-in-the-world is not solitary. It involves “being-with-others” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 158). Life’s meaning is unconsciously interpreted only in association with “others.” And those “others” include both fellow human beings and non-human entities of the environment. Heidegger (1962, p. 155) affirms this by submitting that “involvement-with-the-world” or “dwelling-in-the-world” or “familiarity-with-the-world” as states of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world is meaningful only in interaction with other *Daseins* in the world and the world environment. This means that individuals are, both ontically and ontologically, social beings.

The sociality of human being is such that, far beyond other entities, they have the capacity to consider other’s minds, empathise with others’ needs, and transform the empathy into sympathy, care and generosity (Waytz, 2014, p. 1).

They also have the capacity not to engage such transformations of empathy and even neglect the presence of the “others.” Heidegger (1962, p. 158) speaks of this mode of individuals’ relationship with “others” where he says that *Dasein*’s immersion with the world entails encountering “others” in one form or another, either indifferently or positively. The indifference entails passing by other *Daseins* in such a way that they do not matter to each other. And the positivity entails leaping-in and

leaping-ahead others such that *Dasein* gets involved in others' affairs to the point where it takes over their problems and anxieties and solves for them.

With *Dasein*'s sociality, moral values are considered necessary and, thus, created in society. This is because individuals' interaction with others need to be regulated by some standards of right and wrong that avails them internal (self) and external (social) peace, harmony, order, happiness and fulfillment (Omoregbe, 1993, p. ix). It is on that basis that they are able to assess the goodness or badness of their actions individually and collectively. While good actions avail them internal (self) and external (social) peace, harmony, order, happiness and fulfillment bad actions do not. This, then, provides the basis for which a critically ill person applies his conscience and fear of death to assess his already-lived experience and seek to amend things, depending on the result of the assessment. Usually, the result of the assessment motivates individuals to wish for recovery, not just for pleasurable longevity, but to stand another chance to reform their moral approach to life and set things right and straight in society. It is common to find individuals who recover from critical illnesses becoming more humane than they used to be prior to the illness. They try to be more benevolent than malevolent, more enduring, tolerant and accommodating than overbearing and intolerant, and more altruistic than egoistic. In living the morally reformed life, they do not merely do so personally, they also do so emotivistically. By this is meant that they try to persuade others to understand life in the new light of their personal conviction and join them in living in that way too. This

constitutes the way in which once critically ill or diseased individuals recreate societal or world moral order.

Conclusion

Getting afflicted with disease is a painful and unsavory experience for individuals. It makes life appear lonely, boring, short, nasty, and meaningless. Yet it is an inevitable state of human being. No matter how it may be wished away, it is part of individuals' way of being-in-the-world. Accordingly, when it occurs, individuals are to embrace it as one of the facticities of their existence, struggle through, and live life meaningfully with it.

An attempt to live life meaningfully by disease-afflicted individuals is to introspect about their pre-affliction social relations. And the introspection is to aim at positively changing their moral approaches to the relations. Such positivity is to create a more friendly and humane society than they knew and practiced prior to the affliction. That is not only to be personal but also proliferated through some emotivist programme, which would influence other people. These offer a pattern of reasoning in which disease-conditions of human being contribute positively to creating and sustaining a new moral order in society.

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