

# From Anxiety to Boredom—The Transformation of Phenomenology of Affectivity from Heidegger's De-subjectification Perspective

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**Abstract:** *In Being and Time, Heidegger argues that anxiety can enable individuals to free themselves from the they or the subject and thus individualise themselves. However, this discussion can lead to the misunderstanding that, by shaking off the identity of a general subject, Dasein becomes an individual subject. Then Heidegger's critique of the philosophy of subjectivity would not only be unsuccessful but would also be somewhat extreme. In the face of this danger, Heidegger replaces the basic affectivity of anxiety with boredom. By analysing boredom, Heidegger achieves the goal of de-subjectification.*

**Keywords:** Affectivity, Anxiety, Boredom, Dasein, De-subjectification.

## 1. Introduction

Heidegger's phenomenology of affectivity (stimmung) is a relatively crucial topic in his earlier philosophy, not only because of its strong connection with temporality (Zeitlichkeit) but also because it is an important step for Heidegger to overcome the philosophy of subjectivity. In *Being and Time*, the basic affectivity is death anxiety (Angst), but in 1929 texts that *What is Metaphysics?*, we find that Heidegger has introduced boredom (Langweile) as a gateway to anxiety at this time. In his 1929-1930 secret work *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger never mentions anxiety, but instead uses boredom as the basic affectivity of humans. The question of why the theme of affectivity of phenomenology has transformed puzzled the readers. Some scholars believe that the structure between anxiety and boredom is similar, but this argument cannot explain the situation in which Heidegger does change the theme. This paper attempts to provide a new perspective on the transformation from anxiety to boredom, namely, de-subjectification. There is no doubt that in Heidegger's questioning of being, the overcoming of traditional subjectivity philosophy is its important task. However, as Heidegger himself pointed out, "this (*Being and Time*) break is since the path taken and the attempt against, but it faces the risk again that it may become merely a confirmation of subjectivity" [1]. Therefore, the anxiety that attempts to overcome subjectivity in *Being and Time* may entrench this being in the position of the subject. Therefore Heidegger inevitably seeks a newer affectivity to complete this discussion. This paper is to explain why Heidegger gradually completed the effort on de-subjectification through affectivity with the following texts, i.e., *Being and Time*, *What is Metaphysics?*, and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

## 2. Individualised Effect of Anxiety

In Heidegger's conception, the approach of *Being and Time* is to question existence through a discussion of the relationship between "Sein-Dasein" and the Dasein can question being because of its temporality. However, it seems difficult to incorporate an analysis of existentialism into this discussion

paradigm, because if we eliminate the existentialist part of *Being and Time*, and analyse the temporality of the here-and-now alone, combined with the two works *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *Kant and Problem of Metaphysics*, we would not consider such a construction method to be abrupt. However, even after *Being and Time*, we find that Heidegger was not completely indifferent to the ontological analysis of Dasein, otherwise there would be no emphasis on boredom in 1929, but rather that in the process of perfecting his own thinking horizon, he constantly exposed new methods of discussion for this analysis. This shows that the ontological analysis is not an optional analysis, but a very important part of the analysis of Dasein. In this analysis, the structure of affectivity is of paramount importance. As Lauren Freeman and Andreas Elpidorou said: "The value of Heidegger's account, we believe in particular his account before 1930, lies primarily in its unique capacity to highlight the existential import of affectivity and, relatedly, to cast into sharp relief the fact that affectivity is an irrevocable and essential aspect of our worldly, social, and concerned existence" [2].

In *Being and Time*, the basic affectivity of Dasein is expressed as anxiety to death, and an analysis of anxiety is closely related to the they (das Man). Let us begin with an analysis of the they. We know that, according to Heidegger, the structure of Dasein this being that can inquire into existence is co-being. In its original state of existence, Dasein often unfolds together with the Other. However, this coexistence is always a distanciality and falling prey state. In other words, the characteristic of being-with is that a particular being is deprived of its own existence and dissolves into the multitude. This multitude is, in Heidegger's view, a neutral 'who'. "The they has its own ways to be...being with one another as such creates averageness" [3]. Therefore, it seems that the they is in a state of averageness and entanglement.

It is worth noting that although the state of falling into the they is the inauthentic state of being of Dasein, Heidegger does not regard the they as a present being. "The they is as little objectively present as Da-sein itself...nor is the they something like a universal subject which hovers over a

plurality of subjects" [3], This means that the they, although they are the state against which Heidegger argues, is not subject because they are not a completed being. In other words, the they is a state of Dasein rather than a subject.

Although Heidegger proposed that the they and the subject are not the same, this does not mean that there is no connection between the they and the subject. On the one hand, entanglement with the they is precisely the most ordinary behaviour of Dasein. In this analysis, the common structure between societies is revealed, but how the they are entangled (whether between histories or political systems) is different. On the other hand, the analysis of the they is manifested in our time in the specific form of the technological age. Heidegger proposes that "The utilisation of all materials, including the raw material 'human being', for the technical production of the absolute possibility of producing everything, is determined in secret by the complete emptiness in which the being, the materials of the real, hangs. This emptiness must be filled. But since the emptiness of being, especially if it cannot be experienced as such, can never be filled by the abundance of the existing, the only way to escape it is to set up the existing in such a way that it is constantly possible to organise it as a way of securing aimless activity" [4]. The essence of technology is compulsion (Herausfordern), a way of constantly placing people and beings in a way that makes them exist. This stems from the will subject's escape from its own nothingness (Nichtigkeit) and leaps into the average state of the they. Therefore, the technological age is precisely the average state of the they at this moment. And Heidegger clearly states that the technological age is the metaphysical destiny, an age of formation, in which only when Dasein becomes the subject and all beings are grasped as representations, does the average nature of the they come about under the compulsion of the technological age, and its origin is precisely the subject. Therefore, to get away from the they is also to get away from the subject.

Although Heidegger did not yet deal with this idea much in *Being and Time*, he actually gave the technological age many provisions similar to the they, such as: "Because reality consists in the uniformity of the planned calculation, man must also enter into uniformity in order to remain equal to reality" [4]. The technological age is the materialization of the present age, and it comes from the development and completion of the philosophy of subjectivity. Therefore, the they is precisely the embodiment of the subjective way of thinking. To rescue Dasein from the coercive situation under this technological oppression, we need to truly ponder the essence of man. In *Being and Time*, such insight is expressed as anxiety and death. Death is a most intrinsic, unrelated, and insurmountable feature of Dasein. In the everyday average state of being in the they, Dasein cannot feel death. In the toil and trouble of dealing with many existents and others, Dasein entangled. However, death is the extreme improbability of Dasein. Levinas had a profound insight into Heidegger's death, saying: "Death announces an event over which the subject is not master, an event concerning which the subject is no longer a subject" [5]. In fact, death does free Dasein from subjectivity and the state of being-the-they that subjectivity creates, and pulls it back to the identity of a being given existence.

At the same time, this process is accompanied by the experience of anxiety. The nothingness given by death contrasts sharply with the meaning and busyness brought about by the subject or the they. The choice between these two states of existence is entrusted to Dasein, or rather, it is precisely the anxiety about death and nothingness that turns Dasein towards the entanglement of mediocrity, and it is precisely the choice between anxiety and nothingness that makes Dasein itself. That is why Heidegger proposed: "Angst individuates Da-sein to its own most being-in-the-world which, as understanding, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. Thus along with that for which it is anxious, Angst discloses Da-sein as being possible, and indeed as what can be individualized in individuation of its own accord" [3]. As can be seen, Heidegger gives affectivity a very high position. It is no longer just a state of mind for human beings. As Lauren Freeman and Andreas Elpidorou pointed out "affective experiences are far more robust than we typically think; contrary to many folk psychological conceptions of emotion, they are not just discrete states that we happen to occupy that are caused by our surrounding environment; rather, they are basic to and constitutive of human existence. According to Heidegger, what makes us human (or, Dasein) is not just that we are rational, social, or practical beings. In addition to being these things, we are also affective, specifically, 'mooded' beings" [6].

Through the two-way emphasis on anxiety and death, Heidegger emphasises that when Dasein escapes from the existential state of the general subject and the they, it achieves a more authentic mode of existence. However, the question that arises is: is extreme individualisation not also an extreme form of subjectivity? Heidegger's response to this was, "Angst individualizes and thus discloses Da-sein 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" [3]. Heidegger's insight is to avoid worldless solipsism or extreme subjectivism by interweaving the world and existence. The unfolding of existence is accompanied by the individuation of each being, and the birth of the world is also based on the entanglement of each being's understanding of existence. This to some extent avoids the solipsism understanding of the problem of existence. If there were no world, man would certainly be a subject based on himself, and the constraints of the world on Dasein would make Dasein the only one to make self-determination according to the boundaries of his field of vision. In this construction, Heidegger actually completes the two-way meaning. First, by showing the anxiety and death of Dasein, he demonstrates that his understanding of the existence of Dasein is individualised, thus avoiding the misunderstanding of the general subjectivity of Dasein. Second, by highlighting the passive status of Dasein through existence and the world, Dasein avoids falling into the nest of solipsism.

However, this construction is not without problems. The extreme individuation achieved by anxiety may not escape the criticism of 'extreme subjectivism'. Specifically, although Heidegger uses anxiety to pull people out of the they and face themselves, thereby escaping the generality of the subject and gaining their true selves, this line of reasoning that highlights

the bodily nature of the individual so strongly inevitably cannot be understood as an extreme subjectivity. It can be said that this way of speaking by Heidegger is bound to invite the criticism that "on the one hand, the big subject is abolished, but on the other hand, the small subject is retained." It is precisely because of this dangerous edge that Heidegger seeks to find a newer horizon of understanding.

### 3. The Deepening Anxiety and Nothingness

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger mentions: "Angst does not know what it is about which it is anxious. But 'nowhere' does not mean nothing, rather, region in general lies therein, and disclosedness of the world in general for essentially spatial being-in" [3]. The so-called 'anxiety', such as Kierkegaard's anxiety, is a special affectivity different from that evoked by a specific being. Its object can only be nothing. However, this nothingness is not the absence of something in Heidegger's view. For example, the emotional response to the absence of the physical products or relationships that we currently possess is fear rather than dread. Nothingness is a state, a loss of meaning.

Professor Wu Zengding pointed out that there are actually two meanings of nothing (Nichts) in *Being and Time*, namely "First, 'nothing (Nichts)' means the unguided or 'meaningless' nature of the world in which Dasein exists...Second, 'nothingness(Nichtigkeit)' means that Dasein exists towards its own death and end...In Heidegger's view, the latter meaning of 'nothingness', that is, Dasein's existence towards death or end, is more primordial in terms of existentialism and ontology; while the former meaning, the meaningless nature of the world, comes from or is based on Dasein's existence towards death or end" [7]. Indeed, when Heidegger portrays the possibility of always being nothing with the finality of death, then 'nothingness' can truly manifest itself to the being. If there is no finality, then the meaning of everything will be lost, and there will be no meaninglessness. However, in Wu Zengding's view, the relationship between these two kinds of 'nothing' is not as strong as Heidegger envisaged. "In fact, Heidegger's specific analysis shows that the meaningless 'nothingness' of the world is revealed in the 'anxiety' of the being, and there is no need to trace it back to the 'meaninglessness of the being towards death'. On the contrary, tracing the 'nothingness' back to the being's approach towards death not only fails to free the 'nothingness' from a solipsism meaning but also contradicts the meaning of the 'meaninglessness of the world'"[7].

In other words, Wu Zengding believes that there are two reasons why Heidegger no longer talks about the nothing or nothingness of death after that: one is that it will lead to solipsism, and the other is that the two kinds of nothing can seem to be discussed separately, so omitting the discussion of death does not lead to the extinguishing of the nothing of meaning. However, we can see that Heidegger clearly emphasises that anxiety and nothingness itself do not lead to solipsism, because when a person accepts the gift of being, they also belong to the recipients. As a Dasein of being-in-the-world, we decisions are also faced with the finitude of our own horizons or existence. At the same time, without the meaning of nothingness given by death, for Dasein, the world is neither meaningful nor meaningless to

Dasein. Therefore, the point of Heidegger's turning to discuss the nothingness of the world independently and no longer talking about the death of Dasein is not in the above two, but in seeking a deepening of horizons.

This kind of thinking is fully explained in the article *On the Essence of Ground* written in the same period, and the relationship between the world and Dasein is fully demonstrated by the structure of grounding (Gründen). Dasein makes the world worlds (welt weltet) in its grounding. The premise of transcendence is nothingness and an exploration of the integration of existence and nothingness more fully speaks to the profound connection between Dasein and being, and also highlights Heidegger's position on the decentralization of being. In other words, *Being and Time* shows the structure of how Dasein exists in the world, while the discussion of freedom, ground and nothingness shows the structure of how the world worlds. It is not conflict, and together they form a complete system of Sein-Dasein.

In the essay *What is Metaphysics?*, Heidegger expresses thoughts that are related to *On the Essence of Ground*. "Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence? It can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety" [8]. It can be seen that, compared to *Being and Time*, Heidegger more clearly points out the connection between anxiety and nothingness. Anxiety is the process of reaching nothingness, or anxiety reveals nothingness. In addition, "In anxiety there occurs a shrinking back before...that is surely not any sort of flight but rather a kind of entranced calm. This 'back before' takes its departure from the nothing. The nothing itself does not attract; it is essentially repelling. But this repulsion is itself as such a parting gesture to ward beings that are submerging as a whole" [8]. Nothing has an important place in the way that the Dasein comes into being. The grounding for Dasein would not be possible without the original field of unfolding brought about by nothingness.

Therefore, the misunderstanding of transcendentalism caused by the simple analysis of Dasein and the structure of the world in *Being and Time* is clarified by the supplementary analysis of nothingness. If Heidegger had not supplemented his analysis with an analysis of nothing, the dynamic and generative meaning of being itself would have been overlooked. This was an important reason why Heidegger turned to an analysis of the world as world. At the same time, the essence of being is freedom and transcendence, which in a way answers the criticism that Dasein is anthropocentric. Heidegger responded to the criticism of his anthropocentrism: "This objection that is now passed all too readily from hand to hand says nothing so long as one omits (unterläßt) o think through the approach, the entire thrust, and the goal of the development of the problem in *Being and Time* and to comprehend how precisely through the elaboration of the transcendence of Dasein, 'the human being' comes into the 'center' in such a way that his nothingness(Nichtigkeit) amid beings as a whole can and must become a problem in the first place" [8]. It can be seen that the nothing of a proposal is enough to strip Dasein from anthropocentric criticism.

It is worth noting that Heidegger proposed boredom that a

new emotional phenomenon in the essay *What is Metaphysics?*. However, boredom did not receive thematic research because at this time, in Heidegger's view, boredom was merely a process of accessing anxiety. As he said: "Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests beings as a whole" [8]. Boredom reveals beings as a whole and thus veers too far towards anxiety and nothingness. However, in his later work *The Basic Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger gives boredom a more nuanced and profound role.

#### 4. Double De-Subjectification in Profound Boredom

In *The Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger distinguishes between three main states of boredom. The first form of boredom is becoming bored by something (*Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*), and the second is being bored with something (*Sichlangweilen bei etwas*) and the passing of time belonging to it; the third is profound boredom (*tiefe Langweile*) as 'it is boring for one'. Clearly, Heidegger primarily wants to discuss the existential structure of deep boredom as an authentic emotion, because this kind of boredom is the real boredom and the root of the previous two kinds of boredom. As he said: "The first form is neither the cause, nor the reason or point of departure for the development of boredom into the second and third forms, but vice-versa: the third form is the condition of the possibility of the first and thereby also of the second" [9]. The reason why it is more fundamental boredom is that in profound boredom, the relationship between being and temporality is more closely demonstrated. "What is boring is neither beings nor things as such-whether individually nor in a context-nor human beings as people we find before us and can ascertain neither objects nor subjects, but 'temporality' as such" [9]. As can be seen, Heidegger here revisits the structure of temporality and considers profound boredom consistent with this structure.

In terms of the function of profound boredom itself, "There is a telling refusal on the part of beings as a whole. They recede into an indifference...Everything-in every respect, in retrospect and prospect, beings simultaneously withdraw. The 'three perspectives' [*Sichten*] of respect, retrospect, and prospect do not belong to mere perception, nor even to theoretical or some other contemplative apprehending, but are the perspectives of all 'doing and activity' of *Dasein*...Originally, there is a 'single' and 'unitary universal horizon of time'. There is a telling refusal of all beings simultaneously in 'what' and 'how' they are: 'as a whole', as we put it. This now means: 'in one originally unifying horizon of time'" [9]. Through boredom, the *Dasein* has a refusal by beings as a whole while attracted to temporality. It is therefore also depicted an original emotion that "takes us into an expanse together with a holding us in limbo that intensifies extremity". This extremity is precisely the decision that *Dasein* makes when it looks back on the property of temporality of its own being-given and withdraws from the ordinary state, or rather, the moment (*Augenblick*), as its authentic self. It is precisely for this reason that Heidegger gives Kierkegaard such high praise. "What we here designate

as 'moment of vision' is what was really comprehended for the first time in philosophy by Kierkegaard-a comprehending with which the possibility of a completely new epoch of philosophy has begun for the first time since antiquity" [9]. As anxiety is linked to death, boredom is linked to temporality. As Cristian Ciocan said: "Profound boredom does not engage this or that dimension of time, but the horizon of temporality as a whole. The discussion moves again from the existential level to the ontological one, i.e. to the fundamental connection between being and time, where *Sein und Zeit* stopped" [10].

So far, we have seen that Heidegger's interpretation of the state of boredom seems to be full of the prescriptive nature of anxiety in *Being and Time*, that is, to escape from the mundane state and face the true self. However, the problem seems not to be that simple. According to Wang Guangya's examination of this issue, there are three possibilities for the relationship between anxiety and boredom: first, boredom is the channel for anxiety; second, anxiety and boredom are completely similar structures; and third, boredom is a deepening of anxiety. What I want to express is that all three views have their own rationality. However, in terms of the first view, it only applies to Heidegger's discussion in *What is Metaphysics?* We hope to be able to combine the second and third points of view in the following analysis to gain a grasp of Heidegger's true intentions.

It makes sense to say that anxiety and boredom have a similar structure and that both boredom and anxiety have the effect of pulling a person back to themselves from the whole or the they. But this argument is not comprehensive, because it cannot explain the change in Heidegger's philosophical theme at this stage. Beginning in 1928, Heidegger began to shift from the questioning path of fundamental ontology to metontology (*Metontologie*), a shift based on the perfection of his own thinking. If fundamental ontology discusses beings in the world, the subject of meta-ontology is the 'beings as a whole' (*das Seiende im Ganzen*). Metontology includes fundamental ontology and becomes the philosophical theme of Heidegger at this stage. The beings as a whole includes a discussion of the integration of being and nothingness. As we have analysed before, the emphasis on nothingness can free being from the misunderstanding of the subject in foundational ontology. At the same time, it also reflects the deepening of Heidegger's vision between 1928 and 1930. Based on this transformation, Zhang Jinyi proposed: "If we limit the existential modality of 'anxiety' and the effects it opens up to the framework of *Being and Time*, then it can be argued that the authenticity achieved in 'anxiety' is focused on the totality of the temporality of the ontology of existence, while the depth boredom as the basic mood focuses on the totality of the possibility of the essence of existence, that is, the existence of the being that the being has to accept" [11]. This precisely shows that Heidegger's shift in the theme of affectivity during this period actually came from his deepening and refining of philosophical themes.

What needs to be pursued now is the essence of this transformation. In *The Basic Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger clearly mentioned his intention to discuss the temporality of boredom. "What we wish to do is the converse of this-as already emphasized repeatedly namely to press forward to the essence of time through our interpretation of

the essence of boredom...such a way as does not regard time as something we find within our consciousness or as a subjective form, It is a path on which, even before setting out and going along it, we have already comprehended that precisely the essence of consciousness and the essence of subjectivity must be put into question in advance to remove the chief obstacle preventing our access to original time" [9]. In other words, the pursuit of deep boredom in the process of determining the temporality of being towards existence also dispels the misunderstanding of Dasein as human subjectivity.

On the one hand, based on this examination of the efficacy of affectivity, Dasein can first break away from the general subject: "In this boredom, we do not carry out some abstraction, for instance, based on which we generalize ourselves from a particular individual ego to a universal ego in general" [9]. On the other hand, boredom also counteracts the danger of individual subjects causing extreme subjectivity, so Heidegger said: "The 'it is boring for one (Es ist einem langweilig)' has already transposed us into a realm of power over which the individual person, the public individual subject, no longer has any power" [9].

Although Heidegger intentionally downplayed the ontological construction of being in his interpretation of boredom and examined the same problem from a deeper perspective, boredom and anxiety are different interpretative schemes proposed by Heidegger based on the same intention—the de-subjectification of being. Therefore, their structures are undoubtedly similar. As Zhang Jinyi says, "the reduction of 'anxiety' to 'boredom' is in essence another repetition of Being and Time" [11]. It can be said that only after Heidegger has achieved an analysis of deep boredom is the questioning of being by Dasein complete, as is the openness of being to Dasein.

## 5. Conclusion

Above all, in Heidegger's philosophical conception, the the questioning of being accompanies human, and the primary aim is to make people withdraw from their subjective identity. When Heidegger discovered that the they and the subject are accomplished together, anxiety serves as a channel for escape. And when Heidegger discovered that anxiety could lead to a different subjectivity for Dasein, boredom took the place of anxiety. Of course, we must not expect a philosopher to produce a complete result at the beginning of his thinking. It is normal for ideas to be criticised and overcome. The question of affectivity is Heidegger's rebellion against the philosophy of subjectivity, which began with anxiety and was achieved through boredom. Therefore we find that Heidegger did not change his philosophical intention. In this sense, boredom and anxiety have similar functions. However, Heidegger did deepen the discussion of the way this intention. In this sense, boredom does have a transcendental aspect over anxiety. Only when we understand Heidegger's philosophical intention and the criticisms he has suffered can we understand the reasons for the changes or deepening of his philosophical themes.

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