

Thinking with Paula's Paper (A Response to "Evermore Now: Daseinsanalysis and Early Development" by Paula Thomson, Psy.D.)

If responding is somehow to answer or call again to someone, then, Paula, I have already "responded" to your paper: having called you again and again – long-distance and late-night – during the energizing process of thinking-with you toward this evening. For that conversation – and for the long conversation that is ongoing between us – I thank you. And on behalf of the larger community, I also thank you for the time and careful effort you have given to sharing your thoughts with us and for making the Da-sein stretch from there (Los Angeles) to here tonight.

For me, what is most important about tonight's paper is the questioning stance Paula offers us. Hers is not a text convinced of its own undeniable truth. Rather, she asks us to wonder with her through big questions. I believe that the capacity to question is shaped in the cauldron of relationship. Questioning is, for me, the region in which thinking becomes "critical" in the best sense of the word. That is, "critical" in the sense of having crucial significance. Like the very young child who is literally en-couraged to ask all and any questions. Who is en-couraged to value questions -- because our asking shelters the opportunity to reveal something not yet known. The child's ontic question, "Be home soon?" reveals, if we can listen to it, other as yet unasked questions of dependence, independence, futurity, hope and mortality itself.

Paula's paper asks us to question in two important directions: 1) to question Heidegger's descriptions of Da-sein's temporality, by offering new possibilities she calls Developmental Da-sein and Traumatized Da-sein and 2) to question the reliability of unchanging ontological structures, suggesting, as I understand it, a kind of lived hermeneutic exchange between the ontic and the ontological. I would like to suggest brief thoughts, out of my own reading of Heidegger, toward both of these concerns.

1) We cannot, I believe Heidegger insists, actually separate ontological structures from lived ontic experiences. These are always already an intertwine and this intertwine is human existence itself. If this inextricable unity is our existence, then Paula's ponderings point to both a Yes and a No. Da-sein, I believe, is an ongoing, ever-unfolding developmental achievement. Even in the radically deficient mode of, say, Traumatized Da-sein. To paraphrase Paula, Da-sein "is a process of emergence that is inextricably linked to the emergent properties from which it emerges." (Sounds positively Heideggerian, Paula!) We are/Da-sein is always both ontological and ontic in this emergence. It seems to me that Yes there is an ongoing, dynamic interchange in any particular human being's lived ontico-ontological existence: what actually happens to a person always influences and shapes what becomes actual for her or him out of all the human possibilities and potentialities. None of us would practise therapy as a client or a therapist if this were not the case. And No, since these two threads of the intertwine of our existence cannot be lived separately, there is no change in ontological structures. There is only change in the human being. For example, there is, in Heidegger's description, always the necessity and the issue of being-in-the-world-with-others, whether in a particular life this proves the source of traumatic harm or of tremendous healing.

2) As for the questions of temporality in Paula's paper: Da-sein's time, according to Heidegger, is never a series of discreet now-moments. Rather, as Paula has noted, Da-sein "stretches" along between birth and death, with past and future always already extended behind and ahead in the present. I wonder whether what Paula refers to as the never-ending now moments of infancy and adolescence are not, in fact, also modes of this stretching. What Heidegger would call "deficient" modes perhaps – but modes nonetheless. The "now" experience is actually more elongated than a moment: it stretches. Perhaps a kind of baby stretch or the way Da-sein's stretch actually develops rather than a completely different kind of time. Many adults know the creative power of a focused and almost total absorption that seems to alter time to a standstill, a never-ending moment. And yet this is actually part of what Heidegger would describe as Da-sein's stretch between birth and death.

What is also developing in infancy and adolescence is the lived experience of what Heidegger calls Da-sein's "time for..." Da-sein's temporality, like Da-sein in all its aspects, is care, which is our variously lived-out involvement or engagement in the world with others. Da-sein does not "have" time – like a thing or a moment. Da-sein lives "time for...", purposive. As Paula points out, even fetuses have an inborn experience of intentionality, of being-toward. This relates directly, I think, to time for...

So what about time for ... in infancy and adolescence? Perhaps, in terms of evolution and neurobiology, the time experiences of these developmental bursts are actually time for...time. A kind of temporality in waiting, a temporality of waiting. Adult Da-sein's task perhaps is to respect the slow, deficient-mode stretching of developmental Da-sein, perhaps even to relearn from it how to slow, to wait, to be glad in what-is.

Of course, Traumatized Da-sein's what-is is horrific, as anyone in this room who knows the nightmare of all past, no future can attest. But even in this radically compromised deficient mode of being-with, being-in-time, being-in-space, embodied Da-sein is actually changing and stretching between birth and death, even if one's self-experience lags far behind. Perhaps this helps us understand suicide: necessary because we actually do go on living even as we feel we do not and cannot.

So, I open the evening now to all the other questions and responses Paula's rich paper has undoubtedly encouraged. And to close my response, I repeat a German Pietist proverb Heidegger quoted more than once: Denken ist danken. To think is to thank. Thank you, Paula.

Cathleen Hoskins
Toronto, 28 April 2006