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Evaluating Heidegger's Fundamental Mood of Dread: Intentionality and Revealing

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In "What is Metaphysics?" Martin Heidegger claims that the fundamental mood of dread[1] reveals the nothing. In this paper, I will focus primarily on the intentional structure of the mood of dread, and the claim that the mood reveals the nothing. First, I will give an overview of Heidegger's account of the intentional structure of the mood of dread. I will then explicate S.J. Paluch's objections to Heidegger's conception of the mood of dread as intentional and to the claim that fundamental moods *reveal.* I will then respond to Paluch's objections with Ronald Grimsley's defense of the intentional structure of the mood of dread and what dread is said to *reveal.*

Heidegger asserts that fundamental moods reveal. He states that "the founding mode of attunement not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this revealing—far from being merely incidental—is also the basic occurrence of our Da-Sein."[2] Here, Heidegger establishes the significance of fundamental moods– they are vital and inherent in Da-Sein. Heidegger states that "[the fundamental mood of] anxiety reveals the nothing."[3] In order to explicate this claim, I will now briefly explain what the nothing is, according to Heidegger. He states that the nothing is "the complete negation of the totality of beings,"[4] and argues that the nothing is incapable of being an object.[5] What he seems to mean by this is that the nothing is a negating action —the nothing nihilates, and this nihilation is a sort of "repelling gesture" towards beings.[6]

Furthermore, Heidegger claims that in order for the nothing to be revealed, it would require its own fundamental mood—he introduces the fundamental mood of anxiety.[7] Heidegger is careful to make a distinction between fear and the fundamental mood of anxiety. He does not intend for the mood of anxiety to be confused with common anxiousness or fear, he states that "anxiety is basically different from fear."[8] Heidegger asserts that when we are experiencing fear, it is directed at *something;* when we are in the mood of anxiety, anxiety cannot be directed at anything in particular. Recall that Heidegger argues that it is impossible to make the nothing into an *object*, and this impossibility is what prevents anxiety from being directed at anything in particular. Interpreted in this way, it seems as if the fundamental mood of dread has an intentional structure,

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[1] Due to varying translations of Heidegger's term Angst, the terms "dread"," anxiety", "mood of dread" and "fundamental mood of dread" are used interchangeably throughout this paper.
[2] Heidegger, Martin. "What is Metaphysics?" In Basic Writings: from Being and Time to the Task of Thinking, by Martin Heidegger, edited by David Farrell Krell, translated by Max Niemeyer Verlag, 93-110. San Fransico: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993. Pg. 101
[3] Ibid., 101
[4] Ibid., 98
[5] Ibid., 97
[6] Ibid., 103
[7] Ibid., 100
[8] Ibid., 101

notwithstanding its inability to be 'about' some *thing* in particular. If the fundamental mood of dread is to have an intentional structure it must be a type of intentional structure that is not able to take a particular object.

In his discussion of "What is Metaphysics?" S.J. Paluch directly criticizes a supposed intentional structure of the fundamental mood of dread. He begins his argument by attacking Heidegger's claim that dread is always 'of' something, and that it reveals something that cannot be taken as an object (the nothing). Paluch concludes his argument by stating:

> I think we are forced to conclude that Heidegger both denies and affirms that dread is intentional (i.e. that 'dread' is always 'dread of' with the 'of' requiring a complement)… He denies the intentionality of dread in denying that dread has a target-object. He affirms the intentionality by treating the lack of a target-object as a target.[9]

Paluch is not incorrect in questioning Heidegger's account of the intentionality of dread, but he is incorrect in concluding that Heidegger simultaneously affirms and denies this intentionality. Although Heidegger makes it very clear that the nothing is not an object, this fact does not interfere with the intentional structure of the mood of dread. Paluch is especially incorrect in asserting that Heidegger denies the intentional structure of dread by denying dread a "target-object." What Paluch seems to miss is that dread has an intentional structure, and in having such, *attempts* to take a target-object, regardless of the fact that the nothing wholly evades being taken as an object.

Furthermore, Paluch argues that the experience of "dread revealing the nothing" can be denied.[10] He claims that Heidegger gives an incorrect description of the experience of the mood of dread, and then infers that the nothing has been revealed in the experience.[11] Paluch gives an example to counter Heidegger's claim that moods reveal:

> 'Jones is afraid of Smith and doesn't know it' is neither absurd nor implausible, yet 'afraid' is clearly intentional in this sentence. Jones may very well know that he is afraid (be victim to the mood of fear) and yet not know the object of his fear. The mood itself cannot be said to reveal its own object.[12]

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[9] Paluch, S.J. "Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?"." Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 30, no. 4 (June 1970): 603-608. Pg. 603. JSTOR. Accessed 19 March 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2105640.
[10] Ibid., 605
[11] Ibid., 605
[12] Ibid., 605

It is clear that Paluch is categorically wrong in his comparison. Recall that Heidegger draws a clear distinction between fear and the fundamental mood of dread. Paluch's 'fear' cannot be considered an appropriate analogue to 'dread.' Furthermore, Heidegger argues that dread reveals the nothing—something that cannot be made into an object. Although it seems counterintuitive to assert that something that is *nothing* can be *revealed,* Paluch seems to miss this point when he asserts that the mood "cannot be said to reveal its own object"– the nothing is not an object that can be revealed qua object.

Ronald Grimsley takes a much more charitable stance on Heidegger's account of the nature of the fundamental mood of dread. Grimsley explains the intentional structure of dread as such: "it is not dread of 'this' or 'that', but in the last analysis, of the 'world' as such, that is of a totality which cannot be defined as a mere aggregate of finite objects."[13] What Grimsley seems to mean here is that, the intentionality of dread is directed towards something that is difficult, if not wholly impossible to grasp as *something that is not.* This assertion seems to accept the intentional structure of dread, while remaining sympathetic to the difficulty in explaining how the intentional structure of the fundamental mood can be directed at *something* which is not *anything*.

Grimsley defends Heidegger's claim that fundamental moods reveal. Grimsley argues that "the basic structure of human being" is "first revealed not through a process of intellectual analysis, but through certain 'fundamental moods.'"[14] Grimsley maintains that fundamental moods "point beyond themselves to the ontological aspects of man's existence. The sense of 'being there' [Da-sein]…is revealed through the 'key mood of dread.'"[15] Grimsley's interpretation of 'being there' being revealed in the fundamental mood of dread is likely founded on Heidegger's assertion that "Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing."[16]

Furthermore, Grimsley explains that "in the mood of dread, Nothing, as it were, presses itself upon man's consciousness, forcing him to an awareness of himself as nothing (finite being-for-death)."[17] It seems as if Grimsley's interpretation of the mood of dread revealing is more tenable than Paluch's denial of any revelation. Grimsley may not be entirely correct in exactly *what* dread reveals, but he is more sympathetic towards Heidegger's claims than Paluch.

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[13] Grimsley, Ronald. "'Dread' as a Philosophical Concept." The Philosophical Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing for The Philosophical Quarterly) 6, no. 24 (July 1956): 245-255. Pg.249. JSTOR. Accessed 19 March 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2216756.
[14] Ibid., 248-249.
[15] Ibid., 248-249
[16] Heidegger 103
[17] Grimsley 249

In light of these preceding claims, perhaps we should assume that Heidegger was unclear or over simple in asserting that "anxiety reveals the nothing." Perhaps Heidegger means to say that Da-sein is revealed in the fundamental mood of dread because it 'hangs' in the nothing, and can be differentiated from all particular beings. This is not to deny that the nothing is revealed in the fundamental mood of dread, but to suggest that maybe the nothing is not the only 'thing' that is revealed.

To conclude, Paluch's arguments are founded on a misinterpretation of Heidegger's claims. Paluch's accusation that Heidegger both affirms and denies the intentional structure of dread seems to be founded on the strangeness of attempting to explain the nothing. Paluch's argument that fundamental moods do not reveal is supported by an inappropriate analogy, and is therefore irrelevant. Grimsley's interpretation seems to come closer to what Heidegger may be communicating; Grimsley is more supportive of the intentional structure of the mood of dread, and seems to understand the difficulty associated with talking about the concept of the nothing. Grimsley's assertion that the fundamental mood of dread reveals "the sense of being-there" may be more developed and accurate than the claim that "anxiety reveals the nothing."

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