



## How Consciousness of Death Affects Man's Life in Heidegger's Thought

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of death plays a great influence in the life of man since it either enhances life or paralyzes life. Martin Heidegger treats death as an important factor for bringing man to thyself and thus in his line this literature will provide insight on how the consciousness of death positively enhances man's life. But also the literature will provide concrete insight on how the consciousness of death can help man to live a significant life in this material world as the result of the acceptance of death.

**Keywords:** *Death, consciousness, acceptance and Dasein.*

**Citation:** Prospa Peter Msogoya (2022). How Consciousness of Death Affects Man's Life in Heidegger's Thought. *Int J Arts Huma Social Studies*, 4(5), 73-77.

### INTRODUCTION

In this philosophical paper, I am going to expound in detail on how awareness or consciousness of being towards death as Heidegger puts it, positively affects man's life as the outcome of the acceptance of death. Starting from how consciousness of death brings acceptance of death and how the acceptance of death brings the essentials of life, the inseparability of life and death, consciousness of death brings an authentic life, death as a power of individualizing and totalizing of Dasein, death's reflection leads to homecoming, the moral paradox, sum moribund us as the way of experiencing death and life as the preparation of death in general sense.

#### 1.1 Consciousness Brings Acceptance

According to Martin Heidegger consciousness of death should not be the reason to run out of death but only to bring acceptance, running from the one that makes oneself real can only work from the outside and not from within. One flees from the knowledge of death by engaging his body into unreasonable works and stress himself by the psychological strategies of fleeing that which is known and how to format one's feelings. The way out for this burnout caused by the knowledge of death that can cause into depression, sleepless nights and psychological torture is only the acceptance of death.

Accepting this monster called death leads one to engage with it, interact with it, friend with it and have a fascinating journey into one's innerly of the self, this fundamental acceptance of the death that comes out as the reason its consciousness brings balance of man's system both, psychologically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially and hence total and complete activeness of man's potentialities being put into realization without any fear and hate of life [1]. Acceptance of death brings restoration of man's potentialities, the lost of the many years of happiness because of the struggle with death and the fear of death can be restored to its fullness as one accepts death from within. Consciousness of death indeed flees one from whether the age is increasing or decreasing, any atom of fear is removed to those who have taken death within themselves.

#### 1.2 Acceptance of Death Brings Essentials of Life

Heidegger makes us to understand that consciousness of death makes one to understand that death is just a way of life and essentials of life are hidden in this reality called death, essentials of life such as peace, joy, love and care allows one to be himself and be able to interact with the outside world without fear and anxiety, this consciousness of death helps man to take care his world as a better place for one to realize his potentialities both socially, economically, spiritually and culturally. These essentials of life such as peace, love, joy, care are also elements for the formation of the good society and since man by nature is a social being thus, one becomes social or can interact with others and share his potentialities as long as the concept of death is not a threat but a blessing to him [2].

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 232.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 224.

When death is accepted and not denied in any status whether intellectually, socially, religiously and spiritually one or the society is able to enjoy the pleasures of life, because consciousness of death that brings acceptance changes people's attitudes towards life and hence loss of the fear of death, the attitude of a person changes when death is accepted personally because this inward acceptance of death does not call for references or factors such as cultural reference, religious reference or social perceptible but only personal acceptance even if the acceptance of death may differ from one person to another or from one belief to another for example the acceptance of death is different from a Christian, a Buddhist and Atheist and a Philosopher [3].

### 1.3 The Inseparability of life and death

Heidegger argues that death does not require demise that is the paradoxical experience of the event of the end of our lives but death is a way to be. Death as a way to be is a hundred supported by the Christian passage which says "death is itself a passing into life" that means in order to be born truly into the life of the Spirit one must first die to the material world so that one can be reborn to the world in a way that will unify the spiritual and material aspect of the self. Death and life as the inseparability is one of the radical believe and important for the life of a person on the regards of life and death, life and death are inseparable in the sense that in us there is both life and death, both life and death are ON, as one is born he enough to die and therefore, as life begins so death too, then, we consider death as the process or the movement as Martin Heidegger puts it which began when life begins, thus, as we living therefore, we are dying considering death as the process. If one become conscious of this truth, that life and death are inseparable and therefore are ON, all the possibilities of being alive is one's hence living in fullest [4].

According to Martin Heidegger death is the process or movement, it is not something that happen to a man in future but it is happening within a person always, if one is conscious the thought of life and death are involved in his thinking, as much as breathing brings more conscious that one will notice that in every inhalation there is life and in every exhalation there is death, life and death is like ticking off the clock and there is nothing like life and death but there is always life in death and death in life. One who does not embrace death will not have meaningful life because death is and death does not come, it can only come to those who are unaware.

### 1.4 Consciousness of Death brings an authentic life

Individual consciousness of death leads to widest and deepest understanding of the significant of death to an authentic life that is the life in line with the thinking of death, which is the possibility toward an eminent possibility of *Dasein* itself. From Heidegger's conception of being towards death lead us to understand that it is toward a possibility that is toward something which is possible and when related to our daily life where we encounter different possibilities that are what is attainable, manageable and viable [5]. When it comes to useful things we take time to consider them by taking care of them that is producing them, getting them ready and readjusting them and thus can be said of life when life is seen from the angle of the consciousness of death life becomes meaningful and authentic full of joy, desire, peace and applicability.

Man as a being towards death is potentially aware of his finitude which is the outcomes of the consciousness of death, acceptance of this awareness creates in man an attitude of expectation and therefore, Being toward death is anticipation; being toward death is understood to be an anticipation because if being toward death is not meant as an actualization of death neither does not meant to dwell near the end in its possibility this results into thinking about death and therefore, thinking about this possibility that is how, when it might be actualized leads to expectation. The expectation of the actualization of death as a result of thinking of death leads to understand and have it with regard to whether and when and how it will really be present objectively and therefore, the anticipation becomes personal that is the anticipation of oneself (*Dasein*). In this anticipation *Dasein* discloses itself to itself with regard to its most extreme possibility and to project oneself upon one's ownmost potentiality of being means to be able to understand oneself in the being of the being thus revealed to exist and therefore brought about an authentic life [6]. Life of an individual in this world has meaning just because there is death and therefore, if there were no death in our world life would be meaningless. In actually fact, meaning of life is never revealed in an endless time and thus, life is noble only because it contains death, this an which testifies that man is destined to another and a higher life, higher life is the life lived in a full consciousness of death and how positively responds to the terror of death by a person in question and low life is the life full of fear of the terror of death whereby life is not lived in greater potentialities. To be true, death is just the manifestation of life since it is an event that embraces the whole life of man because our life is full of death and dying and therefore, being conscious of it is manifesting the real life in death. It is death that purifies the past and puts upon it

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Robert Firestone and Joyce Catlett, *Beyond Death Anxiety-Achieving Life Affirming Death Awareness*(New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2009), 74.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 122.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 132.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *What is called thinking*, trans. Joan Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 102.

the seal of eternity because nothing which is perishable, spoiled and corruptible can stand the test of death but only the eternal can stand before death this is to show how the consciousness of death sees from beyond [7].

### 1.5 Death as a Power of Totalizing and individualizing Dasein

Heidegger claims that death totalizes a *Dasein*, because through death the identity of the *Dasein* becomes complete since in death there is no reshaping and redefining again. Death in totalizing *Dasein* must not be confused with demise, here death totalizes *Dasein* (our being here) when it is able to comprehend itself as a whole, this becomes possible through resoluteness of *Dasein* where by *Dasein* accomplish a reflexive reconnection to the world of projects lost in death, recovery made possible by the lucid encounter of the self with itself in death [8]. Death has the power of reshaping the identity to be uniquely mine and inseparable, death individualizes *Dasein* because all the experiences are uniquely mine since life history as a whole is individuated independently. Death is in every case mine insofar as it is at all [9]. Death gives an individual identity that one will say, I am this particular person not on account of the totality of determinations attributable to me but due to the mineness of death, where the mineness at issue is an underived and primitive term distinguished only by its sheer that is thisness and not by any property or set of properties. Heidegger adds that *Dasein* remain stranded by the global collapse of its projects and leaving itself projecting into projects, that is as a being that fundamentally takes a stand on its being and is defined by that stand, hence qualifying his description of *Dasein* that is radically individualized by its confrontation with anxiety as a self alone [10].

### 1.6 The Moral paradox

The moral paradox of life and of death can be expressed by a moral imperative that, “*treat the living as though they were dying and the dead as though they were alive*” this is to mean to that in life a moral person should consciously be aware that death is the mystery of life and always affirm eternal life both in life and in death; this will awaken the moral conscious of person to be alive in relation to other human beings [11]. Also in regard to the consciousness of death that brings happiness, care also is the virtue in the scene; care is accompanied with solicitude and attentiveness which is necessary condition for happy life of a person and society at large. Care as the condition to be ‘connected with and being concerned about’ as Heidegger calls it, care is necessary for another and therefore, the Being is actualized in and through care in relation to that other. Care can also denote care for oneself in the sense of caring for one’s authenticity, integrity or wholeness. The human being is there for being as such to reveal itself and by attending to its uncoveredness the human being chooses him or herself and acts resolutely as the result of his or her decision. Care therefore, stands before every practical initiation and attitude as it shapes the person from inside and gives him or her orientation towards the world and the others. The consciousness of death brings togetherness which is condition for the philosophy of care and therefore, care is the basic condition for the happiness of man as man is not defined by how happy he is but by how happy others can be because of him and therefore genuine happiness is collective happiness. Care or love is happiness and happiness is care, for the consciousness of death to bring happiness and happiness is care which is solidified by considerateness, solicitude, love and forbearance, all these are to bring happiness in the life of man because of the consciousness of death that brings acceptance of death and hence happiness [12].

From the moral sense, man is called to raise a sense of life to all and everywhere, all and everything must be raised to life even eternally. This means that man’s consciousness about death places man at the responsibility of raising eternal life in relation to human beings, animals, plants, and even inanimate things. Man is responsibly to be always and in everything be a giver of life and radiate creative vital energy. Love for all that lives, forever creature, rising above the love for abstract ideas meaning that struggling in the face of death in the name of eternal life to all as the Christians Claim, Christ’s love for the world and for man is victory over the powers of death and the gift of abundant life [13]. As it is said from the ancient times, that love is connected with death, passion that is the fully expression of the highest intensity of life, always holds the menace of death. Indeed he who accepts love accepts death, because love finds its expression in death and death is an expression of love, because he who attaches too much value to life and avoids death, runs away from love and sacrifices it to other tasks of life which might be immoral.

### 1.7 Personal’s Death Reflection leads to Homecoming

Many times life’s reflection is biased by being reflected only from one side, that is the side of simple pleasures such as natural beauty, spiritual development and also development of pro-social traits such as trust and agreeableness all of these are the foundations of building the trait of gratitude. On the other side, there is a focus on this particular potential route that is the exposure to difficult circumstances that is the life threatening circumstances as solid foundation of

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 243.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 246.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Charles Guignon, *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 226.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, Martin, *The Question of Being*, trans. W. Kluback and J. T. Wilde (London: Vision Press, 1974), 145.

<sup>11</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 252.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 228.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, 253.

building solid trait of gratitude. Life may be taken for granted when there is no critical reflection about it because life itself is one of those benefits that we enjoy constantly and therefore, we tend to fail to notice the basic advantages of life and may even take this benefit for granted, but Martin Heidegger turns us back to our original root of life which is the thinking of death as a path to homecoming and meaningful life.

It is the basic truth that it is possible for all we call projects, wishes and planning to breakdown and to happen to everyone who surely endures a true confrontation with his or her death. The call of Heidegger is that it is better to acknowledge and confront the underlying angst that accompanies the thought of death through our lives than adopting the indirect tranquility by saying “*everyone dies, but not me, not today*”. Because through confronting the angst that accompanies the thought of death take us from being homeless to be at home, according to Martin Heidegger we become homeless when we lack to find the fitness of what we should do in our world in order to make sense of our existence by giving content to our worlds and thus no one has the right answer to the question what we should do with our lives, this lack of fitness is what makes us homeless and therefore Heidegger comes with an answer of death as that which brings the fitness [14].

In this case, life itself need to be critically reflected as in the situation where life is confronted with a situation that life is in jeopardy and therefore, leads to appreciation as the result of becoming aware of what might not be, which is life itself and the highlighted point of Martin Heidegger about *Sum Moribundus* (I am that in which I find myself) In this line appreciation becomes the cognitive process of appraising something with increased value just as real estate may appreciate in monetary value and therefore, one’s appreciation for life may increase when confronted with their death. experience shows that those who have encountered the threats of death through near-death experiences indicates that their appreciation for life itself has increased, those who have passed through their thick and thin in their heaths are noted to be very grateful appreciative to life itself and thus their trait of gratitude is built through appreciation of life. The sense of appreciation also rose to those who are thinking about death as it reminds them to live each day to its fullest because considering life as a gift enhances the sense of gratitude [15].

Reflection on one’s own death indeed enhances gratitude but also reflecting on the losses of other potentialities also increase gratitude, in this sense consider the appreciation made by one thinking about the absence of a romantic partner, this is the evidence that shows that even in losing other potentialities tend increase individual’s appreciation of the lost thing or person. Also death reflection may be a good exercise for enhancing state gratitude; this is because writing about one’s own death may permit the person to analyze their mortality at a more abstract level allowing them to fly on the maintained of their acceptance of their inevitable demise just because death pushes individuals to confront their mortality in a personal and experiential manner as when is confronted with the reality that life might not be as mortal beings, life itself is seen as a limited resource that one is not entitled to and thus appreciation for life increases [16].

### **1.8 Death as Settling Matter**

As it is said by Martin Heidegger that the authentic life is that of the acceptance of one’s death and the acceptance of one’s death is the totality or wholeness of *Dasein*, therefore death becomes a settling agent as it puts to rest the ongoing process of reshaping and redefining an individual’s identity, because what was called his life all about becomes now a settled matter. Death acts as the settling matter because as long as human individual is alive, as long as he continues to take a stand on what it means to be, his identity is not a settled matter because it is open to constant revision and reinterpretation. Heidegger claims that as long as *Dasein* is, it can choose its possibilities, hence as long as this ahead-of-itself item in the structure of *Dasein* is not extinguished; *Dasein* will be characterized by a lack of totality [17]. Therefore death comes in to extinguish ultimately and irrevocably man’s ability to choose his possibilities.

### **1.9 Moribund us Sum as the Way of Experiencing Death**

According to martin Heidegger, the totality of one’s life is reached at the point of death, but this achievement seems to be impossible by the fact that it is impossible to see what it would mean to say, “*this is what my life was all about*” because I am not able to experience that totality while I am dead. In solving this problem Heidegger brings in the new concept of *Moribundus* sum as the solution to the problem which means that “*I am only in that I find myself*” [18]. According to Heidegger knowing is powerful than experiencing in which I know from within my own standpoint how to view my life as something I have the potential to realize. This becomes a standing ground on how to explain my

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson, *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (New York: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 272.

<sup>15</sup>Areceli Frias and Philip C, “Death and Gratitude: death reflection enhances Gratitude”, *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6. No 2 (March 2011): 156-158.

<sup>16</sup>Areceli Frias and Philip C, “Death and Gratitude: death reflection enhances Gratitude”, *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6. No 2 (March 2011): 160.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Charles Guignon, *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 224.

wholeness or totality without waiting until my life runs its course to gain a sense of being exposed to and defined by the power of death. Heidegger on his lecture course on *The History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* from 1925, a response to the Cartesian *cogito sum* that is decisive not only for the project of Being and Time, but also for Heidegger's entire thinking path. Heidegger's response to Descartes reads as follow;

If such pointed formulations mean anything at all, then the appropriate statement pertaining to *Dasein* in its being would have to be *summoribundus* (I am in dying), *moribundus* not as someone gravely ill or wounded, but insofar as I am, I am *moribundus*. The *moribundus* first gives the *sum* its sense [19]. Here Heidegger clearly states that the *Sinn*, meaning and sense of being originates from *Dasein*'s ontological relationship with its death. For Heidegger this relationship is the only true certainty of *Dasein*'s existence.

### **1.10 Life as the Preparation of Death**

In Heidegger's thought man is a being towards death and therefore in a strict sense, our living and struggles of life is just the preparation of our death and Heidegger's thought life is the movement towards death because man is a mortal being and therefore has a finitude life. Life as a whole is meaningful only in the face of death and all our decisions about how to live in this perishable world, we make all the decisions because of the realization that this life is short and therefore, individually, socially and culturally we tend to cut our coat according to our size just because death is there. Life is personal preparation for everyone regardless of the race, color, culture, nationality, economic status because death is transcultural reality as the necessary condition for such meaning as Heidegger says death is everydayness and so it is life. Moving from life as a general reality of conscious existence to how one live it in everyday experience, death is seen in the shadows of each move we tend to make in life. Death is the experience that guides, influences or determines what forms our lives will take and the relationship our lives will have with the lives of others [20].

### **CONCLUSION**

Generally, it is the awareness that brings acceptance and it is the acceptance that brings happiness in different aspects of man's life as it is claimed the consciousness or awareness of death has a great impact in the life of man, life is promoted, enhanced, empowered and fostered as man accepts death to live with, friend with, interact with and social with. As it is seen death is to be embraced with all the energies of man both psychologically, spiritually, philosophically and morally. Man towards death should bring a life plan or project that gives value and substance to man's daily life, the search for transcendent goals, supported by death awareness indeed makes life more meaningful, consciousness of death or acceptance of death leads to positive events and makes one aware of the value of life, but also consciousness of death reminds that life is temporal, the more one invest in life and love, the more one achieve, the more one is valued and the more one is aware of his own existence.

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. trans. Theodore Kisiel, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985),254.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 227.