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Death: Philosophy, Therapy, Medicine

Being-Toward-Death and the Authenticity of Human Being

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A common understanding of death is that death is the termination of life; it is a fact, an event in the future, that cannot be forecast and which will inevitably effect our lives. This notion of death depends on the phenomenon of death as it appears to our average understanding of it. Death defines man as a finite being, as mortal, as walking towards death since his birth. Now, Heidegger provides us with a different interpretation. In the existential analytic of Dasein, death is understood as Dasein's being-toward-death, and as such it unfolds a meaning hidden within our average idea of death. Understanding death existentially means the ability to understand death as belonging to Dasein's own being. Death as being-toward-death is for Dasein a way to be; it is not an event occurring in the future, but a possibility. Death becomes, for Heidegger, the most intimate possibility of Dasein's authentic being, as it makes it possible to grasp Dasein's being as a whole. In this paper, through an interpretation of Heidegger's account of Dasein's death, I will attempt to show that death, existentially conceived, is to be understood as a turning point in the perspective towards the authenticity of human being.