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The Existential ›Anruf‹ as the Agency of the Anti-Objectives of the Discourse on Stress

Zusammenfassung: Basierend auf zwei umfassenden diskursarchäologischen Studien dokumentieren Mølholm und Vetner, dass im dänischen Stress-Diskurs Handlungsfähigkeit und Anweisungen nicht zu finden sind. Stattdessen, zeichnet sich der Diskurs durch Anti-Zielsetzungen aus, insofern Einstellungen, Verhalten und Handlungen eine untergeordnete Rolle spielen. Der Artikel untersucht, inwiefern die Abwesenheit von Handlungsfähigkeit und die Anwesenheit von Anti-Zielsetzungen selbst Handlungsfähigkeit, in der Form des existenziellen Anrufs des Gewissens des Daseins, ist. Das moderne Individuum muss einer ständig wachsenden Menge von Normen, Forderungen und Erwartungen nachkommen: »Sich verlierend in die Öffentlichkeit des Man und sein Gerede *überhört* es im Hören auf das Man-selbst das eigene selbst« (Heidegger 1967, S. 271). Dieser Artikel wird den engen Zusammenhang zwischen einem ›yet-to-be-disclosed-place‹ der Anti-Zielsetzungen und einem eigentlichen Sein-können des Daseins demonstrieren, bei dem der ›Anruf‹ das Man-selbst zurück zum Sich-selbst ruft.

Schlagwörter: Existenzialismus; Heidegger; Archäologie des Wissens; Foucault; Stress; Da-sein;

Abstract: Two large, Danish discursive-archaeological studies document an absence of agency and instructions in the discourse on stress. Instead, the discourse on stress is pregnant with anti-objectives: attitudes, behaviors and actions that are to play a less dominating role. This article explores the possibility that the absence of agency and the presence of anti-objectives is an agency in itself, in the form of an existential Anruf (calling) of the conscience of the Da-sein. As the late-modern individual abides to an ever-growing set of norms, claims and expectations, it loses itself in the idle talk of the They (Heidegger 1996, S. 250). This article will demonstrate the close correlation between the yet-to-be-disclosed-place of the anti-objectives and the Authentic potentiality-of-being of Da-sein, to which the ›Anruf‹ calls the they-self back to it-self.

Keywords: Existentialism; Heidegger; Archaeology of Knowledge; Foucault; Stress; Da-Sein;

1

In May 2016, my colleague Mikael Vetner and I presented the results of our recently conducted discourse-archaeological research on the absence of agency in the discourse on stress (Molholm/Vetner 2018) at a conference at the University of Illinois, USA[1]. Our study was based on the works of Michel Foucault and Reiner Keller. In our research we

1 The research is based on an archive of more than 29,000 articles in Danish national and regional newspapers, journals and business- and labor market magazines from a five-year period ranging from January 1st. 2011 to December 31st. 2015, and the results were published in an article in 2018

have found, that »rather than describing, displaying and putting forward a set of actions, norms and attitudes (in the same way as we know it from the discourses on for example globalization, health, safety, or learning), the statements of the stress discourse points to *the cause and source* [...]« (Mølholm/Vetner 2018 S. 17); that stress-reducing action-markers only occur as »vague anti-objectives« (Mølholm/Vetner 2018 S. 18) giving subtle suggestions, that the late-modern worker do or be less of something which is otherwise perceived to be fundamentally good: being flexible, dedicated, excited about their work, accessible, holding a positive attitude and be focused on developing their personal and professional competencies. In the discourses on globalization, learning and development, these norms and attitudes (flexibility, dedication, etc.) are accentuated as positive and good in the sense that they are *productive*, because they function as agents that are urgently needed, if we – both individually and as welfare societies – are not to succumb to the threat that the globalization is posing to us, but instead are to leave the battle as winners (Mølholm 2013, S. 245-282). Globalization is, as the US Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat said in a 1999 speech, »an inevitable element of our lives. We cannot stop it any more than we can stop the waves from crashing on the shore« (Fairclough 2009, S. 324), and as the battle is global, we are inevitably caught in a battlefield that we cannot leave. But as in any battle, fight and competition, the globalization has both winners and losers and is therefore verbalized as both an opportunity and a threat, a blessing and a curse. It holds promises of great fortune and immense happiness for the prosperous and enterprising, as well as omens of disaster and despair for those who does not realize that times have changed; those who are in an urgent need for »reality therapy« so they will »move themselves out of the red zone« (Head of Market Lars Goldschmidt, Danish Trade and Services in The Week-Letter A4, 2004, vol. 40, S. 19).

In other words: as pregnant with agency the discourses on globalization, learning and development are, the discourse on stress is barren. The absence of agency is, seen from a discourse-archaeological point of view, the most significant feature of the stress discourse in, that it does not construct a correlated *dispositif* which subjectify the individual with a set of norms, knowledge, understanding, perception and attitude to guide his or her actions, behavior and talk.

After our presentation, we received a number of questions and comments. One question, in particular, returned to my mind, over and over again, in the following days and weeks. No less vague than the anti-objectives of the stress discourse, the question in all its apparent simplicity was:

Could you not say that even the absence of agency has agency?

This question apparently raises a paradox: that there is presence in absence. There is, however, another possibility: that rather than stating a seemingly meaningless paradox, the question points to one of the obvious conclusions in Niklas Luhmann's System Theory: that all systems – social, conscience and biological – *have to* select their next action and that choosing *not* to choose is also a choice, namely, the choice not to choose (Luhmann, 1991, S. 93 ff.; Luhmann 2016, S. 65 ff.). Thus, the absence of agency bears its own

specific form of agency. Or rather: It does not communicate a selection of ›this and not the other‹; an actualization of one action out of the infinite many which are then, at the same time, potentialized. Therefore, in the social world of communication on stress, there are no selections of actions that neither the social systems (German: Soziale Systeme / Kommunikationssysteme) (e.g., organizations, institutions, teams, families, unions) nor the systems of minds (German: *Psychische Systeme/Bewußtseinssysteme*) (human individuals) can link to and process within their own systems. Instead, the systems are left in a state of oscillation, wavering in a decided undecidedness about the handling of work-related stress, burn-out, anxiety and depression. In addition, that leaves the field of communication, as far as agency is concerned, wide open and empty for the discourses on globalization, learning and development.

Luhmann is, however, not the first to present the idea that the cognitive system, vis-a-vis the consciousness of the human being, is destined to choose. In *Being and Nothingness,* the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre uses the term ›facticity‹ to describe that particular situation, which he later calls ›the human condition‹: a

> »perpetual contingency for which it (the for-itself, own clarification) assumes the responsibility and which it assimilates without ever being able to suppress it. This perpetually evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and re-attaches it to being-in-itself – this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself« (Sartre 1943, S. 82-83).

I may, as a human being, not have chosen *to be*, but the fact that I exist forces me to choose. Even if I choose not to choose, *that* choice is, and can *only* be, mine. Thereby, a paradox occurs: that which forces and binds me at the same time makes me free. I am destined to be free. Martin Heidegger conditions the »being free of Da-sein for its existential possibilities« by making it clear that »freedom is only in the choice of the one, that is, in bearing the fact of not having chosen and not being able also to choose the others« ((BT/SZ, § 58, S. 263/285)[2].

Luhmann and Sartre represent two very different phenomenological positions, respectively an epistemological and existential one. Luhmann's position is a functionalistic theory in which social actions are to be explained by the functions they have in relation to the system: the continuation of (meaningful) operations (Luhmann 1991), while Sartre is concerned with the question of being and »the ultimate meaning of these two types [in-itself and for-itself, own clarification] of being« (Sartre 1943, S. xliii). Thus, to make choices is, from Luhmann's and Sartre's perspective, inherently related to two very different aspects of human existence: cognition and consciousness; operations and being. While they both accentuate ›non-choice‹ as a choice nonetheless, Sartre not only makes an explicit connection between his concept of consciousness and Heidegger's concept of

2 Specifically, with references to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time / Sein und Zeit* I have adapted the commonly accepted and used method of reference to his philosophical work, used in this case and which I have used throughout the rest of the article.

the Da-sein (Sartre 1943, S. xxxi) but also describes the human condition – »the for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as itself in order to found itself as consciousness« (Sartre 1943, S. 82) – in a way that has affinities to Heidegger's distinction between winning and losing oneself and the existential conscience's summoning of the Da-sein to »its own-most potentiality-of-being-a-self« ((BT/SZ, § 58, S. 258/280; see also section 5).

I know the person who stated the question to be someone who does not engage in mundane, circular inferences, and I therefore had to pursue the question slightly further. My first impulse instinctively told me to look in the direction of Martin Heidegger (or maybe it was because I know the person who asked the question to be something of an expert on Heidegger, see, for example, Brinkmann 2004a and 2004b), more specifically his *theory of existential conscience* as he elaborates it in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1967/1996), in order to look for agency not in the communication of the outside world but in the wordless, silent speech of the conscience of the Da-sein (BT/SZ, § 56, S. 252-253/273-274). Thus, it can also very well be argued that the above elaborated reflections on the work of both Luhmann and Sartre may appear as somewhat forced rationalizations.

2

In this article, I aim to demonstrate an affinity between the anti-objectives of the discourse on stress, all of them within the formation on working life discourses, and Martin Heidegger's analysis of the existential conscience in *Being and Time*, more specifically his description of the antagonistic relation between *The They* and the authentic being of the Da-sein (BT/SZ, § 9, S. 40/42), and the »in every way opposite character« (BT/SZ, § 55) of listening to The They and hearing the call – der Anruf – of the existential conscience of the Da-sein.

Furthermore, I argue that just as the anti-objectives of the discourse on stress point the late-modern human being in the direction of a ›yet-to-be-disclosed-place‹, the existential conscience does the same: it points *not* to a *specific* action or any »factual occurrences« (BT/SZ, § 57, S. 258/280). Instead, it directs Da-sein, when it is lost, ›back‹ to its *authentic* (German: *Eigentliches*) »being-mine«, which is »my own [and] somehow always already decided« and to which Da-sein is related »as its truest possibility« (BT/SZ, § 9, S. 40/42).

Such an endeavor may appear to constitute a ›methodological eclecticism‹ between, on one side, a highly descriptive approach, »the description of an *archive*« (Foucault 1991, S. 59), to lay forward the at-any-given-moment regularity of statements constituting a given Discourse (in this case Discourse with an upper-case D, as opposed to with a lower-case), and, on the other, an existential-phenomenological analysis of the meaning of the anti-objectives and the absence of agency in the Discourse on stress (and not of stress as a lived experience). As I elaborate further later in this article (section 5), describing what occurs at the surface of emergence is limited to what we can ›see‹ – that which is actually there, in text. It is more about seeing than listening; more about the descriptive

how than the analytical why (Mølholm/Vetner 2016, S. 29); it is a delimitation of the archaeology of knowledge from the endeavors of the interpretive sciences, which would read the text as »the expression of the thought, the experience, the imagination, or the unconscious of the author, or, indeed, of the historical determinations that operated upon him« (Foucault 1982, S. 24). Heidegger's existential phenomenology is concerned with *the meaning of Being* and a Da-sein that is not characterized by *what* it is, but *how* (Wentzer 2007, S. 487-488, 532).

This article is not an attempt to do both: describe a formation and suggest an interpretation of what may hide beneath the surface of it, just waiting to be dug out by someone like me. Rather, the purpose is to address that which is described as absently there and to bring it forward *in the light of* the existential phenomenological theory of Being – how it ›is‹ as an existential phenomenon: What is the meaning of ›being‹ or ›existence‹, and how do we come to be and exist in a world where the Discourse on stress holds only little and vague agency dressed in anti-objectives?

Finally, a few clarifications are needed: the aim of this article is *not* to add further perspectives and/or analysis of Heidegger's collected work, nor to support or reject bits and parts of the various critical readings of his work (e.g., that of Arendt or Sartre). It is first and last to explore the potential of Heidegger's concept of the existential conscience – as presented in *Being and Time* – to help us reflect upon the absence of agency in the discourse on stress as that which we vigorously speak of yet cannot come to a common, mutual and collective understanding of and thus cannot act upon.

Furthermore, the aim of the article is not to add to the already excellent work done to understand stress as a lived, existential experience (e.g., in a Danish context, Charlotte Bloch's: *Flow and stress, sentiments and the culture of emotions in the everyday life* (Da: Flow og stress, stemninger og følelseskultur i hverdagslivet), in which she, among others, draws from the work of Martin Heidegger), nor is it to add to studies within other fields of research on stress: anthropology, psychology, etc. Therefore, this article will not go further into a paradigmatic question of how various scientific positions and fields of research define, delimit and explain the occurrence of stress. The scope of the article is limited to the field of Discourse studies aiming to, as already mentioned, demonstrate affinities between a particular discursive phenomenon – anti-objectives as absent agency – and the Heideggerian concept of the existential conscience. For illustrative reasons, however, a number of examples from different publications addressing the phenomenon of stress have been included in sections 5 and 6.

3

In Heidegger's existential phenomenology, what characterizes human existence is not that human beings are subjects that stand in opposition to a world of objects. The existence of the human being is an ›embedded‹ existence that he calls ›being-in-the-world‹. Thus, the human *being* is a being that occurs among other kinds of beings in the world – handy things at hand/handiness (German: *Zuhandenheit*), and objects/objectively pres-

ent things (German: *Vorhandenheit*) – but in its own particular way and with its own particular, focused attention. Furthermore, Heidegger distinguishes between ›being‹ as a real entity and ›being‹ as nature or essence: Useful things (German: *Zeug*) and handiness; objectively present ›things' (German: *Vorhandenheit*) and objective presence; Da-sein (the human being) and existence. In the following, I will give a brief introduction to useful things, objectively present things and Da-sein, before I, as outlined above, zoom in on the ›Anruf‹ of the existential conscience of the Da-sein as a call from a yet-to-be-disclosed-place.

A useful thing »is essentially ›something in order to…‹« that we encounter innerworldly (BT/SZ, § 15 & 18, S. 64/68, 77/83), the latter referring to the fact that the »world is always already ›there' in all things at hand« (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 77/83) and thus has an innerworldly existence. However, the world being already there also means a dissolving of the subject-object relation, since we can thereby only »meet things in the world objectively« in the sense that »we always already understand the world on a pre-reflective level« (Brinkmann 2004a, S. 63). When I take a walk in the forest and see a tree before me, I instinctively ›know‹ it as a tree because I have come to become a human being that grows up in a world in which there are trees. I do not see the tree, then ›say‹ the word to myself, *then* realize that what is standing in front of me is a tree among thousands of other trees, and *then* come to realize that I am now standing or walking in a forest. It is, Heidegger says, quite the opposite: the world is always already ›there‹ in everything we meet and encounter, and thus, everything that catches our attention and ›comes‹ to us does so *innerworldly*: *in* the world in which we ourselves are, and to which we are attuned, attentive, caring and understanding. With Heidegger's own example, what is »nearest to us is [...] the room, not as what is ›between the four walls‹ in a geometrical, spatial sense, but rather as material for living«, and in which the useful things get their usefulness from their relation and »belonging to other useful things: writing materials, pen, ink, paper, desk blotter, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room« (BT/SZ, § 15, S. 64/68).

Each thing gets its relevance, serviceability and functionality »*together with* something else3 (i.e., the other things at hand, own clarification). The character of being of things at hand is *relevance*« (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 78/84). In our everyday going-about in the world, we as human beings do so without giving it much thought. There is an unheeded familiarity in the handiness of the various things at hand with which we manage our lives and go about in the world; things do not show themselves individually, one by one, and eventually constitute a whole or sum of things, but rather – as already pointed out – quite the opposite.

3 Sartre, in the introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, says that one of the great achievements of modern thought, not least existential phenomenology, is that it has managed to overcome the dualisms »which have embarrassed philosophy« for so long, and that »the appearances which manifest the existent are neither interior nor exterior; they are all equal, they all refer to other appearances, and none of them are privileged« (Sartre, 1943, S. xxi). We know, understand and make sense of the phenomena that we experience, from and in their relations to other phenomena with which they appear, and »the appearance refers to the total series of appearances and not to a hidden reality [...]« (ibid).

When, for example, we get up in the morning and have breakfast with our family, we do so without giving the handling of the useful things much thought. From opening the cabinet and taking out the box of cereal, and opening the fridge to take out the carton of milk, we pour it all into the bowl that we have placed on the table in front of the chair that we are about to sit in to scoop the mix of cereal and milk with a spoon, one mouthful at a time, into our mouth. The spoon gets its relevance from its ability to scoop; the scooping gets its relevance from its ability to satisfy our basic need for food; and the satisfaction of basic needs is relevant to the protection and preservation of our life and to the preservation and protection of Da-sein (for other examples, see BT/SZ, § 18, S. 78/84). Heidegger's point is that we can establish this chain of relation in all aspects of our lives. Replace the spoon with anything else – a screwdriver, for example – and you will be able to establish the same ›chain' or »totality of useful things« in which each useful thing can be, what it ›is' (BT/SZ, § 15, S. 64/68). This is not least obvious in regard to the life we live in our late modern societies, and our use of various types of technology ranging from our computers and smartphones to GPS and self-monitoring devices (just to mention a few of the most obvious ones) that are all integrated, useful things in our lives.

It happens, however, that we either ›dis-attach‹ or dis-relate ourselves from our unheeded and familiar handling of the things at hand, or that the things at hand appear to be ›out of place‹, not really fitting the context in which we meet them (a friend of mine has a bicycle frame that has been painted over, hanging on his living room wall; instead of being relevant as a means of transportation, it is now relevant as a piece of art). In situations like that, the handy things at hand change status and instead become ›objects‹ (for lack of a better word), or *objectively present things* that are thus characterized by »the objects way of being« (Wentzer 2008, S. 98). It is »the being *of* beings (objective presence) that is found and determined by discovering them in their own right in going through beings initially encountered«, as distinguished from the handiness' »*innerworldly* beings initially encountered« (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 82/88). It is the ›neutral‹, dis-attached, rational and (again: for lack of a better word) ›objective‹ encountering of the objects; the dis-engaged, objectivized attitude – an ›outerworldlycation‹ or ›dis-innerworldlycation‹ of the things at hand.

Returning to the example with the spoon, we can also look at it just as an object made out of some kind of metal. An object that can then be used to dig small holes in the vegetable garden to sow seeds to grow Brussel Sprouts; or an object that can be used to pick up the dogs' poo in the garden, so we do not step in it when we go there to play football. Or we may have displaced the screwdriver when we need it (the screw holding the door hinge is loose, and thus the door may fall off) and, in need of an if-not-permanent then at least a temporary solution, we look for some*thing* other than a screwdriver that may be able to do the job. Something of the right size that we can hold and turn in our hand, that will fit just nicely enough into the slot of the screw that it will allow us to turn it so it goes back into the door frame. On the table is a dinner knife that just about fits such a description and requirement. In that moment, the dinner knife becomes an ›objectively present thing‹ which is no longer just relevant as a tool that is designed to assist me during dinner, but for the moment also relevant as ›some*thing* else‹. When we do that, we ›take a step

back‹ from the intuitive, familiar and ›natural‹ use of the tools we call by the name of spoon or dinner knife, and with which we consume food, to perceive and think of them as objects or ›things‹ that we *might* consider using for something else. Therefore, all beings exist in the form of relevance that is specifically related to that particular situation in which they appear innerworldly.

At some point, however, as the examples above show,

> »the total relevance itself [however] ultimately leads back to a what-for which *no longer* has relevance, which itself is not a being of the kind of being of things at hand within a world, but is a being whose being is defined as being-in-the-world [...]. The primary ›what-for‹ is a for-the-sake-of-which. But the for-the-sake-of-which always concerns the being of *Da-sein* which is essentially concerned *about* this being itself in its being« (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 78/84).

When we eat, we do so to satisfy a basic need and preserve our lives. Using various types of tools supports us in doing so, and the tools are thus relevant as such. If we are fortunate enough, we may also eat to satisfy our desire for something that brings us some kind of pleasure: a particularly fine piece of meat, delicious vegetables or a nice glass of wine. However, all of that does not answer the simplest of all questions: *what for?* Why is preserving life not only relevant, but important? Why is finding pleasure in eating (if not relevant) important *to me*? When we are able to answer questions of this kind, Heidegger says, we have come to an *understanding* and thus (which I will address below), understanding is an *existential* (along with attunement and falling prey) of the Da-sein. This distinguishes Da-sein from other beings in that Da-sein

> »is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being. [...]. Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. Da-sein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each Da-sein itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities« (BT/SZ, § 4, S. 10/12).

In the postscript to the Danish translation of *Sein und Zeit*, Associate Professor of philosophy Thomas S. Wentzer explains that Heidegger's concept of the Da-sein »as a perception of the being of the human being as a process, centered around the being of the human being itself«, not as an individual that is preoccupied with him- or herself, but as a being which is concerned with its own being (Wentzer 2007, S. 532) on an existential and, with a word that Heidegger uses repeatedly throughout the book, authentic (German: *Eigentlich*) level of being.[4] Da-sein understands itself, and with some explicitness, in its be-

4 Among the critics of Heidegger's early work is the German-American philosopher and political

ing (BT/SZ, § 4, S. 10/12) and therefore does not concern itself with *what* it is, but *how* it is. When we find ourselves in situations where we come to ask if maybe the way we are living our life and the choices that we make in defining it are motivated by ›rational‹ measures and considerations imposed upon us by the society in which we live, rather than being an act of »authentic resoluteness« through which our Da-sein »*hands itself down* to itself« and to »the simplicity of its fate« (BT/SZ, § 74, S. 351/384), we do so out of a concern for our very – and authentic – being. An example could be the son who loves to sing and dance but who agrees to join the family business of selling cars because that is what is expected of him and ›what one does‹ in the time and place in which he lives. Singing and dancing may be his ›truest possibility‹, but in the »everyday-being-with-one-another, Da-sein stands in *subservience* to the others« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 118/126). Again: it is a process, not an individual or a subject:

> »Da-sein is never to be understood ontologically as a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present. [...]. Da-sein is my own, to be always in this or that way. [....]. The being which is concerned in its being about its being is related to its being as its truest possibility. [....] because Da-sein is always essentially its possibility, it *can* ›choose‹ itself in its being, it can win itself, it can lose itself, or it can never and only ›apparently‹ win itself. It can only have lost itself and it can only have not yet gained itself, because it is essentially possible as authentic, that is, it belongs to itself« (BT/SZ, § 9, S. 40/42).

By using terms such as ›truest possibility‹ and ›authenticity/in-authenticity‹ Heidegger makes a clear distinction between that which we are ›in ourselves‹, independent of any norms, perceptions, attitudes and general understandings held by ›the society‹ (Heidegger calls it *the publicness of the They*, which I will return to later). This is a concern which again and again circles around the question not of *who* we are as an individual ›I‹, but *how* we are: a process in which we on a more instinctive, word-less level are occupied with

thinker, Hannah Arendt. In *What is Existenz Philosophy?* she argues that Heidegger descends to what can best be described as an »existential solipsism« in that he trifles with »all those modes of human existence which rest on the fact that Man lives together in the world with his fellows« (Arendt 1946, S. 50), so that Man's central concern is his own Self that is so clearly perceived when against the backdrop of the anticipation of his own death (BT/SZ, § 74, S. 351/384): »the essential character of Man's Being is determined by what he is not, his nothingness… Death may indeed be the end of human reality; at the same time it is the guarantee that nothing matters but myself« (ibid). I do, though, believe that Arendt gives Heidegger's »being free for death« (BT/SZ, § 74, S. 351/384) too much importance and weight, and she gives too little importance to his emphasis on Da-sein's *being-with-one-another* and to *Mitda-sein* (BT/SZ, § 26), in which he stresses that »concern proves to be constitutive of the being of Da-sein which, in accordance with its different possibilities, is bound up with its being toward the world taken care of and also with its authentic being toward itself. Being-with-one-another is based initially and often exclusively on what is taken care of together in such being. [...]. As being-with, Da-sein ›is‹ essentially for the sake of others« (BT/SZ, § 26, S. 115, 116/122, 123). Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes the social condition of the human existence, to which I will give further attention later in this article.

being or come to be in a particular way; a way in which we appear to ourselves as what we were always already meant to be. That is why, in Heidegger's work, there seems to be such a subtle distinction and delicate balance between winning and losing oneself: in a split second and in the tiniest of decisions, we may shift from being authentic to becoming inauthentic. All it takes is a change of focus from being concerned with our own being to being concerned with adhering to what is expected of us regardless of how it may affect our sense of self.

It is an urgent matter to Heidegger that human existence is not ›reduced‹ to being a subject that now and then, whenever it feels like it and is in the mood, decides to open up to the world around it in order to grasp and understand it. He strongly opposes the idea that the question of human understanding is to be reduced to what Husserl defined in a lecture as »the possibility of knowledge as such« (Husserl 1999, S. 16), and whether – or under what conditions – it is possible for a subject to establish a relation to a surrounding world of objects that allows it to experience these objects/this world ›as they are/it is‹. It is not, Heidegger writes, »that human being ›is‹, and then on top of that has a relation of being to the ›world‹, which it sometimes takes upon itself« (BT/SZ, § 12, S. 53/57). The epistemological-phenomenological understanding of the human being as a ›subject‹ which stands outside, opposite or in front of ›a world of objects‹; a human being which stands *on the side* of the world looking *in at* it, clouds the fact that the human being is *not* first and foremost an outside standing, perceiving and learning subject but rather a *being* that is *embedded* in a world that is always already ›there‹; a being that is always already ›present-being‹ (German: *Da-sein*). The concept of a human being that ›has‹ an environment »does not say anything ontologically [...]. In its very possibility, this ›having‹ has its foundation in the existential constitution of being-in« (BT/SZ, § 12, S. 54/57-58). The human being does not ›have‹ a relation to the world; being-in means that the human being *in* its being, *is* its relation to the world.

As mentioned above, two of the most basic existentials' of Da-sein are *understanding* and *attunement*. When going about our daily life and doing things such as the activities mentioned in the examples above, we do so as human beings who exist in a world with which we are already familiar. We know and understand our world and are attuned to it at the same time as we encounter it.

Heidegger uses the term *thrownness* to describe how Da-sein is brought before itself and has already found itself »as one finds one's self in attunement« (BT/SZ, § 29, S. 128/135), surrendered to its own being. We are always already in a mood to which we are delivered, and thus, Da-sein is what it *has* to be, independent of its own free will and choice. We are *thrown* into our being and are responsible for it, whether we want it or not, and we are attuned to the situation in a way that lies beyond our control and which defines our being-in-the-world: »*In attunement lies existentially a disclosive submission to world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered*« (BT/SZ, § 29, S. 129-130/137-138). When attuned, we are in a mood (and can never not be in a mood and not attuned) that is at the same time something retrieved *and* forgotten, and something from which we are thrown into a future that is now made present (BT/SZ, § 68, S. 321/350). Time is – as the title of Heidegger's book so clearly indicates – of the essence in our being-

in-the-world, not as a succession of moments but, with a word that Heidegger borrows from Plato, ecstasies, indicating that time is not three-dimensional; it is a unified whole which is always ›here‹ in the now: »Temporality temporalizes itself as a future that makes present, in the process of having been« (BT/SZ, § 68, S. 321/350). Thus, attunement and understanding as existentials' of the Da-sein fold themselves around the always present ›now‹.

When we are in a certain mood, we ›attune‹ ourselves to any given atmosphere of any given moment to which we respond. This attunement allows us to be *affected* or *moved*: to be astonished, amazed or disappointed when something either exceeds or falls short of our expectations; to be fearful when encountering a threatening situation; to be perplexed and irresolute when we find ourselves in a situation where our experiences, knowledge and ability to deal with the situation seem inadequate; to be joyous or indifferent when …;, etc. Without our attunement to the world, we would not be able to experience something as astonishing/disappointing, fearful/safe, irresolute/resolute; joyous/indifferent, and thus, we would not be able to submit ourselves (in)to the world. It is, Heidegger stresses, *not* a psychical condition that calls for apprehension but rather an immanent reflection that can only »find ›experiences‹ because the there is already disclosed in attunement«; It »assails Da-sein [...]. It comes neither from ›without‹ or from ›within‹, but rises from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being« (BT/SZ, § 29, S. 128-129/136). The attunement ensures that the human being, through its Da-sein, merges with the world of which it is always already a part. When our mood is bad, Heidegger says, we are prevented from this: blinded, Da-sein is disconnected from heedful and circumspect caring.

The purpose of what we do, the relevance of the activities we engage in and the goals we strive to achieve always end up in an existential referring back to a ›for-the-sake-of-which‹ that is not ›someone‹ or ›something‹ but rather its being in relationship and dialogue with Being as such or the phenomenon that calls Da-sein to act and be. Thus, Heidegger says, »we *interpret* (own italic) the meaning of the previous freeing of innerworldly beings initially at hand« (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 79/84-85) to *understand* the possible possibilities of that very thing at hand that meets us innerworldly. How, and to what extent, the situation we find ourselves in is, allows us to be authentic and our truest possibility. As a temporal ecstasy, »understanding is grounded primarily in the future (anticipation or awaiting), [...] still [...] always a present that ›has been‹« (BT/SZ, § 68, S. 321/350), which means that in Da-sein's process of understanding, it projects its potentiality-of-its-being into its future possibilities of being, while at the same time understanding makes something present that already has been (i.e., a potentiality that is actualized in the present now). Given this temporality of understanding, Heidegger establishes *projection* as the existential structure of Da-sein: »It projects the being of Da-sein upon its for the-the-sake-of-which, which means Da-sein exists as itself [...] either authentic, originating from its own self as such, or else inauthentic« (BT/SZ, § 31, S. 136/145). It is an authenticity that is closely related to the folding of the past-present-future of Da-sein's being-in-the-world. Because time is to be understood as a unified whole, attunement must always have its understanding and understanding will always be attuned. Thus, »as essen-

tially attuned, Da-sein has always already got itself into definite possibilities« (BT/SZ, § 31, S. 134-135/143-144). It is only when the innerworldly being initially at hand is related to a for-the-sake-of-which that originates from Da-sein's own self and accordingly has relevance as a ›what-for‹ that we as human beings are authentic in our being-in-the-world. As quoted above, Da-sein belongs to itself and is always in this or that way, independent of what other people – in a broader sense ›the public‹ – might think, want, demand, desire or require.

4

And yet, in our everyday handling and going about in the world, we as human beings adhere to a representation of the world that is characterized by its averageness – its »average intelligibility« (BT/SZ, § 35, S. 157/168). According to Heidegger, the human being-with-one-another is an ontological-existential condition of its existence: the ›I-here‹ is conditioned by a ›you-there‹, and thus by an ›us‹ in the being-with-one-another. One of the consequences (if not problems) of this being-with-one-another is that it »dissolves one's own Da-sein« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 119/126), and that again paves the way for an ambiguity:

> »Everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, grasped, and spoken whereas basically it is not, or it does not look that way, yet basically is. [....]. Not only does everyone know and talk about what is the case and what occurs, but everyone also already knows how to talk about what has to happen first, which is not yet the case, but ›really' should be done. Everybody has always already guessed and felt beforehand what others also guess and feel. This being-on-the-track is based upon hearsay – whoever is ›on the track' of something in a genuine way does not talk about it – and this is the most entangling way in which ambiguity presents possibilities of Da-sein so that they will already be stifled in their power« (BT/SZ, § 37, S. 162/173).

Without drawing any further references or giving the impression of any kind of identity, Heidegger emphasizes what Foucault addresses, almost half a century later, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1982) and in his inaugural lecture at College de France (Foucault 1971): that even though many people may harbor a »desire to find themselves [...] on the other side of discourse, without having to stand outside it, pondering its particular, fearsome and even devilish features« (Foucault 1971, S. 215), he or she is only too aware that it is not possible to say just anything at any time because he or she must abide to the many and imposing conditions required, if one is to talk (Foucault 1982, S. 44). Da-sein, Heidegger says, is »*subservient* to the others. [....]. The everyday possibilities of being of Da-sein are at the disposal of the whims of the others« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 118/126). Thus, the individual human being risks the consequence of being considered to be mad if he parts with »the common discourse of men« (Foucault 1971, S. 217). Our language is »under the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible« (Heidegger 2000, S. 85).

That being said, and just to be clear, Heidegger and Foucault do not adhere to the same phenomenological understanding. As Heidegger's *Being and Time* is a reckoning with epistemological phenomenology (BT/SZ §§ 12, 13), Foucault's work is a reckoning with existential phenomenology (Raulet 1983), among which Heidegger's philosophy must be counted. Foucault was occupied with that, and only that, which manifested itself in writing (which later came to include, when introducing the concept of the dispositif, institutions and architectural forms (Foucault 1980, S. 194)) and from which we can describe the archive: the set of rules that defines the limits and forms of conversation, memory, reactivation, appropriation and of the sayable (Foucault 1991, S. 59-60); the »law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events« (Foucault 1982, S. 129), and thus a confined and limited collection of detectable, tangible texts. Heidegger was occupied with a more intangible, in-confinable ›the they‹ which is »nothing definite and which we all are« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 119/126) and the Da-sein as a being which is concerned in its being about its being (BT/SZ, § 9, S. 40/42). ›The they‹ is the neuter, which is not someone in particular, not me, not you and not the sum of all of us; it is The Others to whom Da-sein is – as already quoted – subservient; the Da-sein that, in the taking care of things, is also being-with towards others, and not just itself. Furthermore, Da-sein is – as already mentioned – not a case or an objectively present being but a being which, by and large, is simply just concerned with its own being.

It seems, therefore, that Heidegger in *Being and Time* is ambiguous as to whether the publicness of ›the they‹ is to be held as something good and productive, or something that is essentially bad and destructive. One moment he uses paragraph after paragraph to emphasize, how »being absorbed in the world of taking care of things« prevents Da-sein from being itself (BT/SZ, § 26, S. 118/125); how the »publicness obscures everything, and then claims that what has been thus covered over is what is familiar and accessible to everybody« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 119/127) and how this »fallen prey to the ›world‹« eventually leads Da-sein to fall away from itself (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 164/175). The next moment he insists that the everydayness of being-with-one-another, which makes the everydayness and averageness of the being-in-the-world visible, is a condition that we have to accept because the existential ›I-here‹ is conditioned by the ›you-there‹, which again conditions the ›we‹ and ›us‹ and thus, that »the being-with-others belongs to the being of Da-sein [...]. As being-with, Da-sein ›is‹ essentially for the sake of others« (BT/SZ, § 26, S. 116/123); it holds concern and care for one another: »Concern proves to be constitutive of the being of Da-sein which, in accordance with its different possibilities, is bound up with its being towards the world taken care and also with its authentic being towards itself« (BT/SZ, § 26, S. 115/122).

So essentially, Da-sein is ›split‹ between the existential necessity to be concerned with, and care for, the common society and community in general, and its own being in particular. If it loses itself in the publicness of the they, it fails to concern itself with its very being. On the other hand, if it gets absorbed in its concern for its possibility of being itself, it fails in its being towards, and caring for, the world.

5

In their article, Mølholm and Vetner (2018) *describe* the formation of discourses and the antagonistic relation between (some of) the discourses in the formation of discourses on the late-modern working life: the discourses on globalization and on lifelong, personal and professional learning and development on one side, and the discourse on stress and mental well-being on the other. While the former discourses are potent with agency, the latter is significant due to its lack of the very same. While the former discourses are focused on developing strategies to ensure that the societies in which we live will make it in a globalized world, by, among other things, employing the necessary means to develop human resources to their fullest potential, the latter addresses the downfall and side-effects of this race towards perfection and optimal performance in our endeavor to survive in a globalized world, consequently leading to a growing number of individuals becoming ill with stress, depression and anxiety.

However, as Mølholm's (2013) and Mølholm and Vetner's (2018) works are a discourse-archaeological description of regularities that can only be carried out at the surface of the emergence of discursive objects (Foucault 1982, S. 41), they can only ›see‹ what is visible and manifests itself in texts and, whether the various utterances have agency or – as is the case with the discourse on stress – do not. The significance of the absence of agency in the stress discourse is that agency has been replaced by anti-objectives that function as *agents of avoidance*, in utterances framed as ›do or be less‹ of something (e.g., flexible, dedicated, online 24/7, boundless) or ›you are not to be so much‹ of something other (e.g., exited, available, explorative) (Mølholm 2013; Mølholm/Vetner, 2018). These are highly ambiguous objectives, but objectives nonetheless. Two of the examples presented in the articles are the following:

> »There is never a time of the day where you are not accessible, and therefore, there is always the possibility that flexibility leads to an increase in the level of stress« (The Week-letter A4 2014/0311).
> »Structural conditions, such as boundless work [...], cause stress. Yet it is treated through advice and treatment directed at the individual, and if the employee expresses criticism, he is told to put on his yes-hat« (Information, 2014/1008).

These two examples[5] are, as Mølholm and Vetner (2018) substantiate in their work, representative of a stress discourse which, instead of agency and action markers aimed at reducing stress, advances anti-objectives that are suggestive rather than directive. In the first example, the anti-objectives are to be less accessible and, as a consequence, less flexible because we can *reduce*, rather than increase, the level of stress. In the second example, the anti-objectives are to be less forgiving with boundaries and to set up clearer and

5 The first is a quotation from the Danish professor Helge Hviid, University of Roskilde; the second is a quotation from a (at that time) Master-student in philosophy and social science at the University of Roskilde, Kristian Haug.

firmer divisions between work, family and leisure; to demand and display less enthusiasm while at the same time no longer treating the problem as if it is individual, thus suggesting that we initiate collective measures instead. However, neither these two statements nor the other statements representative of the stress discourse give clear and directive advice as to who, what, where and how we both collectively and individually deal with stress: organizationally, individually and as a common, societal problem.

As a consequence, the answers and solutions to the problem of a growing number of people becoming ill with work-related stress, depression and anxiety remain to be *a yet-to-be-disclosed place*: a place in which the individual human being can be concerned in its being about its being in such a way, that he is able to balance the care for, and subservience to, The Other and the listening to The They, with care and concern for his own truest possibility and potentiality so that he can be authentic and true to himself (BT/SZ, § 18, S. 80/86), *even* when he is busy or exited (BT/SZ, § 9, S. 40/43).

It is a balance in a place that he has to find for himself. No ›common discourse of men‹ can guide him to that place because it is a place of his own. Without any agency, the discourse provides no common ground for the late-modern human being on which he is able to establish structural and/or individual solutions to the problem of stress. Nevertheless, establishing conditions – structural and individual – that allow the individual human to find his or her own yet-to-be-disclosed-place and to stay there, appear to be key to breaking the upward trend in the scale of work-related stress. The discourse on stress points in no specific direction other than *away* – yet not *too* far – from the dictatorship of the public realm which has so effectively subjectified the late-modern human being so that he is unconditionally dedicated to strive as hard as he possibly can to live up to the norms, attitudes, expectations and claims of flexibility, 24-7 availability, creativity, dedication and lifelong learning, and to adhere to the common understanding that globalization can be both heaven and hell, depending only on his ability to stay ahead of all the others. He is, Heidegger writes in his *Letter on Humanism*, challenged in finding the balance between being dictated by the publicness and paralyzed by the impotence of the private:

> »But if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless. In the same way, he must recognize the seductions of the public realm as well as the impotence of the private« (Heidegger 2000, S. 86).

In the letter, Heidegger continues by saying that man must let himself be claimed by Being, during which he only seldom will have anything to say. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger says something similar: that the call of conscience which summons' Da-sein – the being which is concerned in its being about its being – to its ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self (BT/SZ, § 54, S. 249/269), »›says‹ *nothing* which could be talked about, it does not give any information about factual occurrences« (BT/SZ, § 58, S. 258/280). In the yet-to-be-disclosed place, there is only the silence of a being that rests on the unstrained balance and the quietness of canniness.

6

The unstrained balance and the quietness of canniness are, though, still more difficult to find and hold on to. From different perspectives, a number of recent studies point to an imbalance between the claims from a competitive society and the needs of the individual. For example, Rossi, Meurs and Perrewé (2016) state that

> »the frequent pressures and demands experienced in daily routine generate an intense and constant stress that affect a growing number of workers [...]. On the other hand, organizations are looking for highly productive and well-balanced employees, because only these will be able to show their talents and skills to the fullest. [...]. Excessive tension has become so widespread today that it is no longer just a threat to quality of life, but a threat to life itself« (Rossi/Meurs/Perrewé 2016 S. ix),

and Danish Psychologist Majken Matzau and High Performance and Nutrition Expert Umahro Cadogan (2014) state that

> »stress has become an escalating problem in recent years [...] where we float around in shambles of knowledge, information and communication, and both our professional and private roles are liquid and under constant pressure. [...]. The modern male has to realize his full potential in the knowledge-based labor market [...] and on top of that a subtler existential and spiritual realization of the higher potentials of his personality in the form of individualism and personal growth« (Matzau/Cadogan 2014 S. 53, 55).

(For further examples see also Bloch 2001; Rasmussen 2005; Andersen/Brinkmann 2013; Lumholt/Mortensen 2015).

In a feature article in the Danish newspaper *Information*[6], Danish psychologist Dorte T. Viftrup, PhD, describes the situation of a Danish school teacher[7] whom she is treating:

> »She knows that she is not normal, because she cannot work, cannot achieve. She is also sad that Marius from 3.b is being bullied. She hasn't been able to do anything about it. She suffers from sleeping problems, palpitations and concentration problems. She has, as many other Danes who are suffering from stress, not been able to live up to the claims from the society and working life of self-actualization, competence development, independence and flexibility. Of growth. Still more people suffer not only from stress, depression and anxiety. They also suffer from a guilty conscience, low self-esteem and a disappointment over themselves. Because they are unable to deal with the problems themselves« (Viftrup, 2015b).

6 The example is also given in Mølholm and Vetner's article on the stigma of stress and the absence of agency (2018).

7 Viftrup tells a similar story in the article psykisk sundhed som relationsevne (2015a).

What the school teacher does not realize is that she is probably experiencing not so much a disappointment in her ability to realize *her own* self but rather a disappointment in the realization of *the they's* version of it. She feels this because in our late-modern society, the realization of the self (in order to become the best and most authentic version of yourself) and the optimal exploitation of one's individual, human potential so that society can succeed in global competition have become one and the same (Andersen 2013, S. 37). Therefore, the school teacher's image of her true self and society's version of that image have gradually merged. Thus, failing to meet the expectations of society and to constantly improve your performance has become the same as failing to realize and utilize your full potential and become, what you – authentically – were meant to be. The existential nearness of Being in an authentic Da-sein has been colonized and cloaked by the material distance of the they. In her article *Psykisk Sundhed Som Relationsevne,* (Viftrup 2015a), with reference to the Danish professor in psychology Svend Brinkmann, Viftrup makes a direct connection between the individual's inability to comply with the demand to be flexible, realize his full potential through education and work and constantly increase his skills and competences on one side, and stress, depression and other mental illnesses on the other (Viftrup 2015a, S. 135). Furthermore, the identity of the individual human being and his ability to act is, Viftrup continues, developed in relation to others, and if he is alienated in this relation »he loses a part of, and is alienated to, himself« (Viftrup 2015a, S. 142).

Heidegger's gloomy warning not to get »lost in the publicness of the they and its idle talk« (BT/SZ, § 55, S. 250/271) has an ominous ring to it, almost as a premonition of darker times to come when in »the self-certainty and decisiveness of the they, it gets spread abroad increasingly that there is no need of authentic, attuned understanding. The supposition of the they that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine ›life‹ brings a *tranquilization* to Da-sein, for which everything is in ›the best order‹ and for whom all doors are open« (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 166/177). What Heidegger did not know at the time when he wrote *Being and Time* was how significantly the labor market and organizational life would change after WW2 in the direction of a democratization and humanization of the working life in a number of European countries (Miller/Rose 1994, S. 33).

From the 1950s onwards, research established how increased influence and responsibility, participation, self-management, self-realization, flexibility and – not least – lifelong learning and education opportunities had a dramatic influence on the productivity, efficiency, job satisfaction, competitiveness and quality of the products (Miller/Rose 1994; Miller/Rose 1995) of the worker. Strikingly enough, as the worker became more productive, hard-working and stable, he simultaneously became more grateful – he started giving more to the workplace and was happy to do so.

The research was based on the basic assumption that human beings innately strive towards personal growth (Korsgaard 1999, S. 145). Self-actualization through the realization of one's full potential became, as the example above so clearly emphasizes and confirms, the ›new‹ normal, and the concept of lifelong learning, as Danish Professor Knud Grue-Sørensen remarked after the UNESCO conference in Tokyo 1972, occurred with an almost catchphrase-like ring of both promise and requirement (ibid, S. 144). As a result,

there are no limits to the individual's ability to constantly learn and develop, and lifelong learning is therefore, as my friend and colleague Professor Norman Longworth once said with a smile on his face, literally ›from lust to dust‹: the individual human being is forever destined to be in a state of incompleteness, always in a process of striving for a higher level of competence. Words such as *good enough* or *as good as it can get* are therefore meaningless. He who might be under that delusion is, as former Head of Market at Danish Trade and Service Lars Goldschmidt said in 2004, »in need of reality-therapy« (Kudahl 2004, S. 19) and lacks a proper and acceptable attitude. Or, as the principal of a local school said in an interview that I conducted in the fall of 2000 in connection with a North Denmark *Learning Region* project: *To those of my teachers who believe that they have finished educating themselves I say, that if you believe that then you are more finished than educated*.

Undoubtedly, human potential is now seen as a resource to be exploited on the same level as any other natural resource, and individual competencies are capital that has become an object of quantitative measurements, calculations and evaluations. Human potential for constant growth through self-realization has become an object of investment and strategic planning at all levels of society. What started as a humanistic *Bildungs* project[8]: supporting the individual human being's striving toward growth, development and self-actualization on his own terms, ended up becoming, as a consequence of an ever more globalized world, a production- and market instrument (Andersen 2013, S. 36 – 37). This shift occurred as a reaction to outside circumstances – an ever more globalized world – and to forces that created an urgent need to exploit every resource, the human included, to the fullest. As a result, the realization of the full potential of the human population is no longer an *individual* Bildungs project. It has ›moved out‹ of the individual human being and into the public sphere, in which each citizen – from cradle to grave – »compares itself with everything« during which he »drifts towards an alienation« (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 166/178). It is a fold-up of the Da-sein and the they.

Gradually, the late-modern human being is subjectified with the norms and attitudes of lifelong learning, self-actualization and the realization of his full potential. This is a positive form of attention rich on the energy stemming from the focus on the qualities of the individual, which constantly reminds the individual of his excellence; a positive form of attention that, like a spur, urges him to work still harder and strive ever higher. However, as the American historian Christopher Lasch remarks in his book *The Culture of Narcissism*, it also makes the late-modern human being dependent on others to support and uphold his self-esteem: »he cannot live without an admiring audience« (Lasch 1979, S. 22). In an article in the Danish newspaper *Information*, philosopher Arno Victor Nielsen explains how a bank manager at the Danish bank *Middelfart Sparekasse* had trouble bringing his employees' enthusiasm for work under control:

8 The German term *Bildung* is equivalent to the Danish term *dannelse*, but has no equivalence in English. It refers to the individual's endeavor to part with his own particularity in order to »rise to the universal [...]« (Gadamer 2004, S. 11). Among other things, this means »learning to affirm what is different from oneself and to find universal viewpoints from which one can grasp the thing, ›the objective thing in its freedom‹, without selfish interest« (ibid, S. 12).

> »The bank manager had to force his employees to take time off. The bank had established so many bonus arrangements and appreciative leadership methods that the employees became addicted to the praise and rewards they got at work. [....]. Life outside work became poor in comparison to life at work. At first, it seems as if the individual employee got more freedom, but the result was that they were constantly at work. In reality, the behavior of the employees was controlled by the reward structures that came with the flexible work« (Nielsen in Riel 2011, October 25th.).

Thus, ›opening all the doors‹ to a full and genuine life has its price. The tranquilization of the Da-sein, Heidegger points out, is not a restful place but rather a very busy one: »This tranquilization in authentic being, however, does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one to uninhibited ›busyness‹. Being entangled in the ›world‹ does not somehow come to rest« (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 66/177-178). The individual human being has to keep moving if he is to retain the attention of an admiring audience who, on top of everything else, also expect him to be creative and innovative – to perform, produce or imagine something new and not yet seen. In this busy place, the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa says, the escalating exhaustion of the late-modern self, which is empirically evident in the form of the growing prevalence of clinical depression and burn-out syndrome, can be imputed to the fight for recognition which literally starts over every day (Rosa 2014, S. 70).

The school teacher in the example above does not seem to receive any admiring glances whatsoever. She appears to be only too aware that having been given all the opportunities to succeed, and yet failed, she has to carry the burden of failure and the responsibility of ›abnormality‹, all by herself (Viftrup 2015a, S. 135). In addition, she is, Viftrup says, typical of all those suffering from stress, depression and anxiety who are burdened by a guilty conscience, low self-esteem and disappointment in themselves. She appears to be ›out of tune‹ in that she, in the words of Heidegger, had »become tired of itself. (Her) being has become manifest as a burden« (BT/SZ, § 29, S. 126-127/134).

Viftrup's story about the school teacher exemplifies the anti-objectives of the discourse on stress. It displays a vague yet-to-be-disclosed-place in which the individual human being can be authentic. Viftrup emphasizes the influence of society's escalating demands on the individual, but she does not – as is generally the case in the articles and books (academic and popular alike) addressing the issues of stress, depression and anxiety – give any unambiguous and clear agency to the discourse on stress. However, Viftrup is – as is Nielsen – clearly pointing to the potential damage to the individual human being's possibility to be his true, authentic self, if and when he gets too caught up in listening to the they and, on the one hand, is seduced by the promising attention to, and seeming admiration of, his unique potential for growth, and, on the other hand, he gets addicted to and trapped in the requirements of flexibility, dedication and self-actualization. The school teacher is clearly described as someone who is in what Heidegger calls *a bad mood* and thus as someone who is blinded and disconnected from the heedful and circumspect caring for herself (BT/SZ, § 29, S. 128/136). She is portrayed in such a way that she appears to be failing at being her authentic, own self, where she would be concerned in her being about her truest

possibility. She *had* heard what society expected from her, but she was unable to act accordingly and that made her a disappointment not only to society but also to herself. Her attunement to the situation is used to exemplify a general condition in the labor force, where failing to meet the demands and expectations of society is a defeat so severe that it effectively prevents the individual from caring about his or her own being as being. In this way, the late-modern worker, being unable to deal with the situation itself, not only fails to hear her own self when it gets lost in the publicness of the they but also, ashamed and dishonored, loses her ability to hear the call of her conscience even when all is not, Heidegger says, lost »to him who wants to be brought back« (BT/SZ, § 55, S. 251/271).

The employees at Middelfart Sparekasse also heard what their manager expected from them and had reacted positively to the combined financial and emotional incentives. They too are described as ›not free‹, as they became so dependent on the potential positive attention from their leaders that they were unable to leave the stage where they could be seen, acknowledged and appreciated by those around them: in the work sphere specifically, and in society more generally, they were unable to hear the call from their conscience and thus, not free to be their true, authentic selves.

Therefore, it takes a different type of hearing to be able to hear that wordless, silent and nameless ›voice‹ – the call of conscience. It is an ability to hear that which was originally there but is now »numbed by the ›noise‹ of the manifold ambiguity of everyday ›new‹ idle talk« (BT/SZ, § 55, S. 251/271). In being without words, it is – it must be, Heidegger says – a silent call that requires the individual human being to first shut his mind to the loud, persistent and insistent voices from the surrounding world so that he can *hear* the call. The existential conscience calls from *within* Da-sein itself, *from* its »uncanniness [...] as not-at-home« (BT/SZ, § 57, S. 255/276) and »*forth* from its lostness in the they« (BT/SZ, § 57, S. 253/274). It has »the character of *summoning* Da-sein to its ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self, by summoning it to its ownmost quality of being a lack«[9] (BT/SZ, § 54, S. 249/269), »*out of* [its] falling prey to the they« (BT/SZ, § 57, S. 256/277). In other words, Heidegger emphasizes the Being of Da-sein as both the source *and* the key to bringing Da-sein into balance with its authentic self. The call of conscience is similar to the sound of dissonance that arises when something gets out of tune – in this case, according to Heidegger, Da-sein's attunement to the world.

Heidegger points specifically to »information services such as the newspaper« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 119/126) when he wants to point to the source of the origin of the alienation of the self »which *closes off* to Da-sein its authenticity and possibility« (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 166/178). Considering how the level and magnitude of information services have increased since Heidegger wrote *Being and Time* more than 90 years ago, I believe we can safely assume that if he were alive today, he would be even more concerned and find that he had that much more reason to sound the alarm.

When analyzing the discourse on stress, I find that sounding the alarm is precisely what the vast majority of researchers and professionals are doing. They point, as already

9 In German: »Der Gewissensruf hat den Charakter des *Anrufs* des Daseins auf sein eigenstes Selbstseinkönnen, und das in der Weise des *Aufrufs* zum eigensten Schuldigsein.«

mentioned, to the overwhelming amount of communication from society – the »public ›surrounding world‹« (BT/SZ, § 27, S. 119/126) – urging and inciting the late-modern human being to be vigilant, flexible, dedicated, lifelong and life-wide learning, efficient, pro-active, creative, innovative, courageous, fresh, energetic, resourceful, goal-oriented individuals (feel free to add more), as (one of) the primary causes of stress, depression and anxiety. At the same time, therefore, from an existential point of view, the discourse on stress allows us the opportunity to understand the *yet-to-be-disclosed-place* as that which Heidegger calls the existential conscience, and the vague anti-objectives as the wordless call that summons us from our lostness in the common, binding understanding of what it means to be a ›normal‹ human being in late-modern working society. To be part of today's society, being-with-one-another somehow dissolves the individual human being's ability to be himself.

However, Heidegger explicitly describes this »not-being-its-self« as something which »functions as a *positive* possibility of beings«: a *nonbeing* that »must be conceived as the kind of being of Da-sein nearest to it and in which it mostly maintains itself« (BT/SZ, § 38, S. 164/176). It almost appears as if there is a constant battle within the individual human being between listening to the they and listening to the call of the conscience. There is a battle between, on one hand, subservience to others in the everyday being-with-one-another, and those with whom the individual takes care of things and the world in which he lives and, on the other hand, listening to the voice that wants to bring Da-sein back to itself. Therefore, Heidegger almost sounds both defeatist and defiant at the same time: as if we have to accept falling prey and giving up on our ownmost self if we are to be a coherent, functioning society, yet we must also let ourselves be summoned and take up the fight to get back to being our ownmost self.

If balancing these two antagonistic considerations and necessities was difficult in the mid-1920s, it is no wonder that it seems almost impossible today. The example of the school teacher illustrates the battle between explicit care for society and the unspoken, nameless concern for the ownmost potentiality of the self. Viftrup's articles are an example of the regularity with which the discourse on stress mainly focuses on how the claims of society are increasing the burdens on the working man; such articles are characterized by anti-objectives that function as *agencies of avoidance*: a less careful listening and adhering to the claims and expectations of society, which would make it possible to hear the call of the conscience calling »from afar, to afar« (BT/SZ, § 55, S. 251/271). Perhaps what the discourse on stress is indirectly urging us to do is said best by our local priest Lene Riger-Kusk in her sermon of September 4th. 2016, with reference to the story where Jesus visits Martha (Luke 10, 38-42):

> »Maria's sister Martha isn't here with us today. [...]. *If* Martha is here she is sitting at the edge of her chair, because there might be something that she has to take care of. And then she has to leave. Just briefly. Then hopefully she will be able to make it back again. Because Martha is busy. There *is* a lot one has to get done. And if you are a conscientious and responsible human being who wants to do things, as well as possible, then there isn't much time to suddenly sit down in the middle of it all and just *be*. Mar-

> tha is a modern human being who wants to be a part of as many things as possible and miss out on as little as possible. Therefore, she is always on the move. Always on. Always on her way. […]. In a life and an existence and an everyday life where we often come to make exaggerated demands, the solutions are not to sleep a little less, run a little faster or plan our calendar more effectively. What we need is a place of refuge. A place where we don't have to be poised ready for anything or anyone. A place where we are looked at with eyes that does not expect anything from us other than being content with who we are. […]. No human being is able to give and ›be on' all the time.«

However, that is what is required of her, due to the acceleration of the pace of life, the acceleration of social changes and the technological acceleration that characterizes late-modern life (Rosa 2014), caused by the logic of competition that drives it. This situation creates a fatal combination of growth and acceleration that is based on the equation between time and money made by Benjamin Franklin, and according to which it is continuously essential to find ways to either/both spare or/and spend more time, to gain advantage over her direct competitors to get the education she wants, the job she desires to either get or hold on to, the husband and family she dreams of, etc. She has to dedicate more energy – time and effort – to uphold her competitive advantage, which ultimately leads to a situation in which the sustaining of this advantage is no longer a means of living an independent life guided by self-defined goals but instead becomes an overriding goal for societal life as well as individual existence. Thus, the acceleration eventually »transforms the forms of human subjectivity and our ›being-in-the-world‹« (Rosa 2014, S. 50). It is an acceleration which »indicates a deep, structural distortion of the relation between the self and the world and between the various ways in which the subject is situated or ›localized‹ in the world« (Rosa 2014, S. 96).

The Danish psychologist and writer Nadja Prætorius describes this outer-defined alienation in which we conform to the reifying perspective of the surrounding world as a *dehumanization* that occurs without our even realizing it and in which we are deprived of the experience of something intimate and authentic; something meaningful and real about being *that* human being and the fellow human being that one has the potential to be (Prætorius 2013, S. 188-189). We are, as individual human beings, torn between our responsibilities and obligations to ›The Other‹ and our consideration for our ownmost potentiality of being a self.

Towards the end of his book *Stå Fast* (Eng. *Stand Firm*), Brinkmann (2014) says that ›who I am‹ is defined by the promises and obligations I have for others; what has significance in life and who I basically am, is thus a manifestation hereof. In an accelerated society in which technological innovations have obliterated the distances in space and time the question is, though, *who* ›the others‹ are since they are potentially everyone. For example, my colleagues are not just those sitting in the same building as I, but everyone working at my university, plus every other person in the world who may find inspiration in my work to do theirs, and who may therefore send me an e-mail, give me a phone-call or send me a request of all sorts via LinkedIn, Facebook or some other social media; my students are not just the few young women and men that follow my classes and study in

our Master's program, but potentially every student at my university (and others, for that matter); my friends are not just those with whom I have a close and intimate relation but (potentially) everyone I am friends with in the virtual world of the already mentioned social media. In a world where everyone is potentially ›the other‹ it has become still more difficult to define and decide who and what has enough significance in our lives that they and that deserve our obligation and the right to define who we are. We give, as the American blogger and writer Mark Manson so eloquently put it, way too many fucks about way too many things and have, during that process, lost track and sight of what is truly important to us (Manson 2016). And one thing is for sure: we cannot, as Riger-Kusk said in her sermon, give and ›be on‹, all the time.

7

Since the end of WW2, the human *Existenz* has, without a doubt, come under continuously stronger and more significant pressure than ever before in the history of man, with a tendency among the working population to have surrendered to the dictatorship of publicness. As a thrown being-in-the-world, Da-sein in its uncanniness has literally lost its sense of self in that the call of conscience is, as Heidegger formulates it, »like an *alien* voice« (BT/SZ, § 57, S. 255/277). In its unfamiliarity it makes no sense; we have become disconnected to our potentiality-of-being-a-self. Misconceiving the they self with our ownmost-potentiality-of-being-a-self, failing to meet the expectations of constant growth, personal and professional development, dedication and flexibility is confused with listening to and answering the summoning of the call from our existential conscience.

Nonetheless, in the anti-objectives of the discourse on stress we ›hear‹ that alien, wordless voice calling us from afar to afar, to that which is always an individual yet-to-be-disclosed-place, yet the sound of a common truth that fills ›us‹ – the collective ›we‹ – with an existential *Angst*, unrest and discomfort. Thus, even though it may – to some degree rightfully – be perceived and interpreted as yet another burden put on the shoulders of an already overburdened, late-modern human being, and yet another deficit to feel guilty about not being able to level out, it is very much a common responsibility to make an effort to change the discourses that govern the working-life of the late-modern human being, so that the discourse on stress comes to hold the agency that will allow us simply *to be*.

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