

# Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology

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## Anxiety or Dread (*Angst*)

According to Heidegger the phenomenon of dread (*Angst*) is a **fundamental, existential mood** of *Dasein* that is to be differentiated from fear, which is directed in one's **concern** towards a particular entity in the world (for example, a tiger). But dread has no boundaries that confine it to a particular environment, and is a mood that is directed towards the **world as such**. *Dasein* is struck by an "**uncanniness**," a not-being-at-home (*Unheimliche*) in the very place it dwells (namely, the world). Heidegger notes, "**When dread has run its course we say, 'it was really nothing.'** This kind of talk strikes the very heart of the matter. It was nothing; the of-which of dread is nothing, that is to say, nothing that takes place in the world, nothing definite, nothing worldly. But since it can nevertheless be oppressively present in an obtrusiveness, it is much more than something threatening for fear, for it is the world in its very worldhood" (*History Of the Concept Of Time*, p. 290). What Heidegger means by this "it was nothing" is that *Dasein*, via *Angst*, confronts the finitude of its Being; the "it was nothing" indeed means that dread confronts *Dasein* with no-thing (i.e. no *particular* entity), but its "having to-be," its inescapable facticity as **thrown** into existence. As such, Heidegger writes, "**Dread is nothing other than the pure and simple experience of being in the sense of being-in-the-world**" (*History Of the Concept Of Time*, p. 291). –Timothy Dante Cerda-Walker



In what *Angst* is about, the "it is nothing and nowhere" becomes manifest. The recalcitrance of the innerworldly nothing and nowhere means phenomenally that *what Angst is about is the world as such*. The utter insignificance which makes itself known in the nothing and nowhere does not signify the absence of world, but means that innerworldly beings in themselves are so completely unimportant that, on the basis of this *insignificance* of what is innerworldly, the world is all that obtrudes itself in its worldliness.

What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the *possibility* of things at hand in general, that is, the world itself. When *Angst* has quieted down, in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say "it was really nothing." This way of talking, indeed, gets at *what* it was ontically. Everyday discourse aims at taking care of things at hand and talking about them. That about which *Angst* is anxious is none of the innerworldly things at hand. But this "none of the things at hand," which is all that everyday, circumspect discourse understands, is not a total nothing. The nothing of handiness is based on the primordial "something,"\* on the *world*. The world, however, ontologically belongs essentially to the being of *Da-sein* as being-in-the-world. So if what *Angst* is about exposes nothing, that is, the world as such, this means that *that about which Angst is anxious is being-in-the-world itself*.<sup>7</sup>

Being anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world. It is not the case that initially we deliberately look away from innerworldly beings and think only of the world about which *Angst* arises, but *Angst* as a mode of attunement first discloses the *world as world*. However, that does not mean that the worldliness of the world is conceptualized in *Angst*.

*Being and Time*, Stambaugh Translation, p 114. Here Heidegger notes that *Angst* discloses to *Dasein* the world as world (in his meaning of the term), thus interrupting *Dasein* in its everyday relation to others in the They (*das Man*)

