

Medard Boss's Daseinsanalysis Of Martin Heidegger. Reflections and a Conjecture on an Unexplored Aspect of the Zollikon Seminars

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Abstract

Was Medard Boss daseinsanalyst for Martin Heidegger during the second crisis in the philosopher's life? In addition to Boss occasionally working therapeutically with Heidegger when the two men visited each other and while traveling together, the Zollikon seminars themselves can be understood as part of Heidegger's daseinsanalysis with Boss.

Key words

Martin Heidegger, Medard Boss, daseinsanalysis, existential therapy, psychotherapy

Preamble

I. No one ever 'treated' Freud – the architect of psychoanalysis – psychoanalytically. Evidently, there was no occasion for it, even if anyone would have dared to undertake doing so. But what of Martin Heidegger, whose fundamental ontology of existence (*Da-sein*) became the source of daseinsanalysis? There was in his life a documented occasion of extreme distress followed by what seems to have been an ongoing experience of chronic melancholy following it that continued over a period of thirty years until his death in 1976. Two sorts of therapeutic response were provided by psychiatrists in the daseinsanalytic tradition, the second of which coincided with the development of the Swiss school of daseinsanalysis founded by Medard Boss.

In his biography of Martin Heidegger, Rüdiger Safranski recounts events following the philosopher's fall from grace in 1945, when he was dismissed from the faculty of Freiburg University¹. Safranski (1998) writes:

Heidegger in fact had a physical and mental breakdown in the spring of 1946 and underwent psychosomatic treatment by Viktor Baron von Gebattel, a physician and psychologist of the Binswanger school of daseinsanalysis [Daseinsanalyse], a psychoanalytical method that had been inspired by Heidegger's philosophy, whose practitioners included Heidegger's later friend

Medard Boss. Heidegger's own information on his breakdown and sanatorium stay is vague

(pp 351-352)²

The information provided by Safranski is based on conversations Heidegger had with Heinrich Wiegand Petzet in November 1947, in Freiburg. Petzet quotes Heidegger on what happened in the wake of his experience of what Heidegger characterized as an *Inquisitionsverhör* (an inquisitorial interrogation, now commonly referred to as the denazification proceedings to which Heidegger was subjected). According to Petzet (1993, p 46), Heidegger recounted that 'when I subsequently collapsed, the dean of the medical school, [Kurt] Beringer . . . came to me and simply drove me away to [Viktor von] Gebssattel in Badenweiler. *And what did [von Gebssattel] do? He just started walking randomly with me through the snow-covered winter forest. He did not do anything else. But as a human being he helped me, so that three weeks later I was again healthy and returned home [emphasis added].*'³ Maybe.

Heidegger's memory for the period of time he spent with von Gebssattel was shaky it seems, since evidently he was at Badenweiler in July and could hardly have walked in 'winter snow' with the psychiatrist then. As for Safranski's account of the nature of the 'treatment' he received from von Gebssattel, it was perhaps less reflective of the psychiatrist's understanding of Binswanger and his practice of daseinsanalysis than in the nature of how psychiatrists of his time worked in sanatoria, which were institutions for the rich and famous. In the tradition of the Bärghölzli, at Badenweiler von Gebssattel would certainly have taken a great deal of personal interest in his well-known patient and for that reason would have spent a lot of time with him. It is not clear, however, that he engaged in formal psychotherapeutic interactions with Heidegger during scheduled hours of time spent together in his consulting room. All we do know for certain is that Heidegger expressed his gratitude to von Gebssattel (1958) in his own way more than a decade later by contributing a revised version of the first of his Summer 1957 Freiburg lectures on '*Grundsätze des Denkens* [Fundamental Principles of Thinking]' to a *Festschrift* for the psychiatrist.

I suggest here that in the wake of his appearance before the 'Inquisition' Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit* was suddenly reordered and during the remaining thirty years of his life (1946-1976) his *Da-sein* remained attuned in a fundamentally different way than it had been before his experience in 1946⁴.

The situation with Medard Boss, which began about a year following the *Zusammenbruch* was quite different than Heidegger's experience with von Gebssattel. When Boss, who had been in analysis with Freud in 1925 and had worked with Jung at the Bärghölzli, wrote to Heidegger in 1947, he was in his mid-40s. Heidegger was in his late 50s. Two years later, they

met for the first time. Ten years after that, beginning in 1959, Heidegger worked closely with Boss for a decade in the now well-known seminars held at Boss's home and office in the Zollikon district of Zurich. Heidegger became Boss's intellectual and spiritual mentor, but they also formed a friendship – and perhaps a relationship of a different sort.

In June 1976, a few weeks after Heidegger's death, I met Boss in the room where the seminars had taken place. He told me a bit about that time in Heidegger's life just after World War II as he recalled it. I quote from my diary:

While serving as a field doctor in the Second World War, Boss had much free time and saw the title – merely that at the time – Sein und Zeit. Soon he heard all of the rumors about Heidegger and the Nazis. 'This was one of the most slandered of men.' He sent Heidegger food during this time, having heard that he was starving.

Heidegger was quite 'shy,' but could be 'aggressive' in discussions about thinking. He was 'incapable of defending himself' against comments about his personal life.

It was by way of his 'personality and friendship' that Heidegger came out of his shyness after the War and began to travel – for example, to France, Italy⁵.

He did not mention a 'professional' relationship as Heidegger's *Therapeut*⁶.

In an interview a decade earlier for *Psychology Today*, Boss (1968) had told Mary Hall:

In his emotions, Heidegger always remains a small boy of the Black Forest ... But if you understand Heidegger as being this child, he is the most charming and kind-hearted person you could ever know. . . . I am fascinated by him, but I can see his weaknesses.

Two or three times each term he comes over [to Zurich] to give seminars to my students, both as a psychiatrist and as a philosopher [emphasis added]

(pp 61-62)

These were, of course, the Zollikon seminars. Heidegger soon began to spend time at Boss's summer home in Lenzderheide and Boss visited Heidegger in Freiburg and Todtnauberg, at the famous *Hütte* or cabin where he had finished *Sein und Zeit*. The two men also took vacations together with their wives. These reflected Heidegger's increasing willingness to come out of his self-imposed seclusion and seem to have been instigated by Boss.

In 1970 Heidegger suffered a stroke, which meant another fundamental existential change. His health deteriorated and he received fewer visitors. In the introduction to *Zollikon Seminars* Boss (2001) notes that from that point on 'my conscience as a doctor no longer allowed me to expect that Heidegger could continue to endure the great strain of the Zollikon Seminars' (p xviii). Heidegger's visits to Zurich were discontinued, but he and Boss still occasionally met informally as before. Boss stresses the difficulty of the work Heidegger carried out in the seminars, but he might also have remarked that the discontinuation of these meetings meant the end of something therapeutic for Heidegger.

As I have written elsewhere (Groth 2008), Heidegger became 'a Western kind of *rishi*' (sage or guru) to Boss's *brahmachari* (seeker or student), but it also occurs to me to ask whether, from the time after they first met in the summer of 1949 through their last visits (but especially during the decade of the Zollikon seminars), Boss was at times and in some fashion daseinsanalyst to Heidegger's daseinsanalysand.

The biographical information on Heidegger is still limited and matters will likely remain that way as long as Heidegger's two sons are still alive. Only a few of the 256 letters Heidegger wrote to Boss are published in *Zollikon Seminars* and they are severely redacted. Editing of the 'Conversations' was overseen by Hermann Heidegger, the younger of the philosopher's two sons, so there is likely a great deal of missing material that might eventually shed light on my thesis that both men acknowledged that Boss from time to time acted as Heidegger's daseinsanalyst.

The shyness and childlike quality of Heidegger Boss mentions are all that reflect a psychotherapist's perspective. There is no talk of psychopathology⁷. Indeed, for daseinsanalysts, the language of psychopathology is irrelevant. It is curious then that Boss continued to use such language in his publications, but since he was writing for psychiatrists (and other medical doctors) and psychotherapists it is likely that he did so in order to help bridge the abyss between traditional psychiatry and daseinsanalysis.

II. So just how does one 'treat' daseinsanalytically a person whom Boss welcomed 'both as a psychiatrist [a doctor of the soul] and as a philosopher' when he visited Zollikon? How does one 'treat' the source of daseinsanalysis? The answer is, of course, just as one would treat any other human being.

Boss's orientation as a daseinsanalyst is perhaps best summarized by his therapeutic watchword: 'Why not?' As he wrote in his *Grundriß* (which Heidegger monitored and edited throughout its composition) (Boss 1979): 'In the vocabulary of the Daseinsanalytic therapist, "Why?" is replaced as the most important word by "Why in the world not?"' (p 279)⁸. Unlike the psychoanalyst, who reconstructs the analysand's past in order to find in it causes that may be adduced to answer the question 'Why?' in an

attempt to explain the analysand's present experience and behaviour, Boss as *Therapeut* looks toward the therapand's future, a future that from the perspective of his lived present is to be found in the realm of possibility, and which begins with and in the immediate relationship between daseinsanalyst and daseinsanalysand. Given the other's human, all-too-human freedom, the daseinsanalyst asks of the other the decisive 'rhetorical' question: 'Why in the world not?' For the daseinsanalyst, this means looking out for the other after a fashion that makes way for, opens the way for, and thus frees up the other's existence.

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger (1977, p 163) had contrasted solicitude that makes way for the other – *vorausspringende Fürsorge* – with a kind of solicitude that intervenes, standing in for the other – *einspringende Fürsorge*. In the latter, one steps ahead and effectively in the way of the other, leading the way much as a parent does with his child. By contrast, *vorausspringende Fürsorge* is the basic therapeutic stance of the daseinsanalyst, and so it would have been for Boss with his celebrated friend and mentor—and perhaps daseinsanalysand.

Boss's stance allowed for the emergence of what Heidegger termed a clearing (*Lichtung*) that is the site (*Ort, topos*) of the openness (*Offenheit*) of the human kind of being – *Da-sein*, the *there* (*Da-*) of being (*Sein*)⁹. As a child, each of us is, of course, a limpid clearing before his existence is, inexorably, slowly but surely narrowed down by the routines of socialization. Thereafter, each of us remains a clearing, but then of now more, now less, illumination. But then come those moments that darken one's *Da-sein* and bring about profound existential change. One such moment in Heidegger's life was his experience of the *Inquisitionsverhör*.

Boss (1963) describes his therapeutic comportment in this way: 'Much more crucial than anything the [daseins-] analyst says is *his actual human openness to every realm of life belonging to the patient's existence* [emphasis added] (p 149).' Such openness is compromised in a moment of existential crisis such as Heidegger's. It is the task of daseinsanalysis to help restore it. In daseinsanalysis the other's *Da-sein* may come to reclaim its openness, thanks precisely to the openness offered by the *Therapeut*. In such openness what I term revalidation of the existence of the other can come to pass (Groth 2002)¹⁰. In the clearing that opens up, a lightening of the other's *Da-sein* can take place. Things once again more readily present themselves and a less restricted availability of world (as one finds in the life of the child) is again made possible. This amounts to not the creation of something new to see but, rather, the restoration of sight, that is, the *sighting* of the things themselves, which show up anew and, as it were, look to us once again, renewed, for our response. These things have been there all along, of course, but after a period of being dimmed down, they once again look back to us for our wide-eyed expectation. The opening up of perception

in daseinsanalysis, then, is the result of the lighting up of things that have been in the shadows.

While our *Da-sein* is the condition for the appearance of things as meaningful, things retain ontological priority, in that they first address us, call out to us, engage us, and draw us to them. In the intentional moment, illumination and what is illuminated are co-intensive. The condition for the possibility of existence is likewise the condition for the possibility of the world – of things.

III. So little (alas) for what is known of the background and context of what may be construed as Boss's therapeutic moments with Heidegger. It is not difficult to imagine the details of Heidegger's daseinsanalysis as I conjecture it took place. The things that mattered to him were his pens, the paper he wrote on, his books, the spring and pump outside his window in Todtnauberg, the topography of the Schwarzwald as described by one of his favorite writers, Adalbert Stifter¹¹ – and above all his voice, what Richard Wisser (1958), referring to Heidegger, termed *la voix qui pense*. These things had darkened when Heidegger's *Da-sein* was reordered in 1946. We will never fully know what went on between Boss and Heidegger when they talked, often over a glass or two of wine. That belongs to the intimacy of their *Gespräch*. Nor can we now on the basis of published material know whether they agreed that certain times were formally devoted to daseinsanalysis designated as such. I rather doubt that there were any such hours. On the other hand, I think it quite likely that arranging to have Heidegger visit Zollikon to 'help' Boss and his medical residents 'both as a psychiatrist and as a philosopher' was for Boss a way of 'helping' Heidegger and *these* hours may be understood as daseinsanalytic sessions as well as teaching moments for Heidegger. The unique documents that are collected in *Zollikoner Seminare* are in a sense both an account of Heidegger's contribution to psychiatry (medicine and psychology) and daseinsanalysis and a record of the philosopher's existential revalidation under the watchful gaze of Medard Boss.

Heidegger was at his most in *Gespräch* – with a text of Aristotle or Hegel or Nietzsche, Hölderlin or Trakl or Rilke, in his dialogues with language itself and with his own thought that constituted his texts (lectures, essays and addresses), and *im Gespräch* in the intimacies of his seminars in Zollikon. Being forbidden to teach was for Heidegger as serious blow to his *Existenz* as one could imagine¹². What part Boss the daseinsanalyst may have played in enabling Heidegger to again be at home among the things that mattered to him and gave his *Existenz* its meaning must for now remain a matter of conjecture. But I think there is validity in the suggestion that Boss's therapeutic endeavour with Heidegger included arranging and seeing to fruition the ten-year-long series of seminars that

still provide those of us here with singular documents from the history and provenance of daseinsanalysis.

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Notes

¹ At this time, his daily routines, including the 10:00 a.m. ‘call to thinking,’ were disrupted. Access to his library was limited, his manuscripts were in danger of being confiscated and destroyed, and his residence in Freiburg was under the control of the French military. He soon spent most of his time at his Schwarzwald retreat near Todtnauberg.

² ‘Tatsächlich erlitt Heidegger im Frühjahr 1946 einen körperlichen und seelischen Zusammenbruch und begab sich in eine psychosomatische Behandlung bei Victor Freiherr von Gebattel, einem Mediziner und Psychologen, der zur Binswangerschen Schule der Daseinsanalyse gehörte, einer psychoanalytischen Richtung, die sich von der Heideggerschen Philosophie hatte inspirieren lassen und der auch Heideggers späterer Freund Medard Boss zugehörte. Heideggers eigene Auskünfte über seinen Zusammenbruch und den Sanatoriumsaufenthalt sind vage.’ (Safranski, 1994, p 390]

³ ‘Und was tat der? Er stieg erst mal mit mir durch den verschneiten Winterwald auf den Blauen. Sonst tat er nichts. Aber er half mir als Mensch. Und nach drei Wochen kehrte ich gesund zurück.’ (Petzet, 1983: p 52).

⁴ Earlier in his life as a student Heidegger had experienced another episode of ‘collapse’ that prompted his decision to leave the Jesuit novitiate. In early February 1945 Heidegger had already written to his wife about ‘faint spells & headaches & strange depressions’ (Heidegger, 2008: p 185), but there is nothing in his published correspondence to date that reports symptoms of a related kind. The most candid and likely accurate account we have so far of this change and these years is to be found in the correspondence between the philosopher and Hannah Ardent, who remained in contact with Heidegger from their earliest meeting when she was his student in 1924 until her death in 1975, a year before Heidegger himself died. For an overview, see Maier-Katkin (2010).

⁵ There was even talk of a trip to Washington together that did not materialize.

⁶ On the notion of the *Therapeut*, see my papers (Groth, 2014a; 2014b).

⁷ In their (Askay and Farquar, 2010) fanciful ‘Disclosure of Martin Heidegger, Medard Boss and Sigmund Freud’ Richard Askay (one of the translators of *Zollikon Seminars*) and Jensen Farquar quite inappropriately attempt

a 'diagnosis' of Heidegger, offering up standard *DSM* disorder language to indicate what might have been 'wrong' with Heidegger. In the play that is the centerpiece of the book, Heidegger is analyzed by Freud (pp 133-137).

⁸ "Nicht "Warum" wird deshalb das therapeutisch wichtigste Wort des daseinsgemäß behandelnden Therapeuten sein, sondern ein "Warum denn eigentlich nicht?'" (Boss, 1971: p 564). Boss continues: "Diese "Warum-denn-eigentlich-nicht-Fragen" sind das eigentliche Herzstück jeder "großen Psychotherapie"". 'In fact, "Why in the world not?" is really at the heart of any comprehensive psychotherapy.' (Boss, 1979: pp 279-280). See also Boss (1963), pp 248-251.

⁹ Heidegger characterized matters this way as early as §28 of *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1977: p 174 ff).

¹⁰ In my paper 'Therapeutic Revalidation in Existential Analysis' (Groth, 2002), I discuss the reinvestiture of existence (existential revalidation) as the fundamental goal of daseinsanalysis, which in that paper I refer to as existential analysis. See also Groth (1990-91, 1997a) for discussions of the original investiture of existence.

¹¹ See my translation (Groth 1993) of Heidegger's 'Adalbert Stifters "Eisgeschichte",' originally presented on Radio Zurich on January 26, 1964. See also Groth (1997b).

¹² When circumstances permitted, after a period of five years Heidegger returned to Freiburg University to teach. In the interim, he gradually resumed giving lectures. I like to think that Boss's *vorausspringende Fürsorge* in part facilitated this.

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