

# ENYO

**ENYO: A Multi-Disciplinary Journal  
of African Studies**

**Vol.5 No.1 2024**

ISSN 2756-5874



# Enyo:

**Vol. 5. No.1 2024**

*Enyo : A Journal of African Studies*, is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed, original researches that focuses on African issues relating to: Arts, Humanities, Philosophy, Medicine, Science, Technology, Geography, Education. This annual journal accepts well researched and original submissions from: languages, linguistics, history, religion, philosophy, creative and performative arts, mass communication, sociology, anthropology, education, sciences, political science, information technology, and any study that relates to Africa.

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## HEIDEGGERIAN CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR NIGERIAN YOUTHS: HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*Authenticity is defined as the act of living a genuine and original life. There is no doubt that man is a being (Dasein-in Heidegger's word) who desires freedom and wishes to make his choice of action at all times, yet he is caught up in the habit of running away from his responsibility by following the crowd and having nonchalant attitude towards his personal growth. And from running away from his responsibility, he gets thrown into the anonymous world (the world of "the\_ they self") and into the crowd and becomes a Das man. This development seems to characterize the Nigerian youths' behavior in today's society. Because of this inauthentic behavior, it calls for existential engagement so as to redirect youths towards genuine and original selfhood. In other to address this problem, the research employs Hermeneutic method which is the interpretation of Heidegger's concept of authenticity and how inauthentic lifestyle is capable of denying Nigerian youths what it takes to be truly human. This research posits that until youths begin to be true to themselves in actions and words, and disengage themselves from the anonymous world, society will continue to fail and human condition will continue to degenerate. This work shows ways (drawing from Heidegger's concept on authentic existence on the state of being where a person fully embraces their own unique potential and freely chooses their own path in life) youths can accept their existence by constantly striving to live true to themselves in actions and words.*

**Keywords:** Heideggerian, Authenticity, Nigerian Youth, Hermeneutics.

### INTRODUCTION

This study arises from the researchers' observations of troubling realities within Nigerian society, particularly concerning the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity in the lives of Nigerian youths. While individuals are expected to live genuinely and embrace their true selves, many young Nigerians are increasingly losing their sense of authenticity due to societal pressures and external influences. Our youths opted for bad faith as against authenticity. Heidegger appears to understand the apprehension of authentic *Dasein* as the individual's will and resolve to assert its individuality in the face of the banal conformism of the herd like *das Man*. Authenticity is the recognition of freedom, and bad faith is the denial or refusal of freedom. Consequently, when one recognizes, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time one realizes that he/she cannot not will the freedom of others.

Those who hide from this total freedom, in a guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards. Others, who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth, I shall call scum. But neither cowards nor scum can be identified except upon the plane of strict authenticity. "Thus, although the content of morality is variable, a certain form of this morality is universal. Kant declared that freedom is a will both to itself and to the freedom of others."<sup>1</sup> A noticeable trend among Nigerian youths today is the overwhelming pressure to conform to societal standards, particularly regarding material success, social validation, and peer influence. This has led to a shift in priorities, where young individuals often strive to align themselves with socially accepted but inauthentic lifestyles. For instance, many youths engage in materialism-driven behaviors such as fraudulent activities, excessive social media portrayal of an unrealistic life, and participation in activities that compromise their true identity just to gain societal recognition.

At the heart of this issue is what Heidegger describes as *das Man*; a phenomenon where individuals lose their true selves by conforming to external expectations, becoming absorbed in societal norms instead of embracing personal authenticity. Nigerian youths, rather than carving out unique identities based on self-awareness and responsibility, are increasingly adopting the collective mentality of *das Man*. This raises concerns about self-awareness, personal development, and the long-term consequences of inauthentic living.

However, Heidegger's concept of authenticity provided a lens through which this issue can be analyzed. His philosophy emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, personal responsibility, and living a life that is true to oneself rather than dictated by external forces. "What is obscured in Heidegger's criticisms of *das Man* and publicness is his prior assertion that the collective category of *das Man* is precisely what presents the individual with all its possibilities (including the possibility for authenticity) and that this is not a bad thing."<sup>2</sup> This study, therefore, seeks to examine the nature of authenticity and inauthenticity in the lives of Nigerian youths through Heidegger's existentialist perspective. It aims to analyze how Heidegger's ideas can provide insights into how Nigerian youths might reclaim their individuality, escape the pressures of *das Man*, and live more meaningful and self-directed lives.

The concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity, as presented by Martin Heidegger, emphasize that individuals, including Nigerian youths, should strive to live in a way that is genuine, true to themselves, and not dictated by societal pressures. However, many youths today struggle with this ideal, becoming immersed in external influences that lead them away from their true selves.

This raises several critical questions: How can an individual live authentically? At what point does a youth deviate from their original self and become inauthentic? What are the consequences of living an inauthentic life for Nigerian youths? It is against this backdrop that this research seeks to employ the hermeneutic method to analyze Heidegger's theory of authenticity and interpret what it truly means for Nigerian youths to live a life that is real and free from obscurity.

### **MARTIN HEIDEGGER CONCEPT OF DASEIN: THE TERRITORY OF BEING**

Dasein is a Heideggerian concept which means "Being-there". It was the first major keyword of Martin Heidegger. According to him, the investigation of Being requires a prior investigation of Dasein; the being preoccupied with the question of Being. Dasein is ontic-ontologically prior in the whole question of Being. The search for Being, Heidegger argues, will be a futile venture if man's priority is not recognized. Martin Heidegger is concerned with the ultimate nature of Being. But before we can grasp the ultimate nature of Being, he insists that we must first understand what Dasein is. It is only Dasein that enquires into the nature of Being and has the prerogative to ask the question of Being. Therefore, to know what Being is, we must first know Dasein.

Dasein as "Being-there" depicts man as a being who is present in the world. This presence does not simply mean being next to the world, like a desk occupying space with a fixed nature, but rather in the sense of a meaning-making being-in-the-world. The world is part and parcel of Dasein. Dasein is rooted in the world.

According to Heidegger, you cannot study Dasein without considering existence. Dasein is the only being capable of interpreting the world. It makes sense in and of the world. In order to make sense of the world, Dasein interprets. It is not merely present in the world; it is a meaning-making being in the world. This arises from the fact that Dasein constructs meaning within the world.

Dasein, as a meaning-making being, is not a fixed property. It is capable of opening up possibilities and holds great potential. Dasein's possibilities are so enormous that it can assume any significance at any given moment, and it remains inexhaustible.

*In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities. As the potentiality-for-Being which it is, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its Being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes. But this means that Dasein is Being-possible which has been delivered over to itself thrown possibility through and through. Dasein is the possibility of Being-free for its own most potentiality-for-Being. Its Being-possible is transparent to itself in different possible ways and degrees.<sup>3</sup>*

For Martin Heidegger, only Dasein truly exists. He distinguishes between kinds of existence: *Existencia* and *Existenz*.

- *Existencia* means presence-at-hand, and can be applied to entities other than Dasein; things that relate passively to the world. Animals, for example, do not create meaning in the world because they do not have an

active purpose in it.

- Existenz (Existence), on the other hand, specifically belongs to Dasein. Only Dasein exists. Its essence lies in its existence. This means that man is not a finished or fixed product; he keeps becoming. For Heidegger, existence is the being that creates, recreates, and transcends himself.

Saying that Dasein is essentially a being-in-the-world means that Dasein has an inseparable relationship with the world of things and people. He has a native attachment to the world. Being-in-the-world is ontological to man. The world is part and parcel of his being. He cannot separate himself from it. It is in the world that man lives, moves, and has his being. The idea of being-in-the-world must be distinguished from the idea of being immersed in the world.

Heidegger writes:

*Dasein is never 'proximally' an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a 'relationship' towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only because Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is. This state of Being does not arise just because some other entity is present-at-hand outside of Dasein and meets up with it. Such an entity can 'meet up with' Dasein only in so far as it can, of its own accord, show itself within a world.<sup>4</sup>*

If Dasein immerses itself in the world, it ceases to be an authentic being. It becomes lost as a subject and is reduced to an object of use in the world, forfeiting its freedom. One immerses in the world when his desires take control of him. This is a failure to determine oneself as a being.

Although man is part of the world, he transcends the world, because he possesses freedom a permanent capacity for self-determination, self-orientation, and self-detachment.

Dasein is not only a being-in-the-world; he is also a being-with-others, which means that human existence is a shared existence; a being-in-common. Thus, social relations are part of human existence and cannot be escaped. One cannot elude the care and concerns of others. Dasein cannot exist without the others. For Dasein, being aware of oneself is also being aware of others, because others shape the way we think and frame our minds. We discover and know ourselves as beings with other people; our being is a being-with-others.

However, being-with-others does not mean that human existence should be swallowed up by mass opinion. Man remains a being with unique characteristics and attributes. Each individual has his life to live and his death to die and these attributes are not transferable.

According to Heidegger in *Being and Time*: “Dasein understands itself proximally and for the most part in terms of its world; and the Dasein-with of Others is often encountered in terms of what is ready-to-hand within-the-world.”<sup>5</sup>

## MARTIN HEIDEGGER’S HUMAN EXISTENTIAL TRAITS

For Martin Heidegger, there are three native or natural traits of man. These traits, together with temporality, constitute an internally unified structure in human existence. The three fundamental traits are:

- Facticity
- Existentiality
- Fallenness

### FACTICITY

By facticity, Martin Heidegger means that there are already certain givens of human existence about which man can do nothing. Facticity means that man is already in a situation and set of circumstances; that man operates within certain defined limits, within a limited horizon.

According to *Being and Time*: “The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.”<sup>6</sup> It is also a fact that there are limits which man cannot go beyond. Facticity refers to the limiting conditions of human existence. For example, being born male or female constitutes the facticity of human existence. No one chooses to be born, nor chooses where or how they are born. Man, simply finds himself thrown into the world, in situations and circumstances that are not of his own making. Heidegger writes:

*Dasein's facticity, however, is essentially distinct from the factuality of something present-at-hand. Existent Dasein does not encounter itself as something present-at-hand within-the-world. But neither does thrownness adhere to Dasein as an inaccessible characteristic which is of no importance for its existence. “As something*



*thrown, Dasein has been thrown into existence. It exists as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be.*"<sup>7</sup>

## EXISTENTIALITY

This is the second native trait of human existence, according to Heidegger. It refers to the fact that man has natural abilities and capacities to recreate himself or make himself into what he wants to become. Man has the ability to recreate and reconstitute the world as he deems fit, as well as the ability to transcend the present and project himself into the future.

For instance, a trader can become a president; a student can become an engineer. Human life is, therefore, for Heidegger, a vast expanse of uncharted territory full of possibilities which man actualizes as he pilots his everyday life. As Heidegger further explains:

*Possibility, as an existential, does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of the 'liberty of indifference' (libertasindifferentiae). In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities. As the potentiality-for-Being which it is, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its Being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes.*<sup>8</sup>

## FALLENNESS

Fallenness refers to the tendency of man to become a mere presence in the world, when he fails to live up to his possibilities or potentialities. It is the inability to aspire to the superior mode of Being. Man is essentially fallen when he pays undue attention to the distracting cares of everyday life; things, people, events. This is the dominant tendency in man toward inauthenticity. When fallenness takes place, he becomes inauthentic, losing himself by becoming immersed in the external world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes this condition as "Fallenness' into the 'world' means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. Through the interpretation of falling, what we have called the 'inauthenticity' of Dasein may now be defined more precisely."<sup>9</sup>

## AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

For Martin Heidegger, Dasein can live in two primary modes: Authentically or Inauthentically. Dasein lives Inauthentically when it is fallen. In this state of fallenness, Dasein becomes absorbed in the things of the world, loses self-awareness, abandons its potentiality altogether, and follows the anonymous dictates of the world.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger clarifies, "Inauthenticity does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the 'they'."<sup>10</sup> The inauthentic Dasein is lost in the 'They'. The 'I' becomes eclipsed and destroyed. Dasein turns away from itself into the They-self. It no longer owns itself it becomes an owned man, which Heidegger refers to as 'Das Man'. The self loses its individuality in the anonymity of the collective. Inauthenticity, therefore, is man's dominant tendency to seek ease, to relax, to be lost in the cares of the world, and to succumb to the oppressive distractions of everyday life.

On the other hand, Authentic selfhood refers to a genuine or original view of the self. It is a self-understanding that comes from within, as opposed to a borrowed identity imposed from without. In authenticity, Dasein is no longer immersed in the anonymous world. It is not lost in the 'They' or the crowd. Instead, it becomes aware of its own history, its capacities, and its uniqueness and lives out its life in accordance with that understanding. Authenticity is thus the mode of existence in which Dasein owns itself, lives deliberately, and actualizes its unique potentialities rather than conforming to the expectations of the mass.

## UNDERSTANDING AUTHENTICITY IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Authenticity, in general terms, can be defined as the state of being genuine or real. This basic understanding aligns with how many Nigerian youths interpret authenticity namely, as the quality of being true to oneself and one's identity. However, this common definition differs from Martin Heidegger's existential conception of authenticity, and it is often misunderstood in practice.

As Heidegger explains in his book *Being and Time*, "authenticity does not arise from ethical or moral judgments imposed by society. Rather, it is rooted in an existential and personal standpoint."<sup>11</sup> Authenticity, in Heidegger's view, refers to a way of being in which an individual consciously acknowledges and embraces

their own existence. It involves taking responsibility for one's choices and actions, instead of conforming blindly to societal expectations or external norms. The authentic individual lives deliberately choosing freely and owning the consequences of those choices. Heidegger warns in *Being and Time* "against losing oneself in Das Man (the "They-self"), where one's existence is dictated by the anonymous crowd rather than one's own convictions."<sup>12</sup>

To illustrate this, consider a hypothetical example: Heidegger might argue that even a prostitute who independently chose her path, fully aware of and willing to bear its consequences, could be said to live authentically. This is not because the action itself is morally approved or disapproved, but because the choice is owned, uncoerced, and not shaped by societal pressure. In contrast, a pharmacist who entered the profession solely because of family or societal influence without personal conviction may live inauthentically, despite the profession being socially esteemed.

In the Nigerian context, many youths equate authenticity with conforming to what society deems acceptable or just. For instance, while society may condemn the prostitute because of moral judgments, it may praise the pharmacist who chose his path under compulsion simply because the result aligns with collective expectations. From a Heideggerian perspective, such praise or condemnation misses the point: what matters is whether the individual made their choice freely and owns that choice, not whether the choice aligns with societal norms.

Furthermore, Heidegger's concept of Being-with-others reminds us that "while we exist in relation to others, we must not lose ourselves in the world of things or in the expectations of others."<sup>13</sup> Our social relations should not drown out our capacity for self-determination. Unfortunately, many Nigerian youths fall into inauthenticity by succumbing to external pressures whether through peer influence, societal glorification of wealth, or the allure of quick success through means like cybercrime or kidnapping. These choices often arise not from personal conviction but from the desire to fit into societal expectations or to gain social approval.

Heidegger's idea of authenticity is thus not about pleasing society or avoiding its disapproval. It is about living out of deep personal conviction, making choices that reflect one's true self, and bearing responsibility for those choices. It calls on Nigerian youths to resist the temptation of conformity when it compromises their individuality.

In existentialist thought, including Sartre in his work *Existentialism is Humanism*, "the concern is not whether actions are classified as good or bad in a moral sense. Rather, the concern is whether actions are genuine or counterfeit."<sup>14</sup> If I act simply because others are doing so, my actions are inauthentic. But if I act out of personal conviction, regardless of whether my action pleases or displeases others, then I act authentically. To live authentically may sometimes require making choices that are unpopular or misunderstood by society.

Authentic existence does not mean a rigid adherence to any moral code or uncritical following of tradition. Instead, it is a call for Nigerian youths to recognize and affirm their identities, uniqueness, and singular place in the world. "To live authentically is to act with originality, spontaneity, and genuineness to choose freely and bear responsibility for those choices. It is a life shaped by personal conviction and the courage to be oneself in the face of external pressures and expectations."<sup>15</sup>

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF INAUTHENTICITY AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Building on the conceptual foundation established in the previous section, this part examines the practical consequences of living inauthentically particularly how Nigerian youths may suffer when their lives are not grounded in personal conviction.

Martin Heidegger emphasizes that inauthenticity does not imply a lesser or degraded mode of Being, but rather reflects a way in which Dasein human existence fails to fully own its existence. In *Being and Time*, he asserts: "Inauthenticity does not signify a 'lesser' Being or any 'lower' degree of Being. Rather, even in its fullest concretion, Dasein can be characterized by inauthenticity when busy, excited, interested, or ready for enjoyment."<sup>16</sup> This observation underscores that inauthenticity is not about moral failure but about a form of existence where one fails to live out one's true potentiality-for-Being.

In authenticity, for Heidegger in his work *Being and Time*, "is marked by fallenness and forgetfulness of the self."<sup>17</sup> It is the flight of Dasein from its own individuality, leading to a reliance on the impersonal norms of the anonymous collective what Heidegger calls the "They" (Das Man). In this mode, Dasein surrenders its autonomy and loses itself in the expectations, opinions, and values of society. J. O. Unah describes this state in his work, *Heidegger: Through the Lens of African Philosophy*, as one in which "man



loses his identity by being absorbed in the inauthenticity of the anonymous world," noting that fallenness is fundamentally a "non-awareness of the significance of what it means to be."<sup>18</sup>

In the Nigerian context, many youths fall into inauthentic modes of existence due to misunderstanding or misinterpreting the idea of authenticity. Rather than embracing a self-defined path, they conform to societal standards, peer influence, or imposed expectations. The implications of this inauthentic existence manifest across various domains:

In religious settings, some youths enter religious vocations not as a result of genuine conviction, but due to societal glorification of such roles or familial coercion. For instance, some individuals become pastors or mystics not from authentic calling but to gain social recognition. This often leads to performative religiosity and even unethical acts such as fake miracles. Such individuals live inauthentically because they have not freely chosen their paths but have instead conformed to what the public deems respectable.

Many Nigerian youths enter into relationships romantic or social where they suppress their individuality to please others. They present curated versions of themselves to conform to expectations, fearing judgment or rejection. This self-denial is an instance of *Das Man*, where one's decisions and behavior are governed by the opinions of others. The result is not only personal dissatisfaction but the breakdown of genuine human connection. Over time, this leads to anxiety, mistrust, and emotional disconnection.

Social media has become a significant site of inauthentic existence among Nigerian youths. Many curate false lifestyles, emulate trends, or promote values that do not align with their inner beliefs, merely to gain approval or avoid exclusion. Here, *Dasein* becomes absorbed in the public narrative, abandoning its authentic potential for the pretense of virtual validation. This form of fallenness fosters a culture of comparison, superficiality, and alienation from true selfhood.

Family pressure remains a dominant source of inauthenticity. Parents often impose career paths or life choices on their children, leading youths to make decisions that do not reflect their own values or aspirations. Consider the case of a girl forced into convent life. Though she eventually became a reverend sister, her decision was not her own. When she faced a personal crisis (e.g., an unplanned pregnancy), her inability to bear the responsibility tied to the role led to tragic consequences. Such a scenario exemplifies Heidegger's concept of inauthenticity: a failure to choose oneself, to take ownership of one's being.

In summary, the implications of inauthenticity among Nigerian youths are profound. Whether through religion, family, relationships, or social media, the pressure to conform displaces the individual from their authentic self. Heidegger's notion of authenticity calls on individuals to resist the pull of the *They* and reclaim responsibility for their existence. For Nigerian youths, this means fostering self-awareness, embracing individual potential, and making life choices rooted in personal conviction rather than societal expectation.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

This research made an attempt to study Martin Heidegger's idea of authenticity and what it could mean for youths in Nigeria today. At the beginning, understanding Heidegger's Concept was not easy. His language is complex, and many of his ideas are not straightforward. Terms like *Dasein*, *Being-towards-death*, and *fallenness* required a lot of reading and reflection before they started to make sense. But as the research progressed, the researcher began to see how these ideas could be applied to the real experiences of Nigerian youths.

The goal of this research was to see if Heidegger's concept of authenticity could help Nigerian youths live more meaningfully, instead of just following social trends and pressures. One of the biggest tasks was trying to connect Heidegger's Western philosophy with Nigerian realities; things like unemployment, family expectations, religion, peer pressure, and the struggles of surviving in a tough economy. This was not always easy, but the researcher tried to find ways that Heidegger's thoughts could speak to our own local issues.

Throughout the writing, the researchers also tried not to make Heidegger look like he had all the answers. In fact, part of the reflection here is that his work is not perfect. It has its problems and risks. For example, if people take his idea of authenticity too far, it could lead to selfishness or a rejection of community values. That would be dangerous in a country like Nigeria, where people rely on each other a lot. But at the same time, Heidegger's work still challenges us to stop living passively and to begin taking our own lives seriously.

This research has pushed Nigerian youths to think more deeply about their own lives, about the choices they make, and about how easy it is to just "go with the flow" in our society. It has shown the Nigerian youths that authenticity is not just a theory, but a call to live more honestly, to stop pretending, and to take responsibility for our being. In the end, this research work has done its part in starting that conversation, especially in a Nigerian context.

To conclude, this work has shown that Heidegger's idea of authenticity is important, but it is not without problems. It offers a strong message: "that we should not just live based on what others expect from us, but we should reflect and choose how we want to exist. "<sup>19</sup> For Nigerian youths, who face so many social and personal pressures, this message is useful. It reminds them that even in hard situations, they can still take charge of their lives.

However, Heidegger's idea is not a final solution. If followed blindly, it can make people forget their responsibility to others. A person might think being "authentic" means doing whatever they want, even if it hurts the people around them. This is why the researcher believe that Heidegger's idea of authenticity is a bit porous. It leaves room for misuse. People could easily interpret it in extreme ways if they don't balance it with community values and ethical thinking.

So, the researcher's stance is: Heidegger's concept is powerful, but it must be used with care. It can inspire Nigerian youths to wake up from passiveness, but it should not be seen as a perfect guide. Nigerian youths should learn to think for themselves, but also remember that life is not lived in isolation.

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